

Constructing new insights into interdisciplinary human service management supervision: How can new technologies be used effectively?

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Acknowledgments

- Research Grant, Faculty of Education, University of Auckland
- Twenty respondents from three years of the Managing and Developing Performance course, 2005 through 2007
- Summer scholar Christine Harrison-Fletcher, research assistant

Context

Three year mixed method
research project

*Learning styles and e-learning:
Delivering knowledge and skills
for health, human service and
social work managers*

(Webster & Harrison-Fletcher, 2009)

Participants were enrolled from 2005 to 2007 in a 'flexi' course blending online and F2F block.

The course ('Managing and Developing Performance') was an elective in a graduate professional supervision programme designed for human service, social work and allied health managers and supervisors responsible for frontline staff.

Participant Demographics

- 20 students (52% of potential respondents) completed questionnaires
- 16 students (42%) were interviewed
- Gender breakdown: 90% women, 10% men
- Ethnicities represented
 - European 13 of 20 (65%)
 - Māori 2 of 20 (10%)
 - Pasifika 2 of 20 (10%)
 - Indian 2 of 20 (10%)
 - African 1 of 20 (5%)

Occupational demographics

- 17 professional supervisors/line managers/professional leaders
- 3 frontline practitioners

Range of organisations

- 8 from the public health sector
- 4 from the non-government/private sector
- 7 from statutory social work agencies

This provided a range of occupational perspectives about online learning.

Aims of this presentation

Address challenges for in-post frontline team leaders in e-learning environment:

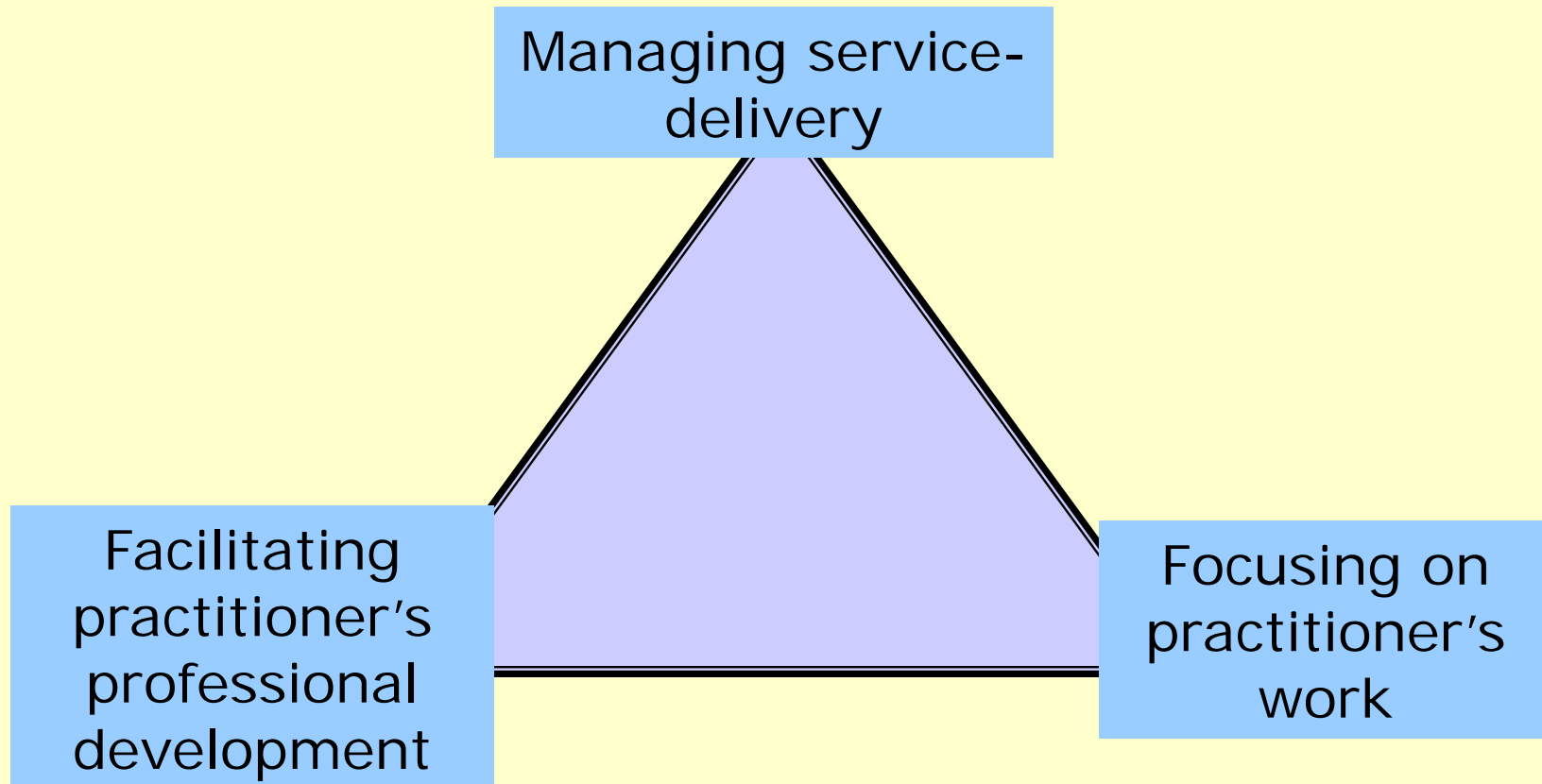
- Acculturation into e-learning: How can new technologies be used effectively?
- Participant collaboration in 'virtual communities of practice' across disciplines (social work, allied health)
- Applying arguably alien performance management theory into management supervision

Aims of this presentation

The presentation will suggest that:

1. Insights gained from the course can be applied to agency management supervision
2. E-learning provides a critical connecting dimension in that application

Triangle of supervisory functions (Hughes & Pengelly, 1997, p.42)



Professional
Dimension

Interdisciplinary
Virtual
Communities
of Practice

Technical
Dimension

E-learning

Organisational
Dimension

Performance
management

Creating new
insights into
administrative
supervision?

Interactions

Organisational dimension

Hughes and Pengelly (1997, p.6) observe that in the context of 'unprecedented changes,'

'Many professionals, regardless of whether or not they welcome the changes, find themselves lost in familiar places as they try to navigate along unfamiliar routes.'

Organisational dimension

'At the centre of these changes lies the introduction into health and welfare services of the ethos of market forces and business management, with the dynamic of cash limits, competitive tendering and short-term contracts.'

In this environment, Hughes and Pengelly argue that 'Managers are the new professionals' (1997, p.13)

Organisational dimension: Supervision interactions

In this emergent environment, administrative supervision interactions between practitioners and managers can function within 'containers' in a complex adaptive system.

(Lewin and Regine 2001; Olson and Eoyang, 2001)

Organisational dimension: Supervision interactions

- Theory Y predominates (McGregor, 1960)
- Pathways for change: emergent approach
- Enabled by mutual trust
- Avoid prescription: Referent power rather than coercive, expert, legitimate or reward power (French & Raven, 1959)

Professional dimension: Interdisciplinary communities of practice

Communities of practice (Wenger & Snyder, 2000)

- Purpose: develop members' capability; build and exchange knowledge
- Membership: self-selection
- Cohesion: by passion, commitment, identification with group expertise
- Duration: determined by members' interest

In the current study, 'interdisciplinary' refers to allied health and social work managers/ supervisors

Professional dimension: Interdisciplinary communities of practice

‘Managers [as] the new professionals’
(Hughes and Pengelly, 1997)

Systems-based questions they should ask:
(Attwood, Pedler, Pritchard & Wilkinson, 2003)

- *How can I best use my position ... to assist us all to make sense of what is going on, so that together we can contribute to sustainable change?*
- *How do I lead this organisation so that we can make the best possible contribution to the improvement and wellbeing of those we serve?*

Professional dimension: Interdisciplinary communities of practice

- *How do I ensure that we implement plans that we have agreed with partners?*
- *How can I share my ideas and emerging goals in ways that do not stultify debate but assist learning about the 'bigger picture'?*

These questions reflect a servant leadership/workplace spirituality perspective
(Fawcett et al, 2008; Liden et al, 2008)

Interface: Professional and technical dimensions

Knowledge & skills transfer between Virtual Learning Community & workplace

A 'simple VLC' (Lewis & Allan, 2005)



Technical dimension: E-learning

- 'Emergent' e-learning: Learner as an intrinsic complex adaptive system (Fenwick, 2003b)
- Human interaction: constructivist approach – 'comprehension transforms knowledge' (Fenwick, 2003a)
- Experiential learner interacts with the managed learning environment: 'co-emergence' (Bates, 2005; Fenwick, 2003a)

'Containers' and technologies

- Managed learning environment becomes a conceptual 'container'
- Technology-container interface: Online interactions between facilitator-learner/learner-learner
- Knowledge is transformed by problem solving: container connecting with the workplace
- 'Learners exercise voice in determining the issues, goals, and applications of course materials' (Fenwick, 2003b)

New insights into management supervision? Participant voices

(Webster & Harrison-Fletcher, 2009)

- Cross-disciplinary distinctions?
- Comfort levels with ICT a critical factor
- Constructivist problem solving occurred
- Trust and online immediacy a factor
- Intellectual engagement a positive experience
- Evidence of functional 'containers'

ICT comfort levels critical

Q. Do I read you right, both of you are saying in part that actually navigating round the Web CT site was quite a disincentive?

'Most definitely.'

'...The online interaction didn't really work for me, you lose a bit of motivation and energy.'

Constructivist problem solving

'... Being able to talk through with other students ... was real life, real time learning for me ... to hear that they were also facing things that were either new to me or very similar to me and getting more answers was useful ...'

Need for trust (Casaló, Flavián, & Guinalíu, 2008).

Q. What's better about [F2F] than online?

'...You ... get the person's ... body language ... whereas online ... you're not really sure ... if that's their real view ... you can't really judge how that person is really going to take it when you can't see them. You get to know them a little bit better and you test the waters a little bit and ... you're a little bit more comfortable to ... disagree with some of their opinions.'

Need for trust and online immediacy

'I'm an energiser and pragmatist so I need to be in a group environment ... A couple of ways ... to address the e-learning environment is for ... course participants to meet at the very beginning ... so you know who your online peers ... are going to be. I think for me what would improve it is if there was a certain time where everyone was on line and there was an immediate response to the postings ... there is immediacy.'

Need for online immediacy

Q. To what extent did frequency of facilitator feedback impact on the course for you?

'I thought where is [the facilitator], are we doing alright? Are we on target? I definitely had anxieties around that ... I knew [the facilitator] was there ... but I would have been more reassured had there been a little bit of feedback ... hey troops how are you doing, any difficulties get in touch with me, am busy but I'm still here.'

Intellectual engagement

'I enjoyed the learning. In a classroom I come up with the first thought that comes in my mind whereas ... [in online asynchronous postings] there's time to read, reflect, look at it again, come back with a more informed and reflective response.'

'I actually missed the interactions with the other students when the Web CT closed down. I felt a sense of loss.'

Intellectual engagement

Q. 'Did the course stretch you?'

'Oh absolutely ... it really did ... it really challenged me ... it required a lot of input ... more so than classroom work, it did challenge me.'

Q. You're talking about the online postings?

'Yes I am. I'd be doing an assignment and then just seeing how other people saw things, just brought so much more into my learning, it really did. I guess it opened me up to other perspectives.'

Intellectual engagement

'I got intensely interested in some of the dialogue and I became quite excited that I could log on ... to see if someone had replied to something I had posted ... I guess it might be with an unexpected pleasure and intellectual engagement for me around the online content ... I didn't expect the online conversations to ... capture me.

I was totally fascinated ... I thought this is fantastic ... people ... willingly shared. ... I got ... information that I may not have been able to access in a classroom ... it was much more interesting than I imagined, online.'

New insights into management supervision?

Elements

- Interdisciplinary workplace-academy perspectives
 - Theory Y facilitation
- Asynchronous, reflective online practitioner interactions
 - Intellectual engagement
 - Trust & immediacy
 - Safe container

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