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‘Leading other midwives’.

A Critical Ethnographic Inquiry, Exploring the Experience of Midwife Team Leaders

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Context

- Role change – from midwife to midwife team leader
- Challenges associated with transition
- Undertaken as part of a Master's programme

Midwives & Leadership

- Able to contribute to leadership on the basis of the skills and qualities demonstrated in their clinical role
- Exercise leadership activities daily by prioritising care needs, advocating women's choices and by demonstrating intrapersonal working, (Coggins, 2005)

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Leaders as defined by the study participants

- *"having visions and looking more longer term at things…what things could be done differently and different ways of working" (P1)*
- *"somebody who would set an example, who would guide in the right direction, who would support" (P4)*
- '*motivated', 'inspirational', 'knowledgeable'* and *'approachable' (P5)*

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Study Aims

1. Determine what it's like to work as a midwife team leader in a community setting
2. Consider what (if any) development should be given to clinicians adopting this role
3. Establish whether leader's find the perceived autonomy of the midwives in their teams challenging

Ethical Considerations

- Potential to ‘pry into people’s innermost secrets, witness their failures and participate in their lives’, (Fetterman (1998, p. 129)
- Ethical approval obtained from appropriate Research Ethics Committee
- Local trust R&D approval obtained

Methodology

- A critical ethnographical methodology was adopted
- Ethnography was chosen as it can focus on the study of institutions or professional groups
- Critical ethnography focuses more specifically on power and how it is distributed within a cultural setting

Setting

- A local community midwifery service
- Around 40 midwives working over 4 teams
- Each team had a WTE managerial team leader and 2 WTE clinical team leaders
- I worked as a clinical leader in one of the 4 community teams
- Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants (letters of invitation were sent to all team leaders)

Data Collection

- In-depth interviews with midwife leaders were the main source of data (5 agreed to be interviewed)
- Participants ranged in age from early 30s to late 40s & in experience from a new leader to a leader with 8 years experience
- Non-participant observation of team meetings (2 meetings) and an examination of job descriptions/role specifications were used

Interpretation and Analysis of Data

- Interviews were transcribed verbatim
- Fieldwork diary, records of observations and job description documents were incorporated
- Four types of ethnographic analysis were utilised: domain, taxonomic, componential and theme (Spradley, 1979)

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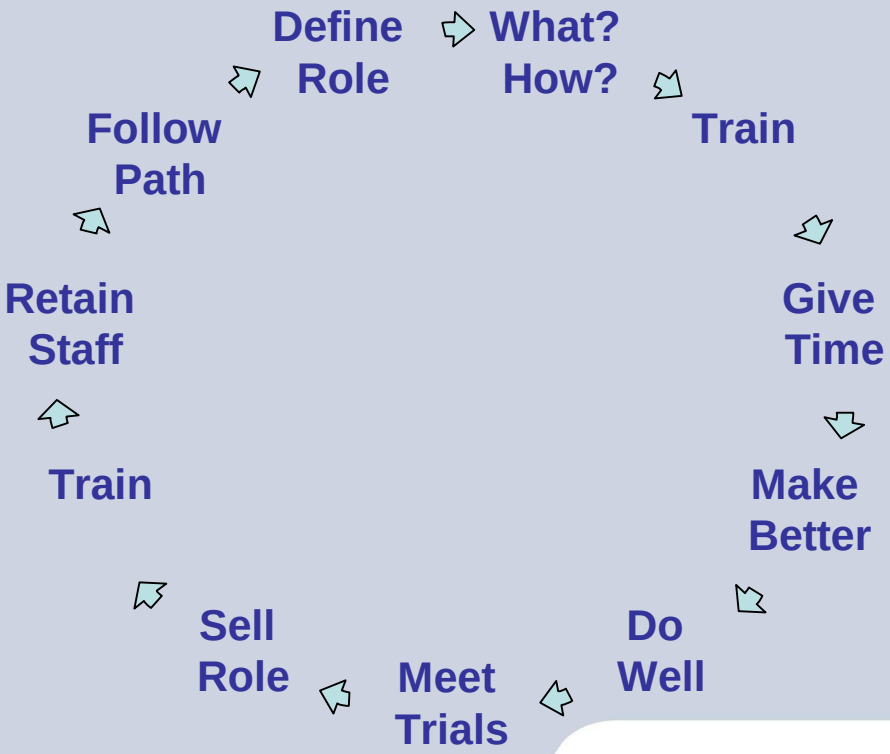
Schematic Diagram Illustrating Emergent Cultural Themes



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'Defining the Role and Understanding its Remit'

- *P1 "I think probably even the managerial team leaders themselves are really unclear on what their role is let alone the people".*
- Leaders' desire for their role to be more clearly defined and for the boundaries of their responsibility to be more apparent

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'Developing the Person within the Role'

- P2 *"It needs to be an ongoing thing but it needs to start – because – just because you have been qualified for ten years it doesn't mean that you are going to have those skills".*
- Leaders' belief that they would be better able to meet the demands of the role if they had had more role specific training or development

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'Having the Space and Time for the Role and Promoting it to Others'

- P5 *"they don't want to be burnt out and frazzled like they see the 'G' grades…what they say is 'I don't want to do that stuff at home, that is what everybody seems to have to do to be a 'G' grade – I am not prepared to do that'".*
- If leaders had the space and time for the role, were confident in their 'people' skills and their ability to meet the requirements of the role they would be more positive, feel fulfilled in their work and promote the role to others

'Pathway to the Role'

- P2 *"if midwives felt that there was a career progression and they did this two-year, sort of, bedding in time and then their career would be moving on and they would be taking in other things like audit and moving up the scales, that those midwives would stay a lot longer".*
- If midwives felt there was a defined career pathway to the team leader role, adequate support in post and job satisfaction in the role there might be fewer problems retaining staff

Discussion

- A sense of the midwives' experience is apparent from the transcripts
- Leaders describe what it is that they enjoy about their role and vocalise their frustrations
- Germane suggestions about appropriate role development are made
- Participants do not expand on the question of the midwives deemed autonomy to any real extent

Implications for Practice

- A need to reconsider leadership at the level of the midwifery team leader
- A need to carefully define the knowledge and skills required to be successful in the role

Implications for Practice

- A need to consider the training and development aspiring and existing leaders receive to ensure that they are ‘fit for purpose’
- A need to reconsider the place for the midwife leader within the team and in the context of the larger organisation

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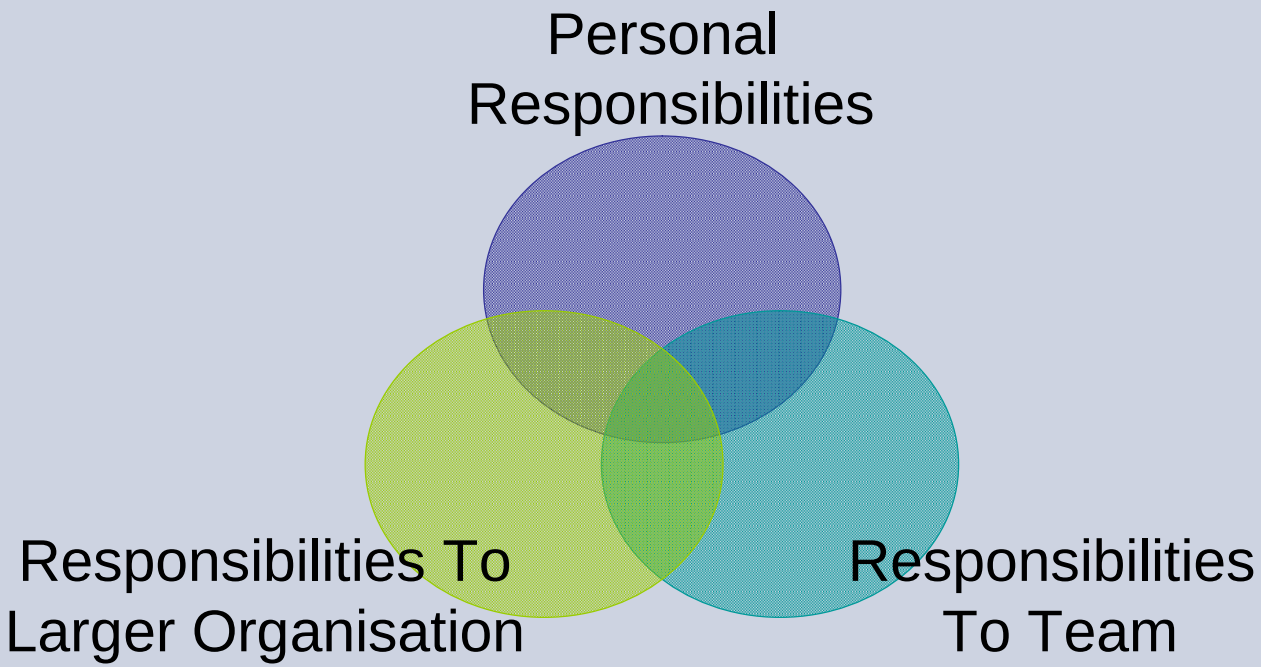
Fit for Purpose



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Questions?

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References

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Thank you