



**An Autoethnographic study of the psychological contracts of health and social care employees in a learning disability service.
Who is Contracting with Whom?**

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Why Carry out this research?

- There is not enough research in LD nursing to add to the evidence base
- Policy statements, RCN 2010, Department of Health 2007
- Research is part of the nurses wider role
- A need to work effectively with our greatest organisational resource base- people



Defining the PC

- The term psychological contract refers to an individual's beliefs regarding the terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement between that focal person and another party' (Rousseau 1989)
- The psychological contract can be described as the informal or implicit relationship between the employee and the organisation.



What is Ethnography?

- Ethnography has roots in anthropology.
- It is a qualitative research method.
- It is used when a group, culture or community is to be studied.
- It describes patterns of behaviour in order to gain understanding of cultural rules, norms and routines.

What is Autoethnography?

- ‘Displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural’ (Ellis and Bochner 2000)
- A way of connecting autobiographical stories to the stories of others
- A way of exploring practice as evidence?



Areas for Exploration

- Who has a PC with whom?
- How is the contract communicated?
- Is the contract idiosyncratic?



Why study the PC?

- The PC has not been widely explored in the learning disability setting
- Well managed PCs lead to positive organisational outcomes and are not dependent on financial input
- By developing understanding of the PC practice recommendations can be made



Managing the PC well

- Increased levels of commitment (Guzzo, Noonan and Elron 1994)
- Demonstration of extra-role behaviour (Guest and Conway 2000)
- Lower levels of turnover, absenteeism and conflict (Guest and Peccei 2001)
- Organisational citizenship behaviour (Turnley, Bolino, Lester and Bloodgood 2003)
- Knowledge sharing behaviours and innovative performance (Thompson and Heron 2006)

Managing the PC Less Well

- cynicism (Johnson and O'Leary Kelly 2003),
- Leaving the organisation, reduced psychological well-being (Conway and Briner 2005),
- Job dissatisfaction (Tekleab and Taylor 2003),
- Reduced organisational commitment (Turnley and Feldman 1999),
- Lowering of obligations to the organisation (Robinson, Kraatz and Rousseau 1994)
- Decreased performance (Lester et al 2002).



Methodology

- Qualitative questionnaires (team members $n=11$)
- Interviews (team managers $n=10$)
- Documentary analysis
- Autoethnographic examination of supervisor-supervisee PC



Findings

Qualitative Questionnaires and Interviews

- Professionals perceived that they had psychological contracts with clients.
- Multiple contracts exist between multiple parties, extending vertically AND horizontally
- Organisations are given human characteristics
- The existence of idiosyncratic arrangements



Findings

- PCs are developed through intuition and are nebulous
- Participants were trying to relate to each other in emotionally intelligent ways
- Emotional intelligence is also related to positive organisational outcomes



Findings

- People act in multiple roles as managers, as employees and as professionals
- The PC within LD is communicated through a communication bridge including: socialisation processes, written communication, individual actions and supervision



Findings

Documents

- Local policy documents are vehicles for the communication of the psychological contract
- Congruence between expectations in policies and expectations of participants
- Informal documents also communicate the psychological contract



Implications for Practice

- By raising awareness of the PC, managerial practice may evolve to include conscious management of the PC
- By gaining understanding of expectations and obligations practitioners may be better able to facilitate successful PCs with others in their organisation



Implications for Practice

- Policy writers at all levels may wish to consider the implicit messages they send to health and social care employees
- Practitioners may wish to consider their role in forming PCs with service users



Voices

- ‘ I feel that it is a privilege to do the job that I do. I feel really happy coming to work. It’s worthwhile and meaningful.’
- ‘I love my job, I love my clients. I love my team.’



Voices

- ‘What keeps me in work is my responsibility to the service user, to the staff team and to the organisation. I would love to make myself redundant because service users didn’t need services anymore but it’s never happened.’



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Thank you

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