

Quilliam

**EXPLORING THE WORLD OF
INTERSTAFF COMMUNICATION
& ITS INFLUENCE ON DISABILITY
SERVICE DELIVERY**

Exploring the world of inter-staff
communication and its influence on disability
service delivery

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Inter-staff communication



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Why research this topic?

- Personal experience as a support worker

- Literature review indicated a gap

Inter-staff communication discussed in recent disability literature, but not explored as a characteristic influencing service delivery (Broadhurst & Mansell 2007; Clement & Bigby 2007; 2008)

Organisational communication literature (Quirke 2008; Jablin & Putnam 2001)

Human service literature pointed towards institutional culture (Goffman 1961)

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Research aim and objectives

To explore the world of inter-staff communication and its influence on disability accommodation service delivery. The objectives of this research aimed to explore:

- The communication channels used by staff within a group home,
- The communication channels valued by staff within a group home,
- The role of the coordinator in providing staff communication opportunities, and
- The cultural context in which communication is used.

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Methodology – how the study is framed

- Qualitative (Institutional Ethnography)
- Painting the picture - what is happening, how, why...
- Not aiming to generalise findings to a broader population (other Vic group homes), other support workers identify with the findings

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Research steps

The researcher:

- Gained ethics approval from Deakin University and participating organisation
- Recruited participants from a non-government Victorian disability service (one group home)
- Interviewed four residential service staff members (including 2 support workers and 2 members of the service management team)
- Analysed the data from the interviews to find key themes
- Provided the findings to the participating organisation

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We found...

- Support workers preferred to communicate verbally, although opportunities to do this were limited
- Instead, much of the communication between staff happened on paper

...written communication is just daily communication. The verbal handover is so that they [staff] can ask questions.

(CRU management member)

...we've got client's notes, consequences book, we've got the breakages book, maintenance book, it's just endless. And then if you don't write in the diary [communication book] that there is something in that book no one will read it.

(support staff member)₁₀₅

We found...

- Support workers and managers felt that there was limited opportunity for discussion regarding professional development
- Instead, the communication content focussed on day-to-day resident activities

At handover they [staff members] probably don't get much opportunity for 'chat chat', but mostly it's about the clients and what has presented the last couple of days. Sometimes there is a little bit of a personal chat, like, 'I've done this today', or, 'I've done that today.'

(CRU management member).

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We found...

- The way that communication was used by service staff reflected the service's organisational hierarchy
- The management role was identified as a unique position, where there is opportunity to help support workers feel more connected to the rest of the organisation

Because they [one CRU management team member] are in the office all the time, or most times...they do have more opportunity [to communicate with the other CRU management team member], which is fine.

(support staff member)

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We found...

- Staff communication was used in ways that had a range of impacts on both staff members and service users

We can't support that client properly if you don't have the information...

(support staff member)

...sometimes you just can't let it go! [I often think] 'I need to tell you [other staff members] this; this is what happened and this is what I think'. You just can't let it go because it's really important information! It could be a staff member's life. It's as simple as that

(support staff member)

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Findings summary

We learnt more about:

- the communication channels that are relied on and their strengths and weaknesses
- preferred communications according to service delivery
- what is talked about when staff communicate
- the many uses or functions of inter-staff communication

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The researchers recommend that support staff:

- Start an ongoing discussion about communication in your workplace
 - talk about *how* staff communicate, reflecting on the communication channels used and if they are preferable or suitable for your role
- Think about the overall purpose of staff communication in your workplace. What does the communication set out to achieve?
- Organise a meeting with your coordinator to discuss ways of ensuring ongoing support in your role

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The researchers recommend that coordinators:

- Be aware of the important role you play in ensuring support workers feel connected to the broader organisation
- How do you help support workers to feel included?

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The researchers recommend that organisations:

Identify ways to support and skill staff to work appropriately in the complex group home environment. This could be done through the following:

- An increase in allocated resources in providing staff members with the opportunity to engage in communication that meets professional needs
- Opportunities such as supervision and team building are recommended by the study's participants

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References

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Thanks for listening!

Any questions?

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