An evil necessity: **Frontline staffs' experiences of group home paperwork**

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Why paperwork?

Paperwork is important

- Paper-based and electronic paperwork form a large part of daily group home service provision (Mansell & Beadle-Brown, 2012)

- Possible increases over time in the number of pieces of paperwork in group homes (Quilliam, Bigby & Douglas, 2015)

- Paperwork is a key organisational technology—transforms knowledge into action (Levinson, 2010)

Why paperwork?

Paperwork can be problematic

It can negatively impact on residents and staff

- Resident files can become problem 'saturated' (Leaning & Adderley, 2015), with forms creating negative resident constructions (Nunkoosing & Haydon-Laurelut, 2011)
- Additional administrative tasks add to supervisor stress (Clement & Bigby, 2010)

Frontline staff sometimes use paperwork in ways that aren't expected

- Completing person centred plans in ways that fail to capture residents' daily experiences (Poppes, Van der Putten & Vlaskamp, 2014) with out of date, half completed and unoriginal person centred plans (Victorian Office of the Public Advocate, 2011)
- Using file notes to influence residents' decisions by recording non compliant behaviour (Hamilton, 2014)
- Avoiding completing paperwork due to a fear of legal implications, and capturing expected service events rather than actual service events (Quilliam, 2009)

Why are staff using paperwork in unexpected ways?

The *frontline* perspective is important

Frontline staff:

- Use and complete paperwork, share paperwork with others
- Understand complexities of daily support (paperwork use and its impact on residents)
- Are likely to identify suitable technologies for their use

Broad project project aim: To explore frontline staffs' experiences of paperwork in group homes for people with intellectual disabilities. What do staff think about paperwork? How do they use paperwork?

This presentation will focus on how

staff manage group home paperwork

Methodology and design

Methodology

- Constructivist grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2014)

    - Researcher and participants construct data
    - Data collection and analysis completed iteratively
    - Coding, constant comparison methods help to make sense of the research question

Design

- Case study approach

    - One disability service organisation
    - Two group homes

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Data collection and analysis methods

Participants

- Eight support workers (one declined interview and future involvement)
- 1 supervisor

Data collection

Interviews

- 8 Semi structured individual interviews, 50mins—1.5 hours in length
    Key questions: 'Could you tell me about paperwork in this house?' 'Overall, how do you feel about the paperwork here?'
- 1 group interview
    Questions: 'From what you said [in the individual interviews]… it seems like you really value daily paperwork because it seemed to have an impact on your minute-by-minute work and decisions… Does this make sense?'

Observations

- 12 unstructured sessions (34 hours), sessions ranged between 1—3.75hours
    Explored how staff used paperwork and how it formed part of service
- Minimally-partially participating observer stance (Bryman, 2012)

Analysis

- Line-by-line and focused coding, constant comparison, sorting, diagramming and member checking

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Group home settings

	Cherry St	Archer Rd
Nature of support	24-hour support (sleepover)	24-hour support (sleepover)
Residents	4	5
Staff	9 total —1 supervisor, 6 support workers, 2 casuals	7 total —1 supervisor, 4 support workers, 2 casuals
Service building	Adapted ordinary house, homely feel	Purpose built house, large and open plan
Service culture	Generally collaborative approach Staff perceived GH 1 as a good place to work: •Acknowledged strong leadership •Felt respected and valued by others "One thing that feels so right about this house is there is mutual respect all the way through it… It reflects out to how you interact and how relaxed you are in a house… If you [staff] feel valued, the clients are valued, where can you go wrong? You can't go wrong can you, if everyone is valued; not just this one sided rubbish. It's a good house." (Kirbee)	Generally individual approach Staff held mixed views on GH2 as a workplace: •Permanent support workers felt unsupported, by supervisor & at times disrespected by other team members •Casual staff perceived it as an 'easy house', identified conflict "In this person's [staff member's] mind there is no, 'okay well if I'm here and that needs to be done, I could do that'… You will get certain staff that will not work together, it is just all, 'do this, do this, do this'." (Freda)
Perspective of role	"Not 'just a support worker'." (Donna)	"Just support staff." (Con)

Findings
Common staff experiences

- Staff shared common experiences of what it's like to be a support worker

- Staffs' experiences appeared to influence how they think and use paperwork (to some extent)

- Staff often recalled use of paperwork explain their frontline experiences

Feeling disconnected, alone, unsupported

"About this audit. It's a finance audit; not about the [resident] files. And Freda [another support worker] told me yesterday… [that the service manager] said, 'Oh, no, it's not a paperwork audit, it's a finance audit.' But no one told us! No one tells us anything! It's really annoying… and frustrating. It's like [the service manager says], 'I'll get back to you'." (Con, Archer Rd)

Common staff experiences

Experiencing a lack of workplace autonomy

"We have to do a key worker's report… because it's part of [the organisation's] policy. Is it helpful? [Kirbee pauses and reflects]. I don't get that it's helpful… You often sit there and wonder, 'why?' and it's because it's policy. I know why [we have to do it]… I often wonder why we bother with it… As a team that works really well together and communicates very well and we do all the other stuff, it's just a puzzlement, just like, 'why do you need to…[?]." (Kirbee, Cherry St)

Common staff experiences

Competing priorities

Doing 'have to' paperwork
Kirbee: "So you've got to… there's a lot of 'have to's'." Donna: "It's got to be the written word…" (Kirbee and Donna, Cherry St)

Providing direct support
"I prefer to spend more quality time with the guys than sitting here doing paperwork, to tell you the truth… You can't be sitting there doing paperwork, especially if one of the guys needs you. They are the priority, obviously… The paperwork has to be done, but it has to wait." (Ellen, Cherry St)

Common staff experiences

Juggling priorities (direct support and paperwork)

"I worked in one house that had five people [clients] in it and some of them you really needed to watch all the time. You can't do that when you are in the office typing out your reports… [It's] sort of like you're juggling balls in the air and when you need to be a 100 per cent focused on a client, you have two choices: be with the clients and forget the paperwork and you go over [time]; you finish at ten… [or] I just fit it in when I get [the chance]." (Kirbee, Cherry St)

"I think it's sort of prioritising… so you've got to work out, 'Okay… This is what I'm supposed to do today, tonight, in my sleepover. Okay, I've got to find time between this and this to do paperwork.' So you've just got to try to slot it in where it's not inconvenient to the house or … to each other." (Donna, Cherry St)

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Common frontline experiences

La Trobe University   12
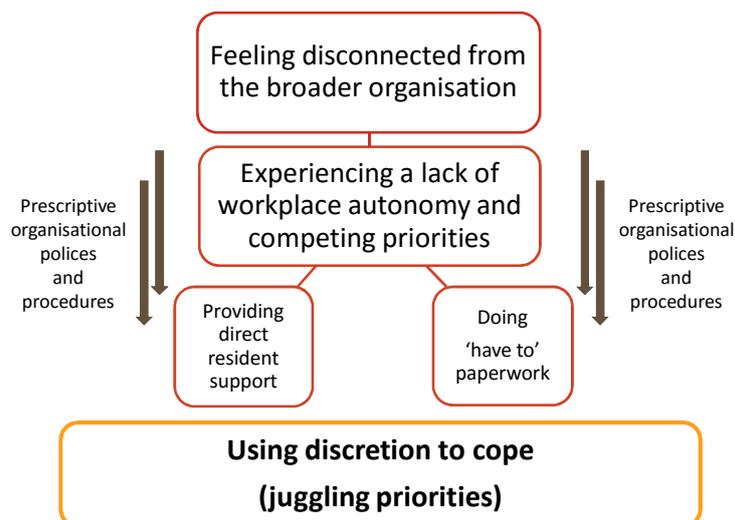
Using discretion to cope

Staff used discretion with paperwork practices—in ways that met *their* needs:

- in ways that suited *their* workplace context and

- in ways that fit into *their* day

Staffs' discretionary practices transformed organisationally required paperwork into more valuable technologies for frontline staff (or made the piece of paperwork easier to complete)

Time—a common discretionary factor

"Sometimes it will be 'Oh, I have to count the medication', 'I have to count the money', sometimes really busy… Normally at the end of the shift we [staff] have to do the money counts… but I don't feel like I have to finish [the tasks] on that night, so I just keep it for tomorrow… I try to manage the things [tasks]… so make little bit of time for me… We [staff] have to manage the time." (Shannon, Cherry St)

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Time as a discretionary factor

Using time to complete paperwork in three ways:

- Pre-filling paperwork

- Completing paperwork immediately

- Back-filling paperwork

Pre-filling AND backfilling paperwork

Donna walks into the kitchen where Kirbee is leaning on the kitchen bench with a pen in her hand, gazing at a booklet. Kirbee explains to Donna that she hasn't filled out the *food diary* for a while, and continues looking at the paperwork, recalling meals and writing on the paperwork where she remembers the information. Donna asks Kirbee to fill out what the resident is supposed to eat tomorrow and Kirbee notes that she has already entered that information.

(Kirbee and Donna, Cherry St)

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Using time as a discretionary factor

Completing paperwork immediately after an event

Stef parks the van in the driveway and promptly pulls out the *mileage book* and a pen that were both sitting in a nook in the driver's door. Stef writes down the date and other details about the destination and distance travelled in the van. A few residents come out of the house and ask to help with carrying the groceries into the house. Stef quickly puts the book and pen away, jumps out of the van and opens the van boot so that the residents can unload the groceries.

(Stef, Archer Rd)

Discussion

Staff felt disconnected from the broader organisation AND lacked autonomy, decision-making around the paperwork in their workplace.

- Lack of opportunities to contribute to decision-making can lead to staff emotionally disconnecting, low job dissatisfaction and staff resignations (Gray & Muramatsu, 2013)

Discussion

Staff used discretion—by using paperwork in particular ways that suited them to help them do *their* work.

- Staff prioritised resident support

    - Staff sometimes completed and used paperwork in unexpected ways (Hamilton, 2014; Quilliam, 2009)

    - Findings illuminate complexities in staff role, tensions between meeting resident's needs and organisational needs

- Discretionary practices should be expected (Lipsky, 1980, p. 15)

    - Human services are complex

    - Difficult for frontline staff to always comply with prescriptive policies and procedures and responses to human need require discretion

    - Difficult for organisations to develop broad ranging policy and procedural guidelines for all staff

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Concluding thoughts

Staff might use paperwork in unexpected ways because they **need** use available technologies in ways that meet *their* needs to provide service in complex, unique service settings, to humans whose needs constantly change.

Next steps

- Complete data collection!
- Compare findings from Organisation 1 to Organisation 2
- Explore staffs' perspectives on becoming more involved in the organisational technology decision-making process

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Thank you

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