Personal Effectiveness, Mental Toughness and Emotional Loyalty Training

Impact on Staff Retention Rates in Four Diverse Social Care Provider Organisations in Cumbria

Evaluation Report
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1: Introduction
Social care seeks to ensure that people achieve their maximum potential, have full and purposeful lives, and exercise real choice and control over how they do this (DH, 2008). However, there are problems in most parts of the United Kingdom (UK) in recruiting and retaining sufficient care staff to achieve this aim. The National Minimum Data Set for Social Care [NMDS –SC] indicates that vacancy and turnover rates for staff in adult social care in England at 8.4% [1 in 12 posts vacant]. This is double the rate for all other types of industrial, commercial and public employment (Eborall and Griffiths, 2008). It is recognised that if staff shortages in social care are to be managed effectively in the longer term, ad hoc solutions such as the use of temporary agency staff need to be replaced by more effective workforce planning, and the introduction of evidence–based initiatives aimed at recruiting, retaining and supporting staff in what is an emotional and pressured role (Evans and Huxley, 2009). In this article, we present findings from a small scale evaluation of one leadership training initiative on ‘Personal Effectiveness, Mental Toughness and Emotional Loyalty Process’ delivered as part of a programme of targeted action which sought to improve staff retention rates across four diverse social care provider organisations in Cumbria.

2: Recruitment and retention in Cumbria
Cumbria is situated in Northern England on the border with Scotland. It is one of the largest counties in England. A substantial part of the county lies above 300 meters with the picturesque mountains of the Lake District National Park dividing the county from North to South and East to West. Population density is low and a higher proportion of the population live in ‘super sparse’ rural areas than any other county in England. Not surprisingly, the domiciliary care sector in Cumbria faces particular challenges over recruitment and retention. Compared to the national average, Cumbria has greater numbers of older people living within its boundaries (CSAC, 2008) and this means that demand for social care from disabled older people living in Cumbria may be high but has to be met by the fewer people of working age. This is an area of low unemployment and there are currently fewer job seekers in Cumbria than elsewhere in England (CSAC, 2008). In terms of the available workforce, social care in Cumbria faces stiff competition from other sectors such as retail and tourism. Wages are often higher in these sectors and working conditions more favourable. For example, the remote rural nature of the county means that car ownership is often an essential pre-requisite of becoming a social care worker and for people on a low income this can be a significant barrier to joining the
workforce. Another disincentive can be the long journey times between client visits which workers must undertake in their own time.

Local intelligence suggests that in social care in Cumbria, retention is more of a problem than recruitment, with so called ‘turnstile employment’ where people join an organisation only to leave relatively quickly (CSAC, 2008). Turnover in domiciliary care in Cumbria is around 26% compared with an average of 19.3% within adult social care in general (CSAC, 2008). A study of 213 Cumbrian social care workers (Gill, 2007), indicated that 44% of respondents had considered leaving their job. The five main reasons were:

1. Search for better pay (52%)
2. Unsuitable hours (42%)
3. Inappropriate stress levels (41%)
4. General dissatisfaction (24%)
5. Concern regarding the direction and focus of the organisation (21%)

While this evidence suggests that improving pay and conditions is critical when it comes to tackling the recruitment and retention problems in social care, local provider agencies’ scope for doing this is constrained by the tight financial situation in the sector. As Yeandle, Shipton and Buckner (2006) point out, the allocation of substantial additional resources to support social care is likely to remain a matter primarily for public policy, public opinion and central government to resolve, although heightened awareness of key issues at the local level, and pressure from key agencies in the decision making process can contribute to the debate about funding in social care. Social care staff participating in Yeandle et al’s study suggested that if pay were taken out of the equation, improving the supervisory skills of their managers, especially listening to, appreciating and supporting their workers would be key factors in motivating them to stay with their organisations. According to Gill (2007), pay is often cited as the reason for leaving a post to avoid bringing-up more confrontational topics with management. Significantly, these findings resonate with national research commissioned by Skills for Care (Lucas, Atkinson and Godden, 2009) which notes that problems with retention can often be linked to ineffective management. A key recommendation of this study is that managers should focus on human resource practices critical to recruitment and retention. These include supervision, appraisal, flexibility, career progression, training and qualifications (Lucas, Atkinson and Godden, 2009).
3: Developing a recruitment and retention strategy

In Cumbria, social care workforce development is supported by ‘Care Sector Alliance Cumbria’ (CSAC) (www.cumbria.gov.uk/adultsocialcare/partnerships/csac). This is an employer led partnership which contributes to the organisational and workforce development of social care providers in Cumbria. It is primarily funded by the County Council and currently works with 250 adult social care providers from the statutory, voluntary and private sectors. In April 2008, CSAC appointed a ‘Recruitment and Retention Project Officer’ to develop a county wide recruitment and retention strategy for 2008-2013. The strategy,¹ is wide ranging and includes six priority objectives including one targeted specifically at retention by ‘Encouraging disengaged employees to stay with their existing employers or to remain working within care’ (CSAC, 2008). The key delivery vehicle for this objective is the development of a new ‘Personal Effectiveness, Mental Toughness and Emotional Loyalty’ training course which aims to:

- Develop working practices that influence engagement and loyalty
- Ensure greater staff engagement and loyalty
- Improve staff retention rates in the longer term.

In terms of strategy development, what is distinctive about the approach employed in Cumbria is the move towards an evidence-based approach. Four practice development sites have been selected for targeted action and research. The sites include: a medium size domiciliary care agency (Group 1); a large learning disabilities charity (Group 2); a special school for looked after children (Group 3); and a care home for older people with dementia (Group 4). The aforementioned training was piloted in these sites initially. In addition to the training, the R&R Project Officer also provided the sites with intensive support to look at a range of issues which might impact on recruitment and retention (e.g. ways of improving company image and advertising results; development of applicant friendly application procedures; and the improvement of HR systems and processes). Despite this targeted action, the figures collected for the mid-term review of the strategy development work in the four practice development sites, show that staff turnover rates have increased (by between 2-3%) across all four participating organisations (reflecting a continuation in a pattern characterised by peaks and troughs).

¹ The full strategy can be viewed on CSAC’s website:
http://www.cumbria.gov.uk/elibrary/Content/Internet/327/5041/5044/39833111028.pdf
[Accessed 18.02.10].
There is some frustration among CSAC members that huge challenges remain in overcoming the macro underlying issues linked to pay and conditions. Putting in place procedures and mechanisms for ensuring robust data collection was also a significant challenge and in many respects a key component of the development work itself. For example, in one of the organisations where two half time workers left their posts this was counted as only one departure. It should also be noted that staff turnover levels are not necessarily negative because they can disguise a more subtle, often positive picture of internal and external progression (Lucas, Atkinson and Godden, 2009). Indeed, an unanticipated outcome of the training was that is inspired two of the participants (both very senior managers within their organisations) to leave their current posts and to find a new job with another care organisation.

4: Personal effectiveness, mental toughness and emotional loyalty training
The training was developed by a local training and development company and was delivered initially over two days in May 2009 to social care managers working in the aforementioned practice development sites. It was planned that the two day intensive training programme would then be followed-up with a series of ‘learning sets’ held over a three month period where participants could reflect upon and refine what they had learnt.

Day one of the training covered ‘personal effectiveness’ and ‘mental toughness’ techniques. ‘Personal effectiveness’ is defined in the training materials as the skill, knowledge and motivation to manage oneself in any situation in order to maximise full potential and achieve the desired objective. ‘Mental toughness’ is defined as the capacity for an individual to deal effectively with stressors, pressures and challenges and to perform to the best of the abilities irrespective of the circumstances in which they find themselves. It is an approach which is gaining some prominence within the NHS (Krichefski, 2009). The second day covered ‘emotional intelligence’ and developing an understanding of the ‘emotional loyalty process.’ A key tool advocated in the training is

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2 The pattern of peaks and troughs was variable across the organisations. For example, one organisation appeared to making good progress to reduce turnover rates however, this was not sustained when the senior manager responsible for recruitment and retention left her post.

3 The training was developed and provided by local training provider, JBE Training & Development. Initially, the emotionally loyalty training was targeted at the education sector. [Accessed 18.02.10]
the ‘emotional loyalty conversation’ which is to be conducted between managers and their staff. The conversations are designed to:

- Build trust, confidence and genuine rapport between employees and managers
- Develop manager’s awareness of what the employee wants from their work and how to align this with what the organisation wants from the person and their role
- Invites employees to relay positively what would make them engaged and loyal
- Initiates discussion about the strengths of the employee
- Empowers employees to create a visualisation of being even more fulfilled at work
- Establish where employees are right now and what steps need to be taken.

The concept of emotional intelligence (EI) was brought to prominence by Goleman (1996) and consists of a set of core skills: namely the intrapersonal competencies of knowing one’s emotions, managing emotions, motivating oneself; and the interpersonal competencies of recognising emotions in others and handling relationships. Despite having gained a great deal of currency in human resource management, there is only limited empirical evidence as to how emotional intelligence is enacted, received, negotiated, deployed and re-colonized within different kinds of workplaces and by different parties (Hughes, 2005). In social care specifically, there has been little investigation and few reports of its application (Morrison, 2007). The concept of ‘emotional loyalty’ is not as well evidenced in the human resources literature and is mostly to be found in the field of marketing where it is seen as a means of assuring ‘brand loyalty’ (Hallberg, 2004). One of the aims of the evaluation was therefore to begin to tease out, from the perspectives of those receiving the training, how the ‘emotional loyalty process’ might impact on employee engagement and staff retention. Indeed, the notion of ‘employee engagement’ is itself a relatively new term for which there are multiple and often conflicting definitions (Macey and Schneider, 2008).

5: Evaluation methodology

The evaluation was small scale due to the limited amount of funding that was available. Focus groups (n=3) were carried out at three of the four participating organisations and included 21 participants. Two telephone interviews were also carried out with participants from the fourth organisation (the care home for older people) because it was not possible to arrange a focus group meeting due to the difficulties in arranging staff cover. One of the participants who participated in the telephone interviews had since left...
the host organisation following the training to take-up a different post within social care.
In total, of 32 people undertaking the training, 23 participated in the evaluation. The
focus groups were carried out four months after the completion of the training. This was
to allow sufficient time for managers to implement the training, attend learning sets and
to observe any results within their organisations.

The focus groups and interviews employed a topic guide which was informed by
Kirkpatrick’s (2006) model of training evaluation. Kirkpatrick’s model requires a training
programme to be evaluated at four levels:

1. Reaction – were learners please with the programme?
2. Learning – what was learned by the learners?
3. Behaviour – was behaviour changed due to the learning that took place?
4. Results – did the change in behaviour affect the organisation (with a specific
   focus of retention and rates of staff turnover)?

The focus groups were recorded and transcribed and then analysed thematically under
the headings above. Information was also collected by CSAC on retention rates for the
four participating organisations six months prior to the training commencing and then six
months afterwards. A small advisory group was set-up to discuss and take-forward the
findings. This included representatives from CSAC, including service user
representation. Research governance approval for the evaluation was secured from
Cumbria County Council Social Services Research Ethics Governance Committee.

6: Findings
The overall feedback on the training was extremely positive. In undertaking the training,
participants valued time away from the ‘day job’ and the opportunities this afforded for
time out and personal reflection. Opportunities for team building and getting to know
colleagues were also acknowledged as important outcomes of attending the course. Part
of the attraction was that the course was free and that it provided a different kind of
training to that which was normally provided locally in the social care sector:

‘All the training we are normally provided with is set mandatory training [e.g.
moving and handling]. This was totally different... This touched on a more
feelings level rather than on the stuff that you have to do... so it was a luxury
from that point of view’
Most participants felt that they had come away from the training with a better insight into their own management practices and how these could be improved.

'I learnt that I have not to get so emotionally involved in things that I end up crying. I have to put that emotion somewhere else, and be more positive. That's what I got from it'

One aspect of the ‘emotional loyalty’ training which was most memorable and often recounted by participants has particularly insightful and helpful was the (stereo) ‘typing’ of certain people within the workplace which was intended as a tool to help managers better understand team dynamics:

'[Researcher: What is a Mood Hoover?] The [person] that brings you down and is negative all the time... I just find it hard to get the Mood Hoovers to understand that that's what they actually are'

A common perception was that the course did not introduce new ideas, but instead encouraged a process of self-reflection; with renewed confidence and self-belief in one’s own practices:

'[The material] wasn’t new to us. It has brought our attention to what we were probably doing without thinking about...It’s like driving a car, we all drive without thinking about it. We get into the car and go to work and then someone points out you are crossing your hands on the steering wheel and its only then you think about’

In terms of course content, the consensus of the three focus groups was that the ‘personal effectiveness’ and ‘mental toughness’ part of the course was more relevant than the emotional loyalty part of the course:
‘I think it will be tricky to show you [examples] of what we are doing from the emotional loyalty bit [of the course], whereas on the mental toughness we can all come up with quite a lot of examples of how it has impacted on us personally…’

(Group 3)

Following the training, only participants from the domiciliary care agency (Group 1) chose to attend the follow-up learning sets. The other three agencies did not attend any post training follow-up due to the difficulties of covering for further staff absences. Furthermore, the domiciliary care agency (Group 1) was the only organisation went on to formally implement the ‘emotional loyalty process’ as a retention tool in the workplace. In this organisation, senior management developed their own ‘emotional loyalty conversation’ topic guide (see Figure 1 overleaf) and had communicated clearly to their managers that they were expected them to carry out conversations with their own staff.

This organisation had also introduced an ‘emotional loyalty contract’ in which participants in the conversations were expected to inform their managers as to the ‘actions I commit to taking as a result of this conversation’. The expectation was that this contract should then be reviewed at regular intervals. Staff below management level were not informed of the new process that had been implemented within their organisation:

‘[Researcher: You now have emotional loyalty conversations with a view to addressing the issue of staff retention?] Yes, we have chats. We don’t call it [emotional loyalty] to them. We just say we are having a chat with you to catch up. Some staff I have been doing it with, have been very suspicious because they are not used to this type of approach. They ask what are you going to do with this information and how are you going to use it? I say it’s confidential - it is just a chat between the two of us… I am going to jot some notes down for you to refer to and we are going to have catch-up again in another few months time’

(Group 1)

While undertaking the conversations had felt awkward at first, managers felt that the ‘chats’ had since become an integral part of their working practices. Some managers reported that they did not use the ‘emotional loyalty contract’, preferring a less formal and more ‘off the cuff’ approach:
Figure 1: Possible Questions for Emotional Loyalty Chat

**Preparing the ground?**
So how are things going with you?
Ask a question about a hobby or interest mentioned on the application form…
What aspects of your job are you enjoying?

**Expectations and goals**
How does your job fit with life/interests?
Do you regard your job as just a job or does it mean more to you?

**Hot Topics**
Are there any parts of your job that you find difficult?

**Highlights**
What have you done recently in work that has made you feel good?
Find out what the highlight is
Amplify the highlight
Reinforce the highlight
Start again with another highlight

**Future Perfect**
Imagine yourself at work when you have felt totally motivated – what does that look like?

**Scale**
Where do you currently feel you are in your job – on a scale of 0-10?

**Steps**
What steps can we take together to get to a higher level on the scale?
What can you do to help with this?

**Personal mission**
Complete an action plan and both sign it
Decide on a date to meet again.
'There was a particular incident this morning when I was faced with an employee - you could see visibly that there was something wrong. Prior to the training I would have taken her upstairs and still spoken to her, but I think after this training it makes you more aware of, well I really have to show that I value this person, whereas in the past you wouldn’t have had that thought process. It has changed your thought process altogether. This wasn’t a planned [emotional loyalty conversation], but the chat is more structured because of the training.'

(Group 1)

While participants from the domiciliary care agency felt it was too early to say how the training and the subsequent implementation of the ‘emotional loyalty process’ had impacted at the level of staff retention rates within their organisation, they were largely optimistic:

'I think it is working. I don’t think it is going to be an overnight success. It is something [the managers] have all identified as what they will do and for their staff and to get staff used to and not to be so sceptical about it. It will not solve [the retention problem] by itself, but it will help to improve morale with the other things we have in place'

(Group 1)

In the other three organisations, it was acknowledged that the ‘emotional loyalty process’ had not been implemented in the workplace in any formal sense. It was felt that engagement in the ‘learning sets’ might have acted as a spur:

'[In terms of being able to demonstrate] how we are putting [the emotional loyalty] into practice, I would have to say discipline us more… If we had done the [follow-up] meetings… those deadlines are inevitably going to push you to try and have a go in a more systematic way'

(Group 3)

A further barrier to implementation was that while some participants felt that they had grasped the concept of ‘emotional loyalty’ at an intuitive level, it was difficult to translate
what this meant for their own management practice without further support and clarification from their own senior managers:

‘Sometimes you listen to your staff team and I am not quite sure whether they are as emotionally loyal to the organisation as they should be… You do hear them saying “No one cares about us” and it comes to us [the managers] and that’s where you have to step in. [Researcher: what would you do?] That’s it. I don’t really know, to me it would be trial and error. I would maybe have to try something that I had picked up on the course, I don’t know’

(Group 3)

More senior managers in both Groups 2 and 3 felt that capacity problems prohibited the implementation of the ‘emotional loyalty process’ hence inaction in developing specific procedures within their own organisation. In both organisations it was felt that managers already had enough to do carrying out and completing the paperwork linked to procedures for staff supervision and appraisal:

‘We are all aware of making time to ask each other and others how they are, you know, and catch up on them a bit, but it is as you are passing… This isn’t the kind of environment where [the emotional loyalty process] would work beyond that…it is difficult enough to get [staff] to cover each of us for our supervision’

(Group 2)

An important issue which emerged in the discussions was how ‘emotional loyalty’ fitted-in with procedures for staff supervision and appraisal. For the learning disability service and special school, ‘emotional loyalty’ was viewed as something which could add to these already established processes:

‘[The trainer said emotional loyalty] must not be used in supervision and I must admit that is where I actually have used it… Within what is a quite formal setting [emotional loyalty] introduces a nice bit of informality and can actually bring out some really concrete things that you can change… Our appraisals were really static and horrible… Now we are saying what have you done and what have you done well, more of a celebration of your job rather than an appraisal. It is still formal supervision but with a bit more of where you can sit and ask how is it going?’

(Group 3)
In the domiciliary care agency, the emotional loyalty process was perceived not to fit with staff supervision and appraisal because these processes were understood as being limited to ‘an observation of staff [practices] out in the workplace.’

7: Conclusion

In this article we have described the development of a leadership training programme which was designed to support the retention of social care staff by showing managers how they could develop ‘personal effectiveness’ and ‘mental toughness’ and engender ‘emotional loyalty’ among their staff. Although it was not possible to evidence any impact at the level of reducing staff turnover with the four participating organisations, the training was rated very highly by all who participated. The training was particularly appreciated for being different to that which is usually offered in the social care sector especially as regard the opportunities it afforded for reflection and ‘time out’. Indeed, it is important to highlight that evidence from elsewhere suggests that training and personal development opportunities such as are important retention tools in their own right (Skills for Care, 2009).

The ‘emotional loyalty’ part of the course was however, less well received by the participants as compared to the training on ‘personal effectiveness’ and ‘mental toughness’. From the perspective of the trainer, it was felt that ‘emotional loyalty’ was a new course and that there was scope for improved delivery and also, that this element might better be delivered as a stand alone course. In terms of practice however, a key finding was that only one of the four participating organisations went on to implement recommendations as regard the ‘emotional loyalty process’. In two of the organisations choosing not to implement the ‘emotional loyalty process’ there was concern that managers would not have time to undertake ‘emotional loyalty’ conversations in addition to procedures already in place for supervision and appraisal. It was, however, recognised that some of the emotional loyalty techniques could be used to improve the quality of existing appraisal and supervision practices. Indeed, it might be suggested that in the organisation which did implement the ‘emotional loyalty process’ more fully, this served to fill a gap in that supervision and appraisal practices were largely underdeveloped here (in that they were being used primarily as a surveillance tool rather than a means of supporting staff in what is an emotional and pressurised role). Whether the ‘emotional loyalty process’ is an acceptable substitute for good supervision is questionable. Furthermore, it may be argued that ‘emotional loyalty’ does not fit as easily...
with social care values as it does with those of the marketing sector. For example, a fundamental principle of social care promoted through the personalisation agenda is the primacy of the social care worker’s relationship with the service user and carer (rather than the employer organisation itself). Indeed, it is recognised that one of the main reasons why social workers choose to stay within their current organisations is because of what might be described as their ‘emotional loyalty’ to service users and carers (Skills for Care, 2009). Social care values are also fundamentally about respect, empowerment, inclusion, individuality and anti-discriminatory practice all of which sit rather uncomfortably with the inclusion of popular management buzz terms such as ‘mood hover’.

In summary the overall, recommendation of the evaluation is in alignment with the findings of Skills for Care (2009) as regards the importance of developing human resource practices which can support retention. In this case, the evidence suggests that in finding an accompaniment to the successful ‘personal effectiveness’ and ‘mental toughness’ training, it might be more appropriate to develop training course content around good management practice in supervision and appraisal. Discussing the rise of ‘care management’ in social work, Morrison (2007 p25) insightfully suggests how the concept of EI might play a role in this:

‘Emotional intelligence or competence is pivotal to gaining the co-operation of other colleagues… and to surviving and thriving in what is a very tough occupation… But the place of relationship and emotion in social [care] is in danger of becoming increasingly marginalised. If it takes the concept of EI, despite its limitations, to refresh and re-engage with emotion… this can only be beneficial’.
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