WORKPLACE SPIRITUALITY AND THE RETENTION OF SOCIAL WORKERS BY CHILDREN’S SERVICES DIRECTORATES

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Stream 20: The Role of the Contemplative in Workplace Organization: Exploring Spiritualities, Theologies, Philosophies, and Ethics
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1. Introduction

The poor retention of experienced social workers by organizations such as Children’s Services is a crisis that has been described by Platt (2002), in her annual report to the government as the most critical challenge currently facing the Social Services. In 2004, Munro (2004: 1091) reported Social Worker vacancies of 40% and higher in London, and of 28% elsewhere. Douglas (2002) observes that it is equally concerning that in a profession where experience counts, many of those actually in post were newly qualified. 27% of new social workers left public service within five years of qualifying. The reports of both the Audit Commission (Recruitment and Retention 2002b:3) and of the Royal College of Psychiatrists (2006) recorded the views of social workers leaving the profession as highly critical of what they regarded as poor management leadership, lacking in vision, and preoccupied with performance indicators. Despite this evidence of the dangers of the systems audit approach; ‘high levels of stress, career crisis, low morale,’ (Noble, 2005 p.289) Munro (2004:1091) notes that there is a lack of ‘rigorous research to increase our understanding of what works.

This paper is part of a larger doctoral study that explores ‘how can managers create workplace environments that maintain the commitment to service of Social Workers by sustaining their spiritual need for personal fulfillment?’ The first section provides the context for the research and highlights the problems within Children’s Services. The next section examines the literature that is essential to this study. The third section outlines the research methodology, narrative research, which has been adopted and adapted for the primary data collection. The fourth section considers, reflexively, some of the themes that have emerged from the research and suggests new practice that may be adopted to address some of the pertinent issues.

2. The Scale of the Crisis in Children’s Services

Children’s Social Care Services (CSCS) are the social work agencies employed by local authorities to carry out statutory child protection requirements: investigations of abuse, legal proceedings to place children in alternative families and the care of children accommodated by the state. The last several years have witnessed a deepening crisis of retaining experienced social workers in CSCS (Platt, 2002) and in 2009 after a major survey of social workers UNISON warned “Child Protection Services are a ticking time bomb that could explode at any minute” (Prentis, 2009). The survey found that 60% of staff reported that they were working in teams where more than one fifth of posts were vacant and 75% said that this had resulted in increased workloads and increased stress for them. In March 2009 the Local
Government Association reported that 89% of councils have difficulties recruiting experienced social workers and that 5000 social workers were urgently needed in the short term just to maintain existing child protection services.

Bell (1999:117) states that by the very nature of the work, social work is stressful. Working with children who have been harmed, is itself traumatizing for the worker concerned and can lead to ‘burnout’ (Maslach, 1997:17). However, whilst recognizing that social work is a demanding job, Collins (2008:1175) notes that much of the research conducted in this area is contradictory and despite the stress generated by structural and extrinsic factors, many social workers report high levels of job satisfaction and motivation. Response to this growing crisis has been to develop over a period of years top down retention strategies which focus on mainstream Human Resource Management theory and practice such as structural and organizational factors that have contributed to poor retention. It is these approaches which appear on the surface to be rational but which have failed within the context of CSCS that will be discussed in the next section.

3. The Failure of Human Resource Strategies in the Retention of Social Workers

The approach to retention that has been adopted by senior management in CSCS has been influenced by strategies adopted in other areas of the public sector as well as that from mainstream HR theory. To provide a flavour of their approach one must first consider the study undertaken by Eborall and Garmeson (2001) which analysed why there are so many vacant social work posts. Their analysis summarised the following:

- Poor image due to years of harsh criticism within the public sphere.
- Poor pay
- Job dissatisfaction due to staff shortages, work overload and inexperienced staff, bureaucracy, excessive paperwork and poor management.
- A climate of fear
- Violence and verbal abuse from clients
- Demoralisation due to many enforced changes.

Thus what emerged were initiatives around developing a learning organisation, taking a strategic approach to recruitment and retention, and performance management. These were supplemented by other local strategies specifically around retention. Nevertheless, the Association of Directors of Social Work reported to the Secretary of State in 2004 that vacancies were increasing and not decreasing despite the wealth of strategies being adopted. They agreed that the HR initiatives were important but they saw the problem from a different perspective and suggested that:
.."nationally, social work needs leadership and vision. We need more focus on raising standards through inspection of practice, quality and outcomes... Under resourcing puts great strain and stress on managers and there is a definite lack of management training available" (Association of Directors of Social Work, 2004:3)

They also concluded that social workers are ultimately motivated to remain in their jobs because of their core beliefs and values and it may be these intrinsic rewards of the job that should be the focal point of a retention strategy.

The difficulty of the research that has emerged over the years on motivation is the predominance of the functionalist approach as typified by the Job Characteristics Model of Work Motivation (Hackman and Oldham, 1980). Psychometric techniques and computer-based data analysis generate considerable statistical data in this quasi-experimental approach to organisational analysis promising practical success in shaping the workforce. A similar method of investigation was employed in 2002/2003 by the Social Services Workforce Survey, Report 31. However, such studies have been ineffective at retaining key workers, and importantly have been rejected by workers as unrepresentative of their purposes and motivations, echoing the views of Hassard (1991) that functionalist approaches divorce the role of values, group, personal, from motivation and organisational analysis. There is a great deal of research on motivation in the workplace with a plethora of theories that have emerged: Galbraith (1977) and Steers and Porter (1983) have explored extrinsic and intrinsic factors from an individual, group and systems perspective; Daft (2001) has explored the ‘dark side’ of extrinsic reward where fear is used to control employees. De Vries (1998) suggests that extrinsic and intrinsic motivational factors are a continuum, not exclusive of each other and effective organisations must have the ability to empower and energise employees by building vision with which they feel comfortable as well as designing suitable control structures and reward systems.

The difficulty with the traditional approaches and their application within social work is the lack of understanding of senior managers, charged with running the system, of the historical context and ethical foundations of the social care service. Up until the Second World War social work both in the USA and UK was undertaken predominantly by philanthropic organisations. Post 1945 there was a parting of the ways and social care in the UK became state led. Whereas the US continued with a clinical-therapeutic model of social work largely funded by healthcare insurance, the UK provided social care through an administrative-bureaucratic model in which the social worker is less of a clinician or therapist and more of a resource-gatekeeper (Reisch, 1998). Thus, private practice is the largest area of social work employment in the US and the smallest area in the UK with British social workers generally being reluctant to work in ‘for-profit’ organisations (Payne, 1997). Educated, trained and employed within the state welfare service, British social workers show a preference to work with ‘poor people and other stigmatised groups’ (Weiss, 2002:594). Weiss (2002: 599) also showed that both US and UK social workers make career choices based on values of social justice – exemplified by the belief in the worth and dignity of every human being. Unfortunately the introduction of quasi-markets into the public sector in the UK has given rise to a ‘new managerialism’ where the focus is on downsizing, reduction in budgets, top down administration and constant reorganisation and change. Consequently social workers have experienced a profound challenge to their humanitarian ideals of social responsibility, the right to social
justice for all, elimination of poverty, exploitation and oppression – that until now has been the foundation of professional social work (Noble, 2004: 294). The question for government and society is how do we address the crisis in social care that is typified by failure to retain qualified and experienced staff within Children's Services if the previous initiatives have failed so dramatically? One suggestion could be moving away from the functionalist approaches to those underpinned by different philosophies more congruent with the social work ethos.

4. Towards an alternative approach to management theory and practice - Spirituality at Work

Transpersonal psychology and personality theory is concerned with what it means to be human and the Spirituality at Work (SaW) literature draws on the work of Maslow (1968) and Frankl (1948) in particular. It is not the intention is this paper to explore the roots of their work in detail but to locate it within the management and organisational literature and to understand better what spirituality means in the workplace.

Maslow (1968:5-15) locates the unconscious spiritual nature of the individual within their biology where it is biologically programmed to promote the health and development of the entire human being – psychological and physical. Maslow’s work was based on an existential philosophy because for him it recognised the ‘two natures’ of human beings: the lower nature of instincts and needs, and the higher nature of ‘godlikeness’ – both simultaneously defining characteristics of human nature. The integration of the higher nature and the lower nature, of intrinsic needs and extrinsic needs defines Maslow’s psychoanalytical theory and ‘Human Spirituality’. Maslow describes (1968:33) the observable characteristics (Table 1) in the person who has achieved the integration of their higher nature with their lower nature – referred to as ‘self actualisation’:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superior perception of reality</th>
<th>Higher frequency of peak experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased acceptance of self, of others and of nature</td>
<td>Increased identification with the human species</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased spontaneity</td>
<td>Changed (improved) interpersonal relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased problem centering</td>
<td>More democratic character structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased detachment and desire for privacy</td>
<td>Greatly increased creativeness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased autonomy and resistance to enculturation</td>
<td>Certain changes in the value system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richness of emotional reaction and freshness of appreciation</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Maslow became increasingly concerned with the relationship between the process of self-actualisation and a person’s attitude and motivation to work and by extension the ideal form of management within organisations most conducive to enabling individuals to achieve self-actualisation. (Maslow, 1962:2). He suggests (1962:50) that if an organisation takes seriously the personal development and happiness of its managers and workers then paradoxically this is more likely to result in increased productivity or profitability. He recognises this is not an easy approach to adopt and would require courage and vision because it is lacking in the scientific determinism that business organisations and managers would like to think underpins the enterprise.

Victor Frankl has also been concerned with the spirituality and our search for meaning. Like Maslow the starting point for Frankl (1948, 2000:32) is the human unconscious as the ontological foundation of a lived life and the epistemological facilitator of meaning and knowledge creation: the unconscious is a spiritual capacity of the human being, reflexive of experience, and by which an individual establishes personal meaning.

“...meaning must be found and cannot be given. And it must be found by oneself, by one’s own conscience. Conscience may be defined as the means to discover meanings, to ‘sniff them out’ as it were” (Frankl, 2000:118)

Frankl (2000:19-80) argues that meaning is the primary motivation in our lives and it is this hunger for meaning that makes us both the physical and spiritual beings that we are. Human spirituality is not a contemplative or intellectual facility but a reflex impulse to perform certain actions or to behave in a certain way in any given set of concrete circumstances. For this reason, human spirituality and the purpose of meaning-fulfilment it serves is radically linked to the work that we do, the causes we serve, and the people we love.

It is impossible within the confines of this paper to explore all the facets of the work of Frankl and Maslow that impact on the SaW movement. However, it has to be stated that many other academics see a great deal of merit in their work. Csikszentmihalyi (2002) recognises the role of work organisations particularly those in the public sector in creating the environment in which meaning can be achieved. He calls for a reformation where the good organisation is defined by the quality of life of its workers and not the size of its profits.

Unfortunately SaW is a concept that sits uneasily in mainstream business management and even attracts outright hostility from business academics (Mitroff and Denton (1999:16). They argue that the reason spirituality has failed to gain
widespread legitimacy in business research is because it is dominated by the scientific positivist paradigm. Even when scientific positivism is not the dominant research approach business schools find the connotations with religion difficult to assimilate (Chalofsky, 2004). Joseph (2004:8) also observes that the interchanging of the words ‘spirituality’ and ‘meaning’ is an assumption lacking definition and is particularly unhelpful in UK business and organisational contexts because in the UK the concept of spirituality is “not universally welcomed or seen as appropriate. Most people do not have a clear notion of their own spirituality”

The instinctive bias against religion, and by extension against spirituality, is an instinct based on serious concerns that must be recognised and acknowledged by SaW researchers because as McLeod and Wright (2001:401) observe:

“It is neither neutral to inquire nor neutral to not inquire about spirituality in our work.... both may be considered political acts. Either could invite oppression – the former potentially through the imposition of certainty; the latter through marginalisation and oppression by silence”

The goal of business research into SaW is not the goal of religion. Many managers and high level executives have expressed personal concern with spirituality and engaging with the economic world. Spirituality is an inextricable part of organisational life, and as such, demands serious business research because the organisational life and culture of an institution or business must be understood, shaped, directed towards specific goals and managed if it is to be productive (Mitroff and Denton, 1999; Ashmos and Duchon, 2000).

Business academics and management practitioners may be reluctant to engage with the study of spirituality but the legitimacy of such research enquiry cannot be seriously doubted. The question must be then: how and in what ways should organizations engage with the spirituality of the people who work with them?

The consensus of the literature is that SaW promotes and builds success for organisations (Fry, 2003; Senge, 1990; Guillory, 2002). Biberman and Whittey (1997) suggest that gains for the organisation include the enhanced quality of decisions made by workers and managers, greater innovation and creative thinking, improved ethical behaviour, a personal sense of empowerment; all of which result in the increased retention and loyalty of key staff. Garcia-Zamor (2003) reports on the success of a SaW programme aimed at tackling poor staff retention at Sikorsky Aircraft. Hua (1999) has similarly reported improved staff retention and higher productivity following from the introduction of a spirituality programme at GE Industrial Systems.

Nevertheless it is important to stress that although SaW has great potential as an approach within many organisations enthusiasts must guard against accrediting business organisations with altruistic motives. Roberts (2001) argues that many
managers who endorse the approach are in reality appropriating the language of SaW for their own ends. This can be seen with the current pre-occupation with the ‘ethical organisation’. Klenke (2003) similarly warns against the misappropriation of the SaW approach by organisations to cloak their greed and profitability, but this should not be seen as undermining of the validity of the SaW approach which is grounded in the experience by people of their work as spiritually meaningful. Finally Marques et al. (2005) has synthesised an integrated model of spirituality and leadership from the SaW literature on management leadership:

- The leader should communicate with the team through regular meetings and encourage contribution from every team member.
- The leader should role model the behaviour expected from staff
- The leader should demonstrate care for subordinates by mingling with them so that they can communicate more readily
- The leader should encourage group activity rather than individual performance
- The leader should encourage a climate of trust among workers
- The leader should encourage common goals but allow teams to be self-directing
- The leader should encourage cooperation between teams, sections, departments
- The leader should encourage workers to see each other as complete human beings.

The SaW approach to management has a great deal of validity and is highly applicable to the management practices that should be a core element of the strategy to retain social workers in employment with Children’s Services Directorates. The next section with discuss the research methodology used within this study. The methodology is based on a narrative approach and the analysis of narratives by ‘Reflective Teams’.
5. **Researching SaW within a Narrative Methodological Approach**

The research that is discussed here aims to explore the subjective and interpreted search for meaning of the human being at work and the spiritual (unconscious) processes that maintain the motivation and commitment of social workers to their jobs. SaW is approached through the discourse of psychoanalytical theory and the methodology adopts a narrative approach.

The narrative approach has developed into a major research methodology in the social sciences over the last two decades (Denzin, 2001:23). This is particularly true for psychoanalytical and psychotherapeutic research. (Rickard, 2001). Allan et al., (2002:10) state that a diversity of roots and sources has led to a diversity of definitions within the narrative approach and most advocates of the approach are unconcerned to define narrative, accepting a multiplicity of concepts and techniques. Narratives range from the factually real, to legend, to myth, to fiction to fantasy.

Moving into the business and organisational literature it can be seen that narrative has been used to explore organisational culture as well as the meaning of organisational experience (Rhodes and Brown, 2005). Various themes have emerged through the use of narrative methodology: narratives enable understanding about the emotional and symbolic lives in organisations (Boyce, 1996; Gabriel, 1998); Organisations are storytelling systems (Boje, 1991; Currie and Brown, 1993); Narratives construct the organisation reflexively (Skoldberg, 1994); Organisations can be re-storied to achieve a different reality and culture (Linde, 2001).

### 5.1 The Approach adopted in this study

The approach adopted was a two stage process. Stage One involved the narrative capture and Stage Two involved the analysis of the narratives with Reflective Teams.

**Stage One:** Having explored the work of Polkinghorne (1988), Jones (2002) and Wilding (2005) the authors decided to select the following sample of participants:

- 6 social workers from within the organisation with which one of the authors works
- 7 Heads of Child Services across the region
- 7 Senior Managers to form the Reflective Team.
- 12 Social Workers to form a Reflective Team
All participants were invited to participate in the research and no undue pressure was put on any individual. All ethical considerations were explored and the organisation gave its consent for the research to be undertaken.

Narratives were collected from the six social workers and four Heads of Child Services. Each participant was asked to set aside approximately two hours – one hour for the narrative and one hour for reflection. Each participant was taken to a comfortable room away from the place of work. The narratives were recorded manually using pen, paper and memory. Once the narrative had been framed as a coherent account, it was returned to the narrator for their consideration. The narrator could amend the narrative, withdraw from the research or return it to the interviewer. Ahead of the meeting and following Wengraf (2001) each participant was asked to consider the following question:

**Why are you committed to your job in this Children’s Services organisation?**

Reference to Lips-Wiersma (2003:414) in supplying ‘prompts’ to help participants frame their responses and these prompts were based, in part, on Moore’s (2003:558) spiritual assessment model that social workers might use with their clients:

- *How would you describe your job in terms of personal growth and creativity, as supportive of people and making a difference to their lives?*

- *How would you describe your spirituality and how it influences you in your job?*

**Stage 2:** One important approach to analyzing narratives within a psychoanalytical discourse is as lips-Wiersma (2002) observes the use of a Reflective Team constituted by a group or panel of peers, colleagues or researchers. Bannister (1999) argues that a Reflective Team approach to analysis can serve to minimise the influence of the researcher’s assumptions, feelings, prejudices and anticipation of desired outcomes on the narrative material.
Gergen (2000:4) suggests that a ‘reflecting team’ should undertake this process of analysis so that additional data is gathered from multiple voices and a collective means of deliberation is established. Thus we had two reflecting teams. The Senior Manager reflecting team reflected on the narratives of the Senior Manager narrators and the Social Worker reflecting team reflected on the narratives of their peer group and then the reflections of the Senior Management reflective team as shown in Figure 1. The Social Worker reflective team was actually a team who worked together regularly, having between 5-17 years of experience each. The group was mixed with seven female and five male members.

Once again drawing from the work of Heron (1992), Wengraf (2001) and Wiersma (2002) the reflective teams were asked to establish by common agreement the themes they saw to be emergent from the narratives. The themes had to be taken directly from the texts as representative of views expressed in each of the narratives.
Once the process of analysis had been undertaken as shown in Figure 2 each reflective team was then asked to explore three specific questions from the perspective of the analysis they had just undertaken. The purpose of this was to compare their views with a SaW approach to the management practices and organisational cultures that support and sustain worker motivation and retention. These questions were:

- What are the attributes, abilities and values of a good team manager?
- How does a manager exercise spiritual leadership and help staff find value and meaning in what they do?
- What are the values of a good team and how would you define the culture of the team to which you would like to belong (could this be framed as a charter)?

The analysis of the narratives and the reflections that emerged are discussed in the next section.

6. Narratives and their analysis

It is impossible within the context of this paper to explore all of the rich data collected from the individual narratives and the Reflective Team analyses. Therefore this section will summarise what emerged through the narratives and provide commentary on what was said. All narrators identities have been anonymised as agreed within the ethical framework of this research.
6.1 Narratives of the social workers

- How would you describe your job in terms of personal growth and creativity, as supportive of people and making a difference to their lives?

In terms of personal growth five out of the six social workers addressed this directly but all had a different perspective on what it actually meant. For Narrator A personal growth is about having confidence in one's own ability and self-belief. Narrator C sees personal growth as about recognising one's own limitations and behaviours and bringing that type of honesty to the social worker role in dealing with the vast array of clients. Narrator D specifically talked about learning and continually questioning your values to understand yourself better. Narrator E spoke about beliefs and values that are brought to the job and their personal growth has been through the reaffirmation of those beliefs as a social worker doing a difficult job. An interesting perspective on personal growth was that given by Narrator E:

“... I've certainly made a great deal of mistakes professionally and in my personal relationships, but I like to think that I've always learned from my mistakes and never repeated the same mistake twice....To a large degree the job is who I am – it has taught me a lot and made me a rounder, fuller person”.

When exploring creativity once again there were a variety of views. Narrator A talked about achieving at work but then went on to discuss cost cutting, bullying in the workplace and lack of consultation where social work is morphing into a business. Narrator C believes that helping people to create a better life for themselves and their children requires a great deal of creativity particularly when dealing with drug users, domestic violence and harm to children. Narrator E has views more congruent with A:

“.. I think the job stunts my creativity to some extent because of the systems and regime that we are forced to work in now. There is little scope for individual creativity... I am a creative person but I express this creativity in other ways outside work.”

All of the narrators see themselves as supportive of people and making a difference to their lives. However the difference is to individual children and possibly their families. Narrator A feels society does not care about the poorest people. Narrator C believes that they empower people to find their own solutions and doesn't use statutory powers to be oppressive. C is also part of a team that is very supportive – particularly in hard times. The support of a team is also a theme shared by Narrator D and E that for them engenders a sense of belonging. However, D does not think society is supportive of social worker. Narrator F, a social worker of many years, has some interesting thoughts on support and making a difference:
"I like the company of social workers because most of us have the same sense of humour – a very dark, gallows-type... I think we deal with so much tragedy each day that our humour is a coping mechanism. I think most social workers would say they share the same values, like being non-judgemental and accepting our clients for who they are, but to be honest these days I think the new generation of social workers are authoritarian and oppressive in their practices and that’s because they don’t genuinely empathize with the client”

- **How would you describe your spirituality and how it influences you in your job?**

This prompt elicited a variety of responses within the social worker narrative group. It raised issues around beliefs and values held by the social workers – honesty, being non-judgemental, engaging with clients, lack of time with clients, prayer and what it means, past history and childhood experiences, religion.

From each of the narratives there is a core understanding about what it is to be a social worker and what values should be brought to that role:

“*A shared value would be general respect for our clients and general respect for each other*” (Narrator B)

Spirituality and how it relates to the social worker role appears to evolve from their own historicity either through values developed in childhood family life or through being part of a religious community. Narrator E suggests that spirituality is about developing a conscience which then guides all of your actions including your interactions with clients. Even when being brought up in a religion but no longer practising it is difficult for the social worker to escape from the past and some actually resort to prayer when under pressure:

“..I do pray, at least that is what I call it, but I don’t say prayers as such or kneel down or anything. I have prayed for colleagues and clients, nothing formal, but was thinking about them. I have even lit the odd candle or two for people." (Narrator E)

### 6.2 The Narratives of the senior managers

Although seven senior managers agreed to participate only four eventually provided a narrative. This was for a variety of reasons including pressures of work. All of the management narratives discuss the public sector agenda for efficiency and how difficult it is to manage in this sort of climate. They too were prompted by the following questions:
How would you describe your job in terms of personal growth and creativity, as supportive of people and making a difference to their lives?

The four senior managers have very different narratives and this is reflected by the focus they choose to give to their thoughts on the above question. Narrative G describes an individual apart from the staff who sees himself as a leader. The discourse is one embedded in traditional business and management with some tokenism related to the social work roots from which they emerged. Although G has been a practising social worker the team ethic appears to have been left behind:

“I think staff should take personal responsibility for their motivation at work and for raising the bar of their own performance. I don’t think my job is to fix every problem, nurse every wound, address every grievance, or to ensure that every job is done.”

This contrasts with Narrative H who began by reflecting on why they entered the profession and the values manifested there. This narrative shows an individual still engaged with the grass roots social workers and at the interface of political turmoil. The recognition that maybe senior managers could engage more with staff and have meaningful discussions instead of just focusing on resource management is reflected on in this narrative. However, it isn’t happening at present.

Narrative I highlights a senior manager who appears to have been ‘under the cosh’ from staff and the discourse is somewhat defensive. Size of salary is an issue and much of the early part of the narrative is about justifying it:

“There is really no adequate financial incentive for doing this job…the buck stops with me….there is a great deal that can go wrong in an organisation of this size…. The complexity of children’s needs along with the families ….”

Although this individual talks about ‘arriving’ at a senior level the narrative would indicate a lack of real engagement with the social worker community and speculates about leaving the profession for something completely different. The narrative is reflexive to some degree about the work social workers are doing but the functionalist management speak of the person at the helm penetrates each sentence.

Narrative J begins with a reflection on a period of illness and why the job had possibly contributed to the situation. The discourse here is one congruent with that of the social workers. Even though J describes their role as a leader this comes with certain pressures but also with responsibilities to and support for those being led.

“Instead of concentrating my attention almost wholly on where we are failing as an organisation, something that’s very necessary in terms of the performance assessments and standards required of us – I now give equal
balance to recognising and celebrating the really good work being done by the organisation”

All of the senior managers are now detached from the day to day work done by social workers in their area. Their priorities have changed and this is reflected in their narratives. Their attitudes to spirituality also vary and possibly reflect the way they manage.

- **How would you describe your spirituality and how it influences you in your job?**

Narrative G distinguishes clearly the place religion and spirituality has in their life. Although narrative G has a predominant discourse of functionalist management it also reveals a personality who has a spiritual dimension and provides evidence for that. However, the final sentence of the narrative is also very revealing:

> “I would not feel comfortable introducing the concept of spirituality into our discussions with staff about motivation, but I do think that benefit could be derived from focussing our future discussions very much on how values and motivation are two sides of the same coin”

Narrative H does not use the term ‘spirituality’ at all in the text and this maybe a deliberate action to avoid articulating thoughts that might be problematic. However, the narrative does recognise the need for senior managers to articulate their beliefs more to social workers and spend more time within the ‘grass roots’ staff.

Narrative I also avoided engaging with the concept of ‘spirituality’. However it did refer to ‘wisdom’ and the trust engendered by managers with this quality. This senior manager sees open and honest discussions as the way forward in keeping up the organisational morale.

Narrative J sees the ‘spiritual self’ as extremely important and something that must be cultivated as part of personal and career development. This narrative concludes:

> “I have often thought that we should pay for a Quaker to come to our senior management meetings and teach us how to be calm and still, able to listen deeply and to speak with honesty, knowledge and genuine conviction. ... Naturally I keep this thought to myself. I know that a lot of staff at every level think like me about the importance of the spiritual in their lives and to the way they do their jobs but we are like the early Christians hiding in the catacombs – we dare not speak openly in public!”
6.3 Social Worker Reflective Team (SWRT) and Senior Manager Reflective Team (SMRT)

The next part of the findings explores the emergent themes identified by the Social Worker Reflective Team (SWRT) and the Senior Management reflective Team (SMRT). This was done separately as part of a discussion which took place over two hours on two different occasions. The following table (Table 2) summarises what emerged as consensus themes. However, not all brought agreement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Worker narratives: Emergent themes from analysis by SWRT</th>
<th>Senior manager narratives: Emergent themes from analysis by SMRT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social work is a vocation and I am motivated by service to my</td>
<td>Motivation at work is the personal responsibility of the worker. Managers must create conditions to develop motivation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clients and my community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am a social worker because it helps me to grow as a person</td>
<td>Managers are required to ensure compliance with the performance agenda but also maintain a balance between control and individual/team freedom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and helps me be the person I really am</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The job of childcare social work is stressful but I can cope</td>
<td>Leadership is intimately related to values, ethics and integrity of the leader and their embodiment of these values is modelled in the motivation and performance of the staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with the stress because the job has meaning for me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The job makes me healthy and happy</td>
<td>Leadership is about vision, giving confidence, security etc so staff can face challenges with resilience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There's no difference between my values and the values of my</td>
<td>Performance should be embedded in the mindset of every member of staff – it’s about quality and integrity of the service they provide to children and families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>job as a social worker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I draw upon my team for my identity, not upon the directorate. The team supports me and values me.</td>
<td>Leaders must look outside the organisation to the bigger context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not feel valued by my management, but I do the job</td>
<td>Values unite all levels of staff in the organisation. These should be explored more in open discussions with staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>because it has meaning and value for me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers impose targets that are irrelevant to our client</td>
<td>Leaders need to know themselves and what motivates them in order to motivate their staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>problems.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Despite poor recognition by society and Government, I would</td>
<td>Change is constant- we do not know what will happen next. This requires leaders to have self-belief not arrogance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not want to do any other job.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think of myself as a spiritual person and I try to do my job according to my spiritual values and/or conscience.</td>
<td>Leaders must pay greater attention to their health and use a variety of means to achieve mental and physical good health.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I pray (or equivalent practice) for my colleagues and/or my clients.</td>
<td>The crisis of staff retention is one of motivation of staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meanings communication is essential for staff motivation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some staff are motivated by ambition. This can be divisive.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Emergent Themes from the Social Workers and Senior Managers
When the SWRT were asked to consider the themes which emerged from the Senior Management narratives and were analysed by the SMRT most agreed with what emerged. However one or two themes led to discussion and some challenge.

The first management theme which raised some issues was “Change is constant—we do not know what will happen next. This requires leaders to have self-belief not arrogance.” Here one of the SWRT argued that the leader of the organisation is less important than the team in building resilience in social workers to face the changes with which they are faced. The second challenge to the management themes came with “The crisis of staff retention is one of motivation of staff.” One individual of the SWRT stated that motivation is a quality of the team: it is a group quality rather than an individual or organisational quality. Teams motivate their members, not experts. A second individual believed that motivation is ‘caught’ not ‘taught’ and experts have no role to play in this process. Finally the statement “Some staff are motivated by ambition. This can be divisive.” Here the members of the SWRT thought that poor or divisive managers should be challenged and leaders should accept responsibility for challenging poor management. Also managers and workers who disrespect the organisational tasks and the values that unite social work as a profession should be made accountable for their actions.

7. Conclusion

This research has raised some issues in terms of the relevance of SaW to Children’s Services and how it might be implemented. One of the findings from this study would tend to re-enforce the concerns of Mitroff and Denton (1999) and Ashmos and Duchon (2000) in that senior managers have difficulty engaging with the concept of Spirituality in the workplace and find discussing it even more problematic. This could be a major stumbling block if a SaW approach was developed and introduced. Although the grass roots social workers appear to empathise with such an approach it would need to be led by Senior Managers – as are most change programmes.

If an integrated framework such as that suggested by Marques (2005) was adopted and the language and discourse around spirituality was reframed to be more inclusive then it may have potential. How this might be done, where and in what organisation is still to be established and could provide the opportunity for further research perhaps within an action research framework.

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