Changing Children and Families Social Work: a summary of key literature

1.0 Introduction

This project picks up on policy themes that have been central to developments in children and families' social work in recent years, including Scotland's *Changing Lives* (2006) and *Getting it Right for Every Child* (2009 and 2010) and the English *Review of Child Protection* (Munro 2011) as well as three areas of literature, that of knowledge exchange, transfer of learning and culture change in the public sector. This paper summarises some of the most relevant literature in those areas, with a view to informing and facilitating reflection and discussion about the ways that this project, through its three strands, might help social work practitioners and managers to put the ideals of a learning culture into practice.   This paper does not intend to be a comprehensive review of all the research and policy literature on these topics; rather we have identified a small number of particularly relevant resources that will inform the project.

The paper will first look at key messages from the literature on organisational cultures and culture change in public services. It will then turn to setting out some of the key messages from the literature on knowledge exchange, learning organisations and transfer of learning. It will then draw out some of the common themes within and across these bodies of work and link those to the reviews of child protection and the calls for change in child protection practice and culture.

2.0 Organisational Cultures and Culture change in public services

2.1 Organisational Culture – what is it?

From the many definitions available, a popular one is

'...shared learning experiences that lead, in turn, to shared, taken for granted basic assumptions held by the members of the group or organisation' (Schein, 2004, p22)

This implies that culture embodies shared values, beliefs and assumptions that are deeply ingrained in an organisation's traditions, and influence how an organisation thinks and feels, wrapped up as the 'how we do things around here' maxim. The shared learning to which Schein refers is historical and essentially behavioural, cognitive and emotional in nature. This is reflected in the three levels of organisational culture that he proposes: artifacts (dress code, company records, statements of philosophy, annual reports); values (ideologies and charters); and assumptions (thought processes, feelings and behaviour) (Schein, 2004).

Martin and Meyerson, in Wilson (2001) suggest that organisational culture has three major perspectives:

- Integration perspective – proposes an organisation-wide consensus on one type of culture, where everyone within an organisation shares the same values, beliefs and assumptions and any conflict of these values could render it dysfunctional.

- Differentiation perspective – describes a culture that exists within the boundary of sub-cultures in an organisation. Sub-cultures can co-exist in harmony or in conflict with, or be indifferent to one another. It is the mix of sub-cultures within an organisation that generates its unique culture.

- Fragmentation perspective – proposes that commonalities and shared meanings do not exist organisation-wide or within sub-cultures. Both consensus and conflict co-exist between people and groups, but are only influenced by specific events or issues.

Parker and Bradley (2000) suggest that hierarchical culture is predominant in the public sector as opposed to other types of culture, and that public sector organisations are, by nature, less market focused and more concerned with political agendas. Organisational culture in the public sector, therefore, manifests itself as more reactive than proactive - responding to political activity and policy.

It has also been suggested that public sector organisations may have a strong sense of social values compared to private sector organisations, and that this can be articulated as 'public sector ethos' (Greasley, Watson and Patel, 2009). This ethos generally characterises an organisation's culture and motivates those within it, giving weight to the argument that public sector organisations have an underlying historical culture and reflect an 'integrated' cultural perspective, where specific values, beliefs and assumptions are shared across the whole organisation. However, the complex nature of public sector organisations, and the possible existence of a number of sub-cultures, will mean that processes and procedures, market focus and outcomes may vary for services, which may have implications for the type/types of culture they gravitate towards.

2.2 Culture change – what is it?

Anderson and Ackerman Anderson (2010) identify three types of change that occur within organisations:

- Developmental – incremental changes to a process or skill, which improve a procedure or process. An example might be a new information management system or training programme.

- Transitional – represents changes that are episodic and planned for. An example could involve the replacement of one strategy for another.

- Transformational – this is characterised as change that challenges underlying assumptions of an organisation and is ongoing and adaptive.

Michelle Drumm provides a comprehensive review and analysis of the culture change in the public sector in the IRISS publication, Insight 17 (2012). She draws on Anderson and Ackerman Anderson to suggest that

"…cultural change occurs over time and time is required to successfully embed changes in practice" (2010:7).

2.3 An example of culture change in public services

Drumm uses the GIRFEC Highland pathfinder as an example of culture change in the public sector (2012). The Highland pathfinder marked a shift away from a service-specific culture to an integrated one, encompassing any services or agencies involved in the welfare of children and their families.

The pathfinder strategy built on good practice but also aimed to facilitate innovative thinking and experimental approaches to achieving objectives. The Scottish Government stated that the approach required *'a willingness by all partners to be prepared to jettison structures, procedures and support systems – even new ones – if they are not doing what they were designed to do' (*2009:3).

Some indicators of culture change occurring in the Highlands included a:

- Shift from a focus on labels, e.g. looked after child, to a more holistic view of each child

- Greater awareness of an outcomes approach

- Development of inter-agency working relationships

- Adoption of common language around the Well-being Indicators

- Buy-in to the programme by the majority of professionals involved, which resulted in a true sense of ownership of the programme

2.4 What enables culture change?

- A clear vision (and what that means)

- Identifying stories (positive outcomes of change)

- Communicating the vision clearly

- Developing a strategy (what will and won't change, what to abandon, improve and develop?)

- Identifying quick wins (small incremental changes sustain momentum)

- Measuring indicators of success

- Developing leadership

'Culture and leadership are two sides of the same coin, in that leaders first create cultures when they create groups and organisations' (Schein, 2004:22).

Leaders are key to championing change programmes, communicating the vision and driving the strategic initiatives. It has been argued that a leader or champion should be assigned to each strategic initiative (Cameron, 2004; Albury, 2005; Fernandez and Rainey, 2006). The importance of

demonstrating leadership at all levels of an organisation is also stressed as key to making successful culture change happen (Scottish Government, 2006; Scottish Social Services Council, 2012; Deacon and Linton, 2012).

2.5 Challenges to culture change

The converse of the enablers listed above as well as short term budgets, hierarchical risk-averse culture and lack of operational leadership skills

2.6 Pointers to implementation

In implementing culture change the evidence suggests:

- It is important to clarify, develop and sustain a shared vision across all services and at all operational levels within each individual service

- Managers and practitioners should take time to reflect on their role and consider how they can effect positive change, and what change will mean for people supported by services (such as children and their families)

- Leadership should be developed and demonstrated at all service levels; individuals and teams need to embrace this call-to-responsibility

- Staff training needs to be considered for current and future changes

- Streamlined systems for recording and assessing impact of culture change need to be implemented

2.7 Key messages from culture change literature

- To embed culture change within organisations takes time (usually over three years)

- Cultural change can be defined as 'transformational' as it challenges the underlying assumptions of an organisation and is ongoing and adaptive

- The public sector can be characterised as a hierarchical type of culture focused on internal stability and adherence to rules and procedures, rather than one of flexibility, innovation and openness (inhibitor)

- The public sector can be characterised as a culture that is reactive to political agendas, often to the detriment of outcomes, and is one where change initiatives can be restricted by short-term budgets. (inhibitor)

- There are key enablers to culture change, in particular, the need for a clear vision to effectively communicate this vision, and related to this, the need for leaders who do not just positively embrace the change required, but embody and demonstrate personal commitment to it.

Drumm (2012)

3.0 Knowledge exchange, learning organisations and transfer of learning

3.1 What is knowledge exchange?

Knowledge exchange entails a wide variety of activities that link the production of academic knowledge to the potential use of such knowledge in non academic environments.

In 2004 the 'SCIE Knowledge Review 7: Improving the use of research in social care' examined ways of promoting research use in social care. The review suggested that there was little point in increasing the rate at which research and evidence flows to the workforce because little research can be directly applied, many practitioners are not equipped to digest the knowledge and there is often a lack of appropriate support systems to support application. This rather disappointing assessment is followed by a review which identified 3 models of research use. The research-based practitioner model which is about the individuals(s) having a personal commitment to using research; the embedded research model in which the responsibility for ensuring research informs practice lies with policy makers and service delivery managers and the organisational excellence model which relies on social care organisations to develop a research minded culture. An initiative may draw on more than one of these models for different settings, stages or types of research use project as they are often not mutually exclusive. The review suggested that a whole systems approach to get the outputs from academia such as research and evidence into practice was needed. It suggested that each category of person or organisation had a key role to play.

Categories of people or organisations	Key roles or responsibilities
Governance and related organisations	Developing strategic frameworks for both research and research use Using research to inform policy, standards, protocols, inspection frameworks etc.
Research funders	Funding practice relevant research Encouraging user involvement in research planning Funding innovative dissemination, development and implementation strategies
Research organisations, universities and researchers	Undertaking practice relevant research Providing overviews of extant research

	Disseminating research in user friendly formats
	Working alongside practitioners and service users to identify local research needs
	Developing collaborative links with practice organisations at local level
	Supporting the conduct of research locally
Practice organisations, practice managers and practitioners	Developing a culture of reflection, evaluation and learning in organisations
	Providing resources/infrastructure to support research use
	Ensuring local practice procedures and protocols are informed by research
	Supporting continuing professional development in research use for key staff
	Developing specific roles within organisations such as practice development
	Identifying practice related research themes/issues and referring them on to research organisations/funders
	Ensuring HRM systems provide reward and incentives for research use
	Linking research use to other management processes such as Best value, performance assessment framework
Training and development organisations/people	Ensuring that training and CPD is informed by up to date research
	Using research regularly in training
	Developing relevant training in research use and research conduct
Service user organisations and service users	Identifying service user issues for research and referring them on to research organisations and funders
	Participating in research planning, design, execution and dissemination to ensure that research is informed by a service user perspective
	Ensuring that campaign activities are informed by research
Facilitating/brokering organisations	Acting as a bridge between research and practice in diverse ways
	Facilitating learning across practice organisations

Walter, I., Nutley, S., Percy-Smith, J., McNeish, D and Frost, S (2004) SCIE

In 2005 Walter, Nutley and Davies asked 'what works to promote evidence based practice'? They found that consistent messages emerged from across different contexts and approaches. These were

Research must be translated – to be used research needs to be adapted for and reconstructed within local practice

Ownership is key – of the research itself, of the tools or projects used to implement research is vital to uptake

Enthusiasts – through personal contact enthusiastic individuals or champions are crucial to the process of getting research used

Contextual analysis – analysing the local context for barriers to and enablers of change

Credibility – Research take up and use is enhanced when there is credible evidence and endorsement from peer and expert opinion leaders who demonstrate a high level commitment to the process

Leadership – strong and visible leadership at both management and project levels can help provide motivation, authority and organisational integration

Adequate support – ongoing support for those implementing change increases the chances of success (financial, technical, organisational and emotional support) a dedicated project co-ordinator/lead are often key to the success of many initiatives

Integration – to facilitate and sustain research use activities need to be integrated within existing organisational systems and practices. Alignment to local and national policy trends also supports research use.

3.2 Learning cultures

Developing a culture of learning is a key factor in the success and sustainability of knowledge exchange and research-use initiatives. The concept of a learning organisation has been developing over the last 30-40 years as attempts have been made to identify the key characteristics of successful companies and organisations, both in the public and private sector and over time. SCIE published a resource pack (2004) that drew on the work of Iles and Sutherland who suggested there are five principle features of a learning organisation (2001).

Organisational structure – learning organisations have managerial hierarchies that enhance opportunities for employee, care and service user involvement. All are empowered to make relevant decisions. Structures support teamwork and strong lateral and vertical relations. Networking is enabled across organisational and hierarchical boundaries both internally and externally.

Organisational culture – learning organisations have strong cultures that promote openness, creativity and experimentation among members. They encourage members to acquire, process and share information, nurture innovation and provide the freedom to try new things, to risk failure and to learn from mistakes.

Information systems – Learning organisations require information systems that improve and support practice, that move beyond monitoring and control. 'Transformational change' requires systems that can facilitate the rapid acquisition, processing and sharing of rich complex information which enables effective knowledge management.

Human resource practices – People are recognised as creators and users of organisational learning. Accordingly Human resource management focuses on provision and support of individual learning. Appraisal and reward systems are concerned to measure long term performance and to promote the acquisition and sharing of new skills and knowledge.

Leadership – Like most interventions aimed at securing significant organisational improvement, organisational learning depends heavily or effective leadership. Leaders model the openness, risk-taking and reflection necessary for learning and communicate a compelling vision of the learning organisation, providing the empathy, support and personal advocacy needed to led others towards it. They ensure that organisations and work groups have the capacity to learn, change and develop.

3.3 Learning Transfer

Much of the literature on learning transfer comes from the fields of psychology, education and human resource management. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that much of it chimes with the fourth feature of a Learning Organisation discussed above, that is, human resource practices.

Learning transfer generally refers to implementation of knowledge and skills from training in practice. For transfer of learning to occur, Baldwin and Ford suggest that 'learned behaviour must be generalised to the job context and maintained over a period of time on the job' (1988:63). The literature suggests there are three key areas that affect transfer of learning or training: learner characteristics, intervention design and delivery, and work environment influences (Alvarez, Salas and Garafano, 2004; Baldwin and Ford, 1988; Ford and Weissbein, 1997). (This observation is confirmed by Cree and Macaulay (2000) in their work on transfer of learning in professional and vocational education.)

Cherniss et al., (1998) published a schema organised into four phases for the enhancement of learning for individuals and organisations.

Phase one: the preparation for change, relates to the relationship between organisational needs and the needs of individuals. Personal choice is emphasised, and programme learning goals are linked to individual learning goals. Expectations are clarified and shared on both sides and support needs to maximise the learning identified.

Phase two: training, this is where a positive relationship between the trainer and learner is fostered, and emphasis placed on the self-directed nature of learning. Goals are set jointly, and learners are

helped to understand how the training may impact on them and what the learning strategies are to be. Opportunities for learners to practise their learning are set out, and feedback given on progress. Support for learning is built in through materials, exercises etc, and insight (linkages between thoughts, feelings and actions) enhanced through discussion and opportunities to check out understanding. Learners are supported to identify their relapse-prevention strategies based on their individual learning style and needs.

Phase three: transfer and maintenance, is where learners are encouraged to practise their new-found knowledge and skills. This requires the participation of managers and trainers in the workplace in providing encouragement and reinforcement within a culture that promotes and supports learning.

Phase four: evaluation of the change, this stage recognises that continuous improvement of both learning programmes and staff is essential in maximising the investment of participants and the organisation.

This literature suggests a move away from investment in training events and initiatives in the hope that learning from these might be cascaded from participants into wider organisational cultures. The evidence for this sort of transfer is not strong; one reason for this is that training often occurs as 'free standing' activity that is not clearly linked to individual or organisational practice and service development and objectives. Models of knowledge exchange, through recognising prior knowledge, skills and values that practitioners bring are considered more effective at getting knowledge into practice. Thus, this project has three strands which are in line with Nutley et al.'s (2007) organisational excellence model of knowledge exchange where the organisation(s), working partnership with universities, become the locus for local experimentation, evaluation and practice development.

4.0 Child protection and policy

From the 1980s, social work with children and families has assumed a predominant child protection focus (Parton, 1984). Since then various attempts have been made to refocus the practice towards broader family support roles (Messages from Research, 1995) however, in a climate where risk discourse dominate (Webb, 2006) social work practice remains stubbornly fixed upon child protection and cases that reflect primarily welfare concerns are often processed through a child protection route (Spratt, 2001). This has led to significant net widening within child protection (Parton, 1999). Additionally managerial systems have resulted in child protection practice that is overly bureaucratic and procedural. Academic commentators conclude that the system is 'close to bankrupt (and) it may be doing more harm than good' (Lonne et al., 2009:5).

The need to support different culture of social work practice is acknowledged in *Changing Lives*, the Report of the 21st Century Social Work Review (Scottish Executive, 2006), which identifies a social work professional lacking in confidence in its own skills and unclear about its distinctive contribution to society. It goes on to identify the lack of professional autonomy amongst social workers, within managerial systems. It concludes that social work has lost touch with some of its core purpose and calls for transformational culture change across the profession.

The need for such change in children and families services assumes a particular timeliness in the wake of the recent UK government sponsored review of child protection in England and Wales by Professor Eileen Munro (2011). The review argues for fundamental change in child protection practice and culture. Specifically, it suggested that 'local authorities and their partners should start an ongoing process to review and redesign the ways in which child and family social work is delivered, drawing on evidence of effectiveness of helping methods where appropriate and supporting practice that can implement evidenced based ways of working with children and families (2011:13).

These reviews bring us back to how do we use the evidence to inform the way in which we can 'help professionals move from a compliance culture to a learning culture' (Munro, 2011:6)

5.0 Common Themes

Reviewing the literature as a whole, common themes emerge:

- Transformational change requires whole systems thinking, an approach that galvanises the whole system within and across organisations, where the structures, cultures, systems, practices and strong leadership come together to create the conditions that enable professionals to make the best judgments using the evidence and their professional expertise to do 'the right thing'.

- Clarity of vision and purpose across all services and at all operational levels within each individual service is key, and related to this, the need for leaders who do not just positively embrace the change required, but embody and demonstrate personal commitment to it.

- Leaders that model openness and reflection as well as nurture innovation are important for ensuring the organisation and the staff are encouraged and supported to learn, change and develop. Informed decision making takes place best in a culture of learning.

- Managers and practitioners must make time to reflect on their role and consider how they can effect positive change, and what change will mean for people supported by services (such as children and their families)

- Interactive partnerships between universities/knowledge brokers (e.g. IRISS and topic specific development centres) and practice contexts can facilitate better communication and knowledge sharing. Good practice and opportunities for learning are inextricably linked.

- Facilitative approaches that give organisations and practitioners a range of supports to engage, understand, translate, test out and integrate knowledge into their local practice experience and contexts help create a culture of learning. Managers and practitioners who have the autonomy and professional authority to integrate new learning into individual and organisational practice.

- For knowledge to be shared it needs to be incorporated into existing continuous developmental activities, process and systems, such as appraisal and supervision, it needs to

be manageable and meaningful (adapted to and tested out in local contexts and practice settings).

Dr Rhoda Macrae, Research Fellow, Changing Children and Families social work Knowledge Exchange Project, School of Social Work, The University of Edinburgh, 2013

References

Albury, D. (2005) 'Fostering innovation in public services', *Public Money and Management*, 25 (1), 51-56

Alvarez, K. Salas, E. and Garafano, C. M. (2004) 'An integrated model of training evaluation and effectiveness'. *Human Resource Development Review*. 3 (4), 385-416

Anderson, D. and Ackerman Anderson, L. (2010) *Beyond change management: how to achieve breakthrough results through conscious change leadership*, (2nd ed), San Francisco: Pfeiffer

Baldwin, T. T. and Ford, J. K. (1988) 'Transfer of Learning: a review and directions for future research'. *Personnel Psychology*. 41, 63-105

Cameron, K. (2004) A process for changing organizational culture, University of Michigan.

Cherniss, C. Goleman, D. Emmerling, R. Cowan., K and Alder, M. (1998) *Bringing Emotional Intelligence to the workplace. Consortium for research on emotional intelligence in organisations*. Rutgers University: NJ

Christie, C. (2011) *Commission on the future delivery of public services*, Edinburgh: Scottish Government

Cree, V.E., and Macaulay, C. (eds) (2000) *Transfer of Learning in Professional and Vocational Education*, London: Routledge.

Deacon, F. and Linton, P. (2012) *How good is our leadership?*, Glasgow: Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services.

Department of Health (1995) *Child Protection: Messages from Research* HMSO: Department of Health

Drumm, M. (2012) *Culture change in the public sector*. Glasgow: IRISS Insight 17

http://www.crfr.ac.uk/projects/completed-projects/changing-children-and-families-social-work/

Fernandez, S. and Rainey, H.G. (2006) 'Managing successful organizational change in the public sector', *Public Administration Review*, March/April, 168-176

Ford, J. K. and Weissbein, D. A. (1997) 'Transfer of learning: an updated review and analysis'. *Performance Improvement Quarterly*. 10 (2), 22-41

Greasley, K..Watson, P. and Patel, S. (2009) 'The impact of organisational change on public sector employees implementing the UK Government's "Back to work" programme', *Employee Relations*, 31 (4), 382-397

Iles, V. And Sutherland, K. (2001) *Managing change in the NHS*. London: NHS Service Delivery and Organisation Research and Development

Lonne, B., Parton, N., Thomson, J. and Harries, M. (2009) *Reforming child protection*. Abington: Routledge

Munro, E. (2011) *The Munro Review of Child Protection: final Report. A Child-centred System*. Department for Education. London: The Stationery Office Cm 8062

Nutley, S. M., Walter, I. and Davies, H.T.O (2007) *Using Evidence: how research can improve public services*, Bristol: The Policy Press

Parker, R. and Bradley, L. (2000) 'Organisational culture in the public sector: Evidence from six organisations', *The International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 13 (2), 125-141

Parton, N. (1984) *The Politics of Child Abuse*. Basingstoke: MacMillan

Parton, N. (1999) '*Reconfiguring Child Welfare Practices: Risk Advanced Liberalism, and the government of Freedom'*. In A.S. Chambon, A. Irving and L. Epstein (eds) Reading Foucault for social Work. New York: Columbia University Press

Schein, E.H. (2004) *Organisational culture and leadership* (3rd ed), San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Scottish Executive (2006) *Changing Lives: Report of the 21st century social work review*, Edinburgh: Scottish Government

Scottish Government (2009) *Changing professional practice and culture to get it right for every child. An evaluation of the development and early implementation phases of Getting it right for every child in Highland: 2006-2009*, Edinburgh: Scottish Government

Scottish Government (2010) *A guide to implementing Getting it right for every child: Messages from pathfinders and learning partners.* Edinburgh: Scottish Government

Scottish Social Services Council (2012) *Step into leadership: Leadership learning pathways for Scotland's social services*, Dundee: Scottish Social Services Council

Spratt, T. (2001) 'The Influence of Child Protection Practice Orientation on Child Welfare Practice'. British Journal of Social Work. 31 933-954

http://www.crfr.ac.uk/projects/completed-projects/changing-children-and-families-social-work/

13

Walter, I., Nutley, S., Percy-Smith, J., McNeish, D. and Frost, S. (2004) *Knowledge Review 7: Improving the use of research in social care practice*. London: SCIE

Webb, S (2006) *Social Work in a Risk Society*. Bristol: Policy Press

Wilson, A.M. (2001) 'Understanding organisational culture and the implications for corporate marketing', *European Journal of Marketing*, 35 (3/4), 353-367