

Practice Leadership



Practice leadership is a cornerstone of delivering high-quality support across all support settings, including services for people with disabilities, mental health conditions, older people, and others requiring care and support.

It involves guiding, coaching, and supporting staff to ensure that support is consistent, person centred, rights-based, and grounded in evidence-informed practices. Good practice leadership is essential in translating values into actions and creating a culture of excellence in everyday support.

The role and importance of Practice Leadership

Support staff are key to shaping the lived experience of those they support. Their actions and decisions – what they do, how they do it, and how consistently – have a direct impact on outcomes such as inclusion, autonomy, wellbeing, and dignity.

To achieve these outcomes, frontline staff need structure, coaching, and strong leadership. Practice leaders are not just operational managers – they are present, hands-on leaders who promote good practice, challenge poor practice, and ensure the support provided reflects each person's rights, preferences, and aspirations.

Defining Practice Leadership

Mansell et al., (2004) redefined traditional management roles, emphasising five key components of practice leadership:

Focusing on quality of life

Organising staff effectively

Coaching and modelling

Supervision and individual review

Team reflection and development



The Practice Leader in action

Effective practice leaders are visible and engaged in daily support. They know the individuals supported, understand what matters to them, and help staff translate values into practical actions. They coach and guide staff in real time, use supervision to build capability, and ensure support is responsive, personalised, and consistent.

Supporting the Practice Leader

To lead effectively, practice leaders themselves need support. This includes time for reflection, access to training, opportunities for peer learning, and alignment with organisational values. They must be skilled in communication, relationship-building, team development, and quality assurance. Their leadership should be reinforced by organisational systems that prioritise person centred outcomes and continuous improvement.

Outcomes of strong Practice Leadership

The evidence shows that effective practice leadership leads to:

- Improved outcomes for people supported.
- More consistent and person centred support.
- Increased staff capability and confidence.
- Greater team cohesion and morale.
- Reduced staff turnover and better continuity of support.
- Stronger relationships with families and other professionals.



(Bigby and Bould, 2018)

The Bild Practice Leadership model

The Bild Practice Leadership model offers a detailed and practical framework for what good leadership looks like in everyday care settings. It is designed to be relevant across different services and specialisms and is based on three interconnected domains.

Driving excellence in support

Practice leaders take responsibility for ensuring high-quality, person centred support. This includes:

- Understanding what matters to each person supported.
- Aligning support with individual goals, preferences, and rights.
- Maintaining a clear focus on improving quality of life.
- Using data and feedback to evaluate and improve practice.



Leading by example

Practice leaders spend time in services, working alongside staff and modelling good practice. They:

- Observe and reflect on how support is delivered.
- Provide coaching and feedback in real-time.
- Celebrate good practice and address concerns directly.
- Promote a culture of respect, dignity, and accountability.



Building strong teams

Practice leaders foster a positive team culture by:

- Setting clear expectations and values.
- Creating opportunities for team reflection and development.
- Supporting consistent use of support plans, routines, and approaches.
- Building trust, psychological safety, and responsibility.



This model offers a practical blueprint for embedding leadership at the point of delivery, ensuring that values are lived out through everyday practice.

Conclusion

Practice leadership is essential for delivering high-quality, person centred support in all care settings. It involves more than managing rotas and policies – it is about being present, modelling values, and creating a culture where great support thrives. Investing in skilled and confident practice leaders is key to sustained improvement and better lives for the people supported.

References

- Bigby, C and Bould, E (2018) Demonstrating the effect of practice leadership on quality of life outcomes for people with intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 31(5), 898-907.
- Mansell, J, Beadle-Brown, J, Ashman, B and Ockendon, J (2004) *Person-Centred Active Support*. Pavilion Publishing.