



scottish social services
learning network

Facilitating the development of Social Services Leadership Communities across Scotland - starting points and future directions.

1 Introduction

The broad focus for this research was to find out how the Scottish Social Services Learning Networks' can further develop social services leadership communities and was carried out during November 2009-June 2010. This report highlights key findings from the research, along with additional information intended to support the 4 Networks establishing a baseline from which to measure future progress as we take forward the future development of Leadership Communities across Scotland.

The intended audiences for this report are the 4 regional Social Services Learning Networks & their local partnership groups; Tayforth Strategic Management Board; Tayforth Leadership Reference Group; the Scottish Social Services Council.

The purpose of this research was to develop a participatory and evidence informed approach in taking forward the Networks' new responsibility to develop and sustain social services leadership communities across Scotland.

This research has been undertaken with the intention of informing the strategic and operational direction of this work in partnership with the other 3 Regional Social Services Learning Networks and the Scottish Social Services Council.

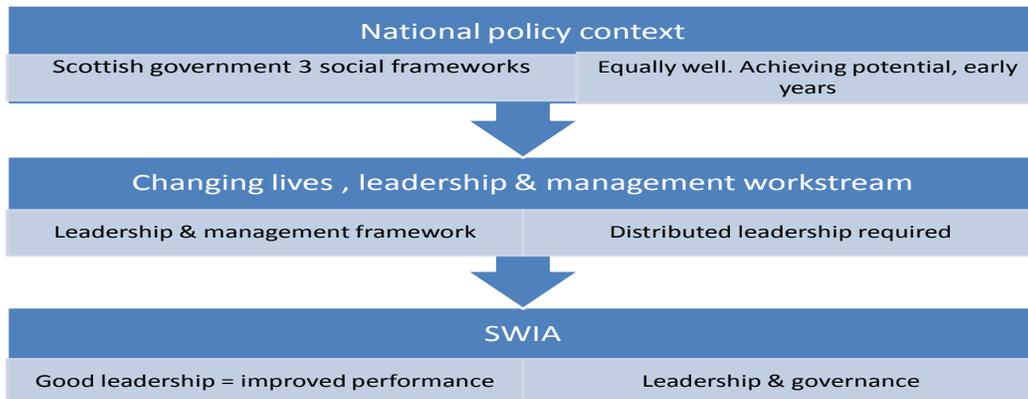
2 Findings

These **two core** questions were explored in terms of what is known, what is not known, and what needs to be known to ensure the Networks can successfully take forward this new area of work.

What evidence is there that leadership communities effectively build leadership capacity?
How can the Networks facilitate the development of leadership communities?

The summary findings presented here emerged from a documentary and literature review; interviews with regional Social Services Learning Network managers & consultants previously taking forward leadership community work; focus group discussions within Tayforth Strategic Board and Leadership Reference Group; feedback from Tayforth Action Learning Set participants via case studies; national survey of Action Learning Set participants across the 4 Network areas. More detailed findings across all information gathered, and supporting evidence and references can be obtained if required.

The image below briefly summaries the policy context for leadership communities:



What evidence is there that leadership communities effectively build leadership capacity?

Firstly, is there any consensus on what we mean by a leadership community? Two commonly referenced definitions state that Leadership Communities are:

“groups of practitioners who support and encourage one another to expand their individual and joint leadership capacity” Dunoon 2004

*“a community of connected, open minded and motivated leaders who share ideas, knowledge and experiences, and who seek to be the best they can be at delivering social services in a way that meets the needs of service users”
(York Consulting 2008)*

The concepts of joint actions and people thinking and working together on their leadership issues are seen as central to building a leadership community. Providing new opportunities for partnership and collaboration are central to the overall approach, as is the opportunity for members to experience different views of leadership.

Partnerships **across** services are the basis for ongoing effective leadership development and Leadership Communities are seen to offer a new approach to fostering and building leadership not only at senior management levels, but at all levels within organizations. A fundamental difference with this approach from traditional leader development ‘courses’ or ‘programmes’ is that leadership community participants are encouraged to use their shared association with each other as a powerful means to support mutual leadership development amongst each other.

Another clear message that we need to foster leadership community development by offering introductory training on leadership was evident.

Wenger is accepted as the pioneer of the concept ‘communities of practice’, the distinctive feature of such a community is that the ‘shared practice’ of members, and the focus being on things that matter to people are central to this concept. Crucially, the ‘shared learning and interest’ of its members are what holds it together, along with the value that participating in the community offers.

Importantly, Wenger differentiates the communities of practice concept from that of a ‘network’ through their capacity to support organizations to manage knowledge, in his own words, within communities of practice *“knowledge is created, shared, organized, revised and passed on within and among members”* (Wenger 1998). He defines ‘networks’ as being about relationships in a general sense. This seems to point to the view that we can regard Leadership Communities as Communities of Practice when considering how to develop and sustain them across the Networks.

To date the Social Services Leadership Communities have been developed around John Adair’s definition of leadership “there’s no leadership without change, and no change without leadership”, the rationale for this was the link with the Changing Lives national policy agenda and the centrality of leading sustainable change to this agenda. The Changing Lives agenda

states that ‘distributed’ leadership is required and emphasized the importance of all social service workers having the opportunity to develop their leadership potential within roles at all levels and sectors of the workforce.

An overarching message that Leadership Communities should not be developed in isolation from other workforce initiatives, and of the vital connection between Leadership Communities as vehicles for the workforce sustaining and building on other forms of leadership development undertaken was very clear throughout all the sources of evidence.

As the Leadership Communities are to be marketed at the whole workforce there will be challenges in resourcing this and the Networks need to agree targeting priority groups within the workforce.

The following themes consistently emerged:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross sector (local authority, voluntary/third and private) groups are required to develop leadership capacity |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action Learning Sets and leadership networks are seen as the cornerstone of broadening leadership development across the sector |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a need to distinguish between leadership of services, of the (social work or social services) profession and in partnerships |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a need to focus both on the individual and the organization throughout leadership development work |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnerships which include higher and further education are seen as crucial for evaluating the outcomes of leadership development |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentoring and coaching ranked highly as leadership development tools preferred by existing sector leadership programme candidates |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We need to develop people, not control them |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frontline staff should be a priority for leadership development |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation of all leadership activity needs to be built in from the start |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership is inextricably linked to ‘leading change’ and management |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership communities offer space to develop but people need the time to do this |

Recent Scottish Government documents describe the aim of leadership communities being to **“provide a forum to facilitate cross-sector links, secure a reflective space with peers, & deliver a social services orientated leadership programme which addresses current leadership challenges”**. This introduces a more specific vision for the communities becoming future vehicles through which any new sector leadership programmes/initiatives can be delivered. Retaining sight of this element of the Government’s vision for leadership communities will be important as we shape the future direction for this work.

3 How can the Networks facilitate the development of leadership communities?

3.1 Defining the future;

What will the future look like if leadership communities are successfully developed?

4 key themes emerged:

Clarity

- We will be able to describe what a leadership community is
- We will know how stakeholders can engage with leadership communities
- We will know what impact the leadership community will have had and what difference it has made
- The Networks will have helped to define what good leadership looks like for different roles in the workforce.....

We will be able to describe what we will see

- Social services workforce will better understand each others' business
- The workforce will be better connected and informed through the leadership communities
- There will be a range of different leadership development activities to suit a range of needs
- There will be networks of peers within localities which offer support and challenge
- Links between leadership & management, and creating capacity (especially the increased capacity within the workforce to manage change) will become more explicit

The Networks will have had some quick wins through targeted activities.

Leadership as a concept will develop a higher profile across the sector

- Larger numbers of the workforce will see themselves as leaders
- Increasing numbers in the workforce will engage with the leadership agenda
- There will be a shared language in the sector of what good leadership looks like for social services
- The Networks will have raised consciousness of how leadership looks across a wide range of sector roles; does it look different in Local Authority, Voluntary or Private sector settings?
- Leadership communities will be seen as relevant to supporting workforce leadership issues

3.2 Developing the vision:

What is the vision for leadership communities? Is this widely shared and understood:

| <i>Key element of the vision</i> | <i>Detail of this element of the vision</i> |
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| <i>Change</i> | Coping with change central to the vision, positively harnessing peoples' energy to make change happen in the best way. Giving people time to participate |
| <i>Service improvement</i> | Leadership Communities will help the workforce to think broadly, strategically and out with their own organisation |
| <i>Networks</i> | We will see Networks of peers within and across localities with cross organization supports being developed to offer peer support and challenge, and support the workforce asking others in the sector for help with leadership issues |
| <i>Leadership</i> | The connection between frontline services and leadership will be clear; a shared language around what good leadership looks like in social services will support improved understanding of leadership throughout the workforce, e.g. citizen leadership, practitioner leadership |

3.3 Purpose of leadership communities -

How important is it that this is clearly understood in order to foster participation?

There was less consensus over the need for the purpose of leadership communities to be clearly defined with an alternative view that fluidity of purpose is important in order to appeal broadly across the sector and not exclude. However, there was consensus that certain elements did require clarity.

Networks need to be clear about:

- a. How people access and engage with the leadership communities
- b. The purpose of Leadership Communities being about sharing knowledge and acquiring new knowledge around **leadership**.
- c. The difference Leadership Communities can make in order to foster increased participation.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarity is vital given the sector as a whole now operates within a performance and outcome/output focused culture |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarity of purpose could be improved by focusing Leadership Community activity around key sector themes, e.g. personalization, reablement |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of building on existing professional groupings/networks/fora in addition to developing new ones |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networks need to adopt an outcome focused approach to developing the Leadership Communities; explore the ‘what’s in it for me?’ and identify commonalities between outcomes for workers and services users/carers |

3.4 How can the Networks build commitment to leadership communities?

Prompt questions of ‘Who needs to be involved?’ and ‘Who must be committed to the plan to develop Leadership communities?’ were asked. There was an unequivocal commonality to responses with clear and consistent feedback regarding who needs to be involved and engaged with, and also what the Networks should do to facilitate building commitment.

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| <h4>What do we need to do to build commitment?</h4> |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Tell stories and give examples of how leadership communities can have an impact ➤ Ensure the right balance of involvement of senior leaders in critical organizations ➤ Encourage broad involvement from across the sector and create the right environment for participation ➤ Identify local champions and existing leaders ➤ Provide knowledge inputs on leadership to support improved understanding of leadership in the sector ➤ Role model good leadership within the Learning Networks and partnerships with the SSSC and Scottish Government to deliver the sector Leadership agenda ➤ Market leadership communities robustly and link clearly to national sector leadership initiatives |
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| <h4>Who needs to be involved and committed to building leadership communities?</h4> |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ those in the workforce who link operations with planning & strategy ➤ workforce development staff throughout the sector ➤ existing leadership community participants and leadership champions ➤ senior directors, managers and strategic leaders in order to legitimize participation across the workforce ➤ Scottish Government and service improvement organizations ➤ Local Practitioner Fora ➤ Those in key sector leadership positioned and leaders of the future ➤ Learning Networks themselves need to be committed |
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Other responses emphasized the strategic issues around how we build commitment:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership activity within the leadership communities needs to be more purposeful |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linking leadership community activity to the Continuous Learning Framework for the sector |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledging the impact of different cultures within different parts of the sector, and recognizing that different approaches to engagement will be required |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Networks will need to be able to describe how the Leadership Communities relate to the day to day business of organizations, e.g. link to turnover/recruitment in order to get buy in for wide sector involvement |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote and signpost the accredited qualifications and learning opportunities in the sector around leadership |

3.5 Moving to the future what do we need to do?

This question focused on identifying what the Networks need to change in order to move to a future where leadership communities are sustained and supported. Secondary questions to find out how to avoid losing momentum from previous activity and keeping existing participants on board were included.

What should Networks do?

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| Review impact of leadership community activity to date | Plan, prepare and evaluate what has gone before; keep asking what people want and if they have got it; value peoples' opinions, listen and value their experience |
| Continue existing leadership community activities whilst the future is being planned | Review role and purpose of action learning sets & build capacity of set participants to facilitate future sets; develop a range of leadership community activities including knowledge inputs on leadership, peer consultation, coaching and mentoring activities |
| Promote, communicate & market leadership communities | Ensure cross sector leadership issues are addressed in leadership community activities; help connect people; develop clear communication strategy |
| Be clear about the outcomes and expectations from involvement in leadership community activities | Promote involvement and participation by being clear about what's in it for those who participate |

Other general themes:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clarity of the focus of Leadership Community activities being on leadership development of the whole social services sector |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Importance of linking with coaching and mentoring initiatives already in place |

Where does this take us?

We already have a good sense of what we need to do, and now need to decide *HOW* we are going to do it and *WHO* is going to do it at a local and national level.

4 NATIONAL LEADERSHIP ACTION LEARNING SET SURVEY RESULTS

Those who had expressed an interest in becoming involved in Action Learning Sets following the regional Leadership Community launches were invited to respond to an online questionnaire. Although the response rate was just over 50% overall it is not known whether those who did not respond actually engaged in set activity.

46 responded from a total of 80 and the following trends emerged:

- 50% from Local Authorities; 33% Voluntary; 11% Private Sector and remainder from NHS/Health Boards.
- 69% working as first line or senior managers
- Motivations for becoming involved very varied but commonly focused on the cross sector opportunity of learning with peers; 'free' learning and development and desire to build on previous leadership development activity.
- 76% already had experience of leadership development including L2D, in house leadership programmes and existing sector leadership and management qualifications.
- Over 66% of people had only attended 1 -3 sessions, with many sessions running under capacity despite the best intentions of those who signed up to them.
- 98% thought that the facilitation of the sets had added to their effectiveness and would want this to continue.
- 95% responded with examples of how the sets had influenced their practice, or had the capacity to do so if they were continued.

The more detailed findings highlighted that Action Learning Sets as one approach to developing leadership in the context of leadership communities can be an effective means for some, but that expectations of those attending and outcomes from involvement require to be clearer if they are to robustly support leadership development.

A third of those attending had previous positive experiences of learning through Action Learning Sets and this had motivated them to become involved, for others their previous leadership development activities were instrumental in their involvement. There were a range of expectations of the sets which were very different across sets and across areas, and inevitably experiences were mixed.

Learning from this for the future is that clarity of expectations, purpose and outcomes from involvement in the sets will be vital to ensuring this activity effectively supports leadership development, if it is to be a part of leadership community activities offered by the Networks.

4.1 Key issues emerging from findings:

- The current model of facilitated Action Learning Sets is highly resource intensive with a low return on investment given the average numbers attending the sets, and lack of clear focus on outcomes for participants and their organizations from participating.
- To date the sets have attracted those in sector management roles, many of whom have undertaken leadership development, **are these the people we should be targeting? Should the Networks be targeting the creation of cross sector sets?**
- Anecdotal reflections from participants reveal the potential of this approach to support leadership development if it is more focused and purposeful, and can be delivered in a way which builds the capacity of those participating to take forward similar sets within their own settings.

4.2 Learning Networks' suggested approach to future action learning set activity:

- We need to ensure better value for money and ensure those participating can be clear about what they will get and what they will be expected to give. In particular we need to have an expectation that set participants will have a plan for transferring their learning into their workplace and be clear about organizational as well as individual gain. We need to be clear about the target group for each Action Learning Set.
- Where external facilitators are being resourced to support sets, future capacity building element to enable cascade of facilitation skills for future sets will be essential.
- In order to foster sustainability of this activity we need to plan to reduce reliance on external facilitation.
- Some existing sets will come to a 'natural' end, others are able to become self facilitated, and some of the new sets recently started will continue in the short term whilst a longer term strategy for this approach is being agreed. We need to develop a clear strategy for the ranges of approaches to this area of work and what models of action learning we will use.

5 Co consultancy project

Views have been gathered from those on the SSKS database to gather feedback on level of participation and use of this approach with a view to evaluating future options for this approach to supporting leadership development. Early indications are that this resource has been used infrequently and that lack of awareness may have contributed to this.

We may wish to explore the potential of refocusing this activity regionally/locally which may be more beneficial. The support for this needs to be tested out within local areas.

Suggested actions for Networks:

- Consider whether the more focused tool of peer consultation could offer a clearer platform from which to explore the whole area of ‘co-consultancy’
- Define benefits and opportunities of co-consultancy and test out appetite for developing this at local levels
- Explore the potential use of the Networks’ portals for supporting either local or regional once level of interest has been gauged.

6 Setting the Networks’ baseline

The Scottish Government suggested a baseline of activity from which we should measure future success in their paper in December 2009. They have accepted that we wish to establish our own baseline and that our recent activity has been designed with this in mind. The table below sets out the suggested baseline along with a view of what we now know and suggested future direction:

| Scottish Government identified baseline | What do we now know | Success measures for the future? |
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| 750 people are active members of the national Leadership Community | No clear evidence that this number of people have engaged actively beyond initial attendance at launch events, and where known, involvement in other events/workshops/ALS locally. There was some clear examples of individuals named as active community members who had not participated in any activities and were unaware that they were part of a LC | Use evidence from research presented above and develop clear and purposeful communications which set out what a leadership community is, how to engage and participate at regional and local level, and how to measure impact of activities |

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| <p>In 2009/10 11 regional events held, of which 2 focused on early years, suggestion that a further 12 events should be held during 2010/11, with half focusing on policy and being jointly resourced by employers</p> | <p>These regional events have engaged large numbers of people from across the sector and there is evidence from these event evaluations and reports that this method of engagement has been a constructive way to promote initial engagement with the leadership agenda.</p> | <p>Regional leadership focused events could be developed which are aligned with existing network activities and focus on local/regional priorities. Measures of success around ensuring that these events engage the whole sector and promote cross sector involvement at different levels of workforce would be constructive</p> |
| <p>250 people in action learning sets</p> | <p>We now have reasonably robust and rigorous evidence of both the numbers who have engaged with set activity, what their impact has been and suggestions for the future direction for this work (see above section)</p> | <p>Future measures of success require to focus more clearly on the sustainability of this activity to support leadership development and on participation where the benefits for both individuals and their organization are more purposeful. For the remainder of 2010/11 Networks need to agree whether a national or regional approach to continuing this activity within aligned resources will be used.</p> |
| <p>50 people offering free-consultancy to each other</p> | <p>Feedback to date suggests that there is little evidence this activity has actually produced this amount of co-consultancy activity, (suggested ways forward see above)</p> | <p>Measures of success cannot be specified until actions (see above) undertaken to gauge interest for this method of leadership development.</p> |
| <p>5 people in mentoring and coaching</p> | <p>We now have much more robust evidence of the interest from employers and individuals in the potential benefits of mentoring and coaching in leadership development, This has</p> | <p>Measures of success could be developed round the impact of Networks' activities to promote understanding of and support for these two forms of leadership development.</p> |

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| | particularly been tested out in the Tayforth Network area with over 100 people attending 3 events in recent months | Again, do we adopt a regional approach or a national one? |
| 6 lunch time workshops involving senior leaders | This activity has not been offered across all Networks but there is evidence that this approach successfully engages more senior leaders, these have been well attended by previous L2D graduates | Measures of success could be adopted around widening this activity to all Networks and measuring impact of this activity. Again, should we develop this area regionally or nationally? |
| All employers allowing staff time to participate; support range of Community activities; and supporting activities through 'in kind' contributions. | There is clear evidence that where activities have been valued employers will provide 'in kind' support such as meeting rooms/catering. Clear evidence that allowing staff the time to participate has been, at best, 'patchy', and that more senior staff with autonomy have been able to engage. | Measures of success around the workforce being allowed to participate in LC activities can only be developed once there is greater clarity around how people can engage and what they can expect. Recommendations from the research findings above to inform this area. |
| SSKS-online topic room and resource download data | There is anecdotal evidence that where individuals are aware of these materials they are seen as helpful, with further anecdotal evidence that organizations signpost their employees to this resource but need support to use constructively. | SG currently developing specification for future leadership materials on SSKS with imminent end of existing license period. Need to develop future measures of success once this work further progressed. |

This report is intended to be shared widely within the 4 regional Networks' management boards and local partnership groups, with SSSC as the means of stimulating discussions and collaboratively planning the way ahead as we implement the Social Services Leadership Initiative. It is also available on the Learning Network website and portal.

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