



Managing care

Moving into management

Rissa de la Paz

This audio is for the Open University course K303 'Managing Care' – Moving to managing, looking forward.

Man 1

A team manager is required to work in a newly established community mental health unit.

Woman 1

This is an exciting opportunity for a highly motivated and skilled, registered mental health nurse or qualified social worker.

Woman 2

You'll work with a multi-disciplinary team to provide a service that's shaped by user's needs.

Man 1

We're looking for experience of working in the community.

Woman 1

...skills in leadership, negotiation and communication....

Woman 2

...excellent inter-personal skills and the ability to work under pressure.

Man 2

An ability to handle budgets...

Woman 2

..and an aptitude for training and supervision.

Man 1

You'll also have an understanding of current policies and guidelines, and their impact on our service.

Rissa de la Paz

After nine years as an approved social worker, Anita, who is also a qualified nurse, was appointed to a challenging new role as manager of a multidisciplinary mental health team. We follow Anita during the first months of her transition from practitioner to manager. We shall also be hearing from Martin, a more experienced manager about his perspective on this vital first phase. How does Anita see her role as a front line manager?

Anita

I'm the jam in the sandwich and I've got to almost represent those underneath me, in making sure their views are heard and helping them move forward and upwards. And I've got to take the information on the instructions I get from down and present them in a manageable way to the people who are in my team. But help them achieve what those above me expect of us in whatever way possible, using every skill I've got.

Rissa de la Paz

Martin, a manager who has worked both in mental health and child protection, agrees.

Martin

I think the first thing to say about first line management is that it's the closest to the delivery of the service. I think secondly, first line management to me is about the management and development of people and then the other issue is that you are the first point of reference for a group of staff.

Rissa de la Paz

Anita has worked for many years in a hospital based multi-disciplinary mental health team. As well as starting a new job, she's moving to a different part of the region. Practitioners often think long and hard before taking the first steps into the world of management and Anita is no exception. In the week before she begins, she shares her thoughts on the challenges that await her.

Anita

My expectations of the job are I'm not going to change anything overnight. I realise that I'm going in and the people I'm going to be working with have a lot of issues and concerns and baggage, which have proceeded me into the job. All of this is not about me, this is about the Team Manager going in to a group of people who haven't had the opportunity to vent their feelings for what sounds like an awful long time.

Rissa de la Paz

Anita will be managing a team of people from different professional backgrounds. How will she make best use of their individual strengths and talents?

Anita

I think the key challenges in the new job will be helping the team to see themselves as an integrated team. I think for a long time it's just been made up of one discipline, nurses. I know the social workers only moved into the building, it'll be about three or four weeks ago now, so there's the bit about integrating them and making them feel like a team. I know it's very difficult to shift someone's cultural mind-set, you know I'm a team player. What I need to remember is that not everybody thinks like me. I'll then be very careful about how I handle that.

Martin

The challenges of managing people from different backgrounds are significant I think. They come with all their historical baggage about their organisations and their organisation's view of the other organisation.

So I think the key to, for me are simple things around creating team spirit, identity, understanding and respect. The real driving force is having a common goal, where we're all heading for the same direction. We might be from different backgrounds but we're heading to the same direction.

Rissa de la Paz

Anita's new role also demands a shift in focus from working directly with users to developing a team who will provide an effective service. How easy is this transition from practice to management?

Martin

When you're a Field Worker working directly with service users and carers, it is about, in many ways about you and what you can do to help them. When you're the Manager, it's suddenly no longer about you. You can have five people in your team doing a very good job and one doing a not so good job. It's about your team members and that's the hardest transition to make and when I first became a manager, I tried to do everything myself because I had standards that I felt were high and there were some people in the team who weren't meeting them and I was very tempted to do it all. Now you can't work like that, because it's not possible for one person to do everything.

Rissa de la Paz

A critical factor in creating an effective team is allowing individuals in the team to develop and grow as professionals. As a new manager, how will Anita handle the delicate issue of supervision and appraisal?

Anita

I think the key issues in managing Supervision and Appraisal are going to be that it means different things to different people. On the whole social workers like being supervised. On talking to the nurses, they don't actually see it as a management task at all. Part of the management task is making sure that people have or only undertake what they can actually deliver; otherwise they feel bad because they can't achieve what they want to. If I'm expected to manage a team and I suppose ultimately carry the can, I want to know exactly what each member of the team is doing. I think I'm going to have... experience problems in asking people to shift to a different supervision system because they're gonna throw their hands up in horror. But at the same time it's I think dawned on me, probably for the first time, that a manager's actually responsible for the person below and you know you're only as good as what your team are producing.

Rissa de la Paz

Quite apart from concerns about her team, how did Anita prepare herself for her new role? Attending a course on leadership proved timely.

Anita

I think it showed me that management is made up of a lot of skills that a lot of us have gained in these jobs, or in the sort of jobs like social work and nursing. I've realised now a lot of it is pulling together the experience you've got, but putting it together in boxes. I think if anything that has been the greatest help because it also give me the confidence to realise that I could be a manager, I did have the skills. I just hadn't realised, because nobody had sat down basically and said "well management is composed of this and this and this." I've talked to other managers as well, I've watched other people, I've watched the managers to, not so much now to see what they're doing for me, I want to see what their styles are. While I don't want to copy anybody, I want to pinch all the best bits of everybody's management styles and see if I can emulate those in some way.

Rissa de la Paz

Anita already recognises that she'll have to manage the expectations of different people – her line managers, her team members and partners in the locality.

Anita

I suspect that my senior managers will have an agenda, things that I'm expected to attend, things that I'm expected to participate and contribute to. I know the team just from talking to them, they also have another agenda, they have expectations about what they would like me to be, not me as a person, me as a manager. What they would like me to be. I'm going to a team of extremely experienced, extremely skilled people, but it's helping them almost channel their energies, channel their resources in an effective way. I think if I've just got a grasp of who are the key players in the area that I work in and what makes my team tick, then I think I'll have achieved an awful lot in three months.

Rissa de la Paz

So how did reality square up to expectations? Anita kept an informal audio diary during the first three months of her new post. Her thoughts were often recorded on the hoof and capture the highs and lows of that crucial period. She begins on the 5th of August, the night before she starts her job.

Anita

On Thursday night I had my leaving night from my old job and an awful lot of people turned out to say goodbye to me. It made me realise just how strong my network was that I was leaving behind, and I've absolutely no guarantees whatsoever that I'm going to be any good as a manager when I move. Looking at it objectively, I know I have all the skills necessary for being a manager but I do feel it's about the rapports of people I'm working with. And I think I'm very anxious that I'm not going to be given a chance to prove that I am able to do the job.

However, on a more positive note I'm really looking forward to it, even though tomorrow morning I haven't a clue what's on the agenda.

Rissa de la Paz

Anita is now in her new post and we hear extracts from the diary she kept during her first few weeks as a manager. We share her anxieties and aspirations as she negotiates her first team meetings, confronts unfamiliar budgets and responds to unexpected challenges. It's Monday, the sixth of August – Sue's first day as a manager.

Anita

I arrived thirty-five minutes early. The office which had been pointed out to me as being mine was still functioning as a waiting room. My office furniture, I later understood had been delivered elsewhere. I didn't have a telephone so I borrowed one of those from somebody else's office. I also discovered that the audit which I had originally been told was for September takes place on Friday of this week. The positive side of that is that by the time the next audit comes around we can only have improved.

Rissa de la Paz

Team meetings are an immediate focus for Anita.

Anita

In my previous job I did take a lot of responsibility for the Team Meetings and always insisted on them being agenda'd, chaired with a definite function. The Team Meeting in this job seems to be very woolly with not a very clear function. I think I'll sit through a few and try and get a feel of what people expect from it.

Rissa de la Paz

Handling budgets is also part of the unfamiliar territory Anita needs to negotiate.

Anita

I have two budget sheets which I sat and looked at today and I've never had to study a budget sheet in my life. I think I picked up the gist of what they were saying, although I'm not entirely sure what I'm allowed to do with this money. No doubt that will be revealed.

Rissa de la Paz

After a few days, Anita meets with the Local Implementation Group for Mental health. It's a group of partners who ensure that standards are met for the National Service framework for Mental Health.

Far from being a gentle introduction to the issues, it throws up an unexpected challenge. It emerges that users have been sent a questionnaire on their views about the service. But the way they were approached apparently left something to be desired.

Anita

I was put in the hot seat immediately, having to apologise for the manner in which the letters had been delivered. Despite the fact I've never even seen the questionnaires. The questionnaires were actually part of the audit which we're having on Friday and immediately prior to going to this meeting I met the woman who was actually conducting the audit and she'd actually passed comment about the lack of response from the users within our team and now I know why.

I've also tentatively asked the team members to meet with me individually next week, so that they can give me some indication of their concerns, some idea of the caseload etc., I think there's going to have to be work on their redefining the criteria for our service. However, I do know it's not going to be an easy route, or a very popular route.

Rissa de la Paz

At the end of the week, Anita chaired her first Team meeting, an experience she approached with trepidation. The encounter raised several issues.

Anita

I felt at a little bit of a disadvantage because I felt as a team they were going to stand maybe not against me, but against management. So I've got to admit I didn't sleep too well last night. The meeting started probably closer to quarter to one than half past twelve. I'm a very firm believer in meetings serving a purpose otherwise they're a waste of everybody's precious time. And I think this is one of the issues I really would like to look at. What I was picking up was there's a lot of resentment between the disciplines. A lot of mistrust, perhaps borne out of being on different sites, not having an appreciation of what each other does. I think the Team Meeting also highlighted the problems we have with GP expectations and I made a note to go out and see each of the GP Practices, listen to what they think the concerns are, but also, part of my role I think is to try and educate them as to the role of the social worker, because we really need the input of the social workers if the team's going to function as a team.

Rissa de la Paz

By consulting with her team members, Anita was able to find a way forward in dealing with the primary care groups in the area.

Anita

I also discussed with the team that I'd like to go and see all of the GP Practices and the advice they gave me was, yes, make the appointments, but talk to them before I actually went out, so that they could clue me up on the burning issues for the GP's and I wouldn't be going unprepared and I felt after Friday that it was a truly uphill task and I'm under no illusions, I know it still is. But on certain issues it's nice to have people actually on board and prepared to give me a bit of backing and give me the benefit of their vast experience.

Rissa de la Paz

Three weeks into the job and Anita has had to cope with staffing problems as several people are on leave. But meetings are becoming more productive.

Anita

On Friday I had another Multidisciplinary Team Meeting, although there were only three staff, one Consultant and myself attending. However I felt it was a lot more focussed and a lot more productive and this view was echoed by the two nurses who attended. I've decided to try and keep it very much to a set agenda and to actually pin people down for decisions which are recorded and that means if any later problems crop up we can actually see what was discussed and said on by a Multidisciplinary Team. Even the Consultant seemed fairly happy with that.

Rissa de la Paz

A month into the job and Anita reflects on her progress so far. Listening to other people and to her own staff has proved a valuable asset.

Anita

It's been a very slow induction process but I feel I have actually covered a lot of ground in the past month. I also had the opportunity to talk to my manager on the health side and she gave me a lot of information about my team members which I suppose could be construed as gossip. But it made a lot of sense of a lot of things I'd heard. I attended two meetings, one about the care co-ordination process and got some feedback on the audit which had been carried out the first week I'd been in post. The team needs more training in this otherwise we're never going to move forward on it. There's a lot of reluctance in the team to embrace care co-ordination in the first place and I suspect any excuse not to comply with it will be used. So one of the things I've got to do when I get from my holidays is arrange another set of training sessions regarding this.

Rissa de la Paz

A priority has been to establish good working relationships with primary care groups in the area. The task hasn't always been easy.

Anita

I met with the last of the GP's in the area in which I work and it was absolutely awful. They are not happy with the way the service was going. They didn't want more than one nurse to be associated with the practice. They have a very unrealistic view about what social workers do and won't have them seeing any of their patients. They also are annoyed that when they refer clients to us we won't pick them up immediately and in some cases we've had to call to suggest that referrals are not appropriate.

Rissa de la Paz

It's become clear that effective communication both within the team and with local partners is crucial to moving forward.

Anita

I came out of there feeling shell-shocked but I was also very angry with the nurse who was with me. Mainly because I don't think he's done a very good liaison work with the GP's. I do feel he could have done a little bit more work, and especially around the issue of social workers working into the team, when they insinuated that social workers just didn't have the training to deal with people with mental health problems. When I got back to the office we broadened the discussion out a little bit. I was told by one of the other nurses that the GP's didn't agree with care coordination, and neither did my team. How on earth can I sell up changes and work towards changes when I'm being undermined by my own team members? One of the nurses said he thought my job could be done in half a day, so they're wasting their time paying me. And it was rather nice to get it out in the open especially as this was followed up by "we don't need a manager," and I thought, "oh well thereby lies the crux of all your problems". As I say at least it's now all out in the open. In that way the knives will only come from the front and certainly not from behind my back now.

Rissa de la Paz

Resolving these problems has meant breaking down professional barriers within the team. It has also meant discerning when it is appropriate to take a clear leadership role.

Anita

I think the working together is very disjointed. Everybody is very precious about their roles at the moment. People are still living almost by the old health rules, social services rules. And in the end, it was just this week, I actually resorted, and I mean should of bit me tongue out afterwards by saying, "No I'll manage this team right, what I say goes, I'll cop the flack for any decisions I make, don't even bother to thwart them because I'm going to direct you now." And I thought that against everything I said I'd do, you know I'd be nice, I'd listen, we'd do a very consensual, try and get a consensus on what we're doing.

Rissa de la Paz

Anita now reflects on her experiences over the first three months in post. Despite the challenges - including an audit of the team's performance during her first week - Anita feels positive about the job. First, her thoughts about team relationships.

Anita

I'm really quite pleased with what I've achieved in the first three months; I've got to know my team a lot better. I think I've got a good idea of what makes them tick. That doesn't necessarily mean I like what makes them tick but at least when they're talking to me I can see where they're coming from. I've managed to identify a lot of the baggage they've, they carry and therefore a lot of the comments they make to me as a team manager is not necessarily directed at me. It's directed at a management post.

I've learned where we fit in the great scheme of things, I've learned who key people are, I've learned who responds sympathetically when you ring up and you say "help I haven't a clue what I'm doing here," I've learned who will direct, I've learned who will snap at me and I've given them a wide berth. I think I'm coming to grips with what I'm supposed to do with as a manager. And I think looking back I did have the right idea, where I underestimated was how difficult it was actually going to be. Think I had this idea that I'd come down, I'd have a team willing to move forward with me. A team who knew what we were expected to achieve as a team. Have firm ideas on how to do a contributions to make and I don't think it's any

exaggeration to say I came down and I didn't find that at all. If found, I think, a team who were almost rigid with fear in places about changes.

Rissa de la Paz

With her experience both in social work and in nursing Anita had thought that she would be able to liaise easily with both types of professionals on her team. The reality was somewhat different – at least at first.

Anita

I think what I found more than anything is distrust by both. I almost feel in order to help them integrate I've really got to prove myself on both parts and I feel I certainly won't be accepted unless I can almost fight on equal terms. But it's damned hard work because it's something that I really didn't want to have to do.

I do believe that as a team we will get there. It's pointless me getting there on me own. You can't have a manager just storming ahead, it's a pointless exercise. Somehow or other I've got to get either in front of them and pull or behind and push.

I think I'll do it, and I think I actually enjoy the job, despite everything it keeps throwing at me. I enjoy the challenge of looking forward. I enjoy the challenge of helping people look forward.

Rissa de la Paz

Anita has found support from other team manager's, especially after they attended a residential course together. This emphasised the importance of some form of mentoring, especially in the early stages of the job.

Anita

Even now I think if one team manager rings another team manager, it's instant response and you know, are you all right. It's an incredible set up which I'm really pleased about because otherwise you don't get an awful lot of support from anywhere else. I think if roles had been reversed and I was putting somebody in who was new to the area, new to the job, I'd actually be keeping an eye on them just in case they didn't come up to scratch.

Rissa de la Paz

Looking back on her own experience, what advice would she give new managers?

Anita

Don't underestimate how much time it takes you to get to know the people. To get to know the systems. Don't start out with any ideas of changing the world, it just doesn't happen at all.

Don't imagine that the team are going to welcome you with open arms, because there's a strong possibility they won't. And that's not about you as a person that's about somebody new coming in and the unknown factor, the same worries that you have about meeting your team they have about you and remember there might be 5, 6, 7 of them.

Don't forget your sense of humour because at times you're going to need it and times that's your only ally. Remember that you're not alone, you will have a support system and try and work out before you actually start in the job who you will get support from.

Finally, remember to enjoy one of the biggest challenges you're likely to have had in your working career so far.

Rissa de la Paz

Despite the difficulties, making that first step into management is something Anita doesn't regret.

Anita

I thoroughly enjoy the job despite what seems like a lot of very negative comments. I think sometimes it's easier to focus on the negative than the positive because there seems to be more of it. But I'm really, really pleased I made the decision to go into management.

It's been a new challenge, a totally new direction and I actually come to work on a morning quite positive. All right the day's events might change that by the time I drive back, but it hasn't stopped me coming to work with a smile on my face most days.