

1625IP Senior Management Team (SMT) Focus Group Thematic Analysis of Developing and Implementing Psychologically Informed Approaches (PIE) - University of Gloucestershire

Introduction

This document summarises the SMT focus group interview conducted in November, 2018. It presents the results of a thematic analysis which highlights key themes and associated dimensions which help unpack the data.

Anonymised quotations are used to articulate the themes and give the participants a voice in the narrative. Four key themes (Table 1) are presented based on the interview schedule and corresponding discussions between participants.

Table 1: Summary of main themes and dimensions

Theme	Dimensions
1.0 Rationale	Practical needs-led approaches Collaborative device
2.0 Benefits	Evidence tool Overarching framework Personal and professional development Culture and ethos
3.0 Challenges	Scepticism and resistance Organisational and attitudinal barriers
4.0 Key Learning	-

1.0 Rationale for adopting PIE

A number of factors were discussed which highlighted how PIE had a high degree of fit with political will and with the practical needs of young people. PIE provided a **practical needs-led approach** that was responsive to the complex reality of young people's lives, and which maintained the centrality of this when defining the best responses. For some organisations it complimented the underpinning strengths-based focus and provided others with the means of embedding new practices that sought to develop the ways in which services were devised. Contextually, there was a strong drive from Bristol City Council to look to focus on the psychological needs of young people, which provided an overarching imperative for local organisations to work with these considerations in a more concerted way, as supported by the Council's ambition of commissioning psychologically informed services in the city.

Against a backdrop of increased emphasis on multi-agency working there was the recognition that organisations needed to look to wider stakeholders in order to devise more complete responses to the needs of young people. The PIE framework provided a necessary **collaborative device** that supported this ambition, although it was noted that discussions between different agencies could be challenging, mainly due to the perceived need for difficult cultural shifts towards PIE approaches (away from accepted although not necessarily

outdated approaches), and pressures stemming from normal day-to-day operational demands.

'If an organisation is bringing it [RP] in for the first time, it's about acknowledging that PIE is what you already do but that this is a framework that pulls that together in a more coherent sense and helps us learn. It underlines the skills and practice already going on and perhaps that needs to be done much earlier.'

2.0 Perceived benefits of PIE

2.1 Staff / organisations

There was widespread agreement concerning the benefits of PIE. Principally, this was based on the perception that PIE helped establish a clear framework for how people approached their work in supporting young people, and how they thought about and responded to young people themselves. Operationally, PIE was beneficial for helping develop and sustain conversations around how best to provide services, which was particularly important in a time when resources were stretched or scarce. It provided a means of scrutinising priorities and what planning was needed to support these. For example, incorporating reflective practice (RP) as an integral organisational component meant that staffing and logistical issues could be given full attention rather than being secondary to other issues. In this sense it provided a means of ensuring wellbeing as a concept that applied equally to staff and young people, was maintained as a core element of practice in day-to-day operations although one participant noted that it took time for the benefits of RP to accumulate and show.

'In my experience you don't get the benefits of reflective practice from the first session. It takes a while for you to experience it to be something that helps your work'.

The PIE framework also provided an **evidence tool** which supported the rationale for focusing on the development of meaningful relationships rather than, for example, a preoccupation with size of the caseload, with respect to providing a clear theoretical justification.

'It provides us with evidence for why we work in a certain way, for example protection against working with very high caseloads, it helps us respond rather than react and concentrate on relationships with individuals'

Consequently, it was easier to develop approaches which were more individually responsive and which maintained the primacy of young people's needs. As such, the framework helped to balance the needs of young people with results-focused contracts for services, providing a space for greater attention on young people. Here, the PIE approach was also perceived to help develop a longer-term outlook which 'slowed down' the case management process in a positive way so as to provide a real focus on supporting the emotional and practical needs of young people AND the staff supporting them.

Overall, the PIE framework created a space for exploring how trauma informed approaches could support all those concerned in the provision of services, for example through supervision processes for staff and the sorts of techniques that led to meaningful engagement with young people. This all-encompassing approach was

important for exploring and understanding the impact of the work and looking at how things could be done differently, especially when confronted with really challenging behaviours. This helped to move away from personalising situations, whereby issues might be attributed to specific individual behaviours, towards looking at the drivers and causes of these behaviours.

Overall, this provided the conditions to develop an **overarching framework** with a common language and culture around supporting young people with complex needs, helped define staff expectations and supported the development of staff training opportunities, the latter being perceived as particularly important because this created an ongoing cycle of development that put PIE at the forefront of staff development e.g. around trauma and attachment, and specific mental health issues.

Importantly, being able to couch PIE in terms of a tool for **personal and professional development** meant that it could be used to demonstrate how staff were doing good things (backed up by evidence). Being able to understand the effect of the PIE approach on oneself was perceived to be very useful for helping staff understand how aspects of PIE could be used as an organisational device for improving health and wellbeing, and as the starting point for supporting young people. This was because it helped staff to understand that there were different ways of thinking and talking about young people that went beyond what more 'traditional' stances i.e. punitive or cynical mindsets. These had been challenged in a positive and constructive sense that had avoided being overly challenging or top-down. It is important to make sure the emphasis is placed on the PIE's role in supporting staff as much as young people, this being particularly important for making sure the services reflect who they are as professionals.

'It allows us to think about how we can support staff as well as young people. It runs right through the organisation and helps us understand how to do things in a consistent way that values emotional and practical needs; it's been a real spur for embracing a range of psychological approaches in the way we work and train people.'

'The facilitator training is really good because it helps [colleagues] grow outside of their roles. To me, it seems like a much stronger model than just getting a psychologist in ... (we are) helping all staff understand that they can engage with and become experts in this approach.'

Consequently, PIE was perceived as a core organisational framework that informed all aspects of delivery, which allows people to explore individual and collective strengths and weaknesses. The result of this was an approach that used tools, for example ACT and TRM, in a much more coordinated way.

These benefits have real impacts on 1625ip's **culture and ethos** and help progress towards whole-scale approaches in which the fundamental tenets of PIE are embedded across all levels and functions of the organisation. This has had a number of outcomes including the building of greater trust and increased credibility, in addition to a number of synergies, specifically greater multi agency working and other opportunities, for example funding through Social Impact Bonds.

2.2. Benefits for young people and service users

Participants noted that the benefits for young people were intertwined with those for the professional due to the ways in which attitudes, skills and competencies ultimately informed practitioners' approaches to supporting young people. One particular benefit was the usefulness of PIE in helping practitioners work around challenging issues that hitherto might have been difficult to overcome were it not for the fresh perspective provided by applying the PIE lens. Here, the intentional incorporation of ideas from peers, supervisors and psychological theories provided a fundamental means of devising responses which helped to manage the issues at hand.

It also developed a more case-focused approach in terms of understanding the very particular needs and contexts of young people. Greater self-awareness by practitioners of the feelings and responses to an individual's case helps to manage situations and in doing so, provides the opportunity to fully explore the young person's strengths and interests rather than just looking to resolve issues as soon as possible. In this sense, assessments became based much more around the young person, rather than the organisation seeking to fit the individual within a standardised or accepted approach which was less about individual relationships. The constant reflection on practice through internal processes created a strong sense of ownership, although it was recognised that external support was still an important resource when required. However, it was recognised that a greater sense of ownership, competence and confidence had created a more egalitarian approach that was shared across the charity.

A further benefit concerned **quality assurance** with respect to the ability to explore in detail the outcomes of case reviews and how this fed into exploring the ways that things were done and how they could be improved. In this case PIE really helped support a whole-systems learning approach, although it was recognised that this could be, at times, a painful or challenging experience for staff, though ultimately helping to build and maintain a relationship-focused approach.

'What we're trying to do is look at cases where things haven't worked and explore that and look at why that is and what we need to be doing differently. There's a number of ways that's feeding into what we do and identifying additional training and I think that happens anyway, but PIE really helps and supports that as something we do as part of our culture.'

3.0 Challenges of PIE

It was accepted that there was always going to be an element of **scepticism and resistance** to new approaches sanctioned by senior management which seek to steer

organisations in new directions. The requirement versus option to attend RP was one such example (linking back to when 1625ip first introduced this circa 2014). Here, it was identified that there was a need to monitor attendance and understand the nature of barriers to help understand, establish and address the practical (timing, workload) versus motivational (behavioural, attitudinal) challenges. Ultimately, this approach helped to ensure RP was embedded as an essential aspect of day-to-day operations and to plan around these challenges. Given the nature of the organisations' work it was perceived that staff were used to putting others first which created its own challenge with respect to helping staff understand that RP, and the wider PIE framework was as much about them as any other staff member.

Further, a number of **organisational and attitudinal barriers** were identified. Participants reported that some organisational roles were more challenging to engage than others based on their remit and workloads, finding it more difficult to see the relevance of the PIE approach. Other challenges included logistical issues with regards to the ability to attend sessions and managing the group attendees (group dynamic) so that there was the right mix of people present. It was recognised that, at least initially, this had taken a lot of organisation and was resource-intensive although was now more self-sustaining.

Similarly, with regards to PIE training, learning from feedback and adjusting the training plan had taken a lot of work to manage during the roll-out process and it was noted that there needed to be strong buy-in from senior management, and a genuine commitment to the ongoing and iterative delivery of PIE training to fully support it. Reflecting on the experience within partner organisations, it was recognised that it was not always the case that senior management needed support to buy-in to the approach, but that it was sometimes that those closer to day-to-day operations needing to better understand how the whole PIE process worked and how it was experienced by staff and young people so as to develop a more complete awareness of process and outcomes. As such, it was suggested that more effort than might initially be thought was needed early on to start the change process within an organisation, with a view to normalising the PIE approach.

Incorporating aspects of PIE within staff recruitment processes was perceived to be essential for supporting an evolutionary shift towards whole-system, PIE-informed, approaches. This was perceived as a useful response to some of the issues identified above which helped to attract candidates with the right skills, attitudes and mindsets to PIE-focused organisations. Also important was the ability to develop or identify opportunities which helped learning to take place between organisations in order to allow aspects of PIE to develop in an organic or culturally sensitive way that worked with, rather than against, processes and procedure.

'It's very noticeable how people are coming to us now because of what we do and how we do it, people want to work here. There's a real energy, there's a real kind of sense of value in being part of the organisation. So, to some extent things do get easier over time as you recruit and attract people who share those values.'

4.0 Key learning

Based on discussions between participants and specific questions concerning what recommendations might usefully be made for future similar implementation of PIE approaches, the following points are made:

- Ensure there is sufficient lead-in planning and preparatory work to establish conversations between multiple agencies early on and identify opportunities to support those who are more sceptical or resistant to the framework;
- Although it is important to create an environment in which a sense of momentum can be fostered, it must be managed carefully in order to maximise learning and opportunities for reflective practice (something recognised as difficult to do in complex contexts);
- Routine and planned RP sessions are critical to the success of RP as a feature of the PIE approach;
- Overall, participants were pleased (and a little surprised) with how well the PIE framework has been adopted and integrated into practice, especially when reflecting on experiences from and in other settings. In this sense, more could be done to celebrate the progress that has been made in addition to making sure people know how important the 'PIE champions' are in the continuing success of the approach.