

Keeping knowledgeable: how NHS chief executive officers mobilise knowledge and information in their daily work

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Declared competing interests of authors: John Powell is a member of the National Institute for Health Research Health Technology Assessment editorial board.

Published August 2014

DOI: 10.3310/hsdr02260

Plain English summary

How NHS chief executives mobilise knowledge and information

Health Services and Delivery Research 2014; Vol. 2: No. 26

DOI: 10.3310/hsdr02260

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Plain English summary

We studied the day-to-day work of seven chief executive officers (CEOs) of NHS acute and mental health trusts to understand how they used various sources of information and knowledge. Each of these CEOs was 'shadowed' for several weeks. We observed and documented their everyday activities, including their interaction with other staff, as well as the relevant documents in their organisation.

We found that NHS CEOs seek information and use knowledge all the time in their everyday work. They do this for three main purposes: making decisions; accounting for decisions already made; and making sense. Making sense was the most common activity, where CEOs would 'connect the dots' between many sources of information available to them. Often this information would be obtained in unplanned ways, especially through conversation. To gather this information, CEOs relied on a highly customised combination of people, ways of doing, and technologies. These were arranged according to their idea of what type of managers they wished to be, but also reflected the specific demands of their job (including their organisational and wider context) at the time. Whether and how well CEOs were able to be appropriately informed depended on this arrangement, and how well it suited the particular demands of their job. We suggest that the work CEOs carry out to collect intelligence and 'connect dots' is therefore more about being knowledgeable as a personal and organisational capability: *knowledge-ability*. By shedding light on what such ability might consist of, our findings will help people understand what skills might be required for NHS CEOs to work more effectively, and how they can best be supported to do this.

Health Services and Delivery Research

ISSN 2050-4349 (Print)

ISSN 2050-4357 (Online)

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This report

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the HS&DR programme or one of its proceeding programmes as project number 09/1002/36. The contractual start date was in March 2011. The final report began editorial review in June 2013 and was accepted for publication in October 2013. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The HS&DR editors and production house have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors' report and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the final report document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this report.

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