

# Book Review

*Leadership and Management in the Irish Health Service*  
edited by Anne-Marie Brady  
Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2010

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The publication of *Leadership and Management in the Irish Health Service* is a welcome development for Irish health services education, marking increased recognition of the need for formal management training for healthcare professionals. In a constrained public sector context, it provides a broad overview of contemporary healthcare management issues, situated against key policy concerns. Aiming to guide health professionals' understanding and practice of leadership and management, the book is organised around four major themes. Section 1 describes the health care environment, outlining the structure and governance of the Irish health service, and providing a broad contextualisation of Irish health policy and economics. Section 2 addresses the fundamentals of service provision and provides an overview of leadership and management principles, organisational culture, delegation, financial management in healthcare and human resource management in the health services. Section 3 moves to consider developing professionals in the health service, and the practice-oriented concerns of communication and conflict resolution, working in teams and work motivation, which underpin day-to-day service delivery. Finally, Section 4 considers developing the health service itself, with chapters dedicated to leading change in the Irish health service, approaches to quality improvement, integrated care pathways and health informatics.

The fourteen contributors to the book come with experience in undertaking management and delivering management education, with twelve holding nursing backgrounds. The strong practitioner-contributors include the national director of serious incidents at the Health Service Executive (HSE); the chief executive officer (CEO) of the new Irish national children's hospital development; the lead of the quality function in the National Office of Quality and Risk; a clinical directorate business manager; and an assistant national director of human resources in the HSE. The balance between the academic and practical

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perspective is most welcome, with the practitioners providing experience-based examples and, as in the case of the chapter on human resources, drawing out the limitations, as well as the benefits, of conventional management approaches. Of particular note is the chapter on integrated care pathways (ICPs). Accessibly written, the chapter details the policy context, nature, benefits and barriers to ICPs and provides an in-depth consideration of how they might be implemented. The discussion is supplemented with examples and resources, including a gantt chart for an ICP implementation process, an ICP appraisal tool utilised by the Irish Care Pathway Network and a case study. The chapter on delegation and financial management adopts a similar approach. These chapters represent *Leadership and Management* at its best: promoting understanding and providing skills and resources to facilitate local enactment.

The primary envisaged readership is postgraduate students undertaking third-level health services courses in Ireland. However, the book is also described as essential reading for undergraduate and postgraduate nursing students and those from other healthcare professions. Undoubtedly, the book will interest this broad church; however, this wide appeal across educational levels and professions leads to some underlying tensions. The most basic arises in the level of prior presumed knowledge of management. A glossary of terms would be useful in this regard. A second tension sporadically arises between the dual objectives of creating understanding and developing skills. For example, the chapter on communication and conflict resolution is clearly action-oriented, while the chapter on leadership and management principles is much more academic. Although complemented by a later chapter on leading change, the consideration of leadership and management principles lacks focused discussion of the nature of managerial and leadership roles and the challenges therein. It also lacks consideration of healthcare-specific strategies to address these challenges, such as clinical management roles and cross-professional leadership constellations. Those transitioning to management roles may desire a greater pragmatic, rather than academic, orientation in addressing this important topic. Nonetheless, it is arguable that skills development is addressed throughout the book, by the provision of reflective questions and additional resources at the end of each chapter. Although cases are provided for some chapters, more extensive use of practice-based examples and the provision of cases for each chapter would facilitate the consistent application of the principles explored, particularly for those lacking significant experience in the domains covered.

Effective and efficient healthcare management is an ongoing, complex and intractable challenge internationally. Its resolution will require informed, questioning and skilled leaders and managers. This book sets the tone for the type of leaders and managers we wish to develop in the Irish context. Of necessity, it is somewhat selective. The editor and contributors have made clear choices, focusing on basic management concerns and policy priorities, including a useful chapter on health informatics. As such, the book is a useful starting point for all. However, two omissions deserve comment. First, the book adopts a predominantly managerialist orientation, avoiding, for example, in-depth critical considerations of inter-professional and managerial-professional relations, including issues of power and hierarchy. This raises the danger of informed, if unquestioning, managers. At a

minimum, it would be of benefit to see these issues explicitly alluded to, if not addressed, with further sources of information provided. Second, in light of the clinical background of the majority of the targeted readership and the increasing policy recognition and formalisation of clinical leadership and management roles, significant attention to these is merited. The benefits – and challenges – of these roles have been explored internationally, and could usefully inform the career decisions and practice of future clinical leaders. References to sources of information on related concerns, including clinical directorate structures, would also be helpful. Finally, a core objective of the text was to provide a view informed by Irish health policy and structure. Sporadic benchmarking against international experience usefully illustrates what is unique about Ireland. This dimension of the book could be meaningfully developed.

Overall, this text is a significant addition to the Irish healthcare management landscape. While the development of the critical dimension and the inclusion of clinical management roles would be welcomed in a second edition, *Leadership and Management in the Irish Health Service* effectively combines consideration of the broad healthcare management context with local practice concerns. Undoubtedly, it will be widely adopted and will contribute to the systematic development of management and leadership capability in the Irish health service.

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