

Identity, skills and development of managers and leaders in the alcohol and other drugs sector

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Introduction and aim: For the non-government alcohol and other drugs (AOD) sector to be successful and sustainable, it must attract, develop and retain a capable and engaged workforce. Central to that is the role that managers and leaders have in influencing workers' satisfaction, growth, and productivity. Yet, becoming and being a leader who successfully manages people at work is not a trivial endeavour.

Method: Our study comprised a literature review, 41 semi-structured interviews, as well as 157 quantitative survey responses from leaders and managers from NGO AOD organisations in NSW and VIC.

Results: We found that for AOD workers to become effective leaders, they need to psychologically identify as leaders, though this shift does not come naturally to everyone. Leaders and managers interviewed also consistently state that they require more support, resources and opportunities for professional development. Findings further suggest that sector leaders tend to focus on acquiring knowledge and skills that are specific to the AOD domain over and above capabilities that relate to the leadership and management of people and work.

Discussion and conclusions: Sector leaders, the workforce, and thus clients will greatly benefit from policies, resources, and practices that (1) help emerging talent adopt meaningful leader identities, (2) provide more systematic and context-sensitive professional learning opportunities, and (3) support leaders and managers in integrating and implementing business-strategy and human resource management approaches during day-to-day operations.

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