Paucity Management Addresses the Limit-situations of Human Services Delivery in Rural Australia

by Susan Mlcek

Abstract

Just as several authors have written about the limitlessness of globalisation, so too does the practice of paucity management reach across all boundaries of society. Its practice relates particularly to the way that rural community welfare managers operate within an environment of resource poverty. Increasingly, the private sector creep of financialisation across the human services profession has had an impact on the roles of people within those organisations whereby their services are being scrutinised continually to show value-for-money in a market-driven environment. Managers are constantly trying to balance and "trade off" actions and activities, in order to manage ethically and professionally. Paucity management is management in complex situations, which at its best addresses ways to deal with potentially limiting situations such as rigorous accountability regimes that could debilitate service delivery. It involves a series of innovative and creative practices such as subtle partnership arrangements to counter the effects of operating within resource-poor situations.

In this paper I discuss my PhD research conducted with community welfare managers from the Central West Region of New South Wales (NSW), Australia. Drawing upon an eclectic theoretical foundation, the paper will discuss aspects of the phenomenographic research process and minimal findings that relate to several limit-situations of human services delivery, as well as implications of paucity management to address those situations.

Introduction

Managers in community welfare service organisations practice in a complex environment due partly to the pluralistic model of welfare and its 'mixed economy of care' (Harris 2000, p. 92). The idea of complexity is one of the foci of this paper, as are the ideas from community welfare managers who see their world of work in a strong, forceful way, not just as being impacted by government, organisation and community boundaries, but as part of an existential duality that allows for their own sense of resilience and privilege to transform situations of resource poverty.

1 In this article, the term human services, is used synonymously with community welfare services to reflect the focus of the original doctoral research.

2 Where I use the collective term 'community welfare managers' throughout the paper I am referring to the participants in the research.
This paper visits themes of chaos, financialisation, paucity management and limit-situations. These phenomena are seen to be defining factors of what is happening on the ground in rural communities at the micro level of activities, drawing on interviews with fifteen community welfare managers. These themes are also an indication that what is done in a multitude of combined activities has its own place in determining how the overall practice of community welfare managers is itself globalised and operationalised. This work in progress will culminate in the completion of a PhD thesis that explores the presence, or otherwise, of models of paucity management as an integral part of community welfare management practice in the Central West Region of NSW. One tentative model already identifies partnerships as a resourceful consideration of paucity management practice and this strategy will be explored here. The springboard for the research has come from an original research question, what are models of paucity management and how does the structure and affiliations of non-profit community welfare organisations affect the implementation of such models? But what is paucity management?

Understanding Paucity Management in the Context of this Research

In 2003, Wagner and Spence introduced a new analytical category in relation to community welfare work in the Central West Region of NSW, paucity management (Wagner & Mlcek 2004, p. 1). As a result of four studies conducted between 1998 and 2002, paucity management emerged as a set of strategies used by managers and workers in non-profit human services in Australia, to operate effectively and ethically under conditions of resource poverty (Wagner & Spence 2003, pp. 119-135). What the literature reveals in effect is that at a micro level, managers within these member organisations are becoming adept at balancing competing needs of clients, workers, managers, and the organisation, as well as addressing tensions between balancing, and/or trading off, professional standards and ethical practice.

Rural community welfare managers must balance competing needs, together with ethical and professional practice to meet those needs, with an ever-increasing diminishment of resources. For a number of community welfare managers in rural communities, ‘paucity management is emerging as standard practice’ (Wagner, Spence & van Reyk 2000, p. 43), and one that is ‘implicit as a by-product of the dominant, government micro-economic narrative that places emphasis on the use of a business partnership model of management that is premised on the grounds of a purchaser/provider dichotomy’ (Mlcek, Wagner & Childs 2003, p. 184).

Complexity and Chaos

A central aspect of my research agenda overall, and specifically in this paper, is to assert that paucity management can be linked with complexity and chaos theories. I say this because at a fundamental level all three positions negate the tendency to nominate simple cause and effect processes. There are numerous examples of government rhetoric driving the way that these managers approach their daily work in areas for example, of accountability and governance. Much of this rhetoric comes from the complication of trying to work in a purchaser-provider model of business activity rather than within a sponsored model of service delivery. For many managers the accountability and governance comes not from just
one government level but can stretch to multiple levels of government as well as different levels within their own organisations. As the practice of being a community welfare manager appears to become more chaotic and therefore limiting, what is most likely occurring is a manager working in situations where they are being inundated with more complex information than can be handled.

The impact of responding to certain discourses in the sphere of community management practice has far-reaching and interesting implications. For example there is a discourse on the use of partnerships that has been pushed by government departments for some time and it points to a desired effective way to deliver human services. Doing business through partnerships is a global phenomenon and has been embraced by the Australian government sector, following private sector examples, as being the efficient way to deliver community welfare services to the public. Wagner, Micek and Spence (2003, p. 1) relate how 'the move towards partnerships and collaborations across organisations, sectors and industries has been promoted as a necessary and desirable development in resource efficiency'. However this discourse only serves to highlight the situation of community welfare managers as being more complex than we at first realise. In many cases the reality of managers creating effective partnerships with other managers on-the-ground - when 'we have different agendas and different personalities' - is questionable and uncertain as a viable option for delivering services. The practice in the way that resources are utilised is not immediately identified as paucity management, neither for governments at a macro level, nor between organisations at a mezzo level, nor even for these managers at a micro level. Some of them for example, while admitting that 'yes we do work in a resource poor environment', denied they were 'doing' paucity management when describing their own practices but were clear that 'others do paucity management'. They spoke about their own 'creative management' or 'resourceful management', or even their 'innovative management'. It appears that the managers' situations are not so simple. How can the above ideas be melded together? In terms of globalisation being viewed as a 'borderless' phenomenon it is more than likely that paucity management is practised everywhere in the world and across all sectors; first (public), second (private), and third (community). Bahnisch (2002, p. 7) tantalises with the idea that 'globalisation is an effect, not the cause'. For example, where there is an acknowledgement by all of the managers that 'yes, we do work in a resource poor environment' and if we follow a trajectory whereby even some welfare managers' practice can be identified as paucity management, then this phenomenon is global - it is an effect, not the cause - but it is caused by advancements about creativity in resource mobilisation, fluidity of markets, and hegemonic processes that are both predictable and unpredictable, depending on the context.

In the title of his book, Lewin suggests that complexity is about Life at the edge of chaos (Lewin 2001) and later reveals how order arises 'out of a complex dynamical system' whereby for example, 'global properties flow from aggregate behaviour of individuals' (p. 13). Community welfare managers' work situations appear at times to be 'at the edge of chaos'. While the original theory comes from classical scientists seeking answers to the disorder, irregularity and discontinuous nature of the world around us, an understanding of its fundamental premise is not
dissimilar to the way that Freire (1972) poses the idea of limit-situations, that is, 'chaos is a science of process rather than state, of becoming rather than being' (Gleick 1987, p.5). Chaos Theory makes strong claims about the universal behaviour of complexity that 'allows for the simultaneous presence of randomness and determinism within systems' (Sim & van Loon 2001, p. 167). Complexity is defined by the spontaneity of individuals to self-organise in such a way that community welfare managers, for example, exercise innovation to the opus operandum map of the way they are supposed to work. Their modus operandi is to be creative and strengths-based, to be reactive and transaction based, as well as strategically pragmatic; one kind of complexity replacing another perhaps (see for example, Mlcek, Wagner & Childs 2003, p. 184).

**The Place of Financialisation in a Market Environment**

There is much debate about the inappropriateness of governments to push peak bodies and managers of community welfare services to become more business-like in the management of their services by setting up strategic partnerships, stewardship and auspicing arrangements. This comes from a belief in the seeming mismatch of trying to embed community welfare services within the government's micro-economic reform agenda. On the back of this type of reform, Wagner and Spence (2003, p. 120) raise doubts about the appropriateness of using private sector management strategies within the community sector. Information accessed through government archives indicates the possible tensions created because of this 'new' market approach to the delivery of services:

Market approaches to human services are not appropriate. The trend toward marketisation of welfare is of major concern to the community services sector, and the people we assist and represent. Australia has developed a mixed economy of welfare because of public recognition that the market has failed to deliver adequate economic and social outcomes for a significant proportion of the population (Australian Council of Social Services 1997, p. 5).

The immediate effect of government policy changes which promote 'enhancement of productivity and competitiveness' (O'Neill 2002, p. 3) has lead to recognition of the need to reassess the way that managers continue to offer welfare services to communities. The characteristics of an evolving system together with the support of current processes within management practice lend themselves to an activity-based management system that is identified as one of the most important ways to be competitive (Maher, Stickney & Weil 1999, p. 12). What comes with this type of management is the practice of scrutinising 'value-added' and 'non-value-added' activities. In these cases, costs become ambiguous because they are more often than not analysed out of context. This happens when governments produce policies that inadvertently analyse welfare service as an expense; in the context of business-like terms rather than as value to enhance the social capital of communities. When this happens there is a risk that the practices inherent in financialisation, for example increased competition, bargaining and negotiating for funding, will contribute to 'disinvestments' (O'Neill 2002, p. 5) by governments and the service providers themselves.
Limit-Situations

An understanding of 'limit-situations' comes from the insight of Professor Alvaro Vieira Pinto, as being not 'the impassable boundaries where possibilities end, but the real boundaries where all possibilities begin'; they are 'not the frontier which separates being from nothingness, but the frontier which separates being from being more' (cited in Freire 1972, p. 71). Limit-situations are not only cultural givens, but are historically determined, and they 'imply the existence of persons who are negated and curbed by them' (p. 74).

Prior to starting my formal field work for the research, I had very strong notions from preliminary talks with community welfare managers, that their actual work was a constant source of navigation and negation. This unlikely dialectic of opposing situations along a continuum - moving forward and then of saying no - held endless possibilities in imagining a collection of rich and thick description from which to start determining models of paucity management. The idea of community welfare managers negotiating boundaries of governance for example, and frontiers of possibilities through a series of limit-acts to answer their limit-situations and that are 'directed at negating and overcoming rather than passively accepting, the 'given' (Freire 1972, p. 72), had been part of my original research proposal.

The epistemic existence of paucity management only serves to reinforce the situation facing NSW rural community welfare services managers; a situation that is characterised by its myriad of service delivery types, its multi-purpose status within communities, its anomalies in funding arrangements and business partnership networks and models, its reporting and management structures, and its response to governance guidelines and recommendations. Community welfare work practices cover aspects of negotiating, networking, collaborating, peripheral involvement in communities of practice, budgeting, auspicing, partnerships, and community democratisation. They can cover all these practices which are linked to their educational, facilitative, representational, or technical roles (Ife 2002, pp. 230-257), in one day or over a longer period of time. Their motivations may be ideological in nature, or have a philosophical focus to them, but what is not contestable is the fact that all managers acknowledged that balancing work under paucity conditions is a difficult but necessary task (Wagner & Spence 2003, p. 130). All of these factors contribute to the limit-situations of human services delivery; they can either be seen as 'limitations', or 'opportunities'.

There are several more limit-situations faced by community welfare managers, and they relate, perhaps most critically in terms of survival, to their ability to work within the boundaries set by the market forces of the day. The use of the market model, together with its market-based initiative financialisation, is part of the management discourse that has made its way into community management. This has happened insidiously since the early 1970s and 1980s (see for example, Jamrozik 1991, pp. 258 & 259; Keast & Brown 2002, p. 440; Kerr & Savelsberg 2001, p. 22; Melville 1999, pp. 25 & 38), and more specifically in at least the last 8-10 years. The renewed discourse contests the underlying principle of participation that was originally intended to improve the universal service delivery model that was typified by impersonal, definitely hierarchical bureaucracy, and rule-bound behaviour/activity that dominated previous government welfare programs. What is not contested today however, is that rural areas are still
disadvantaged compared to urban areas, with respect to public policy and human services (Cheers 1992, pp. 12 & 13), and the community welfare managers in my research act from a broad-based service delivery model rather than a highly standardised one used by urban populations.

The above point is relevant when looking at the technique of managers in their practices. Financialisation involves the application of market model strategies to service delivery, for example, in the response to the promotion of competition to improve efficiency. The process is part of the 'new managerialist culture ... which espouses competition, efficiency over effectiveness, minimises the importance of service delivery and emphasises the importance of the management of scarce resources' (Wagner, Spence & van Reyk 2000, p. 13). However, as Darcy (2002 p. 38) explores the notion that management discourse is 'really a proxy for neo-liberalism', and that it has killed participation in community management (p. 32), he makes the following telling comment that has relevance for paucity management practice in rural areas, that 'management, like bureaucracy, is a discourse about the rational pursuit of efficiency - but its rationality is divorced from questions of political or social value, allowing the emergence of 'content free' management - the replacement of substance with technique' (p. 38).

'Technique' highlights the tendency particularly by governments, to simplify the extraordinary ability, skills and knowledge that rural community welfare managers really require to be able to implement policies through the services they deliver to their communities. Policies are expected to be delivered 'through a variety of 'technical' skills and knowledge' (Jamrozik 1991, p. 60), and very often these 'technical' solutions are derived in urban-based organisations far from the reality of rural environments. For community welfare managers in the central west of NSW, limit-situations that highlight the complexity of time-space distanciation (Giddens 1984, p. 377) contained in their conception of 'ruralness' is a working reality.

Community welfare managers' practice is also not value-free. Decision-making cannot be reduced to a pure science (Darcy 2002, p. 38) although, like their urban counterparts, they do think and act much more strategically particularly when pooling scant resources. For example, the idea of 'participation' is highly manifested in networking, partnerships, and collaborative practice (Wagner & Spence 2003, p. 130). These specific practices however, lead to more potential limit-situations. Just as Darcy (2002, p. 36) points out that 'participation can be a double-edged sword' so too do Keast and Brown (2002, p. 444) allude to networks being both a means to coordinate complexity and 'a double-edged sword'. These similar concerns are possibly because of the need for community welfare managers to employ careful initiation, governance, and ethical management practice to achieve benefits from the potential strengths of networks. The numerous technical solutions contained in the above limit-acts put endless pressure on managers and their staff, many of whom are formally qualified but under-skilled in areas related to the context of sectoral change (Wagner, Spence & van Reyk 2000, p. 38).

The competing discourses around the processes and ideology driving marketisation show us how practices to do with financialisation reveal the further technical limitation of many community welfare managers. In the first instance they are told they will be 'competing on a level playing field' when applying for funding. Regardless of this
reassurance however, management practice in this way offers a limited conception of the outcomes of rural community welfare service delivery because it asks managers to be reproductive and/or responsive, rather than expansive as they tend to be in their dealings with communities. That is, underlying agency and activity within communities is the fundamentally important relationship of individuals in social practice. Community welfare managers are constantly made aware that decisions made in the course of their practice which are based on shared values and experiences of the community, have also a counter side because where service delivery can promote cohesion in a community, groups of people will be excluded by the very dichotomous outcome of social cohesion leading to inclusiveness (Young 1990, pp. 300-323). Competition for funding sets up inevitable limitsituations that are bound up in concepts of inclusion and exclusion.

**Methodology**

The aim of this research was to use a methodology that would end up 'doing research with first-person accounts of experience' (Reissman 1993, p. 17). In other words, to collect narratives/stories that would reveal useful models of paucity management. The qualitative research draws on an epistemological framework that is eclectic. It combines both interactive and interpretive inquiry through the use of methods that come from a phenomenographic approach to data collection and analysis to arrive at an outcome space of meaning variation (Marton 1986, 1988, & 1993). In keeping with this approach, semi-structured interviews were used to collect information from the fifteen community welfare managers. Their narratives/stories came directly from their lived experiences within their work practices and are used to illuminate experience that potentially defines models of paucity management in a resource poor environment. Marton (1996, p. 180) is clear about conceptions having two dimensions – content and structure – and these aspects are manifested through focusing on what people experience as well as how someone thinks about a specific phenomenon. Narratives or stories not only provide...
‘privileged access for understanding the way individuals articulate their experiences’ (Glover 2004, p. 50), but also what they thought of those experiences.

There are several ways to discuss the process of narrative inquiry moving from explanation and description, or vice versa. Both types of inquiry were conducted in face-to-face interviews with the participants. Overall, there was a three-step process to data collection, with the intermediary phase using focus groups for exploratory narrative inquiry as well, to gain a sense of collective action around the initial individual experiences of the managers. The two separate focus groups resulted from the geographic clustering of individuals. My researcher motivation at these events was to direct part of the discussions around the exploration of dynamic metaphors that came from both preliminary talks with the managers and from their initial interviews.

Discussion: An Aspect of Practice - “The Bombardment Zone”

Just as globalisation is identified as having both descriptive and prescriptive elements (Worthington 2001, p. 11), it is probable also that different models of paucity management could be recognised through the influence of the prescriptive and descriptive structure and affiliations of community welfare managers’ organisations. Such models may possibly provide a more viable and more appropriate way to make conclusions about how managers utilise specific strategies within their workplaces to implement effective and ethical operations. Indeed one of the dynamic aspects of paucity management is that, far from being a potentially limiting exercise, inherent in one interpretation of the name, the actions and behaviours of managers actually become strategically innovative to suit their organisational structure and work landscape.

The above sentiments were manifested in the juggling and balancing practices to which the managers admitted. Wagner, Spence and van Reyk (2000), and Wagner and Spence (2003) also alluded to this same sense of juggling in their earlier research about the way that managers, even when feeling isolated, overwhelmed and under-resourced, hardly ever do work in isolation away from the social structures, policies and organisational arrangements in which their practice is operationalised (Jones & May 2002, p. 9). Despite the extent to which some of these factors influence their practices managers ‘do not see (themselves) as being heroic’. They do ‘feel privileged’ to be doing what they do and speak of their work as being part of a ‘brick wall that is supportive and challenging’. However, there are times that they are aware of being in a ‘bombardment zone’.

The application of strategies-to-activity behaviour is encapsulated in the following diagram that uses the metaphor of the ‘bombardment zone’ which was identified by several of the managers. Implicit for them in the above statement and identified by one of the managers is the question ‘what do I need to be doing at my level?’

Throughout the diagram the effects of structure, and in particular affiliations and the ‘marketplace’, are implicit. The interplay of relational facets in the diagram displays an evocative battlefield analogy about community welfare practices, operating in possible chaotic circumstances, or a zone of a complex barrage of ideas, rules, regulations and policy directions. The arrows are meant to suggest that following the daily path along which the manager travels results
in a constant inundation of material and information that relates to being a manager, acting locally, thinking about the role and support from the relevant peak organisation, trying to understand what it means to be part of the third sector, relating management activities to the effect of globalisation and evaluating the impact of government on practices.

These relational concerns have the effect of interrupting what the managers consider to be their main work of delivering a community welfare service but paradoxically the service cannot be delivered unless attention is given to those situations. For example, although my interview with one of the managers had been planned for some time, there was a steady stream of people coming to her door, of people ringing her, of staff asking her to check things for them (she held the only filing cabinet in the building!) and of staff with several updates on the state of a client family crisis that had erupted that morning. She spoke to me with one eye constantly on her emails and as I left she told me of the information flyer that had just come through from her peak organisation about the government's new direction on housing.

A modified version of the diagram was first used in an unpublished presentation to students of social work and social welfare (Mlcek 2004). There was an implicit message during that presentation about heroism and that the person who 'manages the leadership factor' in community welfare work is most definitely - the manager. The idea is supported by some of the contemporary literature on management and leadership whereby the terms manager and leader are used interchangeably. This is particularly so for the nonprofit sector - '... all nonprofit managers are also leaders ...' (Muehrcke 1997, p. 36). My research supports writers such as Ife (2002, p. 230) who caution against the readiness to classify specialist roles to a community welfare worker, in case of 'fragmented practice'. That is, they are not just managers; their management role includes leadership as well.

Drucker (1998, p. 165) suggests we be wary of artificially dividing the functions of managing and innovating (leading) and that 'this division makes no sense at all'. Through managing leadership the community welfare managers constantly ask questions (as indicated by the question icon in the bottom left hand corner of the diagram) about their own expertise, their validity as a service deliverer, and their ability to help communities. Their revelation about the extent of their management role (as indicated by the metaphor 'lightning strike of knowledge' in the top left hand corner of the diagram) is revealed when they engage successfully with all levels of their job. When I 'walk beside' that manager in the diagram, engaging with at least those relational influences on their work, there seems to be very little heroism present but instead the motivation to survive through remaining focussed on the task at hand but still working 'with an eye to the bigger picture'.

The notion of survival goes well with the idea of the bombardment zone because they give a picture of experience that is 'constantly bombarded by many interruptions' impacting on work practices. There are issues to do with trying to be a leader and manager as well as working with local communities to promote democratisation and empowerment. The two areas are not necessarily complimentary. Several of the managers questioned their ability and appropriateness in doing the latter since 'promoting democratisation in communities should not be our role ... that is the job for governments ... we are not trained to do that'. There are
also concerns about accessing the large amount of information put out by their peak organisations. They also need time to reflect on what it means to be part of a community-based organisation, and by definition therefore, the Third Sector. They are constantly being asked to be receptive to the idea of the bigger picture and not to lose sight of the global aspects of, and influences on, their work. Most importantly they are aware that governmental policy and implementation of policy transposes everything that they do. In navigating the bombardment zone, there are constant issues that arise from accountability, governance, funding, and operations practices.

When I look at the diagram above, as crude and simplistic as it is, I can still reflect on its significance concerning navigation through the limit-situations of practice. In being reminded of the instances of interruption that result in community welfare managers reacting sometimes in despair, I look to Wenger's (1998, p. 97) words about the applicability of 'the combination of perturbability and resilience' as being 'characteristic of adaptability'. Where 'learning involves a close interaction of order and chaos', Wenger's line of reasoning is that the 'continuity of an emergent structure derives not from stability but from adaptability'. Can paucity management be seen as part of an emergent structure because it is neither inherently stable nor inherently unstable? Part of the answer must come from the way that community welfare managers navigate their daily work. It is almost that they must be all things to all people and this requires a large amount of skill in generalist practice as well as a healthy dose of adaptability and flexibility.

How these managers operate within their individual models of practice is partly determined at the interface of service delivery, between management boards or communities and clients (Harris 1996). Additionally, managers go about their daily work not in isolation from the roles of their welfare organisations but in their individual capacity to uphold and deliver on the original social mission that underpins their work. In thinking about their work environment there are times when an image provides an apt correlation between process and practice - that of the notion of chaos. The image is raised here, not for the degree of sensationalism that such a term evokes, through connection to 'loss of control' or 'lack of order', but quite legitimately seems to denote a kind of unplanned reactivity that fits well with a degree of perturbability, as well as with the different behaviours and actions which some managers demonstrate in response to certain kinds of environments.

The line between meaningful and merely responsive behaviour is both unpredictable and extremely fluid (Weber 1962, p. 30) and probably accounts for some of the chaotic nature of managers' actions in being able to do their jobs effectively.

If we go back to the discourse on participation and the use of partnerships to engage successfully in effective welfare services delivery, the managers' responses raise problematic issues. When they were all asked if they are involved in partnerships, how these are formed and with whom, several
of them were quite adamant that the talk of partnerships is just 'typical government rhetoric', and others stated 'we don't do partnerships'. Part of the problem with the original rhetoric is that there is a counterquestion from the community welfare managers - 'what do you mean by partnerships'? It seems that despite the growing information about partnerships and their usefulness in creating and sustaining dialogue between and amongst sectors (see for example Wagner & Spence 2003), the present environment (with its 'bombardment zone') indicates that managers are involved in partnerships all the time but not necessarily in the way that governments had initially conceived of this phenomenon. The latter conception comes from having the main focus on the 'business bottom line of service delivery' and while all of the managers recognised this focus, in many cases they are just too overwhelmed and under-resourced to be able to deal effectively with that.

In following the battlefield analogy evoked by the metaphor in the diagram, I have an image of managers working in a state of siege through constant interruptions. The connection between the idea of interruption (Sanders 1988, cited in Kress (ed.) 1988, pp. 143-144) and the impact of information overload on some of the managers' work practices is that they are being constantly inundated ('bombarded') with new processes and information, particularly in relation to funding, accountability, and governance. Governmental departments that work closely with these managers give out ideas in the form of micro-narratives; stories are relayed of what can happen if managers engage in certain practices, miss certain deadlines, or miss completing proper formatted documentation. There is talk about partnerships as collaborative alliances as vehicles to deliver improved outcomes (see for example Austin 1999); talk about principles of governance to facilitate an environment of sustainability. The talking is about a lot of things and some of it is commendable, proactive and conciliatory despite a climate that is at times adversarial. This is also not all bad - the inundation of new ways of doing things - after all, it is no more than what all managers must face in any organisation in a world of constant change and/or renewal.

I am speaking here about partnerships as a vehicle to facilitate change management to effect strategic direction. However, whilst managers accept that community partnerships are acknowledged as being about good corporate citizenship and involving the active engagement in projects and programs relevant to the participants, it is not always clear to most of the community welfare managers from this research, just whose strategic direction is being discussed. In analysing the effect of managers being constantly bombarded with new information about the partnership theme for example, these series of micro-narratives have the potential to present, complicate, and resolve (Virilio 1997). The resolution part is debatable here with managers still questioning the government's ideas of successful and effective partnering (evidence does show that there are some, but too few good examples in rural Australia). In the bombardment zone, information that is seen to be just too rhetorical is also information that is enigmatic; it creates problems of understanding and produces ongoing dilemmas.
Conclusion

This paper has been about the divide between what community welfare managers say they do, ought to do, and have to do. They were quite explicit in alluding to the extent of their work practices; their activities are complex in an environment of resource poverty and can sometimes produce a 'scary experience'. As questionable as this may seem, their experiences do have a direct impact on survival as community welfare managers. What is implicit in the response to the relational levels of engagement associated with the bombardment zone is that their limit-acts attempt to address several layers of engagement. What this means is that at each specific level there is the need to deal with both implicit and explicit issues. For example, at the level of being a manager there are fundamental questions that ought to be asked about what is really involved in being a manager? What are the expectations? What does it mean to be a manager? As these managers engage in all facets of the bombardment zone their management role becomes more complicated with the further need to clarify beliefs and practices that have become affected by queries to do with economic rationalism, mutual obligation, and individual responsibility. These are areas of influence that increasingly permeate all aspects of current welfare policy and service delivery and as such, they play a leading part in determining the makeup of a resource poor environment for these community welfare managers.

As part of this environment limit-situations are quite simply situations that have the potential to limit people’s engagement – because of a situation's complexity – but not necessarily. That is, certain situations identified as limiting, can actually provide opportunities for engagement in activity that was not originally obvious to participants at the outset of engagement. Community welfare managers in rural and remote areas/locations are constantly engaged in limit-acts that transverse their situations of resource poverty into creative and innovative, manageable chunks of work. By sharing their stories, they do acknowledge an environment of 'doing more with less': one that is ethically challenging to manage, and they do acknowledge this environment as being 'full of complexity', but they have 'incredible resilience' as well as identifying 'a privilege to work in rural communities'.

What is not denied is that the managers also acknowledge that they are all working in a resource-poor environment, as well as many saying that their colleagues are doing paucity management. However, what is not so easily recognised is that in nominating a resource-poor environment for everyone, there is not the same recognition that everyone 'does' paucity management. It may be one of the outcomes of the PhD thesis to reveal one model of paucity management but it may be more realistic to suppose that the different innovations and creativity of managers in this rural environment, replace one form of complexity with another, that is, several different models of paucity management. In this paper, I have not defined models of paucity management but opened another window on some of the variables of community welfare work that have been prominent in my research to date.

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Paucity Management Addresses the Limit-situations of Human Services Delivery in Rural Australia - Mleck


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