

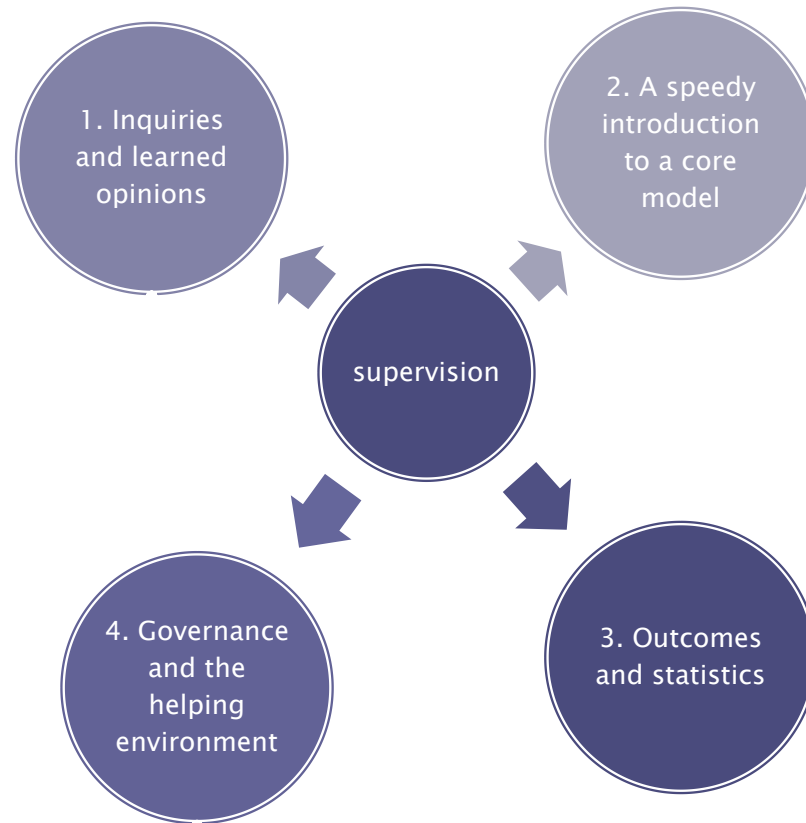
SUPERVISION - an  
exploratory outing with some  
concrete suggestions

Bridget Rothwell  
Social Care Consultant

# Some forethoughts

- ▶ Indebtedness - practitioners and mentors
- ▶ Joining the Dots (Deacon)
- ▶ It's a contested term
- ▶ Underpinning beliefs:
  - The work should go back to the workers
  - Supervision practice is a mirror of front line practice
  - Supervision is systemic
  - Supervision is a set of skills and concepts that can be learned
  
- ▶ And a warning - assumptions and presentation

# Where the conversation will go:



# 1. Inquiries and Learned Opinions

Dr Helen Hammond

Highlighted:

The need for **regular and meaningful supervision** - which takes priority even at times when the urgency of difficult cases may threaten to displace it recognising that these are also the times when hasty inappropriate judgements may be made. (2001, p40)

# Laming: Victoria Climbié (2003)

- Supervision is the cornerstone of good social work practice and should be seen to operate effectively at all levels of the organisation. In Haringey, the provision of supervision may have looked good on paper, but in practice it was woefully inadequate for many of the front-line staff. (2003, 1.59)
- Effective supervision takes time. (2003, 5.186)

# O'Brien (2003)

- ▶ 3.9.1 Although we accept that Caleb was mentioned during supervision sessions ...it is absolutely plain to us that these discussions were routine and superficial. The notes recording these sessions... were scanty and inexact. SW2 did not ask the questions which might have jolted SW4 out of his complacent expectation that Shirley would cope.

# SWIA Eilean Siar (2005)

Supervision.....

- ▶ “should include examining the impact of the social worker’s own values, gender and the dynamics of their relationship with the different family members. In addition, the worker’s attitude to abuse and knowledge and expertise in a particular area may also impact on their professional judgement.” (86:258)

# Marion Brandon et al 2003 - 2010

- ▶ The chaotic behaviour in families was often mirrored in professionals' thinking and actions....

The capacity to understand the ways in which children are at risk of harm is complex and requires clear thinking. Practitioners who are overwhelmed, not just by the *volume of work* but also by its *nature*, may not be able to do even the simple things well. **Good support, supervision** and a fully staffed workforce is crucial. (2009, p1)



- ▶ To work with families with compassion but retain an open and questioning mindset requires regular, challenging supervision.... The emotional and intellectual demands on social workers are substantial.. (2010, p54)

# Eileen Munro (2010)

- ▶ Good social work practice requires forming a relationship with the child and family and using professional reasoning to judge how best to work with parents. The nature of this close engagement means that *supervision, which provides the space for critical reflection*, is essential for reducing the risk of errors in professionals' reasoning. (2010, p11, my emphasis)

# Cooper and Lousada (2005)

- ▶ "supervision ... must always address the difficult psychological and emotional transactions that .. [the] work necessarily involves for staff."
- ▶ "... the dimension of supervision that has been most eroded over the past two decades." (p163)
- ▶ We have attended to the surface and now we need to attend to the depth. **Structure and content.** Borderline Welfare: Feeling and Fear of Feeling in Modern Welfare

# In sum

- ▶ Regular
- ▶ Meaningful
- ▶ Prioritised
- ▶ Happening at all levels
- ▶ More than just on paper
- ▶ Given time
- ▶ Not superficial and routine
- ▶ Recorded accurately
- ▶ 'jolts complacency'
- ▶ Should include talking about values, attitudes, dynamics, expertise, emotions
- ▶ Helps deal with the "volume" and "nature"
- ▶ Challenging
- ▶ Provides space for critical reasoning
- ▶ Includes feeling and addresses the avoidance of feeling



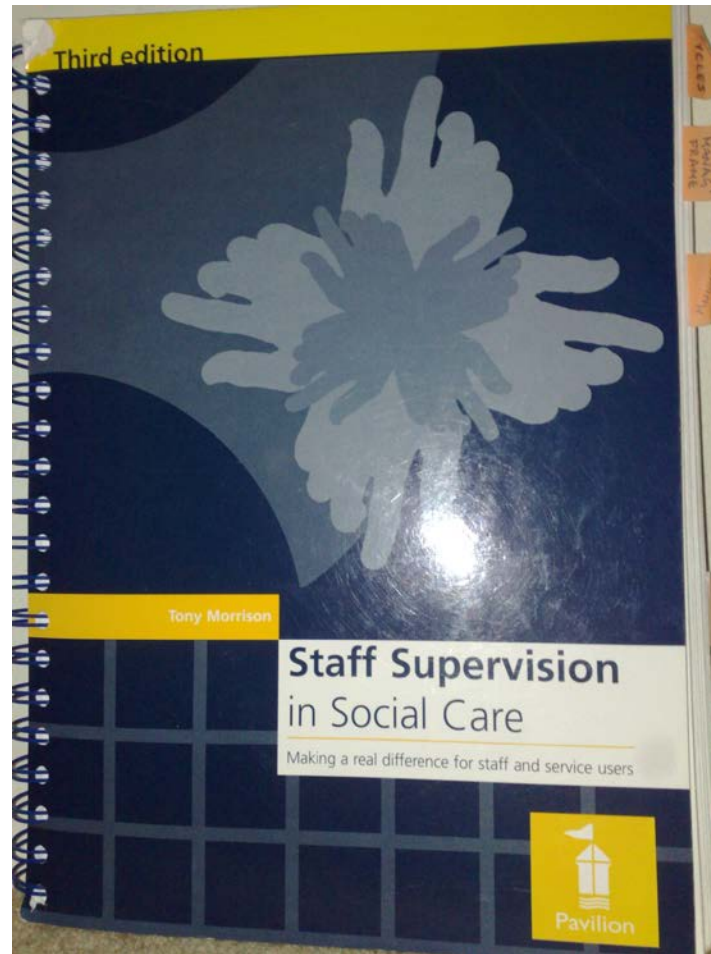
It's not the existence of supervision per se that makes a difference: what is necessary is good supervision

Tony Morrison

(2005, p 3)

*"good supervision"* is practice informed;  
*"good supervision"* is good practice leadership; *"good supervision"* is emotionally intelligent

## 2 A speedy introduction to a core model



# First get the basics right

Supervision is a set of skills and concepts that can be learned

Core elements:

- ▶ Pay attention to the (competing) needs
- ▶ Understand the (competing) tasks
- ▶ Encourage and support reflective, developmental practice
  
- ▶ Understand the context of risk and uncertainty

# Four stakeholders





# Consequences of Poor or No Supervision

## Other professionals/agencies

Role confusion, overlap, gap or rigidity

Information distorted or lost

Lack of joint planning

Stereotyping and conflict

## The organisation (team)

Poor dissemination of policy, poor compliance

Mismatch of priorities

Manager/practitioner conflict

Loss of confidence in agency

Weak strategic planning

'private practice in a public agency'

Organisation less safe

## Service users

Worker unprepared

Poor observation

Reduced empathy

Inadequate assessment

Inappropriate use of authority

Service user less safe

## Supervisee

Reduced confidence and competence

Unclear expectations

Lack of accountability

Judgements unchallenged - practice potentially

discriminatory

Dysfunctional team dynamics

Worker feels less safe

# Benefits of Good Supervision

## Other professionals/agencies

Worker carries clarity of role into multi-professional settings

Appropriate expectations of self and others  
>less conflict, rigidity, competition

Prepared

Understands me/not me and mine/not mine

## Service User

Worker clear, focused and prepared

More attentive to process and user's feelings

More observant

More evidence-based

More consistent

More aware of power issues

## The organisation/team

Clearer communication, up and down

Agency values and policy disseminated

Increased corporate responsibility

Improved consistency

Improved role clarity

Greater openness

Greater sense of belonging -  
reduced staff absence

## Supervisee

Role and accountability clear

Boundaries clarified

Responsibility clarified

Confidence increased

Poor practice challenged

Use/abuse of authority explored

Emotional impact addressed

# What we all need

Someone who knows and helps us to assess how well we are doing our job (or not)

Someone who helps us negotiate our relationship with our organisation

Someone who helps us work out what we need to learn to keep adapting, learning

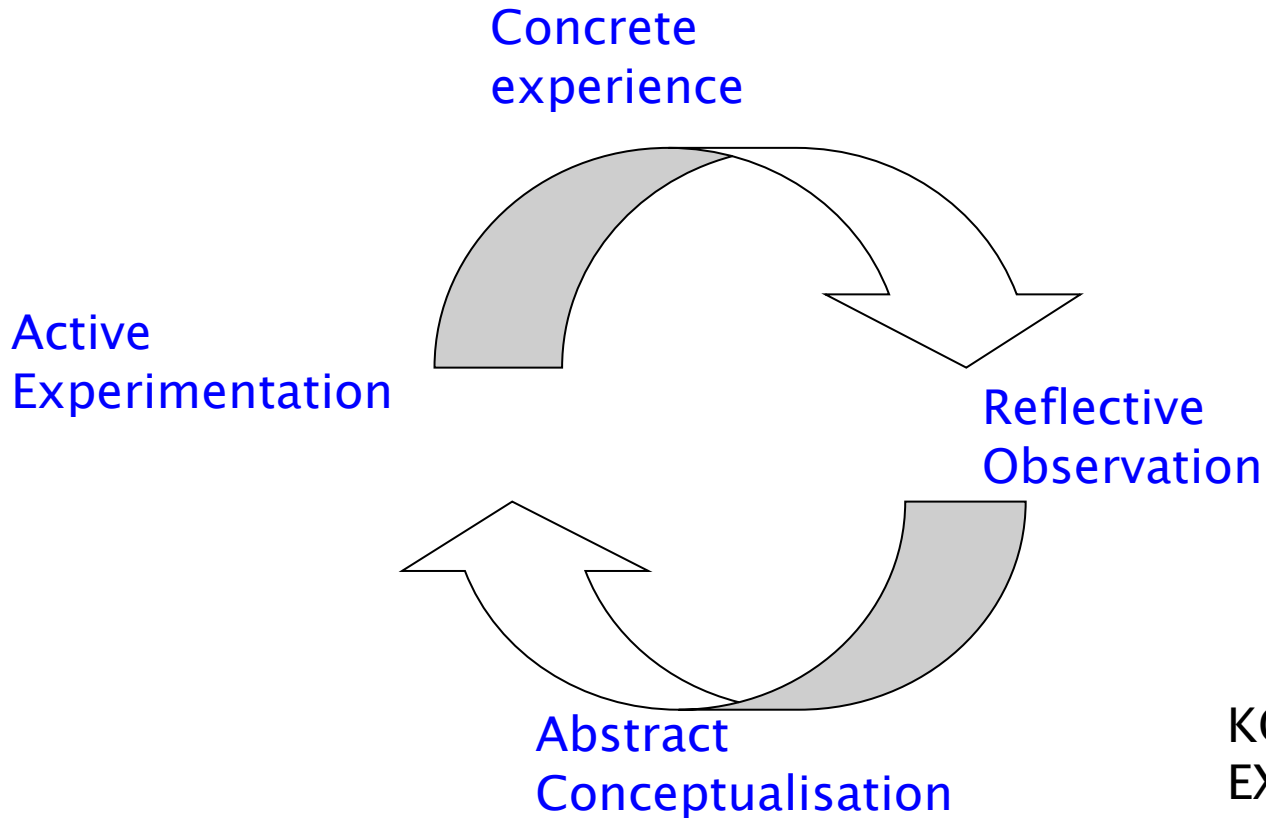
Someone to talk to about the emotional impact of the job



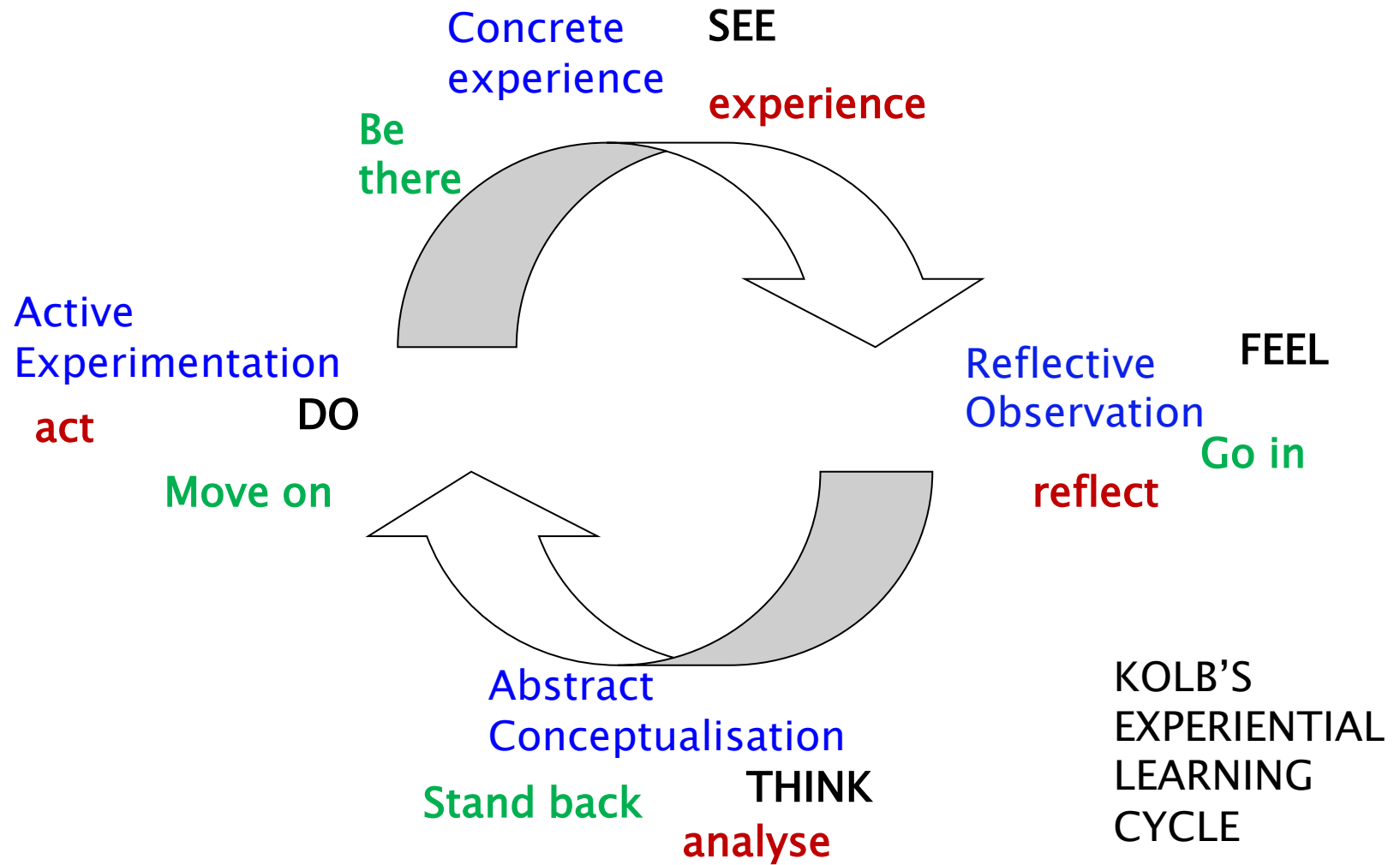
# Four functions

- **Management/Accountability**
  - Quality assurance, throughput, targets and standards, key results
- **Organisational Engagement**
  - Organisational authority and professional autonomy
- **Professional Development**
  - Reflection and reflexivity
- **Support**
  - Use of self; taking care of our machinery

# Four stages of a reflective conversation



KOLB'S  
EXPERIENTIAL  
LEARNING  
CYCLE



# Reflexivity....

- ▶ ...is done in the head, the heart and the gut. It involves making sense of things at an emotional level and an intuitive level as well as an intellectual one.
- ▶ ... is the process by which we construct our identities...
- ▶ We require certain kinds of responses from significant others and reference groups to sustain our ...identity

# One size don't fit all

The nature of your supervision system will reflect the nature of your work

Supervision in a GIRFEC world?



# Contracted Supervision Relationships:

## Three Elements

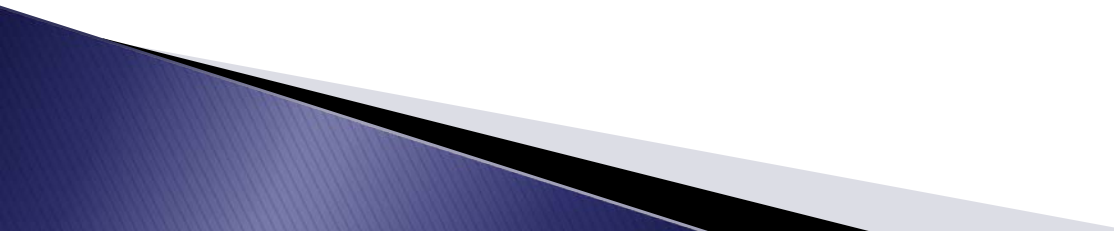


# 3. Outcomes and Statistics

What does supervision have to do with outcomes?

- a) How do we get from good supervision to good practice?
- b) Outcomes have to do with assessment  
Assessment needs to be supervised properly

# Tony Morrison (2005 – 3<sup>rd</sup> edition)

- ▶ Supervision is critical to the quality of service delivery and the experience of users
  - ▶ Supervision is part of the intervention
- 

# The six factor mirror

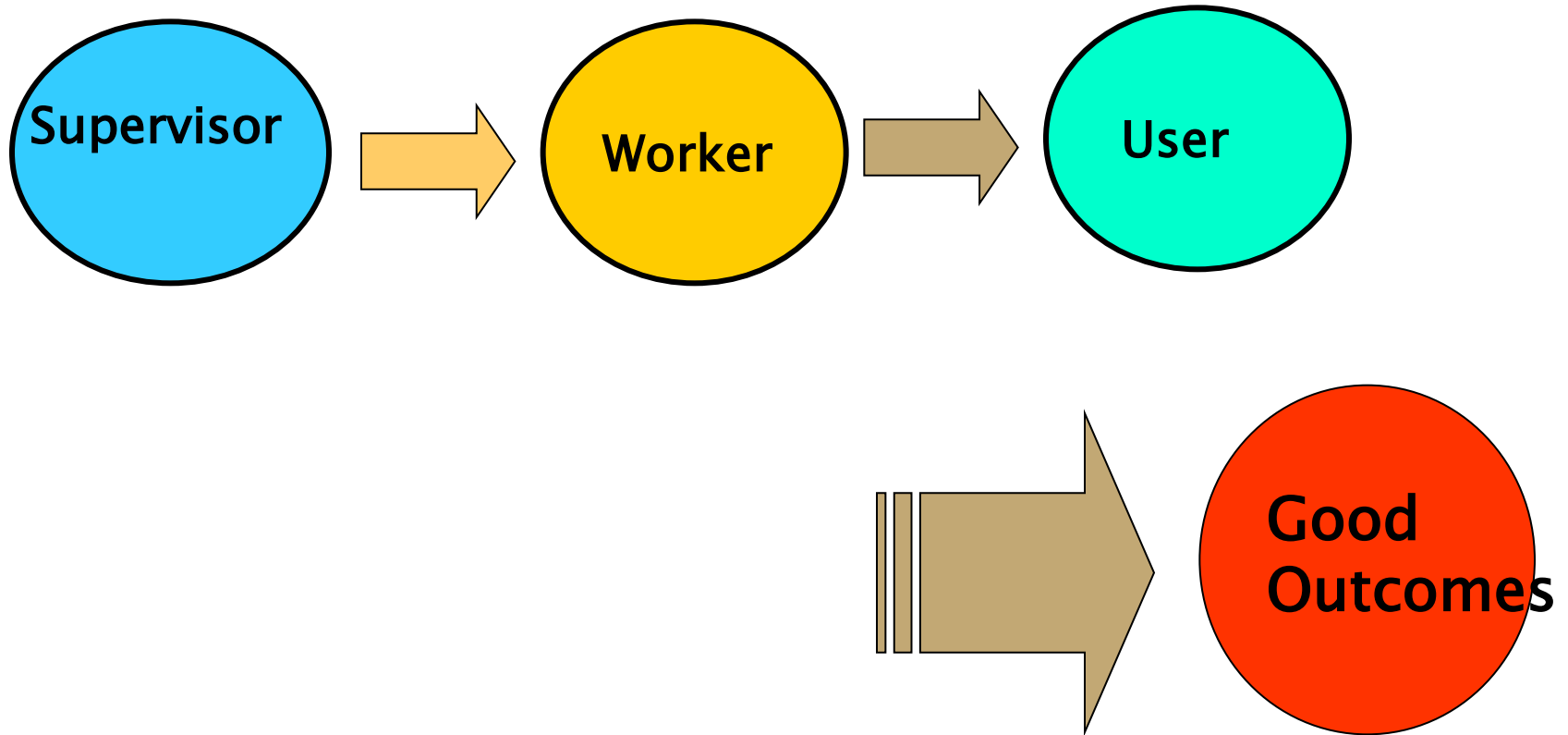
## Supervisor/Practitioner

- Clear on role
- Secure in role
- Emotional competence
- Accurate observation and assessment
- Partnership and Power (Coaching)
- Planning

## Practitioner/Service User

- ❖ Clear on role/purpose
- ❖ Open discussion about power/responsibility
- ❖ Empathy and attunement > trust
- ❖ Reality-based collaboration
- ❖ Negotiated partnership
- ❖ ('life' coaching)
- ❖ Shared planning

# Supervision Outcome Chain



# Kieran McKeown/Jane Wonnacott

Factors which are common to the effectiveness of all therapeutic Interventions:

- ▶ **Client Characteristics and Social Support 40%**
- ▶ **Therapist–Client Relationship 30%**
- ▶ **Client Hopefulness 15%**
- ▶ **Therapeutic Technique 15%**

The strongest link between supervision, good practice and good outcomes were:

- ▶ The supervisor has an **accurate assessment of the worker** and their capabilities
- ▶ The supervisor has the **emotional intelligence** to engage and assist the worker

A guide to what works in family support services

The impact of supervision on child protection practice

# SWIA - Improving Social Work in Scotland

## Children's services, Chapter 3

- ▶ Overall, assessments of the needs of looked after children were of better quality than those of young people leaving care or children with disabilities.
- ▶ "there was a positive association between the quality of assessments and the level of supervision offered by first line managers" (p 54)
- ▶ Supervision
  - Operates alongside appropriate tools for assessment
  - Is an opportunity to review roles and plan responses to identified risks

# Turney et al 2011 Social work assessment of children in need: what do we know? Messages from research

## Observations

- ❖ 'Good assessment matters and is key to effective intervention and to improving outcomes for children'
- ❖ Assessment is complex and challenging

## Findings

- ❖ Improving assessment requires a focus ... on the context for practice
- ❖ A crucial contextual mechanism is the supervisory relationship
- ❖ Supervisors need to feel properly equipped - in terms of time, training and support - to help practitioners reflect critically on their assessments



## 4. Governance, Leadership and the helping context

“The fact is that many of the professionally-led, largely ‘top down’, programmes and initiatives favoured in previous years have not achieved the results we would like so it would be just plain wrong to repeat past approaches - especially in such straitened times.”

(Joining the Dots, Susan Deacon, 2011)

# So what's the model?

Keith Grint (2009)

Critical problems: assumptions made, action taken

Tame problems: causes known, context understood, solutions applied

# Wicked problems, wicked solutions distributed leadership

**Wicked problems**..... complex, messy and often intractable challenges with complex, ambiguous causes

**Wicked solutions:** bite size chunks

**Wicked leadership** - distributed; involve high levels of connectivity; accepts emergence; uses analysis to drive more learning; relies on collective intelligence and works with the existence of the unknown. Under these conditions, leaders are facilitators, enablers and coaches

**What kind of wicked?**

# Anton Obholzer

It is the irrational function of public sector institutions to contain, on society's behalf, the burden of human anxiety about life, death, madness, failure, sickness and violence.

Our large public sector institutions serve as containers for fundamental human anxieties....

# Anton Obholzer

- ▶ For the container to have the best chance of containing and metabolizing the anxieties projected into it, it needs... to [have] a capacity to face both external and psychic reality. For organisations, this requires not only agreement about the primary task.... but also remaining in touch with the nature of the anxieties projected into the container.... all concerned [must] be in touch with the difficulties of the task, and their relative powerlessness in radically altering the pattern of life and of society
  - The Unconscious at Work (1994)

- ▶ Emotionally intelligent practice
- ▶ Emotionally intelligent supervision
- ▶ Emotionally intelligent policy

“We musn’t privelege numbers over narrative”

“Only relationship based cultures offer the security to tolerate, contain and explore uncertainty and unknowing in a productive and collaborative manner”. (TM 2010)

# Working with Uncertainty

- ▶ The uncomfortable knowledge of 'not knowing' (Russ Vince 2001) or 'not wanting to know'
- ▶ Allowing uncertainty and its attendant anxiety to exist
- ▶ Using our containing functions to process the anxiety
- ▶ Using our experience of this to deliver services



# Brandon et al

## Practice Note: Supervision

The findings from the interviews highlighted key points to improve supervision. These include:

- ▶ the need for **regular and sufficiently frequent** supervision;
- ▶ that key issues are monitored and followed up (including missed appointments);
- ▶ that supervision should consider continuity of approach to the family;
- ▶ that extra support for less experienced workers should be provided; and
- ▶ the creation of a structured sharing of uncertainty in order to reach the best possible response to concerns.

# Working from strengths: things we should be proud of

## Changing Lives Governance Structure

- Risk is an essential and unavoidable part of everyday life.
- Reflective practice [among other things] supports improving practice and ongoing professional development to deliver improved outcomes

## Tools and philosophies for practice and risk assessment

- IAF and GIRFEC
- National Guidance for Child Protection

## LACSIG

- "links and connectedness"
- "improvements in the identification and assessment of needs"

# Some concrete suggestions

- ▶ Train your supervisors to supervise within a context of not necessarily knowing
- ▶ Train your supervisors to enable, coach and facilitate and give the practice back to the practitioners
- ▶ Encourage conversation everywhere
- ▶ Audit your organisational climate and consider your attachment messages and management of anxiety
- ▶ Build on strengths
- ▶ JDI

# Afterthoughts

- ▶ There's already a tried and tested model (that's the tame bit, no need to research)
- ▶ Like practice, one size won't fit all (stay 'wicked' with your application)
- ▶ Allow peers to learn from each other (Action Learning Sets, consultancy groups)
- ▶ Be aspirational and believe in the resourcefulness of both the worker and the service user - see Jimmy Reid

# Jimmy Reid, Trade Union Activist and Politician

“To unleash the latent potential of our people requires that we give them responsibility. The untapped resources of the North Sea are as nothing compared to the untapped resources of our people, I am convinced that the great mass of our people go through life without even a glimmer of what they could have contributed to their fellow human beings. This is a personal tragedy. It's a social crime. The flowering of each individual's personality and talents is the precondition for everyone's development.”

**Rectorial Address, Glasgow University, 1971**


# Question One:

What's going on in supervision in your organisation?

What are the gaps?

What are the strengths?

# Question Two

- ▶ In what ways does your organisation support the development of good supervision practice?
  - ▶ What can you do to encourage further growth?
  - ▶ How can you make this tangible?
- 

# For further conversations:

Contact@bridgetrothwell.co.uk



# References

Dr Helen Hammond (2001) *Child Protection Inquiry* into the circumstances surrounding the death of Kennedy MacFarlane

Professor Susan Deacon (2011) *Joining the Dots*

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/343337/0114216.pdf>

Lord Laming (2003) *The Victoria Climbié Inquiry*

[http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH\\_4008654](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4008654)

# References

*Susan O'Brien, QC* (2003) Report of the Caleb Ness Inquiry

*Social Work Inspection Agency* (2005) Inspection into the care and protection of children in Eilean Siar [http://www.scswis.com/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=doc\\_details&gid=197&Itemid=703](http://www.scswis.com/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_details&gid=197&Itemid=703)

*Marion Brandon et al* (2009) Understanding Serious Case Reviews and their Impact

[https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/DCSF-RR129\(R\).pdf](https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/DCSF-RR129(R).pdf)

# References

*Eileen Munro* (2011) The Munro Review of Child Protection, Final Report

<http://www.education.gov.uk/munroreview/>

*Cooper A and J Lousada* (2005) Borderline Welfare: Feeling and Fear of Feeling in Modern Welfare

*Morrison T* (2005) Staff Supervision in Social Care

*Casserley T and D Megginson* (2008) Learning from Burnout: Developing sustainable leaders and avoiding career derailment

# References

*Obholzer A and V Zagier Roberts* (eds) (1994) *The Unconscious at Work*

Grint, K – various

[http://www.esrc.ac.uk/\\_images/Grint\\_19\\_May\\_09\\_tcm8-2439.pdf](http://www.esrc.ac.uk/_images/Grint_19_May_09_tcm8-2439.pdf)

Or

[http://www.informalnetworks.co.uk/Wicked\\_problems\\_and\\_the\\_role\\_of\\_leadership.pdf](http://www.informalnetworks.co.uk/Wicked_problems_and_the_role_of_leadership.pdf)

Vince, R () *Uncomfortable Knowledge Management*

[http://ktru-main.lancs.ac.uk/pub/ol3.nsf/c317180a11767f0785256499006b15a3/70c2aa95d46e85048025676700506833/\\$FILE/VINCE-jr.pdf](http://ktru-main.lancs.ac.uk/pub/ol3.nsf/c317180a11767f0785256499006b15a3/70c2aa95d46e85048025676700506833/$FILE/VINCE-jr.pdf)