Communities of Practice and Social Worker Wellbeing

BASW UK Conference

Belfast

21st June 2019

Alistair Brown and Sarah McMillan

Working Conditions and well-being

Bath Spa university

Dr Jermaine Ravalier (2017 and 2018) Dr Charlotte Boichat

Survey completed by:

1600 in 2017

3421 social workers 2018

Approx 300 returns Scotland

Objectives:

- **Identify what working conditions are like, and influence that these have on stress**

- **Look at what needs to be done to improve working conditions and subsequently reduce stress and related outcomes**

Findings

- Nearly half of all SW'ers dissatisfied (41% in 2017)
- Two thirds attended work while ill at least twice in last year
- SW'ers work average 64 days per year more than contracted (11 hours per week)
- Nearly 70% attended work while so ill they should have taken time off
- 60% looking to leave current job in next 15 months (52% 2017)
- Main levels of stress high case and admin loads, lack of resources for service users

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Recommendations:

- SW'ers need positive professional working conditions to provide the best services
- Strong leadership to manage the demands on SW'ers
- Reduce stress and provide wellbeing support
- Professional development Time for reflective supervision to work through complex cases
- Manageable caseloads and a consistent approach to caseload allocation
- Reverse the blame culture and give SW'ers respect and positive support
- Flexible and remote working through improved technology
- More quality time with individuals and families
- Fair pay and careers

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SASW specific actions

- SW Services Strategic Forum

- Meetings with CSWO

- Writing to MSPs

- Pushing for fair media representation

- Involving people who use services

- SASW Awards

- "the role of the social worker" series of events…"

- Visits to areas/ teams

- Collaborative efforts Universities, IRISS & SWS

- Highlighting best practice

Organisational Professionalism

Professor Julia Evetts; School of Sociology and Social Policy University of Nottingham;

Three different interpretations of Professionalism:

- An occupational value
- An ideology
- A discourse of organisational control

Occupational Professionalism

- **Constructed within professional groups inc;**
  - collegial authority
  - often an altruistic element beyond self.
  - practitioner trust from employers & clients
  - based on autonomy and discretionary judgment
  - controls are operationalised by practitioners
  - guided by codes of professional ethics
  - monitored by professional institutes and associations.

Organisational Professionalism

- **Discourse of control**
  - Increasingly used by management culture
  - Legal forms of authority
  - Hierarchical structures of decision-making
  - Procedural practice
  - Externalised regulation such as
    - target-setting
    - performance review.

Factors mediating professional autonomy

- **Increasing Specialisation**

- **Standardisation of assessment tools**

- **Standardised review formats and documentation**

- **Management/performance recording defines activity**

- **Increasing Caseloads**

- **Hegemony of Gov, Employers, Regulation & Inspection bodies**

- **Reducing space for professional discretion/autonomy**

Professional Integrity

- SSSC -As a social service worker, I am accountable for the quality of my work and will take responsibility for maintaining and improving my knowledge and skills.

- SASW - considered professional judgements Social workers should make judgements based on balanced and considered reasoning, maintaining awareness of the impact of their own values, prejudices and conflicts of interest on their practice and on other people.

- SASW - Being professionally accountable Social workers should be prepared to account for and justify their judgements and actions to people who use services, to employers and the general public.

SASW - Ethics

- Using authority in accordance with human rights principles
- Empowering people
- Challenging the abuse of human rights
- Being prepared to whistleblow
- Using professional supervision and peer support to reflect on and improve practice
- Taking responsibility for their own practice and CPD/PRTL
- Contributing to the continuous improvement of professional practice
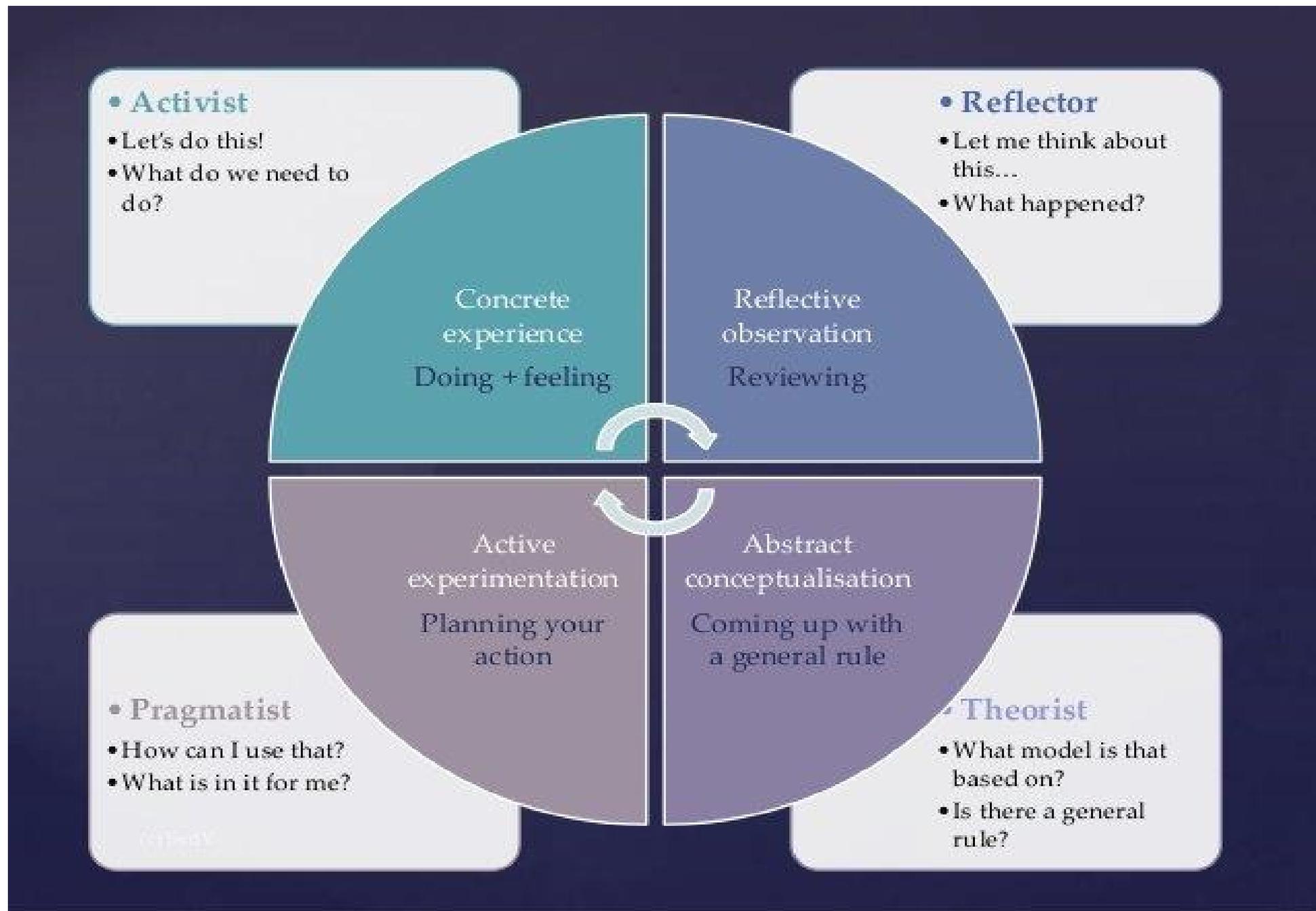
Brigid Proctor Supervison Model (2008)

- **Normative**
  - Provides a structure for practice
  - Part of everyday working

- **Restorative**
  - Support for personal/professional development
  - Building morale and confidence

- **Formative**
  - Sharing Knowledge and Skills
  - Sharing Experiences
  - Knowledge and Problem Solving
  - Skills Development

Heron's 6 Categories - Authoritative

- **Prescriptive**
  - Explicitly direct the client by giving advice and direction
- **Informative**
  - Provide information to instruct and guide the client
- **Confronting**
  - Challenge the client's behaviour or attitude

Heron, J. (2001). *Helping the client: A creative practical guide*.

Facilitative

- **Cathartic**
  - Helping their client to express/overcome thoughts or emotions that they have not previously confronted

- **Catalytic**
  - Help the client reflect, discover and learn for themselves. Move toward self reflection, self direction and self awareness

- **Supportive**
  - Build up the confidence of the client by focussing on their competence, qualities and achievements

Action Learning Principles

- There is no learning without action and no sober and deliberate action without learning

- Adults learn best when they are directly involved in their own learning about a current life situation

- Adults who voluntarily choose a learning experience usually learn more readily

- Applying that learning in the workplace makes it more personally meaningful and of greater benefit to the organisation

(Revans, 1998)

Benefits

- Increased self awareness
- Increased confidence
- Ability to approach situations from a broader and more varied perspective than in the past
- More proactive than reactive in problem solving and decision making
- Better at listening
- Better at giving and accepting feedback
- Handling difficult conversations with more sensitivity and confidence

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Flexible Group Membership

- Presenter role similar to Action Learning Sets
- Rather than enabler focussing on the presenter each person briefly reflects on issues raised
- Presenter then summarises reflections
- Focus is how this affects each member in turn
- Group can expand and contract with availability
- Create an ongoing culture of reflection rather than a discrete project/problem
- Comfortable for newer members or those who struggle with being 'put on the spot' by questions

Group Rules

- **Confidentiality**
- **Take off case worker 'hat'**
- **No 'scrutinising' cases**
- **Summarise description**
- **Speak from 'I' place including feelings**
- **Non Judgement**
- **Work of the whole group (JL Moreno)**

Communities of Practice

"**Communities of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour…. groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.**"

https://wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/

Pillars

- **The domain**
- **The community**
- **The practice**

It is the combination of these three elements that constitutes a community of practice. And it is by developing these three elements in parallel that one cultivates such a community.

https://wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/

What does a CoP do?

- **Problem solving**
- **Requests for information**
- **Seeking experience**
- **Reusing assets**
- **Building an argument**
- **Growing confidence**
- **Discussing developments**
- **Documenting solutions**
- **Visits**
- **Mapping knowledge and identifying gaps**

https://wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/

CoPs and well-being

"Connection is why we are here. We are hard-wired to connect with others." Brene Brown

"Well, I haven't burn out or resigned while I've been attending...... having a regular, reflective space is good for my general well-being and helps maintain resilience as well as helping keep me reasonably sane!" SASW CoP member

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE:
CHILDREN & FAMILIES

"DECISION-MAKING WITH FAMILIES — WHAT WORKS?"

Join us in creating our own Community of Practice and allowing Children & Families Social Workers to reflect together — in a safe environment — to improve their practice, promote the values of social work and maintain the integrity of the profession.

The Community of Practice is for children and families' social workers who are SASW members. Non-members can attend one session before becoming a member of SASW.

Contact sarah.mcmillan@basw.co.uk

29th April 2019

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14:00-16:30

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SASW Office

67 Shandwick Place

Edinburgh

EH2 4SD

"Provides a reflective space to think about my work."

"Hearing about others practice, stimulates ideas, helps with my professional development, improves my practice as my knowledge is increased."

"It helps me to be an informed practitioner."

"It is making me think and ensuring I continue to reflect on new information and research that I almost certainly wouldn't have otherwise."

"It makes me feel part of a community."

"Loved my first session. So glad I took the plunge!"

"Being able to listen to experienced practitioners and to share my ideas with them is incredibly valuable."

Building Resilient Practitioners

- Work stress, burnout, trauma and vicarious traumatisation

- Compassion fatigue and emotional exhaustion

- High worker turnover negatively impacts the whole workplace—clients, managers and workers—and this perpetuates a cycle of adversity.

- There is a considerable body of research which supports the view that, despite working in adverse conditions, social workers also experience high levels of job satisfaction

Resilient Practitioners cont…

- 'Compassion satisfaction', as a complementary concept to that of compassion fatigue, suggests a dynamic and fluid relationship between the benefits and strains of professional social work

   (Alkema et al., 2008; Conrad and Kellar-Guenther, 2006).

- Emotional intelligence is important in social work and involves being able to maintain motivation, persist in the face of frustrations and challenges, regulate moods and to keep distress from overwhelming empathy and optimism

   (Morrison, 2007; Kinman and Grant, 2011).

Thanks for listening!

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