Leading practice
A resource guide for Child Protection frontline and middle managers

inspire

reflect
engage
support
enable
learn
collaborate
Acknowledgements

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Foreword

The role of leaders and managers in Victoria’s Child Protection program is pivotal in achieving good outcomes for children and families. It is challenging and requires both a determination to bring individual skills and knowledge to the role while having a commitment to ongoing learning and reflection.

Good leadership is built on the relationships that we develop with our staff and responsiveness to the changing needs of the children and families with whom we work. It requires us to be optimistic about the challenges and hopeful about making a difference and achieving positive outcomes.

It is well recognised that frontline and middle managers play a crucial role in retaining staff, which is fundamental to quality Child Protection work. The recognition and support of the staff in these leadership and management positions is vital to ensuring their ongoing professional development and capacity building.

The *Leading practice resource guide* is designed to be a practical tool to assist frontline and middle managers in their day-to-day roles as managers and supervisors. Based on the *Child Protection leadership capability framework*, this guide offers contemporary research, theory and opportunities for reflection and self-evaluation.

As a key component of the *Leadership development strategy* I am confident the *Leading practice resource guide* will assist frontline and middle managers in their leadership of staff and in promoting positive outcomes for Victoria’s vulnerable children and families.

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Introduction

This guide is written for frontline and middle managers (from here ‘middle managers’ is used to refer to both) in Child Protection, namely CPW 4 and CPW 5 staff in leadership roles, regardless of whether they directly supervise staff. It recognises that middle managers are critical to cultural change, supervising direct practice and implementing policy reforms, and, as such, are at the forefront of delivering good outcomes for children:

“They affect how policies are followed and what practices are encouraged. They set the tone and expectations in the work environment to such an extent that they are sometimes called the ‘keepers of the culture’ for their agencies. They influence employee turnover (or lack thereof) more than any other factor. Much of the data legislators and policy-makers rely on to make decisions come, directly or indirectly, from [them]. How well supervisors do their jobs affects nearly every outcome the child welfare systems seeks, including the timeliness with which we respond to reports of child maltreatment, the well-being of children in foster care, and the rate at which children are reunified with their parents.’

(Hess, Kanak and Atkins, 2009, p.31)

This critical role is undertaken in the context of the every child every chance reforms in Victoria, which have led to substantial changes to legislation, practice and workforce management. The Aboriginal cultural competence framework (ACCF), which was written by the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) on behalf of Department of Human Services, was released in November 2008 to assist in understanding the concept of culture and its impact on all of us, particularly on Aboriginal people. It highlights that cultural considerations are relevant to all children, whether or not their cultural identity is the same as the dominant culture and the importance of using the lens of culture within all aspects of leadership and decision making.

This has required a holistic approach to assessment and intervention, requiring: collaborative practice by Child Protection and family services organisations; changes to the organisational structure within the Department of Human Services to support and enhance critical decision making; a greater focus on leadership by experienced and skilled staff; and, providing a workplace culture that encourages and supports staff through supervision, mentoring and targeted training opportunities. These are all significant challenges to a workforce engaged in stressful and complex duties.

Research conducted by the Jordan Institute for Families, Nancy S Dickinson, MSSW, PhD (2007) indicates that supervisors are the key link between management at the policy level and practitioners at the direct service delivery level. Good supervision is often the most important factor contributing to staff retention with a lack of supportive supervision being a reason for leaving child welfare (Nisly, Mor Barak and Levin, 2005). Other studies have cited the importance of supportive and informed supervision as a reason why child welfare practitioners remain in the job (Dickinson and Perry, 2002: Landsman, 2001: Little Rock School of Social Work, 2002). In addition, training for supervisors results in increased practitioner satisfaction, reduced preventable turnover and improved practice and outcomes (Collins-Camargo, 2005).
Drawing on what works well

Despite these challenges presented by the field of Child Protection many people are out there doing extraordinary work. In writing this guide we wanted to draw on and capture what was already being done well, and what contemporary research tells us ensures effective Child Protection practice. We asked a group of middle managers from across Victoria to tell us what it is like when they have a good day managing and supervising in Child Protection. Their metaphors are telling:

‘It’s like an eagle soaring above, looking around – people are gliding together, and are united.’

‘We are in sync – everything is working!’

‘The sun is shining and we’re having an influence – we’re able to face the challenges.’

‘We can see the light, we can celebrate good outcomes and people are laughing.’

The stories we heard told us that middle managers value knowing that when things are going well in Child Protection, staff are clear about what they are doing; they are not operating in crisis mode all the time and, as managers, they see their staff developing, even though the workload is considerable and the demands are high. Above all perhaps, the power of a group of committed capable professionals is visible because they are making a difference to the lives of children and families. A good day, one manager told us, looks like a sailing boat gliding on the surface of the water with calm weather and good visibility.

In stark contrast this same group described a bad day – equally graphically.

‘It’s a day when I’m banging my head against a brick wall.’

‘It’s a day when all I seem to do is get stuck with process and conflict.’

‘I’m immobilised and under siege.’

Perhaps one of the most vivid descriptions was the manager who drew a picture of a ‘the stretchy person who can’t think and is being torn in so many directions that they feel they’ve got no answers to the questions that are bombarding them’.

This guide seeks to make a contribution to supporting and enabling middle managers to carry out what we know to be an extremely demanding, complex and multi-faceted role. We believe middle managers who have access to sound theory and research about what works in Child Protection management and, at the same time, have opportunities to reflect and build on their intuitive capabilities, are more likely to experience the calm day on the water and to see themselves and their staff making a difference.

We know that middle managers have significant knowledge and skills and that the values of respect, compassion and collaboration, to name a few, are already reflected in the way they do what they do. However, adult learning is a lifelong process and we believe there is always more to think about and learn. The middle managers we spoke to told us they want greater access to overarching frameworks and theory to help them be effective. They also want to practise and develop their leadership skills. In a bid to do just that, we hope this guide contains a balance between formal theory and knowledge and practical reflective exercises.
We took some key messages from the managers with whom we consulted. Most of the ideas discussed in the guide can be applied across the roles of supervisor, team leader, unit manager, specialist infant protective practitioners, community-based Child Protection practitioners (CBCPWs) and family group conference conveners. Middle managers across the program strive to achieve practice excellence and experience similar frustrations and challenges. At times, each group will need to take a moment to reflect and consider how aspects of the material relates to their role. Overall, however, we believe the ideas are readily applicable and transferable.

This guide has been reviewed through extensive, statewide consultation with Child Protection managers and key stakeholders to ensure it is relevant, easy to navigate and able to assist middle managers as a tool in their day-to-day practice and leadership of staff.

**Current initiatives in supporting middle managers**

This guide is part of a package of initiatives within the Child Protection *Leadership development strategy*, aimed at strengthening middle managers’ capabilities in leadership, people management, practice and effective decision making, in order to enable them to fulfil their roles more effectively.

The Child Protection Leadership capability framework developed by Atkinson-Consulting! (2008) identified the key capabilities, knowledge, skill and work culture required by outstanding Child Protection middle managers.

‘Capabilities’ are defined as the ‘underlying characteristics, competencies, behaviours or thinking patterns that differentiate average from outstanding delivery’ (Atkinson-Consulting!, 2008, p.16). The framework identifies 17 leadership capabilities, and groups these into five interconnected clusters: delivering results, mastering oneself, engaging others, thinking clearly, leading and inspiring. These are situated within a ‘high effectiveness’ organisational culture and, together, lead to better outcomes for children.

We believe that consistency of language and approach is an important contributor to aiding learning and professional development. This guide is, therefore, structured around the leadership capabilities identified by Atkinson-Consulting!, with each chapter exploring one of the five clusters. It seeks to help middle managers reflect on what they would be doing and how they would be behaving in demonstrating each of the five capabilities.

We hope we have provided a practical and conceptual sense of each of the five capabilities for the reader. While each of the capabilities is dealt with separately, they are, of course, interconnected. For that reason we also cross-reference to other chapters and recommend relevant sections that may interest the reader.

The *Leading practice* resource guide replaces a previous resource, *The leadership challenge: a supervisor’s kit for protective services supervisors* and, while aspects of that kit have been included, it draws heavily on the contemporary understanding of leadership in Child Protection. In particular, the work of Eileen Munro, Tony Morrison and Jane Wonnacott has been influential in conceptualising aspects of this guide. These writers have all reviewed critical aspects of Child Protection practice and the conditions required to ensure effective outcomes. We draw on these together with the Child Protection *Leadership capability framework*. 
The Child Protection Leadership capability framework is illustrated below. It is an adaptation of Atkinson-Consulting!'s own diagram and brings together the two areas identified in that work – the capabilities and the organisational culture.

**Figure 1: The Child Protection leadership capability framework**

[Diagram showing the Child Protection Leadership capability framework]

- **Clarity of purpose**
  - Purpose and meaning
  - Individual focus

- **Professional care**
  - Positive safety
  - Sharing the load

- **Reflective insight**
  - Respectful inclusion
  - Objective challenge

- **Effective decision making**
  - Shared collaboration
  - Evidence driven

- **Professional growth**
  - Professional expertise
  - ‘Whole person’ development

- **Outcome focus**
  - Child centred
  - Efficient delivery

- **Delivering results**
  - Achieving child outcomes
  - Co-creating success
  - Delivering program improvements

- **Thinking clearly**
  - Critical inquiry
  - Evaluating analytically
  - Seeing the whole
  - Business insight

- **Mastering oneself**
  - Self-management
  - and awareness
  - Mental agility

- **Leading and inspiring**
  - Creating clarity
  - Surfacing potential

- **Engaging others**
  - Listening deeply
  - Building relationships

- **Practice management and delivery**
  - The department and the statewide Child Protection system
  - Best-interest planning and practice standards
  - Professional practice and decision-making theory
  - Therapeutic interventions and current resources
  - Statutory requirements, legislation and court process

- **People management and delivery**
  - Human resources policies and guidelines
  - Management theory and practice
  - Resource management
  - Human wellness
  - Conflict, complaints and risk management
The literature agrees that it is the dynamic interaction between the organisational culture and effective leadership that leads to good outcomes for children and families. This ensures and enables appropriate processes to occur at every level of the organisation. The characteristics required in these domains are:

- **Culture of the organisation**: needs to be supportive and developmental in its focus, providing clarity of purpose, a focus on outcomes, opportunities for professional growth and reflective practice, and taking care of staff.

- **The presence of managers with the key capabilities**: middle managers must demonstrate a reflective and active style through delivering results for children, thinking clearly and applying relevant knowledge and skills, engaging others collaboratively and sensitively, leading and inspiring and demonstrating self-awareness.

- **Use of a process that is both analytical and intuitive**: processes must ensure a critical and analytical stance is maintained at all levels of practice, whether it is managerial, casework with children or relationships with partner agencies and others; draws on five critical categories of skill – values, formal knowledge, practice wisdom, reasoning skills and emotional wisdom; supervision, mentoring and coaching are primary vehicles through which this process will be fostered and refined.

This guide provides middle managers with concepts and tools to contribute to each of these domains, effect organisational change, enhance their capabilities and ensure processes are both analytical and intuitive. The diagram in Figure 2 is adapted from the work of Wonnacott (2003) and incorporates Eileen Munro's (2008) analysis of Child Protection decision making and Atkinson-Consulting!'s capability framework (2008). It illustrates the practice conditions required to deliver good outcomes for children and families in Child Protection.
Figure 2: The dynamic influence of organisational culture, manager capability and process on outcomes for children

Organisational culture:
- Supportive and developmental.
- Clarity of purpose, outcome focus, professional growth and care, reflective practice.

Manager capabilities:
- Active and reflective style.
- Transformational leadership to deliver results, think clearly, lead and inspire, manage others, manage oneself.

Process:
- Analytical and intuitive.
- Critical and analytical, based on formal knowledge, reasoning skills, emotional wisdom, practice wisdom and appropriate values.

Good outcomes

The Leading practice resource guide emphasises leadership and supervision and management as a primary means through which middle managers lead practice. It builds on the frameworks covered in other learning opportunities such as the Beginning practice in supervision and team leadership and the advice included in the Child Protection practice manual. Other initiatives include, the Graduate Diploma in Child and Family Practice Leadership and activities through the Leadership Development Strategy.

The Leading practice Learning Lab series is designed to integrate and consolidate the information contained within the resource guide. As a series of 100 workshops delivered in 2009–10, the Learning Labs have been developed to reflect the Leadership capability framework and incorporate both current theory and practice in management, leadership and supervision.

Who will benefit from this guide?
The guide was written with the needs of Child Protection middle managers in mind, but it will be useful to other professionals who manage and supervise staff. Of course, middle managers are far from a homogenous group. One challenge has been to write about material that is relevant for managers who come from differing professional disciplines and with varying amounts of experience in the role. Our hope is that there is something for everyone, from the newly appointed manager to the manager with a number of years’ experience in the role.

Our view is that managers’ learning needs will change over time. This is a resource to come back to possibly over a number of years. Remember: adult learning is a lifelong activity, and what may seem only mildly interesting and relevant now might look quite different in two years.

How to use this guide
A range of materials are included in the guide. We aim to:

- operationalise the five leadership capabilities – delivering results, mastering oneself, engaging others, thinking clearly, and leading and inspiring
- strengthen the knowledge base of middle managers
- strengthen the affective and analytical capabilities of middle managers
- strengthen the capacity of middle managers to establish and utilise relationships of influence, both individually and in groups
- provide middle managers with useful reflective exercises to undertake independently, in supervision and in teams, with a view to improving service outcomes.

You might want to read it from cover to cover or go to chapters that seem relevant to your learning right now.
Reading this guide is one learning strategy to strengthen the leadership function in Child Protection. As noted, it is to be accompanied by the Learning Lab series, an important step in supporting middle managers to transfer learning into the real world of practice. We believe that much will be achieved by personal reflection and we also encourage you to raise topics and questions in your supervision. We suggest that some of the material will be challenging and potentially cause some discomfort. We particularly talk about this in Chapter 2, but ask you to take time to create sufficient reflective space to ensure the benefits associated with using this guide are not lost.

We encourage you to read and consider topics at your own pace, according to your preferred learning style. Try to avoid a situation where you feel overwhelmed by what you don’t know. Take up the opportunity to attend other components of the Leadership Development Strategy and, if you have not done already done so, enrol in the four day Beginning Practice in Supervision and Team Leadership professional development course. It will enhance your learning to grapple with the challenge and demands associated with the material you read about here in a peer group setting with a skilled facilitator.

What is in the guide?

The core business of the Department of Human Services’ Child Protection program is delivering a high-quality service to children in need of protection. The chapters may appear to be dominated by a case practice lens, but this is intentional. We think that as much as possible we should be encouraging leaders at every level to ask themselves regularly, ‘What does my way of thinking and behaving with staff mean for children and their families?’

As Wilson (2009, p.66) has noted:

‘...the service outcomes of improved child safety, child well-being and family functioning are the central focus of statutory Child Protection service delivery. Practitioners contribute to these outcomes through service activities that have been strongly linked with these outcomes: building relationships with children, young people, their families, carers and significant others; collaborative practices with other agencies; and tenacious casework. Managers can proactively manage for outcomes by using management strategies to develop an office environment that strongly supports direct service staff to undertake these service activities.’

Throughout this guide we have adopted a sustained focus on the link between the way practitioners are managed and supervised and the prevailing organisational culture. This is a complex relationship because leaders, like practitioners, are able to both influence and be influenced by the dominant culture in which they work. Despite the complexity, we urge you to grapple with what this means for you as you read. We recognise that there is a chain of influence in operation across every level of staff in Child Protection and that, at the case practice level, children and families experience this influence in their interactions with practitioners. As a manager, you model the same values, attitudes and beliefs you want to see manifested in the relationships between children and their families and your staff, even if you are a number of levels removed from the child and family. Therefore, the way you behave and everything you do through these relationships of influence impacts on outcomes.
The guide is structured in the following way.

**Chapter 1 – Delivering results** sets out an overarching framework for the way we have approached the guide. We take the six-factor model developed by Morrison (2005) to show the link between supervision and outcomes for children and families and apply it more broadly than supervision to management and leadership processes. Our contention is that the way middle managers model thinking, feeling and doing, is a template for the way practitioners must work with children and families.

**Chapter 2 – Mastering oneself** explores the various influences on our thinking and behaviour, including influences from our own lives, the work context in which we operate and the nature of the families we serve. The importance of emotion to Child Protection work is noted, as well as the risks of vicarious trauma. We explore a range of concepts such as emotional intelligence, mindfulness and self-care. A number of practical tools and reflective exercises are utilised to consider how middle managers can support their staff as well as attend to their own needs.

**Chapter 3 – Engaging others** draws heavily on the ideas and values that underpin relationship-based practice. We describe ways of establishing, maintaining and sustaining relationships of influence at every level in the Child Protection process. This chapter offers many frameworks and activities for working together with a range of inter- and intra-agency practitioners.

**Chapter 4 – Thinking clearly** as the name suggests, sets out to enhance the affective and analytical capabilities of middle managers. We explore different types of knowledge that constitute effective practice in Child Protection. We describe reflective practice in this chapter and apply it to a model of supervision that we believe is particularly applicable to the emotionally intrusive and ambiguous nature of the work.

**Chapter 5 – Leading and inspiring** places a particular focus on the contributions made by middle managers to establishing and maintaining a collaborative learning culture in the organisation. We suggest these contributions are made through the style and process of leadership.

The style of writing throughout the guide is deliberately interactive as we have taken the liberty of trying to engage with you directly through our questions and suggestions. We hope you enjoy reading and interacting with the material in the guide and that it is useful to you in leading practice in Child Protection.
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Chapter 1 Delivering results

In this chapter we cover:

• forming relationships of influence
• creating a collaborative learning environment
• understanding roles and functions
• role security – effective use of authority
• using emotional competence and empathy – creating relationships of influence
• accurate observation and assessment – encouraging practitioner development
• feedback and evaluation
• partnership and power – understanding and valuing difference
• planning – promoting competence and developing shared plans
• ideas for difficult conversations
• managing teams to deliver results.

Capability: Delivering results

Consistently delivering results involves working in a highly effective and innovative way that best serves the interests of children and families and supports the child's best interests now and for the future.

The five capabilities within this cluster are summarised below.

1. Operating effectively is the capacity to create order, priority and efficiency in a fast and dynamic environment.

2. Serving children and families involves understanding the importance of service to the community and maintaining and developing the professional image and reputation of the department.

3. Achieving child outcomes meets professional objectives, continually improves performance, makes it happen, delivers tailored, integrated solutions or makes systemic improvements.

4. Co-creating success offers assistance, invites and values input, collaborates effectively, creates a climate of partnership.

5. Delivering program improvements demonstrates energy for change, harvests ideas and innovations from others, improves program outcomes, drives systemic reform.
Introduction

To achieve good outcomes for children, middle managers need to establish and utilise influential relationships with other individuals and teams to ensure and enable practitioners in Child Protection to perform effectively and to the highest possible standard. For this to occur, the organisational culture needs to be shaped towards one that values collaborative learning and the appropriate exercise of authority and power. Middle managers contribute to this collaborative learning culture through a thoughtful and reflective management and supervisory style and process.

Managerial relationships assume significant importance in the context of the turbulent Child Protection environment. Contributing factors include changes to policy, legislation and funding, restructuring, demands for greater accountability and the inherently challenging nature of the work. In many ways, an experience of a clear, thoughtful and containing model of leadership is the buffer against the effects of turbulence and anxiety for Child Protection practitioners at every level of the organisation (Gibbs, 2008).

Morrison (2005) developed a six-factor model to demonstrate the link between supervision provided to practitioners and outcomes for children and families. In this chapter we take Morrison’s model and apply it more broadly than supervision to other management and leadership processes, and also extend it to different levels of management. The core component of this model is recognising a ‘chain of influence’ that exists from manager through practitioner to families; that is, what happens between staff at different levels in the Child Protection process makes its way through the chain to the practitioner–client relationship.

In this way, middle managers indirectly affect the delivery of good outcomes for children. Community-based Child Protection practitioners (CBCPWs) and specialist infant protective practitioners and family group conference conveners (from here specialist positions will be used to refer to all) can have similar influence when they operate in teams and with groups of practitioners striving to work in partnership towards good outcomes for children. Managers in Child Protection can build relationships, encourage learning and strengthen organisational culture by being thoughtful and reflective about how they work, thereby providing an influential template for effective frontline practice.
Forming relationships of influence

The quality of relationships between practitioners and clients are powerful determinants for creating change. Research about what clients value consistently shows the importance of relationship-based practice (de Boer and Coady, 2007; McKeown, 2000). In a similar way, the relationship between practitioner and manager is also a powerful vehicle for change (Goleman and Boyatzis, 2008). While this is true for all organisations, it is particularly pertinent to a Child Protection context.

It is well established that if supervisors can model clear, insightful and empathic relationships with practitioners, these same practitioners are far more likely to be able to adopt the same underlying values and skills with the families they work with. Similarly, positive outcomes for children are strongly related to the supervisor’s reflective supervisory style (Wonnacott, 2003).

Morrison’s (2005) six-factor model demonstrates the way this relationship between supervisors and practitioners impacts on client outcomes. Figure 3 shows there are six links in the chain of influence, each consisting of processes and behaviours that together contribute to a collaborative and accountable practice context. Later in the chapter we describe each of these links and provide operational examples of how middle managers can incorporate these values and behaviours for practitioners. Morrison’s six-factors model refers to the relationship between supervisors, practitioners and clients. However, as noted, the same chain of influence can be seen to operate at the level of a supervisor (often a team leader) and their supervisor (the unit manager), even when their dialogue does not have a direct client focus. It is also true at the next level between the unit manager and their supervisor, the Child Protection manager. Principal practitioners and community-based Child Protection practitioners also have considerable potential to model an effective process in the work they do across the Child Protection program and system. This is represented in the adaptation of Morrison’s diagram.
In this way, we see influence cascading through every level in the process of supervision and management throughout the Child Protection program. Each middle manager has the capacity to use these processes positively in shaping attitudes, values and approaches to their work with staff. Conversely, they also have the potential to impact negatively if the processes are poorly managed or neglected.

This complex and dynamic process involves more than just ‘modelling’. It needs to be understood at a deeper level as conceptualised by psycho-dynamic and systems theory and is sometimes referred to in the literature as a ‘parallel’ or ‘isomorphic’ process. Middle managers and senior practitioners draw on this body of knowledge for making sense of complex case situations and the same ideas can be applied in intra- and inter-organisational relationships. A fuller description and application of these in Child Protection is a central focus in Chapter 2.
Creating a collaborative learning environment

Unlike many other organisations, Child Protection staff at every level occupy roles that involve the exercise of authority and power. Middle managers are at the interface between the managerial and professional systems and between the practitioner and the organisation (Bunker and Wijnberg, 1988, in Richards, Payne and Sheppard, 1990, p.13). They occupy an uncomfortable position of ‘the meat in the sandwich’ with sometimes competing and conflicting demands and messages coming from both above and below (Gibbs, 2002).

Child Protection middle managers directly manage the core business of the agency by ensuring that Child Protection work is completed, risk is addressed and that the intervention into the lives of children and their families complies with legislation, procedures and standards. However, middle managers must also support practitioners and enable them to develop professionally in assuming greater self-efficacy and autonomy in practice. A central component of the middle management role is to facilitate a practitioners understanding as to how power and authority are reconciled, so that practitioners experience an appropriate balance between organisational accountability and performance monitoring, and attention to professional development and empowerment (Bogo and Dill, 2008).

Supervision delivered by managers at each level of the organisation, from unit manager to the practitioner, can be understood as a key process through which these organisational, professional and personal objectives are brought together. For Child Protection practitioners, direct practice with families forms a significant focus of supervision. For the next levels up, through team leaders and unit managers, the focus is less directly on the case practice, but is still related to the core business of delivering good outcomes - through management of staff, allocation of resources, development of partnerships and implementation of reforms. The process of supervision, carried out through a safe, honest and trusting relationship, is as important at this level as it is to direct practice, though research suggests it is sometimes provided in ways that do not meet the needs of these staff (Gibbs, 2002).

Establishing a safe and effective supervision relationship at each level of the workforce contributes not only to individual good practice for that particular supervisee, it forms part of the culture of the workplace. It forms a model for how practitioners build and utilise effective relationships with clients as they strive to establish relationships where they too must be able to reconcile tensions between care and control functions, between assessing risk and capacity, as well as working collaboratively and promoting strengths.

The chain of influence, from our elaboration of the Morrison model, operates from the top of the organisation downwards. Middle managers need to experience similar relationships with their senior managers and be given opportunities to explore the complex and conflicting aspects of their role if they are to be effective. While the content of the supervisory focus is different for staff at different levels, the processes are the same. Managers are accountable for the practice of practitioners, including controversial decisions and cases where it appears things have gone badly. They have to assess practitioners’ competence, recognise and respond to problematic practice and set limits and boundaries around what is acceptable behaviour by practitioners (Bogo and Dill, 2008). These can feel like onerous responsibilities fraught with ambiguity and tension, particularly when considered alongside the values of working collaboratively and in partnership to co-create success.
Practitioners quickly become acculturated into an organisation, meaning that, through observation, modelling and personal experiences, practitioners develop a set of ‘organizational beliefs and expectations that guide their interpretation of organizational stimuli, the decisions they make and the behaviour in which they engage’ (Hemmelgarn et al., 2006, p.75). Such mental representations are extremely powerful for influencing their behaviour so that the way they experience relationships with managers will, to a significant extent, shape how they behave with clients. This also means that there is interconnectedness between how people experience the exercise of power and authority at each level of the organisation (Gibbs, 2008).

A workplace culture that promotes learning recognises that feelings of anxiety, uncertainty and ambiguity abound when relationships are unequal and involve the exercise of authority (Kemper, 2000, p.46 in Morrison, 2006). Indeed, ‘Anxiety runs like a vein throughout the Child Protection process’ (Morrison, 1997, p. 196). These powerful feelings need to be acknowledged and contained. A healthy and open organisational culture prioritises the recognition and management of individual and collective feelings of anxiety; values creativity and innovation; encourages staff to question accepted ways of doing things; and conceptualises ‘mistakes’ as an opportunity to learn.

In contrast, an unhealthy culture is one where feelings are suppressed and uncertainty is responded to as a failure or weakness in the practitioner. The fear of being criticised or blamed for problems encourages practitioners to adopt coping mechanisms such as denial, blame and projection. These dysfunctional processes, when not understood and managed, can ultimately result in heightened or dilution of risk when it is applied at case practice level with the child and family.

Groups of practitioners may also replicate and mirror the same powerful, problematic dynamics where feelings are off limits and fear abounds, resulting in a compromised organisational culture (Menzies-Lyth, 1988). These are largely unconscious processes but are readily recognisable in the way organisations reflect the same chaotic, conflictual, crisis-driven approach to problems that families exhibit.

We assert that these dysfunctional processes can be interrupted, and that middle managers have a significant role in forming the chain of influence. Good modelling by team leaders and managers of thoughtful and reflective processes makes a vital contribution to a healthy collaborative culture. Most importantly, this leads to program improvements and to better outcomes for children and families who are located at the base level in the ‘trickle down’ process.

To assist middle managers to think about what they would be doing in this chain of influential relationships, we describe each of the six-factors in Morrison’s model and provide illustrative operational examples. The first three factors – role clarity, role security, use of emotional intelligence and empathy – set a climate of openness and collaboration, in order that the supervisor can gain an accurate assessment of the supervisee. The remaining three factors relate to the development of the practitioner – undertaking accurate observation and assessments, forming partnerships and managing power and planning to promote competence and growth.
Chapter 1 Delivering results 17

1. Understanding role and function

Practitioners and supervisors thrive when they are clear about organisational expectations and responsibilities. We all need to understand our role and it is important that the organisation has a well-articulated management structure, clarity in relation to functions of the role, the delegations people hold and procedural guidelines. Whilst legislative requirements and associated guidelines direct child protection practice, other structures seek to aid practice and should act to provide boundaries and work context for everyone.

Given the significant levels of anxiety, uncertainty and ambiguity generated by Child Protection work, managers help to create a work context that is as safe, predictable and as supportive as possible. Setting a collaborative climate for structures, such as supervision, team meetings and case discussions is vital, just as practitioners must strive to set a similar climate for working in partnership with parents and other services.

The role of supervision in creating a collaborative learning culture

Supervision provides practitioners with an experience and understanding of collaborative learning partnerships. Supervision is a relationship to reflect on both the personal and professional dimensions of Child Protection work, not merely a series of administrative tasks. Steps to establishing the supervisory relationship include the following.

• Establishing a shared understanding about the meaning of ‘supervision’. Supervisors must be clear about what it means to supervise in Child Protection and the separate, but complementary, four functions of the supervisory role (See Child Protection Supervision standards document, Department of Human Services, 2007, p.2). In the literature, these are often referred to as the accountability, educative, supportive and mediation functions of supervision (Pritchard, 1995; Morrison, 2005; Richards et al., 1990).

• Practitioners need to understand what it means to be supervised in Child Protection. It is a process through which the organisation ensures the work gets done and practitioners are enabled and supported to do it.

• Supervisors and supervisees need to understand that both parties have responsibilities and it is through a relationship of trust and confidence that the growth and development of the supervisee will take place.

Ways in which managers might meet these functions are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.1

When practitioners develop clarity about their role, including their responsibilities within the supervisory relationship, this can link to the next level down in the chain of influence (client or practitioner). Trotter (2006) demonstrated this parallel process in his research into the department’s Child Protection program. When Child Protection practitioners reported that their supervisors made use of role clarification skills in supervision, supervisees reported they were more likely to spend time talking with families about the reason for their involvement and to clarify their role.

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1 One useful tool to ensure that supervisees and supervisors understand the multiple functions of supervision are the four function checklists that appear in Tony Morrison’s book about supervision (2005, pp. 41–46). Completing this checklist can also serve to promote a dialogue in supervision about mutual expectations and reduce the chance of misunderstanding and confusion.
Trotter also suggested that when the supervisors used other skills with supervisees, such as collaborative problem solving, they were more positive about their supervision and were also more likely to use these skills with their clients. While the unit manager position is not normally associated with direct case practice supervision, this group of middle managers must offer effective supervision to the team leaders who report to them. Research data shows this has often been found to be problematic, with team leaders reporting poor experiences of one-to-one supervision (Gibbs, 2002; Bogo and Dill, 2008).

Talking about role and function is also critical to the capacity of specialist positions to contribute to good outcomes for children. An important dimension of practice for these groups of middle managers is the way Child Protection practitioners come to understand the boundary between the role and responsibilities of the Child Protection team leader and these specialist roles. In particular, clarity regarding decision making in relation to risk and case planning is fundamental to good outcomes.

Any confusion in the mind of the practitioner is not only undesirable but may impact on outcomes. These specialist middle manager positions are key conduits for practice improvement and change. The capacity for these managers to demonstrate new ways of working with complex cases and for informing further expansion and program developments is immense, but only if all stakeholders are clear about their role and function.

2. Role security: Effective use of authority

The use of authority is integral to Child Protection practice. It is, therefore, no surprise that we consider it integral to the supervisory relationships. If supervision practices are to comply with the department’s code of conduct and its values this complex dimension of the task needs to be consciously considered, just as it must be in practice with the families we work with.

Practitioners and supervisors in Child Protection all need to feel secure in their role and therefore must understand the authority that is invested in each position. Research has consistently shown that it is managing and feeling comfortable with the authority component of the supervisory role that most challenges new supervisors (Hawkins and Shohet, 2006). Similarly, it is often the authority role in Child Protection that most worries new practitioners.

Supervisors at each level need to establish a safe and trusting relationship with supervisees so that these sensitive and challenging aspects of what they are doing can be shared and resolved. Supervisors should also ensure that supervisees are working in a culturally safe workplace. The supervisor should be mindful of cultural practices and beliefs of staff that are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, or from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background. At each step in the process, practitioners must have an opportunity to explore dilemmas and anxieties associated with the authority component of the work. A useful framework for assisting managers to reflect on their feelings about the authority they hold is provided by Obholzer et al (1994), who talk about authority from above, below and within:

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2 In Chapter 3 we discuss in some depth the way that supervision can be negotiated to develop a supportive, purposeful relationship that ensures the needs of both the worker and the organisation are met; which, in turn, is more likely to ensure good outcomes for children and families. Readers should refer to that chapter in combination with this discussion.
• Authority from above, or role authority, is the authority conferred on the supervisor by the organisation so they can do the work and carry out the responsibilities of the role. This means that the supervisor has some control over people and resources.

• Authority from below, or professional authority, comes from a demonstrated level of competence gained from training, qualifications or experience. This authority is seen and recognised through practice therefore those below (supervisees) must accept and sanction this type of authority. Problems can occur when supervisees are reluctant or resistant to accept the professional authority of the supervisor, who may not yet be seen as having ‘earned their stripes’.

• Authority from within relates to how we feel about, experience and express our personal authority. Our personal authority evolves over time and is linked to past experiences. For this reason it is critical that supervisors reflect on the relationships they have experienced with authority figures and what those relationships have meant to them. Problems arise for new supervisors when they are not given an opportunity to explore confusion and anxiety stemming from role insecurity.

Obholzer et al’s typology of authority roles could also be used to clarify practitioner’s understanding and feelings about their statutory role. At the case practice level, the link in the chain is formed when the practitioner experiences clarity and confidence about undertaking the statutory role. As a result, practitioners are in a better position to instil confidence and to gain the trust of families (Morrison, 2005).

Specialist positions occupy roles where there must be clarity about the interface with the team leader’s role. The authority carried by this group of specialist middle managers relates more to professional authority or authority from within. This means that Child Protection practitioners and their supervisor must recognise this group as having particular expertise and clinical knowledge that can contribute to good outcomes. The value of these specialist roles depends on this understanding and the agreement of all stakeholders, so their involvement in cases complements, rather than complicates or blurs, decision making and good practice.

The drama triangle that originates from transactional analysis theory can be used to describe dysfunctional interactions that revolve around three psychological positions: victim, rescuer and persecutor. This triangular dynamic can be generated in groups of people where ‘there are tensions and conflicts over power, vulnerability, responsibility, and between maintaining the status quo or change’ (Morrison, 2005, p.285).

Applied here, the positions could be adopted by team leaders, practitioners and specialist positions as a way of managing conflict, confusion and conscious or unconscious perceptions of each other. Following are some examples to illustrate the dangers of a lack of understanding and agreement about role, function and authority:

• Supervisor to practitioner: ‘There is no point in us talking to the principal practitioner about that case. She’s already given her advice. I think we are starting to get somewhere now. The father is starting to engage a bit with you. (Feeling vulnerable, the supervisor moves into a rescuer role.)

• I am really concerned about the case planning here. I may only be the principal practitioner but I’m thinking something else needs to be done. I’m going to talk to the unit manager. (Principal practitioner feels vulnerable and adopts a persecutor role.)
• I'm feeling I can’t win. I don’t know who I’m supposed to talk to. If I talk to my supervisor it looks like I don’t understand the importance of getting some clinical advice. If I talk to the principal practitioner it looks like I don’t understand how serious the risks are. (Practitioner feels persecuted and retaliates by going into the victim role.)

To guard against the impact of such dysfunctional dynamics and the ensuing interactions it is vital that stakeholders engage in early conversations about roles, functions and authority and power relations.

🌟 Reflective exercise:

• In your current position (for example, team leader, unit manager, specialist positions can you think of examples from your own experience or from others, where middle managers have struggled with managing the authority role?

• How was this evident? What implications were there for clients or colleagues?

• What might have helped avoid this confusion?

3. Using emotional competence and empathy to create relationships of influence

The role of emotional competence in leadership is now well established (Goleman, 1998; Morrison, 2006b; Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky, 2009). In Chapter 2, we highlight the importance of those working in Child Protection being highly competent in managing their own and others’ emotions.

Since Child Protection practice is a highly charged and emotional context, it is of even greater importance that middle managers create a safe context for talking about doubts, uncertainty and the emotional impacts of the work (Morrison, 2008b). Practitioners at all levels need to know they can talk about ‘mistakes’ and learn from these; this is not possible if they think they will receive an unsympathetic or blaming response.

Bennis (cited in Bielaszka-Du Vernay, 2009, p.11) highlights the role of managers in ensuring that inevitable mistakes do not lead to a culture of blame. He advocates that when things go wrong, the effective manager asks, ‘What did I contribute to this mess?’ This encourages a shared responsibility and a systemic view of ‘failure’. He goes on, ‘The goal is not to blame but to understand. Accepting failure is pretty easy; to understand is the hard part’.

This is not so easy to do in a context where ‘failure’ may have severe consequences for the health and safety of children. The most severe of these outcomes can be injury or death. The middle manager has a particularly important role in these circumstances when reflection on practice is required at a formal level, but also to assist in managing the emotional impact and to create meaning from the usually complex events. Practitioners cannot do this if they are emotionally unsupported or if they do not trust that the events will be explored respectfully for the learnings they hold.

How managers handle briefing documents, incident reports, child death inquiries and case reviews will be an influential context for how frontline staff experience these processes. Staff who feel emotionally unsupported or blamed will be defensive and will be unable to reflect on the important learning that comes from these processes; in contrast, adopting a compassionate stance, as well
as recognising the learning that arises from adverse outcomes, will contribute to a reflective and accountable workplace. An emotionally competent manager ensures that important learning occurs while supporting staff through that process.

In many instances practitioners may not be consciously aware of their feelings and it is only through reflective questioning in supervision that these are recognised and processed. Child Protection practitioners have to engage with people who are highly distressed and emotionally fragile; managers have to engage with staff who may also be stressed and vulnerable. At every level they need assistance from emotionally-attuned and competent leaders. This can be done in individual supervision, but also in team forums.3

At every level in Child Protection, unrecognised and unprocessed emotions emanating from the work can distort and contaminate risk. Managers need to elucidate and contain these emotions to enable decision making. Compassionate responses from managers can lead practitioners through the difficult process of reflecting on these difficult emotions and, in turn, assist practitioners to use themselves in purposeful ways with their families.

It must be stressed that compassion is different from empathy and that empathy alone is not sufficient to this task. Empathic identification is derived from imagining what another’s experience may be, based on our own experience. Casement (1985, in Woskeff, 1999, p.213) argues that this can limit people ‘to seeing what is familiar’ rather than developing ‘an openness to, and respect for, feelings and experiences that are quite unlike their own’. A compassionate stance from a supervisor helps form a partnership with the practitioner to understand their own feelings and the meaning of these in the work undertaken.

4. Accurate observation and assessment – encouraging practitioner development

Effective managers encourage the development of practitioners. By creating and being able to sustain positive relationships with practitioners, managers assist professional development. This issue causes anxiety in Child Protection practice because the level of risk is often high – practitioners at all levels can be reluctant to delegate decision-making responsibility or take up that responsibility. Understanding the supervisee’s level of development can assist in this.

To gain new skills and develop new capabilities, practitioners need to have a safe learning environment, but they also need opportunity to take on new and more complex tasks. This requires managers to delegate appropriately. Managers often have difficulty delegating tasks, but can also be critical of subordinates who are reluctant to make meaningful decisions. ‘(D)elegation requires letting go of perfection and relinquishing control. It is very difficult for some people to let go, but being an effective leader absolutely requires it’.

However, delegation should not be an end in itself. Goldsmith (2009, p.11) suggests that the ‘goal should be to delegate more effectively, rather than to delegate more frequently’. In Chapter 3, we discuss ways of assessing practitioner development. In this discussion we consider ways to

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3 In Chapter 2 we discuss the way that feeling states link to cognitive processes. We highlight the importance of recognising and using feelings to inform assessments and decision making. This discussion should be read in conjunction with that section.
invite collaborative reflection on these issues in supervision. Goldsmith provides a number of pertinent questions that could easily be incorporated into supervision and help both parties decide whether delegation is done well:

- Are there areas where I need to delegate more to you?
- Are there areas where I need to get more involved or provide more help to you?
- Do you ever see me doing things that I don’t need to be doing?
- Can I let go of some of my work and give it to you?

**Reflective exercise:**

- If your manager asked you these questions, how would you answer?
- What does this tell you about your own development and about how your manager might see your development?
- If you asked one of your staff these questions, how do you think they would answer?
- What would have to happen for you to have this conversation with your staff?

**Feedback and evaluation**

An important area related to assessment and development is giving feedback. Though integral to the role of manager, it is an area fraught with difficulty for all involved. For many, ‘feedback’ means criticism or raising issues about problematic practice. However, receiving feedback is a critical foundation of adult learning. Talking about prior experiences of feedback and what it has meant for supervisees should be an integral component of engagement and development of the supervision agreement.

Feedback should be a two-way process – all participants (including clients) should give and receive feedback. However, it is important to distinguish between feedback and evaluation. Evaluation involves comparison against competency standards and often occurs in formal performance reviews. This is called ‘summative evaluation’ and, while important, does not represent the bulk of the supervisor’s feedback. This is done through ‘formative evaluation’, which is the ongoing feedback that is targeted at the person’s level of ability, developmental needs and learning goals.

Feedback aims to help the practitioner learn from what they have done and to plan for future work. When well done, it is balanced and stresses process and progress, as well as providing challenges (Bernard and Goodyear, 2004).

Feedback is information on observable behaviour and the effect that behaviour has on others. Bernard and Goodyear (2004) describe three content types of feedback:

- confirmatory – the practitioner should continue to behave in this way
- corrective – the practitioner should change their behaviour
- reflective – the behaviour can be held up and examined for learning.

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4 We discuss this in some detail in Chapter 3.
The primary purpose of giving feedback is most often to facilitate learning and to help the practitioner to develop professionally. This includes reflecting on what went well, as well as areas for improvement.

Goleman and Boyatzis (2008) highlighted the way emotional context colours the experience of feedback. They cite research demonstrating that negative feedback ‘accompanied by positive emotional signals – namely nods and smiles’ was better received by practitioners than positive feedback that was ‘delivered critically, with frowns and narrowed eyes’.

The group who received positive feedback accompanied by negative signals reported feeling worse about their performance than the group who received negative feedback but with positive emotional signals (Goleman and Boyatzis, 2008, p.76). As they summarised it: ‘The delivery was more important than the message itself ... If leaders want to get the best out of their people, they should continue to be demanding but in ways that foster a positive mood in their teams’ (p.77).

Carroll and Gilbert (2007, pp.69–70) help break this down further. They outline five dimensions that managers need to consider and plan for when giving feedback:

• The WHAT – what do I want to say?
• The HOW – how do I do it?
• The EMOTIONS – emotional barriers are the main obstacles inhibiting the exchange of feedback.
• The WHEN – when is the right moment?
• The WHERE – where is the right place?

🌟 Reflective exercise:

• What is your current process for giving feedback to staff? How well does it work?
• How do you get feedback from your manager?
• How do you give feedback to your manager? How well does this work for you?
• Is there anything you would like to change?

In Chapter 3, we outline a psychological model of communication that assists in giving feedback well. Drawing on Reder and Duncan’s (2003) model, we highlight several levels in the communication process where misunderstandings occur, including the emotions being experienced by both the sender and receiver of communication.
5. Partnership and power: understanding and valuing difference

The issue of authority in the Child Protection role has already been noted, but the dimension of power is more complex than this. The formal power and authority held by a practitioner is paralleled at the next level up, in the practitioner’s relationship with their manager, with the manager’s formal power being mandated by Child Protection Supervision standards (see previous section on role security).

However, further to these formal power differences at both levels, there are also crucial socially structured power differences, such as class, gender, religion, race and disability, whose impact must also be understood at all levels in the Child Protection process. These differences impact on the lives of families and on the practitioner-client relationship and are also evident in supervisory and managerial relationships. In each part of the process, critical reflection seeks to ensure adequate consideration is given to power and how it is experienced. If the dimension of power is not considered, there is a danger of relationships being collusive or punitive.

Consider the following two situations.

**Scenario 1**
A unit manager is concerned about the difficulties a team leader is having with her team. The team leader has been struggling with a young male practitioner who dominates team discussions. The other team members, who are female, have complained to her but never assert themselves. The team leader feels frustrated by this and has noticed their anger towards the male practitioner. The unit manager has a choice to make whether he pursues the conversation about gender with the team leader.

**Scenario 2**
A female practitioner is talking in supervision to a male team leader about an experience she has had with some parents in a car. She was transporting them after access with their infant who has been removed from their care. Angry about what Child Protection is doing, the parents repeatedly refer to the practitioner as a ‘fat lesbian’. The practitioner reports this in a matter-of-fact way. The team leader has a choice to make about whether he pursues the conversation about sexuality and discrimination.

- What are your thoughts about these two situations? What might you have decided to do and why?

The issue of cultural sensitivity and cultural competence is central to frontline Child Protection practice. Similarly, middle managers must always strive to improve and build their cultural competence in the work they undertake with staff. Cultural competence is:

‘... a set of behaviours, attitudes and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals that enable them to work effectively in cross-cultural situations.

(Tong and Cross, 1991, p.12 in Department of Human Services, 2008)

A collaborative organisational culture values difference, and managers at every level need to think about what it means for practitioners from non-mainstream cultures to be located in authority relationships, such as in supervision. Likewise, a team leader from a non-mainstream culture managing staff from the dominant culture must strive to remain culturally sensitive to any issues arising in this relationship. Just as at a case practice level, it may be that a unique approach is needed and effective managers will be willing to create safe opportunities to talk to staff about this and to seek advice.
An important part of creating safety is through negotiating a supervision agreement. Valuing diversity and working in a culturally competent way is an integral component of this process. This allows participants to consider and discuss ‘anti-oppressive practice’ and to be explicit about how authority and power are exercised. Managers and their staff need to be open about the cultural differences and consider how concerns will be addressed. Middle managers can contribute to this by demonstrating high levels of self-reflection, including becoming consciously aware of their own cultural biases and how these influence their management and supervisory practice.

Recognition of cultural rights of children is a central tenet of the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*, the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act, 2005* and the *every child every chance* reforms. Child Protection practitioners are more likely to demonstrate cultural sensitivity and competence in their practice when they experience a work context that is explicit about and respectful of cultural diversity. This requires more than filling out cultural plans for children, or abiding by the *Aboriginal child placement principle*. It requires teams and individuals to be deeply reflective about diversity and the way we all participate in oppressive practices.

Brown and Bourne (1996, p.48) suggest an ‘anti-oppressive’ approach, which encompasses a culturally competent approach, can be promoted in supervision by:

- acknowledging differences in power, both of formal position and of identity
- creating a climate where it is safe to explore values, assumptions and attitudes in relation to issues of gender, race, age, sexual orientation, disability, class, religion or nationality
- discussing issues of coercion and choice in the relationship
- recognising limitations in the relationship
- identifying other sources of support
- ensuring there is a framework for disagreements and concerns
- discussing how feedback will be given and received.

**Reflective exercise:**

**Part 1**

If you are not from a minority group, imagine you are, or imagine you are from one that is different from your own (for example, you might imagine you are of Aboriginal or CALD background, have a disability, are homosexual or are from a minority religion). Think about your workplace and the daily ways of operating (for example, the conversations that occur, the physical surrounds, the style of communication). What would it be like for you? In what ways would you feel you belonged? What difficulties might arise? What adjustments would you have to make?

**Part 2**

Considering the discussion in this section:

- What are your ideas about how you can demonstrate a commitment to working in partnership and to culturally competent practice?
- Can you recall an occasion when you did this well?
- How did you know it went well?
Ideas for difficult conversations

In training and consultative exercises with middle managers, participants often highlight the challenge of raising problems and having difficult conversations with supervisees. The following general points may be helpful.

• Early in relationships of influence, acknowledge the potential for problems to arise that can lead to ambivalence and anxiety.

• Discuss and agree how challenges and problems will be raised by both parties during the negotiation of the supervision agreement.

• Discuss the challenges of taking a reflective practice stance that involves change and giving up familiar and accepted ways of doing things.

• Reflect on what the values of openness and honesty mean in the relationship – early recognition of problems and persistent efforts to help practitioners address the difficulties and to change behaviour.

• Recognise your need to practise giving feedback and allow yourself time to develop your confidence and competence in this aspect of work.

• Seek out support and guidance from your middle manager – talk about the challenges you are facing as they emerge.

• If problems persist over time and an unhelpful pattern of behaviour has developed, use frameworks such as the Bridging interview (Morrison 2005), which is discussed in Chapter 3.

• Recognise what is your responsibility and what you can influence but also acknowledge that, in some instances, it may be necessary to seek advice from Human Resources about performance management processes.

Middle managers must also take responsibility for raising concerns with their manager if they believe they are not getting what they need from this relationship of influence. Covey (2004) stresses the importance of middle managers being proactive and identifies the value of positive language in responding to challenging situations. It is not likely to result in a change to a dissatisfying relationship if any supervisee thinks ‘I can’t do anything about my supervision. That’s the way my supervisor is. They can’t change’.

The emotionally competent middle manager, having acknowledged that this is a difficult conversation to have, is more likely to comment to their supervisor, ‘I don’t think I’m getting as much from this relationship as either of us would like. I’m wondering if we can go back to our supervision agreement and talk about our expectations again’. This may be all the middle manager needs to be brought to conscious awareness that further work might maximise the value of the relationship for them both. In some cases this conversation could even lead to a joint decision for the supervisee to access some coaching, consultation or mentoring from another source.
6. Planning: Promoting competence and professional development

Contemporary views of leadership stress the importance of relationship building, emotional competence, thoughtful delegation and developing a workplace culture that encourages learning and invites participation. The chain of influence recognises the importance of planning in the supervisory relationship, and the role this plays in ensuring ongoing development on the part of practitioners.

Furthermore, when the supervisor and supervisee (at every level of the organisation) are able to work together to develop an appropriate plan for supervision, the frontline practitioner in turn will strive to collaboratively develop a plan with families. While a case plan is used in direct practice, a supervision plan is the structure through which managers promote competence and undertake these processes with staff.

Just as reviewing progress is important at a case practice level, management and supervisory practice should also be evaluated in an ongoing way. There should be an agreement at the beginning of the relationship about how the supervision agreement will be reviewed and updated to take account of professional development and growth. However, the review of relationships of influence must be two way. In doing this, supervisors and managers model receptiveness to feedback to their staff.

Supervisees and practitioners lower down the chain of command can be reluctant to give critical feedback to their ‘boss’; it is therefore important to invite opportunities to do so and to develop a culture where critical feedback is part of relational practice. Assuming there will always be parts of supervision that are working well and other aspects that can be improved, encourages a relaxed approach to feedback. The following questions can be used to elicit supervisee’s perceptions of the supervisory process and relationship. These questions are phrased in a way that emphasises the joint responsibility for making supervision effective and the collaborative nature of the relationship:

• What things are working well for you in supervision and what things do you think we could improve?
• In thinking about the four functions of supervision (managerial, development, support and mediation), which do we do well? Which do we need to improve?
• How well has supervision suited your learning style?
• What frameworks and knowledge have been most helpful for your learning?
• How well do we manage disagreements, uncertainty and difficult conversations?
• How can we tell if we are meeting your supervision goals?
• If you were going to advise somebody on how to get the best from me as a supervisor, what would you advise?
• If you were going to advise somebody on how to get the best from you as a supervisee, what would you advise?
• How helpful, or unhelpful, has the feedback been?
• As your supervisor, what areas of your practice do you think I know well? What areas do I need to know more about?
• What areas of challenge has supervision been most helpful with?
The supervision outcome cycle

In Chapter 4, we present the Kolb Learning Cycle as a foundation for a problem-solving or reflective practice model of supervision. We suggest that it lends itself particularly well to work in the complex and emotionally intrusive area of Child Protection, where it is imperative that the supervisor helps the supervisee to connect with the cognitive and affective aspects of experience, as well as describing what happened.

The reflective framework is a useful one for practice, as practitioners try to engage with the story about the family and what it has been like for them. The quality of the assessment of a child’s best interests depends on the practitioner’s capacity to get an accurate picture of the child’s current experience and life, the quality of their relationships with carers and others and the strengths and weaknesses in the broader system. It is in supervision that the practitioner can be helped to move on to the analysis of that information by encouraging them to think about their case from evidence-based knowledge, research and theory to reach an assessment.

If the supervisor has been able to establish a collaborative relationship with the supervisee, together they can make good decisions and better plans for the work ahead. Morrison (2005) suggests that a positive supervision cycle leads to better outcomes for clients. Conversely, compromised supervision results in poor outcomes and heightened risk to children. Figures 4 and 5 illustrate the ways in which supervision can directly impact on outcomes for children. We suggest you take some time to study them and reflect on the relevance to your work.
Effective supervision: clear, safe and enabling. Supervisor has accurate assessment of workers competence

Worker clear and confident on role and task

Client confident in the worker

Increased clarity, trust, openness, sharing of information, reduced anxiety, stronger partnership base

Clearer, more evidence-based assessment. Worker and client clear on next steps and mutual expectations

Figure 4: Supervision Outcome Cycle
Adapted from Morrison, 2005

Figure 5: Compromised Supervision Cycle

Poor or no supervision. Inadequate assessment of worker’s competence

Worker unclear, rigid or out-of-role, accountability unclear

Client less confident

Increased anxiety, less open, less trust, less information between user and worker, limited/no partnership

Assessment weaker, less evidence-based, strengths and needs unclear, risks missed. Less agreement, less clarity

Figure 5: Compromised Supervision Cycle

Poor or no supervision. Inadequate assessment of worker’s competence

Worker unclear, rigid or out-of-role, accountability unclear

Client less confident

Increased anxiety, less open, less trust, less information between user and worker, limited/no partnership

Assessment weaker, less evidence-based, strengths and needs unclear, risks missed. Less agreement, less clarity
Reflective exercise:

- Recall a situation where the process of supervision made a positive difference to the outcome in a case or work problem? How did supervision make a difference?
- Can you recall a situation where, on reflection, you can see that if the practitioner had received more effective supervision the outcomes may have been different? What makes you think this?

Reflective exercise:

In the following case study exercise we ask you to think about the supervisor’s assessment of the supervisee and to hypothesise about what might have happened at the level of case practice and in supervision. We have asked some reflective questions that may assist you in this exercise.

To address our suggested questions you will need to think about how well the following dimensions of the six-factor model have been addressed:

- role clarity
- role security
- emotional competence and empathy
- accurate observation and assessment
- partnership and power
- planning.

Paul has been a Child Protection practitioner in a metropolitan response team for 10 months. This is his first professional job. Eleven weeks ago he was allocated the case of Joshua, a then five week old infant.

The Child Protection report came from a general practitioner (GP) who became concerned after Joshua’s mother, Amy, presented at the clinic, the previous day requesting prescription drugs and appearing significantly substance affected to the extent that she nearly dropped Joshua.

Michael is Aboriginal and grew up in rural Victoria. He was involved with the Youth Justice program following convictions for car theft and breaking and entering. Amy is non-Aboriginal and her family reside in Melbourne. She was briefly involved with Child Protection after disclosing sexual abuse by her maternal grandfather when she was aged 14. Amy’s mother was disbelieving and the case was closed after Amy retracted the allegation and refused to meet with Child Protection practitioners.

Child Protection contacted the birth hospital. The hospital had concerns about the parents, both aged 18, during the early stages of the pregnancy due to Amy’s poor attendance at ante natal appointments, homelessness and Amy’s admission that they used drugs, including heroin. She also disclosed that Joshua’s father, Michael had slapped her across the face during an altercation over money in the first trimester. The hospital monitored the situation and provided the parents with support. Amy’s attendance to ante natal appointments improved and she was stabilised on the methadone program.

Joshua was born at 37 weeks gestation and weighed 2.5kgs. He showed no obvious signs of withdrawal and was discharged from hospital after seven days. Hospital notes documented that the parents were receptive to learning parenting skills, such as bathing and feeding Joshua. Amy was linked in with a GP who prescribed methadone and her local maternal and child health nurse (MCHN).
Paul conducted the first Child Protection visit with another response practitioner and an Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice and Support Service (ACSASS) worker the day that the report was received. The parents were temporarily staying with friends in a small, over-crowded flat. Joshua was awake and in his mother’s arms. He seemed restless and cried throughout their visit.

Amy and Michael informed Paul that they have been together for over a year. The parents did not appear to be substance affected and denied that they were using drugs. They agreed for Child Protection to contact the GP who prescribed them their methadone. Amy explained that whoever made the report must have been mistaken in thinking she had used drugs with her being extremely tired after getting up through the night for Joshua.

Paul spoke with Amy separately and asked about family violence. She admitted previous violence but assured Paul, that because of Joshua; Michael had changed and would never harm her again. Amy revealed they did not have much support as she was estranged from her family and Michael’s family lived far away. Joshua’s cot was checked and the parents were provided with Safe Sleeping and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome information. Paul also highlighted to the parents the risks of co-sleeping and smoking near Joshua.

The parents agreed to further visits by Child Protection and a referral to Family Services, even though they disputed the need. They also consented to Child Protection contacting the MCHN. Amy admitted that she had not kept all of the MCHN appointments and Paul encouraged her to do so.

Paul and the ACSASS worker thought that the family would benefit from Family Services involvement once Child Protection had made a thorough Best interests assessment. The specialist infant protective practitioner concurred with this assessment and it was agreed that the case should remain open given Joshua’s vulnerability and the high number of risk indicators.

Since that visit, Paul had been back to the flat several times. On one occasion, Michael answered the door and said Amy was out with Joshua. He was pleasant but did not engage in conversation and said he would get Amy to contact him. This did not occur and during subsequent visits, Paul suspected the family were home but refusing to answer the door. Last week he visited again and had a door stop conversation with Michael who became agitated and told Paul they did not need any help from anyone and to leave them alone.

After that Paul followed up with the MCHN, confirming that Joshua missed three out of six appointments. Joshua was most recently seen three weeks ago with his mother Amy. According to the MCHN, Amy seems a timid woman who lacks confidence as a mother. The MCHN is worried about the lack of support for the family and wondered if Amy might be showing early signs of Post Natal Depression. Joshua seems to be meeting his milestones but has only been putting on the minimum expected amount of weight.

Paul’s supervision sessions have been spasmodic partly because the team has been understaffed and the workload is high. He is one of the more experienced practitioners after two new practitioners joined the team. At his next supervision session, Paul discusses the case with his supervisor Tony and says he thinks they should close the case because the family does not want any involvement, he has not observed either parent to be substance affected and Joshua seemed to be fine.

Tony is taken aback at what he is hearing: particularly as Paul stresses how important it is to support the parents in caring for Joshua and that, given their backgrounds, it is not surprising that they don’t want Child Protection or Family Services involved.
• How well does Paul understand the role and function of a Child Protection practitioner?
  What leads you to say this?
• What feelings might he have about the case?
• Can you speculate about Michael and Amy’s feelings about Child Protection involvement?
  How well do they understand what Paul is doing?
• What issues might there be about the exercise of authority and power for Michael and Amy,
  and Paul?
• Adopting a framework of cultural competence, what might be important issues to consider?
• What understanding might Paul have of supervision?
• How might Tony be feeling?
• How does Tony appear to have made sense of Paul’s risk assessment and practice?
• What other explanations are there?
• If you were Paul's supervisor, how might you want to proceed with exploring supervision and your
  future role?

We are now going to ask you to read the next part of the story with more information about what is
happening in supervision. We would like you to further hypothesise about what has been happening
at these three levels: (i) case practice, (ii) Paul’s supervision with Tony, and (iii) Tony’s supervision
with his unit manager.

Consider this supervision case study on the dimensions of role clarity, role security, emotional
competence and empathy, accurate observation and assessment, partnership and power,
and planning.

Tony has been a team leader of a response team for six months. He has previously been a practitioner
in the team. He has had some experience acting in the role but has had no formal leadership
professional development training yet.

In his own supervision sessions, Tony has not raised concerns about Paul’s practice with his unit
manager. He has talked about the work he is doing to establish the team and getting to know the
practitioners better. In his supervision sessions they have been focusing on staffing and managing
workload issues.

In his next supervision session with the unit manager, Tony starts the session by saying he is
surprised and disappointed with Paul’s Best interests assessment in relation to Joshua. Tony wonders
if Paul is in the wrong job because he has not talked to him before about the difficulties and how the
case is going.

The unit manager, supervising Tony, has been managing the workload of a vacant team leader position
for two months. Due to the high number of unallocated cases and low staffing numbers, the unit
manager has been encouraged to promote through-put. The management team has been looking
carefully at staffing, trying to find a way to increase the number of practitioners in the intake team.
• How well does Tony appear to understand the multiple functions of being a supervisor in Child Protection?
• What component of supervision appears to have dominated and what may have been missing?
• What has this possibly meant for the information provided for the risk assessment in terms of the child, parents, history and service system?
• Can you speculate about how Tony is managing the authority component? What might be happening in his relationship with his team?
• What assumptions might Tony have made about Paul?
• What alternative explanations are there?
• What work might Tony’s supervisor have undertaken in his supervision that would have helped Tony?
• How might Tony’s supervisor be feeling?
• What assumptions might the supervisor have made about Tony’s developmental level?
• What do you suggest needs to happen and why?

This exercise seeks to promote your thinking about the importance of influential relationships and processes at every level in the Child Protection process. An important final consideration for the effective middle manager is what situations such as this one mean for organisational learning. It is important to consider what factors influence problematic interactions beyond those at the level of individual clients and staff.

Before moving on, we suggest you spend some time thinking about the people you supervise in light of the six-factor linking model.

• What connected with you in relation to your current supervisees?
• Are there any things you might like to do in supervision in the light of your reflections?
Managing teams to deliver results

Leading a team requires enormous courage because authority is always involved, which arouses great anxiety in teams.

‘Teams are often seen as safe places where people can be highly creative and productive. However, research consistently shows that teams underperform their great potential.’

(Couto, 2009, p.100)

Teams are invaluable resources for achieving good outcomes but it can be challenging for managers to harness their creative potential. The team has the potential to promote a collaborative learning culture that is enhanced by multiple perspectives and a broader range of knowledge and skills. There are opportunities for co-working, mentoring and greater transparency in practice. Practitioners can access emotional support from team members and a well-functioning, cohesive team can generate new ideas and innovation. However, when groups of people are functioning poorly, as previously discussed, they may parallel the processes seen in families – fear, chaos, uncertainty, hopelessness, despair, fragmentation, secrecy and so on.

In addition, Child Protection practitioners need to work cooperatively and collaboratively with practitioners in other parts of the organisation and with other agencies, sometimes from quite different professional backgrounds. In the Department of Human Services, this is particularly important with the implementation of the new legislation, the reform agenda and Child FIRST (Child & Family Information, Referral and Support Teams). A practitioner who is clear and confident in their role is in a much better position to work in partnership with other agencies and to recognise the value of good interpersonal communication and mutual understanding and respect. Practitioners can draw much from their experiences of working with members of their own team, where the same values and skills underpin their work together.

The middle manager usually occupies the role of team leader, in addition to being a supervisor and, as such, needs to have knowledge, understanding and skills in working with groups of practitioners. With a well-developed understanding about group processes and dynamics, the team leader can use the team as another place to model trust, openness, fairness and containment. Group processes can be destructive and undermining for members and the leader if these powerful dynamics are not recognised and managed.

Just as individual work in supervision requires achieving a balance between managerial, personal and professional objectives, leading the team involves managing both the task and process issues. An effective middle manager will need to be emotionally competent and encourage the team to explore issues, feelings and conflicts.

Munro (2008) notes the potential value for Child Protection assessments when people work together and pool their resources and thinking. She also cautions against a potentially dangerous ‘group think’ bias or distorted thinking, which can detrimentally impact on the outcomes for children and their families. Based on the work of Janis (1982, in Munro, 2008) she identifies the following dynamics:

5 This is discussed more in Chapter 3.
• over-estimation – where the group develop a feeling of invulnerability based on past successes
• closed mindedness – where group members are no longer receptive to challenge or difference and discount new ways of thinking
• pressure to conform to the dominant view – where views of dissenters are quickly silenced.

As a way of countering these processes, Munro suggests that leaders should explicitly encourage dissent and criticism. In a similar way to the supervisor who asks about other hypotheses that might have been discarded, a middle manager should encourage a ‘devil’s advocate’ role to disagree with the consensus. This is echoed by Hackman (in Coutu, 2009, p.102) who argues, ‘Every team needs a deviant, someone who can help the team by challenging the tendency to want too much homogeneity’.

Effective teams need diversity of thinking yet a level of coherence that enables shared discussion, decision making and development. Many teams have a kind of tug-of-war between these two characteristics – diversity and coherence. It is well established that most people are drawn to those who are familiar, which usually means similar to themselves. While this can lead to comfort and social ease, it is not necessarily conducive to good outcomes (Casciaro and Lobo, 2005).

In managing this balance between cohesion and diversity, middle managers need to build cohesiveness through a shared vision and goals, and ensure opportunities to get to know each other and appreciate each person’s contribution to the team.

Systems theory teaches us that the team is more than a group of individuals – the whole is indeed greater than the sum of the parts (Goding, 1992). The team becoming a collective entity starts with the middle manager being clear about their role. Gillian Ruch (2007) suggests that the team has been under-utilised as a potential ‘thinking space’ for practitioners and contributes to a reflective culture, where peers come together to share ideas and to increase their knowledge base.

The diversity of the group in terms of gender, age, race and cultural background offers different perspectives and can perform the dual function of providing emotional support to their peers. In some cases the team will have a group supervision function, as well as team meetings, where work may be allocated.

Every team needs clarity about the exercise of authority, in particular what decisions team members might make and what decisions belong to the team leader.

If the middle manager is going to participate in group supervision, it is particularly important that the group decides how this is going to work and understands the line of accountability in terms of decision making. Typically, teams may agree to augment the professional development, support and mediation functions of supervision but keep the accountability function within individual supervision. Morrison (2005) identifies some key tasks in establishing the role, function and process of group supervision:

• clarify purpose, focus and key tasks of the group
• clarify its mandate and decision-making authority
• define boundaries
• negotiate the role and authority of the facilitator
• agree on the range of methods to be used.
Just as individual practitioners move through stages of development over time, so do teams.

We have included material from Woodcock’s (1989) model of team development to encourage you to reflect on your team’s development and functioning.

• The underdeveloped team might be described simply as a work group. People have come together to complete a task but little consideration has been given to how members currently operate or the potential of the group to do better. Feelings are usually taboo; change is not welcomed and the covert message is ‘don’t rock the boat’. Some members do a great deal of talking and there is little listening. Mistakes are covered up and people do not learn or progress. There is often a powerful and dominant leader and the team has a low expressive function.

• The experimenting team wants to review its operating methods and do things that will change their performance. People care about the team but, in this stage, members can feel a sense of discomfort as they jostle for position. A team in this stage questions the way they are managed. People are able to speak out and begin to take risks. The team does a great deal of internal work and people are self-absorbed but are more able to listen to each other. This stage could be compared to the ‘storming phase’ identified by Tuckman (1963) in his group development model.

• The consolidating team looks at its operating methods and how the work is completed. The team is more systematic and begins to make good decisions. Members seek clarification about the task or activity, work to establish the objectives to be met, collect information, look at options, plan and review activities.

• The mature team does more effective work, methods are clear and members have a commitment to each other. There appears a high level of effective communication.

🌟 Reflective exercise:

Think back on one experience of working in teams:

• Can you recall the stage of development you reached?
• On what do you base this assessment?
• As a team leader or unit manager, what are the sorts of behaviours and strategies you adopt to encourage your team to function effectively?
• What current or past experiences have you had of group supervision?
• How well did the group carry out the contracting phase?
• What did this mean for your later work together?
• What methods did the group use?
• What was the role of the facilitator?
Summary

The quality of the relationship between managers and their staff is pivotal at every level in the Child Protection program. These relationships of influence can be understood through a broad application of Morrison’s six-factor model.

All research that has looked at the factors that lead to change in families highlights the significance of relationships between clients and practitioners (de Boer and Coady, 2007; McKeown, 2000; Brandon et al., 2008).

The same is true for supervisory and management practices with middle managers modelling the appropriate exercise of authority and power and high levels of social and emotional competence. These attributes are more critical to achieving good outcomes than technical skills, procedural knowledge and compliance.

We suggest that supervisory relationships provide a prime opportunity for managers and supervisors to establish a collaborative learning environment. Attention needs to be given in supervision to creating a thinking space for supervisees, focused on promoting their level of competence and professional development. Supervisors are more likely to be effective when they adjust their supervisory style based on information gained from an accurate assessment of a supervisee’s competence and stage of development. Of paramount importance, both strengths and weakness in practice are able to be addressed through establishing a positive supervisory relationship. This mirrors the practice challenge for practitioners who must endeavour to do the same with the families they work with.

To help understand how good outcomes can be achieved through working collaboratively, we have described the six-factors in the chain of influence: role clarity; role security; emotional competence and empathy; accurate observation and assessment; partnership and power; and planning. The assertion is that at every level of the Child Protection process these factors are important and that through a ‘trickle down’ effect outcomes will be enhanced at the base level of case practice.

Through the delivery of sound reflective supervision, the supervisor seeks to help the supervisee gain an understanding about what the supervisee is doing and why. In the statutory setting of Child Protection, key dimensions of frontline practice and supervisory practice are the exercise of authority and power. Leaders in Child Protection must model anti-oppressive practice with conscious attention to their feelings about the authority they hold and how this impacts on their relationships with others.

Working within a culturally competent framework is as vital within managerial and supervisory relationships as it is at case practice level. When middle managers pay attention to their teams working well together then, as a collective entity, these teams have the potential to contribute to positive outcomes for children and families.

We have suggested that many of the same issues that apply in individual relationships between managers and practitioners apply in teams. Team leaders must help the team to understand its role and function and how this relates to other processes, such as individual supervision. The effective team leader thinks about the exercise of authority and power in the team. We have highlighted the forum of group supervision as being one to consider but caution against doing so without adequate planning and reflection.
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Chapter 2
Mastering oneself

inspire

reflect
engage
support

collaborate
enable

learn
Chapter 2 Mastering oneself

In this chapter we cover:

• preparation for reflective exercises
• self-management and awareness
• emotional intelligence in Child Protection
• the role of emotion in decision making
• influences on thoughts and feelings
• burn out, vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue
• mental agility
• competency and survival modes of learning
• the role of compassion satisfaction
• ideas for self-care.

Capability: Mastering oneself

Mastering oneself involves becoming aware of our own biases, assumptions, thoughts and feelings. It involves being comfortable with ambiguity and demonstrating mental and emotional control to ensure the best outcomes are implemented successfully.

The two capabilities within the cluster are summarised below.

1. **Self-management and awareness** – Aware of one’s own thoughts and feelings; aware of impact on self and others; regulates and manages emotions; suspends judgement.

2. **Mental agility** – Is open to change and improvement; modifies approaches; rethinks strategies and plans; transforms one’s pattern of thinking, feeling and acting.
Introduction

‘People with a high level of personal mastery live in a continual learning mode. They never ‘arrive’. Sometimes language, such as the term ‘personal mastery’ creates a misleading sense of definiteness, of black and white. But personal mastery is not something you possess. It is a process. It is a lifelong discipline. People with a high level of personal mastery are acutely aware of their ignorance, their incompetence, their growth areas. And they are deeply self-confident. Paradoxical? Only for those who do not see the “journey is the reward”.’ (Senge, 1990, quoted at infed.org)

Effective Child Protection managers need to master a range of skills and concepts but, just as important, is the need to ‘master oneself’. The capacity to think critically and reflectively in the midst of a high-pressured and stressful context requires not merely mental aptitude, but also an ability to manage emotions and interpersonal dynamics, and to be both adaptive and decisive, as required. However, Child Protection takes place in a context where ambiguity is high, decisions are emotionally and ethically laden, there is strong public and political pressure and ongoing urgency (Morrison, 2008).

Atkinson-Consulting! (2008) argues that an effective middle manager in Child Protection must have developed the capacity to understand and manage the affective and cognitive aspects of practice and have the emotional competence and skills to help others do the same. Further, an effective middle manager understands that a common defence mechanism is to avoid and minimise difficult feelings; this can effect risk assessments and, therefore, heighten the risk to children. As we have noted elsewhere in this guide, reflective practice is reliant on an exploration of experience, thoughts, feelings and behaviours (see Chapter 4). In order to undertake this exploration we need to understand:

- what influences the way we experience our thoughts and feelings in Child Protection practice
- how an effective leader learns to manage these thoughts and feelings. Indeed, what it means to ‘master oneself’.

To answer this, we will draw on the learnings from a range of fields related to working with people in distressing life circumstances, in particular counselling and psychotherapy, social work practice, the trauma and emergency response fields and the concept of ‘emotional intelligence’ (Saakvitne and Pearlman, 1996; Goleman, 1998; Woskeff, 1999; Morrison, 2005; Morrison, 2008). In addition, we suggest strategies for self-care to help maintain emotional wellbeing.
Preparation for reflective exercises in this module

The exercises in this chapter require the reader to be reflective about emotional material that may raise strong feelings. We all bring with us experiences that may make us sad, vulnerable, ashamed, angry or, alternatively, happy, relieved, proud, joyful, thankful, and so on. Many of us have adverse life experiences and these have often contributed to our resilience, compassion and sensitivity as practitioners (Morrison, 2009; Morrison, 2008).

For the exercises in the reflections, we suggest you not choose highly emotionally laden experiences. The exercises are not designed to distress, but sometimes thinking can evoke painful memories. Before beginning, think about what you will do if painful or distressing feelings arise – who can you talk to? What might get in the way of talking to these people (this person)? Do you need to formalise someone else to talk to (for example, a counsellor or supervisor)? What brings you comfort and pleasure? Plan to do these afterwards. Notice any feelings that arise and note these. Develop a self-care plan, as suggested at the end of this chapter, before you start this part of the guide.

Self-management and awareness

Child Protection is both an emotionally demanding and rewarding experience. Often the demands and the rewards sit side by side, or even run counter to each other; for example, confronting a parent about the abuse of a child is emotionally distressing in all circumstances, yet the confrontation may be the first step towards establishing safety and hope for the child and family. At every level of intervention – from the Child Protection practitioner, to the team leader, to the unit manager – the emotional impact of the work needs to be understood and managed.

At each level of the system, the practitioner is managing not just their own feelings, but is responsible for helping others manage theirs. Child Protection practitioners help families manage their feelings of distress, failure, anger, fear; team leaders help Child Protection practitioners do the same; unit managers support team leaders; and principal practitioners and specialist positions are often supporting people at a number of levels of the system.

Managing the emotional impacts of the work is a complex and challenging task, but managers who can achieve this at their level of action contribute to the same processes being passed down the ‘chain of influence’ to achieve good outcomes with children and families (Morrison, 2005), as discussed in Chapter 1.
Emotional intelligence in Child Protection leadership

The role of emotions in management and leadership has received increasing attention recently, as research has demonstrated the importance of relational models of management. The concept of ‘emotional intelligence’ (EI) by Goleman (1998) and others is a useful conceptual framework for understanding the role of emotions in organisations.

Some authors dislike the use of the term ‘intelligence’ with its connotations of IQ and prefer to use ‘competency’ (for example, Morrison, 2008). However, the concept is differentiated from cognitive intelligence and while the debates about terminology are important, the framework remains useful. Goleman (1998), building on the work of Salovey and Mayer (1990), proposed that:

• IQ accounts for 10 to 25 per cent of variance in job performance and career success.
• EI accounts for between 50 and 70 per cent of variance in job performance.

Goleman’s definition of EI is:

‘Being able to motivate oneself and persist in the face of frustrations; to control impulse and delay gratification; to regulate one’s moods and keep distress from swamping the ability to think; to empathise and to hope.’
(Goleman, 1996 p34)

Morrison (2006, p.8) argues that ‘EI is not an end in itself; it is [a] means to enrich thinking, action, service delivery and outcomes’. We argue throughout this guide that the emotional and cognitive resources required in Child Protection work, makes it imperative that managers have a high capacity to understand and utilise emotions. Goleman identified five emotional competencies that lie within the two broader areas of personal and social competence, listed below.

1. Personal competence

Self-awareness: Knowing one’s internal states, preferences, resources and limitations.
• Emotional awareness: recognising one’s emotions and their effects.
• Accurate self-assessment: knowing one’s strengths and limits.
• Self-confidence: a strong sense of self-worth and capabilities.

Self-management: Managing one’s internal states, impulses and resources.
• Self-control: keeping disruptive emotions and impulses in check.
• Trustworthiness: maintaining standards of honesty and integrity.
• Taking responsibility for personal performance.
• Adaptability: flexibility in handling change.
• Innovation: being comfortable with new ideas.

Motivation: Emotional tendencies that guide or facilitate reaching goals.
• Achievement drive: striving to improve.
• Commitment: aligning with goals of the agency or group.
• Initiative: readiness to act on opportunities.
• Optimism: persistence in pursuing goals.
2. Social competence

**Empathy:** Awareness of others’ feelings, needs, perceptions and concerns.

- Understanding others: sensing others’ feelings and concerns.
- Identifying their development needs: bolstering their abilities.
- Service orientation: recognising and meeting users’ needs.
- Leveraging diversity: cultivating opportunities through different kinds of people.
- Political awareness: reading a group’s emotional currents and power relationships.

**Social skills:** Ability to induce desirable responses in others.

- Influence: ability to persuade.
- Communication: listening openly.
- Conflict management: negotiating and resolving disagreements.
- Change catalyst: initiating and managing change.
- Building bonds: nurturing key relationships.
- Collaborating and cooperation: working with others towards shared goals.
- Team capabilities: creating group energy in pursuing collective goals.

(Adapted from Morrison, 2005)

*Reflective exercise:*

**How’s your EI?** (From Johanssen and Gibbs, 2008)

How would you rate yourself in each of the EI competencies? Review the descriptors on the previous pages and give yourself an overall rating for each of the five competencies. Use a rating scale of one to four: 1 = low competence, 2 = moderately competent, 3 = competent, 4 = highly competent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EI competency</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Self-awareness</td>
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<td>2. Self-regulation</td>
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<td>3. Motivation</td>
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<td>4. Empathy</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Social skills</td>
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- In which of the competencies or component parts of the competency do you need to become more effective?
- How can you get feedback from those you supervise about your EI?
- What can you do to build your competence?
- How will you know when you have increased your competence in this area?
The role of emotions in decision making

Thinking and feelings are often seen as dichotomies – wildly different and contradictory in nature. Indeed, emotion is seen as the less reliable, undisciplined little sister of thinking. However, there is substantial evidence that emotions play an important role in decision making and that using both emotional and cognitive sources of information and analysis are important if we are to make effective decisions.

Morrison (2009) has explored this issue in some detail. He cites research demonstrating that the presence of emotion can enhance the processing of information: subjects asked to view a distressing movie had greater recall when allowed to attend to their emotional responses than those asked to suppress them. Since processing of information, much of which is emotionally laden, is vital to the task of Child Protection, it follows that usefully attending to feelings assists thoughtful analysis and assessment. He goes on to argue that the ‘research suggests that the boundary between feeling and thinking, and the oft-heard call for the removal of emotions from so-called objective or professional decisions, needs reassessment’ (p.12).

The research evidence that emotions contribute to effective practice has demonstrated:

• expanded and creative thinking
• ability to make links between different sources of information
• greater flexibility in negotiations
• improved assessment and diagnostic skills (Morrison, 2009).

Being aware of intense feelings, understanding these and managing them are vital to practitioners at every level of practice. Although emotions are present in decision making (even if unacknowledged) in the face of overwhelming feelings, it is common for practitioners to attempt to suppress or avoid feelings. Managers need to be able to understand, process and use their own emotions effectively and assist others to do the same (Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky, 2009).

The role of feelings has been discussed at length in other chapters (see in particular the importance of reflecting on feelings in the Kolb learning cycle – Chapter 4). In that chapter we also discuss feelings that arise from what Munro (2008) calls ‘intuitive thinking’. But to make adequate use of these, leaders need to be able to differentiate the meaning of feelings that may arise in the course of the work.

Influences on thoughts and feelings

There are many influences on how we think and feel; in working with people in distressing life circumstances, we will focus on three primary influences:

• what we bring with us, including our personal and professional experiences
• our interaction with individuals and systems around us
• the nature of the work and its impact on our lives.
Influence 1: What we bring with us

Practitioners come with a wealth of unique life and professional experiences, whether a new graduate or a practitioner of many years’ experience. Some of these are detailed below.

Professional training and identity

This includes: the values, theories, assumptions and practices that underpin the profession; the ideas and concepts to which we were exposed in training; the beliefs about the world and how it operates; professional experiences; our history of supervision and belonging in the workplace; and the ‘fit’ between the professional and personal ‘self’.

These experiences often provide practitioners with a map for interpreting the world in which we work; they not only help us make sense of things but also influence the direction of our interventions. Values and basic beliefs are less likely to change than theoretical concepts and frameworks that may be updated according to new information and models. However, some models will be seen as having a better ‘fit’ with our underlying values and assumptions, or between professional identity and the role performed in the work.

Our significant life experiences

We all bring experiences from our family of origin: class and culture; the things that happened, good and bad; the stories we tell about ourselves; the roles we played; the predictable patterns of interaction; the unstated rules about how the world works; the sense of self that we internalised growing up; our experience of school and peers; the places we’ve worked and the people we have worked with; our experience of relationships, intimacy, friendship; the many things that contribute to our sense of self; and our current relationships, families and demands.

These significant experiences are formative and influence many of the basic templates by which we engage with the world. Many practitioners, including those in the helping professions, have experienced adverse life experiences. Overcoming these can build resilience and provide an important internal resource (Wolgien and Coady, 1997). In addition, personal experiences of help seeking can impact on practitioner attitudes (positively or negatively) and this, in turn, can impact on relationship building with families (Morrison, 2008).

Our individual characteristics, resources and vulnerabilities

We also bring our unique combination of individual characteristics that form part of our experience of the world. These include gender, race, class, sexuality, faith or religion, age, abilities and disabilities; how these are experienced in day-to-day life; the messages we take from them; the way others respond to us as a result of these. As practitioners we need to consider how these interact with our work and the way they may both constrain or assist us in our interactions with colleagues, families and other organisations. We also need to consider how differences in these characteristics may be experienced. The role these may play in supervision is discussed in more detail in relation to ‘diversity’ in Chapter 5.
Reflective exercise:

This task will take you about 20 minutes. We recommend you do it when you have time to think and to notice the thoughts and feelings that arise. If difficult feelings arise during this exercise, remember to use your self-care plan as discussed in the introduction.

Look at the four areas above: professional identity, family of origin, important events and experiences, and individual characteristics. Choose one of the areas for this exercise. Imagine you are writing a profile on yourself that explains how this area has influenced you as a Child Protection manager. What would be the important things to notice?

To assist this reflection you may want to consider the following.

• Professional identity and training: When and why did you choose your profession? How well did or does it ‘fit’ for you? What values are important to you in your profession? What are the major influences on you in your practice? Where do these come from? What ideas or techniques could you not do without? How do others react to you when they find out what you do – how does this impact on you? If you could change one thing about your work what would it be? What does this tell you about yourself?

• Family of origin: Who was in your family? What was it like being a child in your family? How is this similar to, or different from, the children and families you serve? How was conflict managed in your family? What difficult, annoying patterns do you get into when you are in your family environment? What is the thing you most enjoy about your family and what do you least enjoy? What are your family’s greatest strengths? What would you most like to change? How do you think your family most influences your work now?

• Important experiences and events: What was it like being at school? How do you see yourself as a friend, partner, parent, colleague? What are the best things that have happened to you? What are some difficult things that have happened to you? What do you think you have learned about yourself from these things? Are you ever reminded of these things in your day-to-day work? How do you manage these reminders and what impact do they have on your management style?

• Individual characteristics: What do you think are the unique influences on your sense of identity? What individual strengths and vulnerabilities do you have? How do you see yourself being similar to, or different from, your colleagues? The family you work with? What adjectives would you use to describe yourself as a child? Adolescent? Now? How would you like to describe yourself in the future?

Influence 2: Our interactions with individuals and systems around us

In the day-to-day work of Child Protection management we form relationships with many individuals and organisations. The nature of these relationships may be helpful or an impediment to good outcomes. Aspects of this are discussed in Chapter 3. In this discussion we focus on the importance of self-reflection and awareness and the role of the middle manager in cultural change.

Effective managers are able to reflect on their thoughts and feelings and the way these impact on themselves and others, including relationships with supervisees, peers and other organisations; they actively seek to influence the establishment and maintenance of a reflective organisational culture. Possible contributors to relationship dynamics between individuals and within, and between, organisations are detailed below.
The organisational culture

The organisational culture forms a central condition of practice. The literature agrees that it is the dynamic interaction between organisational culture, leadership and process that, in combination, leads to good outcomes for children and families.

Work culture is defined by Atkinson-Consulting! (2008) as the atmosphere or climate of an organisation and what it feels like to work there. The culture of the organisation needs to be one that is supportive and developmental in focus. It needs to provide clarity of purpose, a focus on change and positive outcomes through relationship-based practice, opportunities for professional growth and reflection and to take care of staff in the difficult work they do (Atkinson-Consulting!, 2008).

The empirical evidence is that managers have an essential role to play in contributing to a work culture that ensures the conditions for effective practice, and therefore good outcomes for children and families (Wilson, 2009). At an organisational level, failure to adequately contain and utilise feelings, including distressing feelings such as anxiety, leads to a compromised learning environment. As Morrison notes:

“In this environment anxiety is seen as unprofessional, a sign of weakness or not coping. As a result uncertainty is suppressed… The absence of forums where feelings and doubts can be safely expressed leads to defensiveness and a resistance to reflect on practice,” (Morrison, 1997, p.6)

The role of the middle manager in influencing cultural change in Child Protection is discussed in detail in Chapter 5. In acknowledging and understanding their own feelings and making space for others to do so, middle managers can contribute to a supportive culture and a collaborative learning environment where practitioners can take appropriate risks and reflect on their practice, utilising all sources of information, including emotional material.

✿ Reflective exercise:

Take a few minutes to think about your current workplace.

• How are emotions expressed?
• Which emotions are OK to be expressed, discussed, valued?
• Are there any that are not?
• How does this get played out?
• What role does emotion play in decision making? Is this recognised or not?
• Which emotions do you find easiest to manage in others? Which do you find more difficult? Why do you think this is?

6 The issue of organisational culture is discussed in detail in Chapter 5.
Transference and counter-transference issues

In thinking about emotions in the exercise above, you may have begun to think about particular people or particular emotions that you experience as difficult. There are many reasons for this, but one contributor may be the presence of transference and counter-transference. These are commonly talked about in the counselling field and seen as an inevitable part of therapeutic relationships. When working in intense relationships, such as that of Child Protection practitioner and manager, these same dynamics can arise (Morrison, 2005).

Transference refers to the feelings from past events or relationships that are projected onto the current relationship by the families (or supervisee); for example, the power dynamic in supervision may trigger unresolved issues related to family of origin. The person then responds as though they are in that previous relationship. Managers, of course, also bring their own transference issues and need to be aware of the feelings and relationship dynamics from the past that may be triggered for them in their work relationships. Counter-transference refers to the feelings and behaviours evoked in the middle manager by the supervisee’s transference. The manager then responds accordingly.

For example, one practitioner noticed a difference in how she managed her feelings when she became a team leader. She found that she became anxious and frustrated with her staff’s expression of distress and felt unsupported by her own supervisor. On reflection, she realised that the increased responsibility as team leader had tapped into difficult issues that she had in her own family. She had always felt responsible for her younger brother and sister. She experienced her own parents as unable to adequately support her and her siblings. The experience of being responsible for her team had triggered these unresolved issues and they began to play out in her relationships with her team and manager.

A reflective stance allows the manager to note the feelings they experience in the interaction and the way this invites them to behave. These can be difficult issues to talk about in a line-management relationship, since they touch on personal experiences. Team leaders, in particular, have an important role to play in establishing a culture where an overlap between personal experience and work dynamics is normalised and not seen as pathology or inexperience. The effective leader can model a willingness to acknowledge that our own ‘buttons’ may get pushed in the work we do, as well as appropriate boundary setting in relation to how far these issues are discussed or dealt with through the work context (Heifetz et al., 2009).

A difficult issue for managers is deciding how far to discuss personal issues with supervisees. It is generally useful to consider this in the contracting stage of supervision (see Chapter 3). During this process an effective manager can normalise the fact that the work is emotionally laden and often challenges us in personal ways. The following questions are examples that may assist in exploring this area.
Questions exploring the emotional impact of the work
(adapted from Dwyer, 2003)
Because the work we do is personally challenging and highly emotional, we often find it touches personal issues for us:

- What supports do you find you need when work is difficult or personally challenging?
- How do we know when the work is touching personal issues for you?
- How would you like to deal with this in supervision if it happens for you?
- Do you have a clear sense of how your work and life influence each other? If so, what do I need to know to support you better? If not, what would help you gain a clearer sense of that?
- If I thought the work might be touching issues for you, would it be OK for me to raise it? How would you like me to do that?

You can see that these questions are collaborative in nature – they suggest the task of making sense of the personal–work nexus as a joint responsibility, but one where the practitioner has lots of choices. They do not necessarily mean that the supervisor needs to know the details of the supervisee’s personal life, but they do encourage the supervisee to consider what that will mean to supervision. These questions also normalise the experience and provide an opportunity to plan for how this may be attended to. Later in this chapter we discuss the role of a ‘self-care plan’, which may also assist managers to discuss these issues appropriately with staff.

Reflective exercise:
Think about a relationship or person that you find difficult:

- What feelings does this interaction arouse in you?
- How do you find yourself behaving in this relationship?
- What do these feelings and this interaction remind you of in terms of other relationships?
- If your supervisor was going to discuss these issues with you, how would you like them to do that?

Patterns of interaction
In forming relationships we all participate in predictable patterns of interaction. These allow us to carry out our daily relationships and activities in a predictable way. These may be helpful or unhelpful but usually arise in rather innocuous ways. They tend to be circular and recursive with a predictable outcome and usually the patterns are adapted to new ways of interacting as required. However, sometimes a pattern of interaction can become stuck and become a problem in itself. The pattern of interaction may begin as a reasonable response to a situation, but it then becomes difficult to respond in more flexible ways. At these times effective managers need to stand back and look at how they may be contributing to these stuck dynamics. They also help others stand back and identify how the difficult feelings and thoughts about the work lead us all to become stuck in unhelpful patterns of interaction. Consider the example below:
Debra is a new Child Protection practitioner. She is somewhat anxious and lacking in confidence. Her supervisor, Rebecca, is team leader in a busy team with several new staff. She is working hard to encourage her team to develop the necessary skills to be independent but is worried that their inexperience may lead them to make poor risk assessments. The following pattern begins to emerge between Debra and Rebecca:

When you look at this pattern, neither Debra nor Rebecca is ‘wrong’ or ‘to blame’. It is like ‘the chicken and the egg’: difficult to see where the pattern first began. Was Debra anxious, or did Rebecca offer advice and scrutiny? It has simply become a ‘vicious cycle’, where the action intended to stabilise the situation has actually become part of the problem (Goding, 1992). Each was responding appropriately, but the pattern that formed between them eventually became ‘problem maintaining’ (Watzlawick, Weakland and Fisch, 1974).

Rebecca responded to Debra’s lack of confidence by providing more scrutiny and advice, which further eroded Debra’s confidence and she invited even more support. By looking at the pattern we can identify where they are stuck and start to consider how we may help them get unstuck. If we can interrupt the pattern of interaction, by doing something different to the usual ‘steps in the dance’, we can find new ways of interacting around the problem. What would you have done to avoid or break this pattern? (You may want to refer to Chapter 5 for some ideas about the learning cycle and Chapter 3 for an exploration of learning styles.)

There are two kinds of patterns that people often get stuck in – complementary and symmetrical:

1. **Complementary** interactions – where one person’s behaviour complements (or is related to but is the opposite of) the other. For example:

   - assertive → submissive
   - angry → withdrawn

2. **Symmetrical** interactions – where the behaviour of each person mirrors the other. For example:

   - angry → angry
   - withdrawn → withdrawn
Being in a complementary or symmetrical response is not a problem in itself; in fact, if someone is angry, being conciliatory or submissive may be the appropriate thing to do in that moment. However, it is not difficult to imagine that if we always respond to anger with submission or conciliation, then the person may never have to address their angry behaviour. Alternatively, if we always respond with angry or confronting behaviour, it too could escalate out of control.

Both a complementary or symmetrical response can escalate or become stuck and could therefore be unhelpful. When caught up in complementary cycles of interaction, it can be helpful to go symmetrical in order to alter the pattern. Conversely, when caught in symmetrical patterns it can be helpful to go complementary. These need to be done thoughtfully, of course, with consideration to the potential consequences of the response.

If we return to the team leader, Rebecca, and practitioner, Debra, in the earlier example we can see they were caught in a complementary cycle: Debra being increasingly helpless and lacking in confidence and Rebecca being increasingly helpful and expert. If the team leader is going to break this pattern she may consider stepping out of this role. While she obviously would not want to become ‘helpless’, she may acknowledge how overwhelming it feels to be the Child Protection practitioner in this case and adopt a collaborative stance to help Debra reflect and identify her own expertise.

We have used the concept of patterns of interaction and cycles in many ways throughout this guide, including discussion of learning cycles and reflective practice processes. These are not conflicting paradigms; when used together they provide a range of strategies, tools and concepts that managers can utilise to lead their staff. These concepts are also familiar to managers through the Best Interests Case Practice Model, where practitioners are encouraged to consider patterns of interaction within families and between themselves and families. The same dynamic applies to each link in the ‘chain of influence’ (Morrison, 2005) from Child Protection practitioner to team leader to unit manager, and between Child Protection staff and other organisations.

These ideas also apply to interagency dynamics. It is not uncommon to see organisations stuck in unhelpful patterns, as they each do their best to meet the needs of vulnerable children and families. Services become polarised, each feeling the other does not understand their position. However, becoming involved in blaming only exacerbates the problem and tends to see people become further entrenched in their part of the interaction. It is useful at these times for a leader to sit down with staff, to write up the pattern of interaction that is occurring between the different services and to consider how they may interrupt the stuck pattern.

**Reflective exercise 2:**

Consider a recent interaction that you observed or participated in that you consider was unhelpful. See if you can write down the steps of the interaction cycle. If you were going to interrupt this cycle, what could you change about your part in the interaction?
Influence 3: The nature of the work and its impact on our lives

A significant determinant of the feelings and thoughts we experience at work is related to the nature of the work we do. It is well recognised that working in Child Protection is very stressful, crisis-driven and often traumatic. Some sources of stress relate to the vulnerability of the children and families you work with, the volume of the work, the public perception of the role, the hazardous nature of the work, bureaucratic processes, the level of support available and the interface with home stressors (Anderson, 2000). Research into the impact of this kind of work has demonstrated that practitioners suffer burnout, vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue.

Burnout, vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue

Burnout is defined as ‘a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation of clients, and feelings of reduced accomplishment’ (Anderson, 2000, p.840). In researching burnout and coping in the Child Protection workforce, Anderson (2000) noted that it is: more common among Child Protection practitioners than among other social workers; usually associated with younger, less experienced practitioners and those who over-identify with families; and also associated with workplace factors such as inadequate supervision and bureaucratic processes.

In addition to burnout, being exposed to trauma in the lives of the Child Protection families can have a cumulative detrimental impact on the practitioners themselves; this is known as vicarious trauma (VT) (Rosenbloom, Pratt and Pearlman, 1999), secondary trauma (Stamm, 1999) or compassion fatigue (CF) (Figley, 1999). Child Protection practitioners are familiar with the cumulative impact of adverse experiences on the families they work with; indeed, this understanding forms a fundamental part of assessing children’s wellbeing under the Best Interests Case Practice Model. However, practitioners tend to be less aware that, just as children exposed to ongoing neglect or trauma suffer cumulative harm, so staff exposed to traumatic work environments also suffer from the cumulative impact of their work.

Working with traumatised children and adults can lead practitioners to question basic frameworks, values and beliefs about the world, such as fundamental beliefs about the nature of humankind or the world as a safe place. The work can also lead to feelings and behaviours similar to the experience of traumatised people operating from the ‘fight or flight’ response.

It is not uncommon for practitioners to find themselves thinking a lot about work or having thoughts and feelings triggered by things outside work. Feeling overwhelmed by day-to-day demands, practitioners may become avoidant of some families or situations, or hyper vigilant about issues of safety. Alternatively, they may dissociate from their feelings and not be able to readily use these to assist them to assess risk.

Practitioners may experience any of the following:

• anxiety, depression
• de-personalisation
• feeling overwhelmed by emotions – anger, guilt, despair, fear
• increased irritability, frustration
• low energy, low self-esteem
• increased sensitivity to violence and abuse, for example, on television
• avoiding situations and people perceived as dangerous
• intrusive dreams or thoughts, sleep problems
• feeling distrustful of other people, relationship problems
• substance abuse. (Morrison, 2007)

In workshops looking at the VT impacts of their work, Child Protection practitioners have identified a range of impacts, including feelings of sadness and anger, isolating themselves from their social networks, fear for their own children, changes to their sense of trust in others, lack of interest in normal activities, increased use of alcohol, avoidance of some families or situations (Dwyer and Miller, undated). Burnout and vicarious trauma are not due to a failure on the part of practitioners, rather they result from engaging in an empathic way with traumatised people (Saakvitne and Pearlman, 1996; Anderson, 2000).

Sometimes Child Protection practitioners directly witness injuries, self-harm or high-risk behaviours, sometimes it is indirect in the form of reports or disclosures. At times they are also direct victims of assaults, threats and abuse and may fear for their own safety (Humphreys and Stanley, 2006). Middle managers who may not directly interact with the children and families, but are constantly exposed to the stories, reports and consequences of the trauma, are not immune from these effects. They bear a high level of responsibility for protecting children and are susceptible to experiencing these adverse effects in the same way as other practitioners.

The organisational support offered has been found to be highly significant in protecting people from the effects of burnout and vicarious trauma. In relation to VT, Zoe Morrison (2007) has highlighted the role of the workplace in alleviating this by:
• ensuring appropriate and diverse caseloads
• providing effective supervision
• providing debriefing
• providing staff and peer support
• ensuring safety and comfort in the workplace, including a comfortable room for breaks, personable décor
• building a workplace culture that normalises the risks of VT. (Morrison, 2007)

In addition, self-care processes have been found to be helpful. For this reason we advocate making self-care plans on a regular basis. At the end of this chapter a self-care audit (Dwyer, 2002) is provided to assist in reflecting on current stressors and planning ways to manage these, as well as some ideas to assist with self-care planning. We advocate that supervisors do a self-care plan and encourage their staff to do the same. It may not be necessary for practitioners to discuss the details of their audit since this may be too personally revealing for some; however, the reflection on what the audit tells them they need to do for self-care is a useful point of discussion in supervision.

✶ Reflective exercise:

Look at the self-care audit at the end of this chapter. Spend some time reflecting on the themes and begin to make a self-care plan for the next three months.
The families we work with and how others respond to them and us

Child Protection is a highly politicised context where practitioners often feel they cannot win. Media portrayals of Child Protection practice are rarely positive and stories of harm prevented or good outcomes for children are unlikely to make it to the nightly news. Child Protection managers are often at the frontline of dealing with the political sensitivities of a case, as well as determining the best action for the children and families concerned. Practitioners often feel good outcomes will not be noticed, but adverse outcomes result in incident reports and reviews. While these are important mechanisms in monitoring practice, ensuring standards and assisting in reflective practice, they may add to the experience of managers feeling overwhelmed and unsupported.

The level of support available in the workplace

The level of support and supervision provided in the workplace can mediate the emotional impact of the work. Anderson (2000, p.841) says, ‘Social support, especially the support of one’s colleagues and supervisor, has been identified as ‘the coping strategy which offers the strongest preventative of burnout in child welfare workers’. In her study of Child Protection practitioners in the United States, those who were able to express emotions about the work experienced less emotional exhaustion, a factor associated with burnout. Team leaders, unit managers and principal practitioners are vital in contributing to a culture that recognises and legitimises the emotional burden of the work and in providing processes to support practitioners.

Conversely, Morrison (1997) describes the ‘professional accommodation syndrome’ (his adaptation of Rowland Summit’s, child abuse accommodation syndrome, 1983) to explain the damaging effects of an insensitive and pathologising response to the distress experienced by practitioners. He argues that it takes courage and strength for a practitioner to talk about and share the painful effects of the work on them and they are likely to experience secondary stress leading to denial, accommodation and retraction, if faced with a blaming or critical response within the agency. Managers can lead this cultural change by talking about VT as a normal part of work and by promoting and practising good self-care strategies. In our opinion, all staff should be encouraged to undertake self-care plans and actively attend to these in supervision, including managers themselves.

These three areas of influence on the thoughts and feelings of Child Protection managers are not mutually exclusive, rather they form a multi-textured influence where at any time, one area or another can be more powerful. At all times, however, an effective manager needs to adopt a stance of reflection. They should consider: ‘Why do I think and feel what I do? How does this lead me to act? Is this how I want to act in this situation?’ In discussing the role of analytical and intuitive thinking in Child Protection practice, Munro (2008) acknowledges the role of ‘emotional wisdom’ as a source of knowledge and skill, as is discussed in Chapter 4. This needs to be differentiated from ‘emotional burnout’ or ‘emotional burden’ as a source of action, and this can only be done by having an emotional awareness of the impact of the work on self and others.
Reflective exercise:

Read this case example and answer the following questions:

• Considering the influences on thoughts and feelings discussed in this chapter (patterns, vicarious trauma, work context, emotional nature of the work), what do you think is the underlying cause of ‘stuckness’ between Child Protection practitioners and the family services team?

• If you were the team leader or principal practitioner asked to consult on this case, what would the major difficulties be for you?

A Child FIRST agency has been working with a family of a single mother and four children aged 12, eight and twins, aged four. The mother’s previous relationships involved serious family violence towards her. The two eldest children were sexually abused by her previous partner, who is the father of the twins. His whereabouts are currently unknown. There is a suspicion that the mother has her own history of sexual abuse, though she has not acknowledged this. Six months ago, the two eldest children were found by an after-school carer to be sexually touching each other. The children were referred to a local agency specialising in problematic sexual behaviours.

The mother saw this as ‘curiosity’ and ‘play’ but has reluctantly taken the children to every appointment. However, the agency is concerned she has not acted on the advice they have given her about setting boundaries with the children. They are concerned that the eight-year-old is at risk from her older sister, though there have been no direct disclosures about this. However, the eight-year-old continues to draw explicit sexual pictures and has told her therapist she likes to ‘cuddle’ her sister and sleep in her bed. The 12-year-old has been very withdrawn in therapy and has denied that she ever touched her sister in any sexual way.

The treating agency made a report about this but, when questioned, both children and the mother have denied the girls sleep together. Child Protection has indicated it can take no further action and the treating agency should continue to see the family in therapy. The team leader of the treating agency called a meeting where she threatened to withdraw, saying they could not provide therapy to the children if they were not safe. Child Protection has maintained it has no grounds for further action. After the meeting, the manager of the service contacted the unit manager requesting a further meeting and indicated they will be withdrawing if no further assistance is provided from Child Protection.
Managing stress through managing demands

Child Protection is a highly pressured environment. To ensure managers remain thoughtful, they need to manage their time and cope effectively with the demands, rather than becoming overwhelmed. The stress associated with a pressured work environment can be contagious. A manager needs to make sure they are not a source of stress, support others under pressure, encourage a low-stress environment and attend to the sources of stress (SCIE, 2009).

Tasks can be understood according to where they sit on the urgency or importance continuum. The grid below provides one way of conceptualising and ordering these competing priorities. While much of Child Protection work can seem to be high on both accounts, careful consideration can help identify those tasks that are more urgent and important and to direct energies to ensure other tasks do not move into that category.

A tension for managers occurs when there are conflicting demands from above (for example, to allocate cases) and from below (protect me from overwhelming workloads). In addition, a context of reform can increase stress because staff may be struggling with learning new ways of doing tasks. Managers have an important role in helping staff re-evaluate workloads and decide priorities in changing workplace circumstances, such as during prolonged staff vacancies or reassignment of roles. The importance or urgency grid can be helpful in this process.

**Figure 6: Urgent or important grid**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High Importance and High Urgency</th>
<th>Low Importance and High Urgency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tasks that are critical and, if not dealt with, could mean harm to people supported, staff or the organisation.</td>
<td>These are often routine tasks such as audits and checks. If left they will move into category A.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High Importance and Low Urgency</th>
<th>Low Importance and Low Urgency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tasks that are important but not yet urgent. Diary time needs to be allocated to complete tasks.</td>
<td>These should only be done if all other tasks have been completed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2009
Mental agility

Managing one’s feelings has a direct impact on developing ‘mental agility’. Being flooded with intense feelings, particularly those that arouse fear, distress and anxiety, inhibits the brain’s ability to process information cognitively. This processing allows for abstract consideration and a response that integrates information from all sources, including affective and cognitive.

Perry (2006) notes the way that a fear-driven state prevents children from managing their own feelings and being free to engage in their environment. This in turn inhibits learning. The same is true for Child Protection practitioners and managers. We cannot learn and make thoughtful decisions if we are in an unprocessed emotional state. Chapter 5 includes discussion about the ‘stuck learning cycle’; being overwhelmed emotionally makes it difficult to reflect and to use all aspects of the cycle – feelings, analysing and action.

A practitioner who is overwhelmed emotionally may become stuck in the feeling part of the cycle or, alternatively, may avoid this part all together and get stuck in action or analysing. The same is true for managers. If managers are going to make sense of others’ stuckness they need to recognise it in themselves. In this discussion we look at:

- the role of emotion in integrating thoughts, feelings and memories and how managing emotions assists learning
- compassion satisfaction
- the practice of mindfulness in managing stress and distress
- a self-care audit and self-care plans.
Competency and survival modes of learning

As middle managers it is helpful to understand some basic interpersonal neuro-biology. Solomon and Siegal (2003) have highlighted the *major integrative function* of the middle prefrontal cortex in linking various parts of the brain functions to each other (body-proper, brainstem, limbic circuits and cortex). In short, the prefrontal cortex is a kind of manager in the brain that integrates thoughts, feelings and memories.

The activation of the middle prefrontal areas is crucial then for many of the emotional intelligence and critical reflection practices we discuss in this guide. Restoring emotional calm and mindfulness facilitates this brain integration; however, trauma and chronic stress activates the limbic system into a threat response – a persistent flight, fight and freeze mechanism. Solomon and Siegal (2003) highlight the functions that the middle prefrontal cortex integrates:

- **Body regulation**: Balance of the sympathetic (accelerator) and parasympathetic (brakes) branches of the autonomic nervous system.
- **Attuned communication**: Enables us to tune into others’ states and link minds.
- **Emotional balance**: Permits the lower limbic regions to become aroused enough so life has meaning, but not too aroused that we become flooded.
- **Response flexibility**: The opposite of a ‘knee-jerk’ reaction, this capacity enables us to pause before acting and inhibit impulses, giving us enough time to reflect on our various options for response.
- **Empathy**: Considering the mental perspective of another person.
- **Insight**: Self-knowing awareness, the gateway to our autobiographical narratives and self-understanding.
- **Fear extinction**: GABA (an inhibitory neurotransmitter) fibres project down to the amygdala and enable fearful responses to be calmed.
- **Intuition**: Being aware of the input of our body, especially information from the neural networks surrounding the intestines (a ‘gut feeling’) and our heart (‘heartfelt feelings’) enables us to be open to the wisdom of our non-conceptual selves.
- **Morality**: The capacity to think of the larger good and to act on these pro-social ideas, even when alone, appears to depend on an intact middle prefrontal region.

Carroll (2008) applied these ideas to supervision and described practitioners as functioning in ‘competency’ or ‘survival’ modes. Competency mode refers to that manner of functioning in work and supervision where neural integration is evident in thoughts, feelings and behaviours. Clearly, good supervision practice has a critical role in helping practitioners to remain in competency mode. On the other hand, when practitioners are feeling chronically stressed, overwhelmed, suffering vicarious trauma or burnt out, they are more likely to operate in survival mode. Managers need to recognise their own mode of operating and to assist in creating the conditions that allow their staff to operate in a competency mode.
Reflective exercise:

How would you recognise when you, as a supervisor, are functioning in survival mode?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survival-mode functioning</th>
<th>How does it affect practice?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Surviving the moment</td>
<td>Rigid thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just getting through</td>
<td>Restricted learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On heightened alert (hyper vigilance)</td>
<td>Reactive emotional responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overwhelmed</td>
<td>Difficult to have reflexivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronically stressed</td>
<td>Self-absorbed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numb</td>
<td>Compassion fatigue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unempathetic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How would you recognise when you, as a supervisor, are functioning in competency mode?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency-mode functioning</th>
<th>How does it affect practice?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining balance</td>
<td>Think about and plan for the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good support and connection to others</td>
<td>Able to reflect on practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good self-care practice</td>
<td>Use imagination and creativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good supervision</td>
<td>Response flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restoring emotional self-regulation</td>
<td>Dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness practices</td>
<td>Empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resilience and robustness</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learn in transformational ways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Empathetic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional balance</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Insight</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Attuned communication</td>
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<td>Think in moral and pro-social ways</td>
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- How can you assist practitioners to recognise when they are functioning in survival and competency modes?
- What assists practitioners to maintain or restore competency modes of functioning?
It’s not all bad – the role of compassion satisfaction

Much of this discussion has related to the stresses associated with Child Protection practice. However, we must also remember that practitioners continue to undertake effective, emotionally rewarding and remarkably inspiring practice with families and children. Indeed, when asked to consider why they stay in the job, experienced practitioners tend to acknowledge the sense of achievement and commitment they experience. Figley refers to this as ‘compassion satisfaction’, in contrast to the ‘compassion fatigue’ associated with the traumatic impact of the work (Figley, 1995).

Figley has developed a questionnaire to test compassion fatigue and compassion satisfaction. This is subject to copyright and is not included in this guide; however, the questionnaire is available online and can be printed out at no cost at <www.justdoiteasy.com>. We encourage managers and practitioners to do the questionnaire and use this for planning and reflection.

* Reflective exercise:

Consider an experience at work that you found challenging but that was ultimately successful in outcome.

- What was it about the issue or event that you found difficult?
- In what way did it challenge you?
- How did you judge whether it was ultimately successful?
- What personal strengths and qualities did you have to draw on?
- On reflection, what does this tell you about yourself in relation to the work you do?

(Adapted from Dwyer and Vivekananda, 2002)
Mindfulness and self-care: attending to possibilities

Saakvitne and Pearlman (1996) recommend that self-care strategies should aim to achieve balance within work life and between home and work life. They suggest strategies incorporate the physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual and workplace domains of life. They and others recommend the practice of ‘mindfulness’, ensuring that you stay present in the moment and available to the inspiration, comfort and joy of daily life.

Siegel (2007, p.xiii) notes there is strong evidence that the practice of mindfulness ‘creates scientifically recognized enhancements in our physiology, our mental functions, and our interpersonal relationships’ and that mindfulness can be practised in many forms from the formal (meditation, tai’ chi, yoga, prayer) to the informal (reflection, thoughtfulness and attunement to others).

In this discussion, we emphasise the importance of attending to the world available to us through our five senses and the opportunities this brings to find sources of comfort, pleasure and balance. Some strategies for self-care require restructuring of our daily lives and the development of new habits. But mindfulness is a practice that can be learned and utilised in any minute of any day. In workshops on work stress and vicarious trauma, participants most often complain that they would like to practice better self-care, but they just don’t have time! Well, the good news is, the practice of mindfulness can take, literally, no extra time at all.

One of the authors discovered this for herself with the help of her two-year-old son. After a busy day and contemplating the stresses of her work while supervising her son playing in the bath, she was shocked by a bucket of water thrown in her face. Her first response was to reprimand her child. However, the look of expectant delight on his face, waiting for mummy to join in the ‘game’, instantly brought her back to ground. While she had been thinking about her work, her child had clearly noticed that she was not really present and needed to be reminded!

This realisation led her to notice the many times when she was not really present to her child or herself in her daily life – a bit of a shock for someone who considered herself a pretty attuned parent! When she decided that she was now going to practise being aware and present whenever she was with her children, she began to really notice the pleasure of bath time: the smell of her toddler’s skin before and after the bath, the texture of his cheeks and hair, the sounds of the water splashing and the sound of his voice as they sang ‘Rubber ducky’.

This required no more time than she had previously given to bath time, but she discovered a number of improvements for herself and her children. The children were less demanding of attention, she felt more relaxed and happier and found the daily tasks of childcare were not only fun, they seemed to make the demands of the day less overwhelming.
**Reflective exercise:**

Think about the last meal you ate. How aware were you of the smells, sounds, feelings, images you encountered? How much were you ‘in your head’ and how much were you attuned to the possibilities around you?

Think about your five senses, if you re-enacted that meal:

- What would you hear around you as you ate?
- What could you see?
- What would you notice in your body – at the level of touch and feelings?
- What was the texture, flavour and colour of the food?
- What difference would it make to you to be mindful during this meal?
- If you were going to make the meal as enjoyable and comforting as possible, without going to significant effort, what would you do the same and what would you change?

**Ideas for self-care**

There are many ways to begin taking care of ourselves and each other. It is generally recognised that self-care needs to encompass the physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual and workplace dimensions of our lives (Saakvitne and Pearlman, 1996). The following suggestions for self-care are drawn from ideas offered by participants in workshops run by one of the authors of this guide (J.D.) and from a resource booklet by Saakvitne and Pearlman (Assessment worksheet 4, 1996). Use these as a starting point for thinking about what brings you pleasure and comfort.

**Physical self-care**

- Eat regularly and healthily.
- Have appropriate medical and dental checkups.
- Walk the dog, pat the cat.
- Get enough sleep and in a proper routine.
- Indulge with comforting physical touch – facials, massage, sex, cuddles.
- Wear clothes in styles and textures that make you feel good.
- Dance, sing, run or walk.
- Get or stay fit.
- Plan simple, healthy meals that bring you pleasure.
- Take a few minutes at the beginning or end of each day for ‘me’ time, such as reading the paper.

**Psychological self-care**

- Change your clothes when you come home.
- Make a list of things for tomorrow before you leave work – so you don’t need to remember anything.
- Make a rule about what time you finish or start work. Stick to it!
- Keep a journal.
- Read things unrelated to work; join a book club or share books with a friend.
• Watch movies that make you feel good.
• Attend counselling or therapy.
• Practise self-reflection and mindfulness.
• Say no to extra demands.
• Try new hobbies.

**Emotional self-care**
• List people who make you feel good and make a date to see them.
• Cry when you need to.
• Notice who, and what, makes you laugh. Do more of it!
• Make a list of as many things as you can think of that bring you pleasure or comfort – plan to do one each day.
• At the end of each day, notice one thing you did well.
• Play and be with children.
• Take social action in a form that makes you feel potent – donate, write letters, join protests.

**Spiritual self-care**
• Practice reflection and mindfulness.
• Spend time in nature – walk the dog, go to the park, watch the sun set.
• Find a spiritual connection to others – through community, club, faith.
• Sing.
• Pray, meditate.
• Listen to music.
• Read inspiring literature.
• Contribute to your community in some way unconnected to work.

**Workplace or professional self-care**
• Take regular breaks at meal times.
• Schedule your holidays and make plans to look forward to.
• Get to know your colleagues.
• Share meal times or breaks.
• Discuss VT and how other people cope.
• Organise a lunchtime walk group.
• Balance your case load and vary tasks as much as possible.
• Request supervision.
• Make your work space comfortable.
• Do professional development in an area where you can improve your skill or knowledge.
Self-care audit and self-care plan

Self-care doesn’t just happen, especially for those who are used to taking care of others. It needs to be planned for, valued and continually reasserted. Child Protection managers are well placed to lead the cultural change required to make self-care a workplace expectation. The self-care audit that follows was developed to encourage practitioners and students to reflect on the sources of distress associated with their work and to provide a basis for planning appropriate self-care strategies to address these (Dwyer, 2002). The audit and plan can be printed and done as part of supervision. Practitioners could be encouraged to check in every six months or so, to see how they are managing the impact of their work. First do the audit yourself, then make a self-care plan to address the major issues that arise in the audit.

Self-care audit
(Adapted from Dwyer, 2002)

Working with traumatised children can have both positive and negative impacts on practitioners. Developing appropriate self-care strategies is one way of limiting the negative impacts. This audit assists in identifying areas that may enhance or undermine self-care. It draws on the range of areas identified in the literature as being pertinent to managing potentially negative impacts. For the purpose of self-reflection, take time to go through the list below. On a separate piece of paper, answer each question as honestly as you can.

🌟 Reflect on your current work context

• How long have you been working in Child Protection or with other traumatised children?
• What opportunities for variety do you have in your work?
• What are the kinds of traumatic and distressing stories or experiences you are exposed to?
• What feelings do you have about the families you work with?
• What kind of support and supervision do you receive?

🌟 Reflect on your own life experiences

• Have you had difficult experiences in your own life?
• Are these similar to or different to those of the families you work with?
• How often does your work remind you of your own life experiences?
• In what ways has your life been different from their lives?
• What effects, both positive and negative, do you think your own experiences currently have on your life?
• What are the positive and negative ways this may impact on your work?
Reflect on your current life circumstances

• What stressors do you currently experience in your life?
• How do these impact on you?
• Which of these are likely to diminish, and which may be more enduring?
• Do any of these connect to aspects of your work and, if so, in what way?
• In your current circumstances, what brings you pleasure and comfort?
• Who are the people in your life who are good for your spirit and wellbeing?
• Who are the people in your life who add stress and distress?
• Who and what are your major supports?

Reflect on your coping style

• What coping strategies do you currently use in managing stress and distress?
• Which of these are potentially problematic for you?
• Does your approach to problem solving assist you in managing stress?

Considered together, what are the sources of stress and comfort that arise in each of these areas? Based on these reflections, begin to consider what would need to go into a self-care plan that covers the immediate, short term and long term:

• On a daily and weekly basis, what are the things you need to do or not do to keep balance in your life?
• On a monthly and regular basis, what are the things you need to do or not do?
• Who do you need to spend more or less time with?
• In the next six months, what long-term changes or strategies do you need to develop to limit the impact of your work on your life?
Self-care plan (from Dwyer, 2002)

In the next ____ months I will make self-care a priority in my life because:

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

Not taking care of myself has the following impact on my life:

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

When I take good care of myself I notice:

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

The following people or places or activities bring me pleasure and comfort:

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

My strategies and plans for self-care (in both the personal and professional realm) are:
• On a daily, weekly or fortnightly basis I will:

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

• On a regular basis I will:

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

• In the next three to six months I will:

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
Summary

In this chapter, we have explored the importance of mastering our own emotions and assisting others to master theirs. We highlighted the importance of emotional intelligence and the influences on how we experience our thoughts and feelings including formative professional and personal experiences, the impact of vicarious trauma and the organisational culture in which we work and the interactive patterns in which we participate.

We then examined the concept of survival and competency modes of learning and the role of the prefrontal cortex in integrating thoughts, feelings and memory. Finally, we suggested that effective self-care planning was a key to maintaining balance and managing the emotional stress of the work and recommended the practice of mindfulness, as one way to begin to build in daily experiences of comfort and pleasure and to counteract the emotional stress associated with Child Protection work. We highlighted the role of the manager in contributing to a cultural and relational context that recognises the emotional impacts of the work and builds in protective mechanisms to support practitioners at all levels.
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inspire

reflect  engage  support

collaborate  enable  learn
Chapter 3 Engaging others

In this chapter we cover:

Critical components for establishing supervisory relationships

• developing a shared understanding
• negotiating a supervision agreement
• working within a cultural competence framework
• understanding the importance of past experiences
• understanding development over time: two models for guidance
• understanding adult learning: process and style.

Maintaining and sustaining supervisory relationships

• engaging others in the tasks and functions of supervision
• purpose and process of feedback
• the bridging interview.

Understanding intra-agency and interagency relationships

• a psychological model of communication
• formulating questions – reflective, strength based and solution focused
• listening deeply
• interagency collaboration.

Capability: Engaging others

Engaging others involves working professionally and effectively with others, listening deeply and building positive and purposeful relationships that help deliver the best outcomes.

The four capabilities within this cluster are summarised below.

1. Professional maturity – involves behaving in a mature, poised and professional manner as a representative of both the profession and the department.

2. Working together – is the ability to work effectively alongside children, families and communities towards the achievement of goals.

3. Listening deeply – is engaging in effective dialogue with others that communicates with a deep respect and empathy for their circumstances, background, culture and intentions.

4. Building relationships – involves identifying, building and nurturing professional relationships with key individuals, groups and other key stakeholders.
Introduction

In recent years, we have become increasingly aware of the value of relationship-based practice in Child Protection (Ruch, 2005). In Victoria, the Best Interests Case Practice Model acknowledges that building good relationships with children, adolescents, their families, communities and services will ensure more effective case practice. Relationship-based practice recognises the uniqueness of each family’s situation and the diverse sources of knowledge and theory that are required to make sense of their complex and unpredictable situations.

Child Protection practitioners need to develop their capacity to build and sustain empathetic professional relationships in order to address risk and to help create change in families. If practitioners are going to engage in relationship-based practice, they also require significant support and challenge to examine and evaluate their styles of practice and how they have made sense of situations. Much of this developmental learning can be done in the context of a safe and nurturing supervisory relationship. Managers need to create a supervisory context that enables and ensures effective relationship building.

This chapter looks in detail at how middle managers can build effective relationships with practitioners and others across the system. To do this, supervision needs to be tailored to the needs of each supervisee. The dimensions outlined in this chapter provide a map for managers in assessing practitioner needs and engaging them in thoughtful ways. We look at early engagement in supervisory relationships and on building and sustaining those relationships so that the supervisee develops professionally over time. We suggest that a thoughtful and purposeful supervisory relationship can influence practitioners in building and sustaining positive relationships with families and achieving improved outcomes for children (see Chapter 1).

We also present a psychological model of communication (Reder and Duncan, 2003) and suggest there are five levels of influence that need to be considered by managers endeavouring to communicate effectively and engage others. Managers model effective collaborative practice by the demonstration of a ‘communication mindset’ and ‘holding other professionals in mind’. We explore the values, attitudes and beliefs that reflect a position of collaborative practice (Morrison, 1998).
Collaboration and cooperation in Child Protection practice

Effective Child Protection practice is dependent on working effectively with others in the wider service system. Child FIRST and the reform agenda have prioritised interagency partnerships and collaboration, as critical for good practice outcomes. Historically, most child welfare systems across the world have struggled to find ways of achieving these successful interagency relationships, beyond individual examples of practice excellence. However, there is increasing evidence in a range of fields that effective collaboration leads to better outcomes (Ruch, 2005; Torres and Margolin, 2003; NAPCWA, 2002).

Effective collaboration and partnership building across organisations takes place at different levels and for different purposes. Horwath and Morrison (2007, p.57) highlight these different levels from the individual to the organisational:

• **Communication** is the first level of collaboration and involves individuals talking together.
• **Cooperation** requires slightly more purposeful activity, such as working together on a case-by-case basis.
• **Coordination or confederation** occurs at an organisational level and is more formalised, but there are no sanctions for non compliance.
• **Federation or coalition** requires joint structures and some ceding of autonomy.
• **Integration** occurs when there is a relinquishment of the old identity and a new organisation is formed.

If we consider the impact of the reforms on Child Protection practice, such as establishment of Child FIRST partnerships and the collocation of community-based Child Protection practitioners, we can see that this has required agencies to collaborate at many different levels up to, and including, the level of ‘federation or coalition’.

In this discussion, we are going to focus on communication, cooperation and coordination at the level of case practice decision making, joint working and projects, since this is the level at which Child Protection middle managers operate. However, we recognise that building partnerships at the level of middle managers and working well with others across agencies is diluted if there is not sufficient attention at senior levels of management to the challenges of high-level formal integration of services. These arrangements legitimise and support efforts made by practitioners and middle managers.
Establishing supervisory relationships

The supervisory relationship is ‘the worker’s most essential helping relationship’ (Knapman and Morrison, 1998, p.17) because it enhances practice with children and families. Supervision is a means through which middle managers engage others and contribute to cultural change in the workplace (Chapter 5).

While the conversations in supervision between team leaders and unit managers, and unit managers and the Child Protection manager, may not have a practise focus, these relationships are equally important to achieving good outcomes. It is through relationships built on trust, openness and confidence, that the management and leadership functions of Child Protection are enacted (Chapter 1).

The supervisory role is complex and demanding and to be sufficiently emotionally attuned and thoughtful, and therefore, effective, all supervisors require adequate training and ongoing supervision themselves. The powerful cascading impact of supervision when delivered effectively at every level is a key sign of a collaborative organisational culture (Gibbs, Atkins and Miranda, 2009).

What assists with engagement?

A number of steps and frameworks assist a manager to engage staff in reflective supervision and to develop a collaborative community of practice. While these may appear particularly important for new and inexperienced practitioners, we suggest that some aspects can be generalised across management levels.

They include:

• developing a shared understanding of professional supervision
• use of a supervision agreement
• culturally competent supervision and management practice
• understanding and exercising authority
• taking a supervision history
• having a stage-of-worker development framework
• knowing the practitioner’s learning stage and styles
• meeting the tasks and functions of supervision.

Some of these ideas will already be familiar from prior training. We do not intend to describe each in great detail and suggest that those interested in enhancing their learning either:

• undertake the ‘Beginning Practice in Supervision and Leadership’ four-day training program
• complete the half-day Learning Lab series
• further reading Chapter 4 in Tony Morrison’s book, Supervision in social care (second edition).7

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7 Some of these frameworks are also discussed in Beginning Practice in Child Protection, so frontline workers will be familiar with some of the concepts in relation to supervision.
Most often, we consider the value of a negotiated supervision agreement at the level of practitioner and team leader. Our view is that all staff in the Child Protection program must be engaged in a supervisory relationship even though, as staff progress upwards through the hierarchy into senior positions, their learning needs will change and the content of discussions will rarely be directly linked to case practice. However, the fundamentals should remain because the values of openness, transparency and collaborative practice continue to underpin these relationships.

**Developing a shared understanding of professional supervision**

Understanding the benefits of supervision and its meaning in Child Protection is one of the important steps to engaging practitioners in a collaborative learning culture. Dissatisfaction with the quality of supervision is one of the factors associated with low morale and high attrition rates in Child Protection. This underscores the importance of clarity and agreement from the beginning.

**What are the benefits of supervision?**

There are four key stakeholders for the delivery of effective supervision:

- the practitioner
- the child and their family
- the organisation
- multidisciplinary agencies involved with the family.

Traditionally, supervision has primarily focused on enhancing practice with families and professional development and support of practitioners. Supervision also has significant implications for staff-management relations, the organisation as a whole and interagency relationships. Supervision is one important structure and process through which the organisation manages and communicates with staff. It provides upward feedback to senior managers about what life is like at the frontline and provides practitioners with assistance to understand and implement policy changes and new practice developments. The way supervision is carried out conveys much to practitioners about how much they are valued in the organisation.

It is through good supervision that practitioners are encouraged to keep other professionals ‘in mind’ and interagency collaborative practice skills are enhanced. Child FIRST amplifies the necessity of practitioners to engage on a regular basis with other professionals. This requires practitioners to give a clear explanation of their role and function in multidisciplinary forums. It is important that all practitioners recognise the invaluable contributions other agencies can make and work to engage in collaborative relationships with professionals from different professional backgrounds. These ideas are further explored later in the chapter.
What is supervision in Child Protection?
The Department of Human Services' Child Protection definition of supervision and its functions are contained in the Child Protection *Supervision standards* document (Department of Human Services, 2007). In Chapter 1, Morrison’s six-factor linking model is described, where the core component of ‘chain of Influence’ recognises what happens between staff at different levels in the Child Protection process, making its way through the chain to the practitioner–family relationship.

Using a supervision agreement
Research has persistently highlighted barriers to effective supervision. Most commonly, practitioners describe a gulf between the espoused policy about frequency and type of supervision and their experience of what is delivered to them (Gibbs, 2002). This emphasises the importance of supervisors discussing the expectations and responsibilities (of both the supervisor and supervisee) early and how both are going to work together. The material that is generated and agreed through this discussion forms the basis of a supervision agreement. This process builds trust and confidence early in the relationship and it also uncovers and addresses the assumptions that have been made by both parties. The agreement can be reviewed on a regular basis.

Morrison (2005) suggests that an effective supervision agreement is:
- based on agency policy
- clarifies purposes and tasks of supervision
- includes four functions of supervision
- includes four stakeholders of supervision
- includes the frequency, location and recording of supervision
- clarifies what is, and what is not, negotiable
- agrees how feedback will be given
- clarifies the boundary of confidentiality
- sets down how the contract will be reviewed
- is written and signed by both parties.

Expectations and responsibilities
Important aspects of the agreement can be reached through exploring four key questions. Before you look at the list below, take a moment to jot down a few of your own ideas.

What does the supervisee hope to gain and expect from supervision?
For example, these expectations may include: having supervision in line with the standards document; receiving effective and sensitive supervision; being encouraged to contribute to the agenda and session; having permission to express feelings; and that supervision is located within a framework of cultural competence and models anti-oppressive practice principles.

What does the supervisee plan to contribute?
For example: to share responsibility for making supervision work; to actively participate; to be clear and honest in seeking assistance; and to give and accept constructive feedback.
What does the supervisor expect in supervision?
For example: that the supervisee shares relevant information regarding cases in an open and objective manner; for supervisees to respect the confidentiality of their own supervision with peers; that supervisees prepare for, and acknowledge, issues to be dealt with in supervision; and that supervisees come prepared for supervision.

What are the responsibilities of the supervisor?
For example: to organise and arrange supervision as set down in the standards; to ensure supervision is given appropriate priority; to ensure that discrimination does not take place in supervision; and to acknowledge and deal with gender and power differences that might impact on supervision.

Open and frank discussion about expectations and responsibilities early in the supervision relationship means there is less chance of barriers getting in the way. Once aired and an agreement reached, it is much easier to talk about difficulties that arise later. Commonly, supervisors want to talk about lack of preparation or a difficulty about talking through feelings. Supervisees may want to raise the lack of opportunity to reflect and analyse practice experiences. The early discussion and agreement reached provides one way of clarifying what is getting in the way of good supervision and dissatisfaction or problems can be raised in a less confrontational way.

These issues are important contributors to better engagement in the early stage of the relationship; in addition, they model the potential benefits in their own work with families, other staff or organisations and provide clarity about roles, responsibilities and expectations.

Culturally competent management and supervisory practice
Cultural diversity is an important issue for the manager to consider early in the relationship. The exercise of authority and power in supervision is also discussed in Chapter 1 and we suggest this material is considered alongside that. Managers are expected to work within a culturally competent professional framework and, in particular, to be familiar with the Aboriginal cultural competence framework (Department of Human Services, 2008).

An effective supervisor, therefore, needs to lead the discussion about diversity and to demonstrate a willingness to learn how to be helpful. ‘As supervisors we model how to encourage another person to tell us what we need to know in order for us to be helpful to them’ (Rapp, 2000, p.96). Quite apart from the major cultural differences related to ethnicity, gender, race and religion, sexuality and even class, there are small and significant differences that can be important factors to consider in supervision:

‘Culture is a means whereby the infinite complexity of the world is reduced to a manageable simplicity. It provides a map that guides us in how to see, what to believe, what to value, how to behave, how to think about ourselves. One’s culture provides off-the-shelf answers to some of life’s most complex problems and dilemmas. Culture also provides a means whereby one effortlessly belongs to a group, and derives security and purpose from such belonging.’ (Minas and Slove, 2001, p.475)
In recent years, we have become more aware of the importance of culturally competent practice and care. Aboriginal cultural competence is a key facet of the Victorian Best Interests Case Practice Model. Child Protection practice must address children’s safety, stability and development needs, which incorporates a lens of culture alongside that of age, stage and gender. It is equally important that middle managers apply this lens to working with staff, many of whom come from non-dominant cultures.

A collaborative learning culture values difference and recognises the importance of thinking about socially structured power and how this impacts at every level of the Child Protection process (Morrison, 2005). Consider, for example, an Indigenous Child Protection practitioner whose family includes members of the Stolen Generation, working in a team where all the other practitioners are non-Indigenous. What might it mean for that Aboriginal practitioner to be in an authority relationship with you, over and above the issues faced by non-Indigenous supervisees?

The capacity to critically reflect on power relations, and what they mean, entails self-reflection and the capacity to limit one’s own cultural bias (Department of Human Services, 2008). It is vital that middle managers think about how systemic racism and structures impact on practitioners who report to them and model cultural competence with the specific intent of influencing case practice with children and their families.

**Reflection:**

Consider one of your staff members.

- What do you need to know about this supervisee’s cultural differences in order to have a good working relationship with them and to be helpful to them?
- How can you recognise different assumptions, norms and attitudes?
- How can you safely talk about these differences?

Managers need to consider the impact of their own cultural assumptions – whether they are of the dominant culture or a minority culture. How, for example, does being a woman/man, heterosexual/homosexual/bisexual, young/older, CALD/Australian born, impact on how you experience and undertake your role? In Chapter 2, we discuss the influences on thoughts and behaviours and in Chapter 1, we explore cultural competence. The discussion in those chapters may assist in thinking about the cultural and other influences on a manager and they way these may impact in positive or negative ways on practice.
Exercising authority

In addition to a culturally competent framework, a manager needs to be consciously aware of how they exercise authority. In Chapter 1, we stressed the importance of staff in a statutory setting understanding the different sources of authority (see Obholzer and Roberts, 1994). Authority from within, or personal authority, evolves over time and is crucially linked to past experiences.

It is important that supervisors and supervisees share their understandings about what authority means in the relationships and the parallels in practice situations. This may well raise issues relating to boundaries and friendships. For example, successfully managing the transition from team member to supervisor, or team leader to unit manager, requires conscious reflection on how the new relationships with others can be negotiated and managed, while taking account of lines of accountability, prior and current power dynamics and, in some cases, existing friendships.

The transition from team member to leader is characteristically difficult for most new managers and may highlight issues of power and authority not previously experienced with colleagues (Gibbs, 2002). In this guide we have recommended relationship-based leadership, however, that is not the same as being ‘friends’ or ‘equals’. Indeed, effective and transparent use of authority is a prerequisite for this kind of leadership. Difficulties with this area are not reserved for new leaders; power dynamics are present in all supervisory relationships.

Cahn cited in Cousins, 2004 p177 in observing that ‘while supervisors often see themselves as having relaxed, collegial attitudes, they were often seen by supervisees as admired teachers, but also as feared judges’. She goes on:

‘We are kidding ourselves if we pretend that power differences either do not matter or have been overcome. People learn in childhood that there are certain risks involved in being honest with people in authority – especially when negative feedback is possible.’

(Cousins, 2004, p.177)

An effective leader cannot rely solely on role authority and must be able to demonstrate professional authority and personal authority. This is discussed later in this chapter when we consider the use of authority in collaborative interagency relationships.

🌟 Reflective exercise:

- Can you recall an example where you or one of your staff moved to ‘the other side of the fence’ (Gibbs, 2002) and was promoted from within the team or office?
- What steps did you or they take to manage the new authority relationships?
- What did you learn from this experience?
Taking a supervision history

One of the most useful tools for promoting engagement early in the supervisory relationship is completing a supervisee’s history of supervision. The aim of the exercise is to assist the supervisor to understand what previous supervision experiences might mean for the current relationship. The supervisee is encouraged to talk about the supervision experiences they have had, what they found useful and not so useful. This is not to find out about previous supervisors, but is designed to help the supervisee to reflect on what behaviours and aspects of the supervisory style they found promoted and hindered learning. It illustrates a willingness and desire to listen to, and get to know, the supervisee.

Reflective exercise:

• Think of a significant supervisory or management experience that you have had as a learner.
• What made it such a significant experience?
• What was it about the experience that made it such a ‘powerful teacher’?
• How did you learn from that experience?
• Think back on the values, attitudes and actions of an influential and important manager or supervisor in your work life.
• What was it about this person that made them such a powerful teacher?

Usually significant learning experiences involve our emotions, a change in perception and sometimes an influential person. These previous supervision and management experiences are powerful shapers of our current beliefs, attitudes and feelings about growth-promoting and destructive learning experiences.

Reflective exercise:

• When did a practitioner last tell you something about their prior experience of supervision or management that helped you to understand them better and to know how to work well with them?
• Can you think about any examples from your current relationships with practitioners where you would like to ask them more about their earlier experiences of supervision and management?
Stages of practitioner development: two models for guidance

One of the essential skills in engaging practitioners in professional supervision is assessing the level at which particular practitioners are performing and their stage of development. Traditionally, supervisory efforts have understandably focused on meeting the development needs of the influx of new practitioners. However, the experience of supervisors confronted with new practitioners from a variety of backgrounds, plus practitioners who are broadening their skills across the whole field of protective work, suggest that supervisors benefit from knowledge about what they can expect at different stages of practitioner development.

We draw on two models, one from the United States (Salus, 2004) and another from the United Kingdom (Hawkins and Shohet, 2006) to explore ideas around practitioners’ stage of development and to consider the implications this has for supervision and management needs. As with all models taken from one cultural context and applied elsewhere, it is important to take adequate account of contextual differences. For example, in Victoria, Child Protection practitioners are required to undertake Beginning Practice, prior to being permitted to do certain tasks. We also know that experiences, such as changing role or team, can take a practitioner to an earlier stage of development. They will need to be supported through this developmental process, as it can be challenging for experienced practitioners to find themselves feeling less confident and capable about doing the work.

Model 1

Salus (2004) describes a four-stage model that seeks to identify the level of supervision support required by practitioners at different levels of experience and independence. It is based on practitioners moving through time and graduating from high anxiety to relative independence.

At any moment, the amount and nature of supervision provided must reflect the actual stage of independence reached by the supervisee and not be based merely on the length of time passed. For this reason we have removed this time frame. The model is useful in considering what kind of support practitioners may need at the different stages of development.

We have adapted the fourth stage from what Salus (2004) terms the ‘relative independence stage’ to ‘established collaborative learner stage’,* to reflect a collaborative learning framework discussed extensively in Chapter 1. These four stages are summarised in table form:*8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First stage</th>
<th>Second stage</th>
<th>Third stage</th>
<th>Fourth stage*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A period of high anxiety.</td>
<td>Make it or break it.</td>
<td>Basic skills stage – good assessment skills and rudimentary intervention skills.</td>
<td>Established collaborative learning partnership – relative independence from directive supervision.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8 Parts of this analysis are adapted from ‘The leadership challenge: A supervision kit for protective services supervisors’ (Protective Services Training Unit, 1995).
Stage 1. High anxiety

The first three to six months on the job are invariably the most difficult for Child Protection practitioners but also potentially the time when they learn most. Dealing initially with abusive and neglectful families can cause a great deal of emotional upheaval for the practitioner. Staff can also typically feel overwhelmed by the demands of the work and believe themselves to be inadequate for the tasks at hand. Both these factors can lead to resistance and avoidance becoming part of the practitioners repertoire if the supervisor is unable to provide sufficient guidance and security. In order to assist the practitioner during this difficult stage, the supervisor should:

- Accept and meet practitioner needs for both structure, support and direction, for example, by doing joint visits, attending court cases or arranging for a fellow team member to do so, being readily accessible for briefing and debriefing.
- Be somewhat more directive than would be appropriate with more experienced practitioners.
- Provide information tools, such as standards and various manuals required to perform the work.
- Accept and normalise confusion by practitioners.
- Allow practitioners to express anxiety.
- Pair inexperienced practitioners with experienced staff members to provide ready access to a competent model.

Stage 2. Make it or break it

At this stage, practitioners are beginning to develop confidence in their knowledge and skills but are still vulnerable to high anxiety. The supervisor needs to balance support with encouragement to be appropriately independent. This requires an understanding that practitioners will make mistakes as they struggle to apply new skills and concepts. However, practitioners can become overwhelmed by mistakes and lose confidence. This can lead them to regress to an earlier stage of development that their experience warrants. Supervisors need to:

- expect and allow some mistakes
- allow them to participate more in decision-making
- help them reflect on their observations, to recognise common themes and new learning.

Stage 3. Basic skills – Good assessment skills and rudimentary intervention skills

This stage is the beginning of independence as practitioners have incorporated basic knowledge and are generally able to identify gaps in knowledge and analyse errors of judgement. Thus, the supervisor can begin to allow the practitioner to take the initiative in the supervision process. Supervision will be more characterised by the supervisor initially listening rather than talking. At this stage, the supervisor is concerned with the consolidation of ability and confidence. To assist this, the supervisor’s focus should be to:

- listen carefully and identify not only what is said but what is not said before asking clarifying questions
- identify practitioners’ families or issues.
Stage 4. Established collaborative learner

At this stage, practitioners should have a good idea of what their own supervisory needs are and be able to determine much of the agenda for supervision. Although practitioners will always be subject to supervisory direction, there can be greater autonomy, and emphasis will be on the supervisor as a consultant and colleague rather than authority figure. However, the supervisor must still assist practitioners at this stage in clarifying their own professional development and identifying learning needs. They must also continue to provide a sounding board for discussion of complex cases.

Practitioners are able to appreciate and take the opportunity to use supervision as a genuinely collaborative learning partnership. They are able to use supervision to experiment with new ideas and different ways of approaching case issues (rather than sticking to rudimentary or textbook practices).

The practitioner is also able to engage in ‘deeper level’ and transformational learning. They understand the processes by which they learn and understand the assumptions that underpin our learning.

Model 2

The second model, by Hawkins and Shohet (2006), summarised from an earlier edition in table form by Morrison (2005) overleaf, although not specific to a Child Protection is useful. The authors attempt to identify the different tasks of the supervisor as the practitioner develops over time.

What characterises each stage is the developing centre of focus and concern for the supervisee:

**Stage 1:** self-centred – ‘Can I make it in this work?’

**Stage 2:** client-centred – ‘Can I help this client make it’

**Stage 3:** process-centred – ‘How are we relating together?’

**Stage 4:** process-in-context-centred – ‘How do processes interpenetrate?’

(Hawkins and Shohet, 2006, p.74)

It is important to note that in a collaborative learning organisation and community of practice, models of independent, fully autonomous practitioners do not make sense. Practitioners are supported by a learning organisational culture and are always accountable for their practice but that must be supervised by a line manager. This is of paramount importance in a statutory Child Protection setting.
Figure 7: Stages of development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• dependent on supervision</td>
<td>• fluctuates between autonomy and dependence</td>
<td>• increased professional confidence</td>
<td>• professional maturity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• anxious about being evaluated</td>
<td>• over-confident vs. overwhelmed</td>
<td>• sees wider context in which user’s needs exist – “helicopter skills”</td>
<td>• can articulate professional knowledge and insight to others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• diffidence about making professional judgements</td>
<td>• less simplistic, engages with complexity</td>
<td>• can generalise and reflect on learning and skills</td>
<td>• able to supervise or teach others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• over-focus on content, task and detail</td>
<td>• tailors interventions to users</td>
<td>• supervision more collaborative and challenging</td>
<td>• increased self-awareness of strengths and gaps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• owning the role</td>
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Supervisory needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supervisory needs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• information</td>
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<tr>
<td>• teaching</td>
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<tr>
<td>• constructive and regular feedback</td>
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<tr>
<td>• encouragement</td>
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Adapted from Hawkins and Shohet, 1989, in Morrison, 2005, p.102

Used together, the Hawkins and Shohet (2006) and the Salus (2004) models provide a conceptual framework for thinking about practitioner development and the implications it has for supervision.
Learning frameworks: implications for supervision

As well as considering practitioners’ stage of development, we also need to understand how they learn and develop. There are a number of frameworks for this and the implications this has for supervision. Below is a list of principles about adult learning that have been adapted by Morrison (2005) from work done in the 1980s by the UK Further Education Unit. We suggest that you start by reflecting on the extent to which these or similar ideas underpin current supervisory and management experiences, both as a supervisor and supervisee.

Adults learn best when they:

- move from dependency to collaboration
- make use of their own experiences and have these valued as a contribution to problem solving
- reflect upon the experience in a positive and safe climate, where openness, trust and commitment are modelled by the supervisor
- learn from problems and activities rather than abstract subjects
- are involved in negotiation, take responsibility and set goals
- focus on moving from analysis of a particular experience to general principles
- acknowledge the importance of process as well as task
- make use of the non-verbal, the underlying and the unexpected
- are enabled by learning facilitators and learning partnerships, not teachers
- value emotions as sources of information and intelligence.

In this chapter we consider related frameworks. We first look at the concept of ‘transformational learning’ (Carroll, 2008) and suggest that the role of the supervisor is to assist workers to develop complex ways of reflecting and learning, that is, to learn how to learn. We then discuss Honey and Mumford’s (1986) learning style questionnaire that was developed from the work of Kolb to use as a useful prompt for facilitating engagement at an early stage in the relationship. It is imperative that managers consider the effects of shared or different learning styles on those they supervise and among different members of a team.
Transformational learning

Current definitions describe supervision as a ‘learning intervention.’ It is recognised that there are different levels of learning, from the concrete to the more abstract and complex. These different levels of learning are described by Hawkins and Smith (2006):

**Level 1:** Skills and competencies.

**Level 2:** Performance and capability, which involves the ability to use a skill at the right time, in the right way and in the right place.

**Level 3:** Developmental learning is somewhat longer term and refers to thinking and acting more holistically, integrating both the professional and personal.

**Level 4:** Transformational learning is the evaluation of old mind sets and mental maps, which involves coming to new ways of perceiving things, and connecting more to the bigger picture.

Carroll (2008) argues that supervision has an important role to play in assisting practitioners towards transformational learning. We have argued in Chapter 4, that reflection assists practitioners to develop the ability to see patterns in new knowledge and to generalise from these new learnings. This is sometimes called ‘deep level’ learning and is also akin to transformational learning, as described by Carroll:

‘Reflection leads to different forms of learning all of which are the appropriate domain of supervision. The deepest form of learning used in supervision is transformational learning which combines both personal and professional learning. In transformational learning, supervisees critically reflect not just on their own experience, but the way they construct that experience. In doing so, they open themselves to new mental maps or meaning-making frameworks that help interpret their experience, learn from it and go back to their work with new insights and new behaviours. This is supervision at its creative best.’

(Carroll, 2008, p.44)

He goes on to describe stages of transformational learning. These can be seen to relate, in part, to a practitioner’s development as described earlier in this chapter but, as he points out, they are dependent on the capacity to reflect:

‘Critical reflection allows us to become aware of how we come to our learning and knowledge, puts us in touch with our “blind spots, deaf spots and dumb spots”, brings to the forefront conversations we do not have with ourselves and lets us get in touch with our own integrity and authenticity.’

(Carroll, 2008, p.43)
The stages of learning Carroll (2008, p.43) identifies are:

**Stage 1: Downloading** – We see what we already know. We think as we have always thought. New knowledge and information confirms what we previously knew.

**Stage 2: Noticing outside of ourselves** – We take a stance away from ourselves and can observe what disconfirms our theories, frameworks and models.

**Stage 3: Awareness and 'making sense of’** – We open ourselves to new ideas, theories and frameworks. We use empathy to understand from other people’s perspectives. We listen deeply and ‘dialogue with integrity’, allowing the new to influence what is already in our lives.

**Stage 4: Critical reflection** – We begin the process of considering, sifting, thinking through, connecting, discussing and making meaning while recognising the meaning making processes of others. Generative dialogue opens the possibility for learning organisations, collective practice wisdom and collaborative communities of practice.

**Stage 5: Transformational learning** – We understand the processes by which we learn. We understand the assumptions that underpin our learning. We understand the contexts in which our learning and meaning making takes place.

*Reflective exercise:*

Think of one of the staff you supervise.

- What stage do you think they are at in relation to their learning?
- What sort of learning does your supervision practice support and facilitate?
- How can you use the stages of transformational learning in your supervisory practice?
Learning styles and supervision

As well as stages of learning, supervisors need to consider the individual learning style of their staff. We all have preferred styles of learning and supervisors can more effectively engage others when they know their own learning style and that of their staff. While styles vary across contexts and individuals will vary the style they adopt according to the situation and how secure they feel in the learning context, it is apparent that people have preferences for how they learn.

Below we have included a brief summary based on the four learning styles identified by Honey and Mumford (1986). The reader will see the connection between them and Kolb’s learning cycle, described in Chapter 4. In that chapter we indicate that for learning to occur, the learner needs to be able to engage with each part of the cycle; it is therefore important that supervisees are encouraged to modify and practise the different skills that accompany each learning style.

Reflective exercise:

Read the following example to illustrate how problems might emerge when a blanket ‘one size fits all’ approach to learning dominates.

Two new practitioners present a team leader with their first court report. The team leader is someone who likes to get on and do things without ‘procrastinating’. He is keen on getting quick results and feels under pressure to get new practitioners up to speed on the full range of work. He suggested they both give it a go and they can later discuss it in supervision.

One practitioner has produced a very lengthy account of everything that Child Protection had done in the case, organised in a chronological date format with little analysis and a recommendation that appeared poorly justified. The practitioner reported that they assumed they needed to include all the details of involvement for the court. The practitioner reports feeling ‘relieved’ that she has managed to get it done because it was a ‘nightmare task’.

The other practitioner struggled for days to produce even a draft and finally presented a report with detailed references to legislation, departmental standards and theoretical material about children who had been neglected but little application to the subject child and family. The practitioner reported that they assumed they needed to include theory to demonstrate credibility to the magistrate. This practitioner reports being anxious that they may not have managed to refer to all the departmental standards, policy documents and aspects of the case practice model.

Each practitioner is demonstrating a different learning style. The first has been able to ‘act’ but needs assistance to reflect and analyse the meaning of ‘data’ about the child and family and how it must be synthesised into a case formulation or understanding, which can then inform the recommendation. The second practitioner has taken an analytical approach, reading and thinking about the implications of departmental procedures, processes and formal knowledge in relation Child Protection practice but has not been able to connect with the actual experience of this child and family. The team leader might have been better to consider a range of learning activities and approaches to help both practitioners at their stage of development and different learning styles. Can you identify learning strategies that might help these individuals?
There are no right answers as to how people learn. All approaches have merit and each may suit different practitioners at different times. Practitioners can often tell you which approach or combination of approaches is most useful for them. The coach, in this case the team leader, can put in place a range of learning approaches to strengthen weaker styles.

The four learning styles (based on Morrison, 2005) are:

1. **Activists**

Activists involve themselves fully and without bias in new experiences. They enjoy the here and now and are happy to be dominated by immediate experiences. They are open-minded, not sceptical, and this tends to make them enthusiastic about anything new. Their philosophy is ‘I’ll try anything once’. They tend to act first and consider the consequences afterwards. Their days are filled with activity. They tackle problems by brainstorming. As soon as the excitement from one activity has died down they are busy looking for the next. They tend to thrive on the challenge of new experiences but are bored with implementation and longer term consolidation. In short, activists like (Carroll M and Gilbert M):

- to think on their feet
- to have short sessions
- plenty of variety
- the opportunities to initiate
- to participate and have fun.

2. **Reflectors**

Reflectors like to stand back to ponder experiences and observe them from many different perspectives. They collect data, both first-hand and from others, and prefer to think about it thoroughly before coming to any conclusion. The thorough collection and analysis of data about experiences and events is what counts, so they tend to postpone reaching definitive conclusions for as long as possible. Their philosophy is to be cautious.

They are thoughtful people who like to consider all possible angles and implications before making a move. They prefer to take a back seat in meetings and discussions. They enjoy observing other people in action. They listen to others and get the drift of the discussion before making their own point. They tend to adopt a low profile and have a slightly distant, tolerant, unruffled air about them. When they act it is part of a wide picture which includes the past, as well as the present, and others’ observations in addition to their own. In summary, reflectors like (Carroll and Gilbert, 2006, p.45):

- to think before acting
- thorough preparation
- to research and evaluate
- to make decisions in their own time
- to listen and observe.
3. Theorists

Theorists adapt and integrate observations into complex but logically sound theories. They think problems through in a vertical, step-by-step, logical way. They assimilate disparate facts into coherent theories. They tend to be perfectionists who won’t rest easy until things are tidy and fit into a rational scheme. They like to analyse and synthesise. They are keen on basic assumptions, principles, theories, models and systems thinking. Their philosophy prizes rationality and logic. ‘If it’s logical, it’s good’.

Questions they frequently ask are, ‘Does it make sense?’, ‘How does this fit with that?’, ‘What are the basic assumptions?’ Theorists tend to be detached, analytical and dedicated to rational objectivity, rather than anything subjective or ambiguous. In summary, theorists like (Carroll and Gilbert, 2006, p.46):

- concepts and models
- to see the overall picture
- to feel intellectually challenged
- structure and clear objectives
- logical presentation of ideas.

4. Pragmatists

Pragmatists are keen on trying out ideas, theories and techniques to see if they work in practice. They positively search out new ideas and take the first opportunity to experiment with applications. They return from management courses brimming with new ideas that they want to try out in practice. They like to get on with things and act quickly and confidently on ideas that attract them. They tend to be impatient with ruminating and open-ended discussions and solving problems. They respond to problems and opportunities ‘as a challenge’. Their philosophy is ‘there is always a better way’ and ‘if it works, it’s good’.

One of the dangers in a highly pressurised context such as Child Protection is that practitioners will be drawn more often to an activist style, where they learn by doing. It is important for an activist style to be balanced with reflector style activities, such as observing more experienced practitioners carrying out an activity, and analyst style activities, such as reading and reviewing a journal article. In summary, pragmatists like (Carroll and Gilbert, 2008, p.46):

- to solve problems
- to see the relevance to work
- using credible role models
- proven techniques
- activities to have real-world relevance.

Learning styles are also relevant when considering the supervisory relationship – the supervisor and supervisee may have similar or different styles that effect the way they approach problems, and work more generally. There are advantages to both situations. We suggest you use the table opposite to identify strategies for strengthening each learning style. These can be very useful to encourage practitioners to engage in the full range of learning styles (Johansen and Gibbs, 2008).
In Chapter 5, we discuss how each of us at times gets stuck in the learning cycle, usually as a response to heightened levels of anxiety. It is important for an effective supervisor to identify with supervisees when this is happening and to implement a plan to help them to ‘become unstuck’. Equally, supervisors must be sufficiently self-aware to know when they are becoming stuck and to work with their manager to develop different learning approaches to aid effective progress with casework and development of practitioners.

**Figure 8: Learning styles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning style</th>
<th>Activist</th>
<th>Reflector</th>
<th>Theorist</th>
<th>Pragmatist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supervisee activity:</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Bringing it together

🌿 Reflective exercise:

In Chapter 1, we met Joshua and his family, the allocated protective practitioner, Paul, and his supervisor, Tony. We are going to use these same Child Protection characters from the case study to focus on the supervisory relationship. In this exercise we are not focusing on the case material.

Paul has been in the response team for 10 months. He has completed Beginning Practice. For the first six months Paul’s team was without a permanent supervisor and there were a series of acting arrangements. Tony has been his team leader for three months after he was promoted from within the team.

Recently, there were some problems with Paul’s case practice when he was unable to gain access to a family involving a young Aboriginal infant and concerns about the parent’s past history and substance abuse. Paul tried to visit the family on a number of occasions and then recommended that Child Protection close the case because the family did not want any ongoing assistance.

During the supervision sessions after this incident, Paul said he was taken aback when the infant’s father shut the door in his face and shouted at him because he had been very low key and had taken a strength-based approach, valuing their achievements as young parents. He asks Tony if he could show him how to manage angry parents, so that they understand he was there to help.

Tony talks to his supervisor about his supervision of Paul. He realises that Paul rarely asks him any questions and that he appears to just get on and do his work. Paul may have ‘slid under the radar because he has been busy’. Tony assumed Paul was engaged with the family and had been visiting regularly.

Tony agrees in his supervision that he should focus on establishing the supervisory arrangements but that he also needs to get to know Paul and more about his stage of development, practice strengths and learning needs.

- What strategies could Tony use to help Paul to understand his role in Child Protection?
- How might Tony explore their mutual expectations of supervision?
- What might Tony want to talk about in relation to the care and control function of practice and supervision?
- How might Tony make use of a cultural-competence framework in supervision and case practice?
- How might he need to understand his current stage of development?
- What might he consider about Paul’s apparent learning style?
- What sort of areas would he want to negotiate in a supervision agreement with Paul?
- What reasonable expectations might Tony take to his supervision with a unit manager?
Maintaining and sustaining supervisory relationships

We now move on to think about the ongoing nature of influential relationships and some frameworks and ideas for exploring further the tasks and functions of supervision.

Engaging others in the tasks and functions of supervision

In Chapter 1, we outlined the four functions of supervision identified in the Child Protection Supervision standards document (2007), namely managerial, developmental, support and mediation functions. In this discussion we look at how these functions may be enacted within the supervision relationship. We draw on Holloway (1999) who provides a systemic model of supervision, where she differentiates between functions and tasks, that is, the difference between what the supervisor is trying to do and the means by which they do it.

While Holloway divides the functions up in a slightly different way to the Child Protection Supervision standards document, that the two are quite compatible. Holloway also understands supervision as a collaborative process, which she calls a ‘learning alliance’. Her model is particularly pertinent to the team leader, and specialist positions, who are working with those undertaking direct practice. However, unit managers may wish to consider how the model can be applied to their supervision context. The five functions identified by Holloway are:

1. **Monitoring and evaluating** – this involves assessing and giving feedback about the supervisee’s competence and ongoing development.
2. **Instructing and advising** – where the supervisor provides information, opinions, suggestions or advice on practice, professional knowledge or skill.
3. **Modelling** – where the supervisor models values, attitudes, behaviours and relationships that are congruent with what is expected of the supervisee.
4. **Supporting and sharing** – involves supporting the professional and personal development of practitioners through empathy, encouragement and constructive feedback.
5. **Consulting** – where the supervisor provides the space for the supervisee to explore, reflect, think about and problem solve.

Figure 9 translates these to the four functions identified in the standards document.

**Figure 9: Functions model**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Four functions model</th>
<th>Holloway’s five functions model</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Child Protection Supervision standards, Department of Human Services, 2007)</td>
<td>Monitoring and evaluating (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerial</td>
<td>Modelling (3) and Consulting (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental</td>
<td>Supporting and sharing (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Instructing and advising (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
You will note that these fit very well with the previous discussion on stage-of-worker development, learning styles and transformational learning. With new and less experienced practitioners, the supervisor may initially use more advising and directing. As the practitioners become more confident and develop more complex sets of skills and capacities, they benefit from more consulting, supporting and modelling.

Holloway also identifies tasks of supervision that we have adapted to the Child Protection context. These are the areas of practice that need to be covered and the range of professional skills the practitioner (supervisee) needs to be developing:

1. **Casework skills** – development of fundamental conceptual and interpersonal skills and knowledge to undertake work.
2. **Assessment and case planning** – skills for assessing risk and needs and planning appropriate intervention.
3. **Professional role** – learning how to function within the work context and organisation and developing appropriate relationships with other professionals; managing the authority of the role.
4. **Emotional awareness** – includes all the emotional intelligence skills.
5. **Self-evaluation** – involves learning how to examine, assess and reflect on practice and its effectiveness.

Holloway argues that effective supervisors cover all relevant tasks throughout a supervisory relationship and do this through the range of functions. While these are not all done at each and every encounter, they should be covered over a period of time to ensure that supervision is meeting the range of tasks and functions required.

Figure 10 below helps explain this in relation to supervisors supervising practitioners. This may also assist specialist positions think about how they consult with other staff. While their role does not include line management responsibility, other functions may apply. The functions of supervision are on the left-hand column, the tasks are on the top line. Each of these tasks can be attended to within the different functions. For example, the task of ‘Casework skills’ can be achieved by:

- **‘Monitoring and evaluating’ function** – by looking at what skills the practitioner demonstrates, whether key performance indicators or other requirements are met, whether files are maintained.
- **‘Instructing and advising’ function** – would include providing suggestions on how to engage a particular parent, directives associated with statutory requirements, advice on resources.
- **‘Modelling’ function** – may include accompanying a practitioner into a meeting with a family and demonstrating respectful use of authority, modelling strength-based questions in supervision, accessing resources and guides (eg. Child Protection Practice Manual), giving feedback.
- **‘Supporting and sharing’ function** – would include encouraging discussion about difficult cases, providing debriefing and other support after difficult meetings, assisting less experienced staff by doing a joint visit.
- **‘Consulting’ function** – could involve utilising the supervisor’s wisdom and expertise to consider ways of conceptualising the case.

These are only examples. There are many ways these functions could be used. We suggest you use the grid opposite as a reflective tool to monitor how you are meeting the tasks and functions of supervision.
Exercise for team leaders:
Using the grid above, go through each of the tasks of supervision. Consider how you would be doing this task through each of the functions, as we did in the example above:
• Think of the last supervision session with one of your staff. What tasks were covered and through what functions.

Exercise for unit managers:
• Do the exercise above in supervision to assist the team leaders to reflect on their supervision of other staff.
• What tasks would you include as part of the supervision you undertake with team leaders? How are these similar or different to the ones team leaders undertake with their staff?
• When you have come up with these, use the grid to reflect on how you do these in supervision.
Understanding communication

Good communication is an essential prerequisite for building and maintaining purposeful supportive relationships. Issues relating to poor communication within and between agencies can be particularly problematic in a Child Protection context. Reder and Duncan (2003) propose a very useful model for understanding communication in Child Protection; intrinsic to this is the supervisor, who has a lead role in helping practitioners to develop a ‘communication mindset’ and skills of communicating effectively (see diagram opposite). This is a useful model for supervisors to think about their communication with others within the agency and across agencies.

While communication is normally understood as a process by which information is transferred from the sender to the receiver, for it to be effective communication the information must also be understood as it was intended. Reder and Duncan (2003) maintain that events seen in serious case reviews and child death inquiries illustrate how catastrophic it can be when practitioners located in different agencies and from different professional backgrounds fail to pay sufficient attention to the ‘meaning’ behind what is actually said and agreed to verbally, either face to face or over the telephone, or what is meant in written correspondence or sent in email communications.

The interpretation of the intended meaning is critical, but there are many interpersonal factors in the sender and receiver that can obscure or distort the meaning of information. These of course include non-verbal communication, such as the tone of voice, facial expression and body language, but also more subtle factors that may not be as readily observed.

Child Protection practice frequently involves communicating data or information; however, this is not a neutral action. The cognitive and affective dimensions of practice are so important that practitioners must also be consciously aware, as senders and recipients of communication, that it is the means by which people convey their feelings about themselves and their experiences. ‘Information’ in this sense encompasses feelings, attitudes, beliefs, intentions and desires, and, if these are not correctly interpreted in the communication process, it can be highly problematic.
Reder and Duncan’s (2003) multilevel approach to communication examines the interpersonal factors that shape the meaning that each person attributes to what is given and received. They suggest that the context in which communication takes place colours how information is understood. To be effective, each piece of information that is communicated must be considered at five levels:

1. **Content** – clarity and content of the information.
2. **Meaning** – interpretations, value judgements, personal beliefs or assumptions that either party places on the information or each other’s professional status and credibility.
3. **Meta-communication** – emotions affecting the sender or receiver.
4. **Context** – organisational pressures influencing the sender or the receiver.
5. **History** – experiences of previous communication between the parties.
Practitioners need to be encouraged to monitor for mutual understanding and to evaluate information they are given, both in terms of the content and meaning. Receivers of a message must be able to hypothesise what facts, thoughts or concepts are being sent to them and the meaning they infer must coincide with the meaning that was intended (Reder and Duncan, 2003, p.87).

**Reflective exercise:**
- Can you recall any examples where people in the work context have misunderstood what you said or had a different understanding of what was agreed?
- How did you make sense of what happened?
- Can you identify at which level of influence the problem arose?

Supervision is an ideal opportunity for practitioners to review how well they communicate to, or receive information from, others by thinking systemically, and ‘holding in mind’ other professionals who are relevant to the case or issue. Supervisors have important roles to play in asking reflective questions that encourage practitioners to think about how they have made sense of situations and what has been said to them by others (Reder and Duncan, 2003). Being asked to reflect also acts as a model through which they can gain greater confidence and skills in asking reflective questions to families and other professionals.

It is important that supervisors recognise that what they ask, and how they ask it, helps to shape and influence the information they are given by practitioners in supervision. Because of the authority and the power emanating from their role, it is possible that the supervisee will answer questions put to them but, if the right question is not asked, vital information may be lost.

We ask questions for different purposes: to gather facts, to seek another’s view, to clarify meaning, and so on. In addition, no question is neutral; simply by asking, it suggests who or what information we think is important and this sends a meta communication to the recipient. Questions can also be asked in ways that are collaborative, reflective, or solution focused. Alternatively they can be blaming, judgemental or critical. We discuss these different types of questioning in the next section.

Supervisors need to be able to formulate and use a varied repertoire of reflective questions to encourage thoughtfulness and professional development of staff. One of the key tasks for the middle manager in chairing planning meetings involving staff from across agencies is being able to ensure different perspectives are heard, demonstrating reflection and thoughtfulness and drawing the discussion towards an agreed plan of action that is based on clear, transparent and coherent decisions. To do this well, managers must be able to use themselves in ‘collaboratively authoritative’ ways (Dwyer, 2003) and be emotionally attuned and socially competent (see Chapter 2).
Asking effective questions

In this section, we look at different types of questions stemming from a number of practice approaches. The capacity to formulate questions to promote critical reflection means being able to maintain a position of curiosity and motivation to help others find a way forward rather than give instruction.

It is important to remember when considering the use of effective questions that we should be aware of cultural differences when speaking with both managers and staff. A major step in cultural competence is being aware of one’s own cultural influences and how these are similar and different from another person’s culture (Department of Human Services 2008). As a manager, self-reflection is a critical cross-cultural skill to limit the influence of one’s own cultural bias, particularly in formulating questions.

**Reflective questions**

One of the essential skills for an effective manager is that they are able to ask useful questions to promote thoughtfulness, problem solving, professional growth and critical analysis. Morrison provides four sets of open-styled questions, (2005, pp.167–172) based on each part of the reflective learning cycle, that can be adapted for use in many situations including team supervision.

Osmond and Darlington (2006) provide additional examples of reflective questions and techniques that the reader will find useful. In both sources, the dominant paradigm is that, with sufficient persistence by both the practitioner and the manager, the practitioner can often be enabled to make sense of situations themselves and find a way forward in complex situations. Adult learners do not learn deeply if they are always told what things mean and what they must do next.

Here are some of our ideas about reflective questions that promote working together to make sense of situations (adapted from Gibbs, 2005). Here an example of a mother will be used.

**Think of a question to understand a person’s values:**

- If you are ‘being respectful’ to that mother, what would it look like or what would you be doing?

**Think of a question to help a practitioner appreciate something from another person’s perspective:**

- I am wondering why you think she may have decided to return home that night.

**Think of a question to help a practitioner appreciate another person’s values:**

- Let’s think about why that may have been important to her.

**Think of a question to explore how a practitioner came to that view:**

- I’m really curious to understand the sorts of things you were thinking about when you assessed him as uncooperative.
- What other explanations might there have been?
- What reasons were there for discarding that idea?
The stance of curiosity

In emotionally laden contexts where values and principles about what is right or wrong are strongly held and where issues of safety are prevalent, we often feel the need to convince others of our point of view. For example, if a child discloses sexual abuse we need the child to be believed and supported by a parent or, if a family needs counselling and support to meet the needs of their children, we need the local family support agency to accept the referral.

In these circumstances it is easy to get caught up in battles as we try to convince an uncertain parent that the abuse has really happened, or an overworked agency that they must take the referral. We can find ourselves doing more talking than listening and making more statements than asking questions. However, at these times, adopting the stance of curiosity may be more useful.

The stance of curiosity is more than a questioning style – it is an ethical stance and a way of using oneself. It is based on the understanding that there are multiple ways of understanding events and attributing meaning. It also allows us to avoid polarising debates and battles for control. It assumes that we all come to conclusions and hold opinions based on our own process of meaning making and that engaging others requires us to understand their unique process of attributing meaning (Dwyer, 1999; Hughes, 2008). This does not mean that we agree with them, or that in ethical issues, all opinions are equally valid.

If we go back to the example of the parent who is struggling to believe a child’s disclosure, we may do better to resist the temptation to just tell them what they should think, rather a stance of curiosity would encourage us to understand their viewpoint. Why do they struggle to believe?, How have they made sense of the situation?, what would happen if they did believe? This process helps us to understand their point of view and the reasons underlying it but, paradoxically, it also helps clarify this view for themselves and opens it up for re-examination as they begin to articulate it to us (Dwyer, 1999).

The stance of curiosity therefore requires that we try to understand the other person’s viewpoint without trying to change that view. We really understand it when we can say to ourselves, ‘I get why she thinks that, even though I don’t necessarily agree with her’. We may find we do agree with the view or we may begin to identify the constraints that might lie beneath the viewpoint, be it fears, values, beliefs, misunderstandings and so on. This can then allow a more respectful discussion about the different viewpoints.

The need to adopt a stance of curiosity can often be seen in case discussions, when some participants may draw conclusions based on their own taken-for-granted assumptions. When these comments start to creep into the conversation, or when a practitioner is not able to understand the perspective of another player in the case, the supervisor needs to encourage greater curiosity.

The middle manager has the role of modeling curiosity in interactions with staff and encouraging a stance of curiosity among others, which can be practised in team discussions or individual supervision. The stance of curiosity and ‘not knowing’ is also useful in conducting serious case reviews or preparing for child death reviews (Gibbs, 2008). This helps elucidate the ‘local rationality’ (Munro, 2005), that is, how things looked at the time, and assists practitioners to stand back and interrogate their own thinking and practice in a non-defensive way.
Reflective exercise:

- In a team case discussion or individual supervision, ask one person to role-play someone they are having difficulty understanding.
- Have other members of the group (or the supervisor) practise asking respectful questions from a stance of curiosity. Continue until the person feels they understand the other.
- If any questions assume an answer or attempt to change the other person’s point of view, they must be rephrased until they are simply curious.
- Debrief by discussing what it was like for each participant and what they learned about themselves and the other person.

Strength-based questions

In supervision, strength-based questions assume that reflecting on what works is a neglected source of learning. We often focus on the negative and what is not working. By asking about exceptions to the problem and identifying when things are working well, solution-focused, or strength-based questions highlight and expose new possibilities in the families we work with and also our staff.

Consider the following examples of strength-based questions in relation to you as a developing middle manager.

Reflective exercise:

Think of an effective supervision session that you facilitated with one of your practitioners. Briefly describe it.
- What made you an effective supervisor in this session?
- What qualities and skills did you call upon in this session?
- Where have you gained those qualities and skills and how long have you been using them?
- How do you develop your strengths and skills as a supervisor?

McCashen (2005, p.141) describes the following five steps in one application of a strength-based approach. When faced with a problem in supervision, the supervisor might adopt these steps, which is consistent with a reflective practice approach, but consciously focuses on strengths.

- Issues are clarified and described in concrete terms.
- A picture of the future is developed and goals are set.
- Strengths and exceptions are identified.
- Additional resources are identified as necessary.
- A plan of action is developed. Before finishing, the supervisor and supervisee would agree on how the agreed action would be reviewed and evaluated.
Solution-focused questions

You will be familiar with brief and solution-focused practice as applied to case practice and Child Protection through the work of people such as Peter de Jong and Kim Insoo Berg (2002) and others (for example, Turnell and Edwards, 1999). Broadly, this approach is a constructivist approach that views troubles and solutions as socially constructed realities portrayed by the use of language. The language adopted by families is often dominated by problems. This, in turn, affirms the problem-saturated view of themselves and their lives; this is replicated in behaviour that is consistent with this problem-saturated view.

Change can occur when families are assisted to notice the things they are already doing that are working and are encouraged to do more of these ‘solutions’. Supervisors can also draw on solution-focused thinking and questions to assist supervisees learn.

As at the practice level, the emphasis is on establishing a relationship through which the supervisee is supported to find their own way forward. However, it is worth keeping in mind the Stages of Change Model discussed in Chapter 1. Not all supervisees will feel ready or even feel it is appropriate or necessary to take action.

As with the stage-matched interventions discussed in Chapter 1, the supervisor needs to titrate their responses to the stage of readiness displayed by the supervisee. Solution-focused models try to address this same issue where the supervisee might be compared to the ‘customer’ (Berg and Miller, 1992), who is ready to ‘buy’ what might be discussed in supervision. The supervisee here is ready to own the difficulty, wanting to solve or act on the issues or be ready to work on it.

Thomas (1996) describes the underlying principles of solution-focused supervision:

• It is not necessary to know the cause or function of a complaint in order to resolve it.
• Supervisees know what it best for them.
• There is no such thing as resistance.
• The supervisor’s job is to identify and amplify change.
• A small change is all that is necessary.
• Change is constant and rapid change is possible.
• Supervision should focus on what is possible and changeable.
• There is no right way to view things.
• Curiosity is indispensable.

Here are some examples of some useful solution-focused questions for use by managers and supervisors (based on McVeigh, 2005).

• Please describe the strengths, skills and knowledge that you will bring to supervision.
• What have you found helpful in previous supervision relationships?
• In this session what is the most important issue for us to focus on?
• What goals would you like to focus on?
• What is important about these goals for you?
• How will you know when you have reached these goals or are happy with your achievements?
• What would be different if this problem was no longer part of your work?
• If you came into me tomorrow and said, ‘My problem is gone’, how would I know?
  What would be different?

• What is one small step you have taken in resolving an issue since we last spoke in supervision?
  Let’s explore that more …

• Let’s look at how things are going with that problem you brought to the last supervision
  session. If zero is complete failure and 10 is complete success, where would you put yourself?
  (Draw it on this piece of paper.)

• What would have to happen for you to move onto the next step?

• Where would you like to be in this scale?

• Tell me a time in your professional or personal life when you overcame a problem.

• When a problem has been reduced in size ask, ‘What are you doing to make the issue less
  troublesome?’

• What can you keep doing to keep this issue well into the ‘not troublesome’ category?

• How did you know what to do with that particular case or situation? How can you use this again
  with other situations or cases?
Listening deeply

Effectively communicating does not only involve asking questions, it also requires the art of listening deeply. This means that managers can listen to what is said as well as recognising and understanding the emotion being expressed. This is at the heart of reflective practice and applies to relationships at all levels. At the level of the frontline Child Protection practitioner, they need to be self-aware and sensitive to the factors underlying their own and others’ behaviour and emotions if they are to notice damaging or dangerous patterns of cooperation, such as disguised compliance (Brandon et al., 2008).

At the next level in the Child Protection process, it is equally important that middle managers be aware of others’ feelings, needs, perceptions and concerns. Middle managers must be able to empathise and look through the lens of the other person. This is important at the individual level with supervisees, but also at a collective level with teams and across multidisciplinary groups.

An important aspect of listening deeply involves recognising what is below the surface and attending to what is not being said, as well as the overt message. Deep listening promotes dialogue, listening how something is said, listening for emotions, listening to what is not said, understanding deeper meaning, building community and connection, and creating space for reflection.

🌟 Reflective exercise:

Think about the place of deep listening in your work and consider the following questions.

- How would you rate yourself as a listener?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses in listening?
- Think of the people you manage.
  - How do you think they would rate your listening skills? (Remember most managers think they are better listeners than others may perceive them.)
  - Would you be willing to ask those you supervise how they would rate you?
  - Are there differences in ratings? What would account for these differences?

Role models for deep listening

- Who are some deep listening role models in your life?
- What can you learn from them?
- Think of a relationship that you have had in the past with your own supervisor, mentor or coach where you have felt they have listened deeply to you.
- What was the experience like for you?
- How did you know they were listening deeply?
- What is it that made this a deep listening experience? What was the result of the deep listening?
- How can you practise what you have learned from your own experience?
Constraints to deep listening

Listening is one part of the communication dynamic. In a busy Child Protection office there are many constraints to deep listening. Can you reflect on what gets in the way of deep listening for you? Consider what factors are associated with it.

In Reder and Duncan’s (2003) psychological model of communication, constraints identified include:

- being overwhelmed with the job
- conflicting responsibilities
- conflicting emotions
- being new to the job
- not taking the time
- not recognising or minimising the importance of the issue
- pre-judging the situation
- taking sides
- not wanting to be unpopular
- rigidly sticking to a particular solution or answer even if it is shown not to work
- settling for a quick, short-term solution, even if it may cause long-term problems
- sweating on the ’small stuff’ and missing the ’important stuff’.

The consequences of these failures of deep listening can be dire. It is generally true that deep listening is easier with practitioners (or families) who are more similar to ourselves (professional training, personality and communication styles, cultural backgrounds, life experiences).

Reflective exercise:

- Which practitioners do you find harder to listen to?
- How do you know that your listening has been affected?
- Do you feel: irritation, impatience, frustration, boredom, resentment that they are demanding, you want to avoid them, you can’t remember things about them?

Despite the importance of deep listening, the literature, and sometimes our own experience, indicates that leaders find it difficult to hear bad news, dissent, warnings and problem signs, and that employees are often afraid to speak up (Edmondson and Munchus, 2007). When open and honest communication is discouraged within the organisation this results in:

- the leader’s or in-group’s views are accepted as sacrosanct – no questions asked
- employees secretly disagree but fail to dissent against the group consensus
- employees are told not to rock the boat or make waves
- employees who speak-up are viewed as troublemakers.
Purpose and process in feedback

In Chapter 1, we discussed the value of feedback as a way to promote learning while recognising the danger that, for some supervisees, the process has come to be associated with problems in their practice, perhaps even ‘being told off’. Earlier in this chapter, we have again stressed the importance of talking about how feedback will be given as part of negotiating the supervision agreement.

A number of years ago Joe Luft and Harry Ingham (1973) developed a model for self-awareness called the Johari Window. Despite the passage of time, we believe that their model continues to provide supervisors with a framework to talk to supervisees about the importance of feedback. Below, we have suggested a way of understanding a specific application to supervision (Gibbs, 2005). Here, the four panes of the Johari Window represent different aspects of practice, some of which are known to the practitioner and some of which are not.

In this discussion, we conceptualise feedback as primarily seeking to promote growth and development of supervisees by helping them to become consciously aware of what they are doing well and less well. One of the aims of supervision is to increase the ‘open space’ or ‘arena’ in the window below. In this space, supervisees are aware of what they know and the limitations of their knowledge and skills, they are consciously competent or consciously incompetent and are able to develop professionally as they gain greater knowledge about their strengths and weaknesses. Reflective practice and well-prepared and timely feedback support the supervisee’s learning and the open space increases.

Figure 12: The Johari Window applied to feedback in supervision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>You know about this</th>
<th>You don’t know about this</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Open (arena)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Blind</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This can be ‘conscious competence’ – we know what we do well and what we need to develop. Or ‘conscious incompetence’ – we know what we don’t know. Feedback supports growth of this pane.</td>
<td>This is about the supervisee’s skills, style and ability that others see in practice but that the supervisee doesn’t recognise. It can be ‘unconscious competence’ as well as areas needing development – ‘unconscious incompetence’. Providing feedback in this pane enables the supervisee to gain self-knowledge and self-awareness. This reduces the blind pane and grows the open pane, which is a key benefit of supervision, coaching and mentoring. It promotes growth and development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hidden</strong></td>
<td><strong>Unknown</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This can be about feelings or challenges that we don’t let other people know about. Self-disclosure can grow the open box.</td>
<td>This may be skills and talents that we have not yet discovered. It can also contain material that is below the surface, at an unconscious level. Reflective practice aids a reduction in the size of this pane.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Gibbs, 2005
Feedback to broaden the open pane

Giving feedback is a process that can be done well or badly. To do it well, managers need to be well prepared and attend to process as well as content.

We suggest that the supervisor must spend some time preparing for feedback. The following reflective questions, adapted from Carroll and Gilbert (2007, pp.72–73), may aid this process:

• How can I create an environment that is conducive to a practitioner receiving the feedback I want to give?
• How much time is required to talk the feedback through?
• Have I got a space and time that will be uninterrupted?
• Is the purpose of giving feedback clear to me as the supervisor and to the supervisee – that it is about enhancing the learning of the supervisee to deliver the best outcomes to children?
• How can I prepare the practitioner to hear what I want to say?
• Have I established a good supervisory relationship with a clear supervisory agreement that talks about feedback?
• In gathering a history of supervision with the practitioner, what do I already know about factors that assist or get in the way of them receiving feedback?
• Am I clear about what I want to say?
• How am I feeling about giving the feedback?
• What would stop me from giving the feedback?
• How open am I to reviewing my feedback in light of the discussion?

Hawkins and Shohet (2006, p.135) outline a framework for giving effective feedback. The CORBS model advocates that it is:

• Clear – supervisors should avoid being vague and faltering which will increase anxiety in the receiver and not be understood.
• Owned – the feedback is your perception and not a fixed ‘truth’.
• Regular – feedback should be given often.
• Balanced – feedback should be given about things that are going well and less well.
• Specific – feedback should not be too general but behaviour focused.
Reflective exercise:

Think about a recent occasion when you gave a supervisee feedback.9

• How clear was the message?
• Did you meet all the aspects of CORBS?
• Did you consider the practitioner’s preferred learning style?
• Were there cultural and diversity factors that needed to be considered in the feedback?
• Did you give the feedback in the way you discussed in the supervision agreement?
• How did the supervisee respond to the feedback?
• Did you check what you intended to say was heard?

In the following section, we present a specific structure for discussing performance issues with supervisees, the bridging interview (Morrison, 2005). While we discuss this in depth here, the framework presented in Chapter 5, to assist practitioners who are stuck in the learning cycle, is also relevant.

In that chapter, we suggest that at times of heightened anxiety people can get stuck in the reflective cycle and engage in repetitive and less than helpful patterns of behaviour. They need support to move to another part of the learning cycle and to find another way of approaching learning. This framework should be considered for applicability to a particular practitioner prior to using a bridging interview approach.

Effective supervisors adopt positive expectations and believe that supervisees want to do a good job. The values that underpin supervision mean that supervisors approach more challenging and entrenched performance problems with a belief that most practitioners can still change what they are doing if they understand what is wrong and are supported through a change process. The key is often an existing relationship of influence where the supervisor is paying attention to the practitioner’s emotional needs, their self-esteem and level of confidence.

When done well, even negative feedback can result in improvement. This guide has strongly advocated for early recognition and response to problems and challenges. Ignoring a problem does not lead to change! Above all, an effective supervisor knows that in the majority of cases the barriers to effective practice and meeting standards are context related and very rarely relate solely to the practitioner’s level of skill and knowledge.

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9 It may also be useful for you to consider the material later in this chapter that describes a psychological model of communication. There are many barriers to effective communication that can impact on the value of feedback.
The bridging interview

In most cases an effective manager will be successful in establishing a workable and productive relationship of influence with a practitioner. However, in a few cases practitioners are unable to reach or maintain the required standard of work. Sometimes it appears that, over time, whatever has been tried by the supervisor has not worked. A pattern of behaviour has emerged that cannot be allowed to continue unchecked. In this small number of cases, the supervisor may decide to utilise a bridging interview (Quick, cited in Morrison, 2005, p.236).

As the name implies, this structure is valuable as a stepping stone from the usual process of supervision into formal performance management procedures, which are not covered in this guide. We also suggest that a supervisor should not use this specific model without talking first to their supervisor and, if agreed appropriate, consulting with a human resource officer. It should be noted that in many human service organisations the bridging interview encompasses a letter outlining the areas of concern. While not part of any formal disciplinary or performance management process, a bridging letter does seek to ensure that the supervisee understands and is clear about what behaviour change is needed.

Before undertaking the interview, the supervisor must prepare well and be clear about what behaviour is concerning and the standard that is not being met. As suggested above, it is important to reflect on any organisational constraints and whether it is reasonable to expect that the practitioner has the required knowledge and skills to reach the standard. In addition, the supervisor should assess issues related to vicarious trauma and burnout to ensure the practitioner has had an opportunity to discuss any of these issues underlying the behaviour (see Chapter 2).

An important reflection must be about the current pattern of supervision and whether the supervisee has been adequately supported to perform work according to the standard.

Morrison (2005, p.239) suggests the following structure for the bridging interview:

- **State the problem** – similar to giving feedback, the supervisor must describe specific behaviour and give examples of behaviours or practice that need to change.

  *As I recall we agreed in our last supervision session that you would complete the court report on James and the case notes on the family by last Monday. Have I got that right?*

- **Listen** – it is important that supervisees are given a chance to tell the story from their perspective. The supervisor needs to listen deeply and try to assess how the supervisee perceives the situation and feels about what is happening.

- **Consider extenuating circumstances** – while listening it is important to reflect on what might be contributing to the continuation of the problem.

  *For example, have you asked them to do something they don’t have the knowledge and skills to undertake?*

  *Is there a personal problem?*

  *Is the practitioner overwhelmed with anxiety about getting it right?*
• **Look for desired alternatives:**
  If it is a ‘capability’ problem:
  • change systems or targets
  • provide time, technical assistance
  • provide training or access to an employee assistance program.
  If it is a ‘disinclination’ or ‘motivation’ problem:
  • provide feedback on consequences
  • provide payoffs for improved performance
  • remove payoffs for poor performance.

• **Design an action plan** – ensure that the plan is concrete, visible and within a set timescale with a review date. Clarify responsibilities and tasks.

• **Check the practitioner’s perception of the agreement** – do not assume understanding unless you have checked. Ask the practitioner to state what has been agreed.

• **Follow through** – improving performance takes time.
  Your aspiration is to change certain behaviour and you must, therefore, follow up on the interview. If the change occurs, you have both succeeded and you should celebrate success. If not, it may be important to move into a formal performance management process.
Effective interagency work and communication

In the remaining part of this chapter, we broaden our thinking about how middle managers sustain and maintain effective relationships both within the agency and with workers across the service system.

We suggest that having a sound understanding of effective communication and, in particular, a 'communication mindset' (Reder and Duncan, 2003) is vital to engaging others. This is a psychological approach to communication, suggesting that a great deal of effort must go into interpersonal relations and processing incoming and outgoing information in order to ensure meaning. ‘Information’ includes feelings and thoughts, there are also a number of individual, collective and contextual influences that can impede understanding.

‘… successful communication requires a degree of reflectiveness, since both parties need to be aware of influences and must monitor them. In that sense it can be regarded as a mindset, a framework that helps organize the meaning given to every message content and all interprofessional encounters.’
(Reder and Duncan, 2003, p.94)

It is well established that effective interagency collaboration is required to deliver good outcomes for children; however, it is also well recognised that this is often difficult to achieve (NAPCWA, 2002). Horwath and Morrison (2007) address the challenges of collaborative practice between agencies and identify five levels to describe the range of working together arrangements: communication, cooperation, coordination, coalition and integration of services.

Placed on a continuum, each of these levels represent a move towards what is required to promote low-level to high-level collaboration. Child Protection middle managers have the responsibility to ensure mid-range collaborative endeavours.

While the success of these endeavours may to some extent be dependent on the structures and processes put in place by senior management to formalise integration of services, these represent the most extensive collaborative effort between services and are only one aspect of the day-to-day collaboration required.

Consider, for example, the Working together strategy (1999) that attempted to improve the partnership between mental health, drug and alcohol, youth justice and Child Protection services. The strategy focused on a number of levels within the system, from departmental collaboration down to case-based practice. At the level of interagency collaboration, middle managers in all services had a central role in interpreting and negotiating what the strategy meant in practice.

As the strategy report noted:

‘Leaders can ensure a client-centered focus, empower others to create innovative solutions, and model a willingness to work together rather than blame one another for challenges and problems. Leaders have a fundamental role in managing the perception among their staff that service cooperation is essential to good results for clients by showing that all efforts to overcome barriers are valued.’

(DHS The Working Together Strategy 1999 p 19)
Effective leaders at all levels of the organisation do not do this by ignoring potential conflicts and avoiding differences, nor do they become caught up in polarised debates that exaggerate and accentuate these differences (Rubin, 1997). Rather, middle managers have a role in engaging their own staff around the benefits of collaboration and dealing directly with constraints that exist in their own team and organisation. Primary among these is developing trust.

Torres and Margolin (2003, p.5) drew together the proven strategies and tools to enhance interagency collaboration and argued that ‘[o]rganizations that successfully work together have typically achieved three things: high levels of trust, serious time commitment from partners, and a diminished need to protect their turf’.

Child Protection middle managers experience first-hand the constraints to collaboration within their own organisations and from others, but also often deal with the consequences of a lack of effective collaborative practice, such as an increased risk of serious incidents. They can, therefore, be highly motivated to ensure collaboration, but can also be influenced by experiences or perceptions of how well people were able to work together in the past (see Reder and Duncan, 2003).

It is important to recognise that contextual factors, such as a heavy workload, lack of supervision or expertise, differences in conceptual or practice frameworks and organisational culture, will all interfere with communication within and between agencies, leading to impaired collaboration. In the struggle to survive anxiety-provoking situations, any actual differences between groupings of people needing to collaborate together within the Child Protection network can become exaggerated. The failure to put in place structures and processes that assist these groups of people to express feelings, doubts and uncertainties, leads to defensiveness, denial and blame. It is not uncommon for agencies to become highly controlling, rigid and lacking the capacity to jointly manage risk.

A key point is that any dysfunctional relationship that arises from these largely unconscious processes has an impact on the child and family.

‘Rather like the child whose world is mediated through the quality of relationships between parents, so the experience of vulnerable families in the child protection process is mediated through the modelling of interagency relationships and behaviour. One cannot feel safe as an airline passenger whilst witnessing the crew arguing amongst themselves, or worse providing conflicting accounts of what is happening and what to do when the plane is in trouble.’
(Morrison, 1998b, p.15)

The reform agenda in Child Protection practice reinforces that working together and collaborating effectively is of paramount importance. It is the responsibility of middle managers to ensure they communicate well with professionals from other disciplines and agency contexts. They need to model for practitioners a capacity to work effectively with other agency workers on a case-by-case basis and on projects. They need to plan and implement clear structures and processes that support working together and where respective roles and responsibilities are articulated, understood and respected. They need to ensure there are safe forums in which everyone can share their feelings of doubt and uncertainty.
Morrison (1998a) describes some contrasting positions taken by managers and whole agencies in relation to working collaboratively. The positions reflect different beliefs, values, and perceptions of power relations and of the value of difference. If managers are able to reflect on the values and attitudes that influence their own approach to working collaboratively, they model this for practitioners, who then reflect on how well they work with families. Morrison describes the following approaches:

- A paternalistic position – assumes an expert position and ‘you need me or us’; collaboration is a benefit to be conferred on others.
- Adversarial position – assumes a ‘them and us’, win or loss struggle and collaboration means ‘be cautious’ or we lose out; territorial behaviours are evident.
- Play-fair position – collaboration stems from a belief in social justice and fairness, involves others to be more effective. Difficulties arise, however, in managing conflicts of interest between, for example, parents’ rights and children’s needs.
- Developmental position – collaboration stems from a therapeutic position of working and learning together, reflects a psychological model of growth and development, people are prepared to be open about the struggles and ‘mistakes’ as well as ‘successes’.

**Reflective exercise:**

Think about a service or agency in your area that you experience difficulties in collaboration:

- On a scale of zero to 10, how committed you are to collaborative interagency working (zero not at all, 10 being totally committed).
- What does this mean for the children and families you serve, you, your team and the agency?
- Can you think of a metaphor that describes your current experience of working together with agencies across the service system?
- What does your metaphor tell you about different relationships and experiences?
- Thinking about power relations (for example, boundaries, territory, responsibility) can you summarise your experience?
- Thinking about difference (for example, values about children and families, views about authority and parental involvement, children’s rights and needs) can you summarise your experience?
- Are there any reflections here about what might promote a change in relationships?

In relation to your team:

- What would your team say about current interagency relations?
- Can you think of examples of collaboration that are working well? Why do you think this is the case?
- Can you think of a situation where collaboration is working less well? Can you think why this might be the case?
- Can you identify strengths in your team in relation to enhancing collaborative practice?
- What barriers are there?
- What can you do about these?
Summary

Engaging others in Child Protection, demands that middle managers give sufficient time and attention to establishing early, positive relationships of influence. We have suggested that managerial relationships with practitioners can benefit from drawing on the values and theoretical underpinnings of relationship-based practice.

To engage effectively with practitioners, managers should clarify respective expectations and responsibilities in the relationship. Particular attention must be given to the authority inherent in the relationship and the exercise of power. Managers need to take account of the practitioners’ stage of development, preferred style of learning and what they bring to the relationship from past experiences. A negotiated supervision agreement is an important tool at the early stage in the relationship.

This chapter also looks at specific aspects of maintaining and sustaining effective relationships of influence. We have suggested a tool for reflecting on the use of supervisory functions and tasks. In particular, we have examined the purpose and process of giving effective feedback as a way of encouraging professional development. We have argued that an effective supervisor will recognise problems and challenges early and strive to work collaboratively with supervisees to bring about change.

In rare situations where a more entrenched pattern of concerning behaviour has developed over time and standards are not being reached or maintained, the middle manager may need to undertake a bridging interview.

We describe a psychological approach to effective communication as a way of supporting relationships at every level of the process – family, practitioner, supervisor, manager, interagency network. It is argued that a model like this prioritises the processing of information to ensure shared meaning. Five levels of influence are identified, all of which need to be considered when we are trying to communicate well.

The capacity to ask effective questions and to think deeply are fundamental prerequisites to engaging others. We discussed reflective questions, strength-based questions and solution-focused questions. Thinking deeply means being able to listen to what is said, but also being able to demonstrate high levels of emotional attunement and competence.

We have asked you to reflect on your values and beliefs about working with others across the service system. We suggest four positions reflect different attitudes and beliefs about working together. As managers you need to identify the strengths and barriers to working well together and look for opportunities to enhance effective collaboration.
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Chapter 4 Thinking clearly

In this chapter we cover:

The place of thinking clearly in practice, management and leadership
• developing a collaborative learning culture
• analytic and intuitive thinking in expert practice and management.

The role of supervision and reflective practice in thinking clearly
• encouraging thinking clearly beyond individual supervision.

Thinking clearly and business insight

Capability: Thinking clearly
Thinking clearly about decisions we make and the actions that follow is vital. The quality of our thinking will determine the quality of our delivery.
The four capabilities within this cluster are summarised below.

1. Critical inquiry – personal searches, searches based on higher goals and purpose, investigates for context and new information, skilfully applies frameworks of inquiry.
2. Evaluating analytically – logically breaks down problems, sees underlying causes and potential implications, evaluates complex problems, systematically analyses multiple, complex problems.
3. Seeing the whole – draws on past experience, identifies inter-connections, sees the broader perspective, forms compelling insights.
4. Business insight – understands how decisions are made, demonstrates financial and political nous, identifies opportunities and barriers, generates compelling insights and strategies.
Introduction

A key task for middle managers is to model and promote thoughtful practice through meeting the professional development needs of practitioners. This chapter looks at how ‘thinking clearly’ is integrally linked to achieving good outcomes for children and families, as well as promoting professional development of the workforce. We then present material about how people think and make decisions, the importance of emotion, and introducing reflective practice as a core framework for management and supervision practice.

This approach models the core capability of being able to see the whole picture while being able to question the component parts. Through a number of specific examples, this chapter aims to illustrate what it means to be ‘thinking clearly’ in the role of a middle manager in Child Protection. The activities aim to encourage reflection and promote thinking about how to assist practitioners and teams to develop greater ‘thoughtfulness’ in practice.

The Child Protection middle manager also needs to be able to draw on a template for thinking clearly and analytically when they are making important contributions to the broader organisational business of financial, policy and strategic decision making.
Practice, management and leadership – the place of ‘thinking clearly’

In recent years, the dominant conceptualisation of effective Child Protection practice has been to draw systematically on formal knowledge and theory, where efficiency, logic and rationality are privileged. Most statutory child welfare authorities across the Western world have prioritised the development and introduction of procedures, checklists and processes, as a way of managing the increasing volume and complexity of the work and to assist practitioners to predict and minimise risk. The thinking that has been encouraged is predominantly ‘surface level’ and the management focus has been on behaviour, competence and the application of administrative solutions to complex problems (Gibbs, 2008a).

This technical, rational approach to practice has dominated our thinking and supervisors have been encouraged to privilege activities, such as ensuring practitioners complete tasks and comply with procedures. In supervision there has sometimes been too little focus on encouraging practitioners to build relationships with families and on helping them to think about how to understand and work at a ‘deeper’ level with people and problems (Gibbs, 2001; Ruch, 2007).

A prevailing focus on managing ‘the doing’ activities rather than on developing the ‘feeling and thinking’ aspects of the work, may have made a significant contribution to practitioners reporting feeling unsupported by managers, being vulnerable to high levels of anxiety, as well as limiting their capacity to develop professionally (Gibbs, 2002; Anderson, 2000). Some authors speculate that this model of practice and management has been a significant contributor to the retention difficulties in Child Protection.

Partly as a result of the limitations associated with this technical approach to practice, we have seen the emergence of ‘the reflective practitioner’ as an alternative model of expertise for practitioners and managers. Effective practice here is understood much more in terms of the quality of relationships between people, the ability to empathise, depth in relation to thinking about practice and the attention that is given to how one makes sense of complex, ambiguous situations. The capacity to be thoughtful and reflective in this field of practice is of paramount importance; staff are working in the ‘swampy lowlands’ of practice where ‘situations are confusing messes incapable of technical solutions’ (Schon, 1983, p.42). While pressure from the community, often seen in adverse media coverage, is to get it right quickly and every time, the reality is that a thorough risk assessment is a process and the conclusion reached this way is often the ‘least likely to be wrong’ (Holland, 2004). This requires that the analysis behind the emerging case formulation, or the way in which cases have come to be understood, must be rigorous, clear and open to scrutiny.

Advocates of reflective practice require that adequate attention is paid to the irrational, often unconscious, feelings associated with managing risk, uncertainty and anxiety in Child Protection work (Ruch, 2005a). The emotions generated by the work can provide a valuable source of knowledge and understanding about the child’s experience, but emotions that are not understood or managed have the potential to impede risk assessment (see chapters 2 and 3). Reflective practice validates the emotional experience of Child Protection work and highlights the key role for the middle manager in helping the practitioner to recognise and process the emotions in a healthy way.
To adequately undertake Child Protection work, we need to harness two sources of knowledge: the technical, rational knowledge and systems; and the knowledge gained from intuition and past experience, often called practice wisdom or intuitive knowledge. Reflective practice combines the science and art of practice by bridging a gap between these two forms of knowledge.

‘Reflective practice … strives to identify knowledge for practice that is derived not only from sources external to the practice arena but also from within practice. Reflective practice acknowledges the relevance of diverse sources of knowledge – practice wisdom, intuition, tacit knowledge and artistry as well as theory and research – for understanding human behaviour.’ (Ruch, 2005a, p.116)

The effective middle manager has a sustained focus on creating ‘thinking’ spaces for practitioners in a safe and containing context. They do this by:

• modelling reflection as a self-involving affective and cognitive activity
• assisting their staff, both individually and collectively, to explore practice events with a view to learning about how to improve outcomes for children and carers
• encouraging and validating reflective practice through strengthening the analytical capacities of practitioners by asking well-constructed, curious and thoughtful questions¹⁰
• resisting the pressure from inexperienced staff to always give direction and provide solutions, thereby missing opportunities to promote professional development, as well as knowing when direction and guidance is most needed.

¹⁰ See also Chapter 3.
A collaborative learning culture

While it is not their responsibility alone, middle managers have a pivotal role to play in contributing to a collaborative learning culture for practitioners.\textsuperscript{11} Practice with children and families is far more effective when we are not only engaged in ‘doing’ activities but also ‘thinking’ activities. Managers must seek to establish individual and team structures in which thoughtful practice embracing ‘respectful uncertainty’ and ‘healthy scepticism’ is nurtured.

To do this well, however, middle managers must also have clarity of organisational expectations, professional roles, responsibilities and identities (Ruch, 2005b). At every level of the organisation, staff need to experience a positive work culture that values the place of thinking and the healthy expression of feelings such as not knowing, doubt and uncertainty about what to do.

The leadership role in Child Protection is vital to encouraging thinking and reflection and thereby contributing to the development of this positive culture. Applying a cultural lens in the role of supervisor or manager is the first step to a culturally competent workplace. Practitioners need permission to make time for thinking and to value reflective practice. However, it cannot be assumed that everyone understands the value of thinking about practice events and situations that arise in the context of work, despite the term ‘reflective practice’ being commonly used.

The following exercise invites you to consider not only what you mean by reflective practice but to engage your team and staff in discussions about thinking and reflection.

\textbf{Reflective exercise:}

- Why is ‘thinking clearly and deeply’ important to your supervisory practice?
- What do you understand by reflective practice?
- Why is it important for children and their families that practitioners and managers develop the capacity to ‘think clearly and deeply’?
- Think about a recent average day at work, how much time did you spend engaged in ‘doing’ activities and ‘thinking activities’?
- On a scale of zero to 10, how important is ‘thinking’ in your team? (zero means not at all, 10 means extremely important)
- What features contributed to your answer?
- On a scale of zero to 10 how important is ‘thinking’ in the organisation? (zero means not at all, 10 means extremely important)
Analytic and intuitive thinking in expert practice and management

In the previous section, we suggested that effective practice and management involves formal analytic thinking. It draws on evidence-based practice, research and theory, but also legitimises the use of intuitive tacit knowledge, which arises from practice. We suggest that reflective practice provides an integrative framework for diverse sources of knowledge and understanding.

Before we go on to describe a framework for understanding the categories of knowledge and skills used in effective practice (Munro, 2002; 2008), it may be useful to spend some time looking in more depth at both the analytic and intuitive paradigms and identifying their strengths and weaknesses. We agree with Munro (2008) that while the Child Protection workforce may need to develop and utilise more formal analytical thinking, understanding the place of emotion and feeling in effective practice is also essential.

**Intuitive thinking**

Effective middle managers need to understand the essential balance between using intuitive and analytical thinking in decision making. Intuitive thinking is a largely unconscious process and allows us to integrate a large amount of information to produce a judgment in a relatively effortless way. It is:

‘… a cognitive process that somehow produces an answer, solution or idea without the use of a conscious, logically defensible step-by-step process.’

(Hammond, 1996, p.60, in Munro, 1999)

When we are thinking intuitively we are relying on patterns, feelings and images rooted in our past experience that can help us to analyse and make decisions quickly. However, Gilgun (2005) argues that experienced practitioners with extensive professional experience utilise what she calls ‘expert intuition’. This includes:

- more formal knowledge, theory, research
- families concerns and views
- practitioner thinking or awareness are all source of information, even though it is often at an unconscious level.

**Analytic thinking**

In contrast to this form of intuitive reasoning, formal analytic thinking draws on empirical evidence-based research and a knowledge base that has been tested, validated and accepted as public knowledge. This is a conscious, controlled process of reasoning that uses formal and explicit data and rules to deliberate and to reach a conclusion.

We invite you to reflect on different types of thinking and the importance of analytical and intuitive approaches for good outcomes.
Reflective exercise:

What do you know about different types of thinking?

• What are the strengths and weaknesses of analytical thinking?
• What are the strengths and weaknesses of intuitive thinking?
• In what phases of a case or for what types of management problem might intuitive thinking be required?
• In what phase of a case or for what types of management problem might analytic thinking be required?
• How do you see these types of thinking relating to each other?

Recent research suggests that both modes of thinking are inter-connected in the brain structure and that the effective practitioner moves along the analytic or intuitive continuum at different stages of the case. Thiele cited in Munro 2008 regards them as complementary functions, with analysis acting as a good secretary, keeping a check on products of intuition, checking them for biases, developing explanatory theories and testing them rigorously. This also underscores the pivotal role of the supervisor who is able, through well-formulated and timed reflective questions, to facilitate this process with the practitioner. In Chapter 3, we suggest that feedback is also a process that encourages the practitioner to become more consciously competent and to increase their reflective capabilities.

For the intake practitioner at the front end of Child Protection, intuitive thinking is important because decisions have to be made quickly, often with minimal assessment data. If practitioners are relying heavily on this type of thinking and decision making they must, however, have extensive expertise and experience on which to draw.

A good example is that an experienced practitioner will quickly be able to peruse an existing Child Protection history and use it to help them decide what to do when faced with a low-level but repeat allegation of abuse. They will know that past behaviour is the best predictor of future behaviour (Brandon, et al., 2008). A less experienced practitioner is more likely to feel overwhelmed by an extensive past history and not take adequate account of it. In the reasoning process about what to do, they may discard it.

The manager needs to be mindful that it is often emotion that guides what we pay attention to, so practitioners who are utilising intuitive thinking must have a high level of self-awareness in order to counteract natural bias and distortion. Offering effective and challenging supervision to these practitioners is critical because the assessment and decision making must be examined and reviewed. We know that people make up their minds quickly and, once made, risk assessments are difficult to change (Munro, 2008).

Effective use of intuitive thinking processes is supported by a team and organisational culture that accepts everyone can get things wrong and assessments may well need to be revised with the emergence of new information and understanding of the case. An organisational culture that seeks to blame and is intolerant of mistakes encourages practitioners to stick to ‘right’ opinions once formed and discourages openness and the revision of conclusions (Dalzell and Sawyer, 2008).
In contrast, in a long-term team many of the decisions that need to be made may lend themselves more readily to a structured, more formal analytical process where time and effort must go into identifying all the possible options and exploring the consequences of each. An example would involve decisions about whether a case plan for reunification or permanent care is required. It is much more likely that in making a recommendation to a manager, the practitioner draws on formal knowledge and theory, such as the legislative requirements, departmental policy, attachment theory, child development frameworks and research about the developmental trajectory of young children remaining in the care system for prolonged periods.

However, in this case, it is also important that the practitioner considers the individual circumstances and history of the child and values their intuitive feelings about the capacity of the birth parents to address protective concerns and their motivation to change. Good supervision is required that encourages the practitioner to consciously articulate the reasoning process behind the recommendation and to review and challenge the combination of analytic and intuitive reasoning processes.\textsuperscript{12}

\textbf{A model for thinking about how we think}

In the earlier edition of her book \textit{Effective child protection}, Munro (2002) deconstructs expertise into the categories of knowledge and skills that Child Protection practitioners use when they are trying to analyse, make sense of situations and make decisions and judgments. These are:

- \textbf{Formal knowledge} – laws, policies and procedures and theories; empirical research, evidence drawn for example, from training and reading.
- \textbf{Practice wisdom} – folk psychology, social norms, cultural diversity; a combination of everyday skills and wisdom with enriched skills drawn from training and practice experience.
- \textbf{Values} – all practice takes place in an ethical framework including, for example, consideration of the balance of rights and needs and awareness of discrimination in all its forms.
- \textbf{Emotional wisdom} – awareness of the emotional impact of work on oneself and others and the ability to deal with this and use it as a source of understanding about behaviour of children, families, self and other professionals.
- \textbf{Reasoning skills} – ability to critically reflect on one’s practice and reason from a basis of experience and knowledge. Ability to understand the balance between intuition and analysis in one’s own decisions; and the ability to make a conscious appraisal of risks and benefits flowing from actions.

\textsuperscript{12} The need for both types of thinking is central to Munro’s (2008) book called \textit{Child protection}. We recommend that those interested in this topic read her text as it provides a comprehensive exploration and contains numerous practice examples.
Figure 13: Effective Child Protection

A model of knowledge and skills

Munro’s Model: Munro, 2005, reproduced and adapted in Dalzell and Sawyer, 2008, p.15.

Dalzell and Sawyer (2008) utilised this model with workers in the UK to promote a greater use of analysis in assessment practice. It has been compared to listening to an orchestra:

‘Clinical practice can be seen as analogous to music. There are laws of harmony which the musician must follow; the act of musical creation or interpretation is grounded in and underpinned by accepted regularities which allows it to be heard and understood by the listener. But its precise form is in no way determined by these laws, and at some times they clearly do not apply, and a new musical language may be introduced. It is likely that the effective therapist, like the accomplished musician, combines an informed understanding of principles and theories with an intuitive gift which enables her to tune in to the experiences of troubled people.’

(Yelloly and Henkel, 1993, p.7)

This metaphor suggests it is possible to simply listen to the music as a whole, or to listen for particular instruments and the role they play in the overall sound. It is argued that once the listener acquires an interest in breaking down music into component parts, this tends to stay with them as a way of listening to music, so too, the practitioner can learn how to analyse practice and the process of dissecting the categories of knowledge and skills underneath what they do. This process then forms a template for future practice, thereby encouraging ‘thinking clearly and deeply’, as identified in the Child Protection Leadership capability framework.
Reflexive exercise:
To assist you to think about the usefulness of Munro’s model we have included two case studies.

Case study 1
This case study has two parts: Part 1 illustrates the application of the model at a case practice and supervisory level and Part 2 illustrates the application to a management problem, relating to structuring the service model in the best way to ensure good outcomes.
You will be familiar with the characters in the following case practice scenario, as we have used them elsewhere in the guide. What knowledge and skills will Paul need to make sense of this case? Use Munro’s model categories to help you answer the question.

Part 1
Paul has been a Child Protection practitioner in a metropolitan response team for 10 months. This is his first professional job. Eleven weeks ago he was allocated the case of Joshua, a then five week old infant.

The Child Protection report came from a general practitioner (GP) who became concerned after Joshua’s mother, Amy, presented at the clinic, the previous day requesting prescription drugs and appearing significantly substance affected to the extent that she nearly dropped Joshua.

Michael is Aboriginal and grew up in rural Victoria. He was involved with the Youth Justice program following convictions for car theft and breaking and entering. Amy is non-Aboriginal and her family reside in Melbourne. She was briefly involved with Child Protection after disclosing sexual abuse by her maternal grandfather when she was aged 14. Amy’s mother was disbelieving and the case was closed after Amy retracted the allegation and refused to meet with Child Protection practitioners.

Child Protection contacted the birth hospital. The hospital had concerns about the parents, both aged 18, during the early stages of the pregnancy due to Amy’s poor attendance at ante natal appointments, homelessness and Amy’s admission that they used drugs, including heroin. She also disclosed that Joshua’s father, Michael had slapped her across the face during an altercation over money in the first trimester. The hospital monitored the situation and provided the parents with support. Amy’s attendance to ante natal appointments improved and she was stabilised on the methadone program.

Joshua was born at 37 weeks gestation and weighed 2.5kgs. He showed no obvious signs of withdrawal and was discharged from hospital after seven days. Hospital notes documented that the parents were receptive to learning parenting skills, such as bathing and feeding Joshua. Amy was linked in with a GP who prescribed methadone and her local maternal and child health nurse (MCHN).

Paul conducted the first Child Protection visit with another response practitioner and an Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice and Support Service (ACSASS) worker the day that the report was received. The parents were temporarily staying with friends in a small, over-crowded flat. Joshua was awake and in his mother’s arms. He seemed restless and cried throughout their visit.

Amy and Michael informed Paul that they have been together for over a year. The parents did not appear to be substance affected and denied that they were using drugs. They agreed for Child Protection to contact the GP who prescribed them their methadone. Amy explained that whoever made the report must have been mistaken in thinking she had used drugs with her being extremely tired after getting up through the night for Joshua.
Paul spoke with Amy separately and asked about family violence. She admitted previous violence but assured Paul, that because of Joshua; Michael had changed and would never harm her again. Amy revealed they did not have much support as she was estranged from her family and Michael’s family lived far away. Joshua’s cot was checked and the parents were provided with Safe Sleeping and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome information. Paul also highlighted to the parents the risks of co-sleeping and smoking near Joshua.

The parents agreed to further visits by Child Protection and a referral to Family Services, even though they disputed the need. They also consented to Child Protection contacting the MCHN. Amy admitted that she had not kept all of the MCHN appointments and Paul encouraged her to do so.

Paul and the ACSASS worker thought that the family would benefit from Family Services involvement once Child Protection had made a thorough Best interests assessment. The specialist infant protective practitioner concurred with this assessment and it was agreed that the case should remain open given Joshua’s vulnerability and the high number of risk indicators.

Since that visit, Paul had been back to the flat several times. On one occasion, Michael answered the door and said Amy was out with Joshua. He was pleasant but did not engage in conversation and said he would get Amy to contact him. This did not occur and during subsequent visits, Paul suspected the family were home but refusing to answer the door. Last week he visited again and had a door stop conversation with Michael who became agitated and told Paul they did not need any help from anyone and to leave them alone.

After that Paul followed up with the MCHN, confirming that Joshua missed three out of six appointments. Joshua was most recently seen three weeks ago with his mother Amy. According to the MCHN, Amy seems a timid woman who lacks confidence as a mother. The MCHN is worried about the lack of support for the family and wondered if Amy might be showing early signs of Post Natal Depression. Joshua seems to be meeting his milestones but has only been putting on the minimum expected amount of weight.

Paul’s supervision sessions have been spasmodic partly because the team has been understaffed and the workload is high. He is one of the more experienced practitioners after two new practitioners joined the team. At his next supervision session, Paul discusses the case with his supervisor and says he thinks they should close the case because the family does not want any involvement, he has not observed either parent to be substance affected and Joshua seemed to be fine.

Tony is taken aback at what he is hearing: particularly as Paul stresses how important it is to support the parents in caring for Joshua and that, given their backgrounds, it is not surprising that they don’t want Child Protection or Family Services involved.
The following forms of knowledge might be used by Paul if he is to think clearly and deeply about Joshua and his family.

**Formal knowledge including:**
- legal framework – *Children, Youth and Families Act*
- best interests and decision making principles
- Child Protection practice advice and guidance
- Best Interests Case Practice Model
- *Cultural competence framework*
- roles and responsibilities under the Act
- ecological and systems theory
- child development theory and needs of vulnerable infants
- impact of drug abuse on babies
- safe sleeping practices
- knowledge of survivors of sexual abuse and trauma
- knowledge about the dynamics of violence
- the history of removal of Aboriginal children
- knowledge about the impact of cumulative harm.

**Practice wisdom including:**
- any experience he has of working with mandated children
- past experiences of working with young parents with drug problems
- knowledge of the attitudes and beliefs held by young people who have been in care
- experience in working with Aboriginal families
- other professionals can provide valuable information.

**Emotional wisdom**
- He knows reported parents are often fearful and scared – they may react angrily.
- Self-awareness – he is conscious of feeling inexperienced and vulnerable.
- He recognises a risk that he may be unable to engage these parents.
- Emotional competence – he knows he must exercise his authority respectfully and sensitively.
- He recognises the potential impact on practitioner judgement when people are hostile and not easily engaged.

**Values**
- His role is to protect children from significant harm and cumulative harm.
- He values working in partnership with parents.
- He values working in a strengths approach.
- All children have a right to be protected from harm.
He values cultural diversity and is committed to developing culturally competency.

He must exercise his authority justly and fairly.

**Reasoning skills**

- He needs to gather more information for a thorough holistic risk assessment.
- He doesn’t have enough understanding about what is happening to Joshua currently.
- He may make assumptions about why Michael has shut the door.
- His assumptions and that of the parents may collide and interact.
- His values may conflict at times.
- He needs to be able to generate some different explanations for what is happening.
- He recognises a pattern of interaction between the family and services over time.
- He understands that the best predictor of future behaviour is past behaviour.
- He understands the consequences of what he does now are highly influential for future work with the family.
- He knows he may need to try to engage them again.
- He considers taking another professional with him.
- He considers the value of seeking legal advice.

We have purposefully generated an extensive list of our ideas to illustrate the value of the model and its application to complex, ambiguous and challenging cases. The model retains a focus on the child in the context of the family and good outcomes.

Later in the chapter, we consider how a process of supervision that draws on a reflective practice framework can help Paul to apply this diverse range of knowledge and skill as well as aid his professional development.

**Part 2**

What knowledge and skills does Tony need to make sense of this situation described below?

Use Munro’s model to help you to answer the question.

**Tony has been a team leader of a response team for six months. He has previously been a practitioner in the team. He has had some experience acting in the role but has had no formal leadership professional development training yet.**

In his own supervision sessions, Tony has not raised concerns about Paul’s practice with his unit manager. He has talked about the work he is doing to establish the team and getting to know the practitioners better. In his supervision sessions they have been focusing on staffing and managing workload issues.

In his next supervision session with the unit manager, Tony starts the session by saying he is surprised and disappointed with Paul’s Best interests assessment in relation to Joshua. Tony wonders if Paul is in the wrong job because he has not talked to him before about the difficulties and how the case is going.

The unit manager, supervising Tony, has been managing the workload of a vacant team leader position for two months. Due to the high number of unallocated cases and low staffing numbers, the unit
The manager has been encouraged to promote through-put. The management team has been looking carefully at staffing, trying to find a way to increase the number of practitioners in the intake team.

**Formal knowledge** including:

- Best interests and decision making principles
- Child Protection case practice framework - knowledge and skills
- familiarity with the same formal knowledge drawn on by Paul
- knowledge about Paul's stage of development as a practitioner
- knowledge about Paul's past history of supervision
- emotional and social competence framework
- knowledge of learning styles
- the four functions of supervision
- roles and responsibilities of a supervisor
- Child Protection *Supervision standards framework*
- supervision agreement format
- reflective practice framework
- adult learning principles.

**Practice wisdom**

- He draws on previous work with new Child Protection practitioners.
- He understands conscious and unconscious incompetence in new practitioners.
- He knows early management of problems leads to better outcomes.
- He knows practitioners need opportunities to process feelings about difficult cases and failure to engage.
- He knows transfer of learning takes time.

**Emotional wisdom**

- He understands practitioner fear about getting it wrong and making a mistake.
- He understands the impact of anxiety and its potential to minimise or exaggerate abuse.
- He has a capacity to think about unconscious dynamics - process reflection.
- He understands possible fear of failure as a new supervisor.
- He understands his possible desire to be liked and be seen to be doing well.
- He understands he may be anxious in exercising authority as a new supervisor.
- He understands the challenge of friendships and boundaries in supervisory relations.
- He understands the need to manage his emotional response if he is to be helpful.
- He knows in a collaborative culture people learn from mistakes.
**Values** including:

- openness
- fairness and respect
- cultural competence
- strength-based collaborative practice
- positive expectations approach
- appropriate exercise of authority and power in supervisory role
- ability to admit mistakes.

**Reasoning skills**

- He needs to make a professional judgement about whether risk is present.
- He knows they don’t have enough information about Joshua and his family.
- He recognises his assumptions about Paul’s level of competence.
- He knows the consequences of appearing to blame or undermine him.
- He knows the consequences of not questioning his assessment.
- He needs to facilitate a process where they think together about alternatives.
- He knows they need to generate some useful hypotheses about what is going on in the family.

There are no right answers to this exercise. Please feel free to add your own ideas. This framework seeks to aid your capacity to analyse problems and understand the situation presented so you might make decisions about how to proceed. It illustrates the value of widening and deepening thinking as a way of avoiding simplistic responses to complex and dynamic case practice and supervisory challenges.
Case study 2

What knowledge and skills does this unit manager need to make sense of this situation described below? Use Munro’s model to help you to answer the question. We have made a few suggestions under each heading as a starting point.

A unit manager in a rural region becomes aware that practitioners in the two response teams are becoming increasingly unhappy about the current system that guides the way they work. There are two response teams located in different population centres, serving a large geographical area with a report rate over and above the state average.

Each team is managed by a team leader and there are six positions in each team, although it is rare for either to be fully staffed.

The team members from across the two teams are on a daily roster to respond to urgent cases and to respond to regional ‘awaiting allocation’ cases, where urgent tasks and responses are required across their joint locations. All team members hold an allocated caseload working with cases in the protective intervention phase in their part of the region.

According to both team leaders who report to the unit manager, it is not working for the joint group to rotate the urgent response function on a daily basis. Urgent response means urgent visits are undertaken by the staff member on the roster that day. They are also responsible for managing the cases on the ‘awaiting allocation’ where urgent follow-up is required. Practitioners report that they spend a great deal of time in the car travelling from one part of the region to another.

Each team leader rotates the management function for the urgent response function on a daily basis. One of them suggests it is challenging to manage practitioners in another part of the region who they don’t know as well as their own team members.

Both team leaders report additional tensions with the centralised intake team who are located in the regional centre where neither response team is located. Intake practitioners have suggested informally that they are hanging on to cases that cannot be allocated and that, of late, there appears to have been no capacity to do the urgent visits because the practitioners on the roster are busy or at court.

The team leaders are jointly stating that the system has to change because of the level of discontent in their teams. The unit manager is increasingly aware that the staffing budget is very tight with money being spent on a maternity leave backfill position for a team leader.

**Formal knowledge** including:

- statistical data about volume of reports, current response times for urgent response cases, numbers of awaiting allocation cases, current caseloads in the both response teams and trends over time showing numbers of cases closed at intake
- knowledge about budgets and financial planning
- conflict management framework.

What other formal knowledge might she need?
Practice wisdom including:

- Knowledge about the systems in place across the state – what works?
- Knowledge that what might work in a metropolitan region may not apply in a rural region
- Local knowledge about the context and the people
- Knowledge about cases ‘changing hands’ and heightened risk.

What other practice wisdom might she need?

Emotional wisdom including:

- Value of consultation with ‘experts’ and ‘stakeholders’
- Under persistent and relentless pressure practitioners can lose sight of the child
- Individual staff and their approaches, stage of development, styles, skills and experience.

What other emotional wisdom might she need?

Values including:

- Child’s best interests are of paramount importance
- Collaboration and consultation with all stakeholders
- Transparency.

What other values are important?

Reasoning skills

- She understands the range of possible options and the consequences for each.
- She understands that decisions made in one part of the service structure impact on another and therefore there needs to be a system approach.

What other reasoning skills does she need?

There are a range of ways for this unit manager to respond to this complex problem where there is no ‘obvious right answer’. Different responses to the same scenario may well be appropriate, depending on many local and organisational factors. The value of the model is that it reinforces the notion that to be effective she will need knowledge, skills and values from across the model. She will need to model thoughtful and insightful action and decision making, tailored to the local context, if she is to be effective.

In many instances, managers are able to create thinking space for themselves and resist the temptation to be reactive. However, we suggest that sometimes it requires a supervisor, manager or peer to support this reflective process. What kind of questions would help a unit manager, facing the above problem, to ensure that she considers the full range of sections in Munro’s model?

We now suggest you undertake the reflective exercise to help you consider how your thinking affects decision making.
**Reflective exercise:**

Look at Munro’s model and the case study. Reflect on your practice over the past few months.

- When you are involved in decision making about cases, do you rely on one part of the model or does it vary depending on the type of case or problem?
- What external factors impact on how you draw on the sections of the model?
- Has this reflection led you to think that you need to change the way you draw on sections of the model?

Now think about the other aspects of your work or problems you face and repeat your thinking. We suggest you look at a complex interagency situation or a supervisory challenge you are currently facing as a middle manager. Use the Munro model to consider what knowledge and skills are needed to help you to move forward.

As noted, it is important for managers to think about the strengths and challenges in relation to the individual, team and organisation. By being more open to reflection themselves, managers contribute to a culture of openness and learning (see Chapter 5). However, we must recognise that people are reluctant to take risks, appear wrong and admit to feeling anxious when the culture is experienced as blaming, shaming and negative. This is why it is so important to create a healthy culture in Child Protection. You may want to consider using this activity with your team as a group activity and to reflect collectively on individual approaches to practice.

The Munro model can provide some scaffolding to support thinking clearly and enhance the reflective capabilities of practitioners. It provides a foundation to help the practitioner bring their thinking process to a conscious level. It demands that those using it differentiate between the types of knowledge they are using to make sense of situations. Importantly, it requires the practitioner to consider the values that underpin their approach and decision making.

For an effective assessment, the practitioner needs to break down the information and ideas into manageable chunks and then stand back and think clearly about what the ‘data’ means, before coming to a decision about what to do. The model encourages practitioners to move on from data collection and to summarise, integrate and synthesise the knowledge that leads them to an overall formulation (Brandon, et al., 2008). You may want to use the model in your supervision or in a team discussion. It can be used in case presentations where the team can reflect on which parts of the model have been used in the analysis.
The role of supervision and reflective practice in ‘thinking clearly’

A model of supervision practice that aids this process of reflective practice for practitioners is presented in the following section. The model prioritises the professional development function of supervision but, if used thoughtfully by the supervisor, can also meet other functions, including accountability (see chapters 1 and 3).

It is also a model that lends itself to other applications and can be applied to the work undertaken by specialist practitioners in their role with frontline practitioners. It can also guide supervision practice at other levels of the organisations – unit managers with team leaders and the supervision delivered by Child Protection managers.

Encouraging ‘thinking clearly and deeply’

Individual face-to-face supervision should be regarded as an integral component of Child Protection practice at every level. It is important that the supervisor understands they have an important role in: ensuring that the practitioner identifies the information they need and how it is to be sought; assist them in developing evidence-based explanations about what is happening; challenging them to be open to different or conflicting hypotheses; and help them to establish a case formulation (Wonnacott, 2003). The process through which the supervisor helps the practitioner to do this should model ‘thinking clearly and deeply’ and assist the practitioner to develop ‘critical thoughtfulness’, that is, the ability to think on practice before, during and after practice events (Holland, 2004).

Schon (1983) argues that reflection-in-action means maintaining awareness of our feelings while simultaneously thinking about how we are making sense of what we are experiencing – theories in use. By helping the practitioner to look back (after the practice experience) and to use those experiences to learn, supervisors enhance practitioners’ capacity to ‘reflect in action’ (during the practice experience).

Learning cycle

In chapter 3 and 5, we discuss an adult learning paradigm and transformational learning in a Child Protection context. The role of learning is central to all the capabilities identified by Atkinson-Consulting! (2008): effective managers are both good learners and good facilitators of adult learning. They strive to create a context where learning is encouraged and supported. Morrison (2005) recognises this when he applies the Kolb learning cycle to promote reflective practice in Child Protection and to support adult learning from experience. He argues that the cycle should occur at each level in the Child Protection process: the practitioner level, the client level and the supervisory level. The four parts of the cycle focus on facts, feelings, analysis and planning.
Figure 14: Supervision cycle

Kolb, modified by Morrison, 2005, p. 155

You may want to use this model to reflect on an example from your own experience such as learning to swim, dance or get fit. It is important to consider the affective and cognitive aspects of the experience and how these impacted on what happened. It is also useful for reflecting on how practitioners engage with families, trying to understand what happened, what it was like, what it meant to them and how they visualise the future as a result.

The basic cycle can be used in supervision to encourage the practitioner to be more reflective by directly addressing the affective and cognitive aspects of practice. This is done by using well-formulated open questions. It discourages the practitioner from jumping to conclusions about the case and making decisions about what needs to happen.

In his book *Staff supervision in social care* (2005) Morrison explains the application of his model. Here, however, we want to highlight the value of this way of supervising that promotes analytic skills to think clearly and deeply about practice events.
Experience part of the learning cycle

The supervisor can help to uncover what information has already been collected and by what methods by asking the practitioner to recall events and to ‘tell the story’. It may be that by asking ‘experience’ questions the practitioner’s attention is drawn to what they don’t know and what other information they need to collect. It is in this early part of the cycle that the supervisor assists the practitioner to bring to a conscious level what they know about the child and what has happened so far.

In non-case-specific discussions, the supervisor helps the supervisee to describe the problem and the multiple dimensions of the situation. It is important for supervisors to be aware of the danger of proceeding straight to action and short-circuiting the learning process. Here are some example questions:

- Tell me about what happened on that last visit
- Can you recall the early part of that meeting with the police? What happened?
- What did you notice about the other professionals who attended?
- What were the concerns expressed by the other team members?

If the aim is to facilitate learning and promote thoughtful practice, attention must be given to the affective and cognitive aspects through reflection and analysis. It is here that learning takes place. In high-risk emergency situations, it may be that solutions or decisions must be made quickly but it is then important to come back to the situation at a later date to reflect on what happened.

Reflection part of the learning cycle

In the next part of the cycle the supervisor uses well-formulated reflective questions to help the supervisee identify which emotions influence thinking and action. Reflection helps the supervisee to recognise patterns and to make links with prior experiences. This is intuitive thinking and can be encouraged by asking questions such as:

- What were your gut feelings?
- What did it remind you of?
- Can you give me a metaphor to describe how you were feeling during the team meeting?
- When have you experienced something similar?

It is here that the supervisor can encourage the supervisee to acknowledge and process emotional responses to families and others that can provide useful insights into the child’s or others’ experience. Without good supervision these emotional clues may be lost to conscious awareness and remain at an unconscious level.

Asking questions such as those below might assist in this process.

- What were you feeling when he started to raise his voice?
- What do you think the child may have been feeling and why?
- How do you think the teacher felt about the decision?
- What do you think the police were feeling?
In addition, it is important for practitioners to be helped to explore whether any of their emotional responses are being contaminated or compounded by events or experiences in their own lives. If emotional responses are not recognised and processed they have the potential to distort risk or can lead to risk being minimised (see Chapter 2).

**Analysis part of the learning cycle**

In the analysis part of the cycle, the supervisor directly addresses the importance of examining how the supervisee is making sense of the experience. It is by asking good analytical questions that the supervisee is encouraged to think clearly about the conclusions that have been drawn and on what basis they were made. If practice is to be ethical and non-discriminatory, the supervisor needs to help the supervisee to explore the dimensions of authority and power.

A core activity in effective risk assessment practice is hypothesising: assisting practitioners to develop their capacity to build, test out and discard multiple hypotheses for understanding and explaining what is happening in a family (Holland, 2004; Dalzell and Sawyer, 2008). By asking the practitioner to articulate the emerging hypotheses, the supervisor ensures the quality of the thinking behind the assessment is examined. There is considerable evidence that problems can arise in the way practitioners reason when they are making sense of complex information. Based on Munro’s work (2008), Dalzell and Sawyer (2008) identify a number of common errors:

- failure to revise risk assessments – difficulty in changing minds, considering alternatives
- discounting of earlier history
- failure to note patterns
- written evidence overlooked in preference to direct reports
- discounting of contrary evidence
- uncritical of evidence that supports own view.

It is therefore critical that supervisors ask questions that help to guard against these tendencies. Here are some examples:

- How did you understand or make sense of that event?
- Can you explain why you think that was a reasonable explanation?
- What other explanations might there be and why have we discarded them?
- What do you think this means?
- How far has this latest report confirmed your previous assessment?

**Action phase of the learning cycle**

In the action planning part of the cycle, the supervisor helps the supervisee to use the analysis to guide what they are going to do next. This may well involve gathering more information or testing out certain hypotheses. Some examples of questions to aid planning and action are:

- Now that we have done some reflecting and analysing about the team, how would you summarise things and what needs to happen?
- What do you think you might want to do next?
- What are some of the different ways you might proceed with this?
It is important for supervisors to recognise that everyone has weaknesses and strengths in different parts of the cycle. This highlights the importance of supervisors understanding the learning style for each supervisee (and themselves) and recognising the importance of asking questions addressing each part of the cycle (see Chapter 3, for discussion of learning styles). We have described the model by covering each stage sequentially. In the real world of supervision practice, it is likely that the dynamic process would move around different parts of the cycle, however, it is important that all aspects are covered.

Individual face-to-face supervision in Child Protection is mandated through the Child Protection Supervision standards. There is now significant evidence that it is an important and integral component of effective practice leading to better outcomes. The model we have described lends itself to encouraging both thoughtful and emotionally attuned practice. Our view is that supervisors can use this model to assist supervisees to attend to the various components of effective practice as outlined in Munro’s model. The model validates diverse sources of knowledge. Questions drawn from a strength-based model of supervision (McCashen, 2005), and a number of other frameworks (Hawkins and Shohet, 2006) are well positioned to strengthen the reflective and analytical capabilities of practitioners (see Chapter 3 for a range of question types).

**Reflective exercise:**

We now apply this model of supervision in the case study we used earlier to illustrate Munro’s model of effective practice. We identified what Tony and Paul may need in terms of knowledge and skills to be effective at the case practice and supervisory level.

How could they be assisted to draw on what they already know and to progress their development further through their respective supervisors using this model? Turning first to Tony’s supervision with Paul: What reflective questions could he ask to promote his professional development at the same time as ensuring accountability for what is happening in the case? (We have made some suggestions to prompt your thinking.)

**Experience questions**

- Can you describe what happened the last time you tried to visit the family?
- Can you recall what was in your mind as you arrived?
- What did Michael say when he opened the door? How did he look?
- What was different this time to the other times you have visited?
- What do you remember about his tone of voice and facial expressions?
- How does Michael’s Aboriginality impact on the way you see him?
- What do you recall about your reactions, expressions and non-verbal communication?
- Have you talked to anyone else about this family? What have they told you?
- What do we know about Joshua right now?
Reflective questions

- What were you feeling about visiting that day?
- What do you think Michael might have been feeling when he saw you on the doorstep?
- If Amy had been there, what do you think she would have been feeling?
- What do you think life is like for baby Joshua? (What makes you think that?)
- What did the visit remind you of?
- What’s gone well in this case? How do you know?
- Have you had this type of experience before?
- What’s the authority role like in Child Protection?

Analytical questions

- If Joshua were able to talk to us, what do you think he would want to tell us about his life right now?
- What do other people who know this family tell us about their assessment? Why do they see the family this way?
- We talk a great deal in the team about the ‘authority aspect of Child Protection.’ What does this mean to you?
- How does it apply in this case?
- What did you think your role was that day?
- What was important for you to achieve that day?
- What do you think Michael and Amy think about your role?
- How did you make sense of Michael refusing you access that last time?
- What did you try that day and why?
- What is your hypothesis about what’s going on here? Are there any other explanations?
- What do you think the risks are for Joshua and what makes you think this?

Planning and acting

- What are our options here?
- What are the pros and cons of each?
- What don’t we know?
- How can we get that information?
- What do you think might be the best way forward to ensure Joshua’s safety?
- What might happen if we go back and suggest that if we don’t see Joshua, we will need to seek an order that ensures we can?

Now let’s turn to Tony and his supervision. What reflective questions could the supervisor ask Tony to promote his professional development, while ensuring accountability for Paul’s work with the family?
Experience
• Can you tell me briefly what happened in your last supervision session when you were talking about Joshua and his family?
• What was your plan that day in supervision?
• What did you hope to achieve in the session?
• What surprised you?
• What did Paul tell you he was planning to do that day and then what did he do?

Reflection
• Can you recall what you felt when Paul recounted what had happened?
• Can you give me a metaphor for how you reacted that day?
• What do you think Paul was feeling in supervision?
• What do you think Michael and Amy are feeling?
• If Paul were sitting here, what would he tell me about his supervision with you?
• What has supervision with Paul been like for you?

Analysis
• What is your hypothesis about Paul and his case practice here?
• What assumptions have you made about Paul and his knowledge and skill level?
• On what was this assessment based?
• How do you think Paul understands supervision?
• What do you think your role is as his supervisor?
• What do you think has gone well in his supervision? What has not gone so well?
• What do we know about new Child Protection practitioners and how they develop over time?
• How does Paul fit with these ideas?

Planning and acting
• What do you think should happen now with the case?
• Can you explain why?
• Are there any other options?
• How can I help and support you?
• What might assist Paul here?
• What could you try in supervision to help him?
• What does he need to do differently?
• What do you need to do differently?
• What other supervisory arrangements are going better?
• What’s different?
These case examples illustrate there are no set ways of approaching supervision. Your ideas may have been different. The model we have described here encourages the supervisor to help the supervisee to broaden their thinking. In many cases, the supervisor promotes practitioners’ learning by asking a good reflective question. When someone struggles to give an answer, it often prompts them to realise they need more information. Asking open reflective questions provides a useful way for the supervisor to assess the supervisee’s level of competence and confidence about what they are doing. It allows the supervisor to ensure they fulfil the managerial function at the same time.

During a supervision session such as the ones discussed here, the supervisor would be trying to be empathetic and supportive and, at the same time, creating an opportunity for the supervisee to be challenged and encouraged to learn through what has happened. The supervisor will need to be aware of their emotional responses and the responses of the supervisee.

We suggest you identify a supervision session in the next week when you plan to ask more open reflective questions. After the session spend a few minutes recalling what happened and how much more knowledge and understanding you may have gained through taking a position of curiosity and interest rather than a position of ‘telling’ (see Chapter 3).

In the last section of this chapter we briefly describe other ways in which middle managers might wish to consider promoting ‘thinking clearly’. In particular, we suggest the team as a whole can play a useful function in providing opportunities for greater thoughtfulness.

**Encouraging ‘thinking clearly’ beyond individual supervision**

The team is a group with potential to promote and sustain reflective practice but only if adequate thought and preparation is given to establishing a clear structure about how this can be achieved. A starting point in ‘thinking clearly’ is for middle managers to reflect on their existing strengths and weaknesses in relation to thoughtful practice (reflective exercise). This exercise could also be done with teams, as a way of doing a current health check and pointing to any gaps and barriers. Ruch (2007) proposes a case discussion method based on work in a statutory setting in the UK. This might be of interest to some middle managers.
**Reflective exercise:**

Use a SWOT box to help you reflect on the strengths, challenges, opportunities and threats to your analytical skills at an individual and team level.

- **Strengths** – provide examples where thoughtful and analytical practice is strong, for example: I encourage it in supervision; I keep up to date with evidence-based research by reading a practice journal on a regular basis; I try not to have ‘corridor supervision’.

- **Challenges** – provide examples where there are tangible weaknesses and deficits in practice, competence, knowledge, skills, for example: I see a lack of analysis and use of supportive evidence in court reports; the current format of a court report does not encourage analysis; most of my team are new recruits.

- **Opportunities** – what exists within the team, agency and external environment to support more analytical practice, for example: the principal practitioner role; my team has a monthly case discussion group; the department is piloting a new operating model; we have a university that offers relevant study options; interesting new research articles to stimulate my thinking.

- **Threats** – what creates obstacles to developing more analytical practice at an individual and team level, for example: I regularly hear team leaders reporting they do not have time for ‘thinking’, just ‘doing’; we have a significant recruitment problem in my area; we have the highest report rate in the state.

**Figure 15: SWOT analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
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<tbody>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Threats</th>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
After completing the SWOT analysis, you are encouraged to consider each box in turn. Ask yourself what you need to do to support the strong areas and address the deficits. Make a note of your responses and the action that needs to be taken. The final step is to consider a timescale for each action, some of which may involve talking to, or action by, other people.

While recognising the immense value of groups in terms of generating different ideas and thinking, it is important to remember there are some potential pitfalls in groups in relation to ‘thinking clearly’ and promoting better analyses. Munro (2002), drawing on the work of Janis (1982), warns against the potential for ‘groupthink’ meaning bias, blind conformity or distorted thinking. As a way of countering processes, such as closed mindedness and pressure to conform, she suggests that leaders should explicitly encourage dissent and criticism.

In a similar way to the supervisor who asks about other hypotheses that might have been discarded, a group leader should encourage a ‘devil’s advocate’ role to disagree with the consensus. To ensure this role does not always fall to the same person, and therefore develop a dynamic where that person is seen as the ‘negative’ one, the supervisor needs to explicitly encourage dissent during discussion and ensure this role is undertaken by all team members. Further ideas and issues associated with teams are discussed and expanded at length in Chapter 1.
Thinking clearly and ‘business insight’

The concepts here can readily be applied to those aspects of thinking clearly called ‘business insight’ in the Child Protection Leadership capability framework (Atkinson-Consulting!, 2008). These include demonstrating ‘political nous’ and developing ‘compelling arguments’ to address problems within the system. This kind of strategic thinking can feel, for some new managers, as though it is a whole new language and world to master. However, there is a role for both analytic and intuitive thinking in these activities and, when properly applied, Munro’s model can be just as useful.

Political nous, for example, often comes with time and experience in the role – this is tacit knowledge learnt intuitively from seeing what works and how to operate successfully at this level in the organisation. Being able to present a compelling argument and understanding the business arm of the Department of Human Services also comes with time and experience but demands learning more formal technical knowledge that can be applied to particular issues and situations.

At the interface between management and practitioners, middle managers are ideally positioned to understand the imperatives from both ‘sides’. They are acutely aware of the demands on Child Protection practitioners and local services, they know the emerging issues in relation to particular client groups, and they manage the practice issues facing practitioners at the coal face. They are equally aware of the current strategic directions of the organisation, of the policy and budget context in which the program is currently operating, and of the local and broader implications of events that are occurring. While this position can feel like the ‘meat in the sandwich’ (Gibbs, 2002) it also holds strategic possibilities. These issues are discussed further in chapters 1 and 3.

Effective middle managers at this level understand the importance of keeping their superiors informed of issues that may need to be managed at a higher level, or situations where risks may escalate; however, they are also mindful of not overwhelming senior managers with unnecessary detail or behaving as though their own expertise cannot be trusted. They thoughtfully consider who needs to know what and why, and then what is the best way to provide this information. Should it be in the form of a briefing document, a requested meeting, a discussion in supervision? Munro’s (2002) model of knowledge and skills discussed earlier can assist a middle manager to decide what kind of knowledge they are relying on to draw conclusions, and what kind of knowledge their manager needs to understand the issues appropriately. In considering this, it is also important for the middle manager to consider the learning style of the senior manager. How do they like information given to them? How does this fit with their own style or with the requirements of the task? What may need to be adapted or emphasised to fit the senior manager’s style or the requirements?

13 Learning styles are discussed in detail in Chapter 3.
Reflective exercise:
Consider, for example, a region with high practitioner turnover at frontline level. The intake and response functions appear particularly prone to lose practitioners quickly. This has put significant pressure on team leaders to ‘act down’ at times. In the past the unit manager has sought agreement from the Child Protection manager to use agency practitioners to supplement the permanent staff group. This has proved unsatisfactory as the agency has sent very inexperienced practitioners who do not understand Child Protection or the region.

The region has a university nearby where social work is offered as a four-year degree course with a third-year entry point for graduates. The unit manager has noted that in the last two years very few graduates from the university have applied for jobs in the program. The unit manager wants to write an issues paper for her manager that sets out the problem, emerging issues and suggests possible ways forward.

Use the table below to jot down your ideas about sources of knowledge you would draw on if you were the unit manager and going to write an issues paper that sets out the problem, the implications and possible ways forward.

Figure 16: Sources of knowledge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue-based knowledge including at case practice, local context and broader systemic level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formal knowledge</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For example, knows there is no agreement with university about student placements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Practice wisdom</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For example, knows the best way to recruit social workers is through offering placement options.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emotional wisdom</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For example, knows agency staff have less commitment to staying than permanent appointments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Values</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For example, values and models openness and honesty about problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reasoning skills</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For example, knows they need to develop a longer term strategy rather than short-term reactive responses.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The unit manager needs to consider how to write an issues paper setting out the problem, drawing on all parts of the model but presenting a sound business case for strategies to tackle the problem that are both short term and longer term in nature.

Before starting to write the paper the unit manager might consider these helpful preparatory questions:

- Who else might you want to consult with while you are preparing and writing the issues paper?
- What would be the headings you would use in an issues paper?
- What are the implications of the current situation for case practice and outcomes for children?
- What specific regional or local context issues are relevant here?
- What broader systemic issues are relevant here?
- What is a short-term strategy to tackle the problem? (For example, the unit manager might suggest talking to the agency about her needs or looking at some mentoring for inexperienced practitioners.)
- What is a long-term strategy to tackle the problem? (For example, the unit manager may suggest meeting with staff at the university to talk about maximising placement options and teaching input from the department.)

Your ideas for responses to the above questions should illustrate that the effective middle manager must be able to consider problems from a number of different levels in the Child Protection process. Locally, a serious problem can be indicative of a much broader systemic, even international problem, as in this case. However, there are also case practice implications that the manager will need to identify as well. Of greatest importance is the skill of being able to approach problems with a multi-level perspective.

Now we ask you to consider another aspect of writing this issues paper and presenting your argument for short- and long-term strategies. How can you ensure the likelihood of your proposals being accepted? You need to think about your manager and how best to convince them with your well-reasoned and structured paper.

To help think about this you may want to imagine you are a manager at a higher level than you – Child Protection manager, community care manager, regional director – who is going to read the paper setting out the issues.

- What would you need to know if you were that person?
- Why would you need to know it or not know it?
- How would you need the information given to you?

You might now like to repeat this exercise using other examples from your experience.

How the middle manager uses capabilities related to ‘thinking clearly’ will be important; however, like all the capabilities discussed in this guide, thinking does not stand alone. To astutely and sensitively manage issues, the middle manager needs to form relationships of influence (see Chapter 1), engage with players at all levels of the system (see Chapter 3), and ensure that a high level of emotional awareness informs the response (see Chapter 2). In this case it would be unhelpful to simply detail the problem – the unit manager has the local knowledge and political nous to know there is significant merit in engaging with both the agency and the university as a means to changing the situation.
Summary

Thinking and decision making in Child Protection is influenced by emotions, values, reasoning skills, practice wisdom and formal knowledge. ‘Thinking clearly’ means that practitioners will try to identify these influences so their practice is of a high quality, fair, ethical and transparent. We have proposed that individual face-to-face supervision using a reflective practice approach, based on Kolb’s learning cycle, has much to offer in this process.

Munro (2008) and others argue that Child Protection practitioners tend to rely too heavily on intuition and need to draw more heavily on formal analytical thinking, while not losing sight of the value of what can be understood through empathy and intuition. In order for there to be well-planned interventions and informed decision making in cases, it is imperative that practitioners are well managed and supported by team leaders and middle managers who demonstrate and model ‘thinking clearly’ drawing on diverse sources of knowledge, including critical reflection as a practice-based knowledge.

Supervision should be a key forum in which the hypotheses generated from information gathering, and the inevitable blind spots and bias, are challenged. Here, practitioners also make explicit their values, assumptions, uncertainties and feelings. The provision of emotionally containing supervision is imperative if practitioners are to utilise the invaluable insights that come from their emotional responses to children and parents. Practitioners who are supervised in this way will develop professionally and be better able to reflect in interactions with families.

We have suggested that the team ethos should be one that values reflective practice and supports members by embedding structures such as case discussions. On a final note, it is important to reiterate that the culture of the organisation is a powerful influence, both positively and negatively, on whether adequate time and resources are given to the feeling and thinking dimensions of practice.

Middle managers can model thoughtful practice, thereby directly influencing better outcomes for children and their families. They contribute in this way to a more healthy, collaborative learning culture but they cannot take total responsibility for it. Those at the executive and senior management level need to reflect on the part they play in the messages that permeate through the many levels of the Child Protection process in relation to the place of thinking and emotion, how priorities are set and how effective practice is measured (Gibbs, 2008b).
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inspire

reflect
engage
collaborate
support
enable
learn
Chapter 5 Leading and inspiring

In this chapter we cover:

Contributing to a collaborative learning culture

- managing difference
- representing the values and beliefs of a collaborative culture
- appropriate use of authority
- being emotionally attuned
- providing leadership in a time of change.

Leadership style and supervisory process

- emotionally intelligent leadership
- three process frameworks to aid the collaborative work culture.

Capability: Leading and inspiring

Effectively leading and inspiring our people helps them to focus on what really matters, and strengthens their professional competence to deliver the best possible results for each child.

The two capabilities within this cluster are summarised below.

1. Creating clarity – conveys a clear sense of purpose and direction; defines clear priorities and boundaries; provides clarity in the face of change; translates broader strategy into practical terms.

2. Surfacing potential – inspires and strengthens the capacity of others; fosters learning and thoughtful reflection; values intellectual challenge and emotional support; encourages and coaches team members to deliver good outcomes for children.
Introduction

‘Services which are most effective are those where front line practitioners are supported in a clear managerial framework and where they are encouraged to develop reflective practice’. There is a clear and positive relationship between the quality of services and an effective management structure. The only way of delivering improving care services and delivering public sector reform is by involving the people who are going to deliver it – engaging with front line staff, listening to them and service users.’ (DoH/SSI, 2003 p.5-6 cited in Morrison, 2009).

Middle managers demonstrate the capabilities of ‘creating clarity’ and ‘surfacing potential’ by developing and contributing to a collaborative learning culture, a term used by Morrison (2005) and based on the work by Vince and Martin (1993). The development of this learning culture is, however, not solely the responsibility of middle managers, it requires a commitment to learning at every level of the process, including at senior management level (Gibbs, 2008). Such a learning culture promotes a willingness to learn from mistakes and to remain open to creative new possibilities (SCIE, 2004).

The research evidence is increasingly clear – improving the quality of services and achieving better outcomes for children and their families is integrally related to how well practitioners are managed and supported within the organisation (Glisson and Hemmelgarn, 1998; Poertner, 2006; Glisson, 2007; Yoo, Brooks and Patti, 2007). It is no surprise then, that Atkinson-Consulting! (2008) found that knowledge and skills, important as they are, cannot, in their own right, predict high levels of effectiveness.

Effective Child Protection practice requires that practitioners experience their work environment as supportive and the organisational culture as one that holds continual learning and development as a priority. The same applies to partnerships with other organisations: the kind of respect and treatment shown to other players in the service network will influence outcomes for children at the frontline. It is the role of middle managers to have clarity about, and demonstrate commitment to, the values and beliefs underpinning the core business of the agency and to rigorously apply these to their work with others.

In this chapter we suggest that middle managers make a highly significant contribution to a collaborative learning culture through their style of leadership and management and through the application of thoughtful and analytic processes in the way they engage with, and support, practitioners. This is not a one-way influence of course, a collaborative learning culture underpins effective leadership through encouraging reflection and learning at all levels of the organisation.
Figure 17: Collaborative learning culture

A collaborative organisational culture:
- Supportive and developmental –
  - clarity of purpose
  - values based
  - relationship-based practice
  - outcome focus
  - professional growth and care
  - reflective practice.

Inspiring leadership
- Emotionally attuned style
- Process – thoughtful and analytic.

Contributions to a collaborative culture leading to good outcomes for everyone.

The two-way relationship between leadership style, process and a collaborative learning culture (Gibbs, 2009a).
Contributing to a collaborative learning culture

Historically, a great deal of focus has been put on establishing policies, procedures and structures in Child Protection to ensure good intra- and interagency working. However, there is increasing evidence that the impact of these will be distorted and diluted if practitioners are working in unfavorable organisational cultures featuring: depersonalisation and a lack of role clarity; diminished job satisfaction; and an absence of cooperation and support.

Given that Child Protection work is high risk, unpredictable and complex, practitioners need to be:

- clear and confident in their role
- feel secure in managing their statutory responsibilities
- feel valued by the organisation
- well trained for the work.

If practitioners are confused and lacking in confidence, they will be immensely challenged when they are working with families and attempting to negotiate effective working relationships across the service system, particularly with staff from other professional backgrounds. Unfavourable work cultures foster anger and frustration to be projected onto others, resulting in tense and problematic relations, which contribute to poorer outcomes for children and their families.

**Reflective exercise:**

Take a moment to think about the 12 most important things that keep you engaged and motivated in your work as a Child Protection manager or leader.

The chances are that your fundamental organisational needs revolve around purpose, meaning, clarity, development and connection – all critical factors we have covered in this guide.

Gallup researchers have spent many millions of dollars identifying just this. They have been able to distil 12 factors from their analysis of hundreds of factors that contribute most to practitioners’ productive motivations, engagement and outcomes. The exact questions are copyright but can be found on the Gallup Management Journal website at <http://gmj.gallup.com>, and can be explored in greater detail in Wagner and Hartner (2006).

In summary, these 12 factors refer to:

- having clear expectations about the roles and responsibilities that practitioners are expected to undertake
- having the basic material resources to undertake work
- having the regular opportunities to utilise practitioners’ talents, strengths and aptitudes
- getting feedback and recognition for good work and progress
- having a supervisor who shows interest in the professional and personal development of practitioners
- consulting and listening to practitioners’ opinions
- practitioners feeling that their role is important to the organisation
- commitment in the work group to undertaking quality work
- having a sense of connection and someone in the organisation to confide in.
Child Protection middle managers have a critical role in creating and shaping this type of work culture that positively influences accurate assessment, effective decision making and sound intra- and interagency relationships.

Work culture is defined by Atkinson-Consulting! (2008) as the:

- atmosphere or climate of a work environment
- perception of how it feels to work in the organisation, within a particular team or for a specific team leader
- ideal operating environment required to provide a sustainable, highly effective work climate that optimises the team’s potential to do its best work.

The complex, uncertain and anxiety-provoking nature of Child Protection work means the organisational culture needs to promote reflective practices where new knowledge and ideas about how to do things better can emerge. It also means that leaders and managers endorse practices that question assumed ways of doing things and recognise that, at times, people get things wrong. In the last few years this type of culture has often been summarised as constituting a ‘learning organisation’. The qualities of a learning organisation are that it:

- values reflection, learning and professional development
- encourages processes which support people to ‘feel’ and ‘think’ as well as ‘act’ (see Chapter 4).
- endorses and encourages ‘thoughtfulness’ and reflective practice as a way of learning
- values evidence-based formal theories but also legitimises intuitive and tacit knowledge, often called practice wisdom.

‘Learning organizations have strong cultures and promote openness, creativity, and experimentation among members. They encourage members to acquire, process and share information, nurture innovation and provide the freedom to try new things, to risk failure and to learn from mistakes.’

(Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2004)

One of the criticisms of the organisational literature is that descriptions like the one above tend to be generalised statements and constitute a broad description of what an excellent organisation might look like (Mumford, 1995). For Child Protection settings it is important to be more specific and we encourage you to think about ways in which a culture can encourage behaviour and practices that lead to the continuous development and growth of practitioners. Mumford (1995, p.15) uses a learning pyramid, which we use to operationalise what learning means at each level.
A learning organisation is at the top of a pyramid sitting on foundational levels as depicted in Figure 18.

**Figure 18: Pyramid of learning within organisations**

- **Individual learner** – commitment to personal reflection or reflection in action (reading this guide).
- **One-to-one learning** – commitment to face-to-face learning (supervision, mentoring, coaching).
- **Group learning** – commitment to the team, or unit learning – professional development activities in groups (team supervision, attending the Child Protection professional development opportunities).
At every level of the pyramid the values, beliefs and attitudes reflect an openness, commitment and contribution to learning how to better deliver effective services. In addition, there is a commitment to strong feedback loops through each of the levels. The list below, adapted from Morrison (2005), describes the features of a collaborative learning environment in Child Protection as featuring:

- central concern for the needs of children and families
- feelings are acknowledged and utilised to explore problems
- difference is valued and explored
- roles are clear
- practitioners show a sense of identity and belonging
- there are strong feedback loops up and down
- staff show an ability to take appropriate responsibility
- staff demonstrate care for each other
- practice issues are brought to supervision
- power issues and relations are examined
- theory and research are used to assess practice
- difficulties and issues are addressed
- staff are keen to improve practice
- action from decision-making forums are implemented and followed up
- supervision sessions are attended.

You will immediately recognise that many of the above features take central place in this guide and are entirely consistent with the Gallup research material about what motivates practitioners. It is of particularly of note that the most important purpose of the organisational culture is to keep a primary focus on children and families (see Chapter 1).

Being culturally competent is extremely important in a healthy culture where difference is valued and power relations are understood and explicitly named. In this kind of culture, the complexity and irresolvable nature of some problems are acknowledged. Managers at each level need to establish a culturally safe and trusting relationship with supervisees so that the sensitive and challenging aspects of the work can be shared and resolved. Learners are encouraged to try new ways of working and to develop innovative solutions. Mistakes, though guarded against, are recognised as providing opportunities to learn.
How middle managers influence work culture

It is important for managers to understand the dynamic processes that promote dominant work cultures and how their own values, beliefs and behaviours can be so influential. In Chapter 2, we explained mirroring or parallel process as an unconscious process where the emotional dynamics of families or other people we work with get reproduced or imported into other relationships. Mirroring stems from the ways individuals manage stressful feelings that arise from the work. In Chapter 3, we talk about how groups and whole organisations can collectively come to an unconscious agreement about how to manage painful and anxiety-provoking work. Faced with conflict and distress both individuals and groups of individuals can deny, minimise, blame, project or rationalise feelings that have the potential to overwhelm us.

In a collaborative learning culture, the dangers of these potentially unhealthy processes are recognised and guarded against. Managers actively shape and influence a collaborative culture by finding ways through supervision, and other forums, to allow practitioners to bring feelings to a conscious level and process them effectively.

In sharp contrast, managers can contribute to a compromised organisational culture by failing to provide forums in which uncertainty, ambiguity and difference are explored. Instead, the reality of the work is managed through unhelpful and unhealthy responses based on blame and denial. Problems can be minimised and there can be a singular focus on surface level, superficial solutions such as a procedure or policy. Effective managers who show a high degree of self-awareness and social competence are in a better position to manage the toxic, contagious and unhealthy dynamic processes dominating compromised organisational cultures (see Chapter 1).

Reflective exercise:

Use a team meeting to talk to your staff about the features of a collaborative organisational culture and the healthy management of anxiety.

- Look together at the learning pyramid and identify what factors support the recognition, exploration of feelings, anxiety, uncertainty and appropriate risk taking at each level of learning.
- Identify what you might do to strengthen this aspect of your work together.

Effective managers can influence the development of a collaborative learning environment by:

- the way they manage differences
- how they enact the values, beliefs and attitudes consistent with a collaborative learning culture
- the appropriate use of authority
- being emotionally attuned
- providing transformational leadership.

These are explored in the next section, with some exercises provided to assist reflection.
1. Managing difference

A common challenge for managers occurs when they are faced with divergent views in an interagency planning group. Morrison (2009a) proposes a tripartite framework for managing differences within and between organisations. Managers can respond to difference by:

- **Regulating difference** – for example, 'In Child Protection, we carry the responsibility for risk and while I know that, as a Child FIRST agency, you don’t agree with our practice to close cases after referral to you, this is the way it needs to work.'

- **Harnessing difference** – for example, ‘OK, it’s important for me to try and understand your position about working in partnership with parents and about ensuring that they have an understanding of what information Child Protection is going to get from you (Child FIRST). I need to think about what this might mean for Child Protection in terms of keeping cases open.’

- **Consensus building** – for example, ‘I would like us all to understand each other’s position and to explore what is common ground and what’s different. Then we can try to work out how we can bring things together in a way that takes account of all our different views. Let’s start by agreeing a common goal.’

*Reflective exercise:*

- Use a team meeting to talk about different ways of managing difference and the costs and benefits of each approach.

- Assess the proportion of caseloads that is dominated by each of the three approaches: (1) regulating difference, (2) harnessing differences, (3) consensus building.

- Ask individual team members to reflect on some of the reasons why people are sometimes drawn towards regulating difference and look for the implications for cases and practitioners.

- Look for examples where views have differed in the team and explore how the issue was resolved.

- Ask the team to brainstorm behaviours that support collaborative learning (for example, encouraging, standard setting, compromising, harmonising, opinion seeking, elaborating).

- Now ask the team to suggest barriers to learning how to better manage differences (for example, passive aggressive, dominating, controlling, doodling, passivity, poor time keeping).

- How do these behaviours contribute to a compromised learning environment?

- Try to help the group to look for parallels in their work with others, either families or other professional groups.

2. Representing the values, beliefs and attitudes of a collaborative learning culture

In this section, we want to emphasise the critical importance of the values, beliefs and attitudes that impact significantly on people’s behaviours and decisions to promote a healthy learning culture. We know that practitioners quickly become acculturated and it is important that they experience, from the very outset, managers at every level being committed to core values and beliefs, such as respect for others, transparency, culturally competent practice and commitment to supervision.
**Reflective exercise:**

Can you identify the values, beliefs and attitudes that would support a collaborative learning culture?

We have included an attempt by St Luke’s Anglicare to specify those beliefs that support a strength-based approach. These may help you.

- All people have strengths and capacities.
- People can change.
- Given the right conditions and resources, people’s capacity to learn and grow can be harnessed and mobilised.
- People change and grow through their strengths and capacities.
- People are the experts on their own situation.
- The problem is the problem; the person is not the problem.
- Problems can blind people from noticing and appreciating their strengths and capacity to find their own solutions.
- People have good intentions.
- People are doing the best they can.
- The power for change is within us.

(McCashen, 2005, p.9)

### 3. Appropriate use of authority

In the Child Protection context, it would be safe to assume that most people want to do a good job and effective leaders have a role to play in identifying what is getting in the way. Effective leaders understand that it is often factors in the organisational context that are contributing to problematic practice. At times, difficult situations result from the interplay of individual, organisational and team factors. This is as true for challenges with practitioners’ practice as it is for work with families (See chapters 1 and 3 for more detailed discussion about exercising authority and power.)

In a positive work culture people will feel they are being treated fairly and consistently. It is important, therefore, that managers reflect on the way they exercise authority. Relying solely on *role* authority, rather than in combination with *professional* and *personal* authority, can lead to a misuse of reward or coercive power. Practitioners will look for transparency in decision making and ethicality, meaning they are treated with respect and dignity.

Examples of bias and favoritism in terms of appointments to jobs, however logical they may appear to those who make the decision, can lead to enormous resentment and distrust in the culture. We have already mentioned the importance of practitioners being encouraged to question accepted ways of doing things and giving permission to talk about mistakes and things that did not go well. The effective leader sets the tone for this by being prepared to acknowledge when they get things wrong and by being transparent about their decisions.

**Reflective exercise:**

- Talk to your team about their perceptions of the way decisions are made in the organisation.
- Draw parallels with practice and how families perceive decision making related to their case plans.
- Look for ways in which you can be more transparent in the processes you use.
4. Being emotionally attuned

Understanding and managing one’s own and others’ emotions is pivotal to being an effective manager. This means being able “to develop and maintain practice which is self-aware and critically reflective” (Training Organisation for Personal Social Services, cited in Morrison, 2009b). Evidence-based research from health and human services has clearly shown the link between emotional intelligence and expert practice. In particular, Benner’s research on competence and expertise in nursing practice in America identified that in acute medical or care situations, expert nurses had a level of anticipatory, observational, analytical and interpersonal patient care skills that were care enhancing and, at times, life saving (cited in Morrison, 2006). Goleman’s research showed that cardiac patients, nursed by staff with depressed mood, had a mortality rate four times higher than expected (Goleman et al., 2002).

It is also apparent that as you move up into leadership and management roles, the intrapersonal skills and interpersonal skills become even more important than technical and cognitive skills. Goleman (2001) argues that what distinguishes outstanding performing leaders are their capacities around emotional intelligence and social intelligence (see chapters 2 and 3). For leaders and managers, it is estimated that 85 per cent of competencies are in the emotional and social intelligence realm (Cherniss and Goleman, 2001).

In the Child Protection context, Schorr’s (1997) research also underscores the importance of leaders having high levels of social competence and the capacity to assess the competence level of staff. Schorr (1997, p.9) suggests that one of the seven attributes of highly effective child and family welfare programs is that they are managed by competent and committed individuals who show a willingness to:

- experiment and take risks
- tolerate ambiguity
- gain the trust of key individuals at every level in the process, including frontline practitioners
- respond to demands for evidence of results
- work collaboratively with staff
- have the ability to be able to allow practitioners discretion at the frontline.
5. Providing leadership in a time of change

Middle managers need to support Child Protection staff in meeting the daily requirements of their roles within budget and according to the parameters of the task; this requires effective management and what is known as ‘transactional leadership’. However, the Child Protection workforce is also undergoing development and adaptation as a result of the reforms in legislation and practice, as well as changes in work culture and role and this requires ‘transformational leadership’. According to Kotter (1990) leaders within a complex organisation undergoing change, such as Child Protection, require the capacity to:

• establish direction by developing a vision of the future, often a distant future, along with strategies about how to achieve the vision
• align people whose cooperation may be needed by communicating the direction
• creating coalitions that understand the vision and are committed to it
• motivating and inspiring by keeping people moving in the right direction, despite the major political, organisational and resource barriers, by appealing to them as people with needs, values and emotions.

Later in this chapter we again draw on Kotter’s work in relation to how effective leaders can manage change processes in the organisation.
Leadership style and supervisory process

It is clear from this discussion that effective leadership requires attention to both the style of leadership and the process of supervision. These are interacting but separate dimensions of leadership. We draw on the research of Cherniss and Golman (2002) in relation to emotionally intelligent leadership and Wonnacott’s (2003) active-reflective supervisory process, to explore these issues. In combining these two dimensions, a middle manager can have a positive impact on the development of a collaborative work culture.

Figure 19: Supervisory styles and collaborative work culture

Emotionally intelligent leadership

The concept of emotional intelligence (EI) is discussed at length in Chapter 2. In brief, it refers to the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ emotions, to discriminate among them and to use the information to guide one’s thinking and actions (Mayer and Salovey, 1997). Most of us have blind spots as to how emotionally intelligent we are. Just ask your teenage children or your most ‘difficult’ supervisee if you have any doubts.

Leaders generally overestimate their EI compared with assessments from peers, direct reports and line managers. It seems the higher our emotional intelligence as leaders, the closer the match between our own self-assessment and other people’s assessment of our leadership. Goleman’s research found that top-performing leaders over-estimate their strengths, at most, on one emotional intelligence ability whereas, poor performing leaders over rate themselves on at least four or more EI abilities. It seems a little bit of humility enhances emotional intelligence!

Cherniss and Golman (2001) identified six emotionally intelligent leadership styles in their ‘primal leadership’ research. These EI leadership styles were drawn from a random sample of nearly 4000 executives worldwide, where the specific leadership behaviours that impacted on organisational climate and performance were studied. Goleman and his colleagues sought to understand how each leader motivated their direct reports, how they managed change initiatives, how they handled crises and which EI capabilities underpinned the six leadership styles.

The six styles are:

• visionary
• coaching
• affiliative
• democratic
• pacesetting
• commanding.

The most effective leaders have a repertoire that uses one or more of these six distinct approaches (Goleman et al., 2002). Managers who model these competencies well for staff are likely to see them being applied in the work their staff do with others.
Goleman and colleagues found four of the styles – visionary, coaching, affiliative and democratic – impact positively on the organisational climate and make a significant contribution to performance and organisational outcomes. The other two styles, pacesetting and commanding, are useful at critical periods but need to be used cautiously and flexibly with other leadership styles. Used as a long-term strategy, both the pacesetting and commanding styles have a negative impact on organisational climate.

Ideally, an emotionally intelligent leader has a range of styles available to them and uses these flexibly with different practitioners and as the needs of the workplace require. In fact, the most effective leaders are those who possess and exhibit a flexible and broad range of styles to achieve better outcomes. However, Child Protection is a context with unique features and it is important to consider what leadership style is most suited to the requirements of practice. As you read the descriptions below, consider what may be the limitations and benefits of each style and when they are most usefully applied.

Visionary

The visionary leader is able to clearly articulate the mission, set standards and let the work group know whether or not their work is furthering the its goals. Followers know where they are heading and the visionary style maximises commitment to the organisation’s goals and strategy. This leader gives freedom about how this is achieved, thereby encouraging others to innovate, experiment and to take calculated risks. The visionary leader draws on a range of emotionally intelligent competencies, such as inspirational leadership, transparency, genuineness and, most importantly, empathy. The ability to sense what others feel and to understand their perspectives helps the leader to coherently articulate an inspirational vision. You will notice that this style of leadership reflects a clear value base, founded on valuing difference and believing in the capacity of people to grow and develop when given a chance.

Affiliative

The affiliative leader is most concerned about promoting harmony and fostering friendly interactions. Affiliative leaders focus on the emotional needs of practitioners by the skillful use of empathy. Collaboration is the leading EI competency. Many leaders powerfully combine the affiliative style with the visionary approach.

Democratic

The democratic leadership style focuses on the EI competencies of teamwork, collaboration, conflict management and influence. Democratic leaders focus on listening deeply and put a lot of energy into working collaboratively. They are empathetic, know how to manage conflict and creating a harmonious work environment. It works best when you are unsure about the direction to take and want input and ideas from everyone. This style seeks commitment through involving people.

Coaching

Coaching leaders focus on developing others by helping practitioners to identify their unique strengths and weaknesses, linking these to their personal and career aspirations which, in turn, are linked to the organisation’s goals. Interestingly, Goleman’s research found that the coaching style is the least used in improving work performance. Many leaders report that time pressures often lead
them to sacrificing this leadership style. Coaching leaders are focused on helping people to grow and develop. At the heart of the coaching style is dialogue about the developmental and learning needs of the practitioner. We would argue that the coaching function can be readily assimilated into the supervision.

**Pacesetting**
The pace setting leader holds and applies high standards for performance. They are committed to meeting challenging and exciting goals, doing things better and faster, quickly pinpointing poor performers. Unfortunately, if applied excessively, pacesetting can backfire and the drive to continually improve performance and to reach excellence leads to low morale or burnout. Practitioners can feel that they are not trusted to get the job done or feel a lack of appreciation for their efforts. The pacesetter that lacks empathy can be easily blinded to the pain of others. Pacesetting works best when it is combined with the passion of the visionary style and the team building of the affiliative style. Pacesetting as a leadership style in Child Protection needs to be applied with a high degree of careful consideration and discretion.

**Commanding**
The commanding leader expects immediate compliance with orders and directions and can therefore easily be experienced as autocratic. The core message given is ‘do as I tell you’. The commanding style soothes fears by taking charge and gives clear direction in an emergency or crisis but, if followers do not comply, there are consequences. They also seek tight control and monitoring of practice. An effective execution of the commanding style draws on three EI competencies of influence, achievement and initiative. In addition, self-awareness, emotional self control and empathy are crucial to keep the commanding style from going off track and turning into bullying.

Unless you are employed in the military or emergency services, it is inappropriate and difficult to rely solely on this style of leadership. Given the nature of the authority role in statutory Child Protection and the importance of working within a culturally competent framework, we suggest that this style of leadership is ill suited to this setting and has the potential to be dangerous.

The commanding and pacesetting leadership styles are most likely to be used when performance-managing a staff member, particularly in the later stages when the coaching style has failed (this guide does not cover performance management processes). However, an over reliance on the commanding style leads to a compromised organisational culture.

**Emotionally resonant styles**
Managers also need to be mindful that emotions are contagious. Goleman (2002) suggests that, through mirroring, people who are in close proximity can end up sharing the mood. He suggests that good leaders are able to read emotions, are attuned to the feelings and emotional registry of the people that they lead and can be empathic with the struggles of practitioners. They are able to name and speak about uncomfortable feelings. For example, if something has happened that practitioners feel angry about, (such as the restructure of a team) or sad about (such as a co-worker’s serious illness), the emotionally intelligent leader is able to empathise and even express these feelings for the work group.
This is called being ‘emotionally resonant’, which helps to contain practitioners’ anxieties and frustrations, facilitates understanding and integration of these emotions and moves the work group in a constructive direction. The styles that promote resonance building are: visionary, affiliative, democratic and coaching.

As we have emphasised repeatedly, such resonant leadership styles leave practitioners feeling understood and cared for. A culture that promotes these styles allows practitioners to share ideas, learn from one another, to make decisions collaboratively and to get their job done. Connecting with others at this emotional level makes the work both meaningful and sustainable. Emotionally intelligent resonance is the foundation for the chain of influence (discussed in Chapter 1).

On the other hand, dissonance, a term that was derived from music, describes a harsh, discordant and unpleasant sound. Emotionally discordant leadership leaves people feeling ‘off-key’ because these leaders are either totally oblivious to how they and others are feeling or do not care about the collective distress around them. The styles most likely to promote dissonance are pacesetting and commanding.

Below is a case example where a unit manager demonstrates the use of all six leadership styles in the course of her work.

Case study

When Janeene, a unit manager in a rural region, goes into the office on Monday morning she is greeted by an ashen-faced team leader, Greg. Greg informs Janeene that he has just taken a telephone call from the hospital-based social worker to say that a young person, Rebecca, who had been under a guardianship order, died over the weekend. Rebecca appeared to have accidentally overdosed on a cocktail of illegal drugs.

Greg adds that a protective practitioner in his team, Georgia, has also just talked to the local newspaper that called asking for information. Greg is very inexperienced in the team leader role and, until three months ago, he was Rebecca’s allocated practitioner. A number of Greg’s team also knew Rebecca as she had been in care for years. Rebecca and her family are well known to many local agencies.

The team leader says he is feeling all right, but Rebecca’s current practitioner, Jenny, is very upset and has gone home. Greg says he has no real idea what needs to happen and what responsibilities he is expected to undertake, except that he realises there are a number of formal things that need to happen.

From this point and over the next weeks and coming months, the unit manager will need to draw on the range of leadership styles. We have listed Goleman’s six leadership styles and suggest how these styles might be utilised in relation to this case. Can you suggest others?
Commanding style

The unit manager, Janine, needs to consider how to manage this crisis to ensure the current service demands are being met while undertaking the follow-up procedures and processes related to Rebecca’s death. The unit manager meets with Greg so an appropriate management plan can be put into place. She also needs to make an assessment in terms of resources and people and assess what gaps need to be filled.

Janine immediately instructs everyone in the unit to stop any contact with media outlets. As a matter of priority, she informs the regional director and Child Protection manager of the death and starts to draft a category 1 incident report to inform the Minister’s office and Office of the Child Safety Commissioner. This is done in conjunction with Greg, who has the details about Rebecca’s death and talked to the hospital social worker.

She organises for the Employee Assistance Program to come on site to provide debriefing for staff and invites the residential care staff to participate in a joint debriefing.

Affiliative style

Janine also realises that in addition to managing tasks efficiently and effectively, it is critically important to manage processes well and people’s emotional responses. She prioritises supporting Greg and his team, both in responding to the immediate crisis but also in managing the medium-term responses related to the initial regional review of the death.

Janine ensures that appropriate follow-up occurs with Jenny at home and that she is offered support as well as ascertaining Jenny’s intention to be involved in the crisis response. Janine provides Greg opportunities to discuss his anxieties about contacting Rebecca’s family in relation to her death, and helps him to talk through and process his anxiety about the immediate regional review of practice and the subsequent child death inquiry (CDI) (Office of the Child Safety Commissioner).

Greg is also aware there is significant anxiety and fear regarding the immediate regional review of practice and the CDI. One team member was part of a previous CDI where the report seemed to lay significant blame for the death on the actions of practitioners involved. The unit manager and team leader agree to work together to develop strategies to best support and contain everyone’s potential feelings of distress, grief, guilt and blame. Janine will monitor for any longer term grief responses and ongoing emotional impact, particularly for the practitioners who knew Rebecca well. She recognises how important it is for her to manage her own emotions at this time and will seek out support from the Child Protection manager if necessary.

Democratic style

The unit manager needs to also consider how to best use the team to manage an immediate emergency structure to cover for staff who are off-line. Janine needs to ensure that, as a team, they can manage the workload while supporting colleagues who are distressed or preoccupied in responding to the death. Greg asks for Janine’s support in calling together a team meeting to inform everyone about the death, to support them and to work out how responsibilities can be managed, tasks prioritised and cases reallocated for the rest of the week.
Coaching style

As Greg is a new team leader who is expressing uncertainty about his responsibilities, the unit manager helps him to plan the short- and medium-term responsibilities he needs to undertake to deal with a child death.

Janine assesses which tasks Greg feels competent to undertake himself, which ones he needs further support with and the ones she needs to take over. Janine talks through with Greg how he will approach the first contact with Rebecca’s family and asks for his ideas about the purpose of the call, how he will convey the department’s condolences, handle the family’s responses and so on.

Janine also knows that Greg has an activist learning style, so she assists him to develop a list of priorities. Greg also likes to talk things through to assist his planning, so they set some additional meeting times to check in.

Pacesetting style

Janine utilises a pacesetting style by ensuring reporting tasks are undertaken to the required standard and competed in a timely manner. She prepares people for the immediate regional review of practice, explaining how it will be conducted and why.

In the medium term, Janine ensures the team is well prepared and supported to participate in the CDI process.

In reviewing Rebecca’s case file, the unit manager assesses whether there were any indicators that Rebecca was in crisis prior to her death and the presence of any other critical issues for managing this case. Janine identifies any key issues that the case immediately highlights that might be useful learnings for the team in managing other, similar cases.

While preparing for the regional review of practice, Janine notes that the community mental health service appears not to have responded to an ongoing moderate level suicide risk and had only offered monthly office-based counselling sessions. Janine discusses with the Child Protection manager the importance of raising the need for improved collaborative processes for managing cases where young people are at risk of suicide. Janine suggests to the Child Protection manager that she undertake an immediate review of other cases where there appears to be a suicide risk and a need for an emergency community-based mental health response.

Visionary style

The unit manager sets, as a medium-term goal, changing the current prevailing culture of fear and anxiety about making a mistake and being blamed to a culture of collaborative learning partnerships. Janine realises she needs to assist Greg and his team to get the most out of the learnings from the regional review of practice and the CDI. She works to assist the team understand that, while the practice review and CDI are difficult and stressful processes, they both offer a valuable opportunity to reflect critically on current practice. She elaborates that in the CDI process the team can benefit from the reflective eye of an external analyst.
Janine models this openness to learning and ensuring reflective practice. The CDI report highlights the importance of ensuring support for new team leaders, particularly in the early months as they manage role transitions from team member to a team leader. Supervision support is also required for team leaders as they try to manage their new authority role within their team. New team leaders, such as Greg, need to relinquish the case manager role if they are to provide effective supervision to case workers. Janine models her capacity to reflect on what the learning means for her as a supervisor of new team leaders.

**Reflective exercise**

Before continuing, we highlight the importance of giving due consideration to your current management style. A starting point may be for you to think about the positive experiences you have had of being managed. This is an extremely important exercise because we know that prior experiences are a powerful shaper of our own management and supervisory styles and approaches (see Chapter 3).

- Think of at least one person who influenced you in a positive way through their approach to leadership and management. Explain why you feel that person is effective.
- What do they do?
- How do they behave with others?
- What impact did their leadership style have on your practice?
- What did they do that was so important to us?
- How have you used this positive experience as a manager?
- Write down what personal and professional qualities are essential to being an effective manager.
- In modelling a culture of feedback, how have you, or can you, go about gaining some feedback from others on your leadership style?

Remember, nearly all of us over-rate our own emotional competence as leaders and the closer our own self-assessment is to that of others, the higher our emotional competence and intelligence! We do not improve unless we are getting feedback and our harshest critics may provide us with the best feedback for developing a growing edge in leadership. Most of us feel very vulnerable asking for direct feedback. We might rationalise it and say, 'People are going to be dishonest or tell you only the things you want to hear'. We are also mindful about power relationships and that supervisees may genuinely be concerned that a supervisor will retaliate and punish them if they are given genuine and honest feedback. Our own insecurities about our competence (or lack of) can also prevent us from seeking or hearing honest feedback.
**Exercise**

On a scale of six to one, rate from strongest (six) to weakest (one) the six leadership styles in your repertoire.

**Figure 20: Leadership styles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Style of leadership</th>
<th>Self-assessment of strengths</th>
<th>How would your manager rate you?</th>
<th>How would your peers rate you?</th>
<th>How would your ‘easiest’ supervisees rate you?</th>
<th>How would your most ‘challenging’ supervisee rate you?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visionary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacesetting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commanding</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A typology of supervisory style and process

A complementary typology to Goleman’s work is that of Jane Wonnacott (2003) who researched the link between supervisory style and process and the outcomes for children. While this was a small exploratory study of 12 cases, she found that the strongest links between supervision, good practice and good outcomes for children were linked to:

- the supervisor making an accurate assessment of practitioner’s competence
- the supervisor utilising EI to engage and assist the practitioner when they had lost focus or direction
- the supervisor working on areas in which the supervisee was weak.

These three components represent important aspects of a developmental model of learning (see Chapter 3). The supervisor is only likely to be able to successfully address their learning needs in the context of a safe and trusting relationship, which is only likely to flourish in a collaborative organisational culture. There is a strong parallel here between the practitioner having a holistic understanding of children in the context of their relationships and environment and the effective manager having a holistic understanding of practitioners in the context of relationships and their environment.

Wonnacott’s (2003) typology of supervisory process styles helps to illustrate the link between style at the supervisor or manager level and the practitioner or client level. She identified three styles:

- active–intrusive
- passive
- active–reflective.

Active–intrusive

The active–intrusive style was the most commonly used, whereby the supervisor took a directive role and focused on the administrative tasks of supervision to ensure the practitioner was carrying out key agency requirements. This style was beneficial in that the supervisor had a good knowledge of the practitioners’ cases and could ensure that practice was carried out in line with the agency’s policies and procedures. These supervisors were able to accurately identify gaps in practitioner’s practice.

However, little attention was paid to understanding practitioners’ feelings and experiences or the interactions between families and practitioners. Rather than addressing these issues with emotional and social intelligence, active–intrusive supervisors tended to take over, becoming directive or interfering with the case. This pattern of dominating behaviours was then replicated in the practitioner’s interactions with the family as the practitioner attempted to regain control of the case.

Passive

In the passive style, the supervisor engaged in a collusive alliance with the practitioner where there was no clear assessment of the practitioners’ strengths and gaps in practice. It was left up to the practitioner whether or not they contacted the supervisor. Wonnacott considered this type of supervision as more problematic than the active intrusive style as the supervisor had abdicated all responsibility and there was no agency accountability for practice.
Active–reflective
The active–reflective supervisor was proactive and knowledgeable about how practitioners were practicing. They sought to engage practitioners in a collaborative and reflective process. They paid attention to practitioner’s feelings and experiences as well as exploring the relational dynamics between the practitioner and family. When the practitioner was struggling with their case work or lost focus in their practice, active–reflective supervisors were able to help the practitioner to reflect on what was happening, using challenging and client-focused questions rather than resorting to proscriptions. The supervisor took opportunities to directly observe the practitioner’s relationship with the family in order to gain a broader assessment of the practitioner’s competency and limitations. This style is well suited to helping the supervisor come to a determination based on a sound, realistic assessment of how much autonomy is appropriate given the practitioner’s level of competence, rather than basing it on years of experience alone.

Figure 21: Typology of supervisory styles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Active–intrusive</th>
<th>Active–reflective</th>
<th>Passive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proscriptive</td>
<td>Collaborative</td>
<td>Laissez-faire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knows the cases</td>
<td>Knows the cases</td>
<td>Cases not known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task and procedure</td>
<td>Task and process</td>
<td>Supervisee-led</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of practitioner’s tasks and outputs</td>
<td>Overall assessment of practitioner’s competence</td>
<td>Lack of assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checking-up</td>
<td>Reflection and challenge</td>
<td>Avoidant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directive</td>
<td>Developmental focus, including emotional competence</td>
<td>Collusive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reflective exercise:

Using Wonnacott’s typology of supervisory styles, it may be useful for you to reflect on your own style and what it might mean for child and family outcomes and practitioners’ growth and development. It may also be useful to share the ideas with supervisees and ask them to give you feedback about your style.

• What internal and external factors influence your style? (For example, how anxious or tired you feel, whether there has been a complaint or serious incident, whether you know the family yourself, whether the team is under additional pressure through vacancies or high demand and your own current experience of supervision.)
• How do you try to withstand pressure to become more intrusive (take over) or passive (neglect and abandon)?

You may wish to use this material on management and supervisory styles to reflect on your professional development goals for the next 12 months.

• What leadership style do you want to focus on developing or enhancing?
• How can you engage in deliberate practice to broaden your leadership style?
• What would be three things you would be doing more of in the next year if you were more developed?
• What would support you in your development and learning?
• Who can support you in this development?
Three process frameworks to aid the collaborative work culture

In the previous section, we highlighted the immense value of being emotionally attuned and able to draw on high levels of emotional and social competence and adopting the most useful leadership style to suit particular situational demands. Effective managers cannot, however, rely solely on intuition and ‘what feels right’. They also need to be able to articulate and demonstrate the use of formal theory and knowledge. Effective managers are analytical and thoughtful about what situations mean and about how best to respond to them. Process frameworks are useful here.

The first looks at situational leadership and how to make judgments about the pace of learning; the second proposes a framework for making sense of practitioners who get stuck in their learning and development; the third describes two models for bringing about change in work practice. These three analytic tools aim to encourage middle managers to think about problems and challenges and plan ways forward based on formal knowledge. Applied sensitively and empathically to individual and unique situations, they contribute to a collaborative work culture.

1. Situational leadership model: assessing practitioners’ autonomy

Situational leadership (Hersey and Chevalier, 2000) is a useful model for assessing practitioners’ readiness (in other words, their knowledge, experience, skills) and practitioners’ willingness (in other words, their motivation, desire, confidence) in undertaking their work responsibilities. These determine the appropriate amount of task behaviour (direction) and relationship behaviour (support) that middle managers need to give to assist practitioners to do their jobs. Both direction and support exist on continuums. This framework assists the middle manager to work with the practitioner towards greater autonomy.

**Direction** involves telling practitioners:

- what to do
- how to do it
- where to do it
- who else to involve.

It also involves applying frameworks, knowledge, policies and procedures.

**Support** involves:

- engaging practitioners in dialogue and conversation
- actively listening to practitioners’ thoughts, feelings and experiences
- providing feedback
- providing encouragement and recognition of efforts.

Practitioners’ **readiness** exists on a continuum ranging from low to high with readiness at level one being the lowest and readiness level four being the highest level of readiness to undertake specific work responsibilities.
Readiness level one:
This indicates the lowest level of readiness where practitioners are unable, unwilling or insecure. New practitioners can often fall into this category of lacking sufficient knowledge, skills and experience to undertake the work. They also may be very anxious or insecure about their capacities and competence. Take Mandy as an example:

Mandy is a new graduate, having undertaken a psychology major at university. In training and supervision she is usually quiet but appears interested. Mandy worries she doesn’t know enough about Child Protection work and is cautious about expressing her thoughts in case she says or does the wrong thing in front of her work colleagues and in front of you, as her supervisor. She takes lots of notes and listens attentively to others and to you when being given directions.
While negotiating her supervision contract, she tells you that she prefers to learn by watching and listening to others. As she talks about her supervision history you learn that she has had shame-based learning experiences, which make her cautious about failing in front of others.

Manager’s response
• Provide high support and high direction.
• Provide structured induction, training and learning situations.
• Provide high support and high direction.
• Provide training, mentoring, coaching from experienced practitioners.

Readiness level two:
New practitioners may begin with a higher level of readiness when they are enthusiastic and confident about their ability to learn the job but also know that there are capabilities, knowledge and skills they need to acquire quickly. Take the example of Lisa:

Lisa is a mature-aged graduate with a social welfare degree, having put herself through university as a single parent. She is keen and enthusiastic to learn and actively applies what she is learning from her prior placement experience and her own personal experience to her current work context. She relishes learning experiences, takes appropriate risks with her practice and asks lots of relevant questions when she has difficulty understand something.

Manager’s response
• Provide structured induction, training.
• Provide lower levels of support and high direction.

Readiness level three:
The practitioner with this level of readiness is able to acquire and learn the skill or capability but becomes apprehensive or anxious when they start to do it on their own. Also, novel situations may raise levels of anxiety. Experienced practitioners can sometimes fall into this category when they are required to learn new competencies or capabilities. They may hide their anxieties or fear they will be discovered to be inadequate. They can appear reluctant to change their practice to meet new policies or procedures in the department:
Judy has worked in Child Protection for four years. She considers herself one of the senior practitioners on the team. She is usually very vocal about the good work she is doing with families and new practitioners can hold her in awe of her knowledge. You notice she is reluctant to adopt a new assessment framework. From her supervision history you know she has a belief that her views do not count in important decision-making processes. She tends to be the ‘devil’s advocate’ whenever a new procedure is being implemented and has a tendency to complain, which is irritating. As a manager you have found it useful to spend supervision time listening to her concerns, validating important ideas and the knowledge and skills she possesses.

Manager’s response

- Provide high levels of support and low direction.
- Provide peer group support to normalise anxiety.
- Validate knowledge and experience.
- Provide peer consultation.

Readiness level four:

This is the highest level of readiness where practitioners are able and willing to do the job and are confident in their ability to do it. They know how to ask for support and direction when they need it. They know what they need to learn to get the job done. This is every manager’s dream practitioner – they are both confident and competent.

Manager’s response

- Provide appropriate levels of support and direction as required.
- Peer support and team supervision are very helpful.

Reflective exercise:

Applying the situational leadership model to leadership capabilities:

- Consider the five leadership capabilities covered in this guide. Consider your readiness and willingness to use these in your practice as a manager.
- On a scale from zero to 10, rate both your readiness and willingness; readiness is defined as your knowledge, skills and experience in undertaking this capability; willingness is defined as your desire and confidence in undertaking this capability.
Figure 22: Leadership capabilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capability</th>
<th>Unable (0)</th>
<th>Able (10)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delivering results</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mastering oneself</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking clearly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading and inspiring</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now, pick one leadership capability cluster that you would like to improve.

- If you were to increase both your willingness and ability, how would your leadership be different in:
  - five years from now
  - the next 12 months
  - the next six months
  - the next month

- What would it take to make this change?
- What steps would you take to make this change?
- What would support that change?
- Who would support that change?

2. Attending to stuck patterns in the learning cycle

In Chapter 3 we described the four learning styles based on the Kolb cycle of adult learning. We stressed that learners need to be able to engage with all four parts of the cycle: experience, reflection, analysis and planning or acting. It is not enough to have a learning experience, adults need to be able to reflect on its emotional dimension and to think about how they made sense of it before they can use the experience to progress their learning.

If learners simply experience problems and apply solutions they will not learn and develop over time. Rather, these solutions are likely to become mechanistic and ‘cookbook recipes’ referred to as ‘short-circuiting’, which fail to take into account changed cultural, social and situational contexts.

Before proceeding further, we suggest you review the discussion of the Kolb Learning Cycle as applied to supervision, which is in Chapter 3.
We all have a preferred learning style and, therefore, may need to develop other parts of the learning cycle that we find more challenging.

In Child Protection, the pressure and urgency of the work can encourage practitioners to act with too few opportunities to feel and think. A key role for a supervisor is to look for opportunities to encourage practitioners to take the time to reflect and analyse. Many of the children and parents with whom Child Protection practitioners engage have experienced trauma and multiple disruptions and losses in their lives. The inherent anxiety and emotionally intrusive nature of the work means that all practitioners must be well supervised and supported (see chapters 2 and 3).

It is inevitable that we will all get stuck at certain points, often when the organisational context is unsafe, unsupportive or unpredictable. Middle managers can begin to see a pattern of behaviour or difficulty emerging that suggests practitioners have got ‘stuck’ in responding to experiences in particular ways. The effective middle manager is able to stand back and look at their own cycle and how they may be stuck and apply the same thinking to practitioners who they manage or supervise. This means finding a way to help practitioners to reach their potential for learning and development, as well as helping them recognise when they are stuck in the learning cycle, which impacts negatively on their work.

Morrison (2005) describes a practitioner whose learning style is:

- balanced – where thinking, feeling and actions are integrated
- stuck in feelings – own feelings dominate, thinking suppressed and actions driven by feelings
- stuck in analysing – thinking dominates, feelings suppressed and actions driven by rigid or proscriptive thinking
- stuck in action – action dominates, feelings projected onto others, thinking suppressed
- stuck in experience – paralysed and overwhelmed, leading to shutting down or disconnection from feelings, thinking and action.

🌟 Reflective exercise:
Reflect on a time when you were blocked in one part of the learning cycle.

- Describe your behaviour.
- What did other people see?
- How did it affect your capacity to do your work?
- What helped you to get ‘unblocked’?

The effective middle manager needs to find a way of encouraging a stuck practitioner to engage in other parts of the cycle. The material presented in Chapter 3 about learning styles will assist you. For example, a practitioner stuck in feelings needs encouragement to think and to analyse. You may ask such a practitioner to read an article, summarise what it says and then talk to you in supervision about how it might be applied in a particular case.

In the following examples, the practitioners’ behaviour might be explored drawing on this framework.
John qualified as a social worker seven years ago and is currently undertaking a part-time master's by coursework. He has been in Child Protection for four years and enjoys having social work students on placement because he finds it stimulating to have to relate theory to practice.

John works in the long-term team and shows no interest in moving across functions or into a supervisory role. In his supervision, he can be hard to pin down and tends to generalise about what he has been doing and what is happening on his cases. He loves to talk about structural issues and is good at talking to the team about the interesting structural theories he is studying at university. Newer and younger members of his team are very respectful of John and his knowledge.

When his supervisor asks him to talk about specific children on his caseload, his responses are quite superficial and he quickly talks about how often he has seen the child and that he is making sure he does the job according to the guidelines. When more creative options are suggested in supervision he is often dismissive and says that ‘we should stick to the recipe’. John describes himself as a departmental person. At times when his supervisor has said a child on his caseload needs one-to-one work and an opportunity to explore their situation, John says ‘that is therapeutic work and should be done by a therapist’.

**Reflective exercise:**
- Where is John stuck in the cycle?
- What does this mean for his capacity to be reflective, to engage with families and to plan for future work?
- What ideas do you have for working with him in supervision to help him become unblocked?
- What reflective questions might you ask him to encourage his capacity to talk about how a child is feeling?

Jane is 42 years old and has been working in Child Protection for four years. She studied social welfare as a mature-aged student and this is her first job since graduating. Jane is also a single parent with three teenage children so she is used to managing a lot of responsibilities in her life. She is a conscientious practitioner and usually has a large caseload and will often take on additional responsibilities when her colleagues are sick or away.

As a result of being overly busy, she is often late for meetings or for her supervision meetings as she has had to attend to ‘urgent’ issues. In supervision, she has described herself as working intuitively and often has difficulty articulating a clear plan for cases. She generally has difficulties managing all the different aspects of her job and her case planning notes are often behind. However, she goes out of her way to organise support services for families and finds herself helping out families and doing things for them when they seem stuck and powerless to help themselves. When her supervisor attempts to clarify Jane’s responsibilities, priorities and boundaries she responds that she does not want professional, bureaucratic barriers to get in the way of assisting the families she works with.

**Reflective exercise:**
- Where is Jane stuck in the learning cycle?
- How is this likely to impact on her capacity to reflect, think and plan?
- What ideas do you have for working with a supervisee like Jane?
- What reflective questions might you ask her to encourage her to think about how she can use theory and research to better understand what is happening in her cases?
Pat is one of the practitioners in the team who has been working longest in Child Protection. She has not been particularly engaged in the Child FIRST changes and team members are aware she has been making cynical and pessimistic comments. This is reflected in her approach to families too, in that she is pessimistic about any possibility that families may make real changes in caring for their children.

Her case plans reflect premature recommendations for permanent placement away from birth families. She is also reluctant to undertake any collaborative case planning with other agencies that are also working with children on her caseload. On the occasions when Pat attends meetings with other agencies, she can deflate the case discussion with comments that any changes that the family is making cannot be trusted to last. In team meetings she seems to be demoralised and disengaged and it is difficult to get her to participate, or to be involved with any new initiatives or ideas. When her supervisor makes the observation that Pat seems burnt out, she replies that she is waiting to take her long-service leave next year.

• Where is Pat stuck in the learning cycle?
• How is this likely to impact on her ability to reflect, think and plan?
• What ideas do you have for working with supervisees like Pat?
• What reflective questions could you ask Pat to encourage her to think about the role of other services in the families she works with?

Nicky is 26 years old, has been Child Protection for two years and has previous experience and education in disability services. She is a quiet member of the team. Her approach to families is sensitive and gentle.

Her supervisor notes that she has been having particular difficulty in working with families where sexual abuse is involved. In supervision, she has spoken extensively about the intense emotions that sexual abuse cases evoke for her.

Nicky frequently identifies with the victim and gets overwhelmed with her feelings of anger towards both the perpetrator and non-offending parent for failing to act protectively. Consequently, Nicky has difficulty closing these cases and having difficulty taking on new cases. When her supervisor raises this issue with Nicky, she says she does not want to let down the young person, in other words, disappoint or abandon victims like their families have.

• Where is Nicky stuck in the learning cycle?
• How do you think this is likely to impact on her capacity to engage with families, think and plan?
• What ideas do you have about working with supervisees like Nicky?
• What reflective questions could you ask Nicky to encourage her to think about the various functions of supervision?

If you utilise these ideas, you will be able to pick up on problematic patterns of behaviour quickly. This means you can intervene to assist a practitioner before there is a need for formal processes under the performance management guidelines. This is a separate process and not covered in this guide. However, if practitioners are managed and supervised effectively these challenges are likely to be addressed early.
3. Understanding the stages of change

In this final section of the chapter, we propose two closely linked models for thinking about change that use a social influence framework. The Stages of Change Model (Prochaska and DiClemente, 1983) has been applied to organisational change (Prochaska et al., 2001) and to managers’ motivation to learn through leadership development activities. Managers may well be very familiar with these ideas as this model of change can be applied in case practice as an engagement and assessment tool with families (Horwath, 2001). In addition, many of the drug and alcohol services utilised by Child Protection use this same model.

The model is built on the premise that change is a matter of balance and that people change their behaviour when there are more motivational forces in favour of change than against. People will only be able to commit to change at the point where the benefits or advantages from the change are overwhelmingly evident. In thinking about applying this model in an organisational setting, the effective manager needs to be able to work collaboratively to increase practitioners’ motivation to change.

In a survey of 400 organisations, Deloitte and Touche (1996) found that employee resistance to change was the number one reason why organisational change initiatives fail. The empirical data indicates that the stages of change can be applied by leaders in a practical way to:

- reduce resistance
- increase participation
- reduce dropout rates
- increase change progress among employees.

Prochaska's et al., (2001) research demonstrates that 'stage-matched' interventions are more effective than 'action-oriented' interventions, when implementing organisational change. In the original Stages of change research, people were found to progress through five stages when modifying any sort of behaviour, either on their own or with formal intervention.

1. **Pre-contemplation stage** – people not intending to take action within the next six months. It is estimated that at any one time, a significant proportion – 40 per cent of a population group – will be at this stage. When forced to take immediate action, pre-contemplators are likely to see change as imposed.

2. **Contemplation stage** – people intending to take action within the next six months. This group comprises another 40 per cent. This group is more aware of the benefits of change but are also aware of the costs, which include time, energy, fear of failure, giving up habits, fear of the unknown and the hassles of learning a new skill.

3. **Preparation (determination) stage** – people intending to take action in the next 30 days. Only 20 per cent of a group will be at this stage. This group can see the need for change and is convinced of the benefits of new behaviours, systems or processes. This group can be excellent role models for others in a team who are more cautious or reticent.

4. **Action stage** – people who have made overt changes less than six months ago. The number one reason why change efforts fail is due to taking shortcuts early in the change process or people being pressured into taking action before they are adequately prepared.
5. **Maintenance stage** - people who have made overt changes over six months ago and practitioners are sustaining the changes and new ways of working. The main risks for relapse are in times of distress, crises, conflicts and unexpected consequences of change.

**Figure 23: Comprehensive Model of Change**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maintenance</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sustaining/externalising new behaviour</td>
<td>Rehearsing new thinking, behaviours, relationships</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lapse or relapse</th>
<th>Determination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Return to some/all old behaviours</td>
<td>Informed decision to change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give up or start again</td>
<td>Decide not: exit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weighing up pros/cons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Start of change process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Precontemplation</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Defensive/denial/projecting blame</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depressed/unaware of problem</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Prochaska and DiClementi, 1982.

Prochaska and colleagues argue: ‘If only 20% of employees in an organization are prepared to take action, it should come as no surprise that a majority of action initiatives fail. People in Pre-contemplation and Contemplation Stages are likely to see change as imposed and can become resistant if forced to take action before they are prepared. When the majority of staff are in Pre-contemplation and Contemplation organisations need to prepare their employees by creating the conditions for change’ (Prochaska et al., 2001, p.249).

The ‘decisional balance’ is an important step for mobilising movement in the change process. It consists of weighing the pros and cons of any anticipated change. The relationship between stage of change and the ratio of pros and cons for each stage of organisational change has now been replicated in a number of settings:

- the cons of change outweigh the pros in the pre-contemplation stage
- in contemplation, the pros and cons are roughly the same
- in the preparation stage, the ratio of pros and cons starts to switch over
- in the action and maintenance stages, the pros outweigh the cons.

Prochaska and her colleagues argue that the dominant paradigm of change has been an action paradigm and that leaders tend to be particularly action oriented; they react with impatience and frustration when their employees are not prepared to follow immediately.
However, practitioners in the precontemplation stage are likely not to perceive a need for a change initiative because, from their perspective, there is not enough benefit from the planned change. They may be right. Not every change that management proposes is wise. A leader working with the stages of change requires profound empathy for where practitioners are at and leadership responses or strategies need to be individualised and matched to the practitioners’ readiness to change. If a stage-matched change management response fails to increase the perception of the pros of changing, then leaders need to either adjust or sometimes abandon the change initiative. Where it’s clear that the benefits of change outweigh the cons, practitioners will be ready to take action.

A case example of enabling change in Child Protection

Creating change through stage-matched responses

Let us now look how stage-matched responses can apply to an example. In this example, we will illustrate how a manager might try to implement a culture of reflective practice in the team using stage-matched interventions (Prochaska et al., 2001). Stage-matched responses by leaders also allow all staff the opportunity to participate in the change process, even if they are not prepared to take action.

Stage-matched responses are shown to reduce resistance, reduce stress and reduce time to implement change and accelerate movement towards the action stage.

1. Identify pros for change

The first step would be to thoroughly explore the implications of changed practice with team members. Help them to weigh up the pros and cons of the particular strategy you want to implement. The team members may come up with some of the following pros for developing reflective practice in their work.

Examples:
• It helps me to learn from my practice.
• It gives me a chance to think about what I am doing.
• It allows me to share with others what I am doing.
• It helps me to be more involved in my practice or work.
• It enables me to know that I am working effectively with families.
• It helps me to focus on what is important, rather than being crisis driven all the time.

2. Cons of change

Next, it would be important to carefully elicit from team members all the cons against developing a reflective practice framework in Child Protection work.

Examples:
• I don’t have the time.
• I have too many things to do.
• What I do is intuitive.
• I have a lot of experience already.
• It is wanky, social work rubbish.
• It is just another management tool.
• What difference is it going to make to the families I work with?

When the pros for engaging in reflective practice outweigh the cons, the team members will move into the preparation stage of change, that is, they are ready to engage with reflective practice strategies within the next six months.

3. Preparing to take small steps
Stage-oriented intervention may involve getting team members to be more curious about considering reflective practice and thinking about actually engaging directly with reflective practice in the next month.

Examples:
• Draw a Munro model (see Chapter 4) of your sources of knowledge for a particular case.
• Talk to someone you respect to find out more about how they think about their practice.
• Identify three ways you could use supervision to enhance your reflective practice.

4. Taking action-oriented steps
This involves team members taking more action-oriented steps and engaging in more goal-oriented behaviours.

Examples:
• Read an article on reflective practice.
• Attend a course and put into action three goals.
• Get someone who feels confident about reflective case to make a presentation.
• Identify one example where you used reflective practice in the last four weeks.

5. Maintaining change
Once team members have taken steps to implement more reflective practice strategies, the maintenance stage involves anticipating and addressing expected or unexpected issues. Middle managers need to stay curious about what may be behind a reluctance to change and encourage team members to go back to the decisional balance and develop new action plans.

Examples:
Team members may report:

‘The more I reflect on my practice, the more others (supervisor or families) will expect of me.’

‘I have been too busy to undertake any reflection on my practice.’

Together, middle managers and team members may need to come up with new strategies to maintain reflective practice as a priority in Child Protection work. New resolves can be identified and marshalled to maintain reflective practices.
Examples:

‘If we prioritise regular supervision, it gives me regular time to engage in reflective practice in my work.’

‘Reflective practice gives my work more purpose and meaning, which is helpful in staying balanced and reducing stress.’

We suggest this model may be useful when you are looking at some of the exercises that we propose in Chapter 4. Middle managers might like to try to implement specific strategies to encourage greater reflective action in the team.

The eight-stage change process for creating major change

Another model for enabling major change in organisations has been proposed by Kotter (1996), who we mentioned earlier in relation to effective leadership style. Child Protection managers and team leaders play a significant role in implementing changes in policy, legislation and funding, restructuring and re-organising how services are delivered to families in a context of external demands for greater accountability and collaborative interagency partnerships.

Kotter (1996) identifies an eight-stage change process for any attempt to create cultural change, re-structuring or new strategy to work successfully. Although most change processes occur on multiple levels, Kotter warns that change efforts will fail if you skip one of the steps or get too far ahead on the later steps before the earlier steps have been established. Think back to the pros and cons of change that we discussed in the previous section. The first four steps of the change process focus on shifting the status quo. Stages five to seven introduce new practices. The final stage embeds the change in the organisational culture.

The Eight-Stage Process of Creating Major Change (Kotter, 1996)

1. Establishing a sense of urgency
   - examining service delivery realities, recent research, reviews, data
   - intensifying and discussing crises, potential crises or major opportunities

2. Creating the guiding coalition
   - putting together a group with enough power to lead the change
   - getting the group to work together like a team

3. Developing a vision and strategy
   - creating a vision to help direct the change effort
   - developing strategies for achieving that vision

4. Communicating the change vision
   - using every vehicle possible to constantly communicate the vision and strategies
   - having the guiding coalition role model the behaviour expected of employees
5. Empowering broad-based action

- getting rid of obstacles
- changing systems or structures that undermine the change vision
- encouraging risk taking and non-traditional ideas, activities and actions

6. Generating short-term wins

- planning for visible improvements in performance, or ‘wins’
- creating those wins
- visibly recognising and rewarding people who made wins possible

7. Consolidating gains and producing more change

- using increased credibility to change all systems, structures, and policies that don’t fit together and don’t fit the transformation vision
- hiring, promoting, and developing people who can implement the change vision
- reinvigorating the process with new projects, themes and change agents

8. Anchoring new approaches in the culture

- creating better performance through family-centred and outcomes-oriented behaviour, more and better leadership, and more effective management
- articulating the connections between new behaviours and organisational success
- developing the means to ensure leadership development and succession

(*Adapted from Kotter, 1996, p.21)

**Reflective exercise:**

Consider the implementation of the best interest principles or another major change you are currently required to lead. Evaluate as a percentage to what extent each of the eight stages is complete. If a stage is incomplete, what is blocking or hindering the implementation of this stage of the change process? What stage requires your attention as a middle manager?
Summary

This chapter of the guide sets out to explore how the capabilities of creating clarity and surfacing potential, which together form the cluster of leading and inspiring, can be operationalised by the Child Protection manager.

We suggest that managers have a pivotal role to play in contributing to a collaborative learning culture in the organisation. We make links between how practitioners experience working in the organisation and their capacity to be effective with the families they work with. This means aspects of organisational culture, such as how clear people are about their role and responsibilities and the delivery of reflective supervision, are extremely important in contributing to outcomes with children and their families.

The first part of the chapter describes the values and belief systems that support a collaborative learning culture. We argue that managers need to behave in ways that are congruent with a positive work culture but note that, at times, the culture inhibits their capacity to do this. The chapter makes a number of suggestions about team exercises that seek to promote an open and transparent culture, where reflection and critical analysis are valued.

In the second part of the chapter, we look in depth at styles of leadership and supervision and propose exercises that encourage managers to reflect on their style. We stress the importance of emotional competence and the capacity to be attuned to the emotions and feelings of those we manage.

The effective leader also requires high-level analytical skills to help them engage effectively with others in processes that promote professional development and growth overtime, working collaboratively to address problematic behaviour patterns and in creating change in work practice. We discuss three theoretical models to inform middle managers thinking about these challenges and suggest that, applied in an emotionally informed and sensitive way to individual situations, they contribute to a collaborative learning culture.
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