Heart and Head

Messages from research and practice on supporting effective judgement in social work
Drivers

- Challenges in the workplace
- Messages from professional programmes
- Cross-UK comparisons
- Strengthening evidential status of practice responses
Purpose

- Consider findings from practice-near research
- Create space for critical reflection and discussion
- Integrate findings from research and practice
Format

- 3 presentation/discussion sessions
- Presentation = 30 minutes
- Group discussion and feedback = 20 minutes
- Plenary: messages and actions emerging
Timetable

• **9.30am – 10.20am**   Duncan Helm. *Thinking Spaces: Offices as supports for analysis*

• **10.20am - 11.10am**   Dr. Peter Yates ‘Examining social workers’ thinking processes through accounts of their decision making in cases involving sexual behaviour between siblings.’

• **11.10am – 11.30am**   Refreshments

• **11.30am – 12.20pm**   Dr Martin Kettle ‘How social workers make sense of their work to protect children’.

• **12.20pm – 1.00pm**   Plenary
Thinking spaces: Offices as supports for analysis

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How do spaces and places of work contribute to the process of sense making in social work practice?
Different spaces for thinking

Intuition  Analysis

Office  Car  Homes
New ways of using working spaces

- “Agile working”
- Open-plan offices
- Working from home
- Call centres
- Hotdesking
- Information technology
Changing offices
Impact?

Economics
Higher occupant density
Easy reconfiguration

Job satisfaction
Communication
Interaction
Noise distraction
Cognitive processing

Kim, J. and deDear, R. (2013)
Workspace satisfaction: The privacy-communication trade-off in open-plan spaces
*Journal of Environmental Psychology* 36 pp18-26
Are “cell” offices better places for thinking?

Workers in smaller open-plan offices performed better under normal working conditions than those in larger open-plan offices and cell offices.

Findings from this ethnographic study

- Movement and direct face-to-face contact
- Case discussion and sharing analysis
- Trust and security
Movement and direct contact

- Intersubjectivity – the construction of shared meaning
- Proximity – important but social workers sought out discussions with people at greater distance
- Depth of communication
Shared analysis

- Interaction can be a distraction but also acts to support analytical thinking
- Offering choice of time, place and person to speak to
- Control over public/private boundary
- Unpicking and unpacking thinking with others
Trust and security

- Containment and safe haven
- Belonging and identity
- The importance of stuff and the comfort of things
Conclusions

- Intersubjectivity – shared meanings co-constructed through daily interactions – are fundamental to social work judgement
- The physical geography of social work offices impacts significantly on sense-making activity
- New practices bring new opportunities but also inflict costs
Discussion

Think about the different spaces in which you have worked

1. What was it about these spaces that helped you with your analysis and sense-making work?
2. How have you adapted to keep up the quality of your analysis as working spaces have changed?