



# Practice-Based Design for Professional Learning and Knowledge Sharing: Adapting the ‘Key Situation Model’ for Social Work in England



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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Date: 18 May 2020

Word Count: 98,573

## Declaration of Authorship

I, Adi Staempfli, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

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## Abstract

How can social workers be supported to continuously develop knowledgeable and ethical practice? Acknowledging the dilemmas and uncertainties in social work practice that unfolds in complex environments, this thesis turns to practice-based perspectives in response to the main question. It foregrounds the interplay of humans within physical and social environments with a focus on 'practices' and considers the challenges for social workers as practitioners, professionals and knowledge workers. In relation to individual decision-making, the role of research, theory, tools, emotions, experience and reflective deliberation are explored. On an organisational level, evidence-informed and best practice, knowledge transfer, group reflection approaches and the role of technology are examined. The author argues that knowledgeable and ethical practice emerges from knowledge related (epistemic) practices within organisations that are grounded in what professionals do. This requires reflexive and mindful professionals who are able to weave together different forms of knowledge and ethical principles with practice situations and with organisations who will support epistemic practices and environments for reflective learning, knowledge co-production and the sharing of knowledge. Building on earlier work (Tov et al., 2016; Staempfli et al., 2012), the author argues that the Key Situation Model can support both practices and environments. Key situations are the typical practices that social workers regularly encounter and thus reflect what social workers actually do. 116 key situations in social work in England are developed and validated in a modified three-round Delphi study with experienced social workers from diverse sectors from across England (n1= 13, n2= 88 and n3= 41). Based on these and informed by the Activity Centred Analysis and Design (ACAD) framework, this thesis presents design options for social work organisations for the implementation of the Key Situation Model's blended reflective learning and knowledge sharing. These design options could support the development of knowledgeable and ethical practice.

## Acknowledgments

Undertaking a thesis project is a challenge not only for the writer but also for their loved ones. My partner Sue and our children Mina and Alexi supported me throughout this with their patience, love and practical support. Thank you so much.

My colleagues Regula Kunz and Eva Tov started the development of the Key Situation Model and I joined them in 2009. Together we formed a community of practice and published our ideas. I thank all members of the Key Situation network, the students, social workers and practice educators who helped us shape the model and sharpen our ideas. In particular, I thank Regula Kunz, Eva Tov and Dominik Tschopp for the stimulating learning and feedback that they offered.

I would also like to thank Pippa Yeoman for her unintentional support and input. I first encountered her and her colleagues' ideas at a conference and her work as well as that of Lina Markauskaite, Peter Goodyear and Lucila Carvalho have been an important influence.

I could not have carried out the research workshops without the fantastic support by the expert by experience and without the participation of dedicated social workers who gave up much of their time and shared their experience. This research would not have been possible without you – thank you so much!

Last, I would like to thank Prof Claudia Bernard for her supervision and her support. I am also grateful to the late Dr Perlita Harris who provided extensive and critical feedback on my upgrade work. And finally, Anna Magyar proof read the final version and offered helpful feedback.

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## Abbreviations

<b>ASYE</b>	Assessed and Supported Year in Employment
<b>BASW</b>	British Association of Social Workers
<b>CoP/CoPs</b>	Community of Practice / Communities of Practice
<b>CPD</b>	Continuous Professional Development
<b>CoRe</b>	Competence Resource Model
<b>DACUM</b>	Developing a Curriculum
<b>EBP</b>	Evidence Based Practice
<b>EIP</b>	Evidence Informed Practice
<b>HCPC</b>	Health and Care Professions Council
<b>IFSW</b>	The International Federation of Social Workers
<b>IASSW</b>	The International Association of Schools of Social Work
<b>KSS</b>	Knowledge and Skills Statement
<b>MHA</b>	Mental Health Act
<b>PVI</b>	Private, Voluntary and Independent
<b>RAND</b>	Research ANd Development
<b>RCT</b>	Randomised Controlled Trial
<b>SWE</b>	Social Work England
<b>WYSIWYG</b>	What You See Is What You Get

## Glossary

**Epistemic** - relating to knowledge. **Epistemic practice** - refers accordingly to “knowledge-centred and knowledge-based activities” (Knorr Cetina, 2005:185) and **epistemic fluency** is the ability of professionals to flexibly combine different forms of knowledge with different ways of knowing to address real-world problems (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017).

**Knowing** – refers to knowledge as something that people do (Blackler, 1995) and to the embodied social processes that emerge in practice when faced with complex challenges and lead to a combination of knowledge with doing and the finding of solutions and alternative courses of actions (Hopwood, 2014).

**Knowledge sharing** – is broadly concerned with how knowledge is implemented, utilised, exchanged or managed.

**Mindful professional** – a term used by Markauskaite and Goodyear (2017:48-49) to describe “someone able to fuse theoretical knowledge with a common-sense grasp of the situation, formal rules with creativity, standards with improvisation and reason with intuition”.

**Practical and discursive consciousness** - Giddens (1984:7) distinguishes three levels of consciousness: “unconscious motives/cognition”, “practical consciousness” and “discursive consciousness”. Practice is guided by application of implicit rules in practical consciousness, which includes an awareness of social rules and constitutes the core of knowledgeability of human agents. Practical consciousness can be elicited through discursive elaboration that leads to discursive consciousness.

**Practice-based perspectives** – is the term I use in this thesis to denote “practice theory”, “practice approach”, “practice thinking” (Schatzki et al., 2005, pp. 12–13) that arise from a “turn to ‘practice’” (Barnes, 2001, p. 26) or “practice turn” (Schatzki et al., 2005).

**Relationierung** – a German term that stands for relating, integrating and linking of knowledge with practice (von Spiegel, 2013; Dewe, 2012; Dewe and Otto, 2012; Dewe et al., 1992).

*“There are ideas that dance like motes of dust at the periphery of our vision, catching our attention briefly before they disappear. And there are others that stick: that we return to again and again; ideas that, for whatever reason, define who we are and what we do.”*

(Cottam, 2018, p. 1)

## **Introduction**

This thesis arises out of a passion for continuous learning. Since starting my own social work learning trajectory, I have engaged in varying learning activities both as a learner and educator. Over the last decade, learning has taken a prominent place in my knowing, doing and being and this thesis is a product of this engagement with ideas, practices and others.

The thesis is about learning of social workers and more widely, learning in organisations and across the whole profession. It is concerned with how social workers can be supported to expand their understanding of practice. Social workers make life changing decisions and strive to support the people they work with to have better lives (Romeo, 2016). In order to support and safeguard vulnerable people, social workers make professional judgements in a range of situations, from making decisions about how to interact with a service user in a specific encounter to an assessment about the risks to and strengths of service users and the plans to support or safeguard them. This thesis focuses on decision-making for practice that emerges from empathic engagement with people and is informed by knowledge and ethical principles. It is therefore, not just about ‘evidence-based’ or evidence-informed’ practice; rather, in this thesis I focus on and talk about ‘knowledgeable and ethical practice’.

We do not always get this right and reports into child deaths and Serious Case Reviews over the last decade point to the importance of professional judgments and the challenges social workers encounter in practice to make such decisions (Sidebotham et al., 2016; Munro, 2011; e.g. Laming, 2009). I therefore explore how we, as a profession, can support social workers to develop their capacity for knowledgeable and ethical professional practice. The

main question I address in this thesis therefore is: ***How can social workers be supported to continuously develop knowledgeable and ethical professional practice?***

In exploring knowledgeable and ethical practice and decision-making, I start with the premise that there are hardly ever clear solutions and that practice is marked by dilemmas and uncertainties (Sidebotham et al., 2016). Uncertainty is indeed a constituent characteristic of all interactions in social work (Munro, 2011, e.g. 2019; Schön, 1983). In other words, social workers cannot be certain about what the social problems are that they encounter, nor can they predict how situations may evolve with or without social work and other interventions (Munro, 2019; Downie and Macnaughton, 2009). This 'messiness' and complexity of social work practice (Forrester et al., 2019) leads many to argue that social work practice cannot be standardised (Munro, 2011; Becker-Lenz and Müller, 2009). Rather, faced with situations of uncertainty and limited evidence, social workers need to form "carefully considered professional judgement[s] ... on a case by case basis" (Sidebotham et al., 2016, p. 238). Thus, social workers need to be able to manage the relationship between practice, knowledge and values.

Professional judgements in conditions of uncertainty and complexity involves decision-making that integrates a range of perspectives. Social workers need to consider their understanding of the lives and wishes of disadvantaged and vulnerable people; their own experience, including skills and previous knowledge; relevant ethical principles and values; legal and policy parameters; organisational and community resources available to address identified challenges, as well as social work theory and research that helps them guide their understanding and their interventions (Munro, 2011, 2019; Croisdale-Appleby, 2014; Ruch, 2007a). Forming professional judgements requires social workers to assess and balance these perspectives to interpret and fuse them with a specific practice situation (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017) and this requires both intellectual and emotional

intelligence, self-awareness and self-confidence (Croisdale-Appleby, 2014). Decision-making based on the profession's commitment to social justice and human rights (Staub-Bernasconi, 2012) further means that practitioners need to engage and work with people in partnership, which entails practical capability and empathy to build relationships (Romeo, 2016). It is about offering first and foremost a relationship (Cornish, 2017; Ruch, 2005). Professional judgements are therefore more than just evidence-informed, as they are tied up with ethical and empathic practice and knowledge.

Addressing the challenge of knowledgeable and ethical practice cannot solely focus on individual social workers. Knowledgeable and ethical practice relies on the profession finding "solutions for the systematic theory–practice gap" (Sommerfeld, 2014, p. 593). Therefore, organisations also need to identify ways to deal with uncertainty (Munro, 2019). Key messages regarding professional judgements from reviews of child protection (Munro, 2011) and serious case reviews (Sidebotham et al., 2016) continually stress the importance of reducing the layers of procedures and prescription, as well as the need to support social workers' understanding of and ability to assess and interpret, knowledge and research to inform practice (see also Collins and Daly, 2011). This needs to be coupled with reflective supervision, reflective spaces and other forms of support (Wilkins, 2017; Laming, 2009). In short, knowledgeable and ethical practice relies on a learning culture and a supportive environment that includes opportunities for peer-learning and discussion (Munro, 2011, 2019; Laming, 2009).

The challenge thus for social workers is how to make and review knowledgeable and ethical professional judgements. For employers, universities and the profession as a whole, the question is how to support social workers with this and how to create and maintain a learning culture and environment (Munro, 2019; Romeo, 2016). Therefore, in this thesis I argue that

social workers can only be supported to develop knowledgeable and ethical professional practice if we focus on learning both at individual and organisational levels.

Learning is traditionally understood in terms of 'acquisition' of knowledge in education and continuous professional development (CPD) and of 'transfer' and 'application' of that acquired knowledge in practice (Boud and Hager, 2012). There are several problems with this view, which I explore in this thesis. This understanding of learning and CPD does not recognise that most learning occurs in practice (Eraut, 2013) whereby knowledge is co-produced (Knorr Cetina, 2005) and social innovation is taking shape (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017).

Learning in social work with its dual education anchored in higher education and practice (Webber et al., 2014) affords excellent opportunities for learning that integrates practice and knowledge. However, Higgins (2014) suggests that the signature pedagogies of the university and practice are conflicting and competing and therefore hinder bridging the practice-theory gap. Signature pedagogy is a useful concept with which to examine learning in and for social work practice. The term, first coined by Shulman (2005, p. 52), denotes the "the types of teaching that organize the fundamental ways in which future practitioners are educated for their new professions". I agree with Higgins (2014) who calls for a radical challenge to the existing signature pedagogy in social work. Trevithick (2011, p. 140) proposes that such a challenge should start with a review of the kinds of learning opportunities offered in education, which should "focus in greater detail on perfecting and integrating students' generalist knowledge and skills in ways that are research based and that 'speak' to the situations regularly encountered in social work". A new signature pedagogy also requires that CPD needs to be linked to the practice of professionals (Boud and Hager, 2012). Thus, I suggest an overarching career-long learning approach that is focussed on practice situations.

Practice-based perspectives that are captured by the notion of the 'practice turn' (Knorr Cetina, 2005; Schatzki et al., 2001, 2005) offer important insights into the nature of current professional challenges and point to solutions to address them. By focussing on what professionals actually do, their 'social practices' (Sandberg and Dall'Alba, 2009), they analyse and support the design of activity-centred learning approaches (Goodyear and Carvalho, 2016). This is always tied up not only with people but also with things (Fenwick and Nerland, 2014; Fenwick et al., 2012). I therefore apply a practice-based and socio-material lens to this thesis, offering an analysis of learning and making suggestions for the design for continuous learning in social work.

From a practice-based perspective, knowledgeable and ethical practice is about more than what is generally termed 'evidence-informed practice' (e.g. Nevo and Slonim-Nevo, 2011). Practice theorists are concerned with the way practitioners deal with and handle knowledge. The focus therefore shifts from knowledge to 'knowing' as an embodied social process that emerges in practice. In other words, knowing comes with doing and with finding solutions and alternative courses of actions when faced with complex challenges (Hopwood, 2014). Key concepts related to knowledge as something that people do (Blackler, 1995) focus therefore on the "knowledge-centred and knowledge-based activities" that are espoused in the term "epistemic practices" (Knorr Cetina, 2005, p. 185). Epistemic practices are particularly relevant in the context of knowledgeable and ethical practice as they enable and support the development of 'epistemic fluency' that allows professionals to flexibly combine different forms of knowledge with different ways of knowing to address real-world problems (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017). Epistemic fluency is therefore the cornerstone of knowledgeable and ethical practice.

Practice-based theories are influential in both the professional and academic literature. However, they have so far been largely neglected in social work, as I discovered in an

extensive review of the literature. Compared to sociology and education, 'practice-based perspectives' or 'practice turn' is about ten times less frequently cited in social work; this thesis addresses that gap. My original contribution to knowledge is therefore to merge evidence and knowledge in relation to knowledgeable and ethical practice in social work with practice-based theory and research, to address the challenges that social workers face in uncertain and complex practice contexts.

I describe, analyse and develop the Key Situation Model (Tov et al., 2013, 2016a) for social work in England. The model proposes that typical, reoccurring, in other words *key* situations in social work practice, offer a meaningful focus around which reflections, learning, knowledge co-creation and exchange can be organised. To develop knowledgeable and ethical practice, I argue that professionals need to both engage in practice situations and broaden their understanding of these situations and of themselves and their own actions. To enable this, organisations need to create and maintain spaces for epistemic practices that support the emergence of knowledgeable and ethical practice. The Key Situation Model suggests a blended reflective learning process that is embedded in organisations and enables reflection and discourse about the knowledge, ethics and quality of practice in relation to key social work situations (Tov et al., 2016a). It sits between the spaces of the academy and practice and offers an innovative approach to organising collaborative learning within and across organisations, including universities and to sharing situated knowledge through a community and network approach and a virtual platform. All these different elements of the Key Situation Model, the reflection model, the virtual platform and the community, are structured around key situations, which supports a practice-based stance, thus keeping practice at the heart of learning and knowledge exchange (Boud and Hager, 2012).

Key situations in social work are defined as situations that social workers see as typical and reoccurring in professional practice and that are experienced as a discrete and meaningful

sequence of activities with a beginning, middle and end. Key situations are generalised situations at a higher level of abstraction that include any number of specific situations. Key situations thus describe typical practice across social work sectors and fields. They consist of general features that are important for knowledgeable, emotionally aware and ethical practice alongside reflections on experienced specific situations. The number of key situations changes over time in response to emerging professional and socio-political landscapes (adapted from Tov et al., 2016a, p. 40).

Since social work practice is influenced by “the expectations of the role in each country and agency in which they practise” (Moriarty et al., 2015), identifying key situations is an essential first step to develop the Key Situation Model. Kunz and Tov (2009) have described social work and social pedagogic key situations in the Swiss context but there is currently no understanding of what social work key situations in England might be. This research thus addresses the sub question: ***What are the typical, reoccurring (key) situations in social work practice in England?*** To address this question, I undertook a modified Delphi study and together with experienced social workers, have developed a list of social work key situations in England.

Before providing an overview of the chapters in this thesis, I first want to elaborate on the practice lens adopted in this thesis.

### **Practice-based theoretical framework**

In this thesis I analyse practice-based perspectives in relation to the challenges that the profession faces and merge these into an argumentation for an activity-centred approach for learning and CPD. I adopt a practice-based theoretical framework that reflects my core personal beliefs and understandings about the world (ontology) and suggests ways in which an enquiry about this world (epistemology) can be undertaken (Sandberg and Dall’Alba,

2009). This framework also acts as a lens through which I view the world (Grant and Osanloo, 2014) and is central to the arguments examined and developed in the literature review and the methodological decisions made; it therefore seems fitting to discuss it in more detail at this point.

My understanding of the social world is rooted in an ecological social work perspective, which understands people as agents within physical, social and cultural environments. This perspective offers a holistic view in which

“people (and their biological, cognitive, emotional, and social processes) and physical and social environments (and the characteristics of those environments) can be fully understood only in the context of the relationship between and among them, in which individuals, families, groups, and physical-social environments continually influence the operations of the other.” (Gitterman and Germain, 2008, p. 52)

This perspective as a starting point means that I am foregrounding the interplay of the social and the individual within the physical and social environment. Such a focus is offered by practice theories and practice-based perspectives that conceptualise social order as “embedded in collective cognitive and symbolic structures, in a ‘shared knowledge’ which enables a socially shared way of ascribing meaning to the world” (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 246). Thus “human action and social order emerge, and attain meaning and intelligibility, from social practices” (Sandberg and Dall’Alba, 2009, p. 1352). Practice-based perspectives have become prominent in the literature in what is termed a “turn to ‘practice’” (Barnes, 2001, p. 26) or “practice turn” and are referred to as “practice theory”, “practice approach”, “practice thinking” (Schatzki et al., 2005, pp. 12–13) or more generally, practice-based perspectives, which is the term I use in this thesis.

Practice-based perspectives locate the social neither in the mind, nor in discourse, nor in interaction, but instead, in ‘practices’ (Reckwitz, 2002). ‘Practices’ need to be distinguished from ‘practice’, which describes the “whole of human action” (Schatzki et al., 2005, p. 11),

whereas 'practices' is defined as the skills, embodied understandings and tacit knowledges, which are the foundations of activity (e.g. Dall'Alba and Sandberg, 2006). Practice theorists afford 'practices' the same status as concepts such as "'structures,' 'systems,' 'meaning,' 'life world,' 'events,' and 'actions' when naming the primary generic social thing" (Schatzki et al., 2005, p. 10). Practices are seen by most theorists as arrangements of human embodied activities (Schatzki et al., 2001; Wenger, 1998; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Bourdieu, 1990; Giddens, 1984), whereby "nexuses of practices are mediated by artefacts, hybrids, and natural objects" (Schatzki et al., 2005, p. 11; see also Brown and Duguid, 2000; Wenger, 1998). Practice theorists' interest in social practices and routinised behaviours thus focusses on the inter-connections of "forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge" (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 249). These approaches are characterised by the central concepts of non-dualism, human agency, embodiment, practice as social and also, the inclusion of non-humans (Schatzki et al., 2005, p. 11). Reckwitz (2002, p. 244) therefore argues that practice theories offer "something new in the social-theoretical vocabulary", as it offers a way to talk about the intertwinement of individuals, the social and things and thus frames our understanding of these.

It is important to note that while practice-based perspectives are only starting to emerge in the social work literature, the notions underpinning these approaches go back to the roots of social work. Jane Addams' theories and methodologies were influenced by the work of Dewey's pragmatism (Seigfried, 1999), "which grounded human activity in habits" and is seen as a formative perspective for practice theories (Schatzki et al., 2005, pp. 16–17). Both pragmatism and practice perspectives "focus explicitly on practices, habits, doings, work" and "agree that human experience is produced by purposive socially mediated doings saturated with affects and emotions, and tempered by the physical arrangements that embed bodily activity" (Buch, 2015, p. 116).

Thus, to explore possible answers to the question of how social workers can be supported to continuously develop knowledgeable and ethical practice, I turned my attention to the interplay of the social and the individual in the context of practice. In other words, I am turning to practice-based concepts in relation to professional practice and judgements.

Looking at professional learning and development through this lens means that “CPD must be located in what professionals do and how they do it” (Boud and Hager, 2012, p. 18), which forms the basis for practice-based curricula. Learning, rather than being understood as an individualistic notion, therefore turns to “practices as the unit of analysis” (Reich et al., 2015, p. 133). Learning is thus seen as a collective and situated process (Gherardi, 2012) that considers how “working, knowing, organising, learning and innovating” are interconnected (Reich et al., 2015, p. 133) and relational (Reich and Hager, 2014). Key situations depict ‘practices’ and thus a practice-based stance is a core notion of the Key Situation Model. It is further underpinned by the view that a profession can be defined by its practice situations and this allows curricula to be designed around those situations (Ghisla et al., 2008, 2011, 2014; Ghisla, 2007; Kaiser, 2005a).

Learning in this view is a socio-material phenomenon that involves humans and things (Fenwick and Nerland, 2014), is emergent and cannot be planned (Goodyear and Carvalho, 2016). Professional practice from this perspective is an epistemic practice, which is distinct from a purely situated practice and learning perspective. It draws attention to the way epistemic tools (e.g. ways of weaving together different forms of knowledge with specific instances of practice and artefacts) enable understanding of professional challenges, whereas situated practice perspectives focus on “tacit skill mastered through a situative act” (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017, p. 457). Professional practice and learning are therefore entwined and highly contextualised in the messy, unpredictable and complex nature of everyday work (Reich et al., 2015) and involve a range of epistemic practices and tools.

This practice-based view also requires an epistemology that assumes that if we want to understand the world, we need to study social practices, which I discuss further in the methodology chapter. For now, it suffices to say that I view key situations that social workers encounter in their every-day practice as such social practices.

The practice-based theoretical perspective has significantly influenced my literature review. In this thesis, I discuss the literature collected and digested over the last decade, since I became involved in the development of the Key Situation Model. While the literature base I refer to is wide, I would find it impossible to describe a precise literature review methodology. Rather, I conceptualise my growing understanding in terms of a hermeneutic circle with increasing understanding (Kelly, 2017; Pascal, 2010; Wilcke, 2002). In seeking to gain an in-depth understanding of the topics, I consulted the literature from many fields and disciplines, but I also had to consider the practicalities of completing this dissertation within a certain word and time limit. Two books that have informed my current understanding more than any others and which for me are key to understand learning and practice, are first, Wenger's (1998) 'Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity', the most influential text in the development of the Key Situation Model (Tov et al., 2013, 2016a). In collaboration with my colleagues Regula Kunz and Eva Tov, the notion of community of practice (CoP) started taking on an increasingly important role. In fact, as a group we became a CoP, our collaboration marked by shared learning, in that hermeneutic sense of striving to understand the parts in relation to the whole and vice versa (Tov et al., 2016a). It continues to be a participative process in which we continually explore meanings, test different ideas in practice and based on newly gained understanding, develop the model in an ongoing iterative process, reflecting the intertwinement of knowing, doing, values and people (Sandberg and Dall'Alba, 2009). In writing this thesis, I started to conceive this endeavour as an action research project, and I discuss this further in the methodology chapter. The second significant book is Markauskaite and Goodyear's (2017) 'Epistemic Fluency and Professional

Education: Innovation, Knowledgeable Action and Actionable Knowledge', which has given me a deeper understanding of professional learning and developed my understanding of the kinds of practices that are concerned with knowledge, namely epistemic practices.

I grappled with a number of issues in writing this thesis. First, my passion for the approach and my deep engagement with it shaped my perception. Whenever possible, I listened to the feedback provided by colleagues and supervisors and engaged in self-reflection and analysis. I hope that the resulting arguments are profound and critical. Second, my mother tongue is Swiss German and yet when I write or read, high German is the standard language used. Most of the literature that I read is in English. So, for the original book (Tov et al., 2013) I had to translate terms and meanings from English into German, which was not straightforward. In writing this thesis, I partly did the reverse. When referring to key passages of German writing authors, I translated quotes and indicated this.

The Key Situation Model has found recognition in practice and academia. In the preface to the book *Von Spiegel* (Tov et al., 2013, p. 6), a leading German social work academic wrote that it "has to be seen as a pioneering work" (own translation). The book was reviewed by Wendt (2015 no pagination) who concluded that

"The arguments in the book are put forward convincingly by Eva Tov, Regula Kunz and Adi Stämpfli. The work produced is a good read and illustrative - but the main 'achievement' in my view lies in the attempt, adjacent to the publication, to build a network and community of practice, as a space for exchange and systematic reflection of practice, which establishes and deepens the understanding of the connection of practice with academia and academia with practice." (own translation).

The book went into its second edition in 2016 and was adopted by some social work programmes in Germany and Switzerland as a standard text. The model is used in several universities as part of qualifying social work programmes in German speaking regions in

Switzerland, Germany and Luxembourg. My own involvement has always been motivated by a desire to improve social work and CPD and to this end, have sought to understand CPD from research and theoretical perspectives; this thesis is as a culmination of this process.

While working on this thesis, I was concurrently engaged as a facilitator in CPD modules both in Switzerland and in England. I ran a pilot implementation of the model as part of an Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) in adult social care in London. To enable learners to engage with different reflection models, I developed a module on the MA in Advanced Social Work: Practice Education, which I convened. The reflective learning approach of the Key Situation Model has also been adopted for small group discussions as part of the Practice Supervisor Development programme. Therefore, my thesis is also informed by my practical engagement in CPD development and delivery and the true value of this thesis will lie in the implementation of the proposed model to support practice-based CPD, knowledge co-production and knowledge sharing.

While many ideas presented in this thesis are informed by collaborative learning with my colleagues (Staempfli et al., 2012, 2014, 2016; Tov et al., 2016a; Tschopp et al., 2016), the work presented here is my own. In conducting this research, I have developed many ideas from the original publications in much more depth, leading to my own argument and contribution to knowledge that is informed by practice-based perspectives.

In the following section I introduce the chapters by offering the reader an overview of the themes that are discussed.

### **Overview of chapters**

This thesis begins with an in-depth analysis of the literature in Chapters One to Three. In Chapter One I lay the foundations for the discussion about knowledgeable and ethical practice. My focus is broadly on social workers as practitioners, professionals and knowledge

workers. It first outlines current research on professional practices in social work. Much of the current literature takes a normative stance and seeks to define what social workers ought to do. There is now work that examines what social workers actually do but this body of work is focussed on specific practices and I identify a gap in the literature that describes the practices of the whole profession in England. Second, I consider notions related to ideas of social work as a profession and discuss 'professionalisation', 'professionalism' and 'professionalism' as key concepts. I propose that social work is best understood as a reflexive or mindful profession. This highlights the central aspect of different forms of knowledge that need to be woven together to support knowledgeable and ethical practice. Therefore, the third section of the chapter discusses various categorisations of knowledge. I examine these in relation to the way knowledge is created by different actors and the function and purpose of knowledge in relation to practice. This includes a discussion of how knowledge informs practice in tacit and explicit ways and considers the situatedness of knowledge. Last, I examine ethical knowledge as a foundation for knowledgeable and ethical practice

In Chapter Two I start addressing the question of how knowledgeable and ethical practice in social work can be supported at individual and organisational levels. The purpose of this chapter is to examine current knowledge in relation to individual and organisational (epistemic) practices. In a first section, examining how social workers make decisions, I discuss the research and theoretical literature on professional judgements and decision-making and explore the roles of evidence, tools and emotions. Developing the argumentation further, I focus on reflexive monitoring, deliberative reasoning and reflection. The discussion shows that both intuitive and analytical ways of thinking are constituent aspects of decision-making and I discuss how these ways of knowing are enacted in practice. The first section concludes with a discussion of notions of situation-based judgements and this points to the importance of different strategies that can be employed by social workers to develop knowledgeable and ethical practice. The second section of the chapter is

concerned with epistemic practices that support knowledgeable practice and knowledge sharing at an organisational level. Common concepts of evidence-based practice (EBP) and best practice are discussed as they pertain to how organisations can integrate evidence or best practice. The discussion then moves on to examining how knowledge can be shared within and across organisations and notions related to knowledge implementation, utilisation, exchange, sharing or management. A key message that emerges from this discussion is that enabling knowledgeable and ethical practice relies on discussion with others. Therefore, I return to reflection, but this time by examining group models that are implemented at organisational levels. Lastly, I turn to technological tools to examine their role in knowledge sharing and co-production.

In Chapter Three, I present the Key Situation in Social Work model. In order to break down the complexity of the model, I present the different elements along the categories of the Activity Centred Analysis and Design (ACAD) framework developed by Goodyear and Carvalho (2016) and Carvalho and Yeoman (2018). The design of any learning intervention rests on the underpinning pedagogical philosophy. Following an introduction to the ACAD framework, I examine and expand the underpinning theories of the Key Situation Model that include practice-based theoretical perspectives on learning and CPD. This chapter offers a foundation for the in-depth analysis and adaption of the model that is presented in Chapter Six.

In Chapter Four, I develop the practice-based research framework and discuss the adopted action research methodology before outlining the methods that led to the description of key social work situations in England. I discuss the sampling strategies and data collection and analysis methods and consider the ethical aspects of the research. I examine my own positionality and issues related to reflexivity and conclude the chapter by considering the strengths and limitations of the research.

Chapter Five presents the findings, the key situations in social work in England, including the tables with agreed and rejected situations. The key situations presented in this thesis offer an insight into the practices that social workers are engaged in day in and day out.

Chapter Six offers a discussion first of these key situations and the associated areas of responsibility. It then develops the argumentation in response to the main research question as to how social workers can be supported to continuously develop knowledgeable and ethical professional practice. In doing so, I draw on the literature discussed and develop many of the challenges and issues into an argumentation for situation-based curricula, learning and knowledge-sharing approaches. Based on my analysis, the Key Situation Model is adapted, design options are suggested and implications for practice, as well as open questions for research, are presented.

In the Conclusion of the thesis, I summarise the key points in relation to supporting knowledgeable and ethical practice and summarise my main and original contributions to knowledge.

# Chapter 1 - Social workers: Practitioners, professionals and knowledge workers

## Introduction

Social workers experience practice as “uncertain, complex and risk-ridden” where no two individuals or families they work with are the same and each professional encounter is unique (Hingley-Jones and Ruch, 2016, p. 242). This requires social workers to be connected to “subjective, affective and relational knowledge” by drawing on their emotional intelligence that enables them to ‘be’ with service users (Hingley-Jones and Ruch, 2016, p. 242). This “awareness of uncertainty, complexity, instability, uniqueness and value conflict” (Schön, 1983, p. 17) and emotionality is not always reflected in professional discourse. Yet these fundamental assumptions about contemporary social work have a direct impact on how social workers understand ‘practice’, ‘profession’ and ‘knowledge’.

Croisdale-Appleby (2014, p. 15) suggests that the task for social work education is to “equip practitioners with the theoretical knowledge and practical capability to do high quality work”. He concludes that this can be framed by three aspects, namely social workers as practitioners, professionals and social scientists. These are in the real world not separable and Croisdale-Appleby points to the “inexorably linked” ways in which knowledge and practice are related. The notion of social workers as practitioners, professionals and social scientists offers a useful first orientation to examine the professional challenges social workers need to manage. However, the assumption that social workers need to have knowledge and practical capability does not address contemporary social work practice challenges sufficiently. Because social work is to a large degree dependent not just on the methodical and relational capabilities but crucially on the ability of professionals to understand and handle knowledge, I would reframe the traditional idea of social scientist to

one of knowledge worker who engages in “knowledge-centered practice” (Knorr Cetina, 2005, p. 178; Blackler, 1995).

Therefore, in this chapter I discuss theoretical perspectives related to ‘practice’, ‘profession’ and ‘knowledge’ to define knowledgeable and ethical practice. Examining these concepts through a practice theory lens is in my view helpful, because it is well aligned to the complex and nuanced realities of contemporary social work practice and the experiences of social workers themselves. I start this discussion with a focus on professional practices by examining social work tasks, roles and responsibilities. I then turn to notions of ‘profession’ and ‘knowledge’ and associated concepts. These considerations allow me to define what knowledgeable and ethical practice is, which then forms the foundations for the later discussion on how knowledge and ethical practice can be supported.

### **What do social workers actually do?**

If we want to define what knowledgeable and ethical professional practice is, then we first need to consider practice itself. This section therefore discusses the literature on social work practices with a focus on what social workers actually do.

There is “a lack of research” (Statham et al., 2006, p. 2) and “a remarkable absence of research into how social workers actually practise” (Ferguson, 2013, p. 121). Some scholars argue that “social work is what social workers do” (Horner, 2018, p. 186; Perriam, 2014, p. 112; Thompson and Thompson, 2000, p. 13). While this is a contested view (Cree, 2013; Payne, 2006), there seems to be no consensus of “what social work is and what social workers do” (Moriarty et al., 2015, p. 4; see also Ferguson, 2013). Yet, only through understanding the “everyday activities” that “constitute what social workers do” can social work be seen (Saltiel and Lakey, 2019, p. 6). Social work is thus “invisible” and “acutely private” as the practice situations social workers engage in, often involve only themselves

and service users (Pithouse, 1998, p. 5, 2019). Social workers are often unable to talk about these situations and experiences “due to issues of confidentiality” (Leigh et al., 2019, p. 2). Therefore, only social workers themselves “can appreciate what it means to do social work” (Pithouse, 1998, p. 5).

Much of the existing literature on social work practice is concerned with roles, responsibilities and tasks. For example, Moriarty and colleagues’ (2015) scoping literature review identified several typologies for these roles, responsibilities and tasks, by referring to broad perspectives, such as therapeutic, transformational or emancipatory. Responsibilities or tasks are equally broad in their conception and refer to for example, facilitators, gatekeepers, advocates, care managers, responding to complex need, effective safeguarding and risk management (Moriarty et al., 2015). More recently, Moriarty, Steils and Manthorpe (2019, p. 10) in a review of the international literature on hospital social work, identified multiple roles related to “assessment, discharge planning, and direct work such as counselling and/or crisis intervention” that are undertaken by social workers. Blewett, Lewis and Tunstill’s (2007, p. 30) literature review discusses similarly broad notions and makes the point that it is difficult to separate the concepts of ‘role’ and ‘task’, as “the nature of the role and the carrying out of the task are inextricably linked” to the wider political, policy, economic and organisational contexts. Overall, many of the descriptions of roles and tasks in the literature outline what social workers ought to do, rather than what they actually do. Such normative statements are expressed in “policy documents, along with professional and occupational standards, government reports and reviews” that seek to define “what constitutes ‘good’ and ‘professional’ practice” (Wiles and Vicary, 2019, p. 48). In contrast, the experience of social workers themselves is quite different. Winter’s (2009, p. 453) research found that social workers define their tasks as falling under roles such as “bureaucrats, agents of social control, assessors of need and assessors of risk”.

Beresford's (2007, p. 39) literature-informed discussion comes closest to describing actual practices. He also sought to describe "social work tasks" and defined these as "what social workers do" and suggested a "range of work approaches and activities", including "individual direct work with service users; indirect work with family and friends; work with loved ones and others identified in roles as 'informal carers'; group work; community-based and community development work". Related to these, he identified a wide range of actual tasks such as "Offering information, advice and advocacy; Helping people negotiate with other state agencies, particularly over benefits/financial support, housing and other services; Providing counselling and other psycho-therapeutic support; Providing practical guidance and help; Referring service users to other relevant agencies and service providers; Accessing financial support to service users." Beresford (2007, p. 35) makes the important point that the lack of understanding of what social workers actually do has not only implications for the profession and academia, it also affects the public and service users. In his view, they do not "have a clear understanding of what social work is and what it does". He therefore argues that "social workers need to be much clearer to service users about what they do." This was reflected in the final report by the Social Work Task Force (2009, p. 8) who recommended "a new programme of action on public understanding of social work, creating greater openness about the profession".

A different strand of research concerned with how much time social workers in England spend on specific tasks provides further insight into what these tasks are and how 'tasks' are understood. For example, a distinction is made between administrative and direct contact tasks, with concerns being raised about the proportion of time social workers spend working directly with families. In a review of the literature, Baginsky and colleagues (2010) found that they spend around a quarter of their time on administrative tasks. Time spent on direct face to face work with service users and administrative tasks has largely remained the same since the early 1970's.

Some studies focus on direct work. For example, Holmes and McDermid (2013, p. 125) investigated the “activities associated with case work” and divided these into “direct work” with children and their families and “indirect work”. Specifying the direct work tasks, they looked to the case management process for children in need and distinguished between initial contact and referral; initial assessment; ongoing support; close case; core assessment; planning and review; section 47 inquiry and public law outline. Similarly, Whincup (2017, p. 973) studied what social workers and children do when they are together, exploring first what constituted direct work. In her interviews with children, she asked about what “‘happens’ and what ‘kind of things’ they did” and practitioners talked about activities such as “cooking, walking, going for a drive and going to the cinema”. She noticed a disconnect between what social workers said they were doing with children and the absence of ‘doings’ in the accounts of children. She developed a typology of direct work that included work “to build and sustain the relationship between child and professional”, “as part of a process of assessment” and “as part of intervention” (Whincup, 2017, p. 973). These studies again describe broad categories that distinguish between direct and indirect work and are sometimes aligned to case management processes.

A growing field of study is now concerned with looking directly at what happens when social workers meet with service users. Current research into social work practices mainly engages in researching practice close-up, for example in ethnographic studies (Ferguson, 2014, 2016b, 2016a, 2018); observations of practice (Forrester et al., 2019); narrative interviews with social workers (Cook, 2017); or case study designs (Saltiel and Lakey, 2019). While these studies offer insights into some practices and activities of social workers, they do not offer a broader view of how social work practice is enacted in situations across fields, sectors and organisational settings that constitute the whole of social work practice in England.

In contrast, the work by Kunz and Tov (2009) and Kunz (2015) offers such an overarching perspective. In their collaborative research with practitioners, they describe 130 professional key situations that are reflective of the professional fields of Swiss social work and social pedagogy. Examples of such situations are ‘Conducting a review meeting’, ‘Facilitating, coaching and supporting group processes’, ‘Safeguarding interests of service users and carers’, ‘Mediating between service users and third parties’, or ‘Facilitating mediation (Kunz and Tov, 2009, pp. 2–6). The situation titles are grouped into thematic areas that are concerned with the social work process and situations in relation to direct and indirect work with service users. Overall, they entail all typically encountered situations that social workers need to be able to manage in practice (Kunz, 2015).

In sum, the analysis of the literature in relation to practice has shown that the literature is dominated by normative descriptions of social work responsibilities, tasks and roles. This body of work is largely concerned with what social work ought to be or how it should be done. I also found that a newer strand of research into what social workers actually do has started to emerge which offers an insight into the actual doings and sayings of social workers. However, so far it covers a limited area of practice. What is missing is a broader perspective that sheds light on the practices of social workers in England, one that cuts across fields, sectors and organisational settings. This gap is addressed through the research presented in this thesis and I will discuss the relevance of this in relation to knowledgeable and ethical profession practice later in this chapter.

### **Profession, professionalisation and professionalism**

An understanding of knowledgeable and ethical *professional* practice draws attention to concepts related to profession and associated notions of professionalisation and professionalism. These changing and contested concepts are the focus of this section. I start with a discussion of critiques of traditional discourses on ‘profession’ and

'professionalisation' that highlights the tensions between these and practice-based views. This is followed by an examination of 'professionalism' that focuses on the powerful interests that underpin many ideas related to it. Last, this section examines the concepts of reflexive and mindful professions. These contain key ideas that are relevant to define knowledgeable and ethical practice from a practice-based perspective.

### **Profession and professionalisation**

Sociologists have attempted to define 'profession' as a discrete category of occupational work that can be distinguished from other occupations (Evetts, 2014). The debate about whether social work is a "pure profession" (Noordegraaf, 2007) goes back to its very beginnings (Beddoe, 2013). While some authors argue that social work is just a semi-profession (Etzioni, 1969, cited in Staub-Bernasconi, 2009) others argue that it is an emerging and developing profession (Weiss-Gal and Welbourne, 2008). The key criteria that define a profession in this traditional discourse are whether a professional group can demonstrate 'expert knowledge', 'autonomy' and, a 'normative orientation' (Weiss-Gal and Welbourne, 2008). Gorman and Sandefur (2011, p. 278) suggest that the various definitions can be summarised as including: "(a) expert knowledge, (b) technical autonomy, (c) a normative orientation toward the service of others, and (d) high status, income, and other rewards".

Trying to define professions based on these criteria has proved impossible (Evetts, 2014) due to several issues. The traditional view with its focus on 'expert knowledge' that is produced in academia and applied in practice (Cnaan and Dichter, 2008), disregards evidence "that a range of professional innovations and organisational knowledge emerges from professional practices and problem-focused design activity" (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017, p. 57) and not just from academia. Indeed, as Markauskaite and Goodyear (2017) argue, knowledge is created in both academia and practice, but its creation and validation entails different epistemic cultures.

While autonomy is a core criterion of pure professions, Staub-Bernasconi (2009) argues that social work is bound by a triple mandate from service users, organisations (representing the state) and the profession itself. Autonomy is therefore always limited by organisational structures and mandates under more or less direct influence of policy.

Social work has from its origins been a profession concerned with human rights and social justice and any definition of professional social work includes references to its ethical code. It therefore has a clear normative orientation toward the service of others (Staub-Bernasconi, 2012; Dominelli, 2009). The ethical and human rights perspective is enshrined at an international level (IFSW and IASSW, 2004, 2012, 2014) and at national level in BASW's (2014) 'Code of Ethics for Social Work' and the HCPC's (2012) 'Standards of Proficiency'. However, the spread of capitalism and neoliberal policies across the globe has contributed to an erosion of social work's central values and commitment to social justice (Howard, 2010) and of the contract between nation states and its citizens (Parton, 2014). As a consequence, individualistic perspectives have gained traction and individual failings are seen as the root cause of social problems, whereas the collective responsibility of the state to all citizens is fundamentally undermined (Karger and Hernández, 2004). This is in stark contrast with the current definition of social work by the International Federation of Social Workers and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (2014 no pagination), which states that "principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work."

The definitional work on profession is closely tied in with professionalisation, as this is the process that seeks to bring about change within a professional group to achieve the status of a profession (Evetts, 2014). Ever since Flexner (1915, p. 161) argued that social work is not "a profession in and by itself", social work has been "eager to upgrade its status to a full-fledged profession" (Cnaan and Dichter, 2008, p. 279). Professionalisation is the concept that

captures these endeavours to promote a profession's self-interests in relation to salary, status and power and the legal protection of the sphere of influence (Evetts, 2014). Abbott (1991) argued that professionalisation is a complex and dynamic process that involves the control of work, development of a discipline and academic institutions and the creation of professionally dominated workplaces, associations and regulation.

From a critical social work perspective, scholars argue that social work is still a relatively young and therefore emerging and evolving profession (Parton, 2014; Howard, 2010). However, rather than being professionalised, it is increasingly being de-professionalised (Howard, 2010; Ferguson, 2009; Staub-Bernasconi, 2009) as there is a shift "from professional self-regulation towards a greater interference by the state and also to greater control by managers, exercised through performance measures of various kinds" (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017, p. 29), a trend which is seen across the professions.

Professionalisation continues to influence the analysis of developing and emerging occupations, such as social care work, social work and social pedagogy in Europe and influences the standardisation of "education, training and qualification for practice" (Evetts, 2014, p. 34). So, while social work is still evolving and trying to establish itself as a profession, it is faced with a simultaneous erosion (Staub-Bernasconi, 2009).

In sum, given these tensions related to knowledge, autonomy and ethics in social work and other professions, it is no surprise that this discourse has not brought about a clear definition of profession and failed to define the distinguishing characteristics of professions compared to occupations (Evetts, 2014). Attempts to define social work as a pure profession and thereby improve its "standing and power" (Beddoe, 2013, p. 48) and secure its status (Staub-Bernasconi, 2009) have been met by a number of critiques. Such a definition relies on a professions' expert knowledge (research and theory) produced by academia and applied in practice, but this leads to the devaluation of service users' and social workers' expertise. In

addition, the recognition of the limited autonomy of social workers has led to the conclusion that the conceptualisation of social work as a pure profession is not compatible with the realities and values of social work. Furthermore, by the 1990s, due to societal and technological changes, the context of professions had radically changed and traditional theoretical frameworks for the definition of professions were further called into question (Evetts, 2014). While there are notable differences between Anglo-American and European discourses, the focus of scholars on the whole has moved to the concept of professionalism (Evetts, 2014).

### **Professionalism and professionalism**

Scholarly work concerned with the concept of professionalism developed in three phases: first, in an early phase, professionalism was defined “as an occupational or normative value”. In a second phase, professionalism was critiqued as an ideology to promote the interests of professionals themselves (similar to professionalisation). A third phase led to a reappraisal of professionalism that combined the previous two phases, defining professionalism as a discourse that is used by managers and organisations to influence the way the service sector work is organised, by arguing that the interests of service users and practitioners can be combined (Evetts, 2014, p. 34). I focus my discussion on this third phase as it seems most relevant to current social work practice in England.

Evetts (2014) argues that professionalism is used as a marketing and advertising tool to attract new entrants and to motivate workers in organisations. The notion of professionalism entered the management literature, training materials and professional regulation. It appeals to both practitioners and managers as it is tied in with the development and maintenance of their work identities, career planning and sense of self. Professionalism is therefore “a powerful instrument of occupational change and social control” and is also a

form of self-control linked to self-motivation and at times self-exploitation (Evetts, 2014, p. 34).

Evetts' synthesis of previous research on professionalism highlights that the appeal to professionalism is "a disciplinary mechanism", to "inculcate 'appropriate' work identities, conducts and practices" (Evetts, 2014, p. 40). Two such mechanisms, one 'from within' and one 'from above' can be identified. For social work, as with other public service occupations, professionalism is imposed 'from above' by employers. The link of professionalism with notions of "dedicated service and autonomous decision making" is what makes it an attractive concept. However, when professionalism is imposed from above, "autonomy and occupational control ... are seldom included" and it is rather used "to promote and facilitate occupational change (rationalization) and as a disciplinary mechanism" (Evetts, 2014, p. 41). Nevertheless, this discourse is seen by practitioners themselves as a way to improve their own status and rewards. As such it:

"is a powerful ideology and the idea of becoming and being a 'professional worker' has appealed to many new and existing occupational groups particularly during the second half of the twentieth century (e.g. social work and social care occupations throughout Europe and North America)." (Evetts, 2014, p. 41)

Although like professionalisation, it promises "exclusive ownership of an area of expertise, increased status and salary, autonomy and discretion in work practices and the occupational control of the work" (Evetts, 2014, p. 42), the realities of such an imposed professionalism are in stark contrast with the aspirations as it leads to:

"(i) the substitution of organizational for professional values; (ii) bureaucratic, hierarchical and managerial controls rather than collegial relations; (iii) managerial and organizational objectives rather than client trust and autonomy based on competencies and expertise; (iv) budgetary restrictions and financial rationalizations; (v) the standardization of work practices rather than discretion; and (vi) performance targets, accountability and sometimes increased political control." (Evetts, 2014, p. 42)

Rather than achieving control over their work, practitioners face control by managers and supervisors and organisational objectives dictate their work through targets and performance indicators, thereby limiting autonomy and professional decision-making based on ethics (Evetts, 2014, p. 41). This represents a shift from occupational professionalism to organisational forms of professionalism (Evetts, 2014, p. 47). Evetts (2014) therefore concludes that professionalism is a myth.

The notions of imposed and organisational professionalism are further explored by Evans (2008). Her focus on the idea of professionalism as a key concept helps to understand individual practitioners' agency. Evans' (2008) work points to the importance of the lived experience of professionals themselves and proposes a professional-within-professional-environment perspective. She defines professionalism as

“an ideologically-, attitudinally-, intellectually-, and epistemologically-based stance on the part of an individual, in relation to the practice of the profession to which s/he belongs, and which influences her/his professional practice” (Evans, 2002, in Evans, 2008, p. 8)

These individual professionalism orientations shape a collective professionalism, which in turn stimulate or provoke “responses in individuals that determine their professionalism orientations” (Evans, 2008, p. 10).

This socio-cultural and practice-based perspective of professions points to some inherent problems in trying to define a profession. By accepting that there is a range of professionalism orientations within any profession, the assumptions about homogeneity, commonality and consensus in relation to any definition of professionalism as a collective is undermined (Evans, 2008). In fact, she argues that definitions of professionalism are “bound to dissipate into impracticable rhetoric” (Evans, 2008, p. 11).

In Evans' view therefore, we need to distinguish between what is demanded, requested or prescribed and enacted. If professionalism is, as she points out, akin to a service level agreement, then the agreement is only enacted if both sides agree and behave in accordance with that agreement. Therefore, if policy makers want to shape a profession by imposing their view of professionalism on an occupational group, they must consider both the influence and understanding of that group's professional culture as represented by the range of professionalism represented within the profession (Evans, 2008). While the demanded and prescribed notions of professionalism may be powerful, the only one that reflects practice is the enacted one and "it remains the only meaningful conception of professionalism; any others represent insubstantiality ranging from articulated ideology to wishful thinking" (Evans, 2008, p. 12). Evans (2008, p. 13) thus defines professionalism as:

"professionalism-influenced practice that is consistent with commonly-held consensual delineations of a specific profession ... that both contributes to and reflects perceptions of the profession's purpose and status and the specific nature, range and levels of service provided by, and expertise prevalent within, the profession, as well as the general ethical code underpinning this practice."

In sum, Evett's (2014) analysis leads to the conclusion that any notion of professionalism is a myth and that in fact, what can be observed is a shift from autonomous practitioners to organisational control and limitation of ethical decision-making. Evans (2008) on the other hand highlighted the power of professionals that is mediated through their own understanding of what it means to be a professional. This perspective seems relevant to the on-going discussion in social work in England, where different stakeholders propagate different ideas about how social work should be done. Many come from central government as requested or prescribed standards (such as the Knowledge and Skills Statements) or policy directives linked to political ideology as to how social services should be provided (Jones, 2015), from academics (research evidence and theoretical work) and from organisations

(procedural requirements or innovative ways of working). Ultimately, individuals' own professionalism, in combination with professional cultures, mediate the degree to which these are enacted in practice through the integration in the personal professionalism and professional culture. Therefore, "a required or demanded new professionalism is not the same as an enacted new professionalism" (Evans, 2008, p. 14).

### **A Reflexive and mindful profession**

A different perspective comes from scholars who suggest conceptualising professions as situated (Noordegraaf, 2007) or hybrid (Gredig, 2011). These are rooted in practice-based perspectives and draw on what Schön (1983, p. 49) calls a "new epistemology of practice" that entails "artistic, intuitive processes which some practitioners do bring to situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness and value conflict". Current research on professional and expert work centres "on processes and the social actors who move them forward" (Gorman and Sandefur, 2011, p. 291). This represents a shift of focus onto the processes involved in being professional that accepts that a profession is "not a fixed, objective matter" but rather "is constructed and given meaning by the stakeholders who are part of it or interact with it" (Beddoe, 2013, p. 46).

In this discourse, questions such as "how professionals and experts use knowledge in their work" has re-emerged (Gorman and Sandefur, 2011, p. 282) and led to a focus on the way that knowledge is created, shared and enacted in professional work (Knorr Cetina, 2005). The four domains of knowledge, autonomy, ethics and status, which form the basis of traditional definitions, are still being addressed but this time with a focus on the nature of different forms of knowledge and on processes (Gorman and Sandefur, 2011). The distinction between pure, abstract, formal knowledge and practice-based tacit and experiential knowledge is still made, but rather than devaluing the "importance of a profession's knowledge base", it is given recognition (Eraut, 1994, p. 14).

In the German sociological discourse of professions, this discourse is summed up under the term of reflexive professionalism (Dewe and Otto, 2012). Reflexive professionalism promotes the inclusion of reflexive knowledge, particularly service users' experience and this is seen as a prerequisite for effective practice and quality in social work. At the heart of professional action lies not scholarly knowledge per se but the capability to discursively interpret the lived experience and challenges of service users in combination with other knowledge, with the aim of opening perspectives and justifying decisions under conditions of uncertainty (Dewe and Otto, 2012). Social work as a reflexive profession is defined by the quality of social work practice that is evident in the participation of service users and carers, the increased courses of action available and social justice and equality achieved. This shift away from the traditional categories of expert knowledge, technical autonomy and status brings attention to actual practice (Dewe and Otto, 2012). Central to reflexive professionalism is a reflexive capability to discursively deliberate specific situations by reconstructing the social causes so as to enable service users to make informed decisions about their own lives and to increase their participation. This requires an ability to interpret and understand rather than apply, and therefore contests the traditional conception of expert knowledge (Dewe and Otto, 2012).

Lorenz (2008, p. 8) suggests that from a European perspective, an emergent notion of professionalism lies in this dual commitment "towards universal criteria of accountable, theory based, and evidence-tested practice" and at the same time "towards the subjectively articulated needs of the service users". In the UK, a similar approach has been advocated by Ferguson (2003, p. 1009) who argues for a "critical best practice perspective", which in his view

"involves a reflexive method which combines the analytical means to enable the identification of the best critical practice that is going on, and the basis for

advancing particular effective ways of working which emerge out of the analysis”.  
(Ferguson, 2003, p. 1021)

Markauskaite and Goodyear (2017, pp. 48–49) refer to a “‘mindful professional’ – someone able to fuse theoretical knowledge with a common-sense grasp of the situation, formal rules with creativity, standards with improvisation and reason with intuition.” This requires a relational expertise that “involves both purposeful inter-professional activity and ‘weaving’ clients’ private knowledge into professional decisions” (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017, p. 60). In addition to the ability to integrate generalised knowledge with specific and often dynamic and complex practice situations, contemporary professionals also need to be able to provide evidence-informed arguments to defend their assessments and decisions (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017).

Summing up, these notions of a reflexive and mindful profession are well aligned with a practice-based perspective of social work. The reflexive capability for discursive deliberation to interpret and understand specific situations in connection with general knowledge points to the role of epistemic practices. In other words, these definitions focus on how professionals deal with knowledge and engage in knowledge-related activities in practice (Knorr Cetina, 2005). Epistemic practices in such a view of the profession need to focus on the lifeworld of service users and on enabling their participation in the co-production of understanding and solutions to their challenges, by merging different perspectives.

### **Conclusion**

From the discussion of concepts related to profession, we can see that attempts to professionalise and define social work as a pure profession have failed. The reality of professional social work practice is always mediated by organisational and socio-political contexts as well as service users’ and social workers’ expertise. This leads to a first conclusion

that social work practice cannot be defined as a rational-technical activity and therefore endeavours to standardise professional practice are highly problematic.

The discourse on professionalism and professionality has further shown that there are tensions between aspirations of occupational groups and definitions of professionalism that are imposed from above. This is particularly important in the context of an erosion of social work's autonomy and ethical base due to neoliberal policies that are also associated with managerialism. However, this discussion has also shown some of the opportunities that are related to influencing occupational change (Evetts, 2014; Evans, 2008). Evetts' (2014) analysis of imposed organisational professionalism perhaps holds a clue as to how social work as a profession can counter-balance some of the current developments. Rather than accepting the substitution of professional values by bureaucratic controls, organisational objectives and standardisation of work practices, I conclude that it is important for social work to make professional values a core element of its analysis, foster collegial relations, focus on relationship-based practice to foster trust and stand up to attempts to further standardise work practices. Furthermore, professionalism, as the analysis by Evans (2008) has shown, is a social construct, which is influenced by both professional culture and individuals' professionality orientations. It is negotiated in the context of different mandates. This leads me to a further conclusion that if we want to support professional development of social workers, then it is important to note that this cannot easily be prescribed or requested. Any endeavour to develop individuals' professionality needs to be aligned to professionals' view or it will not be enacted. Influencing professionalism requires close engagement with professionals and this may open opportunities to supporting the development of individual professionals' identity (e.g. their professionality orientation), which in turn can impact on the whole profession.

Notions of reflexive and mindful professions highlight the centrality of reflexive capability and discursive deliberation to weave together specific, experiential and general knowledge (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017; Moch, 2006; Dewe et al., 1987). I take from this discussion that a key to knowledgeable and ethical practice is the art of merging theoretical and research knowledge with experiential and everyday knowledge, including service users' own expertise, while paying regard to professional values and ethical codes to enhance situational action in professional practice.

The discussion has also shown that knowledge is a central aspect of understanding professional practice. Indeed, Markauskaite and Goodyear (2017, p. 76) argue that "expertise needs to be understood in terms of a relationship between professional work and professional knowledge". Similarly, Evetts (2014) argues that professional work is essentially knowledge-based work in the service sector that involves expertise and experience (Evetts, 2014). It is therefore important to consider knowledge as an essential ingredient in professional work. However, so far, I have focussed on broad distinctions between general scholarly and specific practice knowledge. In order to better understand how professionals can integrate knowledge, values and practice, I therefore develop this understanding further in the next section. The aim of this is to arrive at a better understanding of what types of knowledge social workers need to integrate<sup>1</sup>.

### **Knowledge for and from practice**

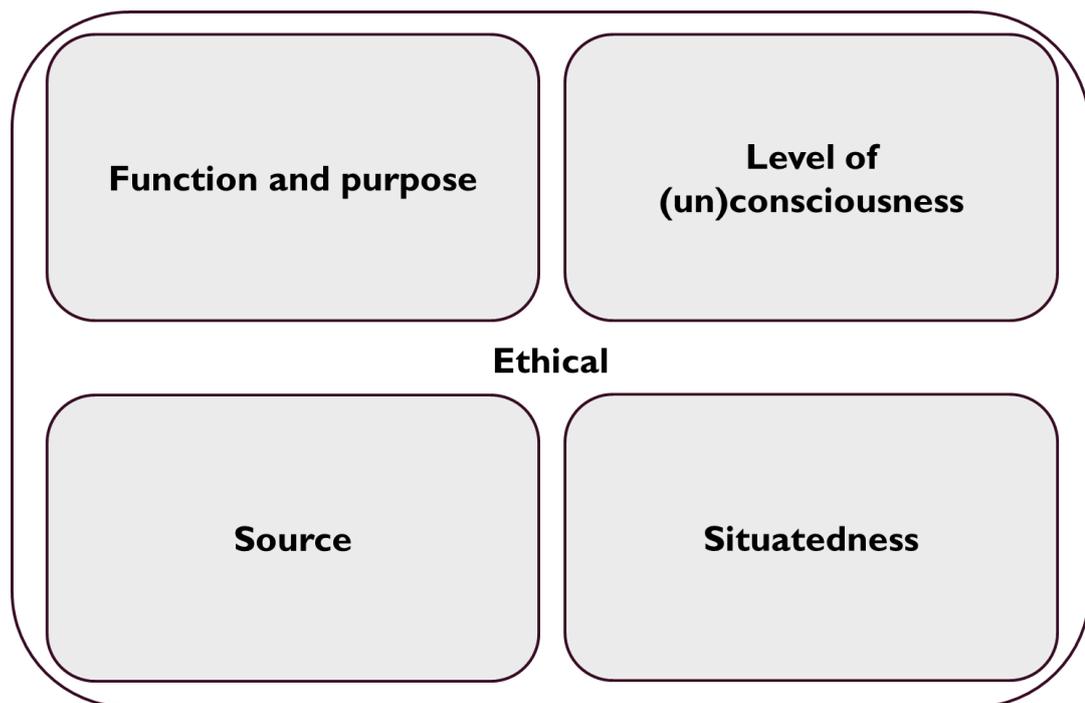
Definitions of 'knowledge' and concepts of how it relates to practice are complex and contested in the literature. I reviewed a range of knowledge taxonomies, which are either

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<sup>1</sup> It is however not a discussion of a curriculum in the sense of topics and theories, which social workers need to acquire in relation to an understanding of the conditions of service users and carers within their environment (for example attachment theory, gender theory) or of possible interventions (such as motivational interviewing or evidence in relation to it) but is concerned with the very nature of knowledge.

widely cited in the literature, are of specific relevance to social work or further the practice-based perspective on knowledge. From a practice-based perspective, I foreground the socio-cultural embeddedness of knowledge in space and time and consider knowledge in a holistic, rather than a fragmented way, thus challenging the dominance of codified academic knowledge (Eraut, 2012). In analysing the literature, I have come to understand the different perspectives on knowledge through five dimensions (see Figure 1).

In the literature, knowledge is discussed in relation to its function for and in practice, and much of the literature is about the different ways in which knowledge is created by different actors, with a focus on diverse sources. A central dimension of the debate centres on whether and how knowledge can be transformed. This is particularly relevant in



*Figure 1* Five knowledge dimensions

relation to actors' (un)consciousness of their knowledge and how different forms influence practice. Transformation of knowledge by people, groups or communities anchors it in different locations and discussions about the situatedness of knowledge considers the different ways knowledge is situated. Lastly, ethical knowledge is an encompassing

dimension that is central to both knowledge creation and its integration and is central to any definition of social work. I discuss these five dimensions in the following sections.

### Sources of knowledge

Knowledge can be categorised by the way it is created. Alavi and Leidner (2001), for example, differentiate between individually and socially created knowledge. Similarly, Pawson et al. (2003) differentiate between knowledge created by organisations, practitioners, the policy community, researchers and by users and carers. Avby et al. (2017) in their study of the role of different forms of knowledge in social workers' decision-making, distinguished between different knowledge sources and associated knowledge forms (research-based, practice-based and ordinary knowledge), as the following figure shows:

Knowledge form	Knowledge source
Research-based knowledge	Research
	Professional literature
	-----
	Legislation
	Local policies
Practice-based knowledge	Web-based tools
	Case documentation
	Courses and conferences
	Parents
	Children
	Other professionals
	Colleagues
Unit manager	
Ordinary knowledge	Experience
	-----
	Basic education
	Common sense
	Personal beliefs
Wisdom	

**Figure 2** Knowledge forms and knowledge sources in investigation work (Avby et al., 2017, p. 54)

Differentiating these further, I refer to Carson (2004) who suggests nine different knowledge categories that arise from different modes of production that are associated with certain sources (see Figure 3).

<b>Domain of Knowledge</b>	<b>Nature of Knowledge</b>	<b>Mode of Production</b>
<b>Empirical</b>	Knowledge about the physical world.	Obtained through observation of the world, codified through symbols.
<b>Rational</b>	Knowledge about the relationship between different parts, abstract, relational and quantitative, both content and process and organising schemata for perception and concept formation.	Created through analytical thinking
<b>Conceptual</b>	Aspects of knowledge built into patterns and coherent ensembles, often integrating more than one domain of knowledge.	Assembled or constructed by human thought through combination of knowledge
<b>Conventional</b>	Socially learned conventions, not dependent on logic or empirical observation for their validity, arbitrary association.	Created through imagination and agreed upon culturally
<b>Cognitive Process Skills</b>	Mental routines, heuristics or algorithms used in particular situations (e.g. problem solving or decision making), although specific to particular contexts and purposes may potentially be transferable across different knowledge domains.	Learnt processes in particular situations
<b>Psychomotor</b>	Knowledge concerned with the body and physical skills and routines.	Created and learnt in physical activities
<b>Affective</b>	Intuitive knowledge in relation to the emotional and aesthetic dimensions of experience, makes experience intelligible, memorable, and meaningful.	Experienced and memorised in connection with situations
<b>Narrative</b>	Knowledge of the human condition, inter-connects mind, body and history and integrates this into a coherent and meaningful life story.	Created narratives that are deeply rooted in experience
<b>Received</b>	Knowledge related to the spiritual side of experience and life, cultural claims about higher powers and guidance in various ways, based on faith and functions as an orienting principle and guide to life.	Claimed to be received divine wisdom and guidance in various ways

*Figure 3 Carson's (2004, pp. 68–73) Taxonomy of Knowledge Types (author's table)*

Carson (2004, pp. 68–73) argues that empirical knowledge is obtained through observation of the world. Rational knowledge is created through analytical thinking and is concerned with the “proportional relationship between the parts of something” (Carson, 2004, p. 69). This type of knowledge is abstract, relational, and quantitative and represents both content and process. Once acquired, it becomes an organising schema for perception and concept formation. Conceptual knowledge represents assembled aspects of knowledge built into patterns and concepts. He points out that its individual parts often come from more than one domain of knowledge. These knowledge forms are associated with scientific methods of knowledge production that are linked with research and theorising and their source is thus by and large, the academy. The other forms of knowledge arise broadly from (cultural) practices. Their source is thus tightly linked to specific mental, emotional and bodily activities.

Conventional knowledge is created through imagination and agreed upon culturally. It refers to socially learned conventions that “do not depend upon logic or empirical observation for their validity” and link things by an “arbitrary association ... that are not otherwise naturally linked” (Carson, 2004, p. 69). Conventional knowledge thus arises out of human practices. Similarly, the subsequent knowledge domains are closely linked to human every-day actions. Cognitive Process Skills are learned processes such as mental routines, heuristics or algorithms that are used in particular situations such as problem solving or decision making. They are strategies for how to think and are specific to contexts and purposes. It is a procedural and dynamic type of knowledge, which can potentially be “transferable across different content areas or knowledge domains” (Carson, 2004, p. 71).

Psychomotor knowledge is concerned with the body and physical skills and routines and is created in physical activities. Affective knowledge is an intuitive form of knowledge and relates to emotional and aesthetic dimensions. It is crucial in making experience intelligible, memorable, and meaningful. Narrative knowledge is linked to the human experience and

our reactions to life in the inter-connectedness of mind, body and history and integrates this into a life story. The narrative enables us to “see integration, coherence, and meaning in what would otherwise be constant waves of disjointed experience” (Carson, 2004, p. 72). Narrative knowledge is thus deeply experiential in nature. Lastly, Carson refers to Received Knowledge, the “spiritual side of human experience and life”, which relates to different peoples’ and cultures’ “claim to have received divine wisdom and guidance in various ways” (Carson, 2004, p. 73). This knowledge is understood in different ways depending on the socio-cultural contexts and spirituality is based on faith, which functions as an orienting principle and guide to life (Carson, 2004).

In social work, the notion of holistic is important. Holistic means that rather than fragmenting the human experience into components, we are reminded to think of people as a whole person with a “body (genetic, physical and biological) and mind (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and senses)” (Jarvis, 2009, p. 25). Carson’s (2004) taxonomy combines different forms of knowledge not commonly considered but relevant to a holistic understanding of humans and therefore seems relevant to a discussion of knowledge in social work. In line with such a holistic understanding, he comments that the point of this taxonomy is to distinguish various types of knowledge based on their origin in which the subtle ontological and epistemological distinctions are preserved, without prioritising one form over another.

In sum, knowledge is created by various individual, organisational, community actors. Knowledge creation does not just stem from researchers and theorists but includes practitioners and service users and carers. The different knowledge forms have different qualities and social workers need to be aware of these subtle differences. Highlighting these differences leads to the question of how these interact with practice. This is the focus of the next section.

### Function and purpose of knowledge

Considering the function and purpose of knowledge in relation to practice raises questions about the ways in which knowledge shapes individual and collective perception, understanding and actions to the fore. A classic understanding of this relationship differentiates between ‘knowing that’ and ‘knowing how’. Ryle argued that there is a distinction “between knowing that something is the case and knowing how to do things” (Ryle, 1945, p. 4).

‘Know-how’ is learned through practice and guided through “criticism and example” (Ryle, 1949, p. 41). This understanding is taken up by Schön (1983) who coined the term “knowing-in-action” as the “characteristic mode of practical knowledge” (Schön, 1983, p. 54). Other authors call this procedural knowledge (Kaiser, 2005b; Krathwohl, 2002; Alavi and Leidner, 2001); Krathwohl (2002) further differentiates between knowledge of subject-specific skills and algorithms; of subject-specific techniques and methods and of criteria for determining when to use appropriate procedures. For Kaiser (2005b), procedural knowledge is about cognitive routines, ‘when-then’ rules, which are established over time. Alavi and Leidner (2001) distinguish between procedural (‘know-how’) and conditional (‘know-when’) knowledge, whereas for Krathwohl (2002) and Kaiser (2005b) ‘know-when’ is part of procedural knowledge.

‘Know-that’ on the other hand, is concerned with generalised rules, reasons or principles (Ryle, 1949). The terms associated with this type of codified knowledge are declarative, theoretical, propositional, formal or conceptual and are more often used interchangeably (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017). Alavi and Leidner (2001) refer to declarative or propositional knowledge and call this type of knowledge ‘know-about’. Kaiser (2005b) posits that declarative knowledge is made up of models, theories and procedures, which are represented in symbols and expressed in language. Krathwohl (2002) differentiates between factual knowledge and conceptual knowledge. Conceptual knowledge in his view provides a

categorisation of generalisable knowledge in the form of theories and concepts, whereas factual knowledge forms the basis for both conceptual and procedural knowledge. Furthermore, Alavi and Leidner (2001) suggest that causal knowledge or 'know-why' is a specific form of declarative knowledge which has an explanatory purpose. Markauskaite and Goodyear (2017) posit that propositional, structural and explanatory knowledge represent an "understanding of the principles underlying a phenomenon".

Overall, there is much agreement about the underlying conceptions of 'know-that' and 'know-how' between these different authors. In addition to these basic categories of knowledge, further categories are discussed. Alavi and Leidner (2001, p. 112) propose relational ('know-with') and pragmatic knowledge, defining the latter as "types of knowledge that are useful to organisations". Krathwohl (2002) points to metacognitive knowledge, which includes both strategic and self-knowledge. Self-knowledge is concerned with cognitive tasks, including appropriate contextual and conditional knowledge. Lastly, Kaiser (2005b) suggests sensorimotor and situational knowledge. Sensorimotor knowledge enables the tacit micro-regulation of the body and is created through feedback processes which enable movement through space and time. Situational knowledge is made up of experiences and is organised in a network of memorised situations.

By synthesising categories by Bereiter (2002) and Eraut (1994, 2009a, 2010, 2013), Markauskaite and Goodyear (2017, p. 91) provide an overview of all these knowledge forms and arrange them in an epistemic map. They propose the categories of propositional ('know-That'), structural ('know-How'), explanatory ('know-Why'), procedural ('know-how'), regulative ('know-for'), experiential ('know -what') and contextual ('know-when') knowledge. 'Knowing That', 'Knowing How' and 'Knowing Why' are declarative forms of knowledge. In other words, this knowledge is codified and denotes understanding of the principles that underlie a phenomenon. 'Knowing-how' and 'knowing-for' are procedural and

meta-procedural forms that tell us something about how things should be done and how the doing is monitored and adjusted. Lastly, 'knowing-what' and 'knowing-when' are relational types of knowledge that are personalised aspects of knowledgeability and relate to previous experience and feelings ('knowing-what') and to reading the context in which actions take place ('knowing-when'). Markauskaite and Goodyear (2017) further differentiate between conceptual, problem-solving, social, material, somatic and ethical knowledge as dimensions of all these different categories.

This section started with asking how knowledge shapes individual and collective perception, understanding and actions. While the outlined categories above tell us what function these different types of knowledge serve, it is not sufficient for professionals to be aware of these – although this is an important aspect – but they crucially need to develop their conceptual understanding and problem solving by relating the different kinds of knowledge to concrete actions in the real material world in explicit ways to make it actionable (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017, p. 97). The categories proposed by Markauskaite and Goodyear (2017) capture the different dimensions and types of knowledge well and offer a good starting point for thinking about the relationship between knowing and doing.

While the propositional knowledge forms discussed above are per definition codified and thus explicit, relational kinds of knowing are more personal and experiential. This opens the question as to how far an actor is aware and conscious of different knowledge forms, a point addressed in the next section.

### **Level of (un)consciousness of knowledge**

Diverse types of knowledge differ in terms of how far an actor is aware of them, thereby affecting their ability to talk about their knowledge. For example, when knowledge is acquired or developed in connection with practice, it can transform into practice wisdom,

which is aligned to intuition and the “routine application of knowledge” (Nutley et al., 2004, p. 9). This intuitive knowledge is crucial as it allows practitioners to perceive and react quickly to situations they encounter (Eraut, 2012) and is involved in professional decision-making and expertise (see Chapter 2). The purpose of this section is to examine how far different knowledge types are consciously accessible to actors. It is therefore important to develop a nuanced understanding that rejects a hindering dichotomous tacit-explicit knowledge classification and accepts that awareness of one’s knowledge lies on a continuum (Alavi and Leidner, 2001).

In social work we encounter general and specific forms of knowledge, but a distinction between them cannot be reduced to a simple equation that sees practice knowledge as specific and tacit and scholarly knowledge as general and explicit. There is no simple distinction between ‘know-that’ and ‘know-how’ in terms of the level of consciousness (Ryle, 1949). Ryle argues that ‘knowing-how’ in practice can take the form of “overt or covert” or it can “be amalgamation of the two” (Ryle, 1949, p. 46). He also posits that knowing-how “is not a sort of knowing-that, so it is neither an intuitive nor a discursive sort of knowing-that.” (Ryle, 1945, p. 12). Thus, ‘knowing-how’ and ‘knowing-that’ run parallel to each other and complement each other, and neither is subsumed under the other nor does one come before the other. Polanyi emphasised the “tacit nature of all our knowledge” (Polanyi, 1958, p. 95) and concluded that “we can know more than we can tell” (Polanyi, 1966, p. 4). Duguid (2005) points out that Polanyi argued that “no amount of explicit knowledge provides you with the implicit”, just as Ryle had earlier stated that knowing-that does not lead to knowing-how. In his view, both Ryle and Polanyi therefore saw the two aspects of knowing as complementing each other by “knowing how helping to make knowing that actionable” (Duguid, 2005, p. 111). Similarly, Eraut (2012) in discussing cultural knowledge stated that it can in part be codified, mainly in written texts as codified academic knowledge (research and publications) and as organisational knowledge (organisational information, records, correspondence,

manuals, plans and other documents). On the other hand, cultural knowledge in its uncodified form plays an important part in work-based practices. Personal knowledge can also be codified through writings that document “personalised versions of public codified knowledge” and “everyday knowledge of people and situations, know-how in the form of skills and practices, memories of episodes and events, self-knowledge, attitudes and emotions” (Eraut, 2012, p. 76). The above writers share a focus on the gaps and links between knowing and doing, and to examine this in more depth, it is useful to further differentiate various forms of tacit knowledge and ways of knowing.

Alavi and Leidner (2001) distinguish between cognitive tacit (mental models) and technical tacit (specific tasks) knowledge. Kaiser (2005b) argues that procedural, situational and sensorimotor knowledge are tacit forms of knowing. In his view, procedural and sensorimotor knowledge cannot become conscious, because a person cannot readily become aware of it, despite obviously possessing it. Every attempt to externalise this knowledge leads to its transformation into declarative knowledge. Situational knowledge, on the other hand, can become conscious but can influence decision-making, even if the person is not aware of it. Declarative knowledge, however, is per definition conscious but its content can only become effective if applied deliberately, thereby transformed into procedural or situational knowledge (Kaiser, 2005b).

As tacit knowledge is “acquired informally through participation” (Eraut, 2012, p. 76) in local practices, it is “deeply rooted in action, commitment, and involvement in a specific context” and is more difficult to “formalize and communicate” (see also Wenger, 1998; Nonaka, 1994, p. 16). It thus often remains hidden as it is taken for granted and individuals are unaware of how it shapes perception, understanding and action (Eraut, 2012).

These arguments point to the importance of context in relation to tacit knowledge. Giddens (1993, p. 113), referring to Polanyi’s notion of tacit knowledge, in his early work coined the

term “mutual knowledge”. Mutual knowledge is social in nature and it forms the basis for interaction:

“Mutual knowledge is ‘background knowledge’ in the sense that it is taken for granted, and mostly remains unarticulated; on the other hand, it is not part of the ‘background’ in the sense that it is constantly actualised, displayed, and modified by members of society in the course of their interaction.” (Giddens, 1993, p. 113)

He elaborated on this in his structuration theory, suggesting that mutual knowledge “is not directly accessible to the consciousness of actors” and is “practical in character” (Giddens, 1984, p. 4). Mutual knowledge is akin to “rules of social life” and as such are “techniques or generalizable procedures” (Giddens, 1984, p. 21). He distinguished three levels of consciousness: “unconscious motives/cognition”, “practical consciousness” and “discursive consciousness” (Giddens, 1984, p. 7). For Giddens, practice is neither guided primarily by theoretical knowledge, nor solely by individual intentions (unconscious motives/cognition), but by application of implicit rules in practical consciousness. Awareness of social rules, expressed in practical consciousness, constitutes the core of “knowledgeability” of human agents but the “vast bulk of such knowledge is practical rather than theoretical in character” (Giddens, 1984, pp. 21–22). According to Giddens, reflexive agents have a capacity to rationalise or give reason to their actions through discursive consciousness: “To be a human being is to be a purposive agent, who both has reasons for his or her activities and is able ... to elaborate discursively upon those reasons” (Giddens, 1984, p. 3). Discursive knowledge is consciously immediately available to actors and is generally of a propositional form. Giddens’ (1984, 1993) view is that unconscious motives are not accessible to humans but an awareness of practical consciousness can be generated discursively. Therefore, for him tacit and discursive are the two ends of a continuum.

The contribution of Ryle and Polanyi to the debate on knowledge is a critique of the positivist tradition, in which they argued that knowledge and knowing are only to some degree

accessible to the human mind, as much of it is tacit. Giddens extends this understanding by pointing to the social nature of the tacit as mutual knowledge and Eraut (2012) points out the importance of both cultural and personal knowledge, both of which have tacit and explicit dimensions. This links to Schön's (1983, 1987) work which refers to knowing in action and reflection in action:

“Knowing in action is tacit, spontaneously delivered without conscious deliberation; and it works, yielding intended outcomes so long as the situation falls within the boundaries of what we have learned to treat as normal.” (Schön, 1987, p. 28)

In his critique of Schön, Eraut (2012, p. 9) suggests – like Giddens – that reflection in action occurs in two different modes of cognition. Instant/reflex processing in routinised behaviour that is at most, semi-conscious, and rapid/intuitive processing that is characterised by rapid decision-making in stop and think breaks in semi-routinised activities. The latter is dependent on previous knowledge and experience and typically “involves recognition of situations by comparison with similar situations previously encountered; then responding to them with already learned procedures” (Eraut, 2012, p. 83). This understanding points to intuitive actions in known situations, which are based on prior experience and knowledge (see Chapter 2).

In summary, the important aspect of these dimensions in relation to knowledgeable and ethical practice is that many aspects of knowledge are not accessible to the conscious mind, as they are embedded in action ('know-how', practical consciousness, motives); these implicit aspects of knowledge are related to the social world in which we live. Crucially, both unconscious and conscious ways of knowing steer actions. While some forms of this knowledge may remain hidden, due to its unconscious nature (motives), other forms (practical consciousness) may come to the awareness of practitioners in discursive consciousness. Therefore, if we want to support social workers' reflexive capability to weave

together knowing and doing, we need to support them to transform their practical consciousness into a discursive one through deliberative cognition in discursive elaboration. At the same time, we need to be aware that not all tacit knowledge can be transformed. The exploration of different levels of consciousness pointed to the importance of contexts and I explore this further in the next section.

### **Situatedness of knowledge**

The idea that knowledge is something discrete and objective, that is out there waiting to be discovered, learned and applied to practice, underpins traditional Western thinking and is prevalent in both professional education and practice. Another perspective by contrast views knowledge as highly contextual and situated.

The term 'situated action' was coined by Suchman (1987). She argued that everyday thinking, knowing and learning is always situated in action and cannot be fully planned, due to the uncertainty of situations. Her work influenced the understanding of human knowledge immensely and has led to a focus on the location of knowledge, discussed under the term of situated knowledge. This perspective has shaped feminist (Haraway, 1988), anthropological (Lave and Wenger, 1991), educational (Kaiser, 2005a, 2005b) and socio-constructivist perspectives. Haraway (1988, p. 583) in her work on 'situated knowledges' critiques the "western cultural narratives about objectivity" with its mind – body split and suggests a feminist objectivity that is "about limited location and situated knowledge" and the embodied nature of knowledge. This view is supported from a psychological perspective: Tennant (2006, p. 74) for example, states that it "makes no sense to talk of knowledge that is decontextualized, abstract or general." Law (2000) concludes that perception, knowledge and action occur together and are supported by self-directed feedback from biological and social systems.

From such a perspective, knowledge is conceptualised as existing in relation to specific situations and is memorised in a network of remembered situations and activated in similar situations (Kaiser, 2005b). This intuitive way of knowing enables the recognition of patterns stored in memory (Simon, 1992), memories which then lead associatively to impulses in actions which are activated quickly and mostly, unconsciously. Kaiser (2005b, p. 53) argues that situations are not amenable to generalised, abstract rules, but are memorised in variations or exceptions. Due to this, in every situation, decisions need to be made situationally and cannot be formed on the basis of generalised rules. According to him and others (Eraut, 2009b; Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1988), the capacity for memorised situations is much bigger than the human vocabulary. It is assumed that experts after about ten years remember (mostly unconsciously) around ten thousand situations (Kaiser, 2005b). This enables chess experts for example to use intuitive skills when making a move, rather than working through possible options analytically (Chase and Simon, 1973 in Kahneman and Klein, 2009).

Kaiser (2005b) differentiates between situational knowledge as content and the situational memory as the place in the brain where it is stored, and suggests that both situational-associative (specific) and symbolic (generalisable) forms of knowledge are relevant for human agency. This is further supported by Markauskaite and Goodyear (2017) who refer to Barsalou (2009) who reviewed the evidence for situated cognition. They argue that “conceptual knowledge is inherently situated and grounded” in “the human conceptual system”. Indeed, “he [Barsalou] shows how conceptual knowledge remains tightly linked with background situations, experiences and actions” (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017, p. 601). They point to Barsalou’s argument that

“conceptual categories are remembered with at least four types of situated information: (a) selected properties of the conceptual category relevant to the situation, (b) information about the background settings, (c) possible actions that

could be taken and (d) perceptions of internal states that one might have experienced during previous encounters with the conceptual phenomena, such as affects, motivations, cognitive states and operations.” (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017, p. 601)

These perspectives have the notion of situational knowledge in common and ground knowledge in practice and specific contexts. Expanding this view, Eraut (2000, 2012) and Alavi and Leidner (2001) distinguish between individual and social knowledge, whereby individual knowledge is inherent in the individual and social knowledge, in the collective actions of a group. Eraut (2012, p. 2) explains further that cultural knowledge is socially situated while personal knowledge is what individuals “bring to situations that enables them to think, interact and perform”. Based on Eraut, Markauskaite and Goodyear (2017, p. 76) differentiate public, personal and organisational knowledge:

“Public knowledge is knowledge that is made broadly available within a culture, including within a profession. Personal knowledge is what an individual knows and is able to do. Organisational knowledge (including group knowledge) is knowledge that is available to everyone within a specific organisation or group. Organisational knowledge emerges at the intersection between, and as an entanglement of, the public and the personal.”

These situated personal, public and organisational forms of knowledge are further located in various ways. The widely-cited categorisation by Blackler (1995, p. 1021) outlines five different ‘images of knowledge’, which refer to their location:

<b>Knowledge Form</b>	<b>Description</b>
Embodied	Action knowledge, know-how
Embedded	Residing in systemic routines
Embrained	Dependent on conceptual skills and cognitive abilities
Encultured	Process of achieving shared understanding
Encoded	Information conveyed by signs and symbols

*Figure 4 Taxonomy by Blackler (1995 in Nutley et al., 2004, p. 9, author’s table)*

These images depict where knowledge is located: embodied knowledge is located in bodies; embedded knowledge, in social routines; embrained in brains; encultured in dialogues and encoded in symbols. He differentiates between embedded knowledge found in organisational routines and encultured knowledge that “refers to the process of achieving shared understandings”, which is dependent on language and therefore “socially constructed and open to negotiation” (Blackler, 1995, p. 1024). He regards knowledge not as something “that people have” but suggests that “knowing is better regarded as something that they do” (Blackler, 1995, p. 1023), in line with practice theorists (see for example Barnes, 2001).

In sum, as this discussion has shown, it is important that social workers are aware that knowledge is fundamentally situated, in personal, public and organisational forms and is thus located and can be found, in different bodies and contexts. Situated knowledges enable fluent practice. Practitioners with several years of practice experience, build up a vast pool of experienced and embrained situations in the form of situated or situational knowledge. As discussed earlier, such situated and situational knowledge is largely of a tacit nature but aspects of it can be discursively unearthed. This is important in the context of joined up learning and coaching. On the other hand, the notion of situated knowledge explains why it is important to explicitly relate the different types of knowledge to practice situations, as this helps develop actionable knowledge. Returning to the question of supporting knowledgeable and ethical practice, these points lead me to conclude that to develop knowledgeability two movements are important - one from situated knowledge to discursive and propositional knowledge and the other from the latter to the former. In other words, it is important to move between general and specific aspects of knowledge in relation to practice. This then leaves the dimension of the ethical to be explored.

### Ethical knowledge and values

From a social work perspective, it is notable that ethics as a form of knowledge has not featured in the above categorisations. The social work literature consistently emphasises the importance of values and ethics in social work. Decision-making for knowledgeable and ethical practice is clearly dependent on ethical principles. Dominelli (2009, p. 19) points out that “values guide personal and professional ethics” and these “cannot be separated from the thinking process when we reflect” (Ixer, 2016, p. 10). But social workers “have to reach moral decisions with both feet firmly in the real world of practice situations and relationships” (Smith, 2011, p. 20). Faced with practice that cannot be standardised, ethical considerations offer important orientations. It is also argued that ethical principles need to underpin practice in response to managerialist and neoliberal approaches to social work and thus professional work “needs to be reconceptualised as a moral rather than an instrumental task” (Smith, 2011, p. 19; Evetts, 2014). Staub-Bernasconi (2012) goes so far as to define social work as a human rights profession. Significantly, ethical and human rights are encoded at international and national levels and are thus an important form of knowledge.

We need to distinguish between general ethical principles and personal values. BASW (2014, p. 17) defines ethics (singular) as “the study of ... norms of behaviour, ... qualities of character” and in its plural form, it refers to ethical norms, as “matters of right and wrong conduct, good and bad qualities of character and responsibilities attached to relationships”. Values are the “beliefs, principles, attitudes, opinions or preferences”, which in social work signify “particular types of beliefs that people hold about what is regarded as worthy or valuable”. Such beliefs are “stronger than mere opinions or preferences” and are concerned with “the nature of the good society, general principles about how to achieve this through actions, and the desirable qualities or character traits of professional practitioners” (BASW, 2014, p. 17). Social workers in England need to at least know and understand the values and ethic codes within the HCPC’s (2012b) Standards of Proficiency and are required to act in line

with these. The ethical principles of BASW's code "encourage social workers ... to reflect on the challenges and dilemmas" they encounter in practice to "make ethically informed decisions about how to act" in "accordance with the values of the profession" in specific cases (BASW, 2014, p. 5).

Ethical knowledge that includes codes, standards and ethical frameworks is a form of generalised knowledge and values are formulated at a context-free high level of abstraction (Eraut, 1994). Staub-Bernasconi (2012, p. 30) argues that taking ethics seriously, requires their integration not only in education but more importantly and more challengingly, making human rights " a central, regulative idea into the whole discipline and practice of social work". She emphasizes the need to integrate them in the professions' knowledge and value base and in practice. This does not seem to be consistently the case, as studies have shown (Cleak et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2015; Staempfli et al., 2015).

Eraut (1994, pp. 46-47) argues that "professional ethics is a particularly difficult area of knowledge to handle". Many values are implicit in nature and "embedded in personal habits and professional traditions". On the other hand, professional values are generalised. This makes the discourse on values fraught with difficulties. Once " values are contextualised" for example, in relation to a specific practice situation, "significant differences in interpretation" (Dominelli, 2009, p. 19) can emerge and "each situation is affected by a number of different and sometimes competing values" (Dominelli, 2009, p. 29). In addition, if we consider the triple mandate in social work stemming from service users and carers, organisations and the profession (Staub-Bernasconi, 2009), we can see that competing values also originate from these different stakeholder perspectives (Dominelli, 2009).

Hence, when ethical knowledge as a generalised type of knowledge, which is universal in nature, is integrated with specific, contextualised practice situations, tensions and multiple perspectives come to the fore. This demands a reflective and reflexive approach and may

call for practitioners “to listen to that unruly voice of conscience and to break the rules” when they are not in the interest of those they work with (Smith, 2011, p. 24). Therefore, social workers need to be knowledgeable about how to integrate values and principles in practice in ways that speak to situations.

Tov et al. (2016a) therefore argue that the integration of knowledge and practice needs to explicitly include values and ethics, which is why I refer consistently not only to knowledgeable but also ethical practice.

### **Conclusion**

The discussion of different aspects of knowledge that focussed on the ways it is produced (sources), the different functions and purposes and levels of awareness that actors have and the situated character of these forms of knowledge concludes that social workers need to be aware of these differences. The relationship between thinking and doing are by no means linear and simple distinctions between the different types of knowledge in relation to levels of consciousness, are not possible. Both unconscious and conscious forms of knowledge and ways of knowing, guide practice. An important aspect in relation to knowledgeable practice is the extent to which knowledge linked to professional actions can be brought to the conscious surface for reflexive deliberation. As the discussion has shown, while some forms of knowledge can be discursively elaborated and elicited, other forms of knowledge are fundamentally unconscious and personally, publicly and organisationally situated. At the same time, it is important that social workers explicitly relate the different kinds of knowledge to concrete practice situations to make them actionable. Both the elicitation and the linking with practice is also important for general ethical knowledge. The epistemic map by Markauskaite and Goodyear (2017) offers a good orientation towards such reflection and learning.

### **Conclusion - Defining knowledgeable and ethical social work practice**

In this chapter, I addressed some of the complexities involved in social work in order to define knowledgeable and ethical social work practice. The examination of the literature concerned with actual practice has shown that there is a growing body of work that examines what social workers do. Rather than taking a normative view of what social workers ought to do, this research field is concerned with describing and analysing actual practice. However, there is a gap in the literature when it comes to descriptions of typical practices across different sectors and fields. Addressing this gap is one purpose of this thesis.

The focus on conceptualisations of profession has highlighted that it is problematic to try and standardise professional practice. Various attempts by different stakeholders to define professionalism and impose professionalism from above, tend to lead to standardised forms of practice. They are likely not enacted or enacted in unintended ways, if the demands and requests are not aligned with social workers' own professionalism orientations. It is argued that to counter the standardisation of practice and imposed organisational notions of professionalism, social work values need to form a core part of practice and analysis. In contrast, conceptualisations of professions as situated or hybrid, espoused by the notions of reflexive and mindful professional practice, emphasise the importance of combining different forms of knowledge with practice in specific situations. Practices in specific situations thus become the focus of the analysis, in line with a practice-based perspective. Based on this view, it becomes possible to define knowledgeable and ethical practice in social work as a practice that fuses different forms of knowledge, including ethical knowledge, with practice in specific situations. Rather, than seeking to further standardise practice, it seems essential to support social workers and organisations to develop an understanding of professional practice that builds on such a definition of knowledgeable and ethical practice.

The discussion of different forms of knowledge has also shown the complexities involved in this. To support social worker's ability to relate different knowledge forms to practice situations, social workers need to develop and engage in reflexive and reflective capabilities to discursively elaborate knowledge. Understanding knowledge as something that practitioners do, rather than have (Blackler, 1995) shifts attention to epistemic practices in social work. These practices take place in an environment where "the body of shared professional knowledge" is in a constant flux of change (Fenwick et al., 2012, p. 1). The emergence of new digital technologies and the proliferation of knowledge in particular is "raising questions about the complexities of professional knowledge and knowledge strategies" (Fenwick et al., 2012, p. 1, see also Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017). While this leads to more and potentially richer resources for learning and CPD, "the identification and integration of different knowledges to address specific professional challenges is increasingly more demanding" (Fenwick et al., 2012, p. 2).

The focus on epistemic practices is important as it extends notions of professional identity, capability and knowledge. Gherardi (2012, p. 16) argues that "the most critical resource" for professionals is not just knowledge but also their ability "to manage their knowledge interdependencies efficiently and effectively through expertise coordination". When recognising social work as essentially knowledge-based work, a key issue becomes how social workers deal with, and are enabled to deal with, knowledge in a way that is firmly grounded in what they do. Ultimately, if social workers are able and are enabled to intertwine their thinking and doing, this will be "in the service of each individual and family client" (King Keenan and Grady, 2014, p. 203). The question therefore is, how specifically can social workers integrate these different forms of knowledge and values in practice, in ways that speak to situations and challenges in practice. In the next chapter, I consider the many ways this has been conceptualised in the literature both at an individual as well as at an organisational level.

## Chapter 2 - Supporting Knowledgeable and ethical professional practice

### Introduction

This chapter focusses on the epistemic practices involved in fusing different forms of knowledge with practice in specific situations. In other words, I examine how social workers can process knowledge in practice and the ways they engage with knowing practices. The aim is to develop an evidence-informed understanding of how knowledgeable and ethical practice can be supported. This fundamentally depends on the types of professional problems social workers encounter and two dimensions need to be distinguished: structure and stability.

Firstly, structure is concerned with how far professionals can obtain the relevant information to solve problems and stability refers to changing factors during problem definition and intervention. For structured problems, on the one hand, professionals can identify all necessary information and they can be addressed by paying attention to a limited number of rules and principles that can be processed in a correct way to solve the problem. Structured problems are essentially problems associated with recognition and knowledge integration. Whereas professional practice that involves “the application of knowledge to unconstrained, naturally occurring situations (cases)” is, on the other hand, substantially ill-structured (Spiro et al., 2012, p. 108). Ill-structured problems often have conflicting goals, emerging unanticipated issues, unknown problem areas with uncertainty about relevant knowledge and they are thus addressed by generating multiple hypotheses and ways to approach them. They require consideration of values and the generation of professional judgements and are “better thought of as knowledge design problems” (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017, p. 556).

Secondly, stability is about how changeable problems are. In relation to tame problems, the parties involved can agree on what the problem is, and this does not change during the analysis. In contrast, wicked problems are ill-defined and deeply social, whereby not everyone agrees about what, exactly, the problem is, and the situation may change during the analysis (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017). They require defining the problem and the solution at the same time, while being aware that they may change during the process. This means that “a complete strategy cannot be worked out in advance” and requires joint action and enquiry (Goodyear and Markauskaite, 2019, p. 46).

The way we view and talk about the relationship between knowledge and practice shapes social workers’ understanding of knowledge related work and this in turn shapes their practice (Thompson, 2017). As the discussion so far has shown, the relationship between knowledge and practice is complex and contested. Yet many social workers and academics continue to talk about ‘using’ or ‘applying’ knowledge in practice. Gredig and Sommerfeld (2008, p. 292) complain that “it is still customary for the relationship between scholarly knowledge and practical professional knowledge to be seen—optimistically—as a fairly straightforward one.” These simplistic notions are problematic as they do not pay enough attention to the complexities involved in epistemic practices as related to knowledgeable and ethical practice.

Supporting social workers to practice in knowledgeable and ethical ways, therefore requires a conceptualisation of the relationship between practice and knowledge that is aligned to nuanced, practice-based and situated conceptions of professional work, knowledge and ethics. Rather than conceptualising this relationship in terms of ‘use’, ‘transfer’ and ‘application’, we need to turn to practice-based notions of “participation, construction and becoming” (Boud and Hager, 2012, p. 22) that offer more relevant notions for ‘epistemic practices’ in social work. Such conceptualisations need to pay attention to reflexive methods

and analytical reasoning as well as to the relational expertise needed to collaboratively weave different forms of knowledge and perspectives together and this must include ethics and human rights, as the discussion thus far has shown.

From a practice-based perspective, work and learning are linked and learning about specific and general aspects of practice allows social workers to develop, argue for and defend their assessments and decisions. A practice-based perspective on knowledgeable and ethical practice also means that when thinking about epistemic practices in social work, both individual and organisational strategies related to knowledgeability and practice need to be considered:

“An individual perspective on knowledge and learning enables us to explore both differences in what and how people learn and differences in how they interpret what they learn. A social perspective draws attention to the social construction of knowledge and contexts for learning and to the wide range of cultural practices and products that provide resources for learning” (Eraut, 2013, p. 207).

These two dimensions also come to the fore in reports and serious case reviews into social work practice which repeatedly convey concerns about social workers’ autonomy in relation to professional judgements and the heavy reliance on procedure (e.g. Munro, 2019; Sidebotham et al., 2016; 2011; Laming, 2009). To support social workers’ ability and space for professional judgements, these reports all suggest a reduction of bureaucracy accompanied by the development of learning cultures. These individual and organisational perspectives allow us to examine the supporting and hindering aspects related to the creation of professional knowledge and the innovation of practice. Therefore, the focus of this chapter is the current knowledge of individual and organisational epistemic practices. I draw these strands together to identify how to support knowledgeable and ethical practice.

### **Individual knowledgeable and ethical professional practice**

To illustrate social workers' epistemic practices, I examine what we know about decision-making and professional judgements. There is a growing interest in the social work literature on professional judgement and decision-making (e.g. Whittaker, 2018; Taylor, 2016; Kirkman and Melrose, 2014). Decision-making research, an interdisciplinary field of study, is concerned with two fundamental paradigms: the rational-analytical decision-making perspective, including more recently, those who advocate for heuristic tools and decision trees (e.g. Taylor, 2016; Gigerenzer and Gaissmaier, 2011; Kahneman and Klein, 2009) and the dual process perspective that "understands intuitive and analytical processes as mutually interdependent" (e.g. Whittaker, 2018, p. 1981; Munro et al., 2017). Recent studies looking at social workers' decision-making (Nyathi, 2018; Whittaker, 2018; Wilkins, 2015; Kirkman and Melrose, 2014; Collins and Daly, 2011) in the UK can be aligned to these perspectives. The way decision-making is viewed, fundamentally shapes research perspectives and suggested practice implications, as this section will show.

The first section of the chapter focusses on individual epistemic practices. I review the research literature on professional judgements and decision-making and explore theoretical concepts related to the role of evidence, tools and emotions. Developing the argumentation further, I focus on reflexive monitoring, deliberative reasoning and reflection and end this section with a discussion about situation-based professional judgements.

### **The role of research, theory and tools in decision making**

There is a longstanding concern that social workers do not pay sufficient attention to theory and research in practice (Munro, 2011). For example, Collins and Daly found that social workers understood evidence mainly as the information that they gather from different sources in relation to a specific case, including the views of people they support. While the authors identified the "implicit use of research and theory", practitioners themselves

understood this as “keeping knowledge up to date or ... practice knowledge” (Collins and Daly, 2011, p. 9). Only a minority of children and families’ social workers spontaneously mentioned research as evidence (Collins and Daly, 2011, p. 8). Most recently, Avby and colleagues (2017, p. 56) in a study of Swedish children’s social workers, found that there was little evidence of “research-based knowledge being of any use to determine the course of action”. Instead, practice-based knowledge dominated the thinking that underpinned the different phases involved in a child investigation. Similar findings note the absence of explicit thinking about theory in relation to social work students (Cleak et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2015; Staempfli et al., 2015). These studies suggest that research evidence is not sufficiently considered by social workers in decision-making.

Collins and Daly (2011, p. 10-11) concluded that when “promoting the use of ‘evidence’ in social work” social workers need to first be clear about what constitutes evidence. Importantly, they identified a clear link between recent educational engagement and viewing research as evidence. More generally, Markauskaite and Goodyear (2017) argue that it is important that professionals understand different forms of knowledge and their qualities.

Munro et al. (2017, p. 107) found that “explicit knowledge plays a significant role” in decision-making by social workers. Social workers, for example, think about laws and procedures that shape their work and they weigh up formal theories and empirical evidence. The authors argue that research is a valuable resource in social work decision-making that needs to be reflected critically, examined in relation to its relevance to the situation and the context that social workers are dealing with. In their view, it is therefore important to not understand “use of theory or research” as a linear process as this neglects the “crucial role of deliberation in making judgements and decisions” (Munro et al., 2017, p. 5). For them, it

is the considered deliberation, ideally together with others, that underpins knowledgeable and ethical practice.

Another perspective is presented by those who argue that research and theoretical knowledge can be introduced into decision-making through artefacts. Wilkins (2015, p. 254) for example found that social workers “use ... theory and research knowledge” via use of methods and tools. Some scholars therefore argue that instruments should either replace or support deliberation (Nyathi, 2018). Collins and Daly (2011, p. 11), for example, argue for embedding research within “assessment instruments used in every day practice” and Wilkins (2015, p. 257) argues that it may be possible to operationalise theory and research in social work practice in tools, such as “the Adult Attachment Interview” (2015, p. 259). However, Kirkman and Melrose (2014, p. 4) argue that a major problem in social work is that there is “an almost total lack of robust evidence” on “what works in particular contexts”, which compromises decision-making. This understanding of ‘robust evidence’ seems to neglect the rich research base that stems from qualitative or mixed methods research, or perhaps the qualitative nature of this knowledge is not easily translated into instruments and consequently, needs to be deliberated.

While Munro and colleagues (2017, p. 125) argue that the assumption that decision-making under conditions of uncertainty and complexity can be objective “makes no sense”, researchers with a focus on rational decision-making, view professional judgements as problematic because they are not ‘objective’. For example, Kirkman and Melrose (2014, p. 4) found that judgements made in real world practice – with limited available time for decision-making and workload pressures – leads to increased reliance on intuition and this in turn negatively affects “objective judgements” by a range of biases. Kahneman (2011) has indeed shown that decision-making that is not underpinned by skilled intuition, can be flawed due to biases. To address this and to achieve more objectivity, Kirkman and Melrose

(2014, p. 6) advocate the development of “heuristic tools and/or checklists” through quantitative analysis of available data. From a rational analytical perspective, the aim therefore is to arrive at objective judgements, which is achieved through the incorporation of tools and instruments in decision-making.

However, the implementation of tools, algorithms or decision trees that are informed by research evidence (e.g. assessment instruments) are controversial. Kahneman and Klein (2009, p. 525) point out that in low-validity situations, such as social work, “algorithms ... do better than chance” and Nyathi (2018, p. 190) claims that rating scales can help professionals to “analyse and process a large number of factors”. Indeed, one dilemma for social workers in today’s networked environment is that they “should consider as much relevant information as is available, both regarding the case at hand and drawing on broader professional knowledge that applies to the situation” and yet, at the same time, “humans can process only a limited amount of information at a time” (Taylor, 2016, p. 1054). Kirkman and Melrose (2014) therefore argue that social workers must spend a lot of time understanding the issues and consequently, have less time for analysis. These authors therefore suggest that decision tools should support decision-making.

In contrast, Munro (2019) cautions against the implementation of actuarial tools as they are based on skewed data, collected in child protection services, with inherent biases. Nyathi’s (2018, p. 200) research also found that “professionals may have misgivings about these tools”, which leads to them “being used less frequently or not as intended”. Algorithms, although able to outperform humans due to their consistency, “only achieve limited accuracy” and replacing human judgment with algorithms is likely to not only lead to substantial resistance but also, undesirable side effects (Kahneman and Klein, 2009, p. 525), such as “false positives and false negatives” (Munro et al., 2017, p. 138). Given the many

uncertainties regarding the use of tools, Nyathi (2018, p. 201) concludes that embracing “intuitive heuristics as an aid [to] analytical reasoning requires further investigation”.

In summary, considering the contested nature of social work practice and the complexities, uncertainties and ambiguities involved, standardising practice through the implementation of tools is problematic and therefore, many practice theorists rather point to the role of deliberation (see discussion on reflexive and mindful understandings of professional work). The discussion of the role of evidence and tools illustrates the two fundamental paradigms associated with rational-analytical decision-making and dual process perspectives. From a practice-based perspective, decision-making is not understood as solely a rational process; rather, it is seen as embodied and relational. This points to the importance of emotions.

### **The role of emotion in decision-making**

Surprisingly, in the discussions on decision-making, emotion is not discussed widely. Emotions are the automatic bodily responses to situations (Munro et al., 2017), a kind of ‘embodied knowing’ (Sodhi and Cohen, 2012, p. 122 in O’Connor, 2019) that forms a “significant but not necessarily recognised form of sense-making” (O’Connor, 2019, p. 8). Recognising “the emotional content of practice is key to safe and effective decision-making” (Turney and Ruch, 2018, p. 126). Therefore, social work practice always involves “a dynamic interplay of intuitive, emotionally informed judgements and analytic evaluations” (Whittaker, 2018, p. 15).

Judgements made in situations that involve high risk and uncertainty affect a professional’s emotional state (Nyathi, 2018) and the highly emotional nature of work impacts on social worker’s thinking and reasoning (Kirkman and Melrose, 2014). Social workers recognise that emotions are influential in decision-making processes (O’Connor and Leonard, 2014). In a pressured environment where there is a need to arrive at quick decisions, practitioners are

likely to rely on their emotional response. When such responses guide decision-making, the risk is that this “may also lead to biases” (Kirkman and Melrose, 2014, p. 54), including assumptions about culture, ethnicity, gender, power, race, religion and sexual orientation (O’Connor, 2019).

On the other hand, when emotions are appraised and self-regulated appropriately, they can usefully inform decisions through self-awareness (Nyathi, 2018). Cook’s (2016, p. 9, 2017) research on social workers’ professional judgements in the context of home visits found that decision-making involves self-regulation of emotions and thinking in making sense of and managing the encounter and actions. She points to the role of emotions and thinking as both informing and impeding judgements. Self-regulation and self-awareness require that social workers analyse and theorise their emotions (O’Connor, 2019) and for this purpose, it is important to both share and examine them (Munro et al., 2017).

O’Connor’s (2019, p. 8) review of the literature found that this mostly occurs unconsciously within teams in informal safe spaces. One reason why emotions are allowed to surface informally, rather than in formal analyses of practice situations, may lie in the “ambivalence felt by social workers about the place of emotions in their profession”, as emotions are experienced strongly in professional practice but they “are not perceived as ‘professional’ (O’Connor, 2019, p. 10).

In sum, while deliberation on emotion is essential to form safe professional judgements, their paradoxical perception by social workers creates tensions. The importance of recognising the role of emotions and thinking in professional judgements leads Cook (2016) to conclude that decision-making is an affective-rational process. The literature on decision-making thus points to the importance of both emotional/intuitive and rational ways of thinking.

### **Intuitive and analytical ways of thinking and decision-making**

Both general and specific knowledge and emotions need to be weighed up in decision-making. Analytical thinking and intuitive forms of decision-making are both “crucial to improving social work practice” (Collins and Daly, 2011, p. 4); it is therefore important not to polarise “between intuitive and analytical decision-making”. The earlier discussion about knowing-in-action (Schön, 1983), practical consciousness, mutual knowledge (Giddens, 1984) and personal and cultural knowledge (Eraut, 2012) has also shown that both intuitive and deliberative cognition play a central role in decision-making. In other words, both intuitive and analytical ways of thinking are constituent parts of professional work. Related to Schön’s (1983) idea of reflection-in-action, Eraut’s (2004) notions of rapid and intuitive cognitive processes and notions of a reflexive profession, is the concept of reflexivity.

Professionals can draw on reflexivity to guide them through actions. Giddens, for example, argued that action “is a continuous process, a flow”, in which individuals reflexively monitor their own behaviours. He argues that this “is fundamental to the control of the body that actors ordinarily sustain throughout their day-to-day lives” (Giddens, 1984, p. 9). Actions are also guided by intentions, which Giddens calls rationalisation and, as discussed earlier, are underpinned by unconscious motives. Reflexive monitoring and rationalisation are thus “bound up with the continuity of action” (Giddens, 1984, p. 6). In other words, reflexivity and reflexive monitoring are constituent parts of action.

Besides reflexive monitoring, actors also rely on deliberative reasoning and analytical thinking. However, Giddens argued that “actors are not inherently predisposed to sustained reasoning or existential reflection on the meaning of their conduct from moment to moment in everyday life” (Giddens, 1984, p. 134). Rather, discursive consciousness is crucial at expected or unexpected critical times. In these circumstances, “actors mobilise their efforts and focus their thoughts on responses to problems which will diminish their anxiety, and ultimately bring about social change” (Giddens, 1984, p. 134-135). This allows them to bring

their implicit understanding (practical consciousness) to their mind (discursive consciousness). This understanding is closely related to Dewey's (1933) and Schön's (1983) view that deliberate reflection occurs at surprising junctures (Rafieian and Davis, 2016). Eraut (2012, p. 9) posits that deliberative and analytic ways of knowing involve "explicit thinking about one's actions in the past, present or future, possibly accompanied by consultation with others". Decision-making thus involves relying on both intuitive, reflexive and deliberative, analytical ways of thinking. This is borne out by research on social workers' decision-making. Whittaker (2018, p. 1975) for example, found that social workers make sense of complex information through intuitive judgements, followed by analytic evaluation. The interplay between intuitive and analytic thinking processes was observable in case discussions that usually started with intuitive thinking, leading to the generation of hypotheses. In a second phase, practitioners turn to analytic thinking to develop the most likely hypotheses and to evaluate them to "provide a cogent explanation of the information available". Similarly, Munro et al. (2017, p. 108) argue that social workers typically use "both analytic and intuitive reasoning and ... explicit and implicit knowledge" in their deliberations. The analysis involved is fundamentally discursive, unsystematic, personal and very contextual. They argue that deliberative reasoning is like creating a story "about what is and might happen", leading to conclusions "about what has gone wrong and what we should do" (Munro et al., 2017, p. 122). For them, the idea of "a narrative, a good enough narrative to proceed with – though with caution – is at the heart of the notion of deliberation" (Munro et al., 2017, p. 123). Thus, theories and research point to the intertwinement of reason and intuition and of intuitive and analytical ways of thinking and knowing. Both play a crucial role in decision-making and thus in knowledgeable and ethical practice.

Intuitive judgements are thus based on prior knowledge and experience. Whittaker's (2018, p. 1975) research found that the intuitive judgements formed by practitioners "were

informed by their previous repertoire of experience” and that they relied on “pattern recognition and story building” in doing so. Kahneman and Klein<sup>2</sup> (2009, p. 519) define intuitive judgments as the automatic effortless decisions that “often come to mind without immediate justification”. They agree with Simon’s (1992, p. 155) definition of skilled intuition that sees it as the ability to recognise patterns in an encountered situation:

“The situation has provided a cue: This cue has given the expert access to information stored in memory, and the information provides the answer. Intuition is nothing more and nothing less than recognition”.

This ties in with Eraut’s (2012, p. 9) idea of instant/reflex and rapid/intuitive modes of cognition in routinised or semi-routinised actions that require previous knowledge of and experience in “similar situations previously encountered”. It also chimes with Giddens’(1984) notions of unconscious motives/cognition and practical consciousness. Intuitive knowing therefore relies on practice experience in similar situations.

Intuition can be more or less skilled. Kahneman and Klein (2009, p. 519) argue that the evidence on natural decision-making shows that intuitive cues that guide judgments arise from experience and manifest skill. When there is a lack of specific experience (and skills developed based on this), judgements are more likely to be inaccurate and prone to biases. In other words, without prior experience of similar situations, there can be no skilled intuition.

This view of professional decision-making underpins the case-based reasoning model, an established method in the legal professions and among mediators and arbitrators and used in other professions to “solve problems efficiently” (Kolodner, 1992, p. 4). Kolodner argued that case-based reasoning is primarily used in two ways: first, to develop solutions in relation

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<sup>2</sup> For a fuller discussion see their excellent discussion in which they sum up their respective influential work on heuristics and biases and natural decision-making processes.

to a case and second, to interpret cases through critical thinking and to justify decisions and actions (Kolodner, 1992). Faced with a case, a practitioner engages in case-based reasoning by first remembering previous cases that were similar to the current one and using them to help solve the current case. They do this by using prior experience to explain a new case, adapting old solutions and evaluating a new solution to interpret a new case (Kolodner, 1992, p. 4). The major processes that reasoners apply are case retrieval and case storage; in other words, a case is remembered and then updated or stored in memory (Kolodner, 1992, p. 21).

Case-based reasoning is closely related to the discussed pattern recognition and storage in memory of situations (Simon, 1992) and the notions of skill acquisition (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1988). The principles underpinning case-based reasoning have been found to be relevant to social work. Whittaker's (2018, p. 1974) study of children's social workers' decision-making in real life situations found that they "understood complex information through sense-making processes that were characterised by quick, intuitive judgements (System 1) followed by analytic evaluation (System 2)". He also found that with increasing experience, practitioners were able to recognise patterns, consistent with Dreyfus' (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1988) model of skills acquisition.

The case-based reasoning model thus offers a useful framework for understanding how intuitive and analytical ways of thinking are played out in decision-making. These ways of thinking and reasoning also come together in accounts of reflective practice (e.g. Whittaker, 2018), which are examined in the next section.

### **The role of reflection in decision-making in social work**

Reflective practice is seen by many as the key to integrating knowledge and practice and to fostering learning (Ixer, 1999, 2016; Wilson, 2013; Munro, 2011; Ruch, 2007a; Schön, 1983).

For Ruch (2005, p. 2) reflection is "a response to the realisation that social work is a complex

and contested profession and discipline operating in uncertain and unpredictable contexts”. Scholarly discussions about reflection highlight three dimensions. Reflection is conceptualised as something that occurs in the process of action and includes the reflexive, intuitive aspects of monitoring and guiding behaviour, related to the above discussed notions of intuitive and case-based reasoning. Deliberative forms of reflection after action are concerned with understanding behaviours and interpreting these in the light of knowledge, values and practice. Last, reflection is relevant in planning and preparing for action (e.g. Lundgren et al., 2017).

For the purpose of this thesis, I do not replicate literature that documents the different concepts, such as reflection, reflexivity and critical reflection (Lundgren et al., 2017; D’Cruz et al., 2007; Lam et al., 2007; Ruch, 2007a; Fook, 2004). I refer to Ruch (2007a, p. 661) who identified four modes of reflective practice: technical, practical, critical and process reflection. These are related to technical-rational understandings of reflection (Brookfield, 2016; Ruch, 2007a; Fook and Askeland, 2006); understandings aligned to pragmatism (Brookfield, 2016; Ruch, 2005, 2007a; Fook and Askeland, 2006); approaches linked to critical theory (Fook and Gardner, 2007; Ruch, 2005, 2007a) and to psychodynamic perspectives (Yip, 2006). Similarly, Lundgren and others (2017) analyse the role of reflection in Fenwick’s (2000) five conceptions of experiential learning which are constructivist, psychoanalytic, situative, critical-cultural, and enactivist perspectives. Lundgren et al. (2017, p. 307) argue that reflection explicitly only features in the constructivist view where “meaning is made by reflecting before, in, and on action”. However, they suggest that reflection also plays a role in psychoanalytically understood learning, where it aids in resolving “intrapersonal conflicts”. As situated learning is premised on implicit interactions with tools and activities, reflection occurs “when making sense of that interaction”. From a critical-cultural perspective, reflection is needed in “deconstruction and discourse analysis”. Lastly, reflection in the enactivist or socio-material perspective is similar to situated understanding but is

ecologically embedded and leads to “evolutionary innovation”. Despite “extensive theorising and philosophical debate” in social work (Wilson, 2013, p. 155), many of these terms and concepts are often used interchangeably (Wilson, 2013, D'Cruz et al., 2007).

In professional education, reflection is so commonly used that it is taken for granted (Eraut, 2004) and is understood as not much else than “thinking about what happened” (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017, p. 38). However, reflection should be “treated as problematic” (Eraut, 2004, p. 47) and questioned in terms of what it is (Kilminster et al., 2010; Ixer, 1999) and what it achieves (Brookfield, 2016; Fook et al., 2016; Ixer, 2016). The danger of simplistic notions of thinking about what has happened is that reflection may reinforce traditional ways of doing things. Such reflection does not question power and authority and assumptions held and can indeed lead to negative outcomes, by reinforcing oppression, stifling innovation and demotivating participants. Thompson and Thompson (2018, p. 29) argue that relying too much on routine and intuitive reasoning contains the danger of “falling into the trap of thinking in tramlines”; simply “following routinised patterns of thought and standardised forms of practice” and relying on “habit, routine and uncritical acceptance of the status quo is not a sound basis” (Thompson and Thompson, 2018, p. 29) for knowledgeable and ethical professional practice. Therefore “reflective practice needs to be reflective in both senses of the word: thoughtful (analytical and well-informed) as well as self-aware or ‘reflexive’” (Thompson and Thompson, 2018, p. 15).

Ideas associated with a holistic relationship-based reflective practice approach (Ruch, 2005, 2007a, 2007b, 2009), in my mind are most closely related to a practice-based stance. Ruch proposes a holistic relationship-based reflective practice in which practitioners integrate “multilayered understanding[s] of knowledge which embrace all four types of reflective practice identified in the literature – technical–rational, practical, critical and process” (Ruch, 2005, p. 116). She therefore defines reflective practice as

“an approach that seeks to respond to ... challenges by acknowledging the uniqueness of each individual and practice encounter and the diverse types of knowledge required to address effectively the complex issues these encounters generate.” (Ruch, 2007a, p. 660)

Acknowledging that reflection is both an analytic and an intuitive process and pays attention to emotions, she brings together the different perspectives discussed above. Therefore, her view of reflective practice combines “the technical–rational sources of knowledge” with “practical, critical and process sources of knowledge” (Ruch, 2005, p. 116). Such reflective practice aims to understand “human behaviour” in “more than the sum of the parts” and can “conceptualize practical–moral knowledges and integrate them with technical–rational perspectives” (Ruch, 2005, p. 116). This requires practitioners to integrate “personal, propositional and process knowledges” whilst exercising “professional curiosity and ask the question ‘why?’ in relation to their practice” (Ruch, 2005, p. 116). This holistic approach that combines different ways of thinking and knowing, seems to me most adequate to support learning for knowledgeable and ethical practice and is closely related to the discussed conceptions of mindful and reflexive professions.

Ruch (2007a, p. 660) argued that the focus in social work should shift from definitional debates to how reflection “can be developed and the conditions which promote it”, because there is a concern that the “practices associated with its application are not well defined operationally” (Wilson, 2013, p. 155). Ruch (2005, p. 116) argues that “one way of understanding reflective practice is to conceptualise it as the concrete application of reflective processes in professional contexts”. Similarly, Wilson (2013, p. 170) argues that “a greater level of consistency in the operationalisation of reflective practice in academic and practice learning” is needed as a “foundation for continuing professional development” for social workers at all career levels. These statements clearly express a view of reflective practice that is closely aligned to notions of epistemic practices.

One issue, which is not consistently addressed in the literature on reflection, is the reflective learning setting (Eraut, 2009). Kilminster and colleagues (2010, p. 2) argue that the rapid implementation of reflective practice in professional education has led to a dominance of individualistic perspectives (see also Boud, 2009). These perspectives are associated with constructivist and psychoanalytic traditions that privilege - in their own way - the agency of the professional over the system. They focus on how they manage or control their behaviour by enacting strategies to address barriers, make use of resources and to achieve self-determined goals (Lundgren et al., 2017). Individual students and novice social workers are thereby often assessed with regard to their ability to reflect (Ixer, 2016). Consequently, social workers see reflection as important for many aspects of practice, particularly for decision-making but see it as “an individualised process” (Collins and Daly, 2011, p. 19-20). Rather than understanding “reflection and reflective practice as emancipatory, both for the professional and their clients”, they perceive it “as an instrument of control” (Kilminster et al., 2010, p. 3).

In contrast, Eraut (2009b, p. 15) stresses the importance of reflection as discourse in the workplace. Such discursive reflection, in his view, plays a central role in the socialisation of newcomers, helps professionals to “provide a defensible account rather than a description of their actions”, leads to increased confidence and helps “preserve personal autonomy of action” (Eraut, 2009b, p. 15). An example of such an understanding of reflection is developed by Boud (2009) who suggests the concept of productive reflection as “not focused on the individual independent learner” as reflection “cannot be an individual act if it is to influence work that takes place with others” (Boud, 2009, p. 32). This is in line with an understanding of reflection aligned to the critical-cultural, enactivist, and situative perspectives. These privilege the system or environment and focus on the interactions between multiple human and nonhuman players in any given situation; learning thus arises through reflection on these (Lundgren et al., 2017). This has led scholars to argue that reflection is best located within

organisations (Boud, 2009) and is best undertaken as social reflection in groups (Beckett, 2009; Fook and Gardner, 2007; Ruch, 2007a). These concepts thus highlight the importance of reflection as a social process and I therefore examine group reflection models in the second section of this chapter.

Ruch's (2007a) view of holistic reflective practice highlights the importance of acknowledging both the uniqueness of specific practice encounters and diverse knowledge types. This points to the situated nature of both intuitive and analytical decision making. I therefore turn to relational and situational dimensions of epistemic practices. These are closely aligned to the earlier discussed notions of a reflexive and mindful profession that focus on the art of merging different forms of knowledge with practice in specific situations.

### **Situation-based professional judgements**

Dewe and Otto (2012) in their deliberations on reflexive professionalism argue that under conditions of uncertainty, knowledge is mobilised in specific situations through reflexive inclusion of different knowledge types, which leads to situational knowledge production and utilisation. The discourse on reflexive professionalism in the German literature since the late 1990s, has been concerned with the concept of '*Relationierung*', which is German for relating, integrating and linking (von Spiegel, 2013; Dewe, 2012; Dewe and Otto, 2012; Dewe et al., 1992). In this view, generalised knowledge and context must be combined or related to each other so that judgements are made based on both a reflexive understanding of scholarly knowledge and of situational/social-contextual appropriateness, without the preferential treatment of either (Dewe and Otto, 2012, Dewe, 2012). Different forms of knowledge are thereby seen as resources (Dewe, 2012; Kaiser, 2005b) that - when combined - complement each other effectively (Gray and Schubert, 2010; Trevithick, 2008). '*Relationierung*' as a process is therefore a way of knowing, an epistemic practice in which practitioners selectively choose academic knowledge, which they then interpret in the light

of their own knowledge of methods, specific practice challenges and normative and ethical maxims, critically reflecting on the goals and resources to finally merge it with practice wisdom and experience (Dewe and Otto, 2012, Gredig, 2011). Similarly, Evans and Hardy (2017, p. 954) argue that practical reasoning needs to include an ethical dimension that integrates ethical ideas and principles with particular situations. However, while 'Relationierung' is identified as key to the integration of knowing and doing, the literature stays relatively silent on how exactly this can be achieved.

The analysis of situations is a core constituent of 'Relationierung' and thus requires consideration of the term 'situation' as a concept in social science. Situation is in many respects a key term to understanding social work (Schönig, 2016) because the personal, cultural and structural dimensions (Thompson and Thompson, 2008, 2018) come together in spatial, temporal and personal ways in a situation. Social problems thus manifest themselves in situations and the social conditions become palpable and life-worlds come (Schönig, 2016).

A situation "is both a singularity of which one has become a part, and a multiplicity that pre-exists one's participation in it" (Zigon, 2015, p. 503). In other words, situation is used to refer to a socio-political situation that has evolved over time and affects what can be termed an action or practice situation. For a useful differentiation of these different perspectives, see Yeh and Barsalou (2006, pp. 356–357) who offer a categorisation of types of situations by "grain size, meaningfulness, and tangibility".

Haupt (1984) stresses the importance of a shared system of meaning as the key to analysing a situation. Similarly, from a practice-based perspective, Schatzki and colleagues (2001, pp. 16–17) argue that this symbolic meaning space is manifested in practices. The analysis of a situation should focus not only on the semantic and symbolic meaning space but extend to the practices that enable meaning. Therefore, any attempt to integrate knowing, doing and

values needs to be focussed on both meaning and practices and their material, contextual realities. Similarly, D’Cruz and others (2009, p. 82) suggest a dualist approach that allows engagement “with a material reality, while also recognising the multiple (and relative) meanings possible for these material realities”.

Shaw and Lunt (2011, in McBeath and Austin, 2015, p. 5) use the metaphor of "practice puzzles" for this and suggest that they "help to focus the curiosity and analytical abilities of research-minded practitioners in order to identify alternatives to practice situations that have significant meaning for service users and co-workers". Interpreting specific situations to understand and weigh up specific and generalisable aspects has the potential for learning from situations (Schönig, 2016).

This analytical and interpretative work is what practice theorists define as epistemic practices. These refer to “how knowledge is generated, shared and enacted in professional work” (Hopwood and Nerland, 2019, p. 321). It is related to Eraut’s view (1994, p. 25) that “learning knowledge and using knowledge” are not separate but part of “the same process”. The notion of co-production is important here: as knowledge is co-constructed in interactions with service users, this involves learning on the part of the professional and the service user (Hopwood and Nerland, 2019).

While routinised professionals deploy their previous experience and knowledge in a concrete situation, when they encounter new, novel and unknown situations, the routinised approach to work is no longer effective (Knorr Cetina, 2005). In this case, relational resources have to be employed, which involve “taking the role or perspective of the other; making an emotional investment (taking an interest) in the other; and exhibiting moral solidarity and altruistic behavior that serves the other person” (Knorr Cetina, 2005, p. 189). Using “relational mechanisms as resources in articulating and ‘constructing’ an ill-defined, problematic, nonroutine and perhaps innovative epistemic practice”, a “relational definition

of the situation” takes shape as a practitioner imagines, generates insights and gains clarity about next moves (Knorr Cetina, 2005, p. 189). This enables professionals to address ill-structured and wicked problems. Knorr Cetina (2005, p. 190) therefore argues that this “being-in-relation ... defines epistemic practice”.

Importantly, “epistemic practices evolve with each new knowledge-related situation” and are shaped “by the work context to which they relate” (Hopwood and Nerland, 2019, p. 321). The process involves the ability “to participate in joint creation of actionable knowledge” that supports both professionals and service users to act more knowledgeably (Hopwood and Nerland, 2019, p. 321). Because professionals’ knowledge of service users is always “incomplete, fragile and of uncertain status”, there is a need “to explore knowledge issues beyond what is already known, question the validity of knowledge claims, test their feasibility, and implications for action” (Hopwood and Nerland, 2019, p. 322). Knowledge in relational practice is thus never static; rather, it is co-produced in every encounter. This relationship-based work brings about a tension for social workers in that contributing their specialist knowledge in this process has the potential to undermine the partnership and results in being seen as the expert. At the same time, rejecting such expertise is problematic. Thus, social workers need to listen to service users’ concerns and stay connected with and value their experiences and expertise, while at the same time focussing on the purpose of their work and their own expertise (Hopwood and Nerland, 2019).

Based on observations of interactions between nurses and families, Hopwood and Nerland (2019) considered the questions of what kinds of epistemic practices are enacted when nurses work in partnership with service users on a home visit. They found that understanding problems, diagnoses and actionable responses all depend on both the professional and service user: in the unfolding partnership they refer to their own knowledge resources linked

to “professional principles and generalised knowledge, parents’ experiences and insights” (Hopwood and Nerland, 2019, p. 334).

This partnership working involved what Knorr Cetina (2006 in Hopwood and Nerland, 2019) calls ‘double weaving’ of general knowledge and specific experiences. This weaving together of professionals’ and service users’ knowledge also means that co-production in professional practice requires learning about and with service users (Hopwood and Nerland, 2019, p. 334). This can start with either “specific situations or generalised knowledge” from where moves between forms of knowledge (specific and general) in both directions occur that make knowledge actionable. Importantly, this involves both partners and positions them as “knowers and knowledgeable” (Hopwood and Nerland, 2019, p. 335) in a negotiated process. The way that epistemic partnership working is enacted gives rise to learning with and about the service user, the problem and the practices required to work collaboratively (Hopwood and Nerland, 2019).

In other words, situation-based judgements are formed in thinking about a situation from two angles. First, (previously learned) declarative and general knowledge is related to practice situations in a movement from abstract to concrete. Second, starting with real world problems, practice is related to theory, moving from concrete to abstract (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017). Thus the weaving together of the two perspectives involves analysing and identifying the “features that are unique to a particular situation and those features that can be generalised, and relating these to theory” (Trevithick, 2011, p. 116). Importantly, this weaving together to create actionable responses takes place in the context of relationships with others.

### **Conclusions regarding individual knowledgeable and ethical practice**

For social workers to make knowledgeable and ethical decisions, they must employ different strategies, including self-regulation of their emotions, responding to cues intuitively and

analytical thinking, to make sense of a situation. There is some debate in the literature as to what role tools and instruments can play in decision-making but on the whole, it is acknowledged that in response to ill-structured and wicked problems and the complexities, uncertainties and ambiguities involved, standardising practice through the implementation of tools is problematic. As this discussion has shown, a rational-analytical approach alone does not offer an understanding of social work that is grounded in the realities of practice and practice-based perspectives. Equally, relying on intuitive decision-making on its own is problematic. While it is not possible to make objective decisions, it is important to be aware of and reflect on common biases that affect decision-making. Therefore, many scholars point to the role of deliberation and emphasise the importance of creating spaces for epistemic practices that include deliberative decision-making and reflection that pay attention to both intuitive and emotional aspects, as well as to general knowledge and contextualised, situation-specific knowledge.

Key to good decision-making relies therefore on enabling reflection of emotional aspects of work. Rather than leaving this to individuals, discussion of emotions and their impact on and embodied knowledge in relation to decision-making, should form an expected part of deliberation. Similarly, the intuitive judgements that are made in the course of action should form part of the analysis. Questioning the underlying assumptions and thinking that guides social workers' own reflexive monitoring and actions could therefore help to become aware of biases, allowing social workers to develop a sensitivity to the cues that situations offer. The case-based reasoning model therefore offers a useful framework for understanding how intuitive and analytical ways of thinking are played out in decision-making in practice.

The notions of 'Relationierung' and holistic reflection both seek to integrate different forms of knowledge as resources in the decision-making process. Both concepts are essentially situation-based approaches that combine these resources with situational aspects of

practice. This is framed as ‘double weaving’ of general knowledge and specific situations that can be achieved through epistemic practices in co-production between professionals and with service users. Therefore, for social workers to develop knowledgeable and ethical practice, they need to develop the ability to engage in epistemic practices which they can then employ in their work and with service users to make knowledge actionable and specific practice instances, knowledgeable. However, while these theoretical considerations are highly relevant, the key question that remains open is how social workers can do this and I return to this later. To conclude this chapter, I consider the knowledge base about how knowledgeable and ethical practice can be supported at an organisational level.

### **Organisational knowledgeable and ethical practice**

The practice-based perspective adopted in this thesis puts ‘practices’ at the centre of its analysis (Nicolini, 2009) and this views individual practitioners as “part of the practising of practices” (Grootenboer et al., 2017, p. 4). Practices are thus mutually constituted and sustained through connections and relationships in complex ways. Grootenboer and colleagues argue that a focus on practices comes before one on practitioners:

“the role of the individual in undertaking practices can only be understood within the arrangements and conditions that enable and constrain the practice as it is experienced among the other practices that are ecologically arranged with it in the site” (Grootenboer et al., 2017, p. 4)

In her evidence to the Education Committee on social work reform, the Chief Social Worker for Children and Families stated that “It is important ... that we focus very much on not just the practice of social workers, but the practice system that they are working in” (Education Select Committee on Social Work Reform, 2016, p. 2). She argued that while addressing workforce capacities and capabilities can achieve a lot, if the practice system is not addressed at the same time, then “we are not going to get very far” (Education Select Committee on Social Work Reform, 2016, p. 2). Practices thus unfold in organisational contexts and are

influenced by the arrangements and inter-connections of bodily and mental activities, objects such as artefacts and their use, shared background knowledge (Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki et al., 2005) and by traditions within organisations (Grootenboer et al., 2017).

This view challenges the notion of practice that is fixated on “human dispositions and habits, and [on] the connotation of iterative procedural routines” (Knorr Cetina, 2005, p. 196). Instead, Knorr Cetina proposes paying attention to the relational dynamic that emerges in epistemic practices. In other words, we need to focus on the epistemic practices that emerge and are given shape in organisations and between people that enable the co-creation and sharing of knowledge (Knorr Cetina, 2005). In the discussion on individual knowledgeable practice, I have argued that a practice environment needs to support a range of different strategies that involve self-regulation, intuitive and analytical decision-making to enable social workers to make sense of specific situations. Such organisational arrangements need to be flexible as the knowledge in relational practice changes from one encounter to the next and is not fixed (Hopwood and Nerland, 2019).

In addressing the questions of how to support knowledgeable and ethical practice, rather than focussing on individual knowledgeable and skills, we thus need to look at the practices within and across the organisations that constitute the knowledgeable and ethical components in practices. In other words, in order to improve professional judgements and practice, organisations need to “create conditions for supporting practitioner expertise” (Whittaker, 2018, p. 15). Therefore, the focus of this next section turns to the kinds of epistemic practices in social work organisations that seek to shape practice in specific situations and the learning from them.

A key question in this regard is how organisations approach ill-structured and wicked problems and deal with uncertainty. Munro (2019, p. 125) argues that over the last decades, a shift from “working with uncertainty” to “managing risk” has occurred at a societal level.

This has led to organisations focussing on managing risk, rather than on working with uncertainty. In social services, this has given rise to a blame culture in which defensive practice leads to decisions that first and foremost help cover the backs of decision-makers, rather than foster positive risk-taking (Munro, 2019). In contrast, Munro (2019, p. 126) argues that organisations need to develop a “generative culture” in order to learn from decisions and interventions that go wrong. This is supported by open reporting where: clarity exists about acceptable and unacceptable behaviours and just responses; flexibility allows practitioners to have a certain autonomy in line with their skills and abilities; and lastly, there is a willingness to learn from feedback and develop practice accordingly. Organisational arrangements for epistemic practices are a key factor in this.

In the social work literature, several approaches seek to conceptualise epistemic practices to support knowledgeable practice and knowledge sharing at organisational levels. Broadly, they fall under what could be termed evidence-based practice (EBP), Best Practice and knowledge implementation, utilisation, exchange, sharing or management. These terms are often used synonymously (Drisko, 2014; Kessler et al., 2005) and are all “essentially concerned with linking research with practice” (Heinsch et al., 2016, p. 4). Many of the underlying principles discussed in the previous section in relation to profession and rational-analytical, intuitive and reflexive decision-making, apply equally to the discussion of these models here. The purpose of the following sections is therefore not to repeat these but rather to focus on how these concepts claim to contribute to supporting knowledgeable and ethical practice in organisations.

### **Evidence-based and evidence-informed practice**

EBP is a contested and multifaceted collection of ideas about how knowing and doing can be linked both at a practitioner and an organisational level; however, there is not much agreement “about what evidence-based practice means in practice and how it is best

promoted" (Nutley et al., 2009, p. 552). Under the term EBP, many different notions are discussed (see for example King Keenan and Grady, 2014). Generally, in EBP the quality of evidence is ranked with systematic reviews and randomised controlled trials at the top and qualitative action research at the bottom (Heinsch et al., 2016).

An important distinction is made in the literature between 'instrumental', 'conceptual' and 'symbolic' use of knowledge (Weiss, 1979), referring to the way research is integrated with practice. 'Instrumental' refers to research findings feeding directly into practice; 'conceptual' use relates to practitioners gaining "new insights and understandings from research, whether or not they can or do implement these in an observable way" (Rutter and Fisher, 2013, p. 10); and 'symbolic' use of knowledge connotes situations in which theory or research is used to legitimise existing practices or positions (Mitton et al., 2007). Nutley and colleagues (2009, p. 553) note that EBP research is mainly concerned with the instrumental use of 'what works', such as "designing and implementing evidence-based programmes and practice tools".

EBP models are contested for a variety of reasons and I have discussed these in the section on tools and instruments in the context of decision-making. More fundamental critiques focus on ontological and epistemological issues concerning EBP and can be summed up under the notion of the impossibility of standardising social work practice (Munro, 2019; Becker-Lenz and Müller, 2009). Munro (2011, p. 92) argues that it "is not simply a case of taking an intervention off the shelf and applying it to a child and family", because an intervention "that works in one situation may not work in another" (Wilson, 2013, p. 156). Also, with the implementation of a programme or tool comes "a tendency to overemphasise rational decision making" (Nutley et al., 2009, p. 553) and quantitative research. This leaves little room for professional experience and judgements (Munro, 2011; Nevo and Slonim-Nevo, 2011), "may miss the rich knowledge derived from narrative data" (Cnaan and Dichter,

2008, p. 281) and ignores the relationship-based reality of social work (Collingwood et al., 2008). Similarly, Drisko (2014, p. 132) argues that while EBP can help guide practice, practice “is best guided by many diverse forms of knowledge, derived from many different kinds of ‘evidence’”. Therefore, in his view EBP “cannot alone guide ... practice” (Drisko, 2014, p. 132).

Critiques are also concerned with the impact of EBP implementation. Nutley, Powell and Davies (2013, p. 25), for example, warn about the risks of EBP that is “too fixed, rigid and prescriptive” and remind us that “we should remain realistic” about the extent to which such models can “actually shape decision making on the ground”. Taylor (2017, p. 1050) further argues that the tensions associated with “improving the quality of decision making through organisational policies” come from “seeking to generalise too much in aspects for which discretion ... is appropriate”. Standardised implementation of evidence in organisational procedures is seen as problematic (Trevillion, 2008), as guidelines do little to change practice (Gray et al., 2009; see also Taylor, 2016) and are associated with bureaucratisation (Munro, 2011).

Critiques of EBP suggest that social work is “essentially concerned with understanding a particular set of circumstances as they affect the individual service user, in response to which the social worker offers first and foremost a helping relationship” (Cornish, 2017, p. 551). In response to this, traditional notions of EBP “have begun to relax, reflecting a more inclusive approach to the nature of knowledge and evidence” (Heinsch et al., 2016, p. 3). However, overall, notions of EBP still espouse “a somewhat linear perspective”, a one-way street from production to application “via a process of implementation” or transformation (Heinsch et al., 2016, p. 3). Transformation aims to make evidence ‘usable’, but dissemination activities rely on “overly simplistic notions of how knowledge is shared and how people learn” (Kelly, 2017, p. 251). However, the need to integrate research and practice remains undisputed

(Gredig, 2011), although “translating these aspirations into practical strategies is not a simple matter” (Nutley et al., 2008, p. 54).

Many authors therefore argue for Evidence-Informed Practice (EIP), which is seen as more appropriate for social work (McBeath and Austin, 2015; Gibbs and Gambrill, 2002 in Cnaan and Dichter, 2008; Schnurr, 2005). McBeath and Austin (2015, p. 4) assert that EIP "encourages practitioners to draw on and integrate various streams of knowledge into individual decision-making, including service user preferences, clinician experience and practice wisdom, and the best available scientific evidence". Likewise, King Keenan and Grady (2014, p. 195) argue for “an approach that conceptualizes art and science as wedded together in the thinking and actions of how we use our knowledge, experience and professional use of self in the service of each individual and family client”.

EIP requires that social workers are research-minded, displaying curiosity, critical thinking and critical reflexivity, and that decisions are based on reflection (Schnurr, 2005). Such a perspective seems fitting for social work and is in line with a practice-based understanding of relational epistemic practices. However, with the acknowledgement of different forms of knowledge and ways of knowing come additional hurdles. Heinsch and colleagues (2016), for example, warn that with the inclusion of different types of knowledge, the assessment of the quality of evidence becomes (even more) challenging for social workers. While quality criteria for different types of research evidence exist, they cannot be applied to the more personal and cultural forms of knowledge and therefore, the question of how quality can be addressed arises. Therefore, I argue that in addition to these frameworks, ethical values and principles should underpin reflections and assessments of the evidence base. My argument is that we cannot solely think about evidence-informed or knowledgeable practice, but instead need to focus on both knowledgeable and ethical practice.

Other approaches that conceptualise how knowledgeable and ethical practice can be fostered in organisations, can be summarised with notions of Best Practice, the focus of the next section.

### **Best Practice approaches**

Rather than focussing on research evidence, Best Practice approaches look to other practices. In the UK, there are many organisations that provide “practice recommendations variously labelled as good practices, best practices, promising practices, research-based practices, evidence-based practices and guidelines” (Nutley et al., 2013, p. 8). Drisko (2014, p. 125) argues that “‘Best practices’ has no standard definition” and states that it is used to refer to a range of approaches, from evidence-informed examples underpinned by evaluation to favoured approaches that lack any research evidence. The term ‘Best Practice’ is also employed when authors want to point to the positive aspects of social work practice (Jones et al., 2008) or want to “illustrate some of the extraordinary skills, knowledge and values in action that routinely characterise social work” (Cooper et al., 2014, p. 5). In this case, Best Practice serves to confront the negative self-image of social work by showcasing best practice (Ferguson, 2003). In the light of these varied interpretations and meanings of Best Practice, Drisko (2014) recommends that any claim of best practice needs to be reviewed critically.

Kessler, Gira and Poertner (2005) offer to my knowledge, the only attempt to provide a systematic overview of Best Practice. Based on a systematic literature review, they describe the different concepts linked to Best Practice, which in addition to EBP include practice wisdom, emulating similar systems, use of expert advice and professional guidelines.

Kessler and colleagues (2005, p. 245) argue that one way Best Practice is understood is related to practice wisdom that is applied when there is no validated research evidence in

relation to new practice situations. In this case, the description of successful practice examples occurs inductively, resulting in practice guidance. The issue however, is that “while workers’ experiences are a valuable resource, practice wisdom is not always wise” (Kessler et al., 2005, p. 245).

Best Practice also refers to practices developed in other systems or organisations that are then emulated. An example of this can be found in the UK where ‘models of practice’ have become increasingly the focus of local authorities who want to improve practice and such models are promoted as a key area for social work innovation (Schooling, 2018). Ofsted define these as “a particular way of or approach to working with children and families” (Schooling, 2018, p. 2). Ofsted have found that when local authorities implement such models of practice, they are more likely to be successful if implemented consistently across a whole system and if staff are well supported and trained. This implies “the same operating model at all levels, with the same principles and philosophy behind it” (Stanley, 2019, p. 4). This does not mean that models should be implanted rigidly, rather an implementation needs to be “adaptable and flexible so that practitioners can modify them for specific situations” (Stanley, 2019, p. 4). There is a danger that when “models are used in a mechanistic way – processes are followed, but without the application of professional knowledge, skills, and judgement” they are not effective (Schooling, 2018, p. 4). Looking to other organisations to emulate a system or an approach requires paying attention to organisational contexts and differences. It is likely that what works in one organisation may not work in another, or may indeed have unintended consequences that are problematic, because success always depends on the context and on the underlying frameworks (Kessler et al., 2005).

Large organisations often deploy experts for specific areas of practice to provide information and consultation to find solutions to organisational processes or problems encountered (Kessler et al., 2005). However, as with practice wisdom, experts are not infallible and in

addition, expert knowledge has its limits, and not knowing is often not declared (Dewe, 2009), which can lead to false assumptions being made.

Best Practice is also implied when professional organisations and interest groups produce practice guidelines. These are supposed to be developed based on systematic literature reviews or meta-analysis (Roberts et al., 2006). However, in social work where much research is of a qualitative nature, guidelines may be produced more on the basis of practice wisdom and may be further compromised by self-serving interests (Kessler et al., 2005).

In addition to these categories, work by Ferguson (2003) has in the UK introduced the notion of Critical Best Practice. In this view, Critical Best Practice aims to “produce knowledge which demonstrates good work which is skilfully supportive, therapeutic, and anti-oppressive”, thus incorporating a critical theory-based analysis and it can be called ‘best’ “precisely because it integrates these different aspects” (Ferguson, 2003, p. 1009). Critical Best Practice starts with the assumption that “there are many existing examples of skilled practice in using a range of knowledges to inform direct work with service users and carers” (Gordon and Cooper, 2010, p. 247). The analysis of these can therefore “provide opportunities for learning about how social work is performed” and “what supports good practice” (Gordon and Cooper, 2010, p. 247). It is thus claimed that Critical Best Practice is “a model for developing systems, knowledge and practice competencies” (Ferguson, 2003, p. 1006).

Overall, notions of Best Practice are contested and the legitimacy of ‘best practice’ “in anything other than a very general sense”, would imply that there is a “generally abstracted version” of social work practice (Grootenboer et al., 2017, p. 10). This is problematic for a variety of reasons. Definitions of what counts as ‘best’ have a temporal dimension, in that what was seen as best practice twenty years ago, may today be bad practice. Central to a Best Practice approach is the question as to who has the power to determine ‘best’ and who counts as expert (Jones, Cooper and Ferguson, 2008). Any discussion of “what constitutes

achievable standards for 'best' is determined not from a single source, such as agency rules and policy, but from a range of sources, including service users, managers, front-line professionals" (Jones et al., 2008, p. 18). Baginsky (2013, p. 32), referring to Lawson et al. (2005 in Baginsky, 2013), found that social workers could not explain "what they would define as 'competent' or 'good enough' practice" and therefore defining 'best', 'excellent' or 'expert' practice seems problematic. Gordon (2018) strongly argues that practitioners, in addition to policy makers, services users and researchers, need their voice heard in these debates.

Through its association with EBP, Best Practice has increasingly become "associated with neoliberalism and bureaucracy, and prescriptive, reductionist, depersonalising approaches to 'what works' in social work practice" (Gordon, 2018, p. 70). Gordon refers to Smith (2011, p. 15) who suggested that

"social work and social workers need to become open to different possibilities, to the articulation of diverse and contrary discourses, to give up on the quest for some elusive 'best practice' and to become comfortable with uncertainty; in short to become reflexive and morally active practitioners".

Similarly, from a practice-based perspective, Best Practice approaches are seen critically. As Koivisto, Pohjola and Pitkänen (2015, p. 6) argue, the aim is typically "to find and implement universally effective and best practices ... [but] practice does not have such inner attributes as goodness, effectiveness, or workability". Practice theorists rather understand these attributes as relational and therefore argue that:

"Instead of searching for the ultimate best practices, we need to investigate the applicability and workability of a practice in relation to the site. We have to investigate what kind of human actors, activities and interactions as well as resources have to be mobilized and enacted so that the goals defined can be achieved." (Koivisto, Pohjola and Pitkänen, 2015, p. 6)

In a broader sense, the relationship between situated practice and quality is complex. Quality is a “vague, open, multifaceted, and rich concept” (Dahler-Larsen, 2019, p. 217). Quality standards are generally viewed as valid across contexts and situations and are thus requested to be observed; yet professionals handle problems, arrive at solutions and achieve quality from day to day, from situation to situation (Dahler-Larsen, 2019). Dahler-Larsen therefore argues that “a notion of quality that has very little contact with even one practical, situated experience” is problematic. He suggests that notions of quality need to be questioned: “Who is asking? In what situation(s)? What is his/her/their project?” This enables understanding and talking about specific perspectives of quality and their possible affordances, which Evans and Hardy (2017) call ‘ethical talk’. As a consequence, every “quality notion should be taken seriously as representative of a particular relevance structure, but not literally as evidence of quality in any universal sense” (Dahler-Larsen, 2019, p. 10).

Critical Best Practice approaches perhaps include such a situated understanding of quality and best practice. As Gordon (2018, p. 70) argues, the approach’s idea of best practice “is not idealised, de-contextualised practice but practice that is rooted in a particular cultural, geographical, historical, political and economic location”. Therefore, there are not “pre-determined ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ practices or outcomes” and practice can only be defined as “the ‘best’ that can be achieved at that time and in that context” (Gordon, 2018, p. 70). Dahler-Larsen (2019, pp. 224–228) recommends, among other things, that organisations should “create spaces for evaluative inquiry that recognizes the “rough ground” of value tensions in practice” through collective sense-making based on involvement, experimentation and dialogue. As there is no “inner core in quality, and there is no authority who knows that inner core”, it is in his view important to produce concepts of quality that include an understanding of “relativity, particularity and definitions through social use”. These concepts should then be used to evaluate practice through observation and reflection and by configuring feedback-loops.

In summary, the implication of the discourse surrounding Best Practice approaches is that organisations need to be mindful to include all the stakeholders and diverse perspectives, including service users and carers and social workers, when trying to define best practice. Best practice guides or examples can only be transferred if local situated practice and conditions are understood. The evidence and value base of best practice examples should also be made explicit to allow professionals a critical review of these.

While the previous sections focussed on models of how organisations can integrate either evidence or best practice in developing practice approaches and interventions, the next section considers how knowledge can be shared within and across organisations.

### **Knowledge translation, utilisation and exchange**

The way organisations engage in the storing, managing and sharing of knowledge is an important area for research and practice. For universities, the impact of research is increasingly tied up with income streams (Heinsch and Cribb, 2019) and there is a consensus that research is important for social services to meet objectives and achieve outcomes (Wilkinson et al., 2012). In the current literature terms such as “knowledge exchange, research utilisation, and knowledge translation” are discussed (Matosevic et al., 2013, p. 7) and it is recognised that “knowledge emerges, circulates and gets applied in practice” in fundamentally social ways (Greenhalgh and Wieringa, 2011, p. 502; Heinsch et al., 2016; Jang, 2013; Knorr Cetina, 2005; Brown and Duguid, 2000; Lave and Wenger, 1991). Notions of relational epistemic practices (Knorr Cetina, 2005) are indicative of an “epistemological reconceptualization” of how ‘knowledge’ in social work research is defined and understood (Syed et al., 2017, p. 293). These discussions parallel those found in relation to reflexive, hybrid and mindful professions.

Government policy recognises that sharing of knowledge is somehow beneficial for organisations, staff, users and citizens (Hartley and Benington, 2006). However, based on their own substantial research in the field with different stakeholders in a variety of networks, Hartley and Benington (2006, p. 102) argue that the UK government has no clear strategy for knowledge exchange and has invested much more in “audit and inspection”, rather than in learning and knowledge sharing. The assumptions underpinning ‘dissemination’ are assuming that emulation and replication of ‘best practice’ occurs through obtaining information from others. Hartley and Benington maintain that co-production and sharing of knowledge emerge together in an intertwined process and suggest that to improve processes of continuous improvement and innovation in public services, there is a need “to develop a more ‘relational’ approach to knowledge generation, transfer and application” (Hartley and Benington, 2006, p. 107). Knowledge sharing and inter-organisational learning depends, in their view, on relationships that are characterised by “trust, curiosity and respect for diversity between people in different organisations”. This involves first and foremost, “the painstaking creation of the conditions necessary to cultivate, graft, transplant and fertilise the new thinking and the new practice that is appropriate to the specific context”. It also relies on appropriate theories that are compatible with the political, complex and contested nature of knowledge and on research methods that support the co-creation of knowledge and can explore the subtle ways in which knowledge can take “root and flower in some contexts and not in others” (Hartley and Benington, 2006, p. 107).

Universities and social work researchers increasingly need to demonstrate the social impact of research (Syed et al., 2017) and need to consider how to deliver impact and positive outcomes for people and communities (Heinsch and Cribb, 2019). This requires “more participatory co-production and co-management methods of engagement” (Kelly, 2017, p. 251). Such interaction models focus on the “interactions between researchers and

practitioners at different stages of knowledge production, dissemination and utilisation” (Heinsch et al., 2016, p. 5). The various interactive strategies range

“from simply enabling greater discussion of findings by practitioners at presentations, through local collaborations between researchers and research users to test out the findings from research, to formal, ongoing, large scale partnerships that support better connections between research and practice over the longer term” (Nutley et al., 2009, p. 554).

This entails researchers identifying and training motivated leaders, practitioners and service users so that they can engage as “key facilitators in professional networks” (Kelly, 2017, p. 252). In such partnerships, knowledge is “co-constructed by researchers, practitioners, agencies, policy-makers” and service users, whereby the “acquisition of knowledge [is] ... achieved through mutual learning and stakeholder interaction” (Syed et al., 2017, p. 293). This form of knowledge creation is underpinned by notions of “collectively negotiated” and “transformed” knowledge (Heinsch et al., 2016, p. 5). The assumption here is that the more resources are invested in partnerships, “the higher the use of research” becomes (Heinsch et al., 2016, p. 5).

Based on her qualitative research with social work researchers in Australia, Heinsch (2018, p. 474) suggests four different interactional approaches to knowledge utilisation: ‘situated’, ‘engaged’, ‘programmatic’ and ‘conventional’. From situated to conventional, these approaches can be differentiated by the intensity of the interaction and the degree to which knowledge production is undertaken in participatory ways. A situated approach involves intensive and ongoing interaction or coproduction of research with practitioners in their practice setting (Heinsch, 2018, p. 475). This requires researchers to translate practice issues into researchable questions (Matosevic et al., 2013); proponents of the practice optimisation cycle (Mueller and Fellmann, 2019; Gredig, 2011; Gredig and Sommerfeld, 2008) suggest that such questions are then addressed in a review of practical, empirical, and conceptual

knowledge that then informs the development of a practice approach, which is implemented and evaluated. The engaged approach is based on continuous consultation and feedback throughout the lifetime of a research project, but the researchers remain independent. This separation between research and practice thus requires “some form of translation between these two contexts” (Heinsch, 2018, p. 477). The programmatic interaction approach involves “the creation, marketing and selling of a research product to solve real-world problems”. This approach is marked by an instrumental use of research that aims to develop “tools, instruments or application models” (Heinsch, 2018, p. 479). Lastly, Heinsch (2018, p. 481) identifies the conventional approach that involves only brief linear interactions to disseminate research findings in response to demand.

Another categorisation that was developed inductively by studying research use in the social care sector, differentiates between the ‘research-based practitioner’, ‘embedded research’ and the ‘organisational excellence’ models (Nutley et al., 2009). The first sees ‘research use’ as a linear and individual process. The embedded research model is related to the ideas discussed under EBP and Best Practice, that focus on implementation of evidence-informed models, tools or practice models. The organisational excellence model is most closely related to situated interactional models, as it focusses on how practice organisations can implement “externally generated research findings” into practice through “local experimentation, evaluation, and practice development based on research”, often in partnership with universities (Nutley et al., 2009, p. 556). Nutley and colleagues (2009) have identified five key mechanisms that support knowledge utilisation: ‘dissemination’ (one-way delivery of research findings to an audience in a more or less tailored and user-friendly way); ‘interaction’ (two-way collaboration between research and practice communities to support the adaption and negotiation of research findings in a specific context); ‘social influence’ (building on experts or peers as influencers who affect attitudes and behaviours and inform potential research users about findings); ‘facilitation’ (enabling ‘use of research’ through

various forms of support, which include provision of practical assistance for individuals and groups); and 'incentives and reinforcement' (seeking to influence behaviour through rewards and control).

Nutley and colleagues (2009, pp. 554-555) suggest that in practice, many strategies to influence knowledgeable and ethical practice draw on more than one approach. Such approaches need to grapple with the often "complex, multifaceted nature of research use". Knowledge exchange and utilisation approaches support collaborative or cooperative approaches to knowledge production and research on a continuum towards more participatory forms of knowledge building (Kelly, 2017). Interestingly, Heinsch (2018, p. 474) in her research found "no strong association between intensive engagement and research use", thus contradicting earlier research by Landry et al. (2001 in Heinsch, 2018). Heinsch (2018, p. 483) concludes that her findings support interactional, engaged and relational approaches to knowledge exchange that lead to the increased integration of research. She argues for engaged and programmatic approaches as she found them to be "most effective in facilitating conceptual and instrumental research use" whilst "minimising symbolic use by practitioners" (Heinsch, 2018, p. 483). She also points to the importance of research translation and argues that while such conceptions have recently been seen as no longer useful, her study suggests that they continue to be valuable for research use in social work.

Nutley et al. (2009, p. 558) on the other hand, conclude that EIP is most likely to come from "multifaceted strategies that combine two or more mechanisms within a coherent framework" and are embedded "in more supportive contexts and cultures" thus moving in the direction of organisational excellence models. They therefore suggest that what is required is a whole systems approach that "thinks about parts and wholes and is ever mindful of the importance of context" (Nutley et al., 2009, p. 558).

Underpinning many of these interactional approaches is the assumption that if knowledge is co-produced, then it is more likely to be 'useable' and 'used'. Co-produced knowledge "places more of an emphasis on professional knowledge and action" as it occurs in the real world (Gredig and Sommerfeld, 2008, p. 292) and it is therefore thought that it will "result in a greater likelihood of use or application" (Heinsch et al., 2016, p. 4). A consequence of co-producing knowledge is that boundaries between research and practice are blurred or dissolved (Heinsch et al., 2016) through hybridisation (Gredig, 2011).

If knowledge becomes known and applied, thus benefitting stakeholders directly involved in the interactions, one key question in relation to interactional approaches is how far such benefits can be seen on the part of those not involved in the interaction. Rossi, Rosli and Yip (2017, p. 9) argue that "intangible changes" can indirectly have an impact on individuals and organisations beyond those who are directly involved. Co-produced knowledge can also result in artefacts (e.g. articles, briefings, instruments or procedures) that can be shared more widely. However, more often, engagement leads to more tacit outcomes, the sharing of which is beyond the original stakeholders and "requires further interactions that support ongoing dialogue" (Rossi et al., 2017, p. 9). This then requires "'distributed networks' of relationships ... and ... collective action involving many individuals engaging in formally organised and institutionalised activities" (Rossi et al., 2017, p. 9; Wilkinson et al., 2012), such as those proposed by Nutley and colleagues (2009) in the organisational excellence model.

It is important to recognise that knowledge exchange does not just include formal research and associated empirical knowing but also needs to consider theoretical and experiential knowing (Nutley et al., 2013). Nutley et al. (2004, p. 19) conclude that "the main message to emerge ... is that the key to knowledge management [lies] in managing the relationship and interplay between knowledge types, particularly the continuous interplay between explicit

and tacit knowledge”. Similarly, Kelly (2017, p. 252) suggests focussing on “the processes in which formal and informal forms of knowledge become known and shared”.

In sum, while some argue for participatory and interactional approaches to knowledge co-production and research (Heinsch et al., 2016; Gredig, 2011; Gredig and Sommerfeld, 2008), others caution that this in itself may not be enough to ensure that knowledge “will have any utility in practice” (Kelly, 2017, p. 251) and therefore do not sufficiently address the gap between research and practice. In my view, these concepts do not adequately focus on the necessary epistemic practices that support weaving together practice and knowledge types following the (co-)production of knowledge. Rather, they simply build on the belief that interaction, or even co-production will make knowledge more relevant and ‘useable’, leading to research being integrated in practice. I therefore agree with Heinsch and Cribb (2019, p. 9) who conclude that “the full complexity of the knowledge utilisation process, and the associated interactions and relationships through which knowledge is ‘exchanged’, have remained underexplored”. We therefore need to examine how organisations can support practitioners to integrate different forms of knowledge, research, theoretical understandings and tools with the practice situations they encounter.

The overall message from these interactional models with regard to enabling knowledgeable and ethical practice is that knowledge can be best woven together in discussion with others, whereby the perspectives of all involved can be harnessed and understanding can be widened. Importantly, this needs to be undertaken in the context of cases or practice situations (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017; Eraut, 2012; Murno, 2011). Recognising this social aspect of knowing, Scurlock-Evans and Upton (2015, p. 396) suggest that we need to pay attention to the importance of collegiate networks to support methods for dissemination and training, which should consider not only the “applicability of research findings themselves” but also the unique challenges of the contexts.

A key concept that seeks to explain and inform interactional and practice-based models of knowledge sharing is communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). CoPs have repeatedly been linked to knowledge management and the literature abounds with examples where CoPs are examined as a strategy for the cocreation and sharing of knowledge (Barbour et al., 2018; Reinmann-Rothmeier, 2001). These processes are then linked with the notion of practice-based learning (see Chapter 3). Another perspective of organisational support for knowledgeable and ethical practice comes from earlier discussed notions of deliberative reflection, only this time, in the following section, I consider specific group methods.

### **Group reflection models**

Group reflection models fulfil many purposes. The discussion of the role of reflection has already highlighted the importance of discursive deliberation. Beckett (2009, p. 93) argues that reflective learning understood from a practice-based perspective requires commitment to first “undergoing diverse experiences from which one can learn” and second to “the public articulation of reasons for one’s judgements at work”. He goes on to argue that to develop holistic competence that arises from “inferential understanding requires not only one embodied practitioner but indeed a whole community of them, because the practices are public practices” (Beckett, 2009, p. 93). Moreover, if reflection is to enhance cooperative capabilities for the modern workplace, including inter-professional collaboration, then reflection needs to be a group-based activity, a “socially reflective practice” (Beckett, 2009, p. 93), as this enables harnessing the potential of wider perspectives. I am interested here in the capacity of such models to enable the integration of knowledge, ethics and practical challenges. Generally, reflective activities in the workplace (e.g. reflective dialogues, reflection groups or debriefing in association with everyday activities) are thought to enable integration, as they “may provide a mechanism to integrate research-based and practice-

based knowledge, offering potential benefits for professional learning ”(Avby, 2015, p. 68; see also Ruch, 2007a). Avby et al.’s (2017, p. 58) later findings also suggest that “social workers’ engagement in a both verbal and tacit reasoning activity” enables the integration of various forms of knowledge. I want to examine these claims in this section.

One important factor to consider is the time allocated to group reflection, as this impacts on group dynamics and the quality of deliberations. First, the regularity of reflective group sessions is important for the development of trust, confidence and reciprocity. Second, Eraut (2009, p. 8) argues that if participants do not have enough time to focus on their own reflections, they may resort to “short and rapid” deliberations. This limits meta-processes that are about expanding “self-awareness and monitoring” and should include “the framing of problems, thinking about the deliberative process itself and how it is being handled, searching for relevant knowledge, introducing value considerations, etc.”. For this to emerge, it is important to have sufficient time for the reflection (Eraut, 2009, p. 8). Therefore, group approaches should ensure that sufficient time is allocated for knowledgeable and ethical understandings to emerge.

Markauskaite and Goodyear (2017, p. 39) argue that “collective reflective practices ... are [increasingly] embedded in organisational change and learning processes”. For example, Jones (2014) in a review of group-based reflection models in social work, identified four main models: the critical reflection model (Fook and Gardner, 2007); the relationship-based model (Ruch, 2005, 2007a, 2009); the work discussion model (Hingley-Jones and Ruch, 2016; Rustin, 2008; Rustin and Bradley, 2008; Warman and Jackson, 2007); and online critical reflective dialogue (Baikie et al., 2012). With exception of the last one, these models were all observed in work settings.

In order to generate an understanding of how far group reflection models are able to support the development of knowledgeable and ethical understanding and practice, I analysed the

first three models. Figure 5 provides an initial summary based on the categories suggested by Eraut (2009),<sup>3</sup> with an added column describing the theoretical framework underpinning the model. All models are based on small groups with up to 12 participants. This is an important point, as it relates to the time available for each participant (Eraut, 2009). All groups are facilitated and the authors stress the importance of this, as it ensures that the group process can be moderated (ground rules, introduction of reflection model, etc.) (Jones, 2014). What seems important for the purpose of the argumentation in this thesis, is that they all start with a presentation of a practice situation (or a case or critical incident) and include discussion of hypotheses, assumptions or underlying meanings. The reflection processes and the way they are organised over time, differ between these models. For a fuller understanding of these processes, I refer the reader to the literature (Hingley-Jones and Ruch, 2016; Jones, 2014; Ruch, 2007a, 2007b, 2009; Rustin, 2008; Fook and Gardner, 2007; Warman and Jackson, 2007).

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<sup>3</sup> Eraut suggests that reflection models can be categorised by “the range of reflective learning agents (individual or group), foci (current, past or future), contexts (busy or relaxed) and purposes (monitoring, decision making or learning)” (Eraut, 2009:20).

Model	Process	Setting (individual or group)	Focus (current, past or future)	Context (busy or relaxed)	Purpose (monitoring, decision making or learning)	Theoretical Frameworks
<b>Critical reflection model</b> (Fook and Gardner, 2007, 2013)	Each participant reflects on a critical incident or recent, concrete or 'raw' event - over two and a half days. Stage one aims to unsettle the assumptions of each participant by group members using a range of critical reflective questions, based on the four aspects of the theoretical framework. Stage two reflection comprises presentations by each presenter about changed thinking and implications for practice.	Small groups (3-12 participants) - facilitated	Past (incident) and current (assumptions) and future (implications)	Workshops: Each participant needs at least 20-30 minutes to present and reflect on their critical incident. Time needed for introductions, ground rules and evaluation. Three sessions, normally between a week or a month apart.	Learning: "unsettling and examining hidden assumptions to generate new frameworks of professional understanding and actions" and "understanding self".	Postmodern perspectives and critical theory.
<b>Relationship-based model of reflection</b> (Ruch 2007a & b, 2009)	A practitioner presents a case they are currently working with, including the issues that are surfacing. The group engages in a discussion about the case - group and the presenter to remain separated. Final stage the presenter returns to the whole group and engages in reflective discussion with group members about aspects of the case which have caught their attention.	Small group sessions - facilitated	Past and current (case) and future (case)	Approximately 1.5 hours in duration, so can be organised at work.	Decision making and learning: containment/insights.	Bion's (1962) 'emotionally informed thinking spaces' and 'containment' and critical theory.
<b>Work discussion model</b> (Warman and Jackson, 2007; Rustin and Bradley, 2008)	One (or sometimes two) members present a current issue or concern which is preoccupying them, no further information on process.	Group (4 - 12 members) - facilitated by an external consultant	Past and current (case) and future (experience and relationships)	Voluntary attendance, on a regular basis (weekly, monthly or every 6-12 weeks).	Learning: share concerns, difficulties and challenges; get beneath the surface level so that what and how of unconscious communication is considered alongside the impact on the worker and others. Not primarily solutions-focussed, but may be byproduct.	Bion's concept of containment and psycho-dynamic understanding of relationships between professionals and service users.
<b>online critical reflective dialogue</b> (Baikie, Campbell, Thornhill and Butler, 2013)	Participants post their reflections on university's Blackboard Learning System. Each group discussion takes place on the Main Discussion Board, and begins on a Monday and finishes the following Sunday. No reference to stage one and two of Critical Reflection model.	Virtual group discussion. Skilled facilitation in the virtual forum	No information	Core component of its campus-based and distance learning Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) programme. Students are expected to take part in the forum for a total of one and a half hours in the week, which comprises reading, thinking about and then responding to prior postings.	Learning: transformative learning	Transformational and experiential learning theory as well as critical theory.

*Figure 5 Reflective group models in social work (author's table based on Jones, 2014)*

Each model seems to have distinct benefits that relate to their aims. The authors of *critical reflection* suggest that reflections enable participants to unearth assumptions (Fook and Gardner, 2007). The *work discussion model* claims to enhance deeper understanding of underlying psychological factors and emotional processes that affect both practitioners, service users and organisations (Rustin, 2008; Warman and Jackson, 2007). Lastly, the *relationship-based* model offers emotional containment (Hingley-Jones and Ruch, 2016; Ruch, 2007a, 2007b; Andersen, 1987). I assume that all three also develop the communication skills of the participants, as they engage in and learn about the ways to phrase hypotheses or ask questions.

An important question in relation to this thesis is, how far these models can support the development of knowledgeable and ethical practice and the integration of different types of knowledge and ways of knowing. From my experience of running and taking part in Intervention groups (Staempfli and Fairtlough, 2019), I hypothesise that this relies on participants' prior knowledge and their ability to discursively elaborate on and make links with knowledge. I therefore analysed the three models to gain a more informed understanding of the types of knowledge that are likely to be integrated in the group reflection models. I examined each model in relation to the six knowledge categories suggested by Tov et al. (2016a- see Chapter 3) This is presented in the following figure:

<b>Reflection model</b>	<b>Scholarly knowledge of social phenomena</b>	<b>Scholarly knowledge of interventions</b>	<b>Ethical knowledge</b>	<b>Experiential knowledge</b>	<b>Organisational and contextual knowledge</b>	<b>Skills</b>
<b>critical reflection model</b>	critical theory with a specific focus on power and hegemonic ideologies, otherwise dependent on participants' contributions	dependent on participants' contributions	values and assumptions, otherwise dependent on participants' contributions	Strong focus on participants' experience and own assumptions	power structures, otherwise dependent on participants' contributions	dependent on participants' contributions
<b>relationship-based model of reflection</b>	psychodynamic theory, critical theory, otherwise dependent on participants' contributions	psychodynamic therapy, unconscious communication, dependent on participants' contributions	dependent on participants' contributions	Strong focus on participants' experience and participants' own insights	dependent on participants' contributions	dependent on participants' contributions
<b>work discussion model</b>	psycho-dynamic understanding of relationships between professionals and clients, otherwise dependent on participants' contributions	psycho-dynamic therapy, dependent on participants' contributions professionals and clients	dependent on participants' contributions	Strong focus on participants' experience and own insights	dependent on participants' contributions	dependent on participants' contributions

*Figure 6 Types of knowledge integrated in three reflective practice group models.*

In these models, integration of different types of knowledge occurs during the reflection process and this is shaped by the facilitator's and the participants' own prior knowledge. Each model's inherent theoretical understandings influence which knowledge forms are being discussed, as illustrated in Figure 5 (Theoretical influences). I hypothesise that the theoretical frameworks underpinning each model are likely to influence the types of knowledge that are regarded as valuable. Critical theory and psycho-dynamic understanding of relationships between professionals and service users, probably frame questions and discussions within the respective approaches. Such framing may occur implicitly (through questions) or explicitly by specifically referring to a theory. Considering the previous point, I therefore expect other perspectives to be less prevalent. This is supported by Rustin (2008, p. 20) who concludes that in work discussion groups, the deliberation "is not, of course, theory-free—the structure of the seminar and the leader's responses are profoundly rooted in theoretical assumptions, ... but theory is kept in the background", although suggestions are made with ideas for further reading. Each model's theoretical underpinnings are likely to shape the discussions and the perspectives by which situations are discussed. They have the potential to expand the knowledge of participants in this way. This is important, as evidence suggests that professional development to proficient and expert levels of skill, can only be achieved if practitioners expand their understanding of their own practice frameworks (Dall'Alba and Sandberg, 2006).

However, each situation (challenge, case, or incident) can only be addressed in the available time (no more than two hours). There is a restricted opportunity to expand the perspectives beyond the actual group session, for example by searching and interpreting relevant knowledge (Eraut, 2009). Therefore, the knowledge discussed depends on the participants' "ability to tell" (Eraut, 2013, p. 214) and the discursive ability of the group to unearth assumptions or tacit knowledge and to make links with their explicit knowledge (discursive consciousness) in the here and now. Rustin's (2008, p. 20) writing supports this: "the

seminars themselves will often include little explicit theoretical discussion, although this generalisation has to be set alongside the fact that each particular mix of members and seminar leader produces a unique constellation.” This is not surprising, considering other findings in relation to social workers’ reference to theory and research (e.g. Cleak et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2015; Staempfli et al., 2015; Collins and Daly, 2011). Facilitators also influence the discussion, which again is reliant on their ability to tell. Their contribution to the integration of knowledge also varies. Rustin (2008, p. 8) for example found that “individual group leaders vary in their approach, especially with respect to how much they may comment on the group’s own functioning”.

In sum, group models are limited in time, are likely to focus on specific theoretical perspectives and rely much on the ability of both participants and facilitators to talk about research and theory. For these reasons, the explicit discussion of different forms of knowledge in group reflection models is likely to be limited.

Crucially, the ability to talk about theory and research can be enhanced. Eraut (2013, p. 214) found that the “ability to tell” is linked to participants’ “prior experiences of talking about what they knew”. Explicit talk about knowledge related to practice is enhanced if there is a “climate of regular mutual consultation”; “training or mentoring relationship in which explanations were expected”; “informal relationships leading to work-related discussions” and “a crisis, review or radical change in practice, which caused people to exchange opinions and experiences”. It seems therefore important to implement regular mutual consultation and learning.

I conclude that various group reflection models are beneficial in many ways but seem limited in their ability to support knowledge exploration and sharing. Therefore, there is a need to develop multifaceted models that address the blending of knowledge, ethics and practice at both a practitioner and organisational level, in a whole system approach that enables

individual practitioners to do the 'grafting', thinking and relating knowledge to specific situations (Hartley and Benington, 2006, p. 104) and organisations to develop supportive contexts and cultures (Nutley et al., 2009).

One issue that needs addressing before suggesting an approach to the design of such a whole system approach, is how knowledge can be shared and managed at an intra- and inter-organisational level, particularly considering the role of boundaries and technologies.

### **Artefacts and technology in socio-material approaches**

Artefacts play an important part in knowledge sharing within and across organisations and there are different technologies that can support boundary crossing. To offer a full discussion of these is not the purpose of this thesis. Instead, I look at the basic functions of technologies, as this is relevant to the discussion of how learning and knowledge sharing can be designed.

Practice-based perspectives acknowledge the situated and social nature of knowledge creation and sharing (Ferguson et al., 2010; Turnbull, 2000). This perspective assumes that the sharing of "situated knowledge has the advantage of acknowledging local practices and contextual influences"; at the same time, due to the inherent situated understanding, sharing of such knowledge beyond the boundaries of one's own setting is challenging (Ferguson et al., 2010, p. 1805). If knowledge is to be shared across the boundaries of organisations, the difficulty arises that situational knowledge created in one context is no longer necessarily understandable to others outside the immediate setting. Wenger (1998) for example, argued that negotiating meaning within a CoP supports the development of understanding, but this meaning cannot easily be grasped by those outside a CoP. If we accept these positions, then questions arise as to what the value of sharing situated knowledge more widely is, how situated knowledge can be meaningfully shared beyond the

original context, including through information technology. This is the topic of this last section.

Turnbull (2000, p. 41) has argued that “a variety of social strategies and technical devices” enable humans to make connections between specific “instances of knowledge/practice” and allow us to see similarities and equivalences. Devices in his view can be “material or conceptual” and “their common function is to enable otherwise incommensurable and isolated knowledges to move in space and time from the local site and moment of their production to other places and times” (Turnbull, 2000, p. 189). Taking up this notion of devices, Fenwick (2012, p. 4) refers to materials that “include both the organic and inorganic, embodied and remote, technological and natural, texts and artefacts”. She contends that materials “are often dismissed or ignored in analyses of professional practice and knowing” despite having an integral role in professional practice and argues for a socio-material approach that sees the material and social as “mutually implicated in bringing forth the world”. Knorr Cetina’s (2005, p. 196) work demonstrates how objects involved in epistemic practices are constituent elements of “epistemic environments” in workplaces. Wenger (1998) talks about reifications, concepts and things that are able to cross boundaries (I will return to this in Chapter Three). For now, it suffices to point to Eraut who explains the role of such reified artefacts in knowledge sharing and learning:

“When artefacts are seen as mediating tools rather than reified knowledge, we come to recognise that much of our knowledge lies in the discussions we have around mediating artefacts rather than in the artefacts themselves. This then creates opportunities for the re-creation of the original artefact.” (Eraut, 2013, p. 217)

Whereas artefacts as epistemic tools are “generic enough to be applicable across situations”, their involvement in epistemic practices allows “the creation of situated knowledge”

(Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017, p. 457). In other words, their value lies in the engagement with tools and artefacts.

Socio-material perspectives therefore focus on how human and non-human elements emerge in networks of activity and become intertwined in assemblages that together “exert power and generate knowledge” through “processes of materialisation and material assembly”. Human participation in practice thus becomes entangled beyond personal and social engagements and involves “how things themselves participate to produce and sustain practices” (Fenwick et al., 2012, p. 5). This means that to support knowledgeable and ethical practice, we need to focus not only on ideas, meaning and human activities more generally, but equally on the material things, such as tools and artefacts that are involved in learning and knowledge co-production and sharing.

The question that is important here is the nature of boundaries between practices and I therefore briefly turn to notions of boundaries and boundary processes. Hara and Fichman (2014) discuss various categories of boundaries found in the literature. They sum them up as physical, cognitive, social and political boundaries and argue that they are all relevant to knowledge management and sharing of knowledge. Physical boundaries refer to locations, buildings and technologies and technical-structural boundaries. Cognitive boundaries are mentally constructed and include personal world views, values and beliefs. Social boundaries are rooted in culture, social interaction and traditions and come to the fore, for example, in cultural differences regarding the sharing and use of knowledge. Political boundaries form when, apart from different interpretations, there are conflicting interests (Hara and Fichman, 2014). These boundaries form external and internal barriers to uptake of technology (Trede et al., 2016). Carlile (2004) emphasises that these boundaries are of increasing complexity, and thus the challenges for the design for knowledge integration are increasingly complex and correspondingly, require more effort.

In terms of addressing boundaries, Carlile (2004), Akkerman and Baker (2011) and Hara and Fichman (2014) agree that physical boundaries can be bridged by technical solutions, such as enabling access to shared databases and through user-friendly systems. Cognitive and social boundaries can be overcome through negotiation of meaning, for example in CoPs (Wenger, 1998), whereas political boundaries need to be addressed by focussing on the generation of shared interests, for example in relation to knowledge sharing and integration. Akkerman and Bakker (2011) also identify four boundary crossing mechanisms that practitioners need to negotiate: identification, coordination, reflection and transformation. These findings suggest that many boundaries can be overcome by social strategies that are supported through mediating artefacts and technology.

Digital communication technologies have grown in importance for learning and knowledge sharing and play a crucial role in assembling epistemic spaces and environments. There is, however, a great variation in workplaces from prohibiting to widespread use of mobile technology. With rapid changes to both technology and workplace cultures, an important task is to develop understanding of and capacity to use technology to support learning in the workplace (Trede et al., 2016). One issue is that many organisations focus too heavily on storage and dissemination, while neglecting the social aspects. Nutley and colleagues (2004) for example, complain that the knowledge management literature is preoccupied with technological “processes of knowledge codification, storage and dissemination”. Similarly, Ferguson et al. (2010, p. 1802) argue that while organisational knowledge is seen as a resource that can be “captured and shared through technologies”, this is often based on rationalist approaches to knowledge management rather than seeing knowledge as emergent and relational. This is also seen in practice, where a couple of years ago, I was told by an Assistant Director in a Social Services Children and Families’ Department, that they had invested a substantial amount of money into the purchase of research resources but then discovered that social workers did not access these. In her review of the literature, Heinsch

(2018, p. 472) found conflicting findings, with some studies finding that social workers prefer “easily accessible knowledge sources”, while others found that “textual sources are less valued”. These points remind me that any endeavour to support knowledge sharing needs to be grounded in what people do. Jang (2013, p. 1379) therefore argues for process-oriented, “socio-cultural knowledge-management practices”, because providing access to literature and resources alone, for example through a virtual platform, is insufficient. The question is how such social practices can be supported through technology and which tools can best scaffold learning, knowledge sharing and participation within and across organisations, communities or networks.

Information technology can facilitate and maintain the connections and exchange between members of various teams and groups within organisations and distributed CoPs and across whole networks (Tschopp et al., 2016). However, this requires first

“... sharper conceptions of learning with technology, learning to participate in technology-mediated practices, and learning to create environments in which one’s own learning-and the learning of one’s colleagues-can prosper.” (Trede et al., 2016, p. 251)

To this end, Wenger et al. (2009) distinguish four perspectives by which ‘digital habitats’ can be analysed and configured: a) tools that support specific community activities; b) platforms on which tools are configured; c) features that help make tools and platforms usable and habitable; and d) the configuration of technologies that provide the digital habitat of a CoP. These different aspects make clear that a combination of technologies needs to integrate platforms and individual tools and therefore, an overall approach is needed that considers such an overall configuration and that recognises that this will rarely be limited to a single platform.

Essentially, the purpose of each element needs to be considered in relation to social practices within and across CoPs (Wenger et al., 2009). The primary challenges that cause communities

to use technology are related to rhythm, interaction and identity (Wenger et al., 2009). Rhythm is concerned with the challenge of time and place for communities. Temporal and spatial separation makes ongoing engagement of community members challenging (although it is precisely the inclusion of different contexts that makes the members of a CoP want to exchange views). Technology offers a range of possibilities to deal with time and place. Synchronous and asynchronous tools and forms of virtual communication offer ways in which time and place can be bridged (Wenger et al., 2009). Interaction is key to support participation and reification, which are fundamental processes for learning in CoPs. Members of CoPs engage in activities, conversations, reflections and other forms of personal participation and on the other hand, they produce physical and conceptual artefacts and other forms of reified objects around which they organise their participation. A meaningful configuration of technologies needs to create opportunities for both participation and interaction, and enabling the storage, sharing, and organising of documents, data, and other artefacts (Wenger et al., 2009). Lastly, identity is concerned with diverse perspectives of members that bring about agreement and disagreement in their mutual engagement and boundary crossing. As people are members of several communities and engage in their own ways in practices, they strive to preserve their own identity across different contexts. The different perspectives arising from belonging to different CoPs, are resources for communities and technology supporting such multi-memberships. Technology can help manage this complexity (by making a community visible, for example, through member directories and profiles). These three challenges and the associated polarities are not only important in terms of technology but are fundamental issues of all CoPs; Wenger and colleagues (2009) argue that these three concepts help to assess and assemble tools to support organisations and communities, meeting their specific needs.

When selecting tools for communities and networks it seems important to enable participation and reification. The following figure illustrates the various tools that can be considered:

Figure redacted

*Figure 7 The tools landscape (Wenger et al., 2009, p. 60)*

Based on a socio-material understanding of knowledge sharing, it is first important to support both participation and reification through tools that enable synchronous and asynchronous communication. For example, tools that focus on reification generally tend to deal with codified knowledge that is shared. Such approaches alone “may be problematic as they are often inflexible and do not support fluid practices” (Lea French and Williamson, 2016, p. 750). Therefore, acknowledging the communicative processes needed and in order to support participation and tools that enable collaboration (such as a wiki, commenting or discussion boards) may be considered in addition to document management (storage, blogs and RSS feeds). Essentially, tools need to enable documentation and collaboration.

Documentation is important, as practitioners are carriers of knowledge that is not codified. The risk is that such knowledge is lost when employees leave. Therefore, Schmitt, Borzillo and Probst (2012, p. 54) suggest that organisations should explore ways to stop “knowledge walk away” and tools offer a means by which professionals can document their knowledge. Practitioners are thus not only involved in creating professional knowledge in practice but also in securing it, as part of their work when they “document their work to achieve continuity in professional services” (Fenwick et al., 2012, p. 5). Such “representational activity” that is involved in documentation, often enables restructuring of the mental description of a situation but also affects the situation itself (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017, p. 122). However, one of the issues with information technology is that there is an influx of available evidence- and practice-based knowledge and information and at the same

time, this knowledge has a shorter lifespan (Kersten et al., 2018). This has implications for practice and digitalisation directly impacts the ways in which work is organised and the skills that are needed to deal with these challenges (Gruber and Harteis, 2018; Fenwick, 2012).

Jang (2013) argues that rather than seeing technology as a way to organise a repository of information with a focus on physical boundaries and technical issues, attention needs to be paid to social actors in knowledge processes. He therefore argues that “the optimal intervention in social work agencies is the employment of diverse knowledge-management practices using information processing, interpretive and political approaches” (Jang, 2013, p. 1376). In such endeavours, devices form an integral part of epistemic practices in professional work and provide a way to link knowledge with practical work and to move knowledge “back and forth between global and local, as well as between local sites” (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017, p. 120). Therefore, the ways these devices are assembled needs to be considered with respect to specific practices and purposes and this is likely to require a range of tools.

In sum, the socio-material perspective has shown that in order to support knowledgeable and ethical practice, both the technical-structural as well as the socio-cultural processes need to be considered. These serve different functions that relate to documentation and reification and to collaboration within and across boundaries of organisations.

### **Conclusions regarding organisational knowledgeable and ethical practice**

The discussion in the second part of this chapter has shown that evidence-based and evidence-informed practice are contested and overall view knowledge as something that can be transferred or transformed in a rather linear way. These approaches, however much they deviate from their positivist roots, are not suited to the uncertainty and complexity of social work practice. Similarly, best practice approaches are problematic, as the notion of a

generalisable best is not in line with the realities of practice. The discussion of different knowledge exchange models underlines the importance of interaction, particularly between researchers and research users in organisations. But the idea that co-produced knowledge will be integrated in more than instrumental ways, is doubtful. I particularly question how organisations can support individual practitioners to integrate different forms of knowledge, research, theoretical understandings and tools, with the practice situations they encounter, if they have not been party to the co-production process. Considering the importance of deliberation in decision-making, I have explored group reflection models and have found that while they can bring many benefits, in relation to integration and thus supporting knowledgeable and ethical practice, their scope is limited. Lastly, a brief discussion of the role of IT tools and artefacts has shown that in order to overcome a range of boundaries, the socio-material and epistemic environment needs to be configured for specific learning and knowledge sharing activities, which include both documentation and collaboration.

### **Conclusions - Supporting knowledgeable and ethical practice**

In this first chapter, I defined knowledgeable and ethical practice in social work as practice that fuses different forms of knowledge, including ethical knowledge with practice in specific situations. This chapter sought to understand how social workers can be supported in this. The overarching message is that social work is marked by complexity and uncertainty and cannot be standardised. This discussion has highlighted the importance of paying attention to not just knowledge per se but importantly, to how social workers can handle knowledge. A key term here is the notion of epistemic practice.

As the discussion has shown, epistemic practices concerned with knowledgeable and ethical practice, need to include paying attention to both intuitive and analytical ways of thinking. Intuitive ways of thinking are important in action situations and include emotions and intuitions based on prior experience. The analysis of both actions and intuitions in

deliberative reflection and reasoning therefore needs to combine these with other forms of knowledge. This is best supported through social reflections that can harness the different perspectives and enables the verbalisation of tacit aspects. Therefore, for social workers to develop knowledgeable and ethical practice, they need to develop an ability to engage in epistemic practices that they then can employ in their work.

Organisations can support these epistemic practices through socio-material approaches that enable social reflection and learning. At an organisational level, the importance of relationship-based approaches was highlighted. The coproduction of knowledge in research projects with researchers' and practitioners' involvement and the various strategies to exchange knowledge, put interaction at the centre of these approaches. However, the question that all the discussed organisational approaches to supporting knowledgeable and ethical practice leaves open is how those who have not been party to the co-production process, or those who learn about theories and research, can be supported in integrating these with their thinking about practice. This discussion also analysed group reflection models, which has highlighted that while being beneficial in many ways, the most frequently used models in social work seem not to offer an adequate way forward in relation to enabling social workers to integrate theory and research with practice.

I have touched upon the importance of tools and artefacts in relation to collaboration, communication and documentation. Technologies and artefacts enable boundary crossing and form an integral part of an epistemic environment that seeks to support knowledgeable and ethical practice.

Ferguson (2013, p. 125) argues that social work needs to be understood "as a creative endeavour shaped in crucial ways by how practitioners, teams and organisations are able to act and go about their work". From the discussion in this chapter, I conclude that this also necessarily involves a focus on epistemic practices at the organisational level that enables

social workers to merge theoretical and research knowledge, professional values and ethics with experiential and everyday knowledge and situational action in professional practice. Creating the conditions for knowledgeable and ethical practice therefore involves creating the spaces for epistemic practices of practitioners, teams and organisations to emerge. The following chapter discusses the Key Situation Model that seeks to address the professional challenges outlined in the first two chapters.

## Chapter 3 - The Key Situations in Social Work model

### Introduction

The origins of the Key Situation Model go back to Kunz and Tov's (2009) work which envisaged a situation-based social work curriculum at the School of Social Work, University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Northwestern Switzerland in 2005. As a starting point, they identified the key situations in Swiss social work and social pedagogy in a modified 'Developing A CurriculUM' (DACUM) method (Kunz, 2015, see Chapter 4). While the initial idea of curriculum development had to be abandoned due to wider organisational changes, the notion of situation-based learning was developed further to support the integration of practice and theory in BA Social Work seminars. In iterative cycles, Kunz, Tov and Staempfli (Tov et al., 2013, 2016a; Staempfli et al., 2012) developed a blended reflective learning process organised around the existing key situation titles, ending up with eight steps and a module plan in which students reflect on one situation over the course of a semester. The model was published in 2013 in the book 'Schlüsselsituationen der Sozialen Arbeit' (Key Situations in Social Work) and a second revised edition was published in 2016 (Tov et al., 2013, 2016a).

As the university's virtual learning platform was not very user friendly, a new platform, CoPs and a network were developed in a research and development project ("#keysituation"<sup>4</sup>) from 2014 to 2016 (Staempfli, et al., 2016). The driving vision for this project was to establish a platform like Wikipedia but one based on social work situations, with an active membership that continuously reviewed the documented reflections of situations, enabling a dialogue on quality of practice and knowledge. The Association 'Network Key Situations in Social Work'

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<sup>4</sup> Funding was provided by the Gebert RUF Foundation as part of the «BREF - Brückenschläge mit Erfolg» (Building Bridges with Success) programme with a focus on social innovation - and by the School of Social Work of the University of Applied Sciences and Arts (UASA), Northwestern Switzerland. (<https://www.grstiftung.ch/de/search~grs-055-13~.html?search=schl%c3%bcsselsituationen>)

was founded in 2015 to establish an independent, non-profit and cooperative basis for the further development of the Key Situation Model, the network and the platform.

The Key Situation Model's core aims are: the integration of knowledge, practice and values through reflective learning; the sharing of co-produced knowledge that is embedded in real social work practice situations on a virtual platform; and enabling a discourse on the quality of the practice and knowledge within the wider professional community (Tov et al., 2013). Four years after opening the platform to the social work community, there were on average 1500 registered international users, consisting of two thirds who were students and one third, social work practitioners and educators. The Association continues to support the establishment of a social work community in which practitioners, students and academics discuss the quality of knowledge and practice espoused in reflections of situations.

Over time, the vision of the Key Situation Model has developed into a multi-layered and -faceted approach. This chapter aims to describe the Key Situation Model's, theoretical foundations and the different elements illustrated in the following figure:



**Figure 8** The elements of the Key Situation Model: reflective learning process, communities of practice and virtual platform (with permission from the Association Network Key Situation in Social Work).

These three elements not only depict the key elements of the Key Situation Model, they also symbolise three essential aspects of learning design. The reflective learning process stands for the tasks that learners engage in when learning about an experienced situation. The CoPs stand for the social organisation and the platform is an expression of the virtual environment and tools that enable collaboration, learning and situation-based knowledge co-

construction, documentation and sharing. All three elements are organised around key situations in social work, as illustrated by the document symbol in Figure 8.

An issue that I have grappled with over the years, is the complexity of the model and the challenge for me has always been to explain the model in a way that people can grasp these different dimensions. I have found that Goodyear and Carvalho's (2016) Activity Centred Analysis and Design (ACAD) framework and Carvalho and Yeoman's (2018) ACAD wireframe offer a matrix that allows me to present and analyse the Key Situation Model in order to break down these complexities. I have therefore structured this chapter along the ACAD wireframe. It starts with a discussion of the pedagogical philosophy that underpins the model. I then discuss the various elements of the Key Situation Model to illustrate how learning, professional development and knowledge sharing are organised in the learning space (micro level), at an organisational level (meso level) and across the whole network (macro level). To offer the reader a better understanding of these, I start the chapter with an exploration of the ACAD and the associated wireframe.

### **Activity Centred Analysis and Design for learning**

The ACAD framework emphasises the centrality of learners' activities with a focus on what they actually do. By 'doing' Goodyear and Carvalho (2016, p. 220) denote a whole range of human activity, including "thinking, feeling, perceiving, talking, making, moving, and so on". Because such activity occurs in physical and social environments, design needs to consider "material artefacts, digital tools, social structures, divisions of labour and other organisational arrangements that shape and are shaped by the human activity" (Goodyear and Carvalho, 2016, p. 220).

But Goodyear and Carvalho (2016) caution that (professional) learning cannot simply be designed:

“Rather, design *for* learning has to work indirectly by proposing tasks – suggestions of good things to do – which may stimulate and otherwise influence the real-world activity that eventuates, but which cannot prescribe or actually generate that activity.” (2016, p. 221, author’s emphasis)

Equally, design should suggest and offer tools and other artefacts that can support learning and “make recommendations about how learners might best work with one another” (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017, p. 609), while understanding that learners may use additional resources or work in different ways.

In this view then, learning emerges through the activities of learners as they make use of “the task design (epistemic), the structures of place (set) and the organisational structures (social)” (Yeoman, 2015, p. 56). The design for learning may start with an idea about what the intended learning outcomes ought to be, but one must acknowledge that unintended outcomes will also arise. So, while learning itself cannot be designed, the epistemic, physical and social elements can be designed, and Figure 9 illustrates how these are connected.

Goodyear and Carvalho (2016, p. 224) point out that the ACAD framework can be applied broadly “to create a holistic picture of epistemic, physical and social design components, emergent activity, co-configuration and outcomes” or to “specific areas of activity or infrastructure”. The key is to pay attention to the arrangements of how learners work together, the tasks they engage in and the tools that can support their activities. The focus therefore is on the “designable elements” that can be said to support emergent activities and phenomena in learning (Carvalho and Yeoman, 2018, p. 5).

Figure redacted

**Figure 9** *Activity centred analysis and design (ACAD) (Carvalho and Goodyear, 2017, p. 9)*

With reference to Alexander et al. (1977) and Goodyear (1999), Yeoman (2015) suggests three levels at which the ACAD framework should be considered. These relate to the scale

and scope of the design at “the detail or micro, the regional or meso, and the global or macro” level (Carvalho and Yeoman, 2017, p. 194). The global macro dimension outlines the broader context for the design, including the overarching philosophy that underpins professional learning, buildings and technology, organisational forms and the intentions of stakeholders. It is a ‘high level pedagogy’ that although not describing the set, social and epistemic design in detail, points to the underlying principles that underpin the design of the activities (Goodyear, 1999). The regional meso dimension is concerned with the local design, based on the global dimension within an organisational setting and defines how space and technology is used, what kind of community is envisaged and what the curriculum should look like. Goodyear (1999) calls this the ‘pedagogical strategy’ that promotes a shared understanding of intentions and permits coordinated action. Finally, learning arrangements at the micro level specify the detail of the strategy and determine which artefacts, tools and texts are to be used (set), what social arrangements are planned (social) and how tasks are organised (epistemic) in and around the actual learning space and time (Yeoman, 2015).

The combination of these levels and the concepts from the ACAD framework (set, social and epistemic) led Yeoman (2015) to create a three-by-three wireframe (Figure 10). This wireframe “helps designers navigate between theoretical concepts and their practical enactments” (Carvalho and Yeoman, 2017, p. 194):

	<b>Set Design</b>	<b>Social Design</b>	<b>Epistemic Design</b>
<b>Macro</b>	<b>Buildings &amp; Technology</b>	<b>Organisational Forms</b>	<b>Stakeholder Intentions</b>
<b>Meso</b>	<b>Allocation/use of space</b>	<b>Community</b>	<b>Curriculum</b>
<b>Micro</b>	<b>Artefacts, Tools &amp; Texts</b>	<b>Roles &amp; division of labour</b>	<b>Selection, sequence, pace</b>

*Figure 10 The ACAD wireframe (Carvalho and Yeoman, 2018, p. 1126, author's table)*

This wireframe “helps designers to operationalise the conceptual underpinnings of the ACAD framework (Goodyear and Carvalho, 2014), the pedagogical framework (Goodyear, 1999) and Alexander et al.’s (1977) pattern language” (Carvalho and Yeoman, 2018, p. 1127). It thus allows me to talk about the Key Situation Model and break down its complexity. I outline the central design ideas of the model at the different levels in respect of the set, social and epistemic design elements. This makes it possible to outline “the relationship between underlying philosophical values, designed environment, and scaffolded human interaction” (Yeoman, 2017, personal communication). The pedagogic philosophy is part of the macro dimension and since it underpins the whole design, I discuss it first.

### **Pedagogic philosophy**

Any model of and for learning is explicitly or implicitly rooted in a pedagogical paradigm. When developing the Key Situation Model, Lave and Wenger’s (1991) work on CoPs and particularly Wenger’s (1998) social theory of learning, formed a foundation that grounded the model securely in a practice-based perspective. However, I have only come to

understand the wider practice theoretical context through undertaking this thesis project. The overarching philosophy that underpins the Key Situation Model is informed by practice-based and socio-material perspectives that shape the understanding of how professionals learn in and for practice. This section aims to make explicit these practice-based principles in relation to learning and pedagogy, thereby offering a theoretical anchor for the Key Situation Model. Two domains are important for this: firstly professional learning for and in work and secondly, continuous professional development. These are discussed in the next sections.

### **Practice-based definitions of learning and development of competence**

From a practice perspective, learning can be understood from broadly three positions (Hager, 2011 in Hopwood, 2014) that are based on a) psychological theories; b) sociocultural perspectives; and c) positions that foreground emergence. I examine these perspectives and outline important definitions of learning for each of these.

#### ***Practice perspective in psychological theories***

Psychological theories pay attention to behaviour and cognition and see learning as “a product, often associated with reflection, rooted in an individual epistemology of practice” (Hopwood, 2014, p. 350). Two of the most cited learning theories in the social work literature are prime examples of this strand of practice theory: Schön’s (1983) ‘epistemology of practice’ and Kolb’s (1993) ‘experiential learning cycle’.

Kolb (1993) developed his experiential learning theory in the 1970’s and 1980’s in which he conceptualised learning as an experiential cycle that encompasses concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. Learning is seen as an holistic process that involves the whole person (thinking, feeling, perceiving and behaving) whereby “knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1993, p.155). The basic tenets of the theory suggest that four styles of learning are required

at different stages of the learning process (Kolb et al., 2014). These are not seen as fixed personality traits, but rather as a preferred way of learning that is developed based on genetics, life experiences and the challenges posed by the present environment. Kolb and colleagues later developed the four learning styles to nine and included the concept of learning flexibility (Kolb et al., 2014). In the UK, Kolb's Learning Style Inventory is widely known and used, despite continuing problems with "reliability, validity and the learning cycle" (Coffield et al., 2004, p. 30). One of the reasons for its wide replication lies in its simplicity in that it speaks to everyday experience, even though critiques suggest that it does not "reflect the reality of the complex social process of human learning" (Jarvis, 2009, p. 23).

Building on Kolb's work, Jarvis has developed a more complex understanding of learning that focuses on the social nature of humans and that understands people as having both mind and body. Learning occurs at points where a disjuncture is experienced in novel situations. He defines a primary processing of bodily sensations and experiences of disjuncture that later gives way to a secondary process that is "more concerned with the cultural meanings" in which "cognition becomes central to learning" (Jarvis, 2009, p. 28). The combination of these processes means that learning is always an embodied endeavour. Over the years, Jarvis developed and changed his definition of learning from "the transformation of experience into knowledge, skills and attitudes" (Jarvis, 1987, p. 32 in Jarvis, 2009, p. 25) to his current definition:

"Human learning is the combination of processes throughout a lifetime whereby the whole person – body (genetic, physical and biological) and mind (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and senses) – experiences social situations, the perceived content of which is then transformed cognitively, emotively or practically (or through any combination) and integrated into the individual person's biography resulting in a continually changing (or more experienced) person." (Jarvis, 2009, p. 25).

This definition is illustrated in the following figure:

Figure redacted

*Figure 11 The transformation of the person through learning. (Jarvis, 2009, p. 29).*

Illeris (2010) further theorises that any kind of learning includes two processes: an external process of interaction between an individual and their environment and an internal acquisition process, which is triggered in the interaction. This internal psychological process is influenced by both content (knowledge, understanding, skills) and incentives (motivation and emotions). Incentives shape decisively what is learned at the same time that content is influencing motivation and perseverance. In other words, the more interested I am to develop competence, the greater my motivation to get involved in a learning process, and vice versa, so that the two processes of learning are always “activated simultaneously and in an integrated fashion” (K. Illeris, 2009a, p. 10).

Content is not merely defined as knowledge but also skills and more broadly as insight, understanding and ability (Illeris, 2010). Development of these allows us to “function appropriately in the various contexts in which we are involved” (K. Illeris, 2009a, p. 10). Learners are thereby driven by uncertainty, curiosity or by unmet needs in order to re-establish a mental, psychological and physical equilibrium (Illeris, 2010). The interaction, on the other hand, includes action, communication and collaboration and is geared towards the integration of individuals in their social environment. Learning is thus about the development of sociality or the ability to engage and integrate. Overall, learning is an attempt “to develop meaning, skills, mental and bodily balance and social and societal integration, and in this way, we simultaneously develop our functionality, sensitivity and sociality” (Illeris, 2009a, p. 11). Figure 12 below illustrates his definition of learning, which is that

“all learning always includes three dimensions which must always be considered if an understanding or analysis of a learning situation is to be adequate: the content

dimension of knowledge, understandings, skills, abilities, attitudes and the like, the incentive dimension of emotion, feelings, motivation and volition, and the social dimension of interaction, communication and cooperation – all of which are embedded in a societally situated context.” (K. Illeris, 2009a, p. 7)

For competence to emerge it is not enough to focus on knowledge and skills alone; rather, it involves emotion and interaction. If learning aims to enhance capability, then “it must contribute to the generation of relevant functionality, sensitivity and sociality which are the main general characteristics of competences” (K. Illeris, 2009a, p. 11). Only if all these dimensions and processes are engaged, are learners able to develop competence.

Figure redacted

**Figure 12** *The three dimensions of learning and competence development. (Illeris, 2009, p. 10)*

Illeris (2009a, p. 13) distinguishes four types of learning: firstly, “cumulative” or “mechanical learning”, relevant in early developmental stages or in completely new and unfamiliar situations with no prior knowledge and context; secondly - with reference to Piaget (1950)- “assimilative” learning; and thirdly, “accommodative” learning. Assimilation adds new content to pre-existing schemas and is relatively easily achieved but may be hard to access in contexts other than the ones in which it was learned. This point is particularly relevant for the integration of knowing and doing, as learning by assimilation will not allow easy transformation from one context to another. Accommodation, on the other hand, is experienced by the learner as requiring considerable effort, as it is enacted when it is difficult to immediately relate content to any existing schemas. It requires breaking down “(parts of) an existing scheme” and transforming it so that the new situation can be woven. This type of learning, “can be recalled and applied in many different, relevant contexts” (Illeris, 2009, p.

13)<sup>5</sup>. Lastly, Illeris (2009, p. 14) refers to a type of learning that occurs in exceptional circumstances only. It involves “personality changes, or changes in the organisation of the self” and is experienced as “both profound and extensive”. It requires “a lot of mental energy” and if successful, leads to “a feeling of relief or relaxation”. This transformative learning occurs in crisis-like situations.

A different model that focuses on professional development of skills that is rooted in an individualistic notion of expertise, stems from the Dreyfus brothers (1988). They proposed that individuals develop their skills in relation to situations by approaching them first “in the manner of the novice level” and then developing their expertise through five stages (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1988, p. 20). They differentiate between novices, advanced beginners and competent, proficient and expert practitioners and Benner’s (1982) seminal work explored the relevance of this model to nurse practitioners’ development. Figure 13 shows the five stages with a summary of the key aspects in relation to components, perspectives, decisions and commitments.

The five levels point to two aspects of skilled performance. The first concerns a move from “reliance on abstract principles to the use of past, concrete experience” (Benner, 1982, p. 402), whereby both context-free elements and situational components expand over time with experience. The second is related to perception and an understanding of a given

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<sup>5</sup> Illeris (2009, p. 14) points out that other learning theorists also point to “two such types of learning”: Argyris and Schön (1978, in Illeris, 2009) developed the concepts of single and double loop learning; Ellström (2001, in Illeris, 2009) refers to adaptation-oriented and development-oriented learning and Vygotsky’s (1978, in 2009, p. 14) notion of extended learning in the zone of proximal development can according to Illeris “be seen as a parallel to accommodative learning”.

Skill Level	Components	Perspective	Decision	Commitment
1. Novice	Context-free	None	Analytical	Detached
2. Advanced beginner	Context-free and situational	None	Analytical	Detached
3. Competent	Context-free and situational	Chosen	Analytical	Detached understanding and deciding. Involved in outcome
4. Proficient	Context-free and situational	Experienced	Analytical	Involved understanding. Detached deciding
5. Expert	Context-free and situational	Experienced	Intuitive	Involved

**Figure 13** Five Stages of Skill Acquisition (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1988, p. 50, author's table)

situation. In the early stages, a situation cannot be perceived in its entirety but is seen as “a compilation of equally relevant bits”. With experience, a more holistic view is developed, and relevant parts can be seen (Benner, 1982, p. 402). Novices lack “any coherent sense of the overall task” and thus judge their performance by how well they follow rules. This changes to a “holistic template matching” in which proficient and expert practitioners perceive a situation based on their vast pool of experiences (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1988, p. 22).

The first three stages are akin to problem solving strategies, but the following stages are marked by “a rapid, fluid, involved kind of behaviour”, which is quite unlike the “slow, detached reasoning of the problem-solving process” (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1988, p. 27). At the competent level, practitioners begin to perceive more context-free as well as situational elements. As they encounter numerous situations that differ from each other in small ways for which there is no script, they must make decisions about which plan to adopt, without being able to predict the outcome with any certainty (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 2005). Competent individuals therefore start to feel responsible for their decisions and become “emotionally involved” in the outcomes of the situation and this is “not easily forgotten”

(Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1988, p. 26). Proficient practitioners recognise the essential aspects of a situation from a deep involvement and from the memory of similar situations (see earlier discussion on skilled intuition). Despite this intuitive understanding, proficient practitioners still analyse situations and possible plans and outcomes in a detached manner (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1988, pp. 28-29). Experts, on the other hand, simply know what to do “based on mature and practiced understanding” and this usually works, except in unfamiliar situations. Through their extensive experience, they have not only memorised individual situations, but have accumulated similar patterns into whole groups of situations.

However, the way practitioners operate is similar whether beginners or experts, when “facing an unfamiliar situation” (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 2005, p. 788). At this point, both must rely on deliberation that involves reflection on intuitions (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1988) and even on rules, though experts do not normally “calculate, or solve problems, or even think” (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 2005, p. 788). Such “skilled analytical ability” is employed when “the expert gets a wrong take or a wrong grasp of the situation and finds that events and behaviors are not occurring according to expectations” (Benner, 1982, p. 406). Therefore, at the expertise level, both inferential (intuitive) and deliberative (analytical) reasoning and rationalities are required, whereas novices largely rely on calculative reasoning (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 2005). As skill “is measured by the performer’s ability to act appropriately in situations that might once have been problems but are no longer problems” (and therefore no longer require analytic reflection in routinised action), the risk of applying analytic reflection to all situations is that it could leave a practitioner in a state of “perpetual beginner by encouraging dependence on rules and analysis, thereby blocking the acquisition of expertise” (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1988, p. 156).

The model by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1988, 2005) and Benner (1982) is seen as “the most advanced and influential model of skill acquisition” and it was ground-breaking for practice

theories (Dall'Alba and Sandberg, 2006, p. 386) and new perspectives in cognition (Hutto and Sánchez-García, 2015). It is widely cited and underpins research in many fields, including social work (e.g. Whittaker, 2018; Devaney et al., 2017). Devaney and colleagues (2017, p. 2378) for example, found evidence of newly qualified practitioners being in the process of moving from 'context-free' rules to 'situational rules' based on an integration of "both technical and practical knowledge in forming judgements and making decisions". They found that this change includes many uncertainties and leads to a 'beginner dip' in relation to confidence in making decisions.

Critiques of the model point to its individualistic outlook and narrow focus on perception and routinised action (Knorr Cetina, 2005; Eraut, 1994). Eraut is concerned that it is not sufficiently considering

"the increasing occurrence of novel and complex situations that require a problem solving approach involving an explicit search for relevant knowledge, the collection of further evidence and critical reasoning" (Eraut, 2009b, p. 4).

Dall'Alba and Sandberg (2006) critique the original research methodology by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1988) because they did not apply a longitudinal approach and therefore overlooked competence as emergent and as having temporality. Based on Benner's (1982) observation that competence in nursing emerges after two or three years and proficiency, after three to five years, Jarvis (2012, p. 87) argues that this poses significant questions in relation to current rapid changing knowledge and practice environments. Jarvis warns that "not every practitioner moves through this progression" and "for some, each procedure is the mere repetition of the previous one so that we can say that some practitioners have twenty-five years of experience while others have one year of experience twenty-five times". Similarly, Dall'Alba and Sandberg (2006, p. 389) state that the "focus on stages veils more fundamental aspects of development" and "directs attention away from the skill that is being developed". They point to the importance of an embodied "understanding of professional practice" that

“constitutes an unfolding ‘professional way-of-being’” in an “unfolding circularity”<sup>6</sup> (Dall’Alba and Sandberg, 2006, p. 389). In other words, understanding of, and in, professional practice is a central dimension and has profound effects on the ability of professionals to progress in their development (see also earlier discussed ‘professionalism orientation’ Evans, 2008). Devaney et al. (2017) argue that a beginners’ dip in professional development should be expected and Fook et al. (2000 in Devaney et al., 2017) have shown that Australian social workers demonstrated increased confidence about their tasks only after two to three years after qualification. This suggests that the development of expertise is not as linear as the Professional Capabilities Framework in England might suggest (Devaney et al., 2017).

Related to the understanding of skilled intuition is an educational approach that has its roots in case-based reasoning. The associated learning approaches go back to the work of Kolodner (1992). Essentially, learning from a case-based reasoning perspective first extends learner’s knowledge through interpretation and labelling of new experiences, which are then assimilated into memory as illness scripts. Second, it makes old experiences more usable and accessible through reinterpretation and relabelling of these illness scripts. Third, it enables the generation of generalisations in relation to many experiences (Tawfik and Kolodner, 2016). I return to this approach in more depth in the second part of this section.

Both Jarvis’ (2009) and Illeris’ (2010; 2009a; 2009) understanding of learning is rooted in psychological understandings. They are rooted in practice-based concepts such as embodiment, the lifeworld and the person-in-the-world that are enacted in external and

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<sup>6</sup> Illeris (2009) in discussing Mezirow’s ‘frame of reference’ points out that a frame involves both a habit of mind and a worldview. A frame of reference is therefore akin to a way of knowing. Markauskaite and Goodyear (2017) also refer to the epistemological process that involves reforming our meaning-forming. In this not only meaning is formed and changed but also the very form by which we are creating meanings. It is a change in the epistemology.

internal processes and they are both concerned with learning vis a vis practice situations or episodes.

The discussion of the development of competence from a Dreyfusian and a case-based reasoning perspective, highlights that with expanding experience, rational analytical ways of being are replaced by more intuitive ones, although deliberation in relation to novel situations remains important. But Knorr Cetina (2005) argues that knowledge-based (epistemic) practices that conceive practices as based on human skills or habits and on routines alone, do not adequately explain the dynamic nature of knowledge work. She argues instead for a relational epistemic practice in which subjects and objects play an important part and are linked.

#### *Practice perspective in socio-cultural theories*

Theories that take on a sociocultural position focus on participation and highlight “the social or relational nature of work and learning” (Hopwood, 2014, p. 351). Lave and Wenger’s (1991) work is an example of this and their work has led to “key shifts in the sociocultural developments” and to the “interest in and expansion of the concept of practice” (Hopwood, 2014, p. 351). Wenger’s (1998) social theory of learning conceptualises “learning as a socially constituted experience of meaning making” and locates “this experience in the relation between the person and the social world as they constitute each other” (Interview with Etienne Wenger in Farnsworth et al., 2016, p. 142). Central to this, is the notion of CoPs with its roots in “accounts of the social nature of human learning inspired by anthropology and social theory” (Wenger, 2010, p. 179), thus shifting the focus from pedagogy and teaching to engagement in practice (Duguid, 2008).

Important to note here is that “engagement in social contexts involves a dual process of meaning making” (Wenger, 2010, p. 180) that involves ‘participation and reification’. The

produced reifications in the form of physical and conceptual artefacts (words, tools, books, concepts, methods, stories, documents, and so on) reflect the shared experience and offer focal points around which the negotiation of meaning becomes organised (Wenger, 1998).

There can be no “meaningful learning in social contexts” without their interplay:

“Artefacts without participation do not carry their own meaning; and participation without artefacts is fleeting, unanchored, and uncoordinated. But participation and reification are not locked into each other. At each moment of engagement in the world, we bring them together anew to negotiate and renegotiate the meaning of our experience.” (Wenger, 2010, p. 180)

In organisational settings, a large proportion of reifications involved in the local practice come from outside. These can be, for example, in the form of instruments, procedures or theories. Reification in this case "must be appropriated into a local process in order to become meaningful" (Wenger, 1998, p. 60). While reification can be helpful as part of forming understanding, it can also stand in the way of a deeper comprehension when, for example, terms are used without much consideration or in-depth knowledge of their meaning. The key is to understand reifications as mediating tools which enable the learning and meaning-making process by recognising that knowledge arises from the discussions we have around mediating artefacts (Eraut, 2013).

Learning in a CoP emphasises participation in shared practices (Wenger, 1998) and landscapes of practice that involve personal trajectories through multiple communities (Hutchinson et al., 2015). Therefore, boundary crossing and boundary encounters are important facets of learning (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Participation thus not only implies local engagement, but also “a more encompassing process of being active participants in the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to these communities” shaping what we do, who we are and how we understand what we do (Wenger, 2009, pp. 210-211). There is great potential to generate learning in boundary

processes if they are systematically focussed on, rather than “assuming or seeking an unproblematic applicability of knowledge across practices”. The integration of different perspectives “can enhance the potential for reflexivity in the practices involved: it is difficult for communities of practice to be deeply reflective unless they engage with the perspective of other practices” (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 19). Furthermore, such learning is a two-way process, in which for example theory can be considered to offer a critical stance toward practice and vice versa. Key questions to be considered are how evidence translates into practice “without robbing practice of its own engaged logic”; what kind of “boundary processes would facilitate this translation” and what kind of “local reflective communities can help research be used productively in practice” (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 19).

Such perspective taking is supported by three modes of identification. Besides engagement in practice, imagination allows us to see beyond our created images of the world:

“If you work as a social worker in a given city, you know that there are countless other social workers in other contexts and you can use your imagination to create a picture of all these social workers and see yourself as one of them.” (Wenger, 2010, p. 184).

Imagination thus enables social workers to “locate and orient” themselves, to see themselves from a different perspective, to “reflect on their situation, and to explore new possibilities” (Wenger, 2010, p. 184). In doing so, the reifications of others play a crucial role which “can create relations of identification that are as significant as those derived from engagement”. Alignment as the third mode of identification ensures that our “activities are coordinated, that laws are followed, or that intentions are communicated” and that our competence is aligned to the practices of the community (Wenger, 2010, p. 184). These three modes of identification, described from the individual perspective described above, are also relevant for the whole community. They allow a community to get engaged in other

practices, to see beyond its own borders and align itself with other practices and perspectives. Without these, a community could not innovate and probably would not be able to survive (Wenger, 2010, p. 184).

The work by Lave and Wenger (1991) and particularly, subsequent developments by Wenger (1998) and Wenger and colleagues (2002, 2009), have been criticised for being presented both as theoretical work and management methods (Duguid, 2008; Lave, 2008). Lave (2008, pp. 64-65) also takes issue with the cognitivist and radical constructivist misrepresentations of her and Wenger's (1991) work. In my view, Wenger's (1998) and Wenger and colleagues' (2002, 2009) ambiguous representation of the CoP concept (as both a theoretical category and a social arrangement), which is seen as lacking conceptual clarity (Handley et al., 2006) has not helped. However, there is another side to this story, which is that a theory needs to have a purpose, and this is manifested in practice. Wenger-Trayner argues in an interview with Farnsworth (2016, p. 144) that this is the reason why he has been doing "work with organisations" but he acknowledges that this may have added to the confusion. This theorising and at the same time being involved in the world, is in my mind a valid viewpoint. It is a creative tension that helps to integrate knowing and doing and fosters innovation and also helps to grasp a concept.

### *Emergence in practice theories*

In the third practice-based approach, "emergence replaces participation" as a dominant framework and "questions of temporality are expanded" by rejecting "linear chronological or precedent/antecedent temporal models" (Hopwood, 2014, p. 351). This comes to the fore in Wenger's (1998) social theory of learning in which he defines learning as emergent with practice. His view of identity formation in practice particularly underlines the temporal nature of both individual identity and the constitution of the practice in which the learning occurs. In addition, the "importance of material or non-human world is foregrounded"

(Hopwood, 2014, p. 351), especially in some post-humanist approaches (Fenwick et al., 2012) and the notion of reifications as boundary objects highlights this. The creation of artefacts is a way to embody “experience and other forms of knowledge” and the “tangibility and persistence of these knowledge-laden artefacts” can move beyond the temporal and spatial settings in which they were co-produced (Carvalho and Goodyear, 2018, p. 41).

Overall, in these approaches, the body “receives more explicit attention”. As learning and knowing are “about what people do and say”, they are “bodily” and involve the “material worlds” in which these practices unfold” (Hopwood, 2014, p. 351). For example, Goodyear and Markauskaite (2019) refer to Kilpi (2016, p. 34) who argues that work “is figuring out how to define and solve a particular problem and then scaling up the solution in a reflective and iterative way – with technology and alongside other people”. Thus, “creating new understandings – new knowledge” involves “working with other people and using appropriate epistemic tools and methods” (Goodyear and Markauskaite, 2019, p. 44).

In social work, where practitioners need to be able to address ill-structured and wicked problems, it is “not enough to be able to learn, to manage one’s own learning and to adopt culturally approved methods of inquiry”, rather “people have to become more adept at designing inquiry” itself (Goodyear and Markauskaite, 2019, p. 44; Brook et al., 2016).

Therefore, learning needs to pay attention not only to how knowledge is integrated and how new knowledge is co-created, but also to innovation processes that are able to address the unknown, complex and uncertain situations that social workers encounter through playing epistemic games. These “games of discourse and mind”, together with the “construction of material epistemic environments” (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017, p. 553), enable the design of inquiry that allows practice and learning to emerge together. Markauskaite and Goodyear (2017) coined the term epistemic fluency to describe these capacities. They state that

“Working on real-world problems usually requires the combination of different kinds of specialised and context-dependent knowledge, as well as different ways of knowing. People who are flexible and adept with respect to different ways of knowing about the world can be said to possess epistemic fluency.” (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017, p. 1)

In sum, these three strands define learning from a practice-based perspective with an increasing shift in the analysis “from individuals to practices and their relationships” (Hopwood, 2014, p. 352). They share the aim “to dispel entrenched and problematic notions of learning” associated with acquisition and transfer models and “go beyond” binary concepts of for example, mind and body (Hopwood, 2014, p. 351). Practice theorists therefore do not primarily consider knowledge, but are rather concerned with “knowing”, which is “a performative rather than cognitive notion” and knowledge is seen as “something that people do together”. Knowing therefore becomes an “embodied social process, human and material, aesthetic, emotive and ethical, and above all, embedded in practice”. Therefore, “questions of learning become questions of knowing” and educators need to consider “how knowing evolves” and is “tied to enactments” in practice (Hopwood, 2014, p. 351). Hopwood posits that learning is not something that is “temporally separable” from practice. Rather, he argues that “learning is a feature of practice, and without practices, there can be no learning”, and neither can learning “be specified in advance” but “performance and learning emerge together”. So, for example, when professionals “work in partnership with families” they need to develop “negotiated, customised forms of support that respond to the circumstances, priorities and strengths of each family” and this requires learning, which is tied up with practice (Hopwood, 2014, p. 352). Consequently, from this perspective there is no boundary between ‘theory’ and ‘practice’; rather, ‘knowing’ and ‘doing’ are mutually constituted in social work through the integration of practice, knowledge and ethics. Every social worker, whether in practice or academia, is part of a professional and/or

social science community in which they must negotiate the meaning of their activities, their knowing and their values dialogically.

A practice-based perspective on learning has therefore profound implications for education and CPD in social work and for the way learning is organised in and for practice. These implications are considered in the next section.

### **Practice-based perspectives of education and continuous professional development**

The practice-based philosophy of educational approaches offers an understanding of how we can support social workers at different stages of professional expertise, knowledgeability and experience to develop, maintain and adapt actionable knowledge and knowledgeable action. The recent emphasis on social work qualifying education in England (e.g. Hanley, 2019; Narey, 2014) sees the initial qualifying education as the reason for “all that is wrong in social work practice” (Devaney et al., 2017, p. 2379); and further locates problems in lacking characteristics of “current students and social workers” (Hanley, 2019, p. 7). The solution to this is espoused in the dominant discourse that sees the answer to this ‘crisis’ in the provision of fast-track programmes (Hanley, 2019). This is an individualistic perspective that mainly focuses on qualifying education and thereby fails to acknowledge that initial education equips social workers with the capability at entry novice level but is by no means an end in itself (Croisdale-Appleby, 2014).

Faced with rapid social change in our societies in the globalised world, the exponential increase of published research together with technological advancements require professionals to continually adapt to new social and technological circumstances and take account of new knowledge generated. Continuous development of good practice thus depends on professionals being able to “continue learning both on and off the job” and this

relies on the “quality of initial professional education” and on the quality of practice and learning opportunities for subsequent work-based learning (Eraut, 1994, p. 41). This requires multifaceted and systemic approaches with a “range of integrated responses” (Devaney et al., 2017, p. 2379).

Stakeholders in social work have different perspectives on education and CPD. On the one hand, employers express a concern that following qualification, graduates are not workplace ready, as “universities are much better at teaching abstract conceptual knowledge (‘theory’) than they are at preparing students to work on real-world problems (‘practice’)” (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017, p. 27). On the other hand, academics argue that skills and knowledge developed in training and education are not supported by practice environments (e.g. Forrester et al., 2018).

CPD for professional groups is therefore a prominent issue but overall, professional learning is conceptualised as “individualised and acquisition-focused” and is therefore not reflective of contemporary practice-based understandings of professional practice and learning (Reich et al., 2015, p. 131). Boud and Hager (2012, p. 18) argue that “CPD must be located in what professionals do and how they do it” and suggest that, rather than using the metaphors of ‘acquisition’ and ‘transfer’, CPD needs rethinking through the metaphors of ‘participation’, ‘construction’ and ‘becoming’. In their view, professional development involves continuous learning in relation to practitioners’ own capacities, but this is always shaped at least in part by the “happenings in their particular professional environment” (Boud and Hager, 2012, p. 20). Therefore, “professional learning is an interaction of the professional with their particular professional work environment” (Boud and Hager, 2012, p. 21). Such interaction also includes virtual interaction through networked learning, which is defined as

“learning in which ICT is used to promote connections: between one learner and other learners; between learners and tutors; between a learning community and its

learning resources.” (Goodyear, Banks, Hodgson & McConnell, 2004 in Goodyear, 2005, p. 83)

Research points to links between CPD activities at an organisational level and recruitment and retention of social workers. Webb and Carpenter (2012, p. 1235) in a systematic evidence review found that overall “interventions addressing organisational and administrative factors (rather than individual employee factors) produced stronger effects” in line with previous research into the factors related to staff turnover. Evidence also points to a connection between a positive learning culture and “lower staff turnover, improved quality of service and outcomes for service users, as well as with increased job satisfaction” (Baginsky, 2013, p. 17).

On the other hand, Forrester and colleagues (2018, p. 188) found that even a well-designed CPD training programme does not translate into practice because essentially, organisational “culture eats training for breakfast”. They therefore conclude that a “focus not just on helping individuals to improve their practice but also on changing the organisational contexts which they work in” is essential (Forrester et al., 2018, p. 189). However, a “culture shift of this magnitude requires substantial investment in the training and professional development of all social workers” and relies on a “shift to reflective and relational practice” in workplaces (Baginsky, 2013, p. 20). While the social work sector sees the development of a learning culture with meaningful and relevant learning and development opportunities as very significant, it is also perceived as difficult to achieve due to financial constraints (Baginsky, 2013). CPD activities thus need to be embedded in an approach that also targets the development of quality of practice and this is more effective if it does not solely focus on individual knowledge and skills acquisition.

These links between the working environment and professional development are further supported by various theories and empirical findings that suggest that learning “does not

happen in isolation but is embedded within the context of daily work practice” (Segers et al., 2018, p. 4). For example, Eraut (2013, p. 213) in researching the learning of professionals, discovered that the majority of learning events -“at least 80%”- are informal. Informal learning is an established part of social work education (practice placements and ASYE) and allows students and “early career workers to observe and listen to other people at work and to participate in their activities and hence learn new practices and new perspectives” (Eraut, 2013, p. 213). This enables them to gain a sense of different kinds of knowledge and expertise, including other people’s tacit knowledge. It is achieved through “a lot of observation as well as discussion” (Eraut, 2013, p. 214).

One approach to professional learning is case-based reasoning education, which broadly involves interpretative and problem-solving approaches. The interpretative approach is concerned with instances of practice situations that are problematic and need deeper engagement with the situation to identify possible solutions or alternative courses of action. The problem-solving approach is useful in developing a deeper understanding of a situation and to support the making of defensible decisions (Kolodner, 1992).

Case-based reasoning education has been developed for medical pre-clinical education in the Netherlands over the last 27 years (ten Cate et al., 2018) and is concerned with clinical reasoning and decision-making (van Loon et al., 2018). It is rooted in problem-based learning and takes small group active learning approaches from it (ten Cate, 2018, p. 14). There is some comparative research (RCT with dental students) showing that individual affect (enthusiastic, cheerful, active, tense, engaged, energetic) was significantly higher in the case-based reasoning learning groups compared with problem-based learning groups and that case-based reasoning education led to higher scores in exams and was highly appreciated among students. The study authors concluded that case-based reasoning education particularly benefited students with lower academic performance (Krupat et al., 2016).

Tawfik and Kolodner (2016) offer a valuable discussion of the implications for problem-based learning that can be drawn from case-based reasoning education. They argue that it is about supporting practitioners to develop “the art of coping with clinical problems as they are encountered in practice” (ten Cate, 2018, p. 3). Learning from experience in case-based reasoning education thereby occurs as a by-product of problem solving (Aamodt and Plaza, 1994). The aim of such learning is to support the development of ‘illness scripts’ (mental representations of diseases) and clinical reasoning skills and a “diagnostic thinking habit” (ten Cate, 2018, p. 3).

To support the initial building of illness scripts, cases should be incorporated early on in the curriculum, starting with simple cases and moving to more complex ones. “Working with whole, but not too complex, cases” initially supports recognition and memorisation of “common patterns” (ten Cate, 2018, pp. 12-13). This helps learners to manage their cognitive load, as the human working memory is limited and cannot process many chunks of information related to complex cases, as this would overload the capacity of the working memory. Illness scripts enable learners to see illnesses as units of information, rather than many potentially unrelated individual symptoms. These illness scripts are memorised in the long-term memory as prototype cases that can easily be remembered and adapted with increasing experience (ten Cate, 2018). This is important in relation to the development of skilled intuition.

Kahneman and Klein (2009) suggest that skilled intuition is dependent on the practice environment. When making decisions, professionals need to be able to recognise the environmental factors and learn from them. They thereby distinguish between high-validity and zero-validity environments, whereby a high validity environment is necessary to develop skilled intuition. Skill is developed through “prolonged practice and feedback that is both rapid and unequivocal” and thus leads to learning. Munro (2011) suggests that skilled

intuition can be developed through engagement in practice and joint reflection. In contrast, it cannot be developed in unpredictable environments (Kahneman and Klein, 2009, p. 524). Social workers are confronted with ill-structured and wicked problems in often unpredictable environments. Downie and Macnaughton (2009, p. 322) for example argue that in psychiatry, uncertainty is linked to the difficulty in making a clear diagnosis, prognosis, treatment and the patients' own uncertainty and the same can be said for social work (e.g. Munro, 2019, 2011; Becker-Lenz and Müller, 2009; Schön, 1983). Therefore, we cannot predict future actions of humans "because of the complexity of the causal influences on the individual" (Munro, 2019, p. 125). These arguments suggest that social work is enacted in unpredictable environments. Considering these points made in relation to the development of skilled intuition and the social work practice environment, I wonder how far social workers can actually develop skilled intuition. Perhaps this is an area that should be researched further.

While 'natural' and informal learning in the practice context is important, Markauskaite and Goodyear (2017, p. 489) argue that "the purpose of higher education is 'education' not just 'plain' natural professional development". Indeed, Eraut found that CPD was important in relation to practitioners' "ability to think and talk about their work" because it provided participants firstly, with "a vocabulary for talking about aspects of their experiences which had been previously difficult to discuss" and secondly, with "concepts and theories which helped them to make sense of their experience and understand issues and alternative perspectives more clearly" (Eraut, 2013, p. 214). This was found to be particularly important for mid-career professionals as they could build on their previous experience and were enabled to shift the perspective. In addition, Eraut points to the importance of mediating artefacts as focal points for enabling discussion and argues that "bringing people together with a series of mediating artefacts can create new approaches to important problems at a local level" (Eraut, 2013, p. 217). This notion of artefacts is related to the notion of reification

as proposed by Wenger (1998), although Wenger sees reification as not just an artefact but also a co-creation process.

Following on from these points, I would argue that CPD should not be conceptualised as either work or university based. Similarly, Higgins (2014) argues that each of these settings is based on their own 'signature pedagogy' and that they are conflictual. Shulman (2005, p. 58) argued that "a sound professional pedagogy must seek balance, giving adequate attention to all the dimensions of practice – the intellectual, the technical, and the moral. Pedagogy is compromised whenever any one of these dimensions is unduly subordinated to the others ...". Within social work, Shulman's (2005) framework has been influential in the United States and Australia (Ledger et al., 2017, p. 62) and it has been claimed that practice learning (field education) is its signature pedagogy. Others have argued that this is "a necessary but not sufficient component" (Earls Larrison and Knorr, 2013, p. 204). I therefore argue that what is needed is an integration of learning across the academy and practice.

Similarly, Boud and Hager (2012, p. 254) argue that learning and development cannot be "simply prompted by organisational interventions", nor can formal learning be replaced by informal learning, or vice versa. A challenge in rethinking CPD and education in social work is that we cannot simply distinguish between "informal learning initiatives that can be formalised and/or fostered and those that can and/or should not" (Boud and Hager, 2012, p. 254). Higgins therefore suggests that "the social work professional community (educators and practitioners)" should start with the question of pedagogy "for a radical challenge to the conflict of the existing pedagogies of the university and practice" (Higgins, 2014, p. 75). Similarly, Webber and colleagues (2014, p. 637) propose that to address the gap between university and practice, moving the two closer together can "enhance the collaborative potential of academics, practitioners and service users to work together for the mutual and

collaborative development of the profession”. My view is that practice-based perspectives of learning offer such a way to re-think professional education and CPD.

Markauskaite and Goodyear (2017) suggest five educational approaches that seek to address these challenges and to enable professionals to develop epistemic fluency. These approaches are dependent on the types of problems practitioners encounter and social work education and CPD needs to support the development of an ability to deal with both ill-structured and wicked problems (see Chapter 2). Markauskaite and Goodyear (2017, p. 554) distinguish between systematic and systemic educational approaches. The first is akin to a step-by-step approach, whereby each part of a whole is examined in a linear way, whereas the latter pays attention to the “interconnections between elements within the larger context of the whole”, which requires a methodical approach that focusses on the relationships between these elements.

Systematic approaches that support professionals in dealing with well-structured problems can be summed up under ‘integrating knowledge’. These approaches are concerned with supporting learners to integrate formal conceptual knowledge with “every day, real-world knowledge” and includes enabling professionals to “relate formal academic knowledge to problems of practice” (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017, p. 555). I argue that this is relevant in social work education and CPD for professional novices, even though they are dealing with ill-structured problems. Examples of such approaches are Case-based reasoning (e.g. Kolodner, 1992), Case-based clinical reasoning education (ten Cate, 2018) and situated learning approaches (Anderson et al., n.d.).

Case-based learning approaches aim to build an understanding of illness through mental representations of diseases while at the same time supporting the acquisition of a reasoning habit (ten Cate et al., 2018). Thus, this way of learning is fundamentally situation or case-based, rather than content-based (Lyons, 2011, p. 373). Interestingly, case-based

educational programmes focus their learning on “the clinical encounter that starts at the moment when a patient presents at the doctor’s office, until the moment that an end is reached in this contact” (van Loon et al., 2018, p. 123). Situated learning is based on the premise that first, learning is centred on real situations that learners can expect to encounter regularly; second, that learning prepares them to recognise and practice in similar situations; and third, that learners’ activities include co-productive dialogue to define, perceive and solve real world issues (Anderson, et al., 1996).

The other systematic approach for ill-structured problems is concerned with “conceptual mastery and flexible knowledge application” (Spiro et al., 2012, p. 108). Learners need to develop their “ability to engage in inquiry” and this can be achieved through “conducting inquiry through playing epistemic games” and “collaborative inquiry” (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017, p. 555).

The systemic approaches develop practitioners’ ability to deal with tame or wicked problems. The ‘learning by designing knowledge’ approach addresses tame problems with an emphasis on ‘knowledge construction’ for encountered situations and challenges that require co-creation of professional knowledge. Capability to deal with wicked problems, on the other hand, is developed through ‘learning by designing inquiry’ that involves supporting learners to design “novel methods of inquiry” that are “appropriate to the needs of emerging problems” (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017, p. 555).

These four approaches to professional learning are closely aligned to earlier discussed notions of reflexive professionalism. They offer a way to support professionals to be able to first understand “knowledge from different conceptual and case perspectives” and then fosters the ability to construct from this understanding “a knowledge ensemble tailored to the needs of the understanding or problem-solving situation at hand” (Spiro, 2012, p. 105). Whereas ‘knowledge integration’ and ‘designing knowledge’ focus on knowledge,’ playing

epistemic games' and 'designing inquiry' are concerned with knowing. I argue that the first two can be seen in terms of Piaget's notions of 'assimilation', which is concerned with integration and 'accommodation' related to (co)construction (Illeris, 2009a). Illeris (2009b, p. 106) therefore suggests that "learning processes should be arranged and practised in ways that make room for assimilative, accommodative and also transformative learning, if applicable". Similarly, Markauskaite and Goodyear (2017, p. 555) stress that all four of these educational approaches are important and they suggest that in addition to these, a fifth approach that supports professionals' ability to construct and configure their epistemic environment, is essential. This includes ways of addressing problems with others through "deep collective learning and joint action" that can be achieved in CPD through joint investigation by students and practitioners with the aim of making changes in their professional work (Goodyear and Markauskaite, 2019, p. 48). Likewise, Illeris (2009b, p. 106) argues that the learning environment needs to "include possibilities for ... reflectivity". Illeris concludes that

"competence development demands active learning patterns that are problem- and practice-oriented and involve relevant judgement and decision making as well as individual and social reflection." (Illeris, 2009b, p. 110)

For Goodyear and Markauskaite (2019, p. 50), making "personal sense" of learners' experiences involves appropriating ideas, methods and instruments, which is "often emotionally charged and deeply personal" because the "processes, outcomes, feelings and intuitions" are "very hard to pin down and articulate". However, this does not mean that concepts, ideas and methods that can be made explicit, should not be shared. Indeed, they argue that reflecting on these can "stimulate fresh thinking about the interface between academic and workplace learning" (Goodyear and Markauskaite, 2019, p. 50). Therefore, they conclude that

"Some things that need to be learned benefit from time spent embedded in the workplace. Other things are best learned through direct instruction and guided

practice, especially when tacit knowledge embedded in practice has been rendered explicit through academic analysis.” (Goodyear and Markauskaite, 2019, p. 51)

From a practice-based perspective, therefore, the task is how to first link the principles that underpin theoretical constructs (such as propositional knowledge) with the “multimodal experiential constructs of knowledgeable action” and secondly, how to connect the different teaching and learning practices and environments so that “tasks for professional learning are simultaneously professional (actionable, situated), conceptual and epistemic” (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017, p. 603). I argue that the Key Situation Model offers a framework for both and this is discussed in the next sections.

### **The Key Situation Model**

In this section, I present the current iteration of the Key Situation Model along the three levels of the ACAD wireframe: the macro dimension is concerned with how the pedagogic philosophy can be formed into an overarching strategy for professional learning and CPD; the meso level seeks to translate this strategy into a local design and finally, the micro level focusses on the design for the actual learning space and time (Yeoman, 2015; Goodyear, 1999).

When developing the Key Situation Model, Tov and colleagues (Tov et al., 2013, 2016a; Tschopp et al., 2016; Staempfli et al., 2012) moved through these different levels. They initially developed a university module, which involved design for learning at micro and meso levels and over time, the design was extended to an international network (macro level). The Key Situation Model offers approaches for a range of purposes that together seek to support knowledgeable and ethical practice. The three main purposes are a) a blended collaborative situation-based learning, b) knowledge co-creation and c) knowledge sharing.

My focus in this thesis is foregrounding the implementation of these three approaches to social work practice organisations but the model can also be used in qualifying education. To break down the complexity of the Key Situation Model, I have summarised the main elements and purposes with the help of ACAD wireframe (see Figure 14):

	<b>set design</b>	<b>social design</b>	<b>epistemic design</b>
<b>Design for networked learning - Key Situation Network</b> (Macro Level)	<b>Buildings and technology:</b> Development and maintenance of the virtual Key Situation platform to enable local implementations of the Key Situation Model.	<b>Organisational forms:</b> Developing people, communities and a network to enable the implementation of the Key Situation Model in different organisations and the participation in CoPs and the network.	<b>Stakeholder intentions:</b> Development of design options of the model for varying stakeholders and a range of purposes (blended collaborative learning, knowledge co-creation and sharing).
<b>Design for learning within organisations</b> (Meso Level)	<b>Allocation/use of space:</b> Adaption of available physical and virtual spaces for chosen purposes in the specific setting.	<b>Community:</b> Adapting the social design options of the Key Situation Model for the chosen purposes.	<b>Curriculum:</b> Alignment of individual and organisational learning and practice development needs with the situation-based curriculum of the model.
<b>Design for learning at learning time-space</b> (Micro Level)	<b>Artefacts, tools and texts:</b> Resources to support chosen learning, knowledge co-creation or knowledge sharing approach(es).	<b>Roles and division of labour:</b> Social arrangements to support chosen learning, knowledge co-creation or knowledge sharing approach(es).	<b>Tasks, sequencing and pace</b> Reflective learning steps in relation to the chosen learning, knowledge co-creation or knowledge sharing approach(es).

*Figure 14 Activity Centred Analysis and Design of the Key Situation Model (author's table based on Carvalho and Yeoman, 2018, p. 1126)*

In the following sections, I describe the set, social and epistemic design for the implementation of blended collaborative situation-based learning, knowledge co-creation and knowledge sharing in practice organisations. I draw on published work in English (Staempfli et al., 2016; Staempfli et al., 2012) and the main German publications (Tov et al.,

2013, 2016a). Furthermore, I refer to unpublished reports produced in the #keysituation project (Tov et al., 2016b; Tschopp et al., 2016) and by the Association 'Network Key Situations in Social Work' (2016). Additional resources can be found on [www.keysituations.net](http://www.keysituations.net) and [www.schluesselsituationen.ch](http://www.schluesselsituationen.ch).

### **Design for networked learning - Key Situation Network (macro level)**

At the macro level, set, social and epistemic design is concerned with the development of an overarching strategy and adequate resources to support the implementation of the Key Situation Model's blended reflective learning, knowledge co-production and sharing options in organisations and universities. It is concerned with enabling collaborative and networked learning (Goodyear, 2005).

### ***Epistemic design***

The epistemic design at the macro level seeks to establish stakeholder intentions in social work. Key stakeholders at present are practice organisations, universities, individual social workers and students and key situation facilitators. The three developed purposes of the model (blended collaborative situation-based learning, knowledge co-creation and knowledge sharing) are based on an understanding of stakeholders' needs and the professional challenges outlined in the earlier chapters.

The overall strategy aims to "to develop an open learning culture, to enable sharing of situated knowledge and to expand the knowledge base in social work" (Staempfli, et al., 2016, p. 73). In addition, Staempfli, et al. (2016, p. 75-76) suggest that implementing the model in practice organisations:

- can inform a dialogue on quality (assurance) in social work organisations;

- enables practice educators and social work supervisors to benefit from both the platform and the reflection model in their work with students or qualified social workers;
- allows researchers to disseminate research findings by documenting these directly on the platform in key situations;
- provides students with an overview of the range of key situations in social work and
- the platform offers a flexible tool for sharing situated knowledge across the whole profession.

These aspects can be considered when thinking about the needs of an organisation or partnerships, when designing local implementations.

### *Social design*

In order to develop and support the implementation of the model in local settings, the attention at macro level turns to organisational forms. The Association 'Network Key Situations in Social Work' was founded in 2015 to establish an independent, not for profit and cooperative basis for the development of the Key Situation Model and to enable its implementation in different settings. The Association sees itself primarily as a core group within a network and operates on self-management principles (Laloux, 2014). Working as an agile organisation, it has developed a number of business models. Its primary function is to develop and support people, communities and the whole network to promote reflection and discourse on key situations in social work and to operate the Key Situation platform. The Association has an international membership (mainly from German speaking areas in Europe) and the board of the Association Network Key Situation in Social Work consists of both academics and practitioners (see Association under "Network Key Situations," 2019).

The Association has recently introduced a certification process for members. Certified members work on behalf of the Association and among other things, support universities and practice organisations to implement the Key Situation Model. Certified members have experience of facilitating learning based on the model; they demonstrate competent use of various tools on the Key Situation platform; they are active collaborators on the platform and in the network and have undergone a certification process via a portfolio route Network Key Situations in Social Work, 2019). They are key to supporting the Association in achieving its goals.

Both certified members and members of local steering groups within organisations who support local implementation, form part of the Key CoP at the level of the Association and ensure the connection between the various local CoPs and the Association is maintained. The aim is to ground the strategic development in learning from situated implementations and to ensure that these are supported adequately and can make full use of the Key Situation Model's potential for their own ends (Tschopp et al., 2016).

### *Set design*

Set design at the macro level is about buildings and technology. The Association has no buildings but operates and maintains the Key Situation platform to enable participation in the network and use of platform by individuals, organisations, universities and the social work profession as a whole.

The Key Situation platform was initially developed in the #keysituation research and development project in Switzerland between 2014 and 2016. The platform is based on Wiki technology, which is defined as “a system that allows one or more people to build up a corpus of knowledge in a set of interlinked web pages, using a process of creating and editing pages” (Franklin and Harmelen, 2007, p. 5). It is “an editable website that is created

incrementally by visitors working collaboratively” (Cole, 2009, p. 142), such as the online encyclopaedia Wikipedia. Tschopp and colleagues (2016) tested various Wiki tools in terms of data protection, goodness of fit for the purpose of the Key Situation Model, including suitability for both documentation and collaboration. The main consideration was that it should offer user-friendly features. Confluence by Atlassian<sup>7</sup> was found to be the best fit for both handling by users and administrators as it contains a simple WYSIWYG (‘what you see is what you get’) editor.

The platform is currently hosted by a provider in Switzerland that guarantees adherence to Swiss and European data protection regulations. Users can register individually or through a university or practice organisation. Registration is only open for qualified social workers and student social workers (Association Network Key Situations in Social Work, 2016). As the platform is protected, no data can be found or accessed by Internet search engines. On registration, every user must agree to a ‘Data Privacy Statement’ and ‘Terms of Use’ to safeguard both platform user data and data in relation to social work situations. Only anonymised situations are published (Tschopp et al., 2016). The German language spaces on the Key Situation platform have around 1500 users (“Network Key Situations,” 2019). Currently, the Association is investigating decentralised, locally implemented cloud-based options for the platform<sup>8</sup>. I am planning to develop an English platform or space(s) as a follow-up project to this thesis.

The platform is based on the principles of openness and participation and allows its users to access, comment on and create key situations. The Association has developed various platform spaces for the representation of key situations and reflections of specific situations under the key situation titles. The platform also offers collaborative community and

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<sup>7</sup> See <https://www.atlassian.com/software/confluence>

<sup>8</sup> <https://confluence.atlassian.com/confcloud/what-is-confluence-cloud-954243460.html>

discussion spaces. As the platform is only open to social workers it is a public space for the professional and academic communities but not for the general public. These collaborative spaces provide (dispersed) CoPs of the Key Situation Network the opportunity to work together. The platform can be configured with varying degrees of access to enable private and/or semi-public access and/or collaboration and these can be set for specific spaces on the platform and/or for different groups of people (to enable knowledge sharing, blended learning and/or or collaboration). Accessing the open spaces is free of charge (Tschopp et al., 2016).

A key to operating and maintaining the platform (including hosting, development and technology support), is to secure a stable financial basis. Technology support for practice organisations is offered through certified members and stewards employed by the Association. They work together with local partners to ensure that adequate first line technology support can be offered locally (Tschopp et al., 2016). This model is currently under review.

### **Design for learning within organisations (meso level)**

The focus on the meso level is how the Key Situation Model can be implemented locally in the context of an organisation. The attention thereby turns to local needs in relation to the curriculum, the available physical and virtual spaces, including the Key Situation platform, and the social arrangements that support learning, knowledge co-creation or sharing within the organisation. The situation-based curriculum needs to be aligned with professionals' and organisational learning and practice development needs; therefore, the key situations that practitioners in an organisation encounter are considered.

Implementation of the Key Situation Model in the local context of an organisation can either include the adoption of the whole model or of individual elements such as the reflective

learning model, or individual elements thereof, for example for the purpose of (reflective) supervision. The model can inform one off CPD activities or workshops for (newly qualified) social workers, students, etc. or it could be implemented as a whole systems approach to continuous CPD for social workers in the organisation that includes the whole reflective learning process (Tov et al., 2016). Furthermore, the Key Situation Model can inform a situation-based approach to knowledge co-creation and sharing. Whatever approach is taken, the design decisions seek to create “the assemblages and arrangements within which knowledge that has a universal status becomes part of a situated practice and situated practice becomes collective knowledge” (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017, pp. 120-121). The strategy employed is like a “broad-brush depiction of plans - of what should be done to achieve certain objectives” (Goodyear, 1999, p. 8).

The design for the implementation of the Key Situation Model in an organisation is based on cooperation and communication between members of the Association Network Key Situation in Social Work, who contribute their understanding, know-how and experience with the model and members of the local organisation. The description of the design, the purpose and the intended activities and outcomes thus serves a mutual benefit of promoting “a shared understanding of intentions and permit coordinated action” (Goodyear, 1999, p. 8).

### *Epistemic design*

The epistemic design is about achieving an alignment of professionals’ and local organisational learning and practice development needs with the situation-based curriculum of the model. The question is, in what way can the Key Situation Model help individual social workers and organisations to achieve good outcomes for their service users. To address this, decisions must be made about which areas of practice the practitioners and managers want to focus on. An organisation might want to support a particular team’s performance and

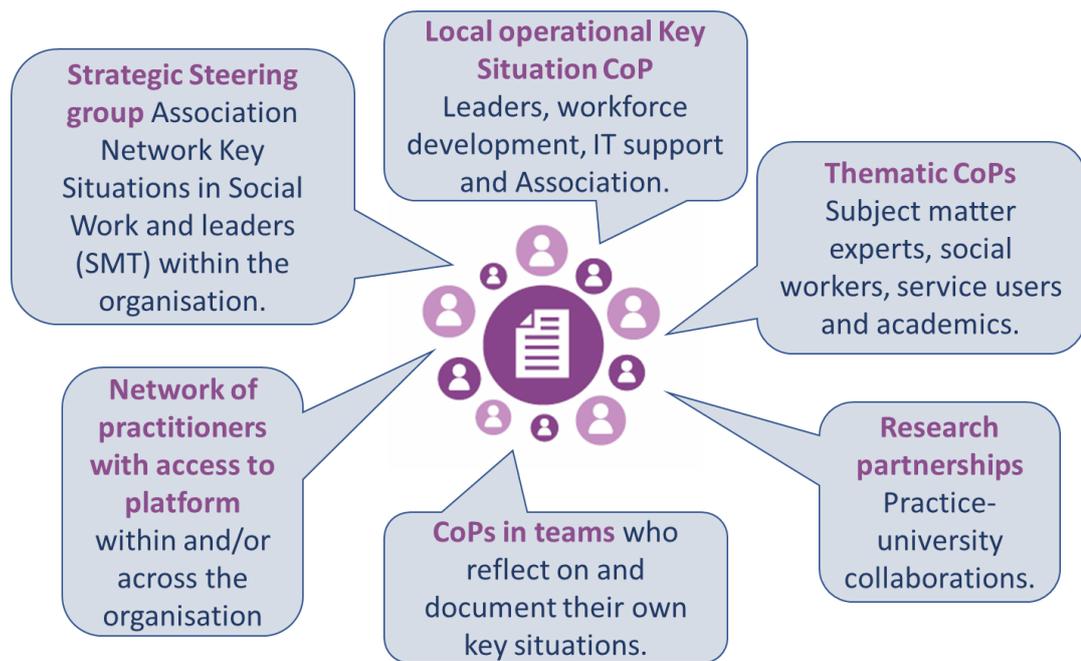
therefore choose to focus on the situations that the team regularly encounters. Or if the intention is to support knowledgeable and ethical practice across the whole organisation, then all key situations that social workers encounter in that setting might be relevant.

The Key Situation Model might be implemented as an approach to CPD, in which case the question might be which group of social workers are targeted (e.g. all social workers or only for student social workers or novices in the organisation - NQSWs or newly appointed staff). These decisions influence the ways in which the model is adapted to fit the local context. To enable members within an organisation to make use of the platform, training is necessary. A plan for the implementation is then worked out accordingly and the micro level design adapted in line with this.

It seems important to note that financial and time resources need to be considered. Tov and colleagues (2013) found that the varying contact and self-directed learning time in different iterations of the key situation module (with between 20 and 40 hours spent on the reflection and discussion of one situation) had an impact on the quality of the produced artefacts (key situation reflections).

### *Social design*

Depending on the activities and outcomes that are intended, social arrangements have to be designed to support these. The Key Situation Model suggests several possible ways of how to organise communities for the chosen purposes (ongoing reflective learning, knowledge co-creation and sharing) (Tschopp et al., 2016; Tov et al., 2013). These are all linked to notions of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) and range from CoPs as a guiding idea for groups of learners, to thematic CoPs as a guiding idea for knowledge co-creation and sharing in an organisation:

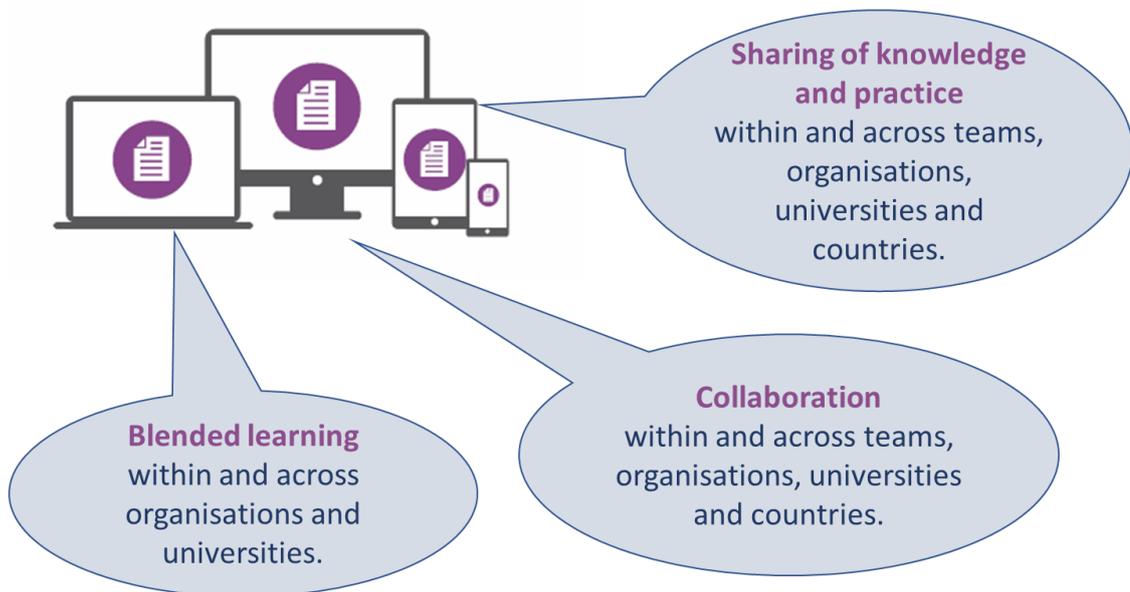


*Figure 15 Social arrangements to support local implementation of the Key Situation Model*

The different CoPs focus on different aspects. The steering group comprised of members of the Association Network Key Situation in Social Work and members of the leadership team of the local organisation develop a strategic plan for the implementation of the Key Situation Model locally. They make decisions in relation to the curriculum and the intended approaches to be adopted (blended reflective learning, knowledge creation and sharing). The steering group can be part of a partnership between a local university and a practice organisation. The local Key Situation CoP then takes an operational lead in developing these approaches in collaboration with the Association. This includes IT support from both the organisation and the Association. This local implementation group supports the activities and organises a range of activities (e.g. quality assurance of situations, enabling access to relevant resources such as the platform, journal articles, books, etc.). Thematic CoPs, research partnerships and CoPs in teams enable the knowledge co-creation and/or sharing. Finally, platform users form a loose network and can develop collaboration across boundaries of teams, organisations or across the whole profession.

### **Set design**

Design decisions in relation to the set consider the physical and virtual space arrangements required to support the chosen purposes in the specific setting. Three main functions are relevant here:



**Figure 16** Central functions of the Key Situation platform

To enable blended learning, knowledge creation and collaboration, the physical spaces required for the chosen approach(es) and the platform need to be considered and configured to support local participation and documentation.

In relation to the virtual environment, decisions need to be made to support individual access to the platform. Consideration needs to be given to data protection (e.g. review processes to ensure anonymity and confidentiality) and access through Wi-Fi networks (both on site and off site). IT support processes and resources need to be devised to address any challenges and to support the seamless use of the platform's functions. The Association contributes the know-how in relation to adapting the platform, including templates and processes (Tschopp et al., 2016).

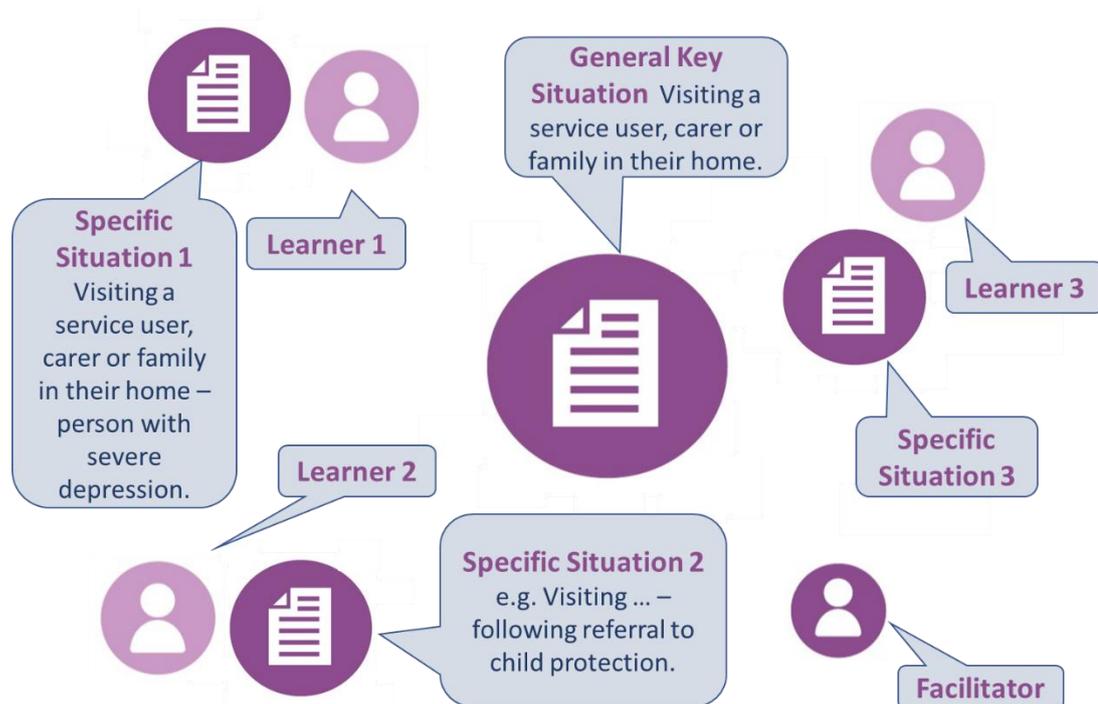
### **Design for learning at learning time and space (micro level)**

This section illustrates the social arrangements, proposed tasks and resources that support blended collaborative situation-based learning. I start with the social design, as this is important in order to understand the epistemic and set design.

#### ***Social design***

The social arrangements of the Key Situation Model's reflective learning approach aim to foster dialogical and collaborative learning. Principally, the process comprises three social forms: the whole group of learners (for example, in an organisation, a qualifying social work or post-qualifying CPD programme), small groups and individuals. The reflective learning approach's central social arrangement is that learners work in groups of three, in what could be considered small CoPs. These groups are formed around a key situation title whereby each learner reflects on their own experienced situation (see Figure 17). The choice of a situation is based on prior experience and an interest in the issues that arose in practice (which may or may not arise out of an experience of disjuncture). In this group there is a constant mutual exchange about the specific and general aspects of the situations they are working on (Tov et al., 2016a).

By working in a group that is formed around a key situation title, it becomes possible to tease out the aspects that are relevant to all similar situations (i.e. the key situation); this enables a discussion and shared learning about the commonalities and differences, about the general and specific aspects of a situation. The tasks (see epistemic design) make use of varying social arrangements.



**Figure 17** Social arrangement of the reflective learning process - groups of learners around a key situation

The *roles* of those involved vary according to the tasks in each step of the learning process, comprising learners (students, CPD participants) and the facilitator(s). The *division of labour* is organised in such a way as to enable learners to engage in individual and group learning. The facilitator, responsible for the introduction of the reflective learning process, provides a brief input and explains each step to all learners. Learners then work in groups and individually to explore and enhance their understanding of their own specific situation and then document this. In the group, the learners elaborate on and co-produce generalised knowledge (characteristics, resources, quality standards). While much of the work is undertaken in face to face sessions, learners may continue and finish the documentation subsequently online. The facilitator's role is to support learners in this process and to provide subsequent feedback on the documentation on the Key Situation platform.

### Epistemic design

The epistemic design involves tasks for learners and suggestions for things to do in the learning time and space. The eight-step reflective learning process is made up of a variety of tasks, as shown in the following figure:



**Figure 18** The eight steps of the key situation reflective learning process

The tasks are focussed on both general (knowledge, skills, values) and specific (contextual, situational) aspects. By moving through the tasks of the learning process, the discussions, thinking and learning straddles both, with the intention that learners are enabled to weave together these different perspectives. The reflective learning process encompasses all eight steps, although it is possible to make use of individual steps and associated tasks (Tov et al., 2016a).

The *sequencing and pace* of the individual steps is managed flexibly. While the facilitator initially introduces each step to the whole cohort, it may be that some groups move forward faster than others. Thus, introducing next steps and setting of tasks may vary accordingly.

Overall, the whole eight-step process requires a substantial amount of time and requires several workshops over a few weeks, although it is possible to work through a situation to illustrate the steps in an exemplary way (not in depth) in one day.

To give the reader an insight into what a documented reflection might look like, I include an example of a completed situation in Appendix 2. The following sections draw on previous work (Staempfli et al., 2016; and Staempfli et al., 2012) and a reflection guide, which is available from [www.keysituations.net](http://www.keysituations.net).

There are two ways of starting the process: either with the description of a specific situation ① or by choosing a more general key situation title ② for which the learners then find a specific example that they have encountered in their practice to reflect on. Subsequent steps should be followed in the suggested sequence. I describe the eight steps of the reflective learning process based on Tov et al. (2016a), starting with the description of a situation.

### ① Describing an experienced situation

#### *Definition*

The description of an experienced practice situation includes a narrative of the actual situation and a brief outline of the context in which it occurred. The narrative is tangible and describes the situation as concretely as possible. It contains actions, statements, observable behaviours but no interpretations or assumed non-observable thinking. It is a story with a focus on the social worker's actions with a beginning, a middle and an end, which is experienced by the social worker as an uninterrupted course of action. The specific context in which it occurred, the professional challenge and the interventions are outlined (Tov et al., 2016a).

### *Tasks*

The description of the situation contains two main tasks. The first is about connecting with and describing a situation; the second is about documenting the situation. Learners are asked to think about a situation they have encountered and that stuck with them, either because they were surprised, concerned or pleased by what had occurred. They then recount their situation to the members of their group, who in turn may pose clarifying questions. Lastly, each learner documents their situation in writing, using the template provided on the Key Situation platform (approx. ½ A4-page). The situation is described anonymously, with no identifying information. Following this, the learners are asked to support each other to review their work with a number of guiding questions.

## **② Choosing a fitting key situation title**

### *Definition*

Even though every experienced situation is unique, the Key Situation Model starts with the premise that there are typical, reoccurring key situations. The choice of a title for an experienced practice situation is important as it determines the focus of the reflective learning. In most instances, several titles are possible for a specific situation (Tov et al., 2016a). For example, where a safeguarding concern is raised by a professional that highlights a potential risk of neglect to a service user by someone who is their carer and a social worker visits the service user and carer, this could be seen as a key situation entitled 'Making inquiries into safeguarding alerts'. However, it could equally be explored under the title, 'Discussing concerns with a service user or carer'. While the first one is likely to focus on procedural aspects and strengths and risks, the second one is more likely to bring to the fore the interaction and relationship building aspects of this situation.

### *Tasks*

The learners are asked to consider the key situation title list and think about a title that best sums up what this situation is about for them. The title is then extended with a reference to the specific nature of the encountered situation. For example, if the learner chooses the situation 'Discussing concerns with a service user or carer', the context is summed up in a brief additional subtitle: 'Discussing concerns with a service user or carer / Inquiring concerns about care provided by relative'. This title is then documented on the Key Situation platform and again guiding questions are used by the learners to support them reviewing their work and ensuring that the title captures their experienced situation in a meaningful way.

### **③ Reflecting on emotions and on intuitions**

#### *Definition*

This step relates to Schön's (1983) notion of a mostly unconscious "reflection-in-action" that guides actions and behaviours in a practice situation. The social worker accesses a variety of knowledge forms and an inner dialogue guides the actions both consciously and unconsciously. This 'conversation with the situation' in the 'reflection-in-action' (Schön, 1983) can partly be transformed from practical to discursive consciousness (Giddens, 1984) through deliberation in the group. The aim is to enable a discussion of both explicit and implicit knowledge (e.g. guiding concepts and principles) to contribute to the professional reflection of situation and learning from this.

This step is also about bringing to the fore the emotions that affected the social worker's actions in the situation. It is concerned with reconnecting with and eliciting the emotions and mental states of the social worker. Elaborating on the emotions of the service users involves a degree of hypothesising and must be treated with respect and caution. However, a focus on verbal and nonverbal expressions and empathic understanding through the emotions of

the social worker in response to the service users' emotional states, could enable such hypothesising.

### *Tasks*

The main tasks to achieve this is to role play the situation. For this purpose, the situation is divided into 4 - 5 meaningful sequences (around the core parts of beginning – middle – end). This helps to reduce the otherwise elusive complexity of the situation. Where possible, each sequence is enacted in a role play by the group members, whereby one learner takes on the role of observer. The subsequent discussion should focus on the reflection in action, the emotion (feeling) and cognition (thinking) of the social worker. Questions to support that discussion include: What emotions did the social worker perceive? What did the observer see (body language, facial expression as an indication of emotion)? What did the social worker think in each sequence (action-guiding thinking)? The role play may also help to elicit the emotions of the service user(s)/carer(s). These emotions and cognitions are then documented for each sequence of the situation on the platform. Thus, a comprehensive picture of the situation emerges, which then allows the reflection of the prevailing feelings, thoughts and tacit knowledge as well as actions in the situation. Lastly, learners are asked to review their work with the aid of several guiding questions.

#### ④ Defining overarching characteristics

##### *Definition*

The overarching characteristics describe the typical and general aspects of a key situation. They are relevant for all specific situations under the same key situation title, since they include the commonalities on a more abstract level. These characteristics define all situations under the same title, even if they occur in different organisational settings and with different service user groups. The overarching characteristics are thus on a higher level and help define a key situation.

##### *Tasks*

To elaborate on these, learners are asked to consider the commonalities and differences of the specific situations they work on and elaborate the common overarching characteristics for all specific situations. This can be done by, for example, focussing on a feature of a specific situation and then rewording it in a more abstract way, so that it applies to all situations under the same title. The characteristics of a key situation should encompass all aspects and therefore define the key situation on a generalised level. But they should not be too generalised so that they are applicable to all situations social workers encounter in practice. The same overarching characteristics developed by the group are then documented in each learners' specific situation. Lastly, guiding questions help review the level of abstraction and the relevance of the characteristics, supporting learners' review of this step.

## ⑤ Identifying knowledge resources and Linking resources to situation

### Definition

At the heart of the reflective learning process lies the identification of knowledge and other resources and linking them with the specific situation under consideration. This step aims to support the integration and weaving together of different forms of knowledge and knowing. Tov et al. (2016a) consider the different knowledge forms as resources for practice, based on Kaiser (2005a) and Ghisla and colleagues (2014, p. 23) who define resources as “the declarative knowledge, skills and attitudes” that enable us to deal with professional situations effectively. In addition, Tov et al. (2016a) also count the material and immaterial resources within the environment or organisational context as resources. They suggest the following categorisation:

Scholarly knowledge of social phenomena	<i>Why do the people in the situation act in this way?</i> Explanations of social phenomena, behaviours, processes, research from social sciences, ...
Scholarly knowledge of interventions	<i>How can one act as a professional social worker?</i> Methods, procedures, tools, research on what works, ...
Ethical knowledge	Whereupon do I align my actions? What are the core values, which need to be considered by social workers in this situation? Values, attitudes, code of ethics, ...
Experiential knowledge	What does this situation remind me of? What previous experiences have I made in similar situations? Own experiences, as well as experiences of others, ...
Organisational and contextual knowledge	<i>Which contextual conditions determine and shape my professional actions?</i> Organisational mandate, law and policy, socio-political conditions, ...
Skills	<i>What do I need to be able to do as a professional? Which skills are needed in this situation?</i> Being empathic, communication, cooperation skills, self-reflection, capability to follow social work processes, ....
Infrastructure and material resources	<i>With what can I act?</i> Material resources, available time, budgets, infrastructural conditions, room, ....

**Figure 19** Key Situation Knowledge Taxonomy (Tov et al., 2016a, p. 41, author’s translation)

Tov and colleagues’ (2016a) knowledge taxonomy strives for a holistic understanding of human learning (Jarvis, 2009), with the aim of enabling the integration of knowledge, values

and practice. This understanding is further informed by the notion that knowledge can be explicit or tacit and is located both within individuals and social environments.

Scholarly knowledge is based on research that is concerned with understanding social phenomena and informing social work interventions. These forms of knowledge are explicit, codified and published in academic literature. Ethical knowledge refers to ethical principles and social work values. All these knowledge forms are generalised. They apply to whole groups of people and are not concerned with individual cases but with overarching principles.

Similarly, knowledge in relation to legislation, policy and specific conditions of practice within organisations, is concerned with groups of people. However, this type of knowledge does not stem from social work's scientific community but arises out of policy and its application to localised practices via policies and procedures. Whereas documented legislation or procedures is encoded, its application is encultured and situated in context.

This points to the fact that in practice we are also dealing with specific forms of knowledge, which are contextualised. Therefore, the category of experiential knowledge represents the embodied and embrained forms of knowledge. Experiential knowledge is a narrative form of knowledge, which can be both tacit and explicit and may integrate other forms of knowledge with different purposes.

Skills are a specific form of knowledge with the purpose of steering action through the application of both cognitive, psycho-motor and affective skills. While cognitive skills, such as the ability to analyse, to think critically and affective skills such as emotional intelligence are well documented, in the literature, the sensorimotor skills are not generally referred to explicitly. However, social workers in their use of self, depend on an ability to control their

bodies in ways that enable body language, which is necessary for building rapport, for example (Tov et al., 2016a).

Tov et al. (2016a) consider these forms of knowledge as a constituent of professional practice that is informed by knowledge and values. However, knowledge alone is not sufficient for this and other resources, such as material and non-material resources, are equally important (see Chapter 3 – Pedagogic philosophy). Tov et al. (2016a) therefore include as a last category 'Infrastructure and material resources'.

### *Tasks*

To identify resources, three possible approaches are possible. First, reflection-in-action may reveal underlying principles or assumptions that can be examined and building on these, further resources can be identified. The second approach is aligned to problem-based learning. The learner starts with questions to the situation, possibly guided by an experienced disjuncture. Questions such as 'Why did I act in such or such a way?' or 'What do we know about effective ways to address concerns?' are posed to guide the identification of resources. Third, (partially) remembered or known codified knowledge (for example from reading, courses, etc.) can be gathered, for example by reviewing learning from a course, and this is then reviewed. Whichever approach is chosen, it is important, to not just rely on experiential knowledge, but to engage with the literature to expand perspectives. It is worth noting that these different types of knowledge can inform different aspects of practice. For example, legal knowledge as internalised codes can explain behaviour, or guide one's actions as values or prescribe procedures on an organisational level (Tov et al., 2016a).

Secondly, following the identification of relevant knowledge for each resource category, learners are asked to describe the knowledge succinctly. Every idea (e.g. a concept from a theory, an intervention method, an ethical standard or value, an experience, a section of a law and a specific skill) are documented as specifically, succinctly and understandably as

possible. Guiding questions to support this are for example: 'What have the authors said?', 'What are their main findings?', 'What is stated in the code of practice?', 'What does the case law say?', or 'What skills are described in the literature?'. References to the literature are listed at the end of each situation.

Thirdly, the relevance of each knowledge resource is explained in relation to the situation. The guiding question here is 'In what way exactly is the resource (e.g. a concept, a research finding, an ethical principle) relevant in the situation?'. The aim is to make the links between a situation and resources explicit.

This learning process is largely done as a self-directed learning process. Dialogue among learners and with facilitators supports the negotiation of the meaning of the resources in themselves and their relevance to the situation. Such discussions can take place face-to-face or online.

The selection and integration of these resources is subject to a certain degree to the personal autonomy and freedom of the learner, as it is not possible to explore everything that is relevant or is taken for granted in relation to a situation. The aim here is to foster learning, so that at the end of the reflective process, the learner has increased their awareness and understanding. The personal values and world views are the basis on which the learner ultimately decides what weight they attach to a resource and what perspectives they take when practising. This personal perspective, however, needs to be negotiated in line with the relevant professional ethical principles and values and with the available evidence (Tov et al., 2016a).

As a last task, learners are again asked to review their work and are asked to think about the relevance of the resources in relation to the key situation, including the overarching characteristics and the focus of the exploration of the specific situation.

## ⑥ Elaborating quality criteria

### *Definition*

Good practice is informed by knowledge, skills and values. This is the focus of quality criteria in relation to key situations. The resources explored in the last step point to quality that is relevant for the situation under consideration. A starting point for criteria is ethical knowledge but they should reflect all forms of knowledge. Quality criteria encapsulate the evidence base, the ethical principles and the skills required for knowledgeable and ethical practice in key situations. Quality criteria are relevant at the level of key situation and thus can guide practice in specific situations in key social work situations (Tov et al., 2016a).

This understanding of the criteria is not based on the quantitative measures associated with many quality assurance systems. The combination of knowing, values and doing in the situational context of professional practice situations results in reflective and reflexive integration of perspectives in criteria. Criteria thus are intertwined with the material, cognitive, contextual, emotional and relational doings in the situation in relation to which criteria are (co)produced.

### *Tasks*

Learners are asked to consider the different resources (knowledge, skills and values) and think about which ones are relevant for knowledgeable and ethical practice. For example, is there a strong evidence base for certain interventions or are certain theories of importance for this type of situation? Based on these, they should formulate quality criteria in their group.

The criteria are formulated at a medium level of abstraction. In other words, they are not so general as to represent the general standards of the profession, rather they should be relevant to the key situation in a differentiated way. Yet they should not be too specific, to be relevant for a specific situation alone (e.g. in relation to specific context, service user

group, skill level of the social worker). Criteria are expressed in a positive way, for example 'The self-efficacy of the service user is strengthened' or "Consideration of risks is balanced, recognising both potential positive and negative outcomes".

Lastly, as with the other steps, learners are asked to step back and review the whole documented situation. By now, a meaningful argumentation starting with a description of the specific situation, in combination with the general aspects, should start to emerge as reflected in the quality criteria.

## **⑦ Evaluating situation based on quality criteria**

### *Definition*

The quality criteria are helpful in considering the aspects of knowledgeable and ethical practice in key situations and therefore, offer a basis for reflecting on the initially described specific situation. The reflection is therefore about evaluating how far the quality criteria were met (or not met) in the practice described.

### *Tasks*

The task for each learner, in discussion with the other group members, is to evaluate, reflect and discuss how far their actions and practice reflect the quality criteria. For each criterion, an assessment is made as to how far it was met and to what degree their actions exemplify knowledgeable and ethical practice in the specific situation. This reflection may highlight areas that have not been considered originally and possible reasons for this. This reflective account is again documented on the platform.

## ⑧ Developing alternative courses of action

### *Definition*

The alternative courses of action point to the developmental potential of learners and to ways in which a similar situation could be handled in future. The starting point of the reflective learning process was an experienced situation, which may or may not have been managed knowledgeably and/or ethically. Each reflective document that was developed over the course of the learning process includes all eight elements, which point to the specific and unique aspects of a situation, as well as to generalisable aspects. All of these, but particularly the last step, have the potential to generate new insights and learning that point to possible alternative courses of action in similar situations. In thinking about different social work interventions in relation to key situations, the repertoire for possible actions is extended and the reflective cycle is ended by looking forward to action in future similar situations.

### *Tasks*

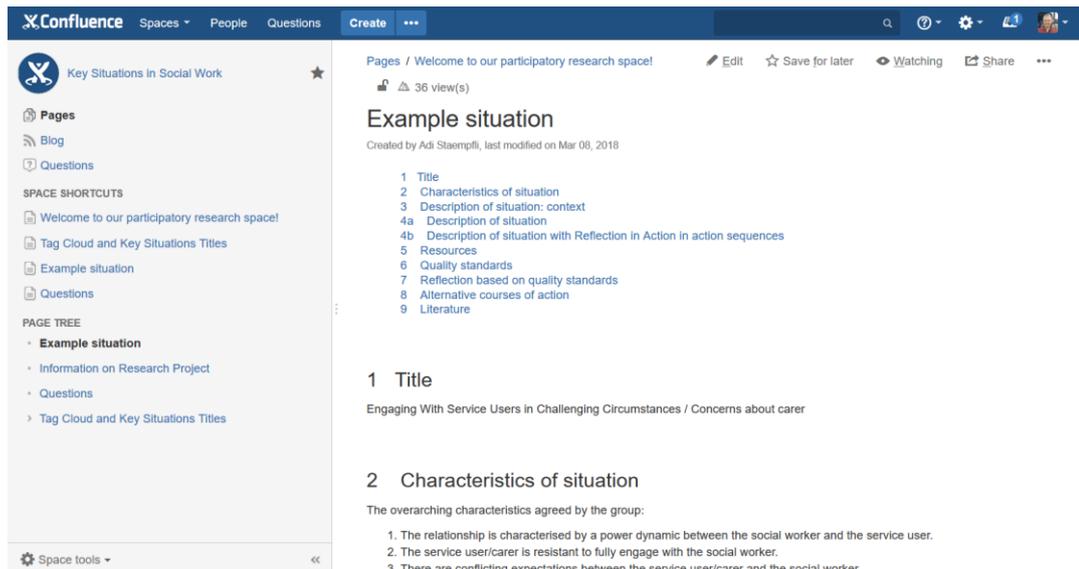
For this last task, learners should consider their overall learning and think about how they could act in similar situations to meet the quality criteria or how they could demonstrate knowledgeable and ethical practice. A starting point may be quality criteria that have not been fully met, with consideration being given to ways in which they could be met. When describing these alternative approaches, learners should include anticipated consequences of any proposed alternative courses of action and think about their own professional development needs. The alternative courses are again documented on the platform.

These eight-steps are designed to support learning, through an integration of knowledge, practice and values. They can also be adapted for the purpose of supporting the co-creation of knowledge, as outlined in the last section of this chapter.

### *Set design*

Several tools are needed to support the activities of the learners and the facilitator. As the blended learning approach over the course of several weeks combines both face to face, group and individual or group learning, the Key Situation platform on which learners document their work is central. It serves as a virtual learning environment. This requires that learners can work on a laptop or PC and have access to the Key Situation platform. The platform enables learners and facilitators to collaborate and to share their work. Following completion of each element of the documentation of the reflective learning process, the facilitator offers feedback. Constructive feedback is crucial throughout the process and requires that the facilitator is familiar with both the Key Situation Model and the platform (Tov et al., 2016a). To offer an introduction to the steps of the learning process, a projector is needed.

Learners produce their reflections directly on the platform. Over time, a situation library starts to emerge, and these artefacts enable the sharing of the situated knowledge and practice in the whole group or class, or more widely (depending on the settings and arrangements). The templates for specific situations include all eight elements along the reflection process and the document is always structured in the same way along the eight elements:



**Figure 20** Screenshot of an example situation on the Key Situation platform.

These documents, based on reflections of specific situations, are grouped under the heading of a key situation.

Blended learning also influences the use of available physical spaces. While a large room is helpful for inputs and whole group discussions (for example, reflecting on the task or the whole process), it is advantageous to have access to a number of (smaller) rooms for groups to work in. As the documentation and researching is done online (on the platform or on the Internet), it is important that these rooms are all equipped with suitable Wi-Fi.

To support learning, several *artefacts* are used: a PowerPoint presentation that offers a focus for the whole class and helps explain the Key Situation Model and each step, a reflective learning guide and an example of a situation that can be used by learners in their groups or individually, to guide them in their activities, including the guiding questions to review their work and a template for the documentation of the eight steps of the specific situation on the platform.

Lastly, the reflective learning process relies on access to texts in academic and professional journals and books.

### Design for knowledge co-creation and knowledge sharing

The social, epistemic and set design for knowledge co-creation and knowledge sharing in practice organisations, builds on the meso level arrangements and on the reflective learning approach outlined above.

The diverse CoPs within and across organisations, such as thematic CoPs, research partnerships and CoPs in teams, work together to develop the knowledge base in relation to areas of practice that are relevant to them or the whole organisation. This requires a fitting social design and, in this thesis, I have outlined possible design options which could be adopted and adapted.

The epistemic design with a focus on the co-creation of knowledge thereby largely builds on the outlined reflective learning process. This enables the co-production of situated knowledge in relation to practice in key situations. However, the focus is likely to lie on the general aspects of key situations (knowledge resources, quality criteria). In order to support the knowledge base in an organisation, in relation to a key situation that enables knowledgeable and ethical practice in associated specific situations, relevant knowledge and quality criteria are thus developed and documented. For example, a focus on a particular practice model or framework could seek to elaborate principles of an approach, theoretical models and skills in relation to regularly encountered practice (key) situations. This would support the embedding of a practice model in the situated descriptions of key situations, exemplifying what practice that follows a particular model looks like.

To enhance knowledgeable practice, knowledge produced by researchers or research-practice partnerships can be 'translated' and linked with key situations. For example, a researcher's work on 'home visits' (e.g. Ferguson, 2018; Cook, 2016) could be transformed through the tasks of description and linked (see ⑤ Identification of resources and Linking resources to situation) to the situation of 'Visiting a service user, carer or family in their

home'. This 'breaking down' of general knowledge to the level of practice in key situations, enables social workers to consult the knowledge for the purpose of planning or reflecting on an experienced situation. This means new workers can get an overview of the kinds of situations and approaches regularly encountered in the organisation. It also enables managers, leaders and service users in an organisation to develop their contextual understanding of quality in relation to key situations encountered locally.

The page of each key situation lists the general elements and the links to specific situations. The developed knowledge resources or quality standards can therefore be documented at the level of a key situation. By clicking on a key situation title, the following elements are then visible:

- 1 Title
- 2 Characteristics of situation
- 5 Resources
- 6 Quality standards
- 9 Literature
- 10 Links to specific situations

*Figure 21* General elements of a key situation (screenshot from the Key Situation platform).

Importantly, the titles allow practitioners to associatively identify key situations that are relevant for them. Research by Tov et al. (2016b) has shown that the vast majority of participants in an online survey of social workers (N=285) rated the German key situation titles as a simple, clear, comprehensible and overall suitable way to categorise practice. Therefore, the knowledge contained in key situations can be shared and accessed with relative ease by social workers.

Importantly, the set design of the platform offers a virtual space for collaboration. This is particularly useful for dispersed CoPs, for example in a research-practice partnership, or for

groups of subject matter experts who work together to develop the knowledge base of the organisation.

### **Conclusions – Key Situation Model to support knowledgeable and ethical practice**

As outlined, the Key Situation Model seeks to support knowledgeable and ethical professional practice through a range of approaches. At the heart of the model lies the blended reflective learning process. Reflective practice is often associated with either individual or group reflection approaches. Instead, the reflective learning process proposed here (Tov et al., 2016a) is a much deeper and longer process that has many similarities with reflective practice but also with case- or problem-based learning approaches. Learning emerges from the engagement in the reflection process.

The focus of the reflection process outlined points on the one hand to the specific and thus unique situation and at the same time, the general elements link the specific situation with typical and reoccurring key situations. These are not only significant for practice in other similar situations but are also future oriented. Overarching characteristics help clarify what aspects need to be considered in preparing for a situation; quality criteria describe professional and ethical practice principles to be observed; and both can be associatively identified through the title. In planning for future similar situations, the platform can act as a resource (Tov et al., 2016a).

Furthermore, the alternative courses of action refer to the potential for professional development, thus showing the direction in which the professionalism, capability and identity of the social worker can or should be developed. Any experienced disjuncture between situational professional practice and professionalism expressed in the quality criteria of the key situation, can form the starting point for further reflective learning

processes and for their negotiation of meaning (Wenger, 1998) in relation to other concrete situations (Tov et al., 2016a).

I have outlined how ongoing reflective learning on key situations can support the coproduction of a situation-based knowledge that can be shared on the platform. This is aligned to the systematic educational approaches of 'integrating knowledge' and 'playing epistemic games'. The overall focus of the reflective learning approach is on integrating specific and general forms of knowledge and the varied tasks suggest a range of epistemic games that can be played in order for participants to develop their understanding and at the same time, increase their capacity for individual and collaborative inquiry (knowing).

I also argue that the Key Situation Model has the potential to support the development of a learning organisation through its focus on epistemic practices. For example, 'Thematic CoPs' (see social design at meso level) that engage in epistemic activities proposed in the reflective learning process, can support the co-production of knowledge that addresses emerging professional challenges locally. The situation-based approach shifts the focus to key situations within an organisation and examines or expands organisational, knowledgeable and ethical practice through collaborative inquiry. Such practices seek to learn from and with social workers, but could also include others (e.g. service users, other professionals and agencies) in continuously developing practice and thus enabling social innovation. Moreover, organisations that adopt the CoP approach to researching areas of practice that are underdeveloped (e.g. local patterns of needs, evaluations of local practice) in partnership with researchers, would enable those involved to develop not only evidence-informed understanding and locally appropriate interventions, they would also enhance their capacity to design inquiry. These latter two elements of the Key Situation Model are therefore aligned to systemic educational approaches of 'learning by designing knowledge' and 'learning by designing inquiry'. The socio-material and epistemic design dimensions of the Key Situation

Model also offers opportunities for organisations to construct and configure their epistemic environment in order to support all four educational approaches and thus establish practices that support the development of epistemic fluency throughout the organisation.

Lastly, the platform with documented situations can be used within an organisation as it contains knowledge directly relevant to local practices. Of course, the quality of documented reflections will be of varying quality, considering that practitioners with different perspectives and experiences co-produce these. Therefore, the quality in these situations needs to be negotiated (Tov et al., 2016a). This is the role of members and CoPs of the network or within an organisation. The idea is that thematic CoPs with members from professional and academic communities, continually comment, edit and add links to resources (for a fuller discussion of the design of the network and CoPs see Staempfli et al., 2016). Over time, a living knowledge repository, a situation library, can develop that is integrated in reflective and individual and organisational quality development practices. The key situation categorisation enables associative accessing of this knowledge (Tov et al., 2016b). In addition, search functionalities of the platform (tag cloud, word search, key words) support specific searches (Tov et al., 2016a).

However, in order to implement this reflective learning model and to create the potential for the associated practice-based CPD, knowledge co-creation and sharing practices in social work, key situations need to be identified. The next chapter outlines the methodological approach used to identify them.

## Chapter 4 – Methodology

This chapter discusses my ontology and epistemology, methodology, the research methods for data collection and data analysis, ethical considerations, issues related to positionality and ends with an analysis of the research's strengths and limitations. This exploratory, qualitative and participatory research project addressed the question of what key situations in social work in England are.

### **A practice-based research framework (my ontology and epistemology)**

Practice theories underpin my ontological and epistemological perspectives in this thesis. A practice-based ontology is premised on the notion that human agency and social order emerge from social practices (Sandberg and Dall'Alba, 2009) in "what can be called a life-world perspective" with a focus on everyday situations (Sandberg and Dall'Alba, 2009, pp. 1350–1351). Practice-based perspectives foreground the "relational character of the enactment of practice", in which performance and agency are "constituted through the *entwinement of life with world*" (Sandberg and Dall'Alba, 2009, p. 1351, italics in original). In other words, as people engage in their activities they are "always already intertwined with others and things" (Sandberg and Dall'Alba, 2009, p. 1354).

Several phenomenological principles are important in a practice-based ontology. Firstly, individual agents and the world are inseparably related through lived experience. Secondly, one person's 'life-world' is simultaneously their own as well as "a world shared with others and things". Thirdly, 'being-in-the-world' is the most basic feature of the relation between individual agents and the world. In other words, our way of being enables us to understand ourselves as subjects and objects (Sandberg and Dall'Alba, 2009, pp. 1353-1354). These principles foreground the central concepts of non-dualism, human agency, embodiment, relational and social practice and inclusion of non-humans. I have referred to these concepts

throughout my thesis with a focus on epistemic practices that enable or hinder knowledgeable and ethical practice and judgements.

These ontological assumptions, principles and concepts open “new ways of conceptualizing and investigating organizational practices” (Sandberg and Dall'Alba, 2009, p. 1364). Practices are thus the primary focus of a practice-based epistemology (Gherardi and Perrotta, 2014). Practice-based research is thus interested in the enactment of practices and primarily seeks to describe and understand social practices as the smallest units of analysis (Gherardi and Perrotta, 2014; Reckwitz, 2002). Importantly, a practice-based epistemology focusses on the practices in working life rather than on individual practitioners (Nicolini, 2009). Researchers are thus studying the way organisational practices are constituted in the enactments of performance and the (visible) actions of members of groups, organisations and societies (Sandberg and Dall'Alba, 2009).

My argument is that key situations, which social workers encounter in their every-day practice, are instances of such enactments. The focus on the performative actions by social workers in key situations is therefore aligned to practice-based ontological and epistemological stances. The description of these situations allows us to see how social work is constituted in England. Researchers need “an appropriate methodological approach” that enables them to see “the connection between the here-and-now of the situated practising and the elsewhere-and-then of other practices” (Nicolini, 2009, p. 1392). In other words, to describe key situations, one needs to look at the situations in specific settings and across many settings to establish the practices that are enacted and that constitute social work overall. Nicolini (2009) suggests that in order to achieve this, a ‘zooming in’ and ‘zooming out’ process is needed, which allows the researcher to understand how practices emerge, are stabilised and are changed and how different practices interconnect in time and space.

Because of the “multifaceted and multi-dimensional” nature of practices, they can only be investigated through an eclectic methods approach (Nicolini, 2009, p. 1395).

Nicolini (2009) posits that we need to explore practices from the practitioners’ perspective, as only they can recognise those practices that are part of their professional everyday lives. In other words, a practice-based inquiry into the enacted practices of social workers requires that the voices of the social workers are at the centre of a study (Gordon, 2018). This understanding is fundamental to the definition of key situations and the description of situations (Tov et al., 2016a). The starting point thereby must be to zoom in “on the real-time practising as an organized set of doings and sayings” by those engaged in the practices. This then allows researchers to capture the actual work that plays out in practice (Nicolini, 2009, p. 1400).

Nicolini (2009, p. 1392) argues that mere observation of practice situations is not sufficient, as practices “always need to be drawn to the fore, made visible and turned into an epistemic object in order to enter discourse”. However, rather than unearthing “the values, beliefs, or presumed inner motives” that are supposed to guide the actions of practitioners, Nicolini (2009, p. 1404) stresses that the purpose of zooming in is “to surface the practical concerns which govern and affect all participants” and to appreciate that from their perspective, “practice unfolds in terms of an often pre-verbally experienced and yet collectively upheld sense of ‘what needs to be done’”. This requires that the social practices that are played out in the doings and sayings of everyday practices are established discursively (Nicolini, 2009). Discursive elaboration thus enables us to move from practical to discursive consciousness (Giddens, 1984) and allows practices and situations to be named. Similarly, Kaiser (2005a) argues that situations must be described by practitioners themselves, as only they can discursively differentiate meaningful situations within their practice. Kaiser argues that although professionals do not always agree about the delineation of such situations, in

discussion they are generally able to agree on what constitutes a situation (Kaiser, 2005a). The elaboration and description of situations that social workers regularly encounter in their practice thus turns these into epistemic objects that can be discussed (Nicolini, 2009).

While any study of practices needs to start with zooming in to capture the localised practices, this needs to include and alternate with zooming out, in “an attempt to trail the active ways in which practices are associated”. This permits researchers to grasp “the mutual relationships between the local real-time accomplishment of practices and the textures that they form and in which they are implicated” (Nicolini, 2009, p. 1412). This zooming out thus, focusses on the situations that social workers encounter across settings and sectors and allows the naming of the *key* situations encountered in social work in England.

In sum, the practice-based perspective I have adopted offers both an ontology and epistemology that is aligned to the Key Situation Model. This research project was planned and undertaken in two phases: it started with a zooming in on specific practice situations as experienced and discussed by social workers. It then involved the clustering of the situations, tasks and processes that were named in the first phase into the general key situations in a zooming out motion. The second phase involved seeking agreement from the wider professional community to define key situations in social work in England. A fitting methodology, in line with these epistemological and ontological assumptions, is action research (Reason and Bradbury, 2001) and participatory research (Humphries, 2008), which I discuss in the next section.

### **Action Research Methodology**

Action research also takes on a life-world perspective, starting with everyday experience espoused in activity and aims to co-create living and innovative knowledge that is focussed on actual social practices (Humphries, 2008; Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005). Furthermore,

action research is about combining learning through research with actions in the real world (MacDonald, 2012). This “living, evolving process of coming to know” is better understood as a verb than a noun (Reason and Bradbury, 2001, p. 3). Fitzgerald and Findlay (2011, p. 302) argue that ‘good research’ is a specific form of learning that “engages participants in mutual inquiry and ... knowledge building discourse”.

Action research’s starting point is the acknowledgement that objective knowledge and objectivity are impossible to achieve, since researchers are always part of the world they study, in which multiple or shared realities exist. It therefore involves "mutual sense making and collective action" (Reason and Bradbury, 2001, p. 2) that opens up communicative spaces (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005); and it is only achievable with, for and by people and communities and ideally engages all stakeholders in the process of sense making and action (Humphries, 2008). These premises fit well with the earlier made points in relation to a practice-based ontology and epistemology.

Reason and Bradbury define action research as:

"a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview ... . It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities." (Reason and Bradbury, 2001, p. 1)

Action research has many origins and forms (Herr and Anderson, 2014; Humphries, 2008; Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005). Some are related to technical research that seeks to change particular outcomes of practices (Kemmis, 2001); others are concerned with practical research that follows an individualistic world view and then there are those approaches that are influenced by critical paradigms (Humphries, 2008; Kemmis, 2001). Not surprisingly, action research is a contested approach and Humphries (2008, p. 78) complains that “action

research can be many things ... and can employ many different methods". However, Reason and Bradbury, in their seminal book on action research, propose an approach that neither solely embraces the individualistic nor the critical perspective (Herr and Anderson, 2014; Humphries, 2008, p. 76). Their main argument is that doing action research involves doing research with people and they propose that action research requires an "extended epistemology", which includes different forms of knowing (Reason and Bradbury, 2001, p. 8). Action research's epistemology strives for a democratic knowledge creation process, with a focus on developing both understanding and practice (Humphries, 2008; Reason and Bradbury, 2001).

Action research thus involves a social practice to be improved; an iterative process with activities that are "systematically and self-critically implemented and interrelated" and a gradually widening participation with "collaborative control of the process" (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, pp. 165–166). This involves users in the generation of knowledge and development of practice in a co-productive process. Thus action research seeks to design research that is participatory and collegiate (Humphries, 2008); grounds the process and outcomes of the inquiry in the practices and perspectives of the stakeholders involved (Humphries, 2008; Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005; Reason and Bradbury, 2001); focusses on development and action in the real world; and emphasises relational aspects to support communities of inquiry to transform into CoPs (Reason and Bradbury, 2001).

The literature in respect of all forms of action research, generally describes iterative cycles of reflection and action. For example, Kemmis and McTaggart (2005, p. 276) argue that it involves "a spiral of self-reflective cycles" that start with planning change; continue with implementing and observing that change in relation to process and outcomes and end with an analysis and reflection that informs a renewed action research cycle and so forth. In the prologue of the book, Tov et al. (2016) discuss how they have come to understand the core

group who developed the Key Situation Model as a CoP. Similarly, in the course of this thesis I started to understand the whole Key Situation project as an ongoing action research project. Many characteristics of the development of the Key Situation Model are grounded in principles of action research. It first started with the constitutive problem of how to address the knowing-doing gap in social work (education). Second, in order to develop a situation-based curriculum, it engaged in a participatory research process in which key situations were empirically described (Kunz, 2015; Kunz and Tov, 2009). Based on this, Tov et al. (2013, 2016a; Staempfli et al., 2012) developed the reflective learning model in an iterative process, which included both qualitative research into the effectiveness of the learning processes (Tov et al., 2016a - see Chapter 5) and continuous adaption of the model to the social work BA programme. Third, in the #keysituation project the platform was developed (Tschopp et al., 2016) and a network with several CoPs was formed and supported (Kunz et al., 2016; Staempfli et al., 2016). This project was itself organised as an iterative project with increasing (international) participation from academia and practitioners (Tschopp et al., 2016). As part of the project, Tov et al. (2016b) carried out mixed method research into the key situation titles and their usefulness. The reflection model was implemented in different universities and each time knowledge, was co-created in the collaborative adaption of the model to new contexts. This iterative, flexible process and the aims of the Key Situation Model point to a critical or emancipatory kind of action research that is concerned with “intervening in the cultural, social and historical processes of everyday life to reconstruct not only the practice and the practitioners but also the practice setting (... the work, the worker, and the workplace)” (Kemmis, 2001, p. 92). The key features of action research (practice to be improved, iterative process, grounded in inquiry and practice and relational and collaborative) can be seen in the development of the model.

This thesis research project is another cycle in the ongoing research and development of the Key Situation Model, with a focus on social work in England. I completed a full action research

cycle, the outcome being the description of key situations, yet this thesis is just a first step of the next action cycle, which I hope will focus on the implementation and evaluation of the Key Situation Model in social work organisations or universities. While it links with the emancipatory perspective of the whole Key Situation Model development, the current project is more limited in scope and is aligned to a practical kind of action research (Kemmis, 2001). In this study, the stakeholders are first and foremost, social workers engaged together in the endeavour to collaboratively name social work key situations in England.

I base my conceptualisation of the Key Situation 'project' as an action research endeavour within the action research literature. Herr and Anderson (2014, p. 5) argue that "each cycle increases the researchers' knowledge of the original question, puzzle, or problem and, it is hoped, leads to its solution." Indeed, "good action research emerges over time in an evolutionary and developmental process" (Reason, 2006, p. 197) and it is always context bound by addressing real-life problems, linked to researchers' and participants' diverse perspectives and capabilities, shared meanings and understandings as well as practice developments for specific contexts (Levin and Greenwood, 2001, p. 105). It thus takes Freire's (2005) stance that "action without reflection and understanding is blind, just as theory without action is meaningless" (Reason and Bradbury, 2001, p. 2). Levin and Greenwood (2001) hence argue that action research is not only epistemologically sound but also, socially valuable.

In sum, the ontological and epistemological assumptions of action research are in line with practice-based approaches. Action research focuses on the lifeworld in its contextual and situated complexity. The current research project, which aims to describe key situations in social work in England, sits within a larger action research project that aims to further the development of reflective learning in social work in the endeavour of supporting knowledgeable and ethical practice. The next section outlines the chosen methods.

## Methods

The aim of this study (description of key social work situations in England) falls within the scope of what is termed 'job analysis', which is a systematic process to discover the nature of a job. It is descriptive in that it seeks "to illustrate the features and extent" (D'Cruz and Jones, 2014, p. 21) of a job. Job analyses focus on both "the tasks performed by individuals in an occupation" and the "knowledge, skills, and abilities required to perform those tasks" (Cadle, 2012, p. 16, in Bishop et al., 2015, p. 65). Two broad categories of job analysis methods can be distinguished: job-oriented and worker-oriented methods that study the "competencies required to perform the job" (Cucina et al., 2012, p. 512) and many methods address both. For the purpose of this study, I only considered the aspects of methods that offered a methodologically sound way to describe tasks (or key situations).

While task analysis is commonly used in higher and further education, it "is not well defined ... and neither is the process for selecting an appropriate or effective task analysis method" (Adams et al., 2012, p. 4). Four methods are frequently associated with such job analyses: the Nominal Group Technique (Manthorpe et al., 2004; Pippard and Bjorklund, 2003; Hollis et al., 2002); the DACUM (Developing a Curriculum) method (Wijanarka, 2014; Dixon and Stricklin, 2014; Johnston et al., 2014; Studer and Kemkar, 2012; Tippelt and Edelmann, 2007; DeOnna, 2002; Collum, 1999; Norton, 1997); a modified DACUM method called CoRe (Competences and Resources) (Kunz, 2015; Ghisla et al., 2008, 2011, 2014; Ghisla, 2007) and the Delphi method (Johnston et al., 2014; Mason and Schwartz, 2012; Pippard and Bjorklund, 2003; Hollis et al., 2002; Boberg and Monis-Khoo, 1992). I ruled out the Nominal Group Technique (NGT) as it generally aims to generate the best ideas in relation to a problem or question (Vander Laenen, 2015; Fletcher and Marchildon, 2014), whereas this study sought to produce a description of not the best situations but all key situations in social work in England. The other three methods informed my research design.

Overall, in this research, I employed a modified Delphi approach. The Delphi method's key purpose is "the collection of informed judgment on issues that are largely unexplored, difficult to define, highly context and expertise specific, or future-oriented" (Fletcher and Marchildon, 2014, p. 12) through exploration of the opinions of experts (Pippard and Bjorklund, 2003). The Delphi method typically starts by identifying a research problem and the selection of suitable expert participants. As a first step, a questionnaire is developed, either based on available literature or by generating ideas in an open qualitative round with participants, particularly where "little is known about a particular topic" (Humphrey-Murto et al., 2017, p. 15). As the current research and literature does not adequately describe what social workers do (Moriarty et al., 2015), it was essential to first engage with social workers through an open explorative qualitative method to describe their practice situations, before developing a questionnaire for the subsequent Delphi rounds (Hasson, Keeney and Mckenna, 2000). For this purpose, I opted for the CoRe method, which like DACUM, is a model for both curriculum construction and for describing a vocational field (Ghisla et al., 2014, 2011, 2008; 2007).

The CoRe method has its roots in the DACUM method and both start with the premise that "any job can be precisely defined according to its tasks" (DeOnna, 2002, p. 7). However, DACUM is strongly rooted in a behaviourist paradigm (Brannick et al., 2012; Collum, 1999; Jonassen and Rohrer-Murphy, 1999) and when developing the CoRe method, Ghisla and colleagues (2008, p. 439, author's translation), dissociated themselves from this, arguing that CoRe "is not about the identification of work tasks", rather it is concerned with a more holistic "descriptive identification of practice situations". Therefore, CoRe's basic assumption is that one can describe any professional field by its important and meaningful practice situations (Kunz, 2015; Ghisla et al., 2008, 2011, 2014; Kaiser, 2005a). The CoRe method was used to describe social work key situations in the Swiss context (Kunz, 2015; Kunz and Tov, 2009).

I ran two one day CoRe research workshops. It allowed me to unearth the situations, tasks and processes that participating social workers encounter in their everyday practice. I analysed these and developed an initial draft description of situations social workers in England encounter. Originally, I had planned to continue a discursive and participatory data analysis online and for this purpose had prepared the data on the Key Situation platform. I had planned to seek agreement from the wider professional community following this, but this strategy was not successful, due to a lack of engagement.

I therefore adapted the method and reframed it as a modified Delphi study with the CoRe workshop being the first round (see Appendix 4). Following this first round, in two subsequent survey rounds, participants provided feedback through ranking and commenting. Data was analysed between rounds and feedback was provided to participants who were asked to re-rank items in an iterative process. The agreed output (list of key situations in social work) was thus developed over three rounds (Humphrey-Murto et al., 2017).

In line with the proposed zooming in and zooming out research approaches (Nicolini, 2009), this research used a modified Delphi method, in which zooming in was achieved through the CoRe method and zooming out through two subsequent Delphi survey rounds (see Figure 22):

Zooming in	Zooming out			
<b>Development of draft key situation titles</b> (with n=13 social workers)	<b>Design and review of questionnaire</b>	<b>Delphi round I questionnaire</b> (n=88 social workers)	<b>Review of questionnaire</b>	<b>Delphi round II questionnaire</b> (n=41 social workers)
<b>Two 1-day CoRe workshops</b> Elaboration of tasks, areas of responsibilities and initial key situation titles.	<b>Analysis and definition of draft key situation titles</b> as items for questionnaire by researcher.	<b>Expert review and rating of key situation titles</b> and commenting on clarity and missing titles.	<b>Adaption of questionnaire</b> based on quantitative and qualitative data.	<b>Expert re-rating of situation titles</b> based on results report and rate any new titles from round I.
<b>Initial analysis</b> by clustering of tasks and development of draft key situation titles.	<b>Development of questionnaire and two pre-tests</b> of questionnaire and survey tool.	<b>Quantitative and qualitative analysis</b> of rankings and comments and adaption of situation titles.	<b>Preparation of results report (feedback)</b> to expert panel.	<b>Quantitative analysis</b> of expert rankings and qualitative analysis of comments. Definition of key situations.

*Figure 22 Key situation research methods: zooming in and out*

In the following sections, I outline the sampling strategies and data collection and analysis methods for these methods and research phases further.

### Sampling

In order to describe *all* key situations in social work in England, it was important to enable the elaboration of as many key situations as possible and to strive for data saturation (David and Sutton, 2011). This can only be undertaken from the perspective of practising social workers (Nicolini, 2009) and the chosen methods fall under what is termed expert-based research. Expert-based research assumes that discursive elaboration of different kinds of expertise can bring about new and useful insights and understandings. This requires intuitive understanding and tacit knowledge, as the knowledge of experts is only partially codified (Bleijenbergh et al., 2011). Sampling thus sought to ensure that as many perspectives as possible were represented, as “inadequate representation of the professional field” can

result in “biased information with regard to the content of a profession” (VanDerKlink and Boon, 2002, p. 415). The quality of the outcomes produced in a Delphi study depend largely on the selection of an expert panel of practitioners. To recruit an appropriate panel, a “well-conceived sample is essential” (Kezar and Maxey, 2016, p. 145).

In order to capture all key situations, it was essential to recruit practitioners that represent a wide range of practice fields (Bragin et al., 2014, p. 5 see also; Gilbert, 2001). Although, the quality of data on the social work workforce in England has historically been mixed (Moriarty et al., 2015, p. 3), there is workforce data that shows that in September 2018, there were an estimated 52,120 social workers employed in England. Of those, 17,000 worked in adults’ services and 31,720 in children’s services, with a further 1000 in adults’ social work in the independent sector and 2400 in the NHS (DfE, 2019; NHS Digital, 2019). No data was available for the number of children and family social workers employed in the independent sector. In my research journal I reflected on my expected outcomes and noted that I was not looking for a fixed absolute truth about the key situations in social work in England; rather, I sought a practice-based good enough starting point for the platform and model and so I struggled to conceptualise the survey in purely quantitative terms. I wondered whether I could generate a sampling framework based on available workforce data but concluded that this was not going to be possible. Because of the gaps in information, overall, it was not possible to establish a sampling framework that would have allowed me to recruit a representative sample of social workers in England. Nevertheless, I thought it would be useful to compare the sample in this study to the available workforce data to increase validity of the findings.

I sought to recruit participants from all sectors and different settings to ensure that the widest possible range of practices with diverse service user groups was reflected in the sample. With no sampling frame in place, I chose to recruit participants through snowball sampling as suggested by Jorm (2015). This had been successfully employed in previous

similar research projects in social work by Kunz (2015) and Bosma and colleagues (2010). Snowball sampling builds on connections and involves social workers embodied in networks of actual persons and consequently, the group of participants cannot be representative of the whole social work workforce (population) (Kemmis, 2001).

Overall, such a sample of social workers is on the one hand rather homogenous, as it includes members of the same profession, within the same (national) legal framework. On the other hand, it needs to be sufficiently diverse and heterogenous to ensure that no practice field is overlooked. I therefore employed a purposive criterion sampling strategy. Purposive sampling aims to recruit participants who represent a defined target population in a qualitative sense (Gilbert, 2001), thus enabling criteria-led judgements about inclusion and exclusion of participants. Sampling criteria help to ensure credibility of the research (Guba and Lincoln, 1982) and the following principles guided my decisions regarding criteria for this research.

First, participants need to “hold specific knowledge of the issue” to be studied (David and Sutton, 2011, p. 232) and expertise needs to be defined clearly in advance (Jorm, 2015). To get an authentic description of the key situations in social work practice I needed to recruit participants who were *social workers in England*.

Most qualified social workers do not work in social care; one study suggests that only 46 per cent work in a social care role and only 25% actually work as social workers or social work managers (Curtis et al., 2010, p. 1636). Therefore, participants needed to be *registered social workers currently working in social work or social care role*. I applied the broad global definition of social work (IFSW and IASSW, 2014) to assess this, so as to not exclude social workers who work in non-statutory social care roles.

I only sought to explore situations that social workers who are still in direct practice with service users encounter (rather than other roles such as management, educators, workforce development). Therefore, social workers in this study needed to *work to some degree directly with service users, carers, families, groups or communities* and I excluded social workers that exclusively worked in other roles.

From a theoretical perspective, participants should have enough experience at the level of expertise because this means that they can recall many situations holistically (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1988). Professionals need to have two to three years of experience to reach the competent level (Benner, 1982, p. 404) and to reach expert level, takes at least 5 years. Kunz (2015) stipulated that participants needed at least 10 years' experience. However, as the average working life in social work in the middle of the last decade was just below 8 years (Curtis et al., 2010), I needed to allow for flexibility. I therefore applied a criterion of *at least 5 years' experience as a practicing registered social worker* as desirable.

In the CoRe method applied by Kunz (2015, p. 39, author's translation), participants needed to be "regarded as highly competent by other professionals", a criterion aimed at increasing credibility of her research. Similarly, I decided to recruit participants who work in a role that is respected by colleagues for their expertise, such as Principal Social Worker, Advanced Practitioner, Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP), Best Interest Assessor or Independent Social Work practitioner. However, as I was concerned that social workers in these roles may not be reflective of the overall workforce in terms of social characteristics, I applied this criterion only as desirable, so as to not further marginalise the perspectives of those underrepresented in these roles.

In sum, for the first Delphi round (CoRe method) the following sampling criteria were applied:

Participants must be:

- Registered social worker in England and
- Working in any social work/care sector: statutory child and family and adult social workers and social workers from the independent and health service and
- Working in a job role that falls under the remit of the global definition of Social Work Profession (IFSW and IASSW, 2014) and
- Working directly with any service user group (service users, carers, families, groups or communities).

Participants should:

- Have a minimum of 5 years' experience as a practicing registered social worker and
- Work in a role that is respected by colleagues for their expertise, such as Principal Social Worker, Advanced Practitioner, Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP), Best Interest Assessor or Independent Social Work practitioner.

To invite interested social workers to participate, I contacted them through existing networks as recommended by Krueger and Casey (2000) for focus groups. I sent out emails to addressees of the Social Work Education Network (SWEN) and Teaching Partnerships and contacted Skills for Care, the Principal Social Workers' networks for both child and family and adult social workers and independent social workers on BASW's list. In addition, I contacted social workers by direct messaging through my Twitter account. I invited all those contacted to pass on the information. I contacted around 500 people and received a total of 55 responses. Social workers interested in participating in the initial CoRe workshops were given participant information and were asked to return socio-demographic data that enabled me to make decisions about inclusion and exclusion against the above criteria (see Appendix 5). 17 social workers agreed to participate in a one-day CoRe workshop, but four interested participants cancelled at short notice.

To aid recruitment, I also offered to conduct focus groups in a location of the participants choosing (for example in another part of the country) (Krueger and Casey, 2000). As travel journey times across the country are more challenging (feedback from participants), a location in London (near Kings Cross station) was chosen and I hired a room in a community centre. Another strategy was to provide “honoraria, meals and transportation”, as this “can go a long way towards validating time and experience”, whereby a fair and transparent allocation of incentives is important (Flicker, 2014, p. 6; Flicker et al., 2008). I successful application for funding<sup>9</sup> meant I was able to provide food and refreshments during the CoRe workshops. In addition, I offered participants shopping vouchers towards the cost of travel and a voucher (£40) in recognition of their time.

For the second phase of the Delphi study the same criteria were applied. However, to ensure anonymity, although asking participants whether they were registered qualified social workers, I did not include personal information (HCPC registration number) that would have allowed me to verify this. In addition, in order to ensure that participants had the right level of expertise for the panel, the optional criterion regarding experience was strengthened, so that participants *must have* a minimum of 5 years’ experience as a practicing registered social worker. Furthermore, to ensure that the views of social workers from different regions in England were included, an additional non-probabilistic quota sampling strategy was used, stipulating that each region *should* be represented by at least 3 participants, thus setting a minimum number of participants for each category (Teater et al., 2016). Participation by social workers with diverse and protected social characteristics (Great Britain, *Equality Act 2010, Section 4*, 2010) in relation to age, disability, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation was

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<sup>9</sup> Goldsmiths, TaLIC Fellowship 2016-17 <https://goldsmithstalic.wordpress.com/2017/02/01/a-practice-based-curriculum-for-reflective-learning-in-social-work/>

actively encouraged in all communications. I expected the age range of participants to be higher due to the experience required.

In addition to the networks outlined above, over the last few years I have curated a professional Twitter account and besides contacting social workers by email and through direct contact, I spread invitations to participate through Twitter (see for example [Tweet 1](#)<sup>10</sup>). I noticed clear spikes in participation, following such Tweets.

On-going monitoring of the data in relation to region and socio-demographics allowed me to take corrective measures to ensure that key groups were represented (see for example [Tweet 2](#)<sup>11</sup>, [Tweet 3](#)<sup>12</sup> and [Tweet 4](#)<sup>13</sup>). However, this is not to say that the sample was expected to be representative of the overall workforce (Teater et al., 2016).

Participants who took part in the first CoRe workshops were invited to join the subsequent Delphi survey panel. While Delphi expert panels are usually recruited before the first survey is sent out, I chose a more open strategy that enabled self-selection. I hoped that by merging the recruitment and first survey round, I could address some of the common weaknesses of Delphi, related to survey fatigue (Johnston et al., 2014). At the end of the first Delphi round, participants were asked whether they were prepared to complete the second survey and were offered an opportunity to leave their email address for this purpose.

With regard to the sample size for the CoRe workshops, Ghisla (2007, p. 34) recommends six to eight professionals, which is the number I aimed for. In total, six and seven participants took part in the two one-day workshops in London in late November and early December 2017, respectively. There is little firm guidance on the sample size for Delphi panels (Brett et

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<sup>10</sup> <https://twitter.com/AdiStaempfli/status/1097034446702895104>

<sup>11</sup> <https://twitter.com/AdiStaempfli/status/1096352767222915072>

<sup>12</sup> <https://twitter.com/AdiStaempfli/status/1098703943025246208>

<sup>13</sup> <https://twitter.com/AdiStaempfli/status/1104339904153243649>

al., 2017; Jorm, 2015). Sample sizes range from 10–12 participants to several hundred, with 30 to 60 panel members as a typical size (Kezar and Maxey, 2016, p. 145). A sample for the Delphi method is not expected to be a statistically validated representative sample (Gabb et al., 2006), as recruitment is based on expertise, as outlined in the criteria above. Conventional Delphi studies with homogenous panels yield good results with “a smaller sample of between 10 and 15 people” (Kezar and Maxey, 2016, p. 145). If panel members on the other hand represent groups with different roles or interests, then the heterogenous nature of the panel requires a larger sample to ensure that the broad range of diverse perspectives is represented. Furthermore, research into the stability of results from Delphi studies show “stability with panels of around 20 or more members” as participants’ responses have less influence with progressively larger samples, thus leading to more stable findings (Jorm, 2015, p. 891).

As attrition is a common issue in subsequent survey rounds (Fletcher and Marchildon, 2014), the initial panel size needed to be larger. Additionally, “panel attrition is likely to be larger in studies that have a long questionnaire and involve substantial time commitment” (Jorm, 2015, p. 891). Furthermore, with larger samples the amount of data that needs to be analysed in between the survey rounds, increases and should also be considered (Brett et al., 2017) to ensure a quick turnaround. Considering these points, I aimed to recruit between 35 and 40 panel members who met the inclusion criteria for the first round and aimed for at least 20 completed questionnaires in the second Delphi round. To increase completion of the online Delphi questionnaires, I offered panel members a chance to take part in a draw for vouchers (£50) after completion of each survey round.

## Participants

I managed to recruit 13 participants for the initial two CoRe workshops. The first Delphi survey link was sent out in February 2018 and was clicked 1794 times. 159 interviews were started of which 99 were completed and of those, 88 met the inclusion criteria. 74 agreed to be included in the second survey round and were sent the link. Of those, 41 completed the questionnaire. In total, around 100 individual social workers contributed their knowledge and time to this study.

The following tables outline the participants' characteristics in terms of professional experience (Figure 23), geographical region (Figure 24), social work sectors (Figure 25), job role (Figure 26) and socio-demographic characteristics (Figure 27). In addition to the number of participants in each Delphi round per category, I have calculated a weighted mean (Hsu and Sandford, 2012) across the three sample groups. This mean has to be regarded cautiously, as the Delphi II group is a subgroup of the Delphi I group.

<b>Experience as qualified social worker (years)</b>	<b>CoRe (n=13)</b>	<b>Delphi I (n=88)</b>	<b>Delphi II (n=41)</b>	<b>Weighted mean in % (N=142)</b>
0 to 4	1	0	0	<b>0.7</b>
5 to 9	2	33	15	<b>35.2</b>
10 to 14	5	23	6	<b>23.9</b>
15 - 19	2	13	8	<b>16.2</b>
20 to 24	2	12	8	<b>15.5</b>
25 to 29	1	3	1	<b>3.5</b>
30 plus	0	4	3	<b>4.9</b>

*Figure 23 Years' of experience as qualified social worker (in numbers by Delphi round and in per cent for all participants).*

Region	CoRe (n=13)	Delphi I (n=88)	Delphi II (n=41)	Weighted mean in % (N=142)
North East	0	3	2	<b>3.5</b>
North West	1	9	3	<b>9.2</b>
Yorkshire and Humber	0	6	2	<b>5.6</b>
East Midlands	3	11	7	<b>14.8</b>
West Midlands	2	3	1	<b>4.2</b>
East of England	2	6	4	<b>8.5</b>
London	5	33	17	<b>38.7</b>
South East	0	13	4	<b>12.0</b>
South West	0	4	1	<b>3.5</b>

*Figure 24* Participants by English region (in numbers by Delphi round and in per cent for all participants).

Social Work Sector	CoRe (n=13)	Delphi I (n=88)	Delphi II (n=41)	Weighted mean in % (N=142)
Adults	3	48	18	<b>48.6</b>
Children and Families	5	30	17	<b>36.6</b>
Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI)	4	5	2	<b>7.7</b>
NHS, Health	1	5	4	<b>7.0</b>

*Figure 25* Participants by social work sector (in numbers by Delphi round and in per cent for all participants).

The Social Work Sector variable (Figure 25) was a multiple-choice item on the questionnaire. Based on other information provided (e.g. such as job title, team, employer type), I adapted the data in this table to reflect the main area in which a participant was working. Within these broad sectors, a range of fields were represented in both survey rounds such as, Fostering and Adoption, Independent Reviewing, Safeguarding, Emergency Duty Work, Edge of Care, Family Court Advice, Mental Health, Approved Mental Health Professionals, Continuing Healthcare, Substance Misuse, Forensic Mental Health and Best Interest Assessor.

<b>Job Role (employed as ...</b>	<b>CoRe (n=13)</b>	<b>Delphi I (n=88)</b>	<b>Delphi II (n=41)</b>	<b>Weighted mean in % (N=142)</b>
Newly qualified social worker	1	0	0	<b>0.7</b>
Qualified social worker	2	16	7	<b>17.6</b>
Experienced social worker	2	30	15	<b>33.1</b>
Advanced practitioner	2	21	9	<b>22.5</b>
Principal social worker	1	3	3	<b>4.9</b>
Social work manager	1	14	5	<b>14.1</b>
Social work service manager	0	1	0	<b>0.7</b>
Social work (assistant) director	0	0	0	<b>0.0</b>
Social work academic	0	1	0	<b>0.7</b>
Independent Social Worker	4	2	2	<b>5.6</b>
Not answered	0	0	0	<b>0.0</b>

*Figure 26 Participants' job role (in numbers by Delphi round and in per cent for all participants).*

As Figure 26 depicts, more experienced and senior social workers took part in the study.

Participants were distributed across the various social groups as can be seen in Figure 27:

Characteristic	Categories	CoRe (n=13)	Delphi I (n=88)	Delphi II (n=41)	Weighted mean in % (N=142)
<b>Age</b>	20 to 29 years old	0	4	1	<b>3.5</b>
	30 to 39 years old	6	28	14	<b>33.8</b>
	40 to 49 years old	5	30	12	<b>33.1</b>
	50 years old and over	2	25	14	<b>28.9</b>
	Prefer not to state	0	1	0	<b>0.7</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Female	8	68	30	<b>74.6</b>
	Male	5	19	11	<b>24.6</b>
	Transgender	0	0	0	<b>0.0</b>
	Prefer not to state	0	1	0	<b>0.7</b>
<b>Ethnicity</b>	White	12	69	36	<b>82.4</b>
	Mixed Race	0	4	2	<b>4.2</b>
	Asian or Asian British	1	6	3	<b>7.0</b>
	Black or Black British	0	6	0	<b>4.2</b>
	Any Other Ethnicity	0	0	0	<b>0.0</b>
	Prefer not to state	0	3	0	<b>2.1</b>
<b>Disability</b>	Yes	1	5	1	<b>4.9</b>
	No	11	80	37	<b>90.1</b>
	Prefer not to state	1	3	3	<b>4.9</b>
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	Heterosexual	11	63	34	<b>76</b>
	Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual	1	11	3	<b>11</b>
	Prefer not to state	1	14	4	<b>13</b>

*Figure 27* Participants' age, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation (in numbers by Delphi round and in per cent for all participants).

The following section presents the data collection and analysis strategies employed in chronological order, starting with the first CoRe workshops and ending with the analysis of the second-round survey data.

### **Data collection and analysis**

Data was collected and analysed in all three phases of the research. In the first phase data was generated and discursively analysed with participants in the two CoRe workshops. I subsequently further analysed this data and produced a questionnaire for the first Delphi survey round. Quantitative and qualitative data was collected online, analysed and the

second-round questionnaire was produced and again the data collected was analysed. Finally, the key situation titles that met the criteria for agreement were included in the final key situation title list. These are presented in the next findings chapter and an example for the analysis of situations concerned with visits can be found in Appendix 8. In the following sections I outline the specific data collection and analysis strategies in both the zooming in and zooming out phases of the research.

### *Zooming in: CoRe workshop*

The aim of the first phase was to develop a draft list of situations that social work practitioners regularly encounter. The open qualitative, explorative and participatory approach of the CoRe process was partially followed for this.

The full CoRe process is organised in workshops with professionals (Ghisla et al., 2014; Ghisla, 2007; Kaiser, 2005a) and following recruitment of participants, an analysis of the professional field is usually undertaken, situations, associated resources (knowledge, skills and attitudes) and competences are identified, eventually leading to the development of a curriculum for professional training and education (Ghisla et al., 2008, 2011). The initial modelling of the occupational field aims to generate a conceptual model of the profession that then acts as a reflective tool during the analysis of the typical situations generated. It is usually carried out in advance by the researcher based on the literature but can be undertaken later. The conceptual model is then validated by professionals (Ghisla, 2007).

As the literature on what social workers do in England is very limited (see Chapter 1), it was not possible to model the occupational field in advance and this was therefore undertaken parallel to the description of situations during and after the CoRe workshops. Ghisla (2007) points out that the different phases of the CoRe process need not be carried out linearly, arguing that modelling may be carried out after the description of situations. Data collection

followed the CoRe process for identification of situations. Unlike in other social science methods where data is analysed, interpreted and reconstructed by the researcher following data collection, the discursively created key situation titles merge the data collection and analysis phases (Kunz, 2015).

The two workshops in November and December 2017 started with an introduction and information round, followed by a gathering of situations (data collection) and a discursive analysis stage. Using Ghisla's (2007, p. 35) research process, the sequences were as follows: individual description of significant situations were gathered; the participants then presented these to the whole group and visually displayed them in the room; in a discussion partly undertaken in the whole group and partly in subgroups, the situations gathered were compared and grouped into clusters of situations.

The purpose of the introduction and information session was to create a collegiate atmosphere, establish ground rules and offer clarification of the aims of the day and of definitions of specific and key situations. Flicker (2014, p. 122) argues that what makes collaborative efforts work are "clear instructions, strong facilitation, breaking the process up into accessible activities and a deep commitment from the teams to the process." Kemmis (2001, p. 98) states that it is important to think about how the debate can become open and engaging and that the first step is to create a communicative space. This was further supported through the world café style approach (Aldred, 2011), whereby participants were offered tea, coffee, water and juice as well as snacks throughout the day and lunch was provided.

I managed to recruit a member of the Goldsmiths' expert by experience group (social service users) who helped facilitate the day and contributed to the discussions. The funding obtained allowed me to pay her for the time. Following preparatory meetings with her, she assisted

with the running of both workshops. During the discussions she engaged fully with all participants and made valuable contributions to the discussions.

Prior to attending the workshop, participants were invited to “pay attention to the practice situations you regularly encounter in your work and in your professional life” and to “observe yourself (and others) and take note of the situations you are involved in day in, day out” (Email sent out in advance to each workshop). On the day, participants were asked to individually record typical situations that they had encountered in their practice on post-it notes and were then asked to present these to the group. This aimed to promote a narrative approach to the description of experienced situations. Ghisla (2007, p. 35) has found that the process of identification of professional situations can be intensive and engaging. My facilitation of this stage was informed by the explication interview technique (Maurel, 2009; Vermersch, 2009), to support focus on specific situations and to guide participants “away from making any judgment or commentary and towards the description” (Maurel, 2009, p. 61). I posed precise and open prompts that sought to elicit the activities of participants and others in these situations. This led to an initial structuring of the encountered situations (Ghisla, 2007), as I asked participants to talk about the actions, actors and identify a possible title of the situation. As common case discussions in social work often focus on a series of practice situations (a history of engagement for example), it was helpful to make statements like “Let us come back the last time when you did x”, which prompted the participant to focus on a specific situation, “to focus on something, which is not yet appearing, but which we are sure exists because he must have experienced ‘the last time he did x’” (Vermersch, 2009, p. 26). The participants thus created a range of post-it notes with regularly encountered situations based on their own experience and the subsequent discussions in the group formed the core of the data analysis phase.

At this stage, a first participatory data analysis emerged but data collection continued throughout the day. Two central concepts in the CoRe literature around which data analysis occurs are 'areas of responsibility' and 'situations' (Ghisla et al., 2014; Ghisla, 2007; Kaiser, 2005a). An area of responsibility in social work is for example 'Initial contact and assessment' while a situation within this area might be 'Meeting with adults, children or parents to understand and assess their situation'. Situations are action sequences from longer stream of events (such as working with a family over a longer period), which involve a multitude of interactions (Kunz, 2015). Kaiser (2005b) calls these typical, regularly encountered situations 'circle of situations' and Tov et al. (2016a) coined the term 'key situations'. Situations were developed by clustering the presented similar situations and participants initially grouped them based on their own intuition and experience (Ghisla, 2007). Notes were physically moved into clusters and participants discussed common characteristics. Data analysis involved an iterative process, in which participants moved between accounts of specific situations, clusters of situations and this led to the development of areas of responsibility, which were again noted and displayed. The areas of responsibility were akin to a practice-based conceptual model (Ghisla, 2007) and thus enabled a first agreement on significant situations (internal qualitative validation).

This process was carried out in discussion, whereby participants moved freely around the room. Some participants proceeded to assess whether within an area of responsibility, important situations were missing. Others continued to think of important situations, which were then assigned to an existing area of responsibility. Subgroups formed flexibly around themes or areas of responsibilities as they emerged. Thus, the number of descriptions of both situations and areas of responsibilities, grew and at the same time, the categorisation developed through intersubjective communication and discursive validation. Towards the end of the day, we started to focus solely on naming and agreeing to key situation titles but did not make much progress in the remaining time. By the end of the first day, a total of 92

post-it notes that described tasks, processes or situations were generated (see Figure 28). They were grouped into 16 areas of responsibility and a total of 4 key situations were agreed. All notes were transcribed and sent out to participants for clarification, as I was unable to read some words.



**Figure 28** Post-it notes generated during the first CoRe workshop.

In preparation for the second CoRe workshop, the second group of participants were again invited to think about important situations in their work. I adopted Kunz's (2015) iterative and incremental process by ensuring that at the start of the second workshop, the transcribed results from the previous workshops were displayed. The second group was therefore able to build on the situations, key situations and areas of responsibilities that had already been developed.

The day again started with an introductory session, followed by individual recordings and descriptions of significant situations. We then proceeded to review the areas of responsibility and the situations that were generated in the first workshop. Two areas of responsibility were added, and the participants generated a further 90 post-it notes with situations. We

then proceeded to focus on naming and agreeing to key situations. Participants reviewed the post-it notes and started to complete prepared note sheets with a title of situation, brief context description, actors, activities and a description of discrete situations with a beginning, middle and end. By the end of the day, a total of 34 key situations were developed; however, these were not agreed with by the whole group, as time ran out.



**Figure 29** Review of post-it notes and identifying key situations.

I made use of the space and stuck post-it notes on flipcharts to visualise the areas of responsibility and emerging key situations (see Figure 29). Miles and Huberman (1994) have long argued for data to be displayed visually. Rose (2014, p. 2, italics in original) suggests that visual research involves “visual materials of some kind as part of the process”. Visual materials are used to generate evidence and to explore research questions (Rose, 2014); to assist in summarising and categorising and to aid understanding (Rowley, 2014); to incorporate analytical steps into collaborative data collection (Flicker, 2014). Such methods are found to be accessible, responsive (Reason, 2010), engaging, motivational and thought-

provoking (Lewis, 2014, p. 79). As most visual research methods “involve talk between the researcher and the researched”, they are arguably inherently collaborative (Rose, 2014, p. 7). Flicker (2014) further posits that embedding methods that involve the collaborative creation of a map or exhibit, “makes it very hard to divorce data collection from analysis” as “conversations about what is important ... become part of the data collection process (Flicker, 2014, p. 123). Kunz (2015) found that the generation of situation descriptions and clustering occurred in iterative, recursive and parallel processes. As the data was generated, categorisation was carried out simultaneously.

The data analysis processes of creating and organising; reviewing and familiarising; categorising; interpreting and representing (Jackson, 2008; Miles and Huberman, 1994) were carried out collaboratively across the two workshops. The data collection and analysis stages of traditional research methods were thus combined, ran concurrently and were carried out in co-production between researcher and participants (Rowley, 2014). However, there is no consensus on what role a researcher should take in relation to data interpretation and analysis. These range from being merely a facilitator for the process to active contributors with “an equal voice at the analytic table” (Flicker, 2014, p. 124). I viewed my role as that of a facilitator and focussed on contributing to discussions by asking clarifying questions. The entire process was documented with photos and audio recording as a basis for subsequent transcription and further analysis (Ghisla, 2007). The photographs also act as evidence of the process and analysis (Lewis, 2014).

In sum, the modified CoRe process was organised as two one-day workshops with social workers from different sectors in which data collection and initial analysis was carried out. The 13 participants generated 182 tasks, processes or situations and 34 key situations in 16 areas of responsibility. In this flexible and iterative process, it was impossible to predict how far the produced situations would adequately depict the professional field of social work in England and I expected that the data would be at varying levels of interpretation and

clustering. I therefore analysed the data further to prepare a set of situation titles that could be reviewed in a survey.

### *Zooming out: Design of questionnaire*

In order to analyse the data further, I collated all transcribed post-it notes and draft key situations from both workshops in a spreadsheet. The analysis of the transcriptions first involved discarding statements that did not relate to specific tasks, processes or situations, such as feelings (e.g. 'feeling overwhelmed'), very generalised statements (e.g. 'enabling participation') or did not refer to social workers' practice (e.g. 'service user's refusal to engage'). The remaining notes were clustered into groups under a proposed or new key situation title so that all identified tasks, processes and situations were included. In doing so, I identified post-it notes that depicted potential key situations. I was careful not to change the wording and stuck with the words used by participants. Some situations were constructed based on several post-it notes, while others were suggested by participants.

When formulating key situations titles, I was informed by two principles. Firstly, situations should be at a medium level of abstraction (Kunz, 2015), whereby a key situation includes any number of similar specific situations from different social work sectors, settings and fields, but is not too abstract that it covers a whole range of unrelated practice situations (Tov et al., 2016). Therefore, when revising titles, I was concerned to find formulations that covered practice situations from a generalist perspective (Trevithick, 2011). For example, rather than talking about 'Undertaking a Mental Health Act assessment' or a specialist child protection intervention, I sought to find a formulation that is applicable to all sectors, such as 'Co-working with emergency services to safeguard people and undertake statutory duties'. Second, I was mindful that a situation title expresses social workers' activities and therefore always starts with a verb (e.g. Doing, Acting, Taking part in).

Following this initial step, I proceeded to analyse the provisional key situation titles by comparing them with the literature. I sought to use the categories described in the literature as a reflective tool (Ghisla, 2007) to identify any gaps. I collated the categories linked to typologies of social work (Moriarty et al., 2015; Dominelli, 2009; Beresford, 2007; Payne, 2006) and tasks and responsibilities (TCSW, 2014; Dominelli, 2009; Beresford, 2007; Asquith et al., 2005). However, I found that all these categories offer very broad and generalised perspectives, so that there is "clearly some overlap between these activities" (Moriarty et al., 2015, p. 9). The analysis did not prove to be fruitful, as the categories were on a much more abstract and generalised level.

Having established the first 87 situation titles that emerged from the first data analysis step, I proceeded to analyse each area of responsibility in terms of completeness and workflow. For example, I noticed gaps in relation to planning of care and support, where only 'Making an onward referral to another service' was listed. In practice however, other important practice situations related to planning are: 'Arranging another service for a service user, carer or a family' and 'Supporting service users or carers to access another service'. At the same time, support plans not only include other services but also service users' social networks and community-based resources. This led me to formulate the additional titles: 'Supporting service users to strengthen their social network' and 'Supporting people to access community-based resources'. Other situation titles described situations that were specific to certain sectors. For example, there were a number of specific assessments in relation to 'carer's assessment', 'age assessment', 'AIM assessment' and 'viability assessment'. In line with the principles for situation titles, I therefore summed these situations up under the heading 'Meeting with adults, children or parents to understand and assess their situation'. Several meeting situations emerged from the workshops, many of which were at a specific level, for example, 'Multi-agency child protection conference' or 'CPA review meeting with a service user'. I changed the titles to a higher level of abstraction that would be relevant

across sectors. When thinking about the principles of highlighting the social workers' activities in the title, I thought about social workers' roles in meetings and wondered how far they were involved not just in participating in a meeting but also in organising and chairing a meeting; I decided on a formula for meetings based on action (Organising - Participating – Chairing) and type of meeting (Safeguarding meeting, Multi-agency meeting, Review meeting, Multi-disciplinary meeting and Social work meeting). So, I created titles such as 'Organising a Safeguarding meeting', 'Participating in a multi-agency conference' and 'Chairing a Multi-disciplinary meeting' for each category. It is important to note that specific context information can be added later on the platform when describing and reflecting on a specific situation, for example, 'Organising a Safeguarding meeting / Adult Mental Health'; 'Participating in a multi-agency conference / MARAC ' or; 'Chairing a Review meeting / placement stability review'. This analysis process led to a total of 104 provisional situation titles, of which 40 were left unchanged from the initial CoRe workshop data analysis, 35 were reformulated and a further 29 situation titles emerged from the above described second analysis.

I also reviewed the areas of responsibility to identify whether any were missing or redundant. I subsumed situation titles from some areas into others (Interaction with leadership and Review meetings) and merged a number of areas, ending up with 11 areas of responsibility. This is related to the CoRe process of conceptual modelling of the professional field and when conducted subsequent to the description, applies a deductive process (Ghisla, 2007).

Ghisla et al. (2014, p. 25) argue that the CoRe process usually leads to “40 to 60 situations”. In the DACUM process, around 100 to 150 tasks emerge that adequately differentiate a professional field and Kunz (2015) used this as a rough guide. To achieve this, her team had to differentiate key situations either into different key situations or cluster several key situations into a new one. Their goal was that in the end, all the key situations were at the

same level of abstraction (Kunz, 2015). In the analysis of the data generated in the workshop, I aimed to generate generic situation titles that are at a similar level of abstraction, that express the activity of the social worker explicitly and that include no less than 40 and no more than 150 key situations. I was also guided by the principle that titles should express social workers' professional practice explicitly and therefore formulated these such that they always commences with a verb in its present participle form (e.g. Doing, Acting, Taking part in).

The initial list of key situation titles then formed the basis for the questionnaire for the first Delphi survey round.

#### *Zooming out: Delphi survey*

The aim of the zooming out phase of the research was to ensure that the developed key situation titles from the first CoRe round were reviewed by a wider community of social workers. More specifically, the objective was to refine the key situation titles and to arrive at a shared understanding and agreement of what the key situations in social work in England are.

The conventional Delphi method was originally developed by the RAND Corporation in 1953. It aims to support the development of consensus and is "best understood as ... a decision-making tool that uses research methods" (Kezar and Maxey, 2016, p. 144). In the late 1960's a second variant of the Delphi method, the policy Delphi was developed at RAND with the aim of examining complex policy issues. Rather than focussing on consensus, the policy approach seeks to gather conflicting views and opinions about a topic and explore this in more depth to arrive at "a more complete understanding of points of consensus and disagreement about a particular topic" (Kezar and Maxey, 2016, p. 144). While the conventional Delphi employs a homogenous sample, the policy Delphi utilises a

heterogeneous sample (Kezar and Maxey, 2016). A third main variant of the Delphi method is the “‘real-time’ Delphi, in which multiple rounds are temporally compressed to occur within a single meeting” (Fletcher and Marchildon, 2014, p. 3). This study’s aims were most closely related to the purpose of the conventional method.

Generally, the Delphi method is useful when researching “a problem or phenomenon when there is incomplete knowledge, the landscape is largely unknown, or there is limited consensus among groups” as it enables tapping into practitioners’ knowledge (Kezar and Maxey, 2016, p. 144) and thus promotes practitioners’ as “experts on the issue being studied” (Fletcher and Marchildon, 2014, p. 8). The main aim of the Delphi method is thus the generation of an “informed judgment on issues that are largely unexplored, difficult to define, highly context and expertise specific, or future-oriented” (Fletcher and Marchildon, 2014, p. 3). The conventional and policy Delphi can be characterised by four criteria: Firstly, participants remain anonymous, to encourage free expression of opinions; secondly, feedback from researchers between rounds is provided to inform participants of the variety of views emerging; thirdly, it is an iterative process that allows participants to “consider, reevaluate, and clarify or modify their views”; and fourthly, responses are aggregated and data is analysed quantitatively (Kezar and Maxey, 2016, p. 144-145). Delphi is usually conducted with paper-based questionnaires or electronic documents sent out by email or administered through online survey tools (Jorm, 2015). It is thus an asynchronous mode of communication (Bowles et al., 2003, p. 107). Typically, between two and five survey rounds are organised (Brett et al., 2017; Kezar and Maxey, 2016; Fletcher and Marchildon, 2014), including the first qualitative round. However, this varies, depending on “the purposes of the study and how long it takes to cultivate consensus, more nuanced views, or identify opposing views” (Kezar and Maxey, 2016, p. 145). Research suggests that “most changes occur in the transition from the first to the second round” (Brett et al., 2017, p. 7).

The 104 provisional key situation titles developed in the CoRe workshops and the subsequent analysis, were used as items on a questionnaire that enabled review by participants as part of an expert panel in two Delphi survey rounds. These rounds were therefore part of an “evaluation phase” (Ziglio, 1995, p. 9 in Fletcher and Marchildon, 2014, p. 3), in which participants reviewed the results of the previous round. Responses gathered in the first round formed the basis for the analysis and development of the second questionnaire. Each round thus provided “an opportunity for the experts to respond and to revise their answer in light of the group members’ previous responses” (Fletcher and Marchildon, 2014, p. 3).

As it is important to check for “comprehension and acceptability of the questionnaire” in a pre-test, before sending it out to the expert panel participants (Brett et al, 2017, p. 3), I conducted two pre-tests. First, as part of a workshop at a conference, I presented a first version of the questionnaire on paper and obtained feedback. Six people completed the questionnaire and following this, the ranking scale was adapted. It gave me an initial insight as to whether the titles and questions made sense and were understandable. It also showed that the workshop participants all completed the questionnaire within 15 to 35 minutes (including consent and demographic data), which was useful information for recruitment of participants.

I then developed an online questionnaire to enable virtual collaboration. Online research methods are increasingly being discussed in the literature (Bezemer and Kress, 2014; Embury, 2014; Rowley, 2014; Karpf, 2012; Fierstein and Page, 2011; Murthy, 2011; Flicker et al., 2008; García and Roblin, 2008; Huxham, 2003) and are defined as research that is initiated, conducted or concluded online using the Internet and web-based technology (Embury, 2014; Flicker et al., 2008). The survey tool offered by SoSci Survey, a web-based survey platform ([www.soscisurvey.de](http://www.soscisurvey.de)), was chosen for several reasons: it was designed for social sciences; it is free to use for individual researchers; it is a shared tool for a community

of researchers that is supported by fee paying organisations who use it; it offers many different question types and it allows export of data to excel.

Following a technical function test, as recommended by SoSci Survey, a further pre-test, this time online, was carried out with CoRe participants and those who were interested in taking part in the CoRe workshops but were unable to do so. 9 people took part in this and it allowed me to test the tool, as well as to further refine the questionnaire. It also provided an opportunity to test data collection and check data retrieval and export functions, as well as setting up the data analysis procedures and statistical tests. Comments further allowed me to make final revisions to the questionnaire.

In the first survey round, participants were asked to rate how frequently they encounter and deal with a situation in their area of practice on a 6-point Likert scale (6= Very Frequently to 1=Never). In addition, the participants were given an opportunity to comment on whether any situations were missing and whether the titles were unclear. Lastly, the participants were able to comment on the areas of responsibility. This 6-point scale was chosen for the purpose of data analysis, whereby 2 scale points (1 and 2 – never and very rarely; 3 and 4 rarely and occasionally; and 5 and 6 frequently and very frequently) were combined for the purpose of analysis.

The questions were supported by visual aids that indicated frequency. As there were over 100 situation titles, it is suggested that items are displayed “under thematic headings ... to aid communication” (Jorm, 2015, p. 893). I therefore grouped the draft key situation titles in groups, related to an area of responsibility. For example, a first-round question, relating to key situations in the area of responsibility of ‘initial contact and assessment’, was displayed as follows in Figure 30:

**In your area of practice, how frequently do you encounter and deal with these key situations related to initial contact and assessment?**

	Very Frequently	Occasionally	Very Rarely	Never
Receiving and responding to new contacts and referrals.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Carrying out a screening assessment/triage with an existing service user or new contact.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Discussing opening or closing a case with manager.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Having an initial face to face meeting with an adult, child or parents.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reviewing initial information on an allocated case.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gathering information to plan next steps.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Establishing contact with a service user or carer.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Engaging with service users or carers at the beginning.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Figure 30** *Layout of first round question on SoSci’s survey tool*

I launched the survey at a presentation at the Adult Principal Social Worker network meeting in February 2019 and the initial Delphi round was open for a two-month period (February and March 2019) to allow as many social workers as possible to participate. Continuous monitoring of completion allowed me to encourage participation from underrepresented groups and I took pro-active steps to continue recruiting participants throughout this period (see Sampling).

Once all data from the first round was collected, I analysed it in a two-week period. Data analysis in Delphi includes both quantitative and qualitative methods and thus uses a combination of deductive and inductive processes (Fletcher and Marchildon, 2014). The first zooming in phase based on the CoRe method that was employed as the first round of the Delphi study, collected exclusively qualitative data in an inductive process. While subsequent rounds mainly relied on quantitative data being collected and analysed, in these rounds, qualitative data in the form of comments were also gathered and analysed (Fletcher and Marchildon, 2014). While quantitative analyses can suggest consensus or agreement with statements, comments can point to “omissions or gaps within the materials provided” (Johnston, et al., 2014, p. 16). The collected qualitative data in the two Delphi survey rounds

was analysed by applying the processes and principles outlined in the section 'Zooming out: Design of questionnaire'. Before analysing the ratings in relation to the key situation titles, I checked the quality of the data, using the quality parameters provided in SoSci Survey.

The quantitative analysis of the ranked draft key situation titles sought to establish agreement as to whether these are key situations. Therefore, the analysis of Delphi data "requires a quantitative definition of 'consensus'" (Jorm, 2015, p. 893). In a systematic review, Diamond et al. (2014) found over ten different ways in which consensus was defined and Jorm (2015, p. 893) points out that there is "no single definition of consensus". In the reviewed literature by Diamond et al. (2014), the median definition of agreement was when 75% of participants agreed with a statement, with a range from 50% to 97%. Humphrey-Murto et al. (2017, p. 18) suggest that a

"typical definition of agreement would be that 70% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that an item should be included. Items where 70% disagreed or strongly disagreed should be discarded, and items not meeting these criteria would be sent to the next round for re-ranking."

Ultimately, it is up to researchers to define consensus in a quantitative way and give a rationale for this (Jorm, 2015). Crucially, Humphrey-Murto et al. (2017) and Diamond et al. (2014, p. 406) suggest that it is important to define and describe the quantitative criteria used.

For the purpose of this study, I defined agreement as:

- If 70% of participants agree that in their area of practice a situation is encountered very frequently or frequently, then a situation will be defined as a key situation.
- If 70% of participants agree that in their area of practice a situation is encountered never or very rarely, then a situation will be excluded from the title list of key situations.

- If a situation title is neither included nor excluded from the key situation list, then the title will again be sent to participants for another round of re-ranking, providing them with the information of the analysis.

Diamond et al. (2014, p. 405) note that one of the limitations of a prior definition of consensus is that “certain items may fall just below the threshold for what is fundamentally an arbitrary cut off”. They therefore suggest that in this case, researchers could consider including these items if justification is provided.

When deciding on the above definition of agreement, I considered that some key situations are context-specific to certain areas of practice (variable ‘Social Work Sector’). While the inclusion of both child and family, adult, health and third sector social workers has ensured that situations from these sectors were included in the review, the quantitative analysis showed that for some situations, agreement (inclusion or exclusion) was only achieved in one social work sector. While in principle, agreement in any one sector would lead to inclusion, I found that the numbers of participants from the health and private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sectors were much lower than in the other two sectors. I therefore included these for re-rating in the second round. Feedback in the first round from several participants was that situations related to (practice) education should be included. Therefore, based on my understanding of the role, I developed seven situation titles that were included in the second round. Altogether, 86 situations were included in the second Delphi survey round and I prepared a feedback report for it.

It is generally recommended to “include summary statistics such as the participants’ score, participants’ medians, range of scores and the proportion of participants selecting each point on a scale” (Humphrey-Murto et al., 2017, p. 18). However, there is some dispute about the effect of providing feedback in follow up rounds, “as this can undermine ‘wisdom of crowds’

effect” (Jorm, 2015, p. 893). I was also concerned about the effect of too much information as this could be off-putting and increase response fatigue. I therefore listed the titles that were accepted or rejected as key situations in the first round for information and included any changes to the wording that was suggested in comments (but that did not substantially alter the meaning). Situations for which there was no or only marginal agreement (included or excluded) were included for re-rating in the second round. For these situations, amalgamated statistics (Brett et al., 2017) were provided, as the following example illustrates:

**No or only partial agreement was reached in the following situations** (see figure below):

	Total Responses (N=88)		Children and Family (n=32)		Adult Social Work (n=48)		Health Social Work (n=10)		Third, independent, or voluntary sector Social Work (n=7)	
	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected
Carrying out a screening assessment/triage with an existing service user or new contact.	63	16	59	22	67	10	70	20	57	29
Discussing opening or closing a case with manager.	57	15	63	6	56	19	30	10	0	43

*Figure 31 Feedback provided to participants in the second round.*

Participants were asked to consider such feedback and their own view as to whether a situation should be included in the final key situation list (see Figure 32):

Considering both your view as to whether a situation is typical in English social work and the above responses by social workers from the different sectors, do you overall think these situations should be included in or excluded from the final list of English key situations?

If a situation is typical and regularly encountered by social workers in any one area of practice or sector (usually by at least 70%), then it should be included in the list of key situations, but the final judgement is yours to make.

	Include in English key situations	Exclude from English key situations
Carrying out an initial or screening assessment.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Discussing opening or closing a case with manager.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

*Figure 32 Rating scales for re-rating of previously included situation titles in survey round two.*

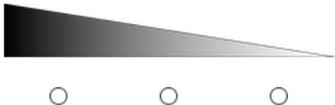
In addition, participants were asked to rate new titles that were proposed in the first questionnaire and participants were asked whether these situations should be included or excluded:

**In your opinion, do you think this situation is a key situation in English social work?**

The following situation is new, based on suggestions from participants in the first round:

Making initial decisions about level of risk and urgency and next steps to be taken.

Yes, include      Not sure      No, exclude



**Figure 33** Rating scale for new situation titles in the second survey round.

In the second questionnaire, the response options were changed from a six-point rating scale about the frequency of encountering situations to a binary response choice (“include” or “exclude”) for rerated situations and a three-point Likert type scale for new situations (“Yes, include”, “Not sure” or “No, exclude”). The rationale for this was that in the final survey round, I regarded participants as expert panel members and therefore, asking them for their overall judgement seemed appropriate. I sent the second survey link to the participants who agreed to take part in the second questionnaire.

For the purpose of the second Delphi round, consensus was defined as

- If 70% of participants agree that a situation should be included in the final list of key social work situations in England, then a situation will be defined as a key situation.
- If 70% of participants agree that a situation should be excluded from the final list of key social work situations in England, then a situation will be excluded from the key situations title list.
- If no agreement is reached, then a situation shall be excluded from the key situation title list.

The second round was open for just over two weeks and following this, I again analysed the data from the second survey round. Finally, I collated all the agreed items from the two rounds and compiled the final list of key situation titles.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Social work research is anchored in ethics and values, expressed in the codes of practice for both social work researchers and practitioners. I put these values into practice and adhered to the ethical guidelines established by the Social Research Association (SRA, 2003) and to the Joint University Council and SWEC's (JUSWEC, 2017) "Code of Ethics for Social Work and Social Care Research". As this research also involved online data collection, ethics needed to be considered in relation to online research. In this regard, I consulted and adhered to the Association of Internet Researchers' ethical guidelines for Internet research (Markham and Buchanan, 2017). I was granted ethical approval through Goldsmiths' ethical approval process (see Appendices 3 and 4).

Harricharan and Bhopal (2014) argue that the basic ethical considerations for face to face and online research ethics are similar. Generally recognised ethical principles include minimising harm, respecting autonomy, protecting privacy, offering reciprocity and treating people equitably (Hammersley and Traianou, 2012). While the consulted guidelines offered sufficient principles, no "single set of guidelines can cover all ethical situations" of research (af Segerstad et al., 2016; Roberts, 2015; Convery and Cox, 2012). In the following sections, key issues related to informed consent, right to privacy, risks to participants and the researcher – participant relationship, are discussed.

### ***Informed consent***

Informed consent is generally considered as a prerequisite to ethical offline and online research (af Segerstad et al., 2016; Roberts, 2015; Neuhaus and Webmoor, 2012). In an

online setting, an overt and active approach to informed consent demonstrates credibility (Esposito, 2012). Participants must be aware of the potential uses of their contributions, particularly if there is a possibility of dissemination of data outside the research setting (Neuhaus and Webmoor, 2012). Thus, I provided written information about the nature of the online and offline research, in which I explicitly stated that consent can be withdrawn at any point and asked for written consent.

This research was concerned with data that is co-produced during the data collection and analysis stage in the first CoRe workshops and with data collected online in the two Delphi survey rounds. I gathered user data in relation to the identities and socio-demographic information and data about professional situations. It was important that participants understood the difference and the consequences of participation, before consenting to participation (see Appendices 5 – 7).

#### *Individual's right to privacy*

A risk of (Internet based) research is the exposure of individuals, which can be avoided by preserving the anonymity of participants, but it may be difficult to maintain complete anonymity and privacy when online data is made publicly available (Harricharan and Bhopal, 2014). I ensured privacy by protecting personal data in line with the General Data Protection Regulation (EU GDPR, 2016, 2018), which is European Union law and the Data Protection Act (Great Britain, 1998, Part 1).

The data gathered in the workshops and the survey was of a general nature (key situation titles, processes, tasks) and it is not possible to identify individuals from that data. However, for the purpose of sampling and analysis, I collected personal data that is defined as “any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person” (EU GDPR, 2016, art. 4.1) and I processed this data (see EU GDPR, 2016, art. 4.2) for the purposes of research (see EU

GDPR, 2016, art. 5.1). As I had obtained written consent prior to processing personal data, this is deemed to be lawful (see EU GDPR, 2016, art. 6).

To ensure data protection, confidential personal information about participants collected (as part of the sampling process) was stored securely in a locked cabinet (paper records) and digital data was secured through password protection. An important decision in relation to online research, data security and privacy is “deciding on an appropriate provider” (Harricharan and Bhopal, 2014, p. 332). The platform SoSci Survey (<https://www.soscisurvey.de>) offers a service that is compliant with European law and ensures privacy of respondents on several levels. It is guaranteed through a secure infrastructure with “encryption, secure software, security updates”, based on reliable technology and avoids collecting personal data as it ensures anonymisation with no collection of cookies or IPs in logfiles. SoSci Survey GmbH’s headquarters and computer centre, which houses the survey servers [www.soscisurvey.de](http://www.soscisurvey.de) and [s2survey](http://s2survey.de), are in Munich (Germany) (<https://www.soscisurvey.de/help/doku.php/en:survey:privacy>) and fall under European jurisdiction. In order to set up the second survey, I collected email addresses from interested participants through the online tool. These were stored separately with no links to the data set, thus making it impossible to identify participants’ responses. Lastly, SoSci’s General Terms and Conditions (GTC) explicitly state that any data collected belongs to the researcher. Backups on the server [www.soscisurvey.de](http://www.soscisurvey.de) are only stored for a period of 12 months (<https://www.soscisurvey.de/en/privacy>). Whereas research data in the UK could be stored for an indefinite period (Great Britain, 1998, Part 1, Section 33), I will destroy the data 5 years after publication.

With respect to privacy and considering that participation may be empowering (Orton-Johnson, 2012), an option is to allow participants to choose either “anonymity or disclosure of their personal data” (Esposito, 2012, p. 322). In fact, “anonymity may not always be

preferred as the default especially in a participatory culture, where people want to be attributed to the stories they publicly share” (Liu, 2010, p. 2). I therefore offered participants of the CoRe workshops the option to be named as co-producers of the initial draft title list and obtained written consent for this. Participants were able to select which information could be made public (name, job title and the social work field they practice in) and were informed that they could withdraw this consent at any point. 11 out of the 13 participants gave informed consent to taking part using their real name. However, any information in relation to situations remains anonymous and consent only covers the publication of personal information to acknowledge their contribution and participation in the overall project on the Key Situation platform and in publications (see Appendix 5).

On completion of the research, it is my intention to publish the key situation titles on the Key Situation platform, which can be accessed by any social worker. However, as the data is at a generalised level (key situation titles), it will not be possible to identify any participants who contributed to this. It is worth noting that content on the Key Situation platform cannot be found by search engines (Tschopp et al., 2016). Furthermore, Tschopp et al. (2016) consulted a data privacy lawyer with expertise in European and Swiss law (the platform is run by the Swiss Association under Swiss jurisdiction) before implementing their recommendations to safeguard both platform user data and data in relation to social work situations. All users of the platform must register and agree to the ‘data privacy statement’ and ‘terms of use’. These state that “without consent from the person, sensitive personal data can only be processed, stored or passed on to a third party in anonymised form” and safeguards (review process) are in place for this (Association Network Key Situations, 2016).

### *Risks to participants*

Research ethics is about “more than the basic anonymity and confidentiality” (Nind et al., 2013, p. 664) and further risks and benefits need to be considered. This research did not

involve any major intervention in the lives of the participants and therefore was “less likely to generate serious ethical issues” (Hammersley and Traianou, 2012, p. 12). The nature of questions asked has the potential to cause harm by provoking emotional reactions (Convery and Cox, 2012, p. 52; Eysenbach and Till, 2001). However, the topic of research was such that no discomfort arose from participation as none of the questions asked in the research process caused distress or offence. In fact, participants were very positive about the process.

The potential risk of disclosure of personal data was mitigated by the confidentiality procedures outlined above and I cannot foresee any potential harm to research participants in the CoRe workshops who chose to participate under their real name.

I was mindful of participants’ individual needs in relation to “communication, disability, comprehension and expense” (SRA, 2003, p. 37). I used non-discriminatory inclusive language and offered additional resources if needed. One participant in the CoRe phase indicated that they were dyslexic and stated their need for time and clear explanations regarding how to contribute. Another participant with health issues disclosed these at the beginning of the workshop and we discussed their needs. The physical environment was not ideal and throughout the day, I kept on checking in with them to obtain feedback and to plan in breaks, as and when needed.

Lastly, there were no conflicting financial interests in this research. Funding, obtained through Goldsmiths’ Teaching and Learning Fellowship, enabled me to offer incentives and other than the publication of the findings, there are no other obligations that arose out of this funding.

The combination of face to face and online expert-based research valued the expertise of participants and this “can be regarded as an ethical stance” (Nind et al., 2013, p. 660). A fundamental issue in research ethics is the “ethical treatment of others”, particularly

research participants (Nind et al., 2013, p. 657). In participatory research, the aim is to create a “fair kind of relationship and an interesting and meaningful experience for participants” (Gauntlett, 2007 in Nind et al., 2013, p. 658). Even in the context of this research with social workers, if the researcher is “considered to have the expertise” (Jackson, 2008, p. 162), an expert-subject relationship can reinforce “oppressive practice and discrimination” and silences participants in similar ways that they experience in their working lives (Lewis, 2014, p. 78). The researcher’s own background and emotions also affect “research experiences and potential outcomes” (Bröckerhoff and Kipnis, 2014, p. 2). This led me to first recognise that as a researcher I must be cognisant of my own positionality in relation to the research. Secondly, this understanding stresses the importance of being reflexive (Humphries, 2008), as the interpretation of data is “a reflexive exercise through which meanings are made rather than found” (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003, p. 414). Self-reflection has also “important consequences for the study’s trustworthiness and on the ethics” (Herr and Anderson, 2014, p. 48). I consider the issues related to my own positionality and reflexivity in the following sections.

### **Positionality and Reflexivity**

Traditional approaches conceptualise positionality as either being an insider or outsider (Robson, 2002), with each position bringing varying “benefits and disadvantages both to the researcher and to the research” (Bröckerhoff and Kipnis, 2014, p. 2). Herr and Anderson (2005, p. 32) argue that positionality is more nuanced as some outside researchers may have “extensive—and often first hand—knowledge of the setting”, for example “researchers studying social service agencies” that “have previously been social workers”; this describes my own position. Similarly, Pechurina (2014, para8.1) reflects on her own shifting positionality within the group of participants that was partly an insider and partly an outsider position. Herr and Anderson (2005) thus suggest that the insider – outsider positionalities

need to be viewed as a continuum. In their view, six different types of positionalities can be distinguished in the literature and the definition of one's position is thus no simple matter and may also change in different stages of the research project. My own background led me to understand my position as both an outsider and insider.

The value base, which informs my engagement in the Key Situation project, is based on notions of open access, collegiate participation across organisational, hierarchical and practice – academy boundaries. For this reason, I strived for a collaborative methodology and methods. I was also guided by a relationship-based approach, with an understanding that any knowledge production process such as this research is a co-productive process, in line with understandings of situated knowledges (Kaiser, 2005b; Blackler, 1995; Haraway, 1988).

Therefore, I valued both the co-production of knowledge and networking aspects of action research. I saw each action research cycle not only as an opportunity to learn more about the conditions of the profession and about professional learning, but also as an opportunity to build relationships, to come together with others with the shared aim of supporting the profession's ability and opportunities for reflexive and mindful professionalism. In the history of the development of the Key Situation Model, workshops have always been used to inform, encourage and motivate participation in the wider Key Situation network and paying attention to social aspects is a crucial part of this (Tschopp, et al., 2016). This research provided further opportunities for this. I see this as a distinct advantage of a collaborative project (Norton, 2004) and is important in terms of creating a Key Situation network in England. Participation can promote "a sense of pride in being able to contribute to a major deliverable" (Dixon and Stricklin, 2014, p. 10) that is satisfying because participants perspectives are valued.

I was a social worker in direct practice for over 15 years both in the UK and in Switzerland and over the last twelve years have worked in academia. I identify strongly as a practitioner, professional and social scientist (Croisdale-Appleby, 2014). Although I am not an insider who is currently in direct practice, neither am I an outsider. The participants in the project were likely to see me as first and foremost an academic and this has influenced our relationship, as academia holds status. Being perceived as an academic outsider may lead to responses that “demonstrate the way participants would like to present themselves” (Pechurina, 2014, p. 3) to an academic. To support a relational praxis (Bradbury and Reason, 2001), I made my values and those of the Key Situation Model, transparent from the outset.

However, positionality is multifaceted and relates to other social characteristics. I was aware that my background determined my perception, thinking and feeling in the research process and in relations with others, whereby my multiple positions intersected, and this could have brought me into conflicting situations within the research (Herr and Anderson, 2014). In order to achieve a reflection-action, I considered reflexivity as a research issue. Reflexivity is concerned with the “impact of the researcher on the research” (Humphries, 2008, p. 29) through an analysis of how one’s social location, theoretical perspective and emotional responses to participants influence the research process and outcomes (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003). While “bias and subjectivity are natural and acceptable in action research” they need to be “critically examined rather than ignored” to avoid distorting effects on outcomes (Herr and Anderson, 2014, p. 59). Furthermore, ontological and epistemological assumptions that are embedded within data analysis methods and their impact on research processes and outcomes, are part of a reflexive approach (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003).

Reflecting on this, I was concerned about underrepresentation of black social workers and wondered whether my own background as a white, middle class, European male had an impact on recruitment. I sought to mitigate this by seeking support from black practitioners

and academics in the recruitment for the online survey rounds. However, despite some public support from black colleagues (both online and face to face), I did not manage to recruit an adequate sample of participants from Black or Black British groups. I also noted a higher than national average participation of male social workers, especially in the CoRe workshops and the last survey round and wondered whether this again could be a reflection of my own influence on the research process, or whether this was reflective of gendered roles and oppression in practice organisations. I had to balance these different positionalities “in order to effectively position myself within a group” (Pechurina, 2014, p. 3) and it was important to make tensions in relation to the research question(s) and participants explicit (Herr and Anderson, 2014). Considering that each participant also has fluid and multiple positionalities (Quiros, 2012), this reflexive endeavour is complex. I take note that authentic studies that transparently reflect on positionality are “more likely to engage in the traditional action research spiral of iterative cycles of plan-act-observe-reflect” and lead to “increased understandings of practice and the practice setting” (Herr and Anderson, 2014, p. 48). Reflecting on this, I see the value of this research as emergent over time, if and when the Key Situation Model is implemented in organisations and/or universities. While I am unable at this point to identify reasons for underrepresentation of the above discussed groups of social workers, it does focus my attention on potential reasons for non-participation and I will need to be mindful of these when progressing with the Key Situation Model in the future.

It was equally important to consider wider issues such as the influence of others in the process and vice versa, as well as the context in which research takes place (Humphries, 2008, Mauthner and Doucet, 2003). This is why it was important to pay attention to the group process and dynamics (Robson, 2002). In Flicker’s view, “orientation, setting up ground rules and reflexively checking assumptions” (Flicker, 2014, p. 124) can mitigate these to some degree and I was mindful of this during the CoRe workshops, carefully wording all communications and starting the day with Ice breakers and positive, inclusive messages.

Being reflexively aware of power dynamics and naming these helps to minimise them, but this “can often be a difficult task” (Flicker et al., 2008, p. 298).

Such reflexivity is also difficult to achieve, particularly when conducting participatory research, as a PhD student. The quest for authenticity in qualitative research demands congruence between design, process and reporting (Riaz, 2016) and I was explicit about my epistemological and ontological concepts that informed my research practices. In order to support my own reflexivity and data analysis, I kept a research journal, in which I documented any ongoing reflections throughout the data collection and analysis phases.

### **Strengths and limitations**

In this section, I examine the strengths and limitations of the research design and practice.

In my assessment of these, I am guided by recommendations for conducting and reporting of Delphi studies that are based on a systematic review of the literature (Jünger et al., 2017). They specifically advise on justification, planning and process, definition of consensus, informational input, prevention of bias, interpretation and processing of results and external validation, which I discuss in turn.

*Justification.* There is no consensus on methodologies and quality criteria of social work research (Shaw and Norton, 2008). Therefore, researchers need to choose a research framework and methodology in line with their own world view and critically think through the methodological and epistemological options this allows (Mills et al., 2006). A strength of the research design outlined in this chapter, is that the purpose of the research is clearly defined and the alignment of the practice-based ontology and epistemology, action research methodology and choice of method offers a good fit. The zooming in and out movements called for by Nicolini (2009) have in this research come to life through the chosen methods.

*Planning and process.* Any modifications of the Delphi study design need to be “clearly justified by a rationale and be applied systematically and rigorously” (Jünger et al., 2017, p. 701). The Delphi method in this study was adapted in two ways. First, I adopted the initial stages of the CoRe method for the first open qualitative round in Delphi. A strength of this modification of Delphi was that the open round was clearly grounded in principles and practices of the CoRe method and this offered much clarity to this first phase of Delphi. The second adaption concerned the sampling strategy. As a departure from conventional Delphi studies, I chose an open recruitment process for the first online survey round. I was aware that the risk of a self-selecting strategy was that some participants who completed the questionnaire could end up not meeting the inclusion criteria, or would not agree to participate in the second round. As it turned out, of the 99 participants who completed the initial survey, only 11 did not meet the inclusion criteria and of the 88 participants, 74 agreed to be included in the second survey. When planning the two survey rounds, I weighed up these risks against the benefits of reducing hurdles to participation. On reflection, this decision seemed to be right, as I managed to recruit more than enough participants, while still ensuring that most participants met the prior defined inclusion criteria. I believe that contributing to this, were my close links with the sector, clear participant information that set out the sampling criteria (see Appendix 6) and support from many leaders in the field. The adaption of the sampling strategy in the context of this research is a strength and may be a valuable insight for other researchers.

*Definition of consensus.* In Delphi studies, it is important to define consensus in advance (Humphrey-Murto et al., 2017; Jorm, 2015), including clear and transparent plans for dealing with items that do not meet the inclusion or exclusion criteria and for when to end survey rounds (Jünger, et al., 2017). A strength of this study design is that consensus was defined in advance and that from the outset, three Delphi rounds were planned (including the first CoRe workshops), in line with recommendations (e.g. Brett et al., 2017). Furthermore, while many

Delphi studies “do not present a detailed discussion of how the results from the exploratory round are processed and converted into the round two questionnaire” (Fletcher and Marchildon, 2014, p. 10), the outlined data analysis strategy for the CoRe method offered transparency as to how data were analysed and clustered into key situation titles and underpinned by clear principles. These were subsequently applied to analysing qualitative data obtained in the online surveys, thereby increasing credibility and transparency overall. This is a clear strength of this study design.

On reflection, I discovered some slight inconsistencies regarding the inclusion of situations after the first survey round. For example, ‘Doing a welfare check’ and ‘Raising a safeguarding alert’ were accepted by 10 social workers from a health setting and I included them in the key situation list without further review in the second round. After the first round, I also included three situations that were accepted by one of the sectors that were represented by fewer participants (health and PVI) and in addition were almost met by other larger groups (‘Participating in a review meeting.’ - accepted by health and almost children and families’ social workers; ‘Discussing a report with a service user.’ - accepted by PVI and almost children and families’ social workers; ‘Arranging another service for a service user, carer or a family.’ - accepted by PVI and almost all participants). This was entirely consistent with the inclusion criteria (if 70% of participants agree that *in their area of practice* a situation is encountered very frequently or frequently, then a situation will be defined as a key situation). However, I did ask participants to review one situation (‘Discussing a report with a service user.’) that was in the first round accepted by seven social workers from the PVI sector and nearly accepted by children and families’ social workers (66%). This was inconsistent with the criteria set out. As it turned out, it was accepted as a key situation by the vast majority (95%) of participants.

I am mindful that in the first questionnaire, I had asked participants to rate how frequently they encountered a situation and in the second, I asked them for a final judgement about a situation. In the analysis of situations rated in the first round, I used sectorial agreement to define a situation as key, whereas in the second round, situations were analysed across all sectors. I had reflected on this in my research journal as the following excerpt demonstrates:

“I elevated the participants to the status of Expert Key Situations Panel members and so did not ask about frequencies, rather asked for their overall judgement. Therefore, the analysis is only undertaken for the all participants together, rather than looking at % at the level of social work sector.”

Definition of consensus therefore, sought to include a wide range of sectors and give voice to them and at the same depict generic agreement across different sectors.

*Informational input.* It was important that all material provided to the expert panel during the whole Delphi process “should be carefully reviewed and piloted in advance in order to examine the effect on experts’ judgements and to prevent bias” (Jünger et al., 2017, p. 701; Brett et al, 2017). The two pre-tests proved invaluable, as I was able to adjust the labels for the rating scale that was not sufficiently clear.

However, a limitation of the study is that I did not pre-test the second-round questionnaire. A pre-test could have been helpful in highlighting the different responses to these questions in advance and provided an opportunity for reflection.

*Prevention of bias.* A limitation of this study was that as a sole PhD researcher with a vested interest in the outcomes of the study, I was not in a position to entrust “an independent researcher with the main coordination of the Delphi study” (Jünger et al., 2017, p. 701). I also risked imposing my own views on the analysis of data from the CoRe workshops, “which may impact participants’ responses in later rounds” (Hsu and Sandford, 2012, p. 346). To

safeguard against bias, I used the language and words proposed by participants and considered all data in a rigorous and systematic way. I also sought feedback from two critical friends and from pre-test participants on the questionnaire.

In the initial CoRe workshops, I was aware that groupthink could impact the “desire for consensus” and this could hamper sound analysis and hinder the exploration of a range of interpretations (Flicker, 2014, p. 124). This was mitigated by the anonymous reviewing of the key situations in the subsequent online survey rounds, which increased the quality of the final key situation list and acted as a counterbalance to any group-thinking that may have occurred in the CoRe round. In addition, Brett and colleagues (2017, p. 8) suggest that the Delphi process can engage a wider “range of expertise more effectively than any other group consensus method” and is fair “because each participant has an equal opportunity to have their views taken into account”.

*Interpretation and processing of results.* Jünger et al. (2017, p. 702) advise that “consensus does not necessarily imply the ‘correct’ answer or judgement”. The issue of whether consensus should be reached is contested (Fletcher and Marchildon, 2014; Manthorpe et al., 2004; Boberg and Monis-Khoo, 1992). The aim of this study was to generate as many perspectives as possible, enabling different experiences to surface; seeking consensus could have a silencing effect by obscuring different perspectives (Boberg and Monis-Khoo, 1992). To mitigate against this, I analysed the results of the first survey round in relation to social work sectors and included situations that were accepted in one sector with exception of the smaller health and PVI sectors. In preparation for the second questionnaire, I reflected further on this in my journal, where I wondered “whether analysis of situations at the level of child and family or adult social work [could] undermine a view of social work as a generalist profession” with reference to the debate about “generalist versus specialist social work education (Trevithick, 2011)”. I therefore asked myself, whether I should “only accept

situations that meet the criteria by all participants?”. Trying to achieve consensus was a balancing act that sought to give voice to all participants, represent diversity and yet depict a generalist view of social work.

The Delphi method was likely to increase the comprehensibility of the titles, as participants were asked to comment on this; the key situation titles being accepted by experienced practitioners increased the likelihood that they would be accepted by the wider professional community (Tov et al., 2016b; Bleijenbergh et al., 2011).

I noticed different average levels of agreement in the two survey rounds. The quantitative nature of data - with comments largely about completeness and comprehensibility, rather than about reasons for decisions - did not allow me to draw any conclusions regarding why situations were accepted or rejected. In seeking to understand this, I reflected on the changed Likert type scales. In the first questionnaire, ratings were undertaken on a six-point, and in the second on a three-point scale (for first ratings of situations). Evidence from a randomised controlled parallel group trial found that changes in scales impacted Delphi study results and that a three-point Likert scale led to substantially fewer inclusions compared with a nine-point one (De Meyer et al., 2019). In contrast, I found that situations were more strongly accepted in round two (with either a two or three-point Likert scale) but I wondered whether the different scales used had an impact on levels of agreement.

A strength of this study was the combination of face-to-face and digital data collection in terms of increasing “data validity through triangulation” (Murthy, 2011, p. 171). Triangulation was also achieved by including participants from different practice fields and different groups of participants (two CoRe groups and larger Delphi sample) (Rowley, 2014). The participatory approach also explicitly acknowledged that only practitioners can describe their own experienced situations and this helped “de-privileging of ‘researcher only’ expertise” (Byrne et al., 2009, p. 68), thereby counterbalancing the power difference that is

inherent in traditional data collection and analysis by “democratizing this stage of the research process” (Flicker, 2014, p. 121). The use of visual methods as part of the CoRe method moved “interpretation from an implicit process to a more explicit process” and further removed data analysis “from the realm of academic mystique” to a collaborative space (Byrne et al., 2009, p. 76). A strength of the data collection and analyses methods was that they enabled sharing of power both in terms of content and process.

Trained facilitators are seen as important for DACUM (Dixon and Stricklin, 2014; Norton, 2004) and CoRe (Ghisla et al., 2008) methods. Although I am not a trained or experienced CoRe facilitator, I believe that my skills and knowledge were sufficient to moderate the modified CoRe process. I was knowledgeable about both the CoRe process and key situations and had worked with students and practice educators with key situations in many settings since 2009. I also had experience with focus groups since 2005 and had carried out three studies involving focus groups, among other methods. Lastly, I had good prior knowledge of and experience with quantitative data, although this study only used descriptive statistics (Robson, 2002).

*External validation.* A prerequisite for achieving trustworthy results in CoRe is the integration of internal and external validation processes (Ghisla, 2007). The nature of this research was explorative and descriptive and required zooming in (Nicolini, 2009) on social workers’ everyday experience of situated practices. This involved intuitive ways of decision-making with limited information in what could be termed a “bounded rationality” (Taylor, 2016, p. 5). This enabled the representation and naming of regularly encountered situations in practice. The subsequent survey rounds captured the views of many social workers and this enabled an external validation of the initial situations. However, even with external validation, no claims to representativeness of these can be made, as the key situations named merely represent an inter-subjectively negotiated description of the practices of those involved. This is a clear

limitation in respect of any claims of truth or representativeness. The situated nature of the knowledge produced also throws up the questions as to whether the key situation titles represent knowledge that could be relevant over and above local settings (Herr and Anderson, 2014). As the titles were agreed by a range of participants from different settings that are “at a higher level of abstraction”, I argue that this study managed to “produce formal theory” (Martí and Villasante, 2009, p. 389) in the form of accepted key situations. However, research has shown that no single occupational analysis method can “contribute 80% or more of the competencies” (Willett and Hermann, 1989, p. 87; Rayner and Hermann, 1988). After the initial construction of a DACUM chart (equivalent to key situation title list), “it is still necessary to increasingly enrich and improve it to enable it to be more comprehensive, objective, and effective during practice and application” (Xue et al., 2015, p. 8). Therefore, a limitation of this study may well be that not all key situations have been captured, despite the contributions from a wide range of social workers. However, the two motions of zooming in and out ensured wider agreement with the represented key situations.

Related to external validation is the issue of response rate; evidence regarding Delphi studies suggests that “low response rates can jeopardize robust feedback” and therefore, researchers need “both a high response rate in the first iteration and a desirable response rate in the following rounds” (Hsu and Sandford, 2012, p. 5). I aimed for a sample size of six to eight participants for the CoRe workshops and met this recommended target in both workshops. Informed by evidence, I hoped to recruit between 35 to 40 panel members who met the inclusion criteria for the first round and aimed for at least 20 completed questionnaires in the second Delphi round. With 88 included datasets in the first survey and 41 in the second survey round, these targets were exceeded. The response rate in the second survey was 55% after two reminders. While this survey used a convenience sample and not a representative sample, it is worth noting that a meta-analysis of 48 studies identified an overall survey response rate for online surveys of 38% (Cho et al., 2013). For surveys with

representative samples “response analysis rates below 60%, between 60% and 70%, and 70% or higher have all traditionally been considered acceptable” (Burns and Kho, 2015, p. E202). The response rate in the second round of the online survey is very good and I am therefore confident that this study achieved stability of findings (Jorm, 2015).

However, in a Delphi purposive convenience sample, it is far more important to assess whether the criteria that pertain to the study’s aims were achieved. Capturing all key situations encountered required recruiting practitioners that represent a wide range of practice fields (Bragin et al., 2014, p. 5; Kunz, 2015; VanDerKlink and Boon, 2002; Gilbert, 2001) and that the panel had appropriate expertise (Kezar and Maxey, 2016). The last section analyses the strengths and limitations with regard to the predefined sampling criteria and the additional criteria related to regional spread and social characteristics. Where data was available, I compared the characteristics of the sample with aggregated available workforce data for social workers in England (DfE, 2019; NHS Digital, 2019). This allowed me to form a qualitative judgement (Gilbert, 2001), rather than making any claims to representativeness in a quantitative sense.

All included participants indicated that they were qualified and registered social workers in England. Participants represented all sectors (child and family, adult, private, voluntary and independent (PVI) and health service) but comparison of the weighted mean of this study with national data, showed that overall child and family social workers were underrepresented, while the other groups were overrepresented:

Social Work Sector	Weighted Mean % (N=142)	Workforce total % (n=52120)*
Adults	48.6	32.6
Children and Families	36.6	60.9
Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI)	7.8	1.9
NHS	7.1	4.6

\* aggregated workforce data (DfE, 2019; NHS Digital, 2019).

**Figure 34** *Distribution of social workers in England and study groups by social work sector (in %).*

The sampling criteria in relation to different job roles that fall under the remit of the global definition of social work (IFSW and IASSW, 2014) was with hindsight not needed. The other criteria ensured this sufficiently. As discussed, (see participants), participants worked in a broad range of fields from different sectors. All participants indicated that they were working at least to some degree directly with service users. One participant was at the time of completing the survey, working exclusively in academia, having stopped working in practice in the preceding 6 months (with many years of experience in direct practice) and was therefore included.

The criterion related to experience stated that CoRe participants should, and Delphi survey participants must, have at least five years' experience as a qualified social worker. One participant in the CoRe workshops was a newly qualified social worker while the other participants met this criterion fully. Indeed, as Figure 23 (on page 211) shows, the experience of most participants fell under Benner's (1982) and Kunz's (2015) definition of competence or expertise. Despite the lower average lifespan in social work (Curtis et al., 2010), participants in this study were overall highly experienced with 64% of participants having more than 10 years' experience.

Related to the expertise of participants was their job role (see Figure 26 on page 213): around a fifth of participants' job role was below the experienced social work level, with the rest being employed at least at the experienced level.

I aimed to recruit at least 3 participants from each English region in the two online rounds and achieved this in the first round. In the second round, however, although all regions were represented, there were fewer than 3 participants from the North East, Yorkshire and Humber, the West Midlands and the South West regions. (see Figure 24 on page 212). Considering the distribution of the total workforce across England, it becomes evident that in the study sample, London and the East Midlands were overrepresented, while the East and South East regions were approximately representative of the respective workforces and all other regions were underrepresented.

Region	Weighted Mean % (N=142)	Total workforce % (n=48,692)*
North East	3.9	6.4
North West	9.3	14.7
Yorkshire and Humber	6.2	11.9
East Midlands	14.0	7.8
West Midlands	3.1	10.7
East of England	7.8	9.8
London	38.8	15.3
South East	13.2	14.4
South West	3.8	9

\* aggregated workforce data (DfE, 2019; NHS Digital, 2019).

**Figure 35** Distribution of social workers in England and study groups by region (in %).

Lastly, I hoped to recruit participants with diverse experiences and social characteristics that were reflective of the overall workforce. The comparison with aggregated workforce data for social workers in England (DfE, 2019; NHS Digital, 2019) (see Figure 36) shows that in terms of age, study participants in the age group 20 to 29 years old were underrepresented. This

was to be expected, as I recruited social workers with 5 years' experience. In relation to gender, participants were more likely to be male, compared with the general workforce. No one who identified as transgender took part in the study (no data available nationally). In relation to ethnicity and race, participants who defined themselves as white, mixed race or Asian or Asian British were overrepresented, whereas Black or Black British participants were underrepresented, but again all ethnic groups overall were represented in the study. No data was available nationally on disability and sexual orientation to allow a comparison. The overall sample included a small number of participants who stated that they had a disability and around 10% of participants indicated they were from an LGB group.

		<b>Weighted Mean % (N=142)</b>	<b>Total England % (n= 48,692)*</b>
<b>Age</b>	20 to 29 years old	3.5	13.2
	30 to 39 years old	33.8	28.9
	40 to 49 years old	33.1	24.8
	50 years old and over	28.9	31.4
	Prefer not to state	0.7	1.7
<b>Gender</b>	Female	74.6	82.8
	Male	24.6	15.3
	Transgender	0.0	no data
	Prefer not to state	0.7	1.8
<b>Ethnicity</b>	White	82.4	64.1
	Mixed Race	4.2	2.6
	Asian or Asian British	7.0	4.6
	Black or Black British	4.2	9.9
	Any Other Ethnicity	0.0	0.8
	Prefer not to state	2.1	18
<b>Disability</b>	Yes	4.9	no data
	No	90.1	no data
	Prefer not to state	4.9	no data
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	Heterosexual	76.0	no data
	Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual	11.0	no data
	Prefer not to state	13.0	no data

\* aggregated workforce data (DfE, 2019; NHS Digital, 2019).

*Figure 36 Distribution of social workers in England and study groups by age, gender ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation (in %).*

While there were groups of social workers who were underrepresented, overall, the sampling in relation to the essential and desirable criteria was successful and no group of social workers was not represented at all, adding further evidence about the stability of the findings.

### **Conclusions – Methodology to identify key situations in social work in England**

This chapter outlined the practice-based research framework, the action research methodology and the Delphi study design with the CoRe method as the first stage. The sampling strategies outlined were employed successfully and the participants had adequate expertise and reflected diverse perspectives inherent in social work. Ethical approval granted by Goldsmiths' was based on the ethical considerations discussed in this chapter. The study shows many strengths and some limitations were discussed.

The value of this action research lies on the one hand in describing the situations social workers encounter. This enables a practice-based categorisation of practice and knowledge that can be used on the Key Situation platform. Publication on the platform is also an opportunity for dissemination that enables continued collaboration beyond this research project with an opportunity to expand collaboration (Embury, 2014) beyond the research project (Huxham, 2003). Insights generated in this study can thus be “refined and enriched” over time, thereby increasing “confidence in their robustness and their range of applicability” (Huxham, 2003, p. 241).

This is fundamentally the idea that underpins the Key Situation model (Tov et al., 2016a). It takes on the characteristics of longitudinal research, “even though individual research settings may be short term” (Huxham, 2003, p. 241). This is particularly useful, as it may be necessary to complete the title list (Xue et al., 2015, p. 8) and adapt it to changing practices and frameworks (Tov et al., 2016a).

The next chapter presents the areas of responsibility and key situations that were agreed in this study.

## Chapter 5 – Findings: Social Work Key Situations in England

### Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the Delphi study that addressed the question of what the typical, reoccurring (key) situations in social work practice in England are. Overall, participating social workers reviewed 142 situations and 116 of these were accepted as key situations clustered into 12 areas of responsibility, as agreed by the participants.

The 104 draft situation titles created in the CoRe workshops and subsequent analysis were rated by 88 participants in the first online Delphi round. The ratings were analysed by area of practice (social work sector). In the first round, a total of 13 situations met the exclusion criteria and 57 met the inclusion criteria. Of those, 14 situations met the exclusion or inclusion only marginally and were subsequently included in the second-round survey together with the 34 situations for which no agreement was reached and 38 newly created situation titles based on the analysis of feedback.

In the second round, a total of 86 situations in 12 areas of responsibility were reviewed and of those, 67 met the inclusion criteria and 19 did not meet either inclusion or exclusion criteria and were subsequently excluded from the key situation title list. One situation although having met the inclusion criteria was subsumed under another title. Figure 37 provides an overview of outcomes of the Delphi process (N/A indicates that a situation was not reviewed in that round):

Number of situations	Round I	Round II	Final decision
6	Excluded	N/A	Excluded
3	Excluded	No agreement	Excluded
4	Excluded	Included	Included
50	Included	N/A	Included
7	Included	Included	Included
26	No agreement	Included	Included
8	No agreement	No agreement	Excluded
29	N/A	Included	Included
8	N/A	No agreement	Excluded
1	N/A	See note <sup>14</sup>	Excluded

*Figure 37* Number of situations meeting inclusion, exclusion or no agreement criteria in each round and final decision about inclusion/exclusion.

In this chapter, I first illustrate the kind of qualitative data collected and how this was used to refine the key situation titles and areas of responsibility. I then present the ratings for all reviewed situations in both survey rounds, followed by the final agreed areas of responsibility and key situation titles.

### Qualitative Survey Data

Participants in the two online survey rounds were able to provide qualitative comments in each area of responsibility. In the first round, I encouraged comments in relation to the comprehensibility of situation titles and completeness ('Are any of the above titles unclear or do not make sense to you?' 'Are any situations related to [area of responsibility] missing?'). Participants made helpful comments about the language they would use and understand. For example, a participant commented on the situation entitled 'Doing a welfare check': "I think it would read better if it said 'undertaking' or 'completing' a welfare check, rather than 'doing'". Comments like these were all reviewed, and situation titles were

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<sup>14</sup> 'Reporting concerns to person or team responsible for quality assurance' met the inclusion criteria in the second round but was subsequently subsumed under the title 'Raising alerts regarding the quality of services'.

adapted. Many participants also made suggestions about situations that they felt were missing. These were often at a specific level, concerning a certain practice field. Comments like, "I am often asked to undertake seclusion reviews with other member of the multi-disciplinary team"; "Undertaking a MHA assessment" or "Conducting full s47 investigations both single agency and with police". All comments were again analysed and where such specific situations did not fall under existing titles, one was created based on the principles outlined.

In relation to areas of responsibility, very few comments were made, and these indicated that the work that social workers are generally engaged in were "captured within these headings" and that "no areas per se are missing". However, several participants stated that they thought "involvement in education and practice education, e.g. going into university to teach social work students" was an area that should be included, as this falls within the remit of social workers' roles. I therefore added this in the second survey round for participants to review. No comments on areas of responsibility were made in the second round.

In the second survey round, asked to comment on 'any of these titles or on the whole area of responsibility', many participants showed a concern for a generic understanding of social work:

"I can imagine that this is a key situation in children's social work, so I have opted to include it."

"This is very much a part of every role I have every [sic!] had working as a Social Worker working in England."

"This appears to capture all of the common Social Work [sic!] situations and seem relevant for many Social Worker, depending on their team and particular grade."

Others expressed an understanding of the different fields and roles that result in different situations they encounter:

“depends what services you work in. If you work in crisis or in EDS then there is a good chance, but I'm not sure it's a key situation.” “more applicable in adult care and cwd for care packages.”

“I can see why so many of these situations are relevant but it really dos dependent [sic!] on the type of team and grade of the Social Worker.”

Some comments also showed that participants had thought about the analysis and the 70% criteria:

“Again key situations but would not regular meet the 70% recommended threshold”

There was also a sense of the potential for change regarding practice situations and some comments reflected a future-oriented awareness of the changing landscape of social work:

“These are key areas, however does not meet 70% recommended criteria. This may change with the new personalisation budget.”

“Holding drop-in sessions for others to access social work information and support. No - but within 5 years this will become a yes, I can imagine.”

For some participants, the reference to key was dependent on the content or the gravitas of a situation, rather than the activity-centred focus of key situation titles:

“Taking and making telephone calls'; whether this is key situation or not depends on the content and with whom the conversation was held.”

Overall, there was a noticeable shift in focus from comments about the frequency of encountering situations in survey round one to an overall perspective about key social work situations in England, perhaps due to the different questions and rating scales, in round two.

### **Quantitative Survey Data: Agreed and Rejected Situation Titles**

The following figures (38 – 51) show the level of agreement in % (of participants) with the inclusion criteria and the exclusion criteria for each sector. As some participants in the first survey round did not complete all questions, the number of participants falls consistently from 88 to 79. The responses depict the level of agreement with the inclusion or exclusion criteria (70% of participants) and are colour coded for ease of reading (green: inclusion criteria met; red: exclusion criteria met). The situations are listed by area of responsibility. Many of the situations related to meetings were moved in the final version to other areas of responsibility that were more appropriate. Where a situation title had been reformulated from the first to the second round, both titles are listed (first title / second title). Some titles were reworded after inclusion to take account of feedback and the final title is listed in brackets.

Initial Contact and Assessment													
Situation Title	Delphi survey round I										Delphi survey round II		Final decision
	All Social Work Sectors (N=88)		Children and Family Social Work (n=32)		Adult Social Work (n=48)		Health Social Work (n=10)		PVI* (n=7)		All Social Work Sectors (N=41)		
	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	
Receiving and responding to new contacts and referrals.	76	8	75	9	79	6	90	0	86	0	N/A	N/A	Included
Carrying out a screening assessment/triage with an existing service user or new contact. / Carrying out an initial or screening assessment.	63	16	59	22	67	10	70	20	57	29	98	2	Included
Discussing opening or closing a case with manager.	57	15	63	6	56	19	30	10	0	43	93	7	Included
Having an initial face to face meeting with an adult, child or parents.	75	5	72	0	77	6	90	0	57	14	N/A	N/A	Included
Reviewing initial information on an allocated case.	84	0	81	0	85	0	90	0	71	0	N/A	N/A	Included
Gathering information to plan next steps.	93	1	91	0	96	2	100	0	86	0	N/A	N/A	Included
Establishing contact with a service user or carer.	84	2	81	3	85	0	100	0	86	0	N/A	N/A	Included
Engaging with service users or carers at the beginning.	75	5	69	6	79	2	80	0	71	14	N/A	N/A	Included
Making initial decisions about level of risk and urgency and next steps to be taken.	N/A										98	0	Included

**Figure 38** Analysis of responses of 'Initial Contact and Assessment' situation titles (in %) by sector (Delphi I) and all participants (Delphi I and II).

Planning informal and formal support													
Situation Title	Delphi survey round I										Delphi survey round II		Final decision
	All Social Work Sectors (N=87)		Children and Family Social Work (n=32)		Adult Social Work (n=47)		Health Social Work (n=10)		PVI* (n=7)		All Social Work Sectors (N=41)		
	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	
Arranging another service for a service user, carer or a family.	68	6	69	9	68	4	60	10	71	14	98	2	Included
Working with brokerage to source appropriate support / Arranging and sourcing appropriate support and care from own service.	52	23	34	31	68	15	40	40	29	43	90	10	Included
Supporting people to access community-based resources.	67	8	53	13	74	6	50	20	57	14	N/A	N/A	Included
Supporting service users or carers to access another service.	70	6	63	9	74	4	60	10	71	0	N/A	N/A	Included
Making an onward referral to another service.	70	7	63	16	77	0	80	10	57	14	N/A	N/A	Included
Supporting service users to strengthen their social network. (Supporting service users to strengthen their social, family and support network.)	66	8	56	9	70	6	50	20	43	29	N/A	N/A	Included
Making and communicating discharge plans.	51	17	28	31	62	6	90	0	43	14	88	12	Included
Preparing for direct work with an adult or a child.	61	12	62	10	59	13	50	10	57	14	93	5	Included
Applying for funding for independent providers.	N/A										63	10	Excluded
Thinking about and planning work you intend to deliver yourself.	N/A										78	5	Included
Planning safeguarding enquiries	N/A										90	2	Included
Contracting with independent providers.	N/A										56	17	Excluded
Liaising and working with other teams and professionals to jointly commission support.	N/A										68	5	Excluded

**Figure 39** Analysis of responses of 'Planning Informal and Formal Support' situation titles (in %) by sector (Delphi I) and all participants (Delphi I and II).

Crisis Intervention and Safeguarding													
Situation Title	Delphi survey round I										Delphi survey round II		Final decision
	All Social Work Sectors (N=85)		Children and Family Social Work (n=30)		Adult Social Work (n=47)		Health Social Work (n=10)		PVI* (n=7)		All Social Work Sectors (N=41)		
	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	
Responding to a telephone call by someone in crisis.	68	6	60	3	77	4	90	0	71	0	N/A	N/A	Included
Seeing and assessing someone in crisis.	68	4	70	0	72	2	100	0	57	14	N/A	N/A	Included
Doing a welfare check. (Undertaking a welfare check.)	39	20	43	17	40	17	70	10	14	57	N/A	N/A	Included
Meeting with a service user following a crisis.	69	4	70	0	70	4	60	0	43	14	N/A	N/A	Included
Raising a safeguarding alert.	54	6	53	10	55	4	80	0	43	14	N/A	N/A	Included
Making inquiries into safeguarding alerts.	67	8	60	13	74	6	80	0	43	14	N/A	N/A	Included
Arranging a safeguarding meeting.	41	22	33	33	52	18	44	22	0	50	98	2	Included
Participating in a safeguarding meeting. / Attending a safeguarding meeting.	49	13	44	19	57	11	56	0	0	33	100	0	Included
Chairing a safeguarding meeting.	29	47	33	44	30	48	33	44	0	83	71	27	Included
Working with carers, parents and others who are close to someone in crisis.	N/A										100	0	Included
Coordinating emergency services (e.g. police, ambulance, etc.) to safeguard people and undertake statutory duties. (Co-working with emergency services to safeguard people and undertake statutory duties.)	N/A										73	5	Included
Dealing with a crisis situation out of hours.	N/A										73	5	Included
Creating a safeguarding plan following an inquiry.	N/A										100	0	Included

**Figure 40** Analysis of responses of 'Crisis Intervention and Safeguarding' situation titles (in %) by sector (Delphi I) and all participants (Delphi I and II).

Assessment														
Situation Title	Delphi survey round I										Delphi survey round II		Final decision	
	All Social Work Sectors (N=85)		Children and Family Social Work (n=30)		Adult Social Work (n=47)		Health Social Work (n=10)		PVI* (n=7)		All Social Work Sectors (N=41)			
	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected		
Planning an assessment.	84	5	87	7	81	4	90	0	86	0	N/A	N/A	Included	
Meeting with adults, children or parents to understand and assess their situation.	87	2	90	0	85	4	90	0	100	0	N/A	N/A	Included	
Observing adults', children's, or parents' interactions.	56	19	80	7	40	26	50	20	43	29	N/A	N/A	Included	
Viewing and assessing the home environment.	60	9	67	7	57	11	50	10	43	0	80	10	Included	
Gathering views from other professionals about adults, children and families.	86	1	90	3	85	0	90	0	86	0	N/A	N/A	Included	
Thinking about and analysing a situation to decide on plans, interventions or actions.	93	1	93	3	94	0	100	0	100	0	N/A	N/A	Included	
Discussing a care plan with a service user.	76	5	70	3	81	6	70	20	57	14	N/A	N/A	Included	
Co-producing a support plan.	71	8	70	3	68	13	80	10	43	0	N/A	N/A	Included	
Making a professional decision about risks and needs and care and control plans.	N/A										93	2	Included	
Reviewing historical case notes and documents.	N/A										98	2	Included	
Establishing the financial situation with service users.	N/A										80	5	Included	
Undertaking an out of hours assessment.	N/A										59	12	Excluded	
Sharing the assessment with the family, child, carer or service user.	N/A										88	5	Included	

**Figure 41** Analysis of responses of 'Assessment' situation titles (in %) by sector (Delphi I) and all participants (Delphi I and II).

Direct Work with Adults and Children													
Situation Title	Delphi survey round I										Delphi survey round II		Final decision
	All Social Work Sectors (N=83)		Children and Family Social Work (n=29)		Adult Social Work (n=46)		Health Social Work (n=10)		PVI* (n=7)		All Social Work Sectors (N=41)		
	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	
Accompanying service users or carers to a service.	19	29	21	28	20	28	10	30	0	43	61	39	Excluded
Discussing a report with a service user.	63	7	66	3	20	28	50	10	71	14	95	5	Included
Visiting a service user, carer or family in their home.	65	10	69	7	63	11	70	0	71	0	N/A	N/A	Included
Visiting a service user in a care home, hospital, or prison (or another institution).	60	12	31	21	78	4	90	10	86	0	N/A	N/A	Included
Doing a home visit with another professional. / Undertaking a joint visit with another professional.	53	13	45	10	59	13	40	0	29	14	93	7	Included
Conducting a counselling session with a service user. / Supporting service users, carers, family members and others with counselling (skills).	19	54	21	45	17	61	30	50	43	29	68	32	Excluded
Conducting a topic-based face to face session with an individual or couple. / Offering information and talking through specific issues with service users, carers, family members and others.	43	24	66	10	33	28	60	30	86	0	100	0	Included
Facilitating a topic-based session with a group. / Offering information and talking through specific issues with groups of service users, carers, family members etc.	25	47	38	28	17	57	40	50	43	14	78	20	Included
Working directly with an adult or a child.	71	11	69	10	72	11	80	0	57	14	N/A	N/A	Included
Visiting children and young people in their home to work directly with them.	34	47	62	14	17	65	20	50	14	43	85	12	Included
Supervising contact arrangement between children and family.	8	78	14	52	7	89	10	80	0	71	N/A	N/A	Excluded
Removing children from their birth family.	5	78	14	41	0	96	0	90	0	71	N/A	N/A	Excluded

**Figure 42** Analysis of responses of ‘Direct Work with Adults and Children’ (part one) situation titles (in %) by sector (Delphi I) and all participants (Delphi I and II).

Situation Title	Delphi survey round I										Delphi survey round II		Final decision
	All Social Work Sectors (N=83)		Children and Family Social Work (n=29)		Adult Social Work (n=46)		Health Social Work (n=10)		PVI* (n=7)		All Social Work Sectors (N=41)		
	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	
Discussing concerns with a service user or carer.	76	1	76	0	76	2	80	0	57	0	N/A	N/A	Included
Supporting conflict resolution between service users and/or others.	49	8	55	3	48	9	50	10	43	29	83	17	Included
Supporting service users, carers and families regarding finances. / Offering help with financial issues and subsistence payments.	48	19	45	24	52	15	50	20	29	43	80	20	Included
Addressing practical issues with or for service users.	67	7	59	10	76	7	80	0	57	0	N/A	N/A	Included
Supporting service users to maintain their physical and mental health.	70	6	59	14	76	2	90	0	71	0	N/A	N/A	Included
Communicating with children, adults or families through an interpreter.	33	20	41	14	33	22	30	30	29	43	88	10	Included
Providing information to service users, carers and the public.	73	2	79	7	76	0	70	0	71	0	N/A	N/A	Included
Informing service users about case closure.	59	13	55	17	63	11	60	30	29	57	100	0	Included
Supporting service user, child, young person etc. with transition to new (case) worker.	N/A										80	12	Included

**Figure 43** Analysis of responses of ‘Direct Work with Adults and Children’ (part two) situation titles (in %) by sector (Delphi I) and all participants (Delphi I and II).

Collaboration and Cooperation													
Situation Title	Delphi survey round I										Delphi survey round II		Final decision
	All Social Work Sectors (N=80)		Children and Family Social Work (n=27)		Adult Social Work (n=45)		Health Social Work (n=9)		PVI* (n=6)		All Social Work Sectors (N=41)		
	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	
Holding a corridor conversation. / Having an informal discussion with colleagues.	61	14	63	22	62	11	67	11	33	50	93	7	Included
De-briefing with a colleague.	70	4	70	7	71	2	56	0	17	33	N/A	N/A	Included
Seeking advice from an experienced colleague.	74	4	81	4	67	2	78	0	50	33	N/A	N/A	Included
Having a one to one conversation with another professional with shared responsibility.	80	5	74	4	82	4	67	0	33	50	N/A	N/A	Included
Attending a ward round.	20	60	0	85	27	47	56	33	17	83	N/A	N/A	Excluded
Discussing a report with a manager or another professional.	75	5	78	7	71	4	67	0	33	33	N/A	N/A	Included
Providing consultations in another service. / Holding drop-in sessions for others to access social work information and support.	41	30	33	37	51	24	44	22	0	50	54	46	Excluded
Coordinating informal and formal support.	70	9	59	15	80	4	56	0	50	17	N/A	N/A	Included
Liaising with other services to coordinate service provision and share information on risks, needs and support.	80	4	70	7	84	2	100	0	67	33	N/A	N/A	Included
Liaising with carers, friends, family and community groups.	75	3	67	7	80	0	78	0	83	0	N/A	N/A	Included
Investigating allegations of suspected fraud.	18	58	0	81	31	40	22	67	0	100	N/A	N/A	Excluded

**Figure 44** Analysis of responses of ‘Collaboration and Cooperation’ (part one) situation titles (in %) by sector (Delphi I) and all participants (Delphi I and II).

Situation Title	Delphi survey round I										Delphi survey round II		Final decision
	All Social Work Sectors (N=80)		Children and Family Social Work (n=27)		Adult Social Work (n=45)		Health Social Work (n=9)		PVI* (n=6)		All Social Work Sectors (N=41)		
	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	
Advocating on behalf of service users and carers.	71	8	44	19	84	2	78	0	50	17	N/A	N/A	Included
Handing over information to key professionals (care coordinator, allocated social worker, key worker).	83	4	81	7	87	2	89	0	50	33	N/A	N/A	Included
Informing others of own services on offer. / Informing other agencies, professionals or teams about the remit and limits of own services.	58	9	63	7	58	9	56	11	50	0	83	17	Included
Arranging a multi-agency meeting.	56	16	48	26	61	16	44	11	17	50	93	5	Included
Participating in a multi-agency meeting. / Attending a multi-agency meeting.	63	14	63	19	66	16	56	11	17	50	100	0	Included
Chairing a multi-agency meeting.	42	28	48	26	36	32	44	44	17	50	80	17	Included
Arranging a multi-disciplinary meeting.	51	20	37	37	57	16	33	11	33	50	88	10	Included
Participating in a multi-disciplinary meeting.	66	13	48	19	73	14	67	11	33	50	N/A	N/A	Included
Chairing a multi-disciplinary meeting.	47	28	33	41	50	25	56	33	33	50	80	17	Included
Handing over after an out of hours shift.	N/A										59	20	Excluded
Planning and arranging safeguarding arrangements with other professionals or agencies.	N/A										100	0	Included
Conducting joint investigations with police	N/A										76	7	Included

**Figure 45** Analysis of responses of ‘Collaboration and Cooperation’ (part two) situation titles (in %) by sector (Delphi I) and all participants (Delphi I and II).

Court work													
Situation Title	Delphi survey round I										Delphi survey round II		Final decision
	All Social Work Sectors (N=79)		Children and Family Social Work (n=27)		Adult Social Work (n=44)		Health Social Work (n=9)		PVI* (n=6)		All Social Work Sectors (N=41)		
	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	
Being instructed on a new court case. / Being instructed on a new court or mental health tribunal case.	16	49	37	26	5	59	0	78	17	83	85	15	Included
Seeking legal advice.	34	20	44	19	32	11	33	11	0	50	93	5	Included
Attending court or a tribunal.	24	38	33	30	16	41	33	33	0	100	90	10	Included
Attending a celebration adoption hearing.	4	86	11	67	0	95	0	100	0	83	N/A	N/A	Excluded
Giving evidence in court or at a tribunal.	19	44	26	33	11	50	44	33	0	100	95	5	Included
Making decisions about potential cases for the court.	N/A										73	5	Included
Supporting a carer or family member to attend court.	N/A										46	27	Excluded
Attending court for warrants.	N/A										44	15	Excluded

**Figure 46** Analysis of responses of 'Court Work' situation titles (in %) by sector (Delphi I) and all participants (Delphi I and II).

Administration														
Situation Title	Delphi survey round I										Delphi survey round II		Final decision	
	All Social Work Sectors (N=79)		Children and Family Social Work (n=27)		Adult Social Work (n=44)		Health Social Work (n=9)		PVI* (n=6)		All Social Work Sectors (N=41)			
	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected		
Writing a report.	91	0	89	0	95	0	89	0	67	0	N/A	N/A	Included	
Writing case notes.	99	0	96	0	100	0	100	0	83	0	N/A	N/A	Included	
Dealing with data protection and freedom of information requests.	28	43	41	33	23	41	33	33	33	50	44	54	Excluded	
Responding to Emails.	100	0	100	0	100	0	100	0	100	0	N/A	N/A	Included	
Taking minutes.	46	19	56	7	36	27	33	33	33	0	54	46	Excluded	
Completing forms.	86	3	85	4	86	2	100	0	83	0	N/A	N/A	Included	
Writing a report for court or tribunal.	N/A										95	0	Included	
Taking and making telephone calls.	N/A										100	0	Included	
Documenting out of hours work.	N/A										73	10	Included	

**Figure 47** Analysis of responses of 'Administration' situation titles (in %) by sector (Delphi I) and all participants (Delphi I and II).

Professional Development													
Situation Title	Delphi survey round I										Delphi survey round II		Final decision
	All Social Work Sectors (N=79)		Children and Family Social Work (n=27)		Adult Social Work (n=44)		Health Social Work (n=9)		PVI* (n=6)		All Social Work Sectors (N=41)		
	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	
Researching evidence and information to inform assessments, plans, interventions and reports.	63	4	74	4	61	2	44	0	67	0	N/A	N/A	Included
Attending a training session or engaging in other CPD activities.	65	3	63	4	70	2	78	0	67	0	N/A	N/A	Included
Engaging in a reflective practice session.	57	8	56	11	57	5	56	0	67	17	90	5	Included
Engaging in supervision.	85	1	85	0	82	2	78	0	67	0	N/A	N/A	Included
Facilitating a workshop. / Giving talks to colleagues, service users, other professionals, community forums.	25	30	44	19	18	34	22	22	33	17	66	32	Excluded

**Figure 48** Analysis of responses of 'Professional Development' situation titles (in %) by sector (Delphi I) and all participants (Delphi I and II).

Quality Assurance														
Situation Title	Delphi survey round I										Delphi survey round II		Final decision	
	All Social Work Sectors (N=79)		Children and Family Social Work (n=27)		Adult Social Work (n=44)		Health Social Work (n=9)		PVI* (n=6)		All Social Work Sectors (N=41)			
	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected		
Reviewing care and support packages and their legality in response to policy and legal changes. / Reviewing care and safeguarding arrangements.	37	27	22	37	48	16	44	11	33	33	98	0	Included	
Peer-reviewing case notes or recording process.	25	37	26	33	30	34	11	44	0	17	49	46	Excluded	
Contributing to in-house investigations.	23	37	33	33	18	34	33	33	0	67	68	32	Excluded	
Responding to complaints and compliments.	22	32	22	33	23	23	33	33	0	83	68	29	Excluded	
Discussing concerns with service provider.	57	10	37	15	70	5	67	11	50	33	N/A	N/A	Included	
Arranging a review meeting.	56	22	52	22	57	23	56	22	33	50	93	7	Included	
Participating in a review meeting.	65	19	67	11	61	27	78	22	33	50	N/A	N/A	Included	
Chairing a review meeting.	48	29	44	30	48	32	44	33	33	50	88	12	Included	
Reporting concerns to person or team responsible for quality assurance.*	N/A										71	24	Excluded	
Reviewing practice of peers.	N/A										39	29	Excluded	
Raising alerts regarding the quality of services.	N/A										88	0	Included	
Engaging in research and practice development activities.	N/A										78	12	Included	
Making unannounced visits to service provider (e.g. foster home, care home, residential service, etc.).	N/A										80	10	Included	
Speaking out when there is suspected discrimination and oppression.	N/A										90	0	Included	

\*this situation was accepted but excluded from the final list of key situations, as it forms part of 'Raising alerts regarding the quality of services'.

**Figure 49** Analysis of responses of 'Quality Assurance' situation titles (in %) by sector (Delphi I) and all participants (Delphi I and II).

Meetings													
Situation Title	Delphi survey round I										Delphi survey round II		Final decision
	All Social Work Sectors (N=79)		Children and Family Social Work (n=27)		Adult Social Work (n=44)		Health Social Work (n=9)		PVI* (n=6)		All Social Work Sectors (N=41)		
	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	
Presenting a case to a panel.	49	24	44	26	52	25	56	22	33	50	98	2	Included
Arranging social work team meeting.	37	39	41	37	34	36	44	33	17	83	66	34	Excluded
Participating in a social work team meeting.	82	9	78	11	86	7	89	0	33	50	N/A	N/A	Included
Chairing a social work team meeting.	39	32	44	37	36	27	44	22	0	83	68	32	Excluded
Organising, participating in or chairing in a conference call.	24	35	33	30	23	41	22	33	0	83	85	15	Included
Manage meetings with councillors or inspectors.	11	75	11	70	11	75	11	78	0	100	N/A	N/A	Excluded
Participating in service or whole systems meetings.	29	34	41	33	25	32	0	22	17	67	80	20	Included

*Figure 50 Analysis of responses of 'Meetings' situation titles (in %) by sector (Delphi I) and all participants (Delphi I and II).*

Education and Practice Education														
	Delphi survey round I										Delphi survey round II		Final decision	
	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected	% Accepted	% Rejected		
	N/A		N/A		N/A		N/A		N/A		N/A	All Social Work Sectors (N=41)		
Offering a teaching session to social work students and others.												73	15	Included
Arranging learning opportunities for social work students.												95	2	Included
Holding a supervision session with a social work student.												80	15	Included
Observing the practice of a social work student.												80	12	Included
Obtaining feedback from service user on a student social worker's practice.												76	15	Included
Deciding about pass or fail of social work student's placement.												71	22	Included
Writing a final report on social work student's placement.												73	22	Included

**Figure 51** Analysis of responses of 'Education and Practice Education' situation titles (in %) by sector (Delphi I) and all participants (Delphi I and II).

## Final Agreed Key Situations in Social Work in England

The final list of agreed key situation titles organised under the areas of responsibility is as follows:

### Initial Contact and Assessment

1. Receiving and responding to new contacts and referrals.
2. Carrying out an initial or screening assessment.
3. Discussing opening or closing a case with manager.
4. Reviewing initial information on an allocated case.
5. Gathering information to plan next steps.
6. Establishing contact with a service user or carer.
7. Having an initial face to face meeting with an adult, child or parents.
8. Making initial decisions about level of risk and urgency and next steps to be taken.
9. Engaging with service users or carers at the beginning.

### Planning for support and care

10. Supporting service users to strengthen their social, family and support network.
11. Supporting people to access community-based resources.
12. Thinking about and planning work you intend to deliver yourself.
13. Arranging and sourcing appropriate support and care from own service.
14. Arranging another service for a service user, carer or a family.
15. Making an onward referral to another service.
16. Supporting service users or carers to access another service.
17. Making and communicating discharge plans.
18. Preparing for direct work with an adult or a child.
19. Planning safeguarding enquiries

### Crisis Intervention and Safeguarding

20. Responding to a telephone call by someone in crisis.
21. Seeing and assessing someone in crisis.
22. Co-working with emergency services to safeguard people and undertake statutory duties.
23. Dealing with a crisis situation out of hours.
24. Undertaking a welfare check.
25. Meeting with a service user following a crisis.
26. Working with carers, parents and others who are close to someone in crisis.
27. Raising a safeguarding alert.
28. Making inquiries into safeguarding alerts.
29. Arranging a safeguarding meeting.
30. Attending a safeguarding meeting.
31. Chairing a safeguarding meeting.

32. Creating a safeguarding plan following an inquiry.

### **Assessment**

33. Planning an assessment.
34. Meeting with adults, children or parents to understand and assess their situation.
35. Observing adults', children's, or parents' interactions.
36. Viewing and assessing the home environment.
37. Gathering views from other professionals about adults, children and families.
38. Thinking about and analysing a situation to decide on plans, interventions or actions.
39. Discussing a care plan with a service user.
40. Co-producing a support plan.
41. Making a professional decision about risks and needs and care and safety plans.
42. Reviewing historical case notes and documents.
43. Establishing the financial situation with service users.
44. Sharing the assessment with the family, child, carer or service user.

### **Direct Work with Adults and Children**

45. Discussing a report with a service user.
46. Visiting a service user, carer or family in their home.
47. Visiting a service user in a care home, hospital, or prison (or another institution).
48. Undertaking a joint visit with another professional.
49. Offering information and talking through specific issues with service users, carers, family members and others.
50. Offering information and talking through specific issues with groups of service users, carers, family members etc.
51. Working directly with an adult or a child.
52. Visiting children and young people in their home to work directly with them.
53. Discussing concerns with a service user or carer.
54. Supporting conflict resolution between service users and/or others.
55. Offering help with financial issues and subsistence payments.
56. Addressing practical issues with or for service users.
57. Supporting service users to maintain their physical and mental health.
58. Communicating with children, adults or families through an interpreter.
59. Providing information to service users, carers and the public.
60. Informing service users about case closure.
61. Supporting service user, child, young person etc. with transition to new (case) worker.

### **Collaboration and Cooperation**

62. Having an informal discussion with colleagues.
63. De-briefing with a colleague.
64. Seeking advice from an experienced colleague.

65. Having a one to one conversation with another professional with shared responsibility.
66. Discussing a report with a manager or another professional.
67. Coordinating informal and formal support.
68. Liaising with other services to coordinate service provision and share information on risks, needs and support.
69. Liaising with carers, friends, family and community groups.
70. Advocating on behalf of service users and carers.
71. Handing over information to key professionals (care coordinator, allocated social worker, key worker).
72. Informing other agencies, professionals or teams about the remit and limits of own services.
73. Arranging a multi-agency meeting.
74. Attending a multi-agency meeting.
75. Chairing a multi-agency meeting.
76. Arranging a multi-disciplinary meeting.
77. Participating in a multi-disciplinary meeting.
78. Chairing a multi-disciplinary meeting.
79. Planning and arranging safeguarding arrangements with other professionals or agencies.
80. Conducting joint investigations with police

### **Court work**

81. Being instructed on a new court or mental health tribunal case.
82. Seeking legal advice.
83. Attending court or tribunal.
84. Giving evidence in court or at tribunal.
85. Making decisions about potential cases for the court.

### **Administration**

86. Writing a report.
87. Writing case notes.
88. Responding to Emails.
89. Completing forms.
90. Writing a report for court or tribunal.
91. Taking and making telephone calls.
92. Documenting out of hours work.

### **Professional Development**

93. Researching evidence and information to inform assessments, plans, interventions and reports.
94. Attending a training session or engaging in other CPD activities.
95. Engaging in a reflective practice session.

96. Engaging in supervision.

### Quality Assurance

- 97. Reviewing care and safeguarding arrangements.
- 98. Discussing concerns with service provider.
- 99. Arranging a review meeting.
- 100. Participating in a review meeting.
- 101. Chairing a review meeting.
- 102. Raising alerts regarding the quality of services.
- 103. Engaging in research and practice development activities.
- 104. Making unannounced visits to service provider (e.g. foster home, care home, residential service, etc.).
- 105. Speaking out when there is suspected discrimination and oppression.

### Meetings

- 106. Presenting a case to a panel.
- 107. Participating in a social work team meeting.
- 108. Organising, participating in or chairing in a conference call.
- 109. Participating in service or whole systems meetings.

### Education and Practice Education

- 110. Offering a teaching session to social work students and others.
- 111. Arranging learning opportunities for social work students.
- 112. Holding a supervision session with a social work student.
- 113. Observing the practice of a social work student.
- 114. Obtaining feedback from service user on a student social worker's practice.
- 115. Deciding about pass or fail of social work student's placement.
- 116. Writing a final report on social work student's placement.

### Conclusions – What are the key situations in social work in England?

Overall, the social workers who participated on the expert Delphi panel reviewed 142 situations.

116 situations reached the criteria for agreement. These 116 are the agreed key situations in social work in England. They are clustered into 12 areas of responsibility. The relevance of these, particularly in relation to enabling knowledgeable and ethical practice, is discussed in the following chapter.

## Chapter 6 – Discussion: Designing for knowledgeable and ethical social work practice – the potential of the Key Situation Model

### Introduction

The key situation titles offer a detailed and practice-based description of the practices social workers encounter, categorised by areas of responsibilities. They enable the categorisation of situated knowledge that is aligned to the actual practice of social workers and this offers opportunities for the design of epistemic environments and curricula. These three aspects are discussed in turn in the first section of examining the implications of the produced key situation titles.

The second section discusses in detail how knowledgeable and ethical practice can be continually supported. In the first three chapters, based on a review of the literature, I have started to develop my argumentation as to how we can support knowledgeable and ethical decision-making and practice by focussing on the interplay between knowing and doing. To support decision-making and practice, we need to address the interplay between the individual and the physical and social environments social workers practice in. The notion of practices brings these dimensions together (Schönig, 2016; Reckwitz, 2002). Knowledgeable and ethical practice is also about enabling innovation in response to new challenges and the unknown, complex and uncertain situations that social workers encounter (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017; Reich, Rooney and Boud, 2015). Innovation is about addressing specific situations and scaling the developed solutions up in reflective and iterative approaches (Goodyear and Markauskaite, 2019; Kilpi, 2016). Therefore, to respond to ill-structured and wicked problems, professionals need to not only be supported to continuously learn and engage in inquiry but need to be enabled to design methods of inquiry (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017). In this chapter I want

to argue that responding to the main research question as to how social workers can be supported to continuously develop knowledgeable and ethical professional practice, we need to turn our attention to the practices involved in becoming and being a professional. The key situations presented in this study offer a first insight into the practices that social workers are engaged in, day in and day out.

Furthermore, from practice-based perspectives, supporting knowledgeable and ethical practice needs involves paying attention to how work, learning, knowledgeability and innovation emerge together, through engagement in practice and associated epistemic activities (Hopwood, 2014). Therefore, objects involved in epistemic practices - such as computers, artefacts and other objects - play an important part of epistemic environments and cultures in workplaces (Knorr Cetina, 2005). Knorr-Cetina's view of epistemic culture turns the attention to the micro practices in specific locations and to how organisational structures and procedures, objects, human bodies, signs and histories are arranged to create knowledge. This view of epistemic culture and epistemic practice is concerned with the way knowledge practices emerge and are arranged. For example, in social services, epistemic practices need to address not only to "continuous adjustment to external reconfigurations (e.g. new policies, standards and other regulations) but also to ongoing fine-tuning to the relentless flux of encountered situations (e.g. new clients with new problems)" (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017, p. 115). The longstanding concern with the development of a learning culture in social work (e.g. Munro, 2019, 2011) can, in my view, be sharpened through such a practice-based lens.

Rather than focussing on culture in a traditional sense, which reduces culture to "the 'ideal', 'spiritual' and 'non-material'" (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017, p. 115), I propose that we need to concentrate on the (epistemic) practices that emerge and are lived out in organisations.

Such a focus on the epistemic organisational environments, curricula and activities therefore focus on how practitioners in organisations engage in knowledge-related practices and how they are supported to develop epistemic fluency (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017). Perhaps then, the well-known management phrase (Forrester et al., 2018) should in this sense be rephrased, with less focus on culture and more emphasis on epistemic practices. I therefore dare to argue that organisational practices eat training for breakfast. The question of how to support knowledgeable and ethical practice therefore moves beyond one of training and 'training transfer', focusing instead on the overall epistemic practices that support learning in and for work.

An emphasis on practices more generally - both epistemic and on practices in key social work situations – in organisations and across organisations, offers focal points for the development of reflexive, mindful practitioners and knowledgeable and ethical practice. Such a practice-based perspective on learning and practice has profound implications for education and CPD in social work and for the way learning is organised in and for practice. In the following discussion, I therefore want to outline how epistemic practices for knowledgeable and ethical practice can be supported through the design of material and epistemic environments (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017) that is guided by the Key Situation Model (Tov et al., 2016a). In doing so, I mainly focus on continuous learning in and for work. However, many of the principles are also relevant for social work education.

I discuss the relevance of the key situation titles and then turn to the broader questions of how this knowledge can contribute to the adaption and implementation of the Key Situation Model in social work organisations. This discussion is focussed on the design options for learning by practitioners within and across organisations and discusses how key situations can inform the

design of curricula, reflective learning and knowledge sharing approaches that ensures that practices remain at the heart of any endeavour to support knowledgeable and ethical practice and social workers. Last, the implications for CPD and research are discussed.

### **Key Situations in Social Work in England**

In this section I first discuss the areas of responsibility and then the key situation titles. They provide detail, clarity and transparency about what social workers in England do and extend the published knowledge by filling a significant gap in the literature.

#### **Areas of responsibility: an inductive categorisation of what social workers do**

Previous literature on social work practices describes them at a high level of abstraction that is more related to the areas of responsibility developed in this study. Previous scholarly work on typologies of social work and tasks and responsibilities of social workers (see Chapter 1) have so far offered broad and generalised perspectives. Even when authors talk about “situations in which social workers are required” they only name five situations (TCSW, 2014, p. 6). The categorisation by Holmes and McDermid (2013, p. 125) describe “activities associated with the children in need case management processes” but these are also at a much higher level of abstraction than the activity-centred notion of situations, as are the categories of direct and indirect work with service users. Overall, these categorisations are more aligned to what Ghisla et al. (2014) call areas of responsibility, which form the broader categories by which key situations are structured. The table in Appendix 1 illustrates the different categorisations.

Comparing the previously published categories to the areas of responsibility, a few points are notable. First, there is much convergence of ‘*Assessment*’ and for example, ‘Direct work as part of a process of assessment’ (Whincup, 2017), ‘Core assessment’, ‘Section 47 Inquiry’ (Holmes

and McDermid, 2013) and 'Assessing people's needs, strengths and wishes' (Beresford, 2007). Similarly, 'Direct Work with Adults and Children' is a strong focus of 'Direct work as part of intervention' (Whincup, 2017), 'Ongoing support' (Holmes and McDermid, 2013), 'Individual direct work with service users', 'Work with loved ones and others identified in roles as 'informal carers'', 'Working with individuals and families directly to help them make changes and solve problems' (Beresford, 2007). Surprisingly, the category of 'Close case' (Holmes and McDermid, 2013) seems more at the level of a situation but could fall under direct work. There is some overlap between the area of responsibility 'Initial Contact and Assessment' with 'Initial contact and referral' and 'Initial assessment' (Holmes and McDermid, 2013). 'Direct work to build and sustain the relationship between child and professional, with this relationship intervention' (Whincup, 2017) also seems to partly align to this area of responsibility. The area of responsibility 'Planning for support and care' encompasses 'Planning and review' (Holmes and McDermid, 2013), 'Making recommendations or referrals to other services and agencies', 'Organising support' (Beresford, 2007) and perhaps also, 'Addressing adversity and social exclusion' (TCSW, 2014). Lastly, the area of responsibility 'Crisis Intervention and Safeguarding' is evident in 'Effective safeguarding and risk management' (TCSW, 2014). Noticeably, some of the previously published categories seem to straddle more than one area of responsibility, such as 'Responding to complex needs', 'Promoting independence and autonomy', 'Prevention and early intervention' (TCSW, 2014) and 'Day-to-day work' (Beresford, 2007) and could therefore be aligned to all of the above discussed areas of responsibility.

Secondly, for some areas of responsibility there are hardly any, or no categories that directly align. 'Court work' is addressed to some degree in 'Public law outline' (Holmes and McDermid, 2013); 'Administration' is clearly an overarching category for 'Keeping detailed records' (Beresford, 2007) and comes perhaps to the fore in 'Day-to-day work' (Beresford, 2007).

However, seeing that social workers spend around a quarter of their time on administrative tasks (Baginsky et al., 2010), this seems not sufficiently acknowledged in the literature that seeks to define what social workers do. Beresford's (2007) 'Indirect work with family and friends' may also be aligned with the areas of responsibility '*Professional Development*', '*Quality Assurance*' and '*Meetings*' but it seems too broad to add value to an understanding of practice. In addition, the categories cited do not refer to the area of responsibility '*Education and Practice Education*'. Finally, the areas of responsibility '*Collaboration and Cooperation*' could be relevant in 'Indirect work with family and friends' and 'Day-to-day work' (Beresford, 2007) but overall, it is astonishing that this area of responsibility does not feature more prominently in other categories, as inter-professional and intra-professional work is a key requirement when addressing complex problems (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017).

Thirdly, it is interesting that the two classic social work methods of group work and community work (Lorenz, 2008) which featured in Beresford's (2007) categorisation, are no longer visible in the descriptions of areas of responsibilities in current social work practice in England. These methods seem to have been "superseded by terms like 'case and care management', 'coaching', and 'empowerment'" (Lorenz, 2008, p. 8) and this is further evident in the categorisations that are aligned to case management processes (e.g. Holmes and McDermid, 2013, p. 127).

In sum, the areas of responsibility offer a categorisation of practice that is to some degree aligned with previous categories but seems to offer a more nuanced typology that provides more detail, particularly for areas that do not involve direct work with people. The areas of responsibility co-constructed in this study therefore extend categorisations and include important areas of work previously neglected.

### **Key Situation Titles: what social workers say they do**

As the review of the literature on social work roles, responsibilities and tasks has shown, there is no consensus about what social workers do (Moriarty et al., 2015). Previous work that focussed on roles, such as ‘therapeutic’, ‘transformational’ or ‘emancipatory’ and on responsibilities or tasks, such as for example facilitators, gatekeepers, advocate, care manager (Moriarty et al., 2015), seem too generalised to act as a useful analytical concept at the level of practices. More recently, close-up research into social work practices (see Chapter 1) offer valuable analyses of specific practices and activities of social workers. With their focus on one specific practice however, they cannot offer a broader view and an overview of the everyday practices that constitute social work as a whole (Saltiel and Lakey, 2019); nor can they illustrate how social work is enacted across fields, sectors and organisational settings. Key situations, on the other hand, are at a medium level of abstraction (Kunz, 2015) and thus offer a more detailed depiction of practices. The responses by all participants (not at sector level) across the two survey rounds indicate average consensus at the level of 82% (range 39%<sup>15</sup> to 100%), well above the defined 70% (see section ‘Situation Titles Agreed and Rejected’ in Chapter Five). All pre-defined groups of social workers participated in this study (see Methodology - Strengths and Limitations) and therefore, there is good evidence for the stability of these Delphi study findings (Jorm, 2015). This lends credibility to the key situation titles as a type of ‘formal theory’ (Martí and Villasante, 2009, p. 389). This Delphi study arguably has achieved to create ‘consensus’, albeit one based on a quantitative definition (Jorm, 2015) and therefore has overall achieved a credible and agreed description of how social work is currently enacted and constituted in England.

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<sup>15</sup> Some situations were included in the first round when they met the inclusion criteria in an area of practice (sector). Therefore, at the aggregate level of all participants some situations did not achieve the inclusion criteria of 70%.

Nevertheless, there are some issues that need to be considered when assessing the credibility of the key situation titles. Some discrepancies in relation to the ratings by participants perhaps undermine the stability of findings as for some situations included in both survey rounds, respondents gave very different ratings in the two rounds. For example, 'Organising, participating in or chairing in a conference call' was encountered very frequently or frequently by 24% and never or rarely by 35% of all participants and was rejected by 83% of PVI social workers. However, when asked whether it should be included as a key situation in the second round, it was strongly accepted (85%). This was the case with eleven situations related to meetings, although on average, agreement with regard to other situations was much higher in the first round. There was no clear indication from the few qualitative comments made, that would allow me to draw out reasons for the rating differences in the two rounds. I wonder whether differently posed questions was a factor in the different ratings that overall led to higher levels of agreement in the second round. Apart from meeting situations, eleven other situations were rated as considerably different in the two rounds. Six of these were reworded in the second round and this could explain the difference, but five were not<sup>16</sup>. Lastly, there was an intriguing discrepancy in relation to the ratings of new situations related to practice education and education, which were accepted by all participants in round two. However, those with recent experience of practice education (n=21) only accepted four out of seven situations as key situations. These practice educators did not accept 'Obtaining feedback from service user on a student social worker's practice', 'Making a decision about pass or fail of social work student's

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<sup>16</sup> These were 'Communicating with children, adults or families through an interpreter' met the inclusion criteria by 41% and the exclusion criteria by 14% of all respondents in round one and 88% and 10% in round two. The other situations were 'Informing service users about case closure' (round I: 55%/17%, round II:100%/0%); 'Seeking legal advice' (round I: 44%/19%, round II: 93/5); 'Attending court or tribunal' (round I: 33%/30% - with rejection by PVI social workers, round two: 90%/10%) and 'Giving evidence in court or at tribunal' (round I: 26%/33% - with rejection by PVI social workers, round two: 95%/5%).

placement' and 'Writing a final report on social work student's placement' as key situations. This is surprising, as all three fall within the role of practice educators according to the Practice Educator Professional Standards (BASW, 2019). Perhaps some of the respondents had experience of practice education only as stage one practice educators and this could have influenced their responses.

Overall, all situations included met the inclusion criteria, even if the difference in ratings in the two survey rounds cannot be fully explained for 21 situations (18% of all key situations). Thus, the list of key situations in social work presented contributes to understanding what social workers do, underpinned by consensus from a broad range of social workers.

The key situation titles are not aligned to particular practice models or theoretical perspectives. Rather than offering the normative perspective evident in previous literature (e.g. Wiles and Vicary, 2018), the description of key situations is merely that, a depiction of what social workers actually do. The titles by themselves do not make any statements about how practice in these situations ought to be undertaken. The key situations were created by social workers from a range of organisations that may or may not use different practice approaches and the principles that guided the wording of the titles sought to achieve generally acceptable titles, relevant to all social worker in these different settings. This means that they are likely to be relevant and meaningful for social workers working to different models.

### **What do the key situations say about social work practice in England?**

The discursive elaboration and description of key situations in the zooming in phase of the Delphi study, arguably empowered social workers who participated, because it was concerned not with demanded, requested or prescribed practice approaches but rather with enacted ways of being

a social worker (Evans, 2008). The accepted situations thus reflect current practice. Social work has been shaped by decades of neoliberal policies that are associated with a reduction of the role of the state, further enforced through austerity measures (Jones, 2015; Ferguson, 2012) with the intention of reducing the “state and services back to the pre-welfare state levels of the 1930s” (Office for Budget Responsibility, 2014 in Jones, 2015, p. 449). This is illustrated in the following discussion that focusses on statutory roles, marketisation and managerialism.

Firstly, social work in England is frequently equated with statutory practice (Baginsky et al., 2019). It was therefore important to include social workers from private, voluntary and independent sector organisations in the Delphi expert panel, but even independent social workers talked mainly about the statutory tasks they perform. Overall, the accepted key situations are clearly aligned to the statutory function of social work. For example, situations concerned with supporting services users or carers such as ‘Accompanying service users or carers to a service’ and ‘Supporting a carer or family member to attend court’ and the situation ‘Holding drop-in sessions for others to access social work information and support’ that all fall outside the statutory requirements, were rejected. The situation title ‘Conducting a counselling session with a service user’ was changed to ‘Supporting service users, carers, family members and others with counselling (skills)’ in round two, as one participant was concerned with the terminology, stating that social workers “do use and have some training in counseling [sic!] we are not therapists”. Despite this change, the situation was overall not seen as a key situation. Situations not aligned with statutory roles were less likely to be accepted as key situations and this is perhaps a reflection of the actual practices of social workers in England.

Secondly, the marketisation of social work practice was raised by participants as an issue that is “unlikely to change anytime soon so we have to work with others to commission the best

services possible". This comment was made in relation to situations 'Applying for funding for independent providers', 'Liaising and working with other teams and professionals to jointly commission support' and 'Contracting with independent providers'. The former situations were accepted by 84% of adult social workers in the second round and this perhaps points to a difference between child and family and adult social work, where the purchaser and provider split introduced by the Community Care Act 1991 has influenced practice more strongly. But even in children and families social work, marketisation and privatisation is proposed as a policy option (Jones, 2015). One participant commenting on 'Contracting with independent providers' stated that this "sounds like a closer relationship than I have/would like to have". Interestingly, all three situations were rejected by the participants but the reasons for these rejections are not clear. In addition, 'Thinking about and planning work you intend to deliver yourself' was a situation suggested by a participant in round one, which was accepted in round two. This perhaps indicates an understanding that delivering services as a social worker is an important task and that not all interventions are outsourced or passed on to communities, families and informal carers or providers.

Thirdly, associated with neoliberal policies is a "managerialist approach to public services" that is driven by targets and performance indicators (Munro, 2011, p. 19). Procedure and process indeed feature strongly in the key situations. Many situations in the areas of responsibility of 'Initial Contact and Assessment', 'Assessment', 'Planning for support and care' and 'Administration' are related to processes and many of these are regulated by detailed guidance and timescales in organisations. But there are also key situations that stress the importance of rapport building, support, relationships and co-production, for example: 'Engaging with service users or carers at the beginning'; 'Meeting with a service user following a crisis'; 'Working with carers, parents and others who are close to someone in crisis'; 'Co-producing a support plan';

and 'Supporting service users to strengthen their social, family and support network'. The role of managers was highlighted in the key situations 'Discussing a report with a manager or another professional' and 'Discussing opening or closing a case with manager' and comments made in the second questionnaire suggest a hierarchical and managerial approach. Participants stated, for example, that they do not make decisions themselves but rather, provide "recommendations to inform management decisions" or have "regular discussions with management regarding this" and thus managers make decisions for example, "regarding cases going to court". Many of the rejected situations may well have been rejected for reasons related to division of labour between social workers and managers, such as 'Contracting with independent providers', 'Liaising and working with other teams and professionals to jointly commission support', 'Investigating allegations of suspected fraud', 'Dealing with data protection and freedom of information requests', 'Responding to complaints and compliments', 'Arranging social work team meeting' and 'Chairing a social work team meeting'. So, while some of these situations were encountered, they were "considered as more common on a managerial level" (participant round two) or on "different levels, i.e. managers / PSW" (participant round two). These observations perhaps lend some credibility to previous research on professionalism (Evetts, 2014) that demonstrates a trend towards organisational forms of professionalism, which questions fundamentally the autonomy of professionals to make judgements and extends to control mechanisms of practitioners.

Despite the rigorous approach adopted in this study, as previous research has shown, it is likely that not all key situations were captured (see Chapter 4 – Strengths and limitations). Some participants commented on the fact that practice is subject to continuous change and that this impacts on what social workers do. For example, 'Holding drop-in sessions for others to access social work information and support' was seen by one participant as not currently a key situation

but could become one “within 5 years” (participant round two). The original description of key situations in Switzerland included a category for future key situations (Kunz and Tov, 2009). Therefore, the description of current social work situations needs to be understood as an evolving categorisation that can adapt to emerging practice landscapes. Tschopp et al. (2016) designed a process that allows adaptation and updating of the key situation list on the Key Situation platform that involves the core members of the community. This process could be followed when the Key Situation platform goes live and is implemented in practice organisations or education.

In summary, the list of key situations fills a gap in the current literature and is thus an important and original contribution to knowledge. I argue that there is now a consensus among a broad range of social workers about what they do and how social work is constituted by the everyday practices of social workers in England. The detail and breadth of the description of social work key situations adds to the general knowledge about social work in England. Rather than seeing the list set in stone, however, it should be regarded as a living and changeable depiction – a snapshot - of current social work practices.

An important aspect about the key situation title collection is that it turns practice situations into epistemic objects (Nicolini, 2009). Importantly, this depiction of social work is neither normative, nor prescribed, demanded or requested (Evans, 2008) but essentially gives professionals themselves a voice and values the importance of their lived experience (Nicolini, 2009; Kaiser, 2005a). It thus brings to the surface how social work is enacted and constituted (Evans, 2008). This shows that social work practice in England has undoubtedly been shaped by the neoliberal policy agenda. The focus on statutory responsibilities is evident in the key situation title list and importantly, also in situations that were rejected. Situations that were accepted and rejected

give some weight to an understanding of social workers that they practice in an environment that is marked by market principles and managerial approaches. This was also evident in the comments made. Clearly, the autonomy of social workers, both in terms of the services they can deliver and decision-making, is curtailed and eroded as discussed in the literature on social work as a profession (Howard, 2010; Ferguson, 2009; Staub-Bernasconi, 2009). This is not the full story though, as social workers in this study were also concerned with engaging with service users, supportive relationships and co-production. These points must be treated as tentative, as the mostly quantitative data collected does not enable me to offer an analysis of meanings and thus reasons for rejecting or accepting situations. The findings of this study offer a depiction of the everyday activities that social workers typically engage in that makes social work less invisible (Saltiel and Lakey, 2019, Pithouse, 1998).

There are several possible implications of this practice-based description of social work situations. Most importantly, it enables social workers “to be much clearer to service users about what they do” (Beresford, 2007, p. 35). This transparency about what social workers do could also benefit the general public, people interested in becoming social workers, other professionals and social work students at the beginning of their career. The Social Work Taskforce (2009, p. 49) had suggested that if the profession becomes clearer about its “role, purpose and value”, it can become more confident and effective. The co-created understanding of key social work practices in England can also influence future research, which is discussed later.

The key situation titles also form an integral element of the Key Situation Model. The subsequent sections explore how this model can support the development of epistemic practices for knowledgeable and ethical practice.

## Supporting the development of knowledgeable and ethical practice

Evaluating the literature in relation to the concepts of profession, professional education and professional judgement from a practice-based stance, has led me to conclude that knowledgeable and ethical practice depends on social workers being supported to engage in practice and in reflexive and reflective learning about this practice, to plan for future practice and to share this learning with others.

Developing an understanding about encountered situations and knowledgeable and ethical practice in similar situations, requires social workers to grasp the complexity of practice. I have discussed these complexities and uncertainties from a practice-based perspective. It includes seeing that engagement in practice situations involves bodily, mental and emotional activities and things such as artefacts and tools (Fenwick and Nerland 2014, Reckwitz, 2002). Practice in social work situations is fundamentally relational, emergent and historically and socially constituted (Reich and Hager, 2014; Wenger, 1998). It is also marked by dilemmas and uncertainties and therefore, social work practice cannot be standardised (Munro, 2019, 2011; Sidebotham et al., 2016; Becker-Lenz and Müller, 2009; Schön, 1983). Social work practice is emerging in a contested space that is mediated by organisational and socio-political contexts, as well as service users' and social workers' expertise (Evetts, 2014; Staub-Bernasconi, 2009; Evans, 2008). I therefore argue that understanding social work as a hybrid, situated, reflexive and mindful profession (see Chapter 1) is more fitting to the complexities encountered in key situations. The view of social work as a reflexive and mindful profession suggests certain ways as to how social workers can develop a knowledgeable and ethical approach to decision-making and practice in key situations. I summarise these in the following section.

Firstly, reflexive and mindful professionals need to pay attention to how knowledge and practice are linked. Seeing social work in this way emphasises the role of knowledge and decision-making

in supporting knowledgeable and ethical practice. Indeed, professional work is seen as knowledge-based work (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017; Evetts, 2014) and therefore, we need to focus on the epistemic practices that are involved in professional practice (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017; Sommerfeld, 2014; Knorr Cetina, 2005; Blackler, 1995). In doing so, we must recognise that technical-rational and prescribed or requested approaches will not be able to address the challenges of working with uncertainty and complexity (Munro, 2019; Nyathi, 2018; Munro et al., 2017; Evans, 2008). Rather, this practice-based understanding of professional work draws attention to how different forms of knowledge are combined with specific practice situations and how professional judgements are formed on a case by case basis (Sidebotham et al., 2016; Beddoe, 2013; Gorman and Sandefur, 2011). This involves knowledge (co-)construction, integration, playing epistemic games and designing inquiry (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017). In other words, social workers as practitioners, professionals and knowledge worker (social scientists) (Croisdale-Appleby, 2014) need to develop their reflexive capability to weave together these different perspectives in relation to complex, uncertain situations in varying contexts. Consequently, education, training providers and practice organisations need to support the development of reflexive capability to enable social workers to fuse different knowledge types. I have argued that the Key Situation Model offers an approach that enables this, and, in this chapter, I further underpin this by discussing the model in the light of the practice-based literature.

Secondly, the review of the literature in relation to professional judgements and decision-making has shown that social workers need to employ diverse strategies to arrive at knowledgeable and ethical decisions. These include self-regulation of their emotions and bodily activities and intuitive and analytical thinking to make sense of a situation and employ a relational expertise (Nyathi, 2018; Whittaker, 2018; Munro et al., 2017; Cook, 2016; Eraut, 2012; Giddens, 1984;

Schön, 1983). We therefore need to distinguish between decisions that are made on the spot, on the one hand, that involve rapid and intuitive cognitive processes (Eraut, 2012) and reflexive monitoring of bodily actions (Giddens, 1984) and, on the other hand, professional judgements that come from deliberative reflections after the action (Eraut, 2004). Recognising and talking about emotions is therefore a vital aspect of untangling the complex activities involved in decision-making (see Chapter 2). In order to make defensible judgements, social workers need to deliberately reflect on situations and on their own intuitions and emotions and reflect on these in the light of other knowledge resources. Deliberate reflection also plays a vital role in the development of skilled intuition, as social workers need to repeatedly engage in practice situations, receive feedback and deliberately reflect on these (Munro, 2011; Kahneman and Klein, 2009). These points lead me to argue that reflective learning needs to be concerned not just with knowledge and analysis but importantly, also with emotions and intuitive ways of knowing and be closely tied to practice.

Thirdly, professional development and learning approaches for knowledgeable and ethical practice requires looking back and forth to learn from one's own engagement in practice and from other perspectives. Markauskaite and Goodyear (2017) argue that the development of capability to become professional knowledge workers involves growth in different directions. Firstly, professionals need to develop their capacity to connect codified academic or professional knowledge with emergent problems of practice. Becoming and being a professional secondly, involves the ongoing development of professional identity. Although key situations are typical, each instance of a specific situation is unique and can bring with it novel problems. Therefore, thirdly, professionals need to be able to create knowledge that looks to the future and enables innovation. This is especially important in the context of changing social environments that require a continuous adaption for a changing future. As the situations social workers encounter

are complex, addressing these requires working together with others – from service users to specialists from other professions. This means that fourthly, social workers need to develop their capability for effective collaboration across organisational and professional boundaries. To support knowledgeable and ethical practice, we therefore need to focus on how these aspects can be supported both in professional practice and education and CPD. Rather than focussing on any one of those aspects, we need to draw all of these together (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017). Supporting practices that enable growth in these directions is therefore essential in order to support knowledgeable and ethical practice.

This leads to a final and central point from a practice-based perspective: supporting knowledgeable and ethical practice needs to move beyond individualistic approaches. I have argued that professional practice and learning are intertwined (Reich, Rooney and Boud, 2015) and that organisations need to create conditions to support expertise (Whittaker, 2018) by developing a generative culture (Munro, 2019). With this in mind, rather than seeing reflective practice as the responsibility of individual practitioners (Collins and Daly, 2011; Kilminster et al., 2010), organisations need to create spaces for social reflective practices (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017; Beckett, 2009; K. Illeris, 2009b) in groups (Fook and Gardner, 2007; Ruch, 2007a). However, the analysis of group reflection models (see Chapter 2) has highlighted that while these approaches can support self-regulation, emotional support and consideration of practice wisdom (Staempfli and Fairtlough, 2019), they are limited in their ability to support the integration of research and theory. The Key Situation's reflective learning approach, while not a group reflection model in the traditional sense, offers a reflective learning process in groups that pays attention to emotions, knowledge and practice. Importantly, practice organisations need to support social workers so that they can use their reflexive and reflective capability, and this

involves the design and support of spaces and practices that enable ongoing discursive deliberation.

The next section considers how a curriculum that enables such development and addresses the complexities of practice and decision-making, can be developed from a practice-based perspective. Such a practice-based focus is relevant for both practice organisations as well as educational institutions who offer initial and ongoing education.

### **Development of a situation-based curriculum for professional learning**

The review of the literature has highlighted that the design of a contemporary and relevant curriculum is challenging. Making curricula relevant means grounding them in what social workers do and how they do it (Boud and Hager, 2012). However, practices are not fixed or static; rather, they are in a constant dynamic flow that is produced and reproduced by professionals as they engage in practice (Wenger, 1998). This leads to considerable variations across contexts and consequently, different views about what constitutes knowledgeable and ethical practice in each setting (Dall’Alba and Sandberg, 2006). Indeed, competence is largely defined by the communities within which professionals engage and needs to be aligned to the practices of those communities (Wenger, 2010). Before turning to the question of how the agreed key situations in social work can inform the development of such a curriculum, it is necessary to consider the research and policy context of curriculum design in social work.

Curriculum development is on the one hand concerned with content, in other words, the knowledge and skills that need to be developed. This has been discussed widely in social work. For example, it was argued that the curriculum of the social work degree, introduced in 2003, was based on limited specifications of core subject areas that had to be addressed (Orme et al.,

2009, p. 164). Narey (2014, p. 8) concluded in his review of the education of children's social workers that despite a "plethora of guidance documents" for universities, there is a lack of "clarity about what a newly qualified social worker needs to know". Narey (2014, p. 41) therefore recommended that there should be "an agreed curriculum for undergraduate and postgraduate social work training". Croisdale-Appleby (2014) similarly suggested that we need to focus on core skills. The subsequently developed Chief Social Workers' Knowledge and Skills Statements (KSS) for child and family social work (DfE, 2014) and social workers in adult services (DoH, 2015) contain numerous statements about the knowledge base social workers need to understand and be able to 'apply' in practice.

As the role and form of social work continually evolve and change, Devaney et al. (2017) argue that educators, employers and users of services need to stay in dialogue about the content of qualifying curricula, the standards expected of graduates and "the supports that should be available to those beginning their careers in practice" (Devaney et al., 2017, p. 2380). Social Work England recently published a first draft paper on qualifying education and training standards. It suggests that a curriculum must "remain relevant to current practice" (SWE, 2019a, p. 10) and that this requires a "continually evolving curriculum" that responds to the "contemporary demands of the whole sector" and places the integration of theory and practice at its centre (SWE, 2019b, p. 10).

With much emphasis in England being directed to social work qualifying education (e.g. Narey, 2014) and the first ASYE (Croisdale-Appleby, 2014; DfE, 2014; DoH, 2015), the development of CPD curricula that span the whole career of social workers has in recent years been a neglected area. Ongoing professional learning for mid-career professionals is important because they can build on their evolving experience (Eraut, 2013). This is particularly important for the

development of skilled intuition (Munro, 2011; Kahneman and Klein, 2009) and expertise (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1988).

In the absence of a national CPD framework (Moriarty and Manthorpe, 2014), it is currently left to universities and other CPD providers, in conjunction with employers, to develop courses and programmes. The teaching partnership initiative, for example, sought to create plans for a national CPD framework, but in my view has not achieved this and the legacy of teaching partnerships is unclear (Baginsky et al., 2019). The policy drive for more employer led CPD (Moriarty and Manthorpe, 2014) also raises questions about who determines learning outcomes, content and teaching and learning methods (Halton et al., 2015, p. 30). The KSS for practice supervisors (DfE, 2018a; DoHSC, 2018) and practice leaders (DfE, 2018b) recently sought to clarify expectations in relation to knowledge and skills for these specific roles but are clearly no substitution for a national framework. They are also premised on individualised notions of capability. The development of a CPD evaluation framework by Social Work England is likely to take some time before taking shape.

My concern is that these policy and practice drivers are what Evans (2008) calls demanded and prescribed notions of professionalism, which while being powerful may not be enacted (as intended) by professionals. Rather than seeing continuous learning as a relational (Reich and Hager, 2014), collective and situated process (Gherardi, 2012), these initiatives - aiming to drive up standards in relation to knowledge, skills and regulation – also seem to be grounded in individualistic perspectives, as is evident in the assessment and accreditation system for child and family social workers. This is concerning in the light of research that has shown the limitation of practice change even with well-designed CPD courses (Forrester et al., 2018). Research has shown the stronger effects of interventions that address organisational factors rather than

individual ones, for example in relation to staff retention (Webb and Carpenter, 2012) and that initiatives that home in on the whole organisational culture show improved quality of service and outcomes for service users (Baginsky, 2013). A practice-based approach to professional education and CPD needs to recognise the interconnections between practising, knowing, learning and innovation (Reich, Rooney and Boud, 2015). The recently published practice framework that seeks to support the development of strengths-based approaches appears to be more aligned to such a perspective. It is designed around five areas of knowledge and co-creation: values and ethics, experiential learning, theories and methods and skills. Conceived as a whole system approach that pays attention to flexibility regarding processes and procedures (DoHSC, 2019), it suggests how the framework can inform professional practice, supervision and quality assurance. Other practice models are equally aimed at whole system change. These approaches generally aim to influence core practices and often include learning and theorising activities (Gherardi, 2012, p. 34). Similarly, the Key Situation Model aims to develop not just individual knowledgeability but also an open learning culture, by combining reflective learning on situations with the sharing of knowledge and the implementation of knowledge practices across an organisation (Staempfli, et al., 2016). It therefore extends the understanding of culture to one of culture-as-epistemic-practices (Knorr-Cetina, 2005).

I therefore argue for a design of social work curricula for both education and CPD that is in line with practice-based understandings of practices and learning. This requires a renewed focus on both content and pedagogy (Higgins, 2014) and needs to consider how a curriculum allows continuous evolution in response to changing contemporary practice (SWE, 2019b). A curriculum needs to enable the development of individual capabilities but should also seek to shape the practices that affect organisational cultures (Forrester et al., 2018). The Key Situation Model, in my view, offers an opportunity to design a curriculum that is rooted in social work

practice (Boud and Hager, 2012), can be implemented within and across organisations and connects practice and learning.

In the next section I address how a curriculum can be designed that is based on the findings of this study. I first consider the issue of curriculum content before discussing the situation-based learning approach that Tov and colleagues (2016a) advocate, by considering wider approaches to learning based on cases. In doing so, I examine the pedagogical approach of the Key Situation Model and suggest some adaptations.

### *Categorising Curriculum Content*

Agreeing on the content of social work curricula is a complex enterprise and designing a curriculum is an epistemic design task at the meso level (Carvalho and Yeoman, 2017). It is about negotiating different stakeholders' perspectives. As discussed, a curriculum needs to be grounded in practice, include the perspectives of important stakeholders and enable graduates and CPD participants to meet professional standards. This is all the more challenging as there seems to be little agreement on the content of qualifying and post-qualifying curricula (e.g. Croisdale-Appleby, 2014; Narey, 2014).

Agreeing on the knowledge and skills a curriculum needs to cover involves creating a taxonomy as "a means to systematise knowledge and practical resources" (Cruickshank et al., 2017, p. 45). Overall, categorisations of social work knowledge have focused on various aspects of knowledge, with different authors trying to "find ways to classify the knowledge base of social work" (Trevithick, 2008, p. 1215). For example, Social Care Online (SCIE, 2011) created an online database with information "on all aspects of social work and social care". Although the categorisation was created in order to enable browsing and searching of the over 160'000

documents on a platform, it is relevant in relation to curriculum development. A subject taxonomy that indexes documents on platform by subject, content type and geography was first launched in 2005 and redeveloped into a thesaurus in 2013. The current thesaurus has 54 categories divided hierarchically into over 1400 terms. The knowledge categories are broad and focus on a wide range of areas. The problem is that such a categorisation cannot offer the basis for a single curriculum as it is too vast. Therefore, a selection has to be made that would emphasise “certain features over others” (Trevithick, 2008, p. 1215).

Reviewing taxonomies of online portals in social work, Hjelmar and Møller (2016, p. 133) found that there is considerable variation. Besides research and policy knowledge, some platforms include practice-based knowledge (Hjelmar and Møller, 2016). As the discussion on knowledgeable and ethical practice has shown, it is essential that social workers merge different forms of knowledge, including theoretical and research knowledge, professional values and ethics, with experiential and everyday knowledge and situational action in professional practice. So rather than just looking to research, Hjelmar and Møller suggest that a categorisation should include “a more unified view of knowledge” that integrates experience and practice-based knowledge “into accounts of research and research-based knowledge ... in order to make it more interesting and meaningful to practitioners” (Hjelmar and Møller, 2016, p. 135).

I think the idea of an integrated approach makes a lot of sense. However, the challenge here is that if we start on the basis of research-based knowledge, as Hjelmar and Møller (2016) suggest, we end up with taxonomies such as the one created by Social Care Online (SCIE, 2018, 2019) that are highly complex, focussed on broad (knowledge) areas and end up with “a dense jungle of concepts” with sterile terms (Trevithick, 2008, p. 1215). In my view, this would not make a knowledge categorisation more interesting or meaningful to practitioners. There is conceivably

another way to structure and represent knowledge. Rather than trying to cover different topics and themes for either social work as a whole or for specific fields, an orientation to the practices themselves, in other words on key situations social workers encounter, could offer a way forward.

Unlike knowledge taxonomies that focus on the thematic categories of knowledge, the key situation collection is more like a 'taskonomy' or 'task taxonomy' that is organised around activities or tasks that social workers need to handle. A taskonomy is thus an activity-based classification system (Dougherty and Keller, 1982, p. 766) and has for example been applied by Tarmizi and de Vreede (2005) to categorise the tasks involved in CoP facilitation for the purpose of CPD. Dougherty and Keller (1982, p. 766) argued that an orientation on tasks or processes allows complex systems of knowledge to be organised in response to activities. The key situation title list is arguably such a taskonomy, categorising social work practice with an orientation to situations as a situation-based classification system.

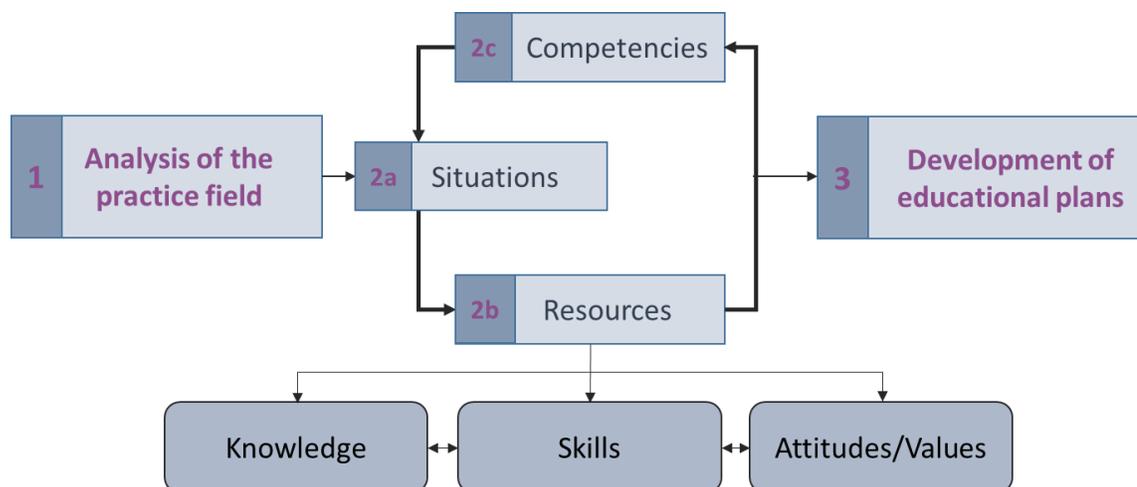
The key situation titles thus offer a categorisation of knowledge and practice that allows the development of curricula for both education and CPD. They offer a holistic perspective through the lens of situated knowledge and practice (Suchman, 1987) that links theories and conceptual knowledge (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017) "to the situations regularly encountered in social work practice" (Trevithick, 2011, p. 42). Importantly, such a curriculum structure is likely to be relevant and meaningful to social workers (Tov et al., 2016b), as I discuss later.

### *Collaborative curriculum development for and in practice*

Curriculum design is about ensuring that learning is relevant and aligned to changing and emerging 'landscapes of practice' (Wenger, 2010, p. 182). Thus, the design method needs to

ensure that a curriculum can evolve and be adapted (SWE, 2019b). Adaptation is also needed to address the CPD and practice development needs in local settings. As the discussion of the Key Situation Model’s epistemic design has shown, the focus of the epistemic design at the organisational (meso) level is about achieving such an alignment to ensure a fit between local practices and the (situation-based) curriculum. A focus on key situations, in which social workers need to skilfully, knowledgeably and ethically engage, might offer universities and organisations a useful perspective for decision-making about both curriculum content and epistemic design.

The CoRe (Competence and Resource) approach illustrated in Figure 52 suggested by Ghisla (2007) offers a blueprint for such flexible development:



**Figure 52** Recursive determination of situations, resources and competencies (Ghisla, 2007, p. 26, author’s translation)

The CoRe process (see Chapter 4) starts with an analysis of the field and the competencies required by professionals. In other words, it focusses on developing the ability to activate individual and collective resources of expertise, abilities and attitudes (Ghisla, et al., 2014) in order to act appropriately in practice situations. This understanding of competence is aligned to a holistic understanding of knowledgeability (Beckett, 2009; see also Wenger, 2010). Curriculum

designers (e.g. universities, training providers, practice organisations, service users) who engage in a collaborative CoRe process at local level could achieve a good fit between the needs of practitioners within an organisation and the affordances of education or training providers. Such an approach could also be scaled up to allow regulators or national organisations to produce relevant and meaningful criteria that are negotiated, and practice-based. The results of such a co-productive approach would be the descriptions of relevant key situations with the aligned knowledge, skills and values that need to be covered in the curriculum.

The developed key situation titles presented in this thesis thus offer a starting point for the co-construction of a curriculum. The titles could be reviewed by stakeholders – in collaboration between practice organisations, universities and people who use services – for both qualifying and post-qualifying education and CPD. Once agreement is reached about which key situations should be addressed and the associated knowledge, skills and values, attention needs to be paid to learning and teaching strategies, as the design of learning that starts with situations is fundamentally different to traditional learning and teaching approaches. These are discussed in the subsequent section.

### **Situation-based learning approaches**

Cree (2005, p. 60) suggested that traditional ways of organising social work professional education that starts off with academic input and is followed by engagement in practice “may not provide the ideal sequencing for students learning to learn”; nor does it enable the development of expertise that relies on analytical and intuitive thinking about experienced practice situations (Munro, 2011). A situation-based curriculum therefore does not first focus on knowledge and then on practice; rather, it shifts the focus onto the relational processes involved

in being professional (Beddoe, 2013) from the outset: it wraps academic learning around experiences (Breen, 2018).

This section, therefore, discusses the epistemic design and pedagogical approach of the Key Situation Model and integrates the arguments developed in the literature review to underline the rationale for the approach. I start with a general view of situation-based learning approaches, before turning to a discussion of individual steps and elements of the Key Situation Model. This analysis also highlights some adaptations of the model.

The situated nature of knowledge and practice has led several authors to the conclusion that an orientation on practice situations should be adopted in the design of social work curricula (Tov et al., 2016a; Kunz, 2015), nursing (Pfefferle et al., 2010), professional formation (Ghisla et al., 2014; Kaiser, 2005a), language and political education (Freire, 2005) and early children's education (Krüger and Zimmer, 2001; Robinsohn, 1973). In these approaches, (practice) situations act as focal points under which the different knowledge types are integrated and situated and a curriculum is therefore structured around situations. Rather than starting with either the knowledge that social workers need to acquire and develop, or the skills or competences needed, such a curriculum is structured around the practices they will be or are encountering. The Key Situation Model is one example of a situation-based learning approach.

The emphasis of such a curriculum is arguably from the outset on both 'thinking' or 'reasoning' like a social worker *and* on 'acting' like a social worker. It is thus informed by 'reflective rational', 'knowledge building', 'reflective embodied' and 'relational' perspectives (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017, p. 597). This recognises the fundamentally social and relational nature of work, knowledge and learning (Hopwood, 2014) and thus places relationships at the heart of social work practice (Hopwood and Nerland, 2019; Smeeton, 2015; Ruch, 2005, 2007a, 2007b, 2009).

A situation-based learning approach therefore aims to develop and maintain mindful professionalism (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017) based on a practice theory lens.

In social work, situations have long been the starting point for reflections and the subject of case discussions and supervision. However, usually reflections and discussions are concerned with 'cases', rather than situations. These cover a broad understanding of 'case' that range from critical incidents, discrete practice situations to longer-lasting cases (Tov et al., 2016a). The discussed sociological literature concerned with situations points to the different dimensions in relation to 'grain size' of the term (see Chapter 2). Tov and colleagues (2016a) argue that key situations are cases that are experienced as a discrete, uninterrupted flow of actions, which is seen by social workers as a unit of meaning. The focus is thereby on a single situation that may be part of a case and is embedded in a social context. In such a situation-based approach, the interactions of the involved actors and the organisational context, become the focus of attention. It is a snapshot of the professional's engagement with a specific task or challenge. These tasks may involve direct interaction with service users, or they may be about the indirect work that goes on, such as collaboration and cooperation or administration. Such a situation-based perspective is akin to what is termed an actor-oriented perspective. This steers the attention to "what people are doing and understand their actions from their point of view" (Drinkwater, 1992, p. 371). Case and situation-based perspectives therefore focus on different aspects. A case perspective is attentive to the person or family who may need support or protection and is primarily about professional decision-making about strengths, needs and safety. A focus on actions in situations, in contrast, is about the professional, their being and becoming. This directs consciousness not so much to others and things in the world but more to social workers' own way of being and their intertwinement with the world that enables them to understand themselves and their practice as espoused by the practice turn (Sandberg and

Dall'Alba, 2009). In that sense, the situation-based approach takes a more reflexive stance that seeks to focus on the knowledge, skills and values of a practitioner in a specific practice situation. This includes the perspective of those the professional interacts with but is more focussed on the actions of the professional in a given situation. The Key Situation Model's reflective learning approach thus offers an approach to reflective practice that is both thoughtful (analytical and well-informed) and self-aware or reflexive (Thompson and Thompson, 2018).

The centrality of learning from practices that underpins the Key Situation Model is related to the ancient tradition of casuistry, essentially entailing both case-based learning and reasoning approaches. Kunz and Hollenstein (2019) argue that casuistry is a pedagogical strategy in social work education with diverse associated practices. In her thesis, Kunz (2015) frames the Key Situation Model as an approach related to casuistry. Cases also form "a distinct way of reasoning" that is underpinned by a "particular way of organising knowledge and particular cognitive processes" by which experts resolve complex practice issues (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017, p. 36). Besides the situation-based models, several pedagogical approaches, for example, problem-based learning and case-based clinical reasoning education (ten Cate et al., 2018; Tawfik and Kolodner, 2016; Kolodner, 1992) offer examples of learning based on notions of casuistry.

However, whereas in case-based reasoning pedagogical approaches, a 'case' has to be transformed into an action situation with for example a focus on "a clinical encounter" (van Loon et al., 2018, p. 123), the Key Situation Model starts with this from the outset. Starting with real-life situations also does not require the writing of vignettes as in case-based reasoning or problem-based learning, which can pose challenges for educators (Kolodner, Cox and Gonzalez-Calero, 2005).

The eight elements of a situation focus on what happened, the doings and sayings in a practice situation, including the thinking and feelings that occur (emotions and thinking - reflection-in-action). The reflection on these generates an initial understanding and explanation of why the professional may have acted in a particular way in the situation. The title, overarching characteristics and quality criteria offer labels that can act as anchors in future similar situations. The future-oriented aspect is elaborated on in the last step of the Key Situation Model's reflection approach that homes in on alternative courses of action. Rather than focussing on cases, with their histories that potentially include many situations and encounters, the model draws attention conceptually to the actions, thinking and emotions of the professional in one practice situation (Tov et al., 2016a). In addition, the Key Situation Model is structured around key situations that are seen as relevant and typical by professionals themselves, rather than around cases or problems that are selected and written by educators. This makes learning highly relevant to future social workers and those in practice.

It is likely to increase relevance for learners as working with authentic practice challenges has been shown to be an important aspect in reflective learning (Mann, Gordon and MacLeod, 2009) and is generally regarded as important in higher education (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017). The focus of the Key Situation Model on typical practice situations also means that the complexity of cases is broken down into action situations and there is no need for a transformation of a case into a situation.

The tasks in the reflective learning process guide learners to consider general as well as specific aspects of situations. For example, a key situation such as 'Visiting a service user, carer or family in their home' can be deconstructed at a more general level in relation to knowledge, skills, ethical principles and different perspectives that are relevant across all such situations. At the

same time, specific instances and experiences of situations can offer the basis for learning about home visits with for example, specific service user groups, or in different environments (e.g. rural dispersed, inner-city, deprived, etc.). The development of reflexive capability is thus focussed on both general and specific aspects of professional practice.

Markauskaite and Goodyear (2017) argue that case-based approaches are systematic approaches to professional learning because they support learners to approach an experienced situation through a systematic, step-by-step approach that focuses on the integration of various knowledge types with practice cases or situations. I want to argue that the Key Situation Model's approach to learning is in my view also a systemic approach, as it is about supporting practitioners to develop a holistic understanding and thinking skills related to experienced situations encountered in practice. The tasks linked to the step 'Identification of resources and Linking resources to situation' in the reflective learning process in particular, are about learners' "ability to engage in inquiry" and the social arrangement of working in small groups thereby enhances "collaborative inquiry" (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017, p. 555). Indeed, the four professional learning approaches described by Markauskaite and Goodyear offer a "powerful repertoire for purposeful, action oriented, thinking and practice" when used in combination (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017, p. 554). In my view, the Key Situation Model, with its focus on real-world practice situations and the systemic and systematic approaches to professional learning, therefore helps learners to develop their ability to fuse different forms of knowledge with a common sense and intuitive grasp of a situation and to consider rules and procedures with a creative approach to their inquiry. Furthermore, it explicitly includes attention to both analytical and intuitive thinking. In short, the Key Situation Model supports the ongoing development of 'mindful professionals' and of epistemic fluency (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017).

As discussed, central to knowledgeable and ethical practice is the reflective capability of social workers to integrate various forms of knowledge. Thus situation-based learning supports this through the setting of a variety of knowledge-related tasks in the epistemic design. It places the epistemic practices (Knorr Cetina, 2005) involved in integrating the lifeworld and expertise of service users and practitioners and the co-production of understanding and ways forward, at its heart. The Key Situation Model achieves this in several ways, which are discussed in the next few sections.

### *Intuition, emotion and analysis*

The discussed literature highlights that reflective learning needs to be concerned with reflection on reflection-in-action and the intuitive rapid forms of thinking (Eraut, 2012) and with recognising the emotional aspects of practice, as this is important for safe and effective decision-making in social work (O'Connor, 2019; Turney and Ruch, 2018). Thus, noticing and reflecting on the interplay between intuition, emotion and analysis (Whittaker, 2018; Nyathi, 2018; Cook, 2016) helps learners to appraise and self-regulate emotions and increase their self-awareness (Nyathi, 2018). Rather than relying on informal safe spaces (O'Connor, 2019), the Key Situation Model's reflective learning approach in groups creates a formal space for reflection on emotions that inform the reflection on and learning from experienced situations. Rapid and intuitive cognitive processes that steer the actions of a social worker are the focus of Step 3 of the reflective learning process. The tasks in this step seek to reconnect learners with the embodied emotions that influenced them in the situation and to verbalise them for reflection and analysis. It seeks to support this through the role play method. Learners are also asked to think about the principles and assumptions that may have affected their thinking and consider whether and how far these might be based on implicit theories or biases. With this focus on the embodied and

relational aspects of practice in situations and the reflective and reflexive deliberation of a situation, as proposed in the Key Situation Model, it is closely aligned to an understanding of reflective practice as holistic and relationship-based, one that embraces technical, rational, practical, critical and process reflection (Ruch, 2005).

### *Reflection on diverse knowledge forms*

The Key Situation Model's approach to reflective learning explicitly includes reflection not just on experience but also on diverse knowledge resources, including ethical principles to derive learning from an experienced situation. This is important for three reasons. First, social work practice should be based on values rather than on research evidence alone (Forrester et al., 2019; Staub-Bernasconi, 2012). Second, research and theory are valuable resources in decision-making but need to be examined critically in relation to their relevance to the situations and contexts social workers are dealing with (Munro et al., 2017). Third, the diverse knowledge resources included in the reflection of practice situations broaden the perspectives: instead of just relying on habit and routinised action (Thompson and Thompson, 2018), they support critical reflection and learning. So, while a situation or case are the central focus of learning in situation-based and case-based models, the model's epistemic design explicitly extends learning to include different types of knowledge and ethical principles.

In analysing the key situation knowledge taxonomy, I compared it with the discussed literature on knowledge concepts as illustrated in the following figure:

Key Situation Taxonomy with key authors cited	Function and purpose (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017; Kaiser, 2005; Krathwohl, 2002; Alavi and Leidner, 2001; Ryle, 1949)	Level of consciousness (Kaiser, 2005; Alavi and Leidner, 2001; Giddens, 1984; Polanyi, 1966)	Location (Kaiser, 2005; Nutley et al., 2004; Blackler, 1995; Haraway, 1988)	Source (Carson, 2004; Pawson et al., 2003; Alavi and Leidner, 2001)
Scholarly knowledge of social phenomena	Knowing that, Factual, Conceptual, Metacognitive, Declarative, Causal, Conditional	Discursive knowledge, Explicit	Social, Encoded, Represented	Empirical, Rational, Conventional, Conceptual, Research, User and carer
Scholarly knowledge of interventions	Factual, Declarative, Procedural, Conditional	Discursive knowledge, Explicit	Social, Encoded, Represented	Empirical, Rational, Conceptual, Research, User and carer
Ethical knowledge	Factual, Declarative, Procedural, Conditional	Discursive knowledge, Explicit	Social, Encoded, Represented	Conventional, Conceptual
Experiential knowledge	all categories	Tacit, unconscious motives/cognition, Practical consciousness, Discursive knowledge, Explicit	Situated knowledge(s), Individual, Embodied, Embrained	all categories, particularly Affective, Narrative, Practitioner, User and carer
Organisational and contextual knowledge	Procedural, Conditional, Relational, Pragmatic	Tacit, Practical consciousness, Discursive knowledge, Explicit	Situated knowledge(s), Social, Embedded, Encultured, Encoded, Represented	Conventional, Organisational, Policy community, User and carer
Skills	Metacognitive, Procedural, Senso-motoric	Tacit, unconscious motives/cognition, Practical consciousness, Discursive knowledge, Explicit	Situated knowledge(s), Individual, Embodied, Embrained, Encoded, Represented	Cognitive Process Skills, Psychomotor

**Figure 53** Comparison of the Key Situation knowledge taxonomy with the four dimensions of knowledge.

I noticed that the model's knowledge taxonomy organises different types of knowledge around their function and purpose. This is evident in the second column, where the different categorisations by function and purpose are closely aligned to Tov et al.'s (2016a) categories. The scholarly forms of knowledge (of social phenomena and interventions) and ethical knowledge, are explicit and discursive and are therefore encoded and represented. They stem from sources associated with research and theorising and through this, the generalised perspectives of service users, professionals and other participants in research are included. But as the discussion in Chapter One has shown, no clear distinction between explicit and tacit knowledge can be drawn and therefore, experiential knowledge refers to all purposes from several sources. It links with affective, narrative, practitioner and service user knowledge and is essentially a personal form of knowledge situated in individuals. Organisational and contextual knowledge is concerned with processes and situated conditions of practice. It is both tacit, e.g. socially situated knowledge forms and explicit, e.g. represented and codified legislative or procedural aspects (see Eraut, 2012). The knowledge domain of skills, lastly, focuses on the

physical and cognitive abilities required in practice and can be both tacit and explicit. It is situated both individually and socially. The Key Situation Model's knowledge categories also include ethical knowledge, which has been found to be lacking in social workers' analysis (see Chapters 1 and 2) and is largely a neglected knowledge category. As this type of generalised knowledge requires explicit reflection (Eraut, 1994) in relation to concrete practice (Staub-Bernasconi, 2012), its inclusion as a knowledge category is significant. As it has been found that social workers preferred practice-based knowledge and rarely consulted knowledge from other sources outside the practice setting (Avby et al., 2017), these knowledge categories visualise the other domains and thus, I argue, support thinking about diverse knowledge resources.

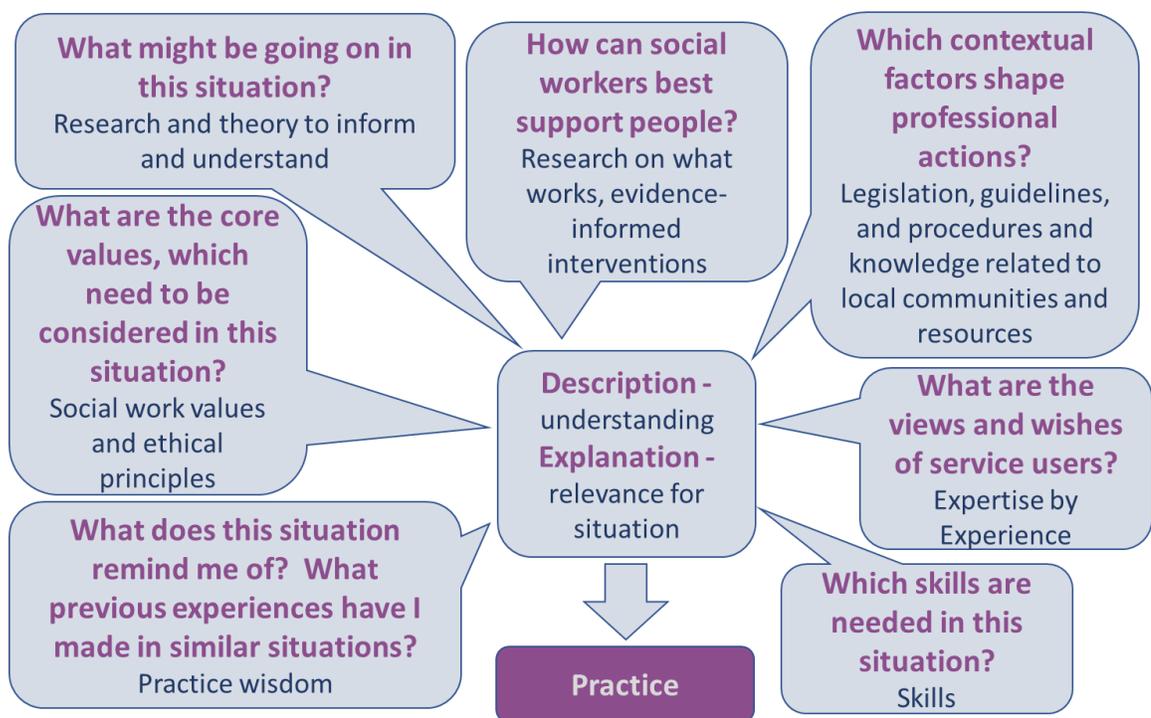
In sum, the analysis of the Key Situation Model's knowledge categories shows that they include all types of knowledge discussed in the literature. However, service user knowledge and expertise by experience is rather marginalised and only included through the voices of others (those of researchers). I therefore suggest adding 'expertise by experience' as a distinct category of knowledge, thus extending the categories by Tov and colleagues (2016a) (as shown in Figure 54).

### *Identifying and understanding knowledge*

The way social workers engage in thinking about these knowledge forms needs to be underpinned by an understanding of their conceptual differences. This can be supported by specific tasks. In relation to professional work, Markauskaite and Goodyear (2017) suggest a map of epistemic activities based on distinct forms of knowledge (see Chapter 1 – Function and purpose of knowledge) that support the development of different aspects of knowledgeability., Markauskaite and Goodyear's (2017, p. 90) map of epistemic activities provides useful questions that can guide discussions and analyses and they argue that working through these questions

can support the four approaches to professional learning discussed in Chapter Three (i.e. knowledge construction; integrating knowledge; playing epistemic games and designing inquiry). In other words, the map supports learning for understanding, problem-solving, making and action (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017). However, while covering the whole knowledge landscape, I have argued that the map is too complex and detailed and should be broken down further in order to support social workers' integration of knowledge and practice.

I suggest the following revised seven knowledge categories with the added category of expertise by experience (service user knowledge). Each category has aligned to it a main guiding question to facilitate learning and epistemic activities:



**Figure 54** Revised Key Situation Knowledge Taxonomy

This knowledge categorisation reduces the complexity of the previously discussed concepts but does so without losing sight of the different forms of knowledge and their qualities. The guiding questions related to different forms of knowledge may also model how to formulate questions,

which is found to be challenging for social workers (Avby et al., 2017). On the other hand, this categorisation is not proposed as resolving the tensions discussed, for example, between explicit and tacit knowledge; rather, it offers an integrative perspective that understands that all these knowledge categories can have both tacit and explicit content (Tov et al., 2016a; Jarvis, 2009). The activities related to step 5 of the reflection process are concerned with identifying (searching for, researching, naming, becoming aware of) and understanding relevant knowledge for each of these categories. I hypothesise that if practice is analysed with reference to all seven categories, this enables a holistic understanding of practice situations and can form an important foundation for knowledgeable and ethical practice. However, caution needs to be exercised here, as there is some evidence that social workers in one study “most likely used research to underpin and legitimize a belief made on other grounds rather than to question and challenge these formed judgements” (Avby et al., 2017, p. 59). It is therefore important that learners are mindful of confirmation bias. The guiding questions and group approach mitigate to some degree against this and help learners navigate through their analysis.

Importantly, the epistemic and social design of the Key Situation Model’s learning approach also helps practitioners and students to develop an understanding of learning that goes beyond the common metaphors of knowledge ‘use’, ‘acquisition’ and ‘transfer’ and enables them to experience what ‘participation’, ‘construction’ and ‘becoming’ (Boud and Hager, 2012, p. 18) looks and feels like.

### *Learning for action – making knowledge actionable*

Such understanding of knowledge needs to be crucially linked with practice in order to influence knowledgeable and ethical practice. It is important to recognise that knowledge and professionals’ knowing evolves and is enacted in ways that do not suggest a single reality that is

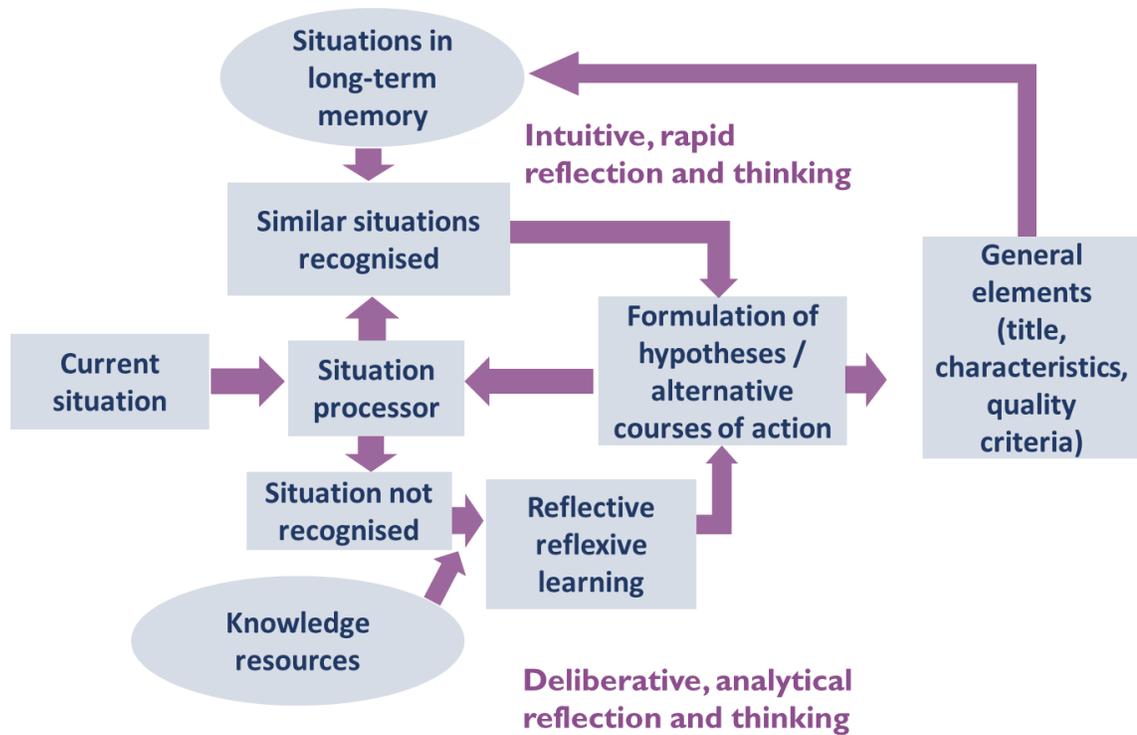
out there waiting to be discovered. Social workers learn about families, their circumstances and their own professional practice not primarily in order to “know families better, but to inform actions that, in turn, help bring about change for families” (Hopwood, 2014, p. 353). Therefore, it is important that reflective learning relates to practice and action (Freire, 2005) and this is illustrated in the above Figure 54 with the arrow that points to practice.

The second set of tasks in step 5 of the reflective learning process is therefore about linking the understanding of various types of knowledge with a practice situation. This is achieved through thinking about the relevance of these in relation to the specific practice situation and by making this explicit (Tov et al., 2016a). It is supported by discussions and negotiation of meaning (Wenger, 1998) among learners and by facilitators’ feedback. It is a form of deliberative reflection after the action that involves moving between inductive and deductive thinking, defined as abductive thinking, which is the essence of deliberation (Munro et al., 2017). The weaving together of general knowledge and specific experiences in the Key Situation Model’s reflective learning process (step 5) can therefore start with a focus on either specific situations or generalised knowledge, as suggested by Hopwood and Nerland (2019). This enables novices to move from general knowledge to specific experiences and experienced practitioners from experience to general knowledge (Tov et al., 2016a). While both include a focus on an experience, the emphasis is different; but moving between specific and general knowledge in both directions essentially enables the weaving together of knowledge and practice and the (co-)creation of actionable knowledge (Hopwood and Nerland, 2019; Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017). It thus reduces the inertness of general types of knowledge (Gruber and Renkl, 2000). Crucially, thinking about a situation in the context of a key situation extends this understanding to future similar situations, in a type of reflection-for-action perspective.

### *Situation-based reasoning and learning*

As the literature review has shown, many researchers reject the idea of decision-making as a rational process and rather see it as involving both intuitive and analytical thinking (see Chapter 2). Kahneman (2011) refers to the former as system I and the latter as system II thinking. This understanding based on natural and dual processing decision-making (Kahneman and Klein, 2009) has been observed in social work (e.g. Whittaker, 2018; Munro et al., 2017; Collins and Daly, 2011). It essentially underpins both case- and situation-based learning approaches (ten Cate et al., 2018; Tawfik and Kolodner, 2016; Tov et al., 2016a; Kaiser, 2005b, 2005a) and the learning processes that build on this, seek to draw on both ways of thinking in combination with experience.

The literature on case-based reasoning processes and education offers a valuable view that is relevant to the Key Situation Model's reflective learning approach. Adapting the case-based reasoning process with a focus on situations rather than cases, the reflective learning process can be depicted as illustrated in Figure 55:



**Figure 55** Situation-based reasoning (based on case-based reasoning in ten Cate, 2018, p. 5)

As ten Cate (2018) explains, case-based reasoning involves both system I (fast, rapid, intuitive) and system II thinking (slow, analytical and deliberative) (Kahneman, 2011). Natural decision-making and dual process models (see Chapter 2) have shown that practitioners draw on knowledge and experience from previously encountered similar situations. The central processing of a situation therefore relies on the recognition of patterns (Simon, 1992) and this is in the best case, informed by skilled intuition (Kahneman and Klein, 2009). System I thinking occurs in the action itself and is about the rapid and intuitive cognitive processes (Eraut, 2012), which involves practitioners reflexively monitoring their own actions to coordinate their bodily doings and sayings in response to encountered situations (Giddens, 1984). System II thinking, or in other words, analytical reasoning, ways of knowing and deliberate reflection (Eraut, 2012), only occurs at surprising junctures in action (Rafieian and Davis, 2016; Jarvis, 2009) when a situation is not recognised. When engaged in a practice situation, as soon as a good enough

narrative, hypothesis or alternative course of action is formed, a practitioner can proceed with caution (Munro et al., 2017). Caution is also indicated in the case of intuitive ways of knowing, as practitioners are not necessarily aware if their reasoning is based on skilled intuition or not (Kahneman and Klein, 2009).

### *Creating situational memories*

All forms of knowledge, including conceptual knowledge (Barsalou, 2009), have been shown to be memorised in connection with situations, experiences and actions (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017). They are stored in a network of remembered situations that are activated in similar situations (Kaiser, 2005b). Such memories support intuitive knowledge use in future situations (Nutley et al., 2004).

Analysis of situations thus supports the creation of situational memories (Kaiser, 2005b) which are stored as whole units that act as “integrated and flexible mental representations that underpin sound understanding and practical reasoning” (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017, p. 563). Kaiser’s (2005b) notion of ‘situating’ suggests that reflection alone cannot lead to situational knowledge, but this transformation can be supported through reflective work before and after the action. In this way, declarative knowledge and understanding in connection with practice situations can lead to enhanced situational knowledge that can associatively influence action. I therefore argue firstly, that by reflecting on a specific experienced situation and linking this with knowledge, learning is memorised in connection with a specific situation (and an aligned key situation title). Secondly, I hypothesise that this knowledge can be recalled in similar situations encountered or be reviewed in preparation for such situations.

While the case-based educational reasoning model focusses mainly on a case in its interpretative and problem-solving approach, the Key Situation Model's process seeks to facilitate the memorisation of situational patterns through reflective learning that integrates both specific and importantly, general elements (key situation title, overarching characteristics, quality criteria). Learners are asked to elaborate and document these general aspects to support learning about essential patterns that are relevant to all situations under the same key situation title. The title thereby offers a label that is closely related to practice; the overarching characteristics define situations of a similar nature and the quality criteria seek to encapsulate knowledge and ethical principles that are future-oriented (Tov et al., 2016a). Therefore, thinking about generalisations in relation to key situations forms an essential aspect of this situation-based learning approach. Such mental representations created in the learning process emerge from the analysis of experienced situations and integrate understanding of knowledge and practice, of reason and intuition and of general and specific aspects. This has the potential to shape rapid and intuitive actions in future similar situations and thus inform knowledgeable and ethical practice.

The interesting question in my mind is how these two types of reflection are linked. In a way, the problem is

“how to recognize the high learning potential of such emotionally rich situations and to gradually focus attention on extracting key issues and addressing them in a manner that leaves participants better prepared for any similar incidents in the future” (Eraut, 2004, p. 49).

In other words, does deliberative reflective learning after the action have an impact on intuitive reflection in future action? This question should be addressed in future research.

### *Developing reflective and reflexive thinking skills*

I have argued that in order to support knowledgeable and ethical practice, the development of social workers' reflexive capability and their ability to engage in epistemic practices, is essential. Situation based reasoning and learning approaches seek to develop reasoning, reflective and reflexive thinking processes and skills (see Chapter 6 - Situation-based reasoning and learning). These skills are learned through the systematic steps in the reflective learning process (ten Cate et al., 2018; Tov et al., 2016a).

The steps and tasks of the Key Situation Model offer a structured process for deliberation. Deliberation is an epistemic practice that professionals engage in (Knorr Cetina, 2005) to form professional judgements and make decisions. Yet, it seems to get "little explicit attention in discussions of reasoning skills in professional practice" (Munro et al., 2017, p. 10; Munro, 2019; Dewe and Otto, 2012; Eraut, 2012). Faced with both novel situations and a constantly changing professional knowledge base (Gherardi, 2012), deliberation is a core element of reflexive capability (Dewe and Otto, 2012) that enables adaptations. The Key Situation Model aims to enhance thinking and reasoning skills related to deliberation through its structured learning process and epistemic design. This enables learners to internalise a way of thinking and the steps that go along with it. In an unpublished MA dissertation that evaluated the implementation of the Key Situation Model in three local authorities' ASYE programme in adult social work, participants indicated that their thinking in practice was guided by the reflection process: "Every time I do a piece of work, where I have a nigging ... I go back and try and break things down by the basic steps ... I will always refer back to it" (Royes, 2016). Tov and colleagues (2016) have argued that while practice itself cannot be standardised, the reflective learning process can. Internalising the process as a way of thinking about a situation arguably helps develop the

required reflexive capability, which is essential for knowledgeable and ethical practice to emerge.

### *Thinking together – social deliberation*

From a practice-based perspective, deliberation is concerned with how people engage together in activities concerned with knowledge and knowing. It is therefore an embodied social process (Hopwood, 2014), which is regarded as more effective than individualistic approaches to learning (Eraut, 2012; Munro, 2011). The socially enacted and embodied sayings and doings in everyday practices must therefore be established discursively (Nicolini, 2009) and deliberation is thus fundamentally discursive, unsystematic, personal and very contextual (Munro et al., 2017). Social deliberation is like ‘thinking together’ - a central learning process in CoPs – that is about seeing each other’s performances in practice that enables learning together and from each other. It enables tacit knowledge to be shared (Pyrko et al., 2016) and transforms the practical into a discursive consciousness (Giddens, 1984). Expertise involved in deliberation can only be developed through experience, learning and importantly, constructive, critical dialogue with colleagues (Munro et al., 2017, p. 142). Moreover, a ‘socially reflective practice’ at the same time enhances the cooperative capabilities that are essential in addressing complex issues (Beckett, 2009, p. 93). Therefore, the social design of the Key Situation Model arranges deliberation in groups, whereby three learners together reflect on their own specific (key) situation. The social deliberative skills developed in this process can also influence other reflective activities in the workplace, for example in reflection groups or case discussions.

### *Developing an understanding of good practice*

A key purpose of the Key Situation Model's reflective learning approach is linked to the elaboration of quality criteria that encapsulate the evidence base, the ethical principles and the skills required for knowledgeable and ethical practice in key situations. These generalised criteria form a central element of reasoning and are used to evaluate practice in the learning process. They also have the potential to support reflection in preparing for practice (Tov et al., 2016a).

Pawson et al. (2003, p. 18) argue that quality standards can be developed from documented practitioner knowledge through a critical appraisal process that is underpinned by 'if - then' statements about future practice actions (if practice in a situation is to be in line with X (quality standard), then Y should be done). The Key Situation Model to some degree defines the if by the type of situation and the then is entailed in the focus on quality criteria. So, if for example, a social worker deals with a situation 'Discussing concerns with a service user or carer / Concerns about carer' then the criteria related to this key situation to be considered are "1. The social worker is congruent and empathic. 2. There is a rapport and trust in the relationship between the social worker and the service user/carer. 3. Conflicting expectations and values and legal obligations are made transparent. 4. The service user's and the carer's voice are actively sought and heard." (see example of reflected situation in Appendix 2).

Discussions about critical best practice (Gordon, 2018) and Dahler-Larsen's (2019) view of quality highlight the merit of involving those concerned with the actual practices in the deliberation of what good practice looks like in specific instances of practice. In other words, considering quality in relation to key situations first opens up a space in which quality can be discussed (and this should involve critical discussion) and enables collective sense-making that respects the relative and contextualised nature of quality criteria.

This dialogical development of an understanding of situated quality involves 'ethical talk' (Evans and Hardy, 2017) in which a "range of ethical ideas, principles and feelings that front-line practitioners draw on" are combined and deployed in particular situations. This integration includes practitioners holding the tension between "particular rights, the consequences of action and retaining their own sense of their professional character". Such talk may lead to learning from situations by extending and developing practitioners' ethical perspectives (Evans and Hardy, 2017, p. 954).

Similarly, Tai and colleagues (2018, p. 470) argue in relation to higher education that it is important for students to develop an understanding of quality and how to make evaluative judgements, so that they can integrate it in future. This enables graduates to be able to "identify what is needed for good work in any situation" (Tai et al., 2018, p. 470). Like case-based reasoning's notion of illness scripts, Tai et al. (2018, p. 472) suggest that by repeated evaluative judgements of different situations, students build contextual and domain specific 'quality scripts', which is an intuitive sense of what quality might mean in a given situation (Dahler-Larsen, 2019). Thus, standards, in their view, "reside in the practices of academic and professional communities, underpinned by tacit and explicit knowledge and are, therefore, subject to varied interpretation/enactments" (Tai et al., 2018, p. 473). They suggest that engaging in evaluative judgements that focus on quality criteria in relation to practice, enables students to gain an overarching sense of quality that is more systematic and calibrated, leading to a deeper understanding of quality. Therefore, "assisting students to develop multiple criteria and qualitatively review their own work against them" helps them to refine their judgements about the quality of their work (Tai et al., 2018, p. 474). Tai et al. (2018, p. 477) conclude that it is important to enable "active and iterative engagement with criteria" in dialogic approaches

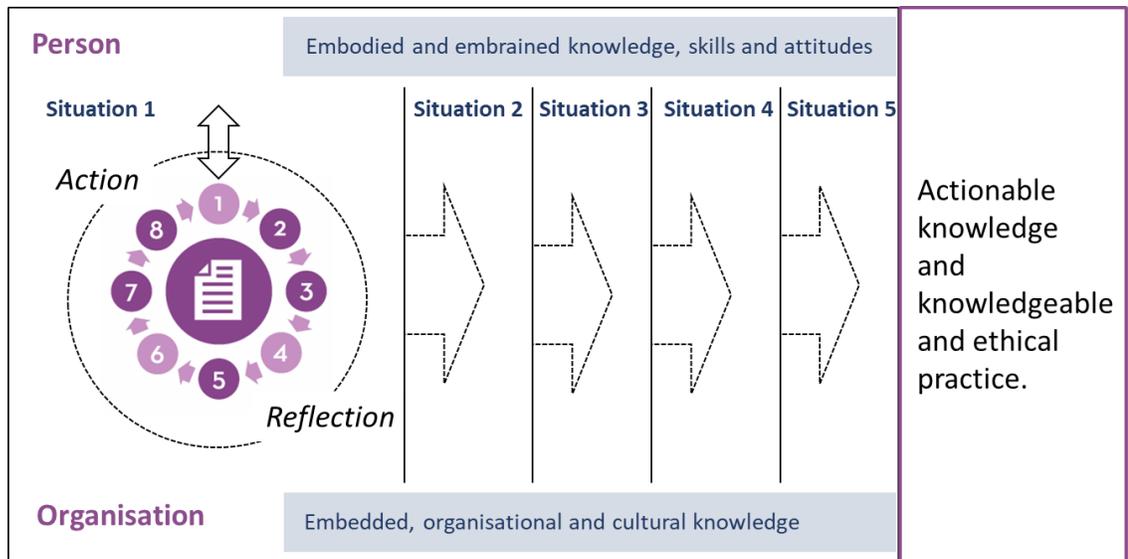
that support an understanding of quality and the “articulation and justification of judgements with a focus on both immediate and future tasks”.

The work by Evans and Hardy (2017) and Tai and colleagues (2018) highlights the importance of an understanding of quality as negotiated and contextual. This underpins the notion of quality criteria and steps six and seven of the Key Situation reflective learning process (Tov et al., 2016a). The development of quality criteria as part of this process thus helps learners to distil the essence of what good practice looks like in a key situation and results in quality scripts that are like learning maxims or take away points that can be more easily remembered. These can then be drawn upon when encountering a similar situation in the future and in preparing for practice. Quality criteria in the Key Situation Model provide a focus for the reflection of the experienced situation and inform the evaluation of practice; through this process they support the development of knowledgeable and ethical practice and practitioners.

### *Supporting professional development at all career levels*

The Key Situation Model can inform professional learning across all levels of career development and expertise (Tov et al., 2016a). This is highly relevant as learning connected to practice is not just a central aspect for novices but also for mid-career and experienced practitioners (Eraut, 2013). For example, Dreyfus and Dreyfus’s (1988) understanding of skill development points to the importance of continued engagement with practice and reflection throughout a career. But professional development of expertise was found to be not linear (Dall’Alba and Sandberg, 2006). For novices without substantial experience of practice situations, the challenge is that they cannot recognise patterns, (Whittaker, 2018; Simon, 1992). Therefore, asking novices to identify, generate and remember patterns (general elements of situations - see discussion on memorisation of mental representations) helps them develop their repertoire and to link general

knowledge to situations. Following qualification, there is a beginner's dip in the early stages of professional development, which seems to be the norm rather than the exception (Devaney et al., 2017). Systematic professional development activities currently end with the completion of the ASYE. However, expertise develops over years and a focus on mid-career learning is particularly important (Eraut, 2013). O'Connor and Leonard (2014, p. 1816) found that the passing of time allowed practitioners to gain experience and develop their knowledge, values, skills, emotional capacity and confidence, contributing to social workers finding their voice and becoming more adept at assessing the relevance of different perspectives. This was supported by reflection and reflexivity. With experience, social workers increasingly can recognise patterns (Whittaker, 2018) and approach professional challenges in a more holistic way that evidences integration of more knowledge forms (Ghanem et al., 2019). But the challenge for experienced practitioners is that they "cannot express well how they think" (ten Cate, 2018, p. 8) despite their knowledge and experience (see discussion of tacit knowledge – e.g. Polanyi, 1966). CPD supports experienced practitioners to think and talk about their work and knowledge - including concepts and theories - and provides them with a vocabulary (Eraut, 2013). This is highly relevant in the context of practice education and supervision where experienced workers need to be able to support novices. Many scholars therefore argue that it is crucial to support both novices and more experienced practitioners to actively learn how to integrate different knowledge sources with practice (Munro, 2011; Eraut, 1994) and how to engage in the epistemic practices associated with this (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017). The Key Situation Model offers a possibility for this. A whole system implementation of the model as an approach to CPD has the potential to support the ongoing development of knowledgeable and ethical practice. Such ongoing reflections offer a practice-based perspective for CPD, as the following illustration shows:



**Figure 56** Continuous Professional Development through reflection and action in key situations (adapted from Tov et al., 2016a, p. 36)

I argue that in engaging in such ongoing reflective learning within an organisation, actionable knowledge is co-produced and, mediated between individual and social perspectives, negotiated understandings of quality can develop. Over time, a depth of knowledge is developed and documented that has the potential to inform the quality discourse and practices within an organisation. Such an understanding of professional quality is thus intertwined with practice situations, knowledge and ethical principles and is not focussed purely on general statements of knowledge (research), skills statements or on quantifiable audit measures (such as for example time frames). Hence, it is a holistic perspective on social work practice quality, developed by professionals, that has the potential to support knowledgeable and ethical practice.

#### **Documenting situation-based learning**

The reflective learning process of the Key Situation Model guides participants in small groups to co-produce knowledge and to document this on the platform. Documenting in itself is thereby an act of learning (Avby, 2015) that enables the restructuring of mental representations and

impacts on practices (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017) by co-creating actionable knowledge. Reflective writing plays an important role in professional education. Once in practice however, reflective practice in groups or supervision mostly occurs verbally. Reflections and learning are not documented and only shared in the here and now. Yet documenting reflections has distinct advantages that are discussed in this section.

Documenting a reflected situation allows the codification of practice knowledge. Personal and practitioner knowledge is often tacit and passed on through word of mouth and observation: Pawson et al. (2003) suggest that to distil this requires first, reflection on practice and second, articulation of the unspoken in discussion that enables practitioner knowledge to be documented. Eraut (2012) points out that personal knowledge, including knowledge related to people and situations, can be codified or tacit. As discussed, an important distinction therefore needs to be made between what Giddens (1984, p. 7) calls “unconscious motives/cognition” that cannot be made explicit and “practical consciousness” that can be transformed into “discursive consciousness” through dialogue and discursive deliberation. The negotiation of meaning and codification in the writing up is therefore a process of participation and reification (Tov et al., 2016a; Wenger, 1998). These produced artefacts have some important characteristics.

Actionable knowledge is co-created and documented. As a product that arises out of social and epistemic practices, reflected situations represent both theoretical, practical knowledge and experience (Carvalho and Goodyear, 2018; Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017; Wenger et al., 2011; Turnbull, 2000), rather than depicting solely a rationalist perspective of knowledge (Ferguson et al., 2010). This means that documented situations that arise in the learning process are reflective of an epistemology of practice (Schön, 1983) and for that reason, are not like scholarly knowledge products that depict “abstracted universal ‘lawlike’ principles”

(Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017, p. 119). Rather, they are incomplete and emergent (Nicolini et al., 2012 in Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017). In this sense then, situations do not offer practice guidance or 'what works' evidence but offer an analysis of different forms of knowledge that are actionable because of the integration with concrete situations.

The writing up of a situation document thus impacts on learning. As authoring a case "requires reflecting on a situation, sorting out its complexities, making connections between its parts, and organizing what one has to say into coherent and memorable chunks" (Tawfik and Kolodner, 2016, p. 9), learning arises from the writing up of a situation. This can be supported by a 'case-authoring tool', "a resource that helps learners author cases based on their own experiences" (Tawfik and Kolodner, 2016, p. 9). Tawfik and Kolodner (2016) argue that a good case-authoring tool encourages learners to reflect on the issue they faced, the way they addressed the situation, the solution that was developed and the outcome of this. For unsuccessful solutions, practitioners need to generate lessons "from the situation and the kinds of future situations in which those lessons might be useful" (Tawfik and Kolodner, 2016, p. 9). The template on the Key Situation platform is such a tool. It is structured along the eight reflective learning steps and guides writers through each step. Each situation is thereby documented along the same elements (headings) under the main heading of the key situation title. This standardised structure makes recognition of the elements across different situations easier (Tschopp et al., 2016).

The writing up of the eight elements in the Key Situation Model is a task that requires learners to be as precise as they can about their understanding, thus making this explicit. In this endeavour, practices are foregrounded and become visible so that the epistemic object can enter discourse (Nicolini, 2009). The publication on the platform in an internal or open space,

makes a situation document accessible to others. Besides the learning that emerges from writing up one's own learning, case authoring has the added benefit of generating a "case library that can be referenced by other learners to benefit from the recorded experience" (Tawfik and Kolodner, 2016, p. 10). This increases the importance of the task of writing up and acts as an incentive for learners (Illeris, 2010). Indeed, learners who recognise "how useful the required reflection will be to their learning" or who understand that "the cases they author will be useful to others" are more likely to engage in case-authoring (Tawfik and Kolodner, 2016, p. 10).

In my experience of facilitating key situation reflective learning workshops and modules, the documentation of learning in such a visible and shared way is experienced as challenging both by learners and to some degree, by lecturers who may not be used to sharing written feedback in such a public way. It takes reflection from an individualistic and verbal practice to a shared, social practice and it embodies and espouses a different kind of learning that is shared and ongoing.

### *Learning from other's situations*

This raises the question as to how situation documents can support knowledgeable and ethical practice. In other words, how far is it possible to learn from the experiences and learning achieved and documented by others? Tawfik and Kolodner (2016, p. 7) argue that sets of cases displayed and accessible in a library "can help the learner identify solutions, predict outcomes, or identify issues to address". In critical best practice, accounts of practice are understood as situated examples of good practice in a given context (Gordon, 2018). I have earlier argued that deliberation plays a crucial role in the weaving together of practice situations with different types of knowledge. The same can be said in relation to other artefacts, such as documented

situations. As codified practice and knowledge examples, they represent the negotiated meaning in relation to a specific situation in a particular context. In order to make sense of this and to assess the relevance to a similar situation in another context with another service user, a social worker needs to again engage in deliberation and negotiation of meaning. Similarly, critical best practice authors argue that only through analysis of documented best practice accounts can learning opportunities in relation to good practice emerge (Gordon and Cooper, 2010, p. 247). Likewise, Tov and colleagues (2016a, p. 114) argue that since every situation is unique and professional practice cannot be standardised, the documented situations are not to be understood as recipes that should or could be transferred to other similar situations. In other words, a documented situation can only form the starting point for another learning process. This understanding highlights that knowledge emerges from discussion and epistemic practices (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017) that practitioners have around artefacts (Eraut, 2013; Wenger, 1998).

This close link between participation (discussion) and reification (production of artefact and the artefact itself) (Wenger, 1998) and the parallel dimensions of action and reflection (Freire, 2005) has led Tov et al. (2016a, p. 194) to paraphrase Freire's famous quote<sup>17</sup>:

"In dialogue, we encounter two dimensions - "reification" and "participation" - in such radical interaction that, if one is sacrificed only partially, the other immediately suffers. There is no real dialogue that is not practice at the same time. Therefore, to lead a real dialogue is to change the world and ourselves." (Based on Paulo Freire and Etienne Wenger, own translation)

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<sup>17</sup> "As we attempt to analyze dialogue as a human phenomenon, we discover something which is the essence of dialogue itself: the word. ... Within the word we find two dimensions, reflection and action, in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed—even in part—the other immediately suffers. There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world." (Freire, 2005, p. 87)

This association between theory and practice, highlights that they “are not such profoundly incompatible modes of knowing” (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017, p. 120). In this view of knowledge as emergent and relational (Ferguson et al., 2010), the production of artefacts anchors and coordinates participation and the participation that emerges around them creates meaning and allows reification (Wenger, 2010). It also reflects Blackler’s (1995) view of ‘encultured knowledge’ that emerges from processes that aim for shared understandings, which are bound up in language and social construction and are open to negotiation. It is an illustration of knowing as something that people do.

The documentation of general and specific knowledge and practice related to key situations opens up the spaces for knowledge sharing, which is the focus of the following sections.

### **Knowledge sharing**

Documenting work, learning and knowledge is a representational activity that has several potential benefits. It enables continuity in professional services (Fenwick et al., 2012) and offers the foundations for lasting professional practices (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017) by for example, securing tacit and cultural knowledge when employees leave (Schmitt, Borzillo and Probst, 2012). Documents are artefacts that from a socio-material perspective, form an important part in assemblages of humans and objects (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017; Fenwick et al., 2012; Knorr Cetina, 2005, Turnbull, 2000). In Chapter Two I discussed how objects such as assessment forms, interview schedules, or checklists (Wilkins, 2015; Kirkman and Melrose, 2014) shape practices in social work and earlier in this chapter, I argued that the key situation titles are epistemic objects (Nicolini, 2009; Knorr Cetina, 2005). These physical and conceptual artefacts are crucial for sharing knowledge.

### *Situation reflections as mediating artefacts*

While the co-produced meaning espoused in an artefact or reification is linked to a site and a time, artefacts can cross boundaries (Wenger, 2010). They are a means for moving knowledge back and forth between global and local and between local sites (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017; Ferguson et al., 2010). The notions of communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and landscapes of practice (Hutchinson et al., 2015; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015) highlight not only the importance of negotiation of meaning but also of boundaries, boundary processes and boundary objects (Wenger, 1998). The literature shows how a range of boundaries in professional work can be addressed (Hara and Fichman, 2014; Akkerman and Baker, 2011; Carlile, 2004). In fact, boundary crossing is an important aspect of learning, as it allows different perspectives to come into view (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015) and thus artefacts play a crucial role in supporting reflection and learning (Carvalho and Goodyear, 2018; Goodyear and Carvalho, 2016; Eraut, 2013; Akkerman and Bakker, 2011). I argue that documented situations, in conjunction with renewed learning in the new setting, can address cognitive boundaries while the platform can help cross physical boundaries by making these situations accessible in other locations (Hara and Fichman, 2014).

Learning is thus tied up with imagination and alignment (Wenger, 1998) and documented situations allow practitioners in one site or by one practitioner to see and reflect on other possibilities; by aligning their own activities they can influence local practices. In this way, artefacts can support joint activity, discovery and innovation (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017; Gherardi, 2012) and are important resources for the development of capability of both individuals and a CoP or an organisation (Wenger et al., 2011). As such, mediating artefacts are a key component in supporting knowledgeable and ethical practice.

### *Situation library*

Technologies enable workers to document their knowledge and learning. The Key Situation platform is what case-based reasoning researchers call a 'case library', but rather than displaying cases, it documents key situations and reflected specific situations. It is essentially a repository (database) of "the interpreted experiences of others" (Tawfik and Kolodner, 2016, p. 7). The idea of a case library is that it can be used as a resource that allows learners to "vicariously experience a more representative set of cases" (Tawfik and Kolodner, 2016, p. 7). Cases thereby provide specificity by displaying individual aspects, rather than generalised principles; but the "generalised and situation-specific knowledge" contained in a case "has a strong potential for effectively complementing each other" (Aamodt et al., 2010, p. 1). Similarly, the documentation of the learning process proposed by Tov et al. (2016) merges reflections on specific situations with generalised elements relevant for all key situations in a single artefact.

A case library can display different types of cases, such as expert cases or cases written by novices. Cases that depict experiences and reasoning of experts are "richer in connections and explanations but have fewer details" (Tawfik and Kolodner, 2016, p. 11). As ill-structured problems can be too complex for novices to grasp, learners who have access to a case library may be able to compensate for this by considering how experts who encountered similar situations dealt with them (Tawfik et al., 2018). On the other hand, cases authored by novices include "descriptions of mistakes made during diagnosis and treatment" (Tawfik and Kolodner, 2016, p. 11) and there is some evidence that novice learners who have access to cases that display mistakes, outperform those who only had access to expert cases; however, not much is known about how learners can learn from accessing either novice or expert cases (Tawfik and Kolodner, 2016).

The potential benefit of a situation library is that learners can access descriptions of practice and knowledge related to practice situations and this enables learners to revisit situations with the potential to incrementally build “understanding afforded by such revisiting” (Tawfik and Kolodner, 2016, p. 11). In case-based reasoning, it is recommended that cases a) include key concepts, skills and demonstrate how these can vary and how each should be understood; b) provide just enough detail to enable understanding of the story; and c) include not only the story but also “resources and reasoning” that helped in understanding and making decisions and solving the challenges faced (Tawfik and Kolodner, 2016, p. 8). The elements of the situation template along the eight steps of the reflection process detail all of these. However, there is no research that evidences the effectiveness of such revisiting or how viewing “one’s own experiences, those of peers, and those of experts differ” (Tawfik and Kolodner, 2016, p. 11) so there is a need for further research on this.

Another advantage of a case library is that practitioners can reflect on future practice. In other words, when preparing for a practice situation, they consult similar situations in the library and think about how they meaningfully can plan their own intervention (Tov et al., 2016a). Thereby they reflect on how a case might help them to solve a current ill-structured practice situation (Tawfik and Kolodner, 2016). However, the richness of learning from authoring a case, or completing a reflection of a situation, cannot be substituted by just reading cases. There is evidence that suggests that students who authored cases “learned more than those students who just used the cases for advice” (Kolodner et al., 2005, p. 2).

A situation library could also be used to extract practice situations in order to improve public understanding of the role and tasks of social workers and importantly how they go about fulfilling those tasks. While the list of key situations informs the public of the kinds of practice situations

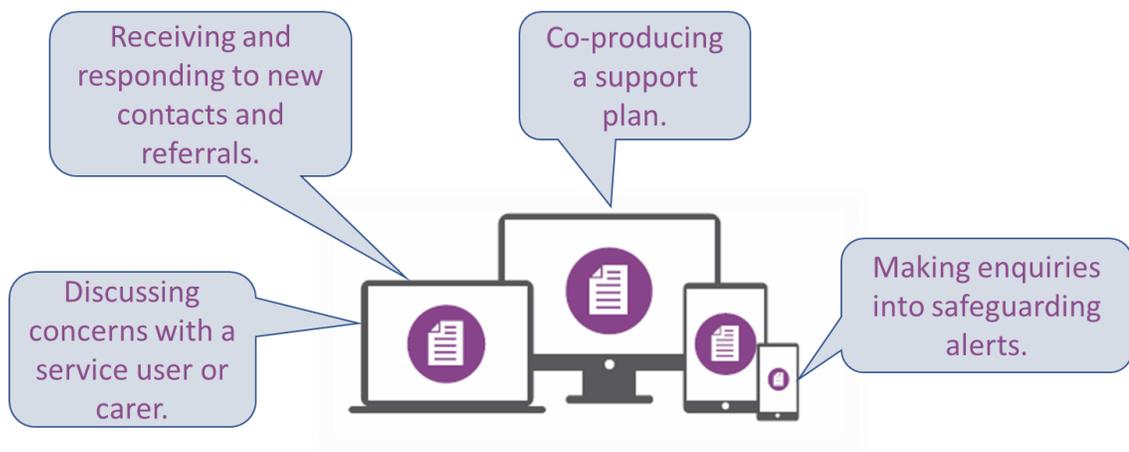
social workers regularly deal with, the publication of edited reflections of situations would go some way to “illustrate good social work practice, creating a benchmark for the public of the positive impact social work can have” (SWTF, 2009, p. 49), which was one of the recommendations by the Social Work Taskforce.

### *Key situations as an index for the situation library*

A key to accessing cases or situations in a library lies in their indexing or categorisation. In fact, a “library is as good as the indexes and indexing scheme one has available for locating something in the library” (Kolodner and Guzdial, 2012, p. 217). Kolodner referred to finding a suitable system to categorise cases as an indexing problem: “retrieving applicable cases at appropriate times”, which is addressed by “assigning labels, called indexes, to cases that designate under what conditions each case can be used to make useful inferences” (Kolodner, 1992, p. 23). Similarly, task taxonomies need to be “expressed with language that others will recognise and be able to use” (Cruickshank et al., 2017, p. 45). Indexing or assigning labels is relevant at two points in relation to reasoning. First, at the point when a case or situation is being retrieved from memory, such that a good indexing system enables someone to identify a “a past situation as being relevant to the one now facing it” (Kolodner and Guzdial, 2012, p. 217), and second, at the time of memorisation, when lessons learned are memorised (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017).

In everyday reasoning, indexing occurs intuitively (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017) and this relies on a learner being able to “identify the most important characteristics” of a case (Tawfik and Kolodner, 2016, p. 7). This poses challenges for practitioners at different levels of expertise, as novices and experts have different abilities in terms of understanding the elements of a case (Tawfik and Kolodner, 2016, p. 7). While novices focus on rules and surface elements,

experienced practitioners can holistically assess a situation (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1988). Key issues explored in research about case libraries are related to finding a fitting case, understanding the narrative of a case and the relevance of a case in relation to a current situation (Tawfik et al., 2018). Similar questions were also explored as part of the #keysituation project (Tov et al., 2016b). In an online survey, 163 German speaking social workers (with varying degrees of experience from under one to over ten years) were asked to think about a situation and then identify a matching situation among the German key situation titles (Kunz and Tov, 2009). The responses indicated high levels of agreement. The respondents could: quickly get an overview of the listed situations (86% agreed); understand what the relevant situation titles are about (93%); quickly find an appropriate title for their own situation (82%); find the title collection to be relevant to their own topics (80%); and find included in the collection all relevant situations in relation to their own practice field (72%). I wonder whether this indicates that the titles facilitate associative identification of relevant situations and I hypothesise that this is the case because they are formulated by practitioners and largely use their own language and words. The platform enables access to situations at a first glance through the titles developed in this study, as illustrated in the following figure:



**Figure 57** Situation-based indexing on the Key Situation platform

If a title is associatively seen as relevant, the link to the key situation and the displayed reflected situations can be followed and the other general elements (overarching characteristics, quality criteria) can be considered, to evaluate how far a situation is relevant to a current situation.

Tov and colleagues' (2016) argument, that a title provides a focus for reflective learning, is supported by Kolodner and Guzdial (2012) who argue that indexes focus on the lessons learned in a case, which can be indexed under different terms. They point out that it is important to recognise that by focussing on one aspect, others may go under and it is never possible to index every lesson learned. Furthermore, the elaboration of overarching characteristics and quality criteria in relation to a key situation, acts as a support to develop templates for novices and allows experts to apply their holistic matching to identify suitable situations. This seems to be in contrast with labelling systems explored by Tawfik et al. (2018) that in order to support access, learners had to rely on expert-based recommendations. However, the participants in the #keysituation study were only given the titles for consideration, whereas the latter were given full cases to consider. Tov and colleagues (2016a) argue that the general aspects of a situation (title, overarching characteristics and quality criteria) support both retrieval and memorisation of situations and lessons learned. There is some evidence that by providing multiple indices, learners can develop their ability to compare their own situation to the ones depicted in a case library (Tawfik et al., 2018), which would indicate that the general aspects of a situation can support both retrieval and memorisation of situations and lessons learned. However, further research is needed to examine these findings further.

Generally, in instructional design that is based on cases or situations, indexing of situations is most effective if "the learner takes time and makes a conscious effort to analyse background information and reflect on the potential applicability of relevant aspects of the experience to

new situations” (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017, p. 563). Therefore, it is important for learners to consider the general elements of a situation, for example, under which title a situation is to be explored carefully (Tov et al., 2016a). Equally, if a practitioner wants to look up a case, the more a “person is willing and able to engage in interpreting the new situation, the more likely it is that they will find a range of relevant experiences that could be applied productively for reasoning about the new situation” (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017, p. 563). So, while in everyday reasoning, labelling occurs mostly intuitively, in instructional designs, reflection on labelling is seen as an important deliberative activity.

#### *Key Situation platform for participation and reification*

As the literature has shown, technologies can also support socio-cultural knowledge-management practices more widely (Heinsch, 2018; Trede et al., 2016; Jang, 2013). Evidence shows that interactional approaches to research, knowledge production and sharing of knowledge are most effective (Kelly, 2017; Heinsch et al., 2016; Jang, 2013). These combine a variety of approaches that involve practitioners in distributed networks that focus on organisational activities (see Chapter 2). The closed and open spaces on the Key Situation platform can thereby act as a blended learning tool within an organisation or across organisations. The open space, accessible by social workers, displays situations for all platform users. Additional spaces for collaboration that again can be either open or closed, enable participation within and across CoPs, universities and practice organisations. The platform thus acts as a repository but offers at the same time a collaborative space that enables participation for the various CoPs, as illustrated in Figure 15 (Social arrangements to support local implementation of the Key Situation Model).

The different social arrangements at the meso level (see Chapter 3 - Key Situation Model) suggest how communities and groups can be organised to support ongoing reflective learning, knowledge co-creation and sharing (Tov et al., 2016a; Tschopp et al., 2016). These CoPs and groups can in turn contribute to an ongoing dialogue through the situation platform, about knowledgeable and ethical practice, both within an organisation and across professional and academic communities. By turning practice situations and their reflections with the situated knowledge into epistemic objects, they can be discussed (Nicolini, 2009). This discursive deliberation, although focussed on the situations that practitioners encounter in organisations, moves beyond simply providing access to a repository and opens up spaces for socio-material approaches (Rossi et al., 2017; Jang, 2013; Fenwick et al., 2012).

If the Key Situation Model is found to be useful and social workers document reflected situations, then a discussion about how social work is constituted, about the quality of practice and knowledge espoused, could ensue. The model aims to support such critical and reflective learning and key situations offer a focus for this discourse. With its focus on quality criteria, this could also support the development not only of practitioners but also of practice itself.

### *Influencing organisational knowledge related practices*

Technologies to support knowledgeable and ethical practice need to be configured in such a way as to allow participation and interaction, and enabling the storage, sharing, and organising of documents, data and other artefacts (Wenger et al., 2009). Therefore, organisations need to address some of the issues related to digital capacity and access (Trede et al., 2016), particularly as they relate to the capacity of professionals to use representational tools and participation in representational practices (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017). In other words, to make full use of the Key Situation platform and support the creation and maintenance of reflective spaces and

the development of reflective capability, as suggested in this thesis, organisations need to support the skills of practitioners.

Negotiating a local approach and implementation of the Key Situation Model in a practice organisation will influence the epistemic practices and thus the culture of the organisation (Knorr Cetina, 2005). This focus on the local site, in which practices and technologies are co-designed with a focus on situations that practitioners encounter, enables the design of an epistemic and learning environment that is in-built into the rhythm of the organisation. Making digital technologies part of such an arrangement will impact on the ways in which work is organised (Gruber and Harteis, 2018; Fenwick, 2012). Thus, (co)creating epistemic practices - as an integral part of both learning and culture - will support not only knowledgeable and ethical practice but shape the epistemic environment and culture (Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017).

A situation-based learning approach must therefore be distinguished from social work methods and practice frameworks that provide guidance for interventions and are concerned with how social workers can engage in practice (Spatscheck et al., 2018). Gherardi (2012, p. 34) distinguishes between “activities at the core of the practice” that are about “mobilising professional authority and jurisdiction; performing accountability on professional, legal and bureaucratic bases; enacting a diagnostic community” and “activities at the margins of the same practice” that are concerned with “learning, theorising in practice, performing of a professional self and of a community of professionals”. The activities at the core of practice are oriented towards “the formation of the object of practice”, while those at the margins are focussed on the reproduction and innovation of the practice itself. The epistemic practices suggested in the Key Situation Model are thus professional activities at the margins and therefore focus on practice reproduction, development and innovation. The implementation of the Key Situation

Model as an overall approach to CPD, seeks to ensure that all CPD activities are tightly linked with key situations. When thinking about these, methods and practice frameworks will be important aspects to consider. For example, reflective learning in the context of a particular practice model, would integrate principles of the framework with concrete situations and make them actionable.

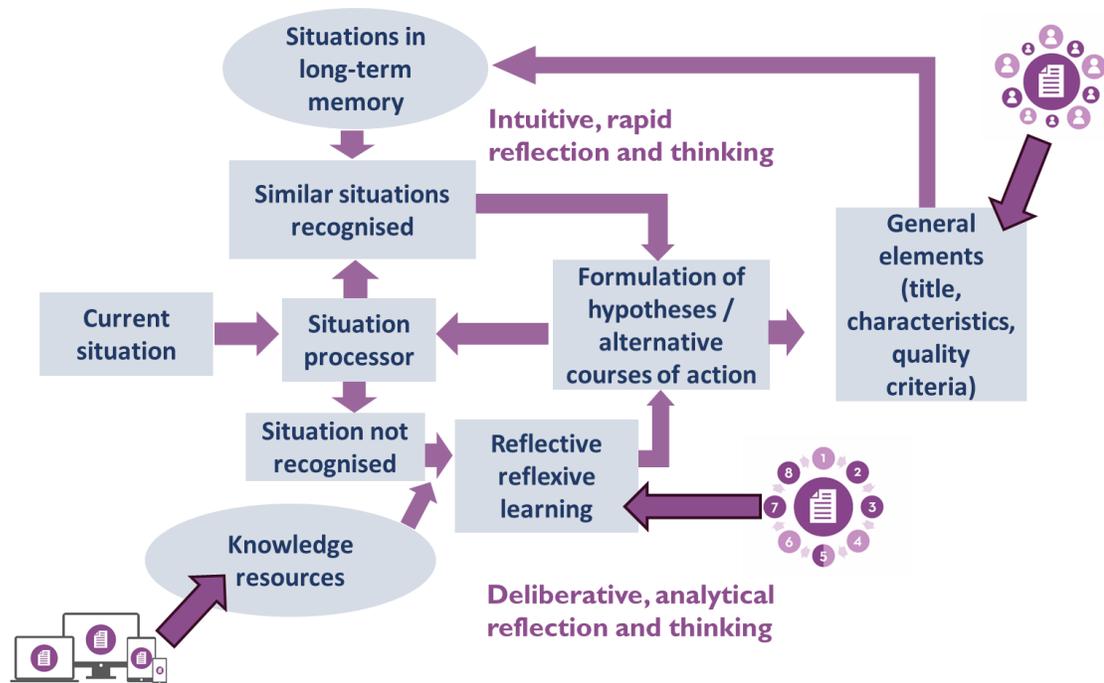
Of course, the quality of such reflections will be of varying quality, considering that practitioners with different perspectives and levels of experience co-produce these. Therefore, the quality in these situations needs to be negotiated (Tov et al., 2016a). This is the role of members and CoPs of the network or within an organisation. The idea here is that for example, thematic CoPs with members from professional and academic communities continually comment, edit and add links to resources (for a fuller discussion of the design of the network and CoPs see Staempfli et al., 2016), thus assuring quality and enhancing learning opportunities.

Reflective learning on encountered situations that is shared and discussed also has the potential to highlight innovative and creative approaches and also point to situations that bring up particular challenges. Local research and evaluation activities could arise from this and any findings could again be included in key situations on the platform and inform reflective learning on specific situations. Implementing the Key Situation Model would support innovations and address the need to create responses to novel situations encountered (Eraut, 2009b, 2009a). It would also offer a framework for researchers to disseminate findings related to key situations by directly contributing to the shared knowledge on the platform.

### **Conclusion – A practice-based approach to knowledgeable and ethical practice**

Overall, the Key Situation Model provides practice-based and socio-material design options for epistemic practices and environments that aim to support knowledgeable and ethical decision-making and practice in social work. This involves the outlined epistemic tasks of the reflective learning process: the social arrangements that are suggested, both as part of the learning process and more widely through the CoP approaches, help maintain the social connections and exchange between members of various teams and groups within organisations and distributed CoPs across partnerships and networks (Staempfli et al., 2016; Tschopp et al., 2016). Furthermore, the Key Situation platform as a virtual space for blended learning, knowledge sharing and collaboration, combines technical-structural as well as the socio-cultural practices that are essential in order to support the emergence of knowledgeable and ethical practice.

Such a socio-material focus thus extends psychological and individualised approaches (see Chapter 3) to reflective learning and situation-based reasoning. It suggests a whole system approach to CPD that includes CoPs and the Key Situation platform, as illustrated in the following figure:



**Figure 58** Situation-based learning, knowledge co-production and knowledge sharing (based on case-based reasoning in ten Cate, 2018, p. 5)

Various CoPs co-produce situated and general knowledge that emerges from reflective learning, for example in teams and CPD and from collaborative inquiries and research in CoPs or research partnerships. The documentation of the co-produced knowledge in all these CoPs thus feeds into the available resources for practitioners reflecting on individual cases and in ongoing continuous learning activities within an organisation. The platform with documented situations contains knowledge that is directly relevant to local practices in an organisation. Over time, a living knowledge repository develops that is integrated in reflective and individual and organisational epistemic and quality development practices. The Key Situation Model's approach thus views knowledge and practice as emerging, fluid and in constant adaption through the weaving together of situational (specific) and general aspects.

The sharing of knowledge is supported through the key situation categorisation that enables associative access. It is further supported by the search functionalities of the platform (tag cloud,

word search, key words) that enable specific searches (Tov et al., 2016a). As discussed, the platform also enables knowledge sharing across organisational boundaries, to support an epistemic culture and practices in social work that are based on practice situations in line with a practice-based perspective.

The integration of learning and work and of continuous learning, knowledge co-creation and knowledge sharing that is central to the Key Situation Model, challenges traditional notions of CPD. The task of social work education and CPD, rather than equipping practitioners with knowledge and capability to do high quality work alone (Croisdale-Appleby, 2014), is to equip practitioners and organisations with the knowledge and skill to engage in and shape epistemic practices and to support the development of epistemic practices and environments in organisations. This in turn might also enhance social workers' capacity for collaborative inquiry and research and more generally, support practitioners' epistemic fluency.

This situated practice-based approach seems appropriate to support mindful professionals. The negotiated nature of the proposed curriculum also recognises that professional work is not a fixed, nor objective matter but rather, it is co-constructed by stakeholders (Beddoe, 2013). Crucially, it addresses knowledge and ethics as core pillars of professional work that need to be addressed. The holistic focus on situations ensures that different forms of knowledge, including practitioner knowledge and service users' perspectives, are woven together with the practices that social workers encounter.

I argue that this radical change thus unifies the pedagogies of the university and practice and perhaps offers a perspective that enables the creation of a shared signature pedagogy as suggested by Higgins (2014). Such a situation-based signature pedagogy places the link between practice and academia at its core.

However, there is also a limitation of the focus on key situations in social work, as it engenders the risk of social work being seen as an isolated professional practice. Noordegraaf (2009, p. 1363 in Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017) believes that in the context of joined up and integrated services, “professional fields need to initiate cooperative projects and products ... for restructuring everyday work forms in the light of coordinated action” and this, Markauskaite and Goodyear (2017, p. 29) argue, will lead to

“increased emphasis on communication, cooperation and learning skills, an openness to learning the vocabularies, techniques and routines of other professional groups, to experiment with new service models and reflect on successes and failures”.

So, while the model’s inclusion of social forms of learning has the potential to develop cooperative skills, perhaps it does not sufficiently address the need for interprofessional learning. Therefore, to develop the model further, ways in which other professionals can join in the epistemic practices need to be addressed.

Current research suggests that CPD needs to be aligned to varied practices and include opportunities for formal and informal learning. Designing curricula that are flexible and meaningfully linked to diverse practices poses challenges. Current demanded and prescribed standards and policy initiatives seem to favour individualised approaches, rather than approaches that seek to influence organisational practices and particularly, epistemic practices. I propose an approach to CPD design that is firmly rooted in a practice-based perspective, aligned to the practices social workers encounter in organisations. Based on the key situations developed in this thesis, a curriculum built on situations could offer a unified structure that is both interesting and meaningful to practitioners. This can be adapted to meet local workforce and practice needs but also allow education and training providers to meet the requirements, as

outlined by the new regulator Social Work England, by ensuring that the curriculum remains relevant to changing practice.

### **Implications of the research and future directions**

This action research project is a first step for the implementation and evaluation of the Key Situation Model in social work organisations or universities in England. Inherent in this approach is the combination of practice development and research. A follow-on project could lead to learning about the effectiveness of the Key Situation Model's practice-based CPD curriculum and learning approach and support the development of an English network and (virtual) community.

### **Implications for continuous professional learning**

The first implication for practice emerges from the practice-based perspective that sees learning and working as intertwined. This implies a focus on practices – both in terms of practices in key situations and epistemic practices associated with knowledgeable and ethical practice and learning. Secondly, I argue that the Key Situation Model offers the building blocks to support social workers in organisations and to enable the development of practice. These can be used to co-configure an environment in which knowledgeable and ethical decisions and practice can emerge. In other words, organisations should consider how to configure the reflective learning process, communities of practice and the virtual platform locally, to create an epistemic environment in which learning and development for knowledgeable and ethical practice in key situations can be supported and shared.

The discussed elements of the Key Situation Model related to blended reflective learning, knowledge co-creation and sharing, are all shaped by the various design options related to the epistemic, social and set design. The discussed ACAD model (Goodyear and Carvalho, 2016) and associated wireframe (Carvalho and Yeoman, 2017) offers a framework not only for the analysis

of learning environments but also for their design. This framework draws attention to the elements that can be designed at all levels of the system. Focussing on the learning arrangements at the micro level, enables determination of which artefacts, tools and texts are to be used (set), what social arrangements are to be planned (social) and how tasks should be organised (epistemic) in and around the actual learning space and time (Yeoman, 2015). The focus on key practice situations thereby ensures that intended learning outcomes are considered in a holistic way.

Organisations and universities that want to implement the Key Situation Model or its elements could start by thinking together with the Association 'Network Key Situations in Social Work' about how to develop an implementation that suits the support and learning needs of social workers. This process involves adaption and is best achieved in a flexible, iterative and recursive process that is supported by evaluation.

The wireframe offers a focus on questions that need to be addressed (see Figure 59). These questions, rather than suggesting a predefined approach, allow a discussion of how the model could best be configured and implemented locally to meet the aims of organisations and to ensure a focus on the epistemic activities of practitioners as learners. The outlined collaborative CoRe curriculum development approach discussed earlier, thereby offers a model for a discussion about which practices (in key situations) and associated competences a partner organisation wants to develop and focus on. The options outlined in relation to the social design (different CoPs) and for the design of the platform, also need to be addressed. Such a collaborative and participative design approach is markedly different to selling a product that is ready made. It reflects an understanding of professional practice and learning that is situated

and highly context dependent. Thus, the approach itself sets the tone for future collaboration and also allows for a shared understanding to develop.

	<b>Which set design options would meet your organisational aims?</b>	<b>Which social design options would meet your organisational aims?</b>	<b>Which epistemic design options would meet your organisational aims?</b>
<p><b>Design for networked learning - Key Situation Network</b> (Macro Level)</p>	<p><b>Buildings and technology:</b> Which E-Learning platform and other ICT could be used?  If so, what arrangements can be made?</p>	<p><b>Organisational forms:</b> Which partners (i.e. universities, teams, other organisations, etc.) should be involved? What partnership arrangements would support your intentions?</p>	<p><b>Stakeholder intentions:</b> What are your intentions? What outcomes would you want to achieve, what artefacts should be produced? How could the Key Situation Model support this?</p>
<p><b>Design for learning within organisations</b> (Meso Level)</p>	<p><b>Allocation/use of space:</b> Which physical spaces are available for learners and CoPs to get together? How can access to the platform be ensured and organised?</p>	<p><b>Community:</b> What types of CoPs are needed? What are the potential benefits of these? Would you want to support communities of practice (CoPs) for specific domains?</p>	<p><b>Curriculum:</b> Which situations would you want practitioners to work on? What skills related to blended learning and knowledge sharing need to be developed?</p>
<p><b>Design for learning at learning time-space</b> (Micro Level)</p>	<p><b>Artefacts, tools and texts:</b> Which existing tools (e.g. reflection guide, situation template, communications technologies) would support learning? What access to research journals or briefings is needed?</p>	<p><b>Roles and division of labour:</b> Who would be involved in supporting participants, technology and CoPs? How would the different tasks be shared?</p>	<p><b>Tasks, sequencing and pace</b> What time resources would you want to invest? How much time would each practitioner have available for reflective learning? Over what time period?</p>

*Figure 59 Activity Centred Design for the implementation of the Key Situation Model (based on Carvalho and Yeoman, 2018, p. 1126)*

Practice organisations might raise concerns about the time and money that needs to be invested in an implementation of the Key Situation Model. I would suggest that practice organisations consider their overall staff development and knowledge management budgets and think about how an implementation of this model might have benefits not usually associated with CPD and knowledge management. Research on the outcomes of the reflective learning process has shown that an increase in time both of classroom contact and length of time of the whole reflection process, increases the quality of reflections produced (Tov et al., 2016a). Mulvey (2013, p. 268) argues that investing in CPD incurs costs, both in terms of paying for CPD activities and in terms of staff time. But, she argues, the real cost lies in allocation of time to think. The current dual emphasis on “reducing costs and increasing productivity” means that employers must invest in CPD and development. Addressing the ‘beginner dip’ and more generally supporting the development of intuitive skills and the move from novice to competent and expertise level of professional competence, requires not only time, but also “an investment in practitioners as a developing resource—one that should be supported, nurtured and prized“(Devaney et al., 2017, p. 2380). It is also a requirement from professional bodies that professionals do engage in CPD. But, investing in employees’ CPD is also risky, as workers might decide to leave the organisation. However, Mulvey (2013, p. 268) pointedly asks “What if you don’t train them - and they stay?” The investment of 20 to 40 hours for the reflection and discussion of one situation seems a lot but it has the potential to produce tangible changes associated with knowledge co-production activities (Rossi, Rosli and Yip, 2017) that can be shared across the whole organisation and this will benefit others.

Other concerns might relate to the in-depth learning approach. In relation to the role of deliberation, Munro and colleagues (2017, p. 150) similarly argue that many will complain that they are making “the whole process so complicated as to be impractical”. They point to the merit

of simplicity in approaches to deliberation but warn that there are limits to this as deliberation requires rigour. This in turn increases confidence in conclusions and “cutting corners in drawing on research will undermine the enterprise” (Munro et al., 2017, p. 151). As my analysis of shorter group reflection models has shown, there are limits with regard to the integration of knowledge and practice these can achieve that could be addressed with the Key Situation Model’s approach.

Other concerns related to the in-depth learning process are related to motivation for learning. Boud, Cressey and Docherty (2006, p. 159) argue that over-formalising reflection in workplaces can lead to resistance and thus inhibit learning. They argue that if reflection is aligned to the needs and desires of participants, then this can be motivating. I argue that starting with experienced situations has potentially a positive effect on motivation. Creating a learning culture - epistemic practices and environments – means building on continuous learning as a fundamental strategy. Organisations that support and value ongoing learning, provide resources and tools for their practitioners and create spaces for dialogue and inquiry, can influence practice and enable innovations to address challenges. Boud and colleagues (2006) emphasise that team learning and collaboration across teams, empowers employees to enact learning in their practice. This also supports systems that allow capturing of and sharing of this learning. I argue that the Key Situation Model can support such learning and through this, a learning culture.

Organisations that develop such a culture may also draw on this approach to redesign and co-produce the services on offer. This inevitably involves “individual and organisational learning and change” that is accompanied by the configuration of material and social arrangements in the organisation (Carvalho and Goodyear, 2018, p. 44).

My vision is that collaborative learning, knowledge co-construction and sharing of knowledge in relation to key situations, will one day also include service users and lead to the development of

not just individual understanding and practice, but support the development of practice across an organisation, enhance epistemic practices and culture and thus, ultimately, the services provided to services users and communities.

### **Implications for research**

The generated key situation titles offer several opportunities for further research. First, they offer a categorisation of what social workers do and this could be of interest to researchers concerned with studying social work practices close-up, a field that has started to emerge in England. This framework allows researchers to situate the practices they study in the broader context of the overall practices across fields and sectors. Furthermore, they could be inspired to study practices in key situations other than the currently most frequently explored home visit. Secondly, the titles offer a categorisation that could inform research into local practices. This would offer researchers an opportunity to investigate local practices and consider the key situations that are relevant for particular teams, organisations or regions. Thirdly, the methodology developed in this thesis might inspire other researchers to develop other national investigations. This would enable international comparative research on different enactments of social work in different settings or countries. Although not addressed in this study, I note interesting differences between the Swiss key situations and the English ones.

More generally, the development and adaption of the Key Situation Model for social work in England leads to further research questions and opportunities. It has so far never been implemented in England— apart from a one-off trial pilot. Research conducted by Royes (2016) highlights some of the benefits and challenges of implementing the model. The Association Network Key Situations also has anecdotal evidence from their engagement in higher education,

where they have used the model as a module and from partner universities who use the model. Therefore, the potential benefits are not just of a theoretical nature but are based on some experience. However, this knowledge base leaves open pertinent research questions that in my mind need to be addressed. This of course will first and foremost depend on whether and how the Key Situation Model is implemented.

A central question I raise is how far reflective learning about a situation will impact on actual practice in a similar future situation. In other words, does engagement with an experienced situation and relevant knowledge lead to social workers being better prepared for similar situations? Whittaker (2018, p. 1981) concluded that one implication for research is to understand how the “cue recognition and pattern-spotting skills can be taught to less experienced practitioners”. The question here is, can skilled intuition and situational memories be formed in the reflective learning process? Furthermore, can situational memories in relation to an understanding of a situation but also in relation to quality criteria, be recalled and guide action through intuitive thinking in the situation? Based on situated understandings of intuitive practice, the question that remains unanswered is how far deliberative reflection on action can be accessed in intuitive ways in similar future situations and thus, associatively influence action.

While Tov and colleagues (2016b) found that social workers were able to identify relevant situations and argued (2016a) that the general aspects of a situation can support the retrieval of situations on the platform, this needs to be further investigated in relation to the developed key situation titles in England.

As discussed, there is currently no evidence about the effectiveness of consulting cases or situations on a platform that were produced by others. There is also very limited evidence showing that novice learners who can refer to cases that display mistakes outperform those who

have only had access to expert cases (Tawfik and Kolodner, 2016). Questions to be addressed are how far learning can be drawn from reading and reflecting on a situation on the platform and how far this can influence actions. How far does the quality of a situation artefact impact on learning? What differences in learning can be seen for professionals at different stages of development? More generally, there is a lack of evidence on outcomes of CPD and CPD is a particularly challenging area to research (Williams, 2007) and evaluate. In order to evaluate the impact of The Key Situation Model, it might be useful to distinguish outcomes of educational programmes (Carpenter, 2011).

Moriarty and Manthorpe (2014, p. 406) found that there is some evidence for self-reported increases in confidence, knowledge and skills for social workers who have undertaken formal CPD. However, this evidence is rather weak in that it relates to Carpenter's (2011) learning outcomes in relation to modification in attitudes and perceptions (level 2a) and acquisition of knowledge and skills (level 2b). Many studies have been small in scale and there is a need for improved evidence on learning outcomes, particularly in relation to changes in behaviour, organisational practices and impact on service users' lives.

The "challenge for education providers and researchers lies in demonstrating if learning from post-qualifying courses has been translated into practice" (Moriarty & Manthorpe, 2014, p. 406). More specifically, the barriers and challenges are that firstly, social workers come with a variety of learning needs and from a range of settings with diverse roles; secondly, a multitude of intervention approaches are used in social work, which are difficult to evaluate; thirdly, social workers never work in isolation and thus, linking CPD outcomes directly to service user outcomes is hugely complex; it is difficult to predict when learning impacts on practice and if so, how long this effect will last (Forrester, et al., 2018) and lastly, even if these variables are addressed,

“social work is far from achieving a consensus on what measures will best evaluate the effectiveness of practice” (Williams, 2007, p. 123-124).

There is also a wider issue. Moriarty and Manthorpe (2014, p. 407) stressed that "we know almost nothing about work-based and self-directed learning or participation in other forms of higher education". So, while social workers engage in a wide range of CPD activities and local provision is being organised, the evidence base to support such flexible CPD development is lacking. Therefore, I argue that any implementation of the Key Situation Model would need to grapple with these complex research-related issues and engage in evaluation to offer an initial evidence base as to the impacts the Key Situation Model has. Such research would need to be very contextualised and perhaps the action research methodology that underpinned this research offers a suitable framework for such an undertaking.

Lastly, in my view, the successful adaption of the Delphi method with the inclusion of CoRe in the first round and the open sampling method for the first online survey round, might be of interest to other researchers.

In summary, the implications of this study are twofold. It can first help shape professional learning, knowledge co-creation and sharing in practice organisations; secondly, if implemented, this can lead to further research with regard to the impact the Key Situation Model has on the practice of social workers and organisations. This PhD research was undertaken within an action research methodology framework and therefore, the value of this thesis lies in the development of design options for professional learning and epistemic practices to support knowledgeable and ethical practice. This links with an understanding inherent in action research that it is about practice developments for specific contexts (Levin and Greenwood, 2001, p. 105) and thus seeks to give meaning to theory through action (Freire, 2005; Reason and Bradbury, 2001).

## Conclusions

The purpose of social work is to safeguard and support vulnerable people in society. Social workers need to be able to address ill-structured and wicked problems that arise from uncertainty, complexity, instability, uniqueness, value conflicts and dilemmas. This requires knowledgeable and ethical practitioners and practices. In this thesis project I therefore set out to develop an understanding of how social workers can be supported to continuously develop knowledgeable and ethical professional practice. It is through the engagement with knowledge and practice that knowledgeable and ethical practice can emerge. I defined such practice as an epistemic practice that fuses different forms of knowledge with specific situations.

The practice-based and socio-material approaches adopted in this thesis highlighted that it is necessary to create the spaces for epistemic practices for practitioners, teams and organisations. This involves both individual workers and service users and organisations and therefore, shaping such practices must address knowledgeability with a focus on participation, co-construction, becoming and emergence. I also highlighted the crucial role of objects, such as artefacts and technologies that form an integral part of an epistemic environment. Creating the right environment and the conditions for knowledgeable and ethical practice to emerge, thus involves epistemic, social and set design for learners and organisations that enables learning through participation and co-construction and sharing of knowledge.

I developed the Key Situation Model presented by Tov and colleagues (2016a). Based on my analysis of the literature, I revised the model's knowledge categories and posit that they now cover the core aspects of knowledgeability relevant for professional practice. I engaged with over 100 experienced social workers from a broad range of sectors and regions to define the key situations in England. 116 key situations in 12 areas of responsibility were agreed. In order to

undertake this research, I developed the Delphi study method and included the CoRe method as the first qualitative round, to develop an initial situation list that was then reviewed in two online survey rounds, with open sampling for the first round.

The Key Situation Model helps to create spaces for learning that include reflection on emotions and intuitions and diverse forms of knowledge, including importantly, research, theories and ethical principles. This could enhance reflexive understanding, self-awareness and self-regulation. Offering meaningful learning opportunities related to actual practice, it is likely to support motivation for ongoing learning. The repeated engagement in practice situations, combined with deliberative reflection, has the potential to develop intuitive skills and memorisation that are essential for practice and decision-making in similar situations. At the same time, analytical thinking skills are developed through various epistemic tasks along the standardised reflection process. The actor-oriented epistemic design of the process is relevant for novice and experienced practitioners. It helps developing both reflexive and reflective capabilities that enables them to become and remain mindful professionals, all of which are key to knowledgeable and ethical practice.

All aspects of the Key Situation Model are underpinned by social arrangements that build on the notions of CoPs to enable social epistemic practices and participation. From learning in groups to participative curriculum design and knowledge sharing across teams and organisations, the aim is to enhance discursive elaboration, collaborative inquiry and co-creation of situated, professional and actionable knowledge. Equally, the platform does not just act as a repository but also offers opportunities for participation and collaboration around artefacts that support extension of perspectives and alignment with other practices across place and time.

I argue that the design options for the Key Situation Model's implementation in organisations, created in this thesis, could inform a whole system approach to CPD and practice development. This would be underpinned by the model's focus on quality that fosters a situated understanding of knowledgeable and ethical practice in key situations. The set design, enabled by the Key Situation platform, could further contribute to knowledge exchange that is rooted in practice and a taskonomy, thereby facilitating access to relevant situations. The model thus could offer a blueprint for how quality of practice could be negotiated in the intertwining of situated practices and general knowledge and shared within and across organisational boundaries. Ideally this involves both professional and academic communities. Thus, the Key Situation Model could be implemented in university-practice partnerships.

In sum, I argue that implementing these different epistemic, social and set design options could substantially shape the learning and knowledge-related practices within and across organisations. The approach of the Key Situation Model is not value-free; indeed, it starts with an understanding of co-construction, sharing and participation. Implementing the model is therefore likely to challenge individualised notions of knowledgeability and practice. Rather than thinking about attitudes, values and skills alone, the focus of these concrete and designable aspects of the Key Situation Model, could influence organisational culture through the practices associated with reflective learning, knowledge co-creation and sharing, in an ongoing development and innovation process.

In summary, there are four central areas in which I make original contributions to knowledge in relation to how social workers can be supported to continuously develop knowledgeable and ethical professional practice in this thesis.

The first one is related to the actual research conducted and the knowledge generated about what social workers actually do. The key situations developed address a major gap in the literature and this research makes the enacted constitution of social work in England visible.

The second original contribution lies in the weaving together of the literature on social work and professional development with practice-based and socio-material perspectives. While practice-based perspectives are highly influential in the professional development literature, they are somewhat neglected in the social work literature. In engaging with the ideas of practice theorists and educational researchers<sup>18</sup> and integrating them with previous work in social work, I have hopefully made a meaningful contribution to the debate in social work (education). In particular, I highlight how systematic and systemic approaches to learning, combined with the organisational design of socio-material epistemic environments, can support both social workers' learning and learning cultures in organisations. While these theoretical and research perspectives address many important issues, it is important to turn them into concrete approaches that help managers and educators design learning environments within or across specific settings.

The third area that arises out of this analysis is about reflexive and mindful engagement with knowledge and practice and is concerned with a range of capabilities related to epistemic fluency. My contribution here is that I developed the reflective learning approach of the Key Situation Model. I show how the model can theoretically support social workers' ability to fluently engage with knowledge and integrate it with practice and how collaborative inquiry and

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<sup>18</sup> (e. g. Hopwood and Nerland, 2019; Carvalho and Goodyear, 2018; Carvalho and Yeoman, 2017, 2018; Markauskaite and Goodyear, 2017; Goodyear and Carvalho, 2016; Tov et al., 2016a; Reich et al., 2015; Fenwick and Nerland, 2014; Hopwood, 2014; Eraut, 2013; Boud and Hager, 2012; Fenwick, 2012; Fenwick et al., 2012; Nicolini, 2009; Sandberg and Dall'Alba, 2009; Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki et al., 2001; Wenger, 1998; Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1988)

(co-)construction of actionable knowledge can be designed within and across organisations to enhance skills relevant for social workers as knowledge workers. Furthermore, the epistemic, social and set design options might contribute to social workers' ability to construct and configure their own epistemic and material environments.

Fourthly, I outline the design options for implementing the Key Situation Model. I illustrate how the model could shape collective learning for knowledgeable and ethical practice in situations and how this learning could underpin a shared and negotiated understanding of what such practice might look like. In other words, I suggest that the Key Situation Model, if implemented in a systemic way, could support quality and practice development within and across organisations. The design options with the associated questions could support universities and employers to adapt the Key Situation Model's blueprint to design their education and ongoing professional development, evidence-informed approaches and knowledge sharing. Crucially, such joint endeavours rely on a common language which allows learning and innovation to be communicated. I hope that the developed key situation titles, based on the knowledge of experienced social workers from diverse sectors across England, offer not only a useful way to categorise knowledge that is closely tied to the practice that social workers regularly encounter but more importantly, can act as focal points around which learning, knowledge co-construction and knowledge exchange can be organised.

Lastly, I propose that the Key Situation Model offers the potential to support the development of a shared understanding of a social work signature pedagogy that integrates practice and theory in a situation-based curriculum and learning approach. The close links to actual practices and the adaptability of the key situation titles could thereby enable continual evolution, ensure that such a curriculum remains relevant to current practice, respond to the

demands of the whole sector and place the integration of theory and practice at its core. These are all requirements of the new Qualifying Education and Training Standards (SWE, 2019a).

Finally, the value of this thesis lies not only in the production of these original contributions to knowledge. Rather, I hope that others will find these ideas meaningful and useful in addressing their own challenges in relation to designing learning for knowledgeable and ethical practice. Others may be inspired to try the model out in their team, organisation or partnership and to this end engage in the key situation network. I look forward to working with them to possibly set up action research projects and to evaluate how far the implementation of the Key Situation Model can support knowledgeable and ethical practice and epistemic environments that benefit service users.

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## **Appendices**

**Appendix 1 - Categorisations of social work found in the literature**

**Appendix 2 - Example of a situation from the Key Situation platform**

**Appendix 3 – Ethical Approval**

**Appendix 4 - Addendum to the Ethical Approval**

**Appendix 5 – Participant information and consent form CoRe workshops**

**Appendix 6 - Participant information and consent form for the first online survey**

**Appendix 7 - Participant information and consent form for the second online survey**

**Appendix 8 - Example of qualitative and quantitative data analysis over three Delphi rounds**

## Appendix 1 - Categorisations of social work found in the literature

### **A typology of direct work** (Whincup, 2017, p. 973)

1. Direct work to build and sustain the relationship between child and professional, with this relationship intervention.
2. Direct work as part of a process of assessment.
3. Direct work as part of intervention.

### **The situations in which social workers can provide particular value and expertise** (TCSW, 2014, p. 6)

1. Responding to complex needs
2. Effective safeguarding and risk management
3. Addressing adversity and social exclusion
4. Promoting independence and autonomy
5. Prevention and early intervention

### **Activities associated with the children in need case management processes** (Holmes and McDermid, 2013, p. 127)

1. Initial contact and referral
2. Initial assessment
3. Ongoing support
4. Close case
5. Core assessment
6. Planning and review
7. Section 47 Inquiry
8. Public law outline

Within these 'activities' the authors distinguish between direct activities, administrative tasks and other indirect activities such as case recording or liaising with other professionals.

**Social work tasks** (Beresford, 2007, p. 39)

1. Individual direct work with service users
2. Indirect work with family and friends
3. Work with loved ones and others identified in roles as 'informal carers'
4. Group work
5. Community-based and community development work

## Appendix 2 - Example of a situation from the Key Situation platform

### Status of situation

- **Stage of development: completed reflection on situation, please comment**
- **Quality:** all reflection steps are completed, please comment
- **Author:** Newly qualified social worker

### 1 Title

#### Discussing concerns with a service user or carer / Concerns about carer

### 2 Characteristics of situation

The overarching characteristics agreed by the group:

1. The relationship is characterised by a power dynamic between the social worker and the service user.
2. The service user/carer is resistant to fully engage with the social worker.
3. There are conflicting expectations between the service user/carer and the social worker.
4. The social worker has to be able to work with diverging expectations and resistance.

### 3 Description of situation: context

A safeguarding concern raised by the district nurse to the Community Mental Health Team highlighted a potential risk of neglect to a service user (SU) who lives at home with her son; he is also her carer. It was alleged that there was no food in the house for the service user. All the food was clearly marked with 'do not eat' and other items were marked with the carer's name. The social worker (SW) arranged a meeting to discuss the allegations with the carer. The conversation took place in the living room. The SU was in the bedroom away from the conversation.

### 4 Description of situation with Reflection in Action in action sequences

First sequence: Arriving at the home of SU

The social worker arrived at the service user's home. The front door was left slightly opened, however the social worker decided to ring the doorbell, announcing her arrival. The carer was welcoming and yet there was a sense of anticipation and

nervousness in his demeanour. The carer directed the social worker toward the living room. The living room itself was filled with boxes, books and CD's, which became apparent to the social worker belonged to the carer and not the service user. It was clear this was his room, his work space, his domain. The carer went on to explain that he is working on a project which takes up a lot of his time.

### Reflection in Action

- Emotion service user/carers: shock, surprise and denial
- Emotion professional social worker (SW): anxiety at having to pose the question
- Cognition professional social worker (SW): The social worker became aware of a shift in the power dynamic when entering the carer's work space. The SW thought that her visit seemed to disrupt the carer's working day and this could be the reason for the sense of anxiety the social worker has detected. Despite the sense of anxiety and tension on behalf of both SW and carer, the SW thought that the question of whether there was enough food for the mother (SU) must remain at the forefront of the social worker's mind and must still be asked.

### Second sequence: Conversation with Carer

Once the social worker entered the living room and the carer requested the social worker "take a seat", the conversation began in quite an open manner. The social worker went on to ask, "how everything was at home and if there was any concerns the carer would like to mention". The carer answered in a considered, cheerful matter of fact type manner. Finally, the SW asked of whether he was buying enough food for his mother.

### Reflection in Action

- Emotion of the carer: feeling apprehensive and slightly defensive.
- Emotion of the SW: Feeling confident the questions were delivered in a level and considered manner, nervous about asking about whether there was enough food for his mother.
- Cognition of the SW: The overall thought was not to respond to the defensiveness of the carer but to instead remain professional and remember the compulsory nature of the questions. The social worker purposely chose to start with quite general questions to alleviate any nerves; acknowledging the value of her own nerves in the situation. Yes, the social worker detected an element of defensiveness and a level of apprehension in the tone of his voice. The generalised questions appeared to have lightened the atmosphere as the carer appeared at ease with each question being asked. However, the social worker decided to continue with the point of questioning as to stop at this point would not have been appropriate in this instance.

### Third sequence: Carer response/reaction to question

The carer responded to the accusation with surprise and disbelief and said that the nurse was mistaken. The carer demanded to know which district nurse had made the complaint and was insistent that he needed to know. The SW told him repeatedly that she could not tell him. The carer's facial expression was one of complete disbelief. He continued to express shock and disbelief. The SW requested him to show her the kitchen area to have a look in the cupboards and the carer continued to express shock and disbelief. The carer guided her to the kitchen.

### Reflection in Action

- Emotion of the carer: feeling of surprise and disbelief
- Emotion of the SW: The social worker felt placed in an awkward situation. She felt slightly awkward to be questioning the carer's behaviour, sense of morality, beliefs and values and to ask to look through/inspect someone's home.
- Cognition of the SW: The SW understood the necessity to ask such questions. She thought the carer's behaviour was extremely defiant and that in order to contain the situation, she should remain calm and professional. She thought it was important to remain indignant and consistent in her response.

### Fourth sequence: Ending the conversation

After looking through the kitchen and having found that there was no concern about whether there was enough food for the carer's mother, the social worker highlighted the benefits of partnership working and that it is important to safeguard the wellbeing of the service user. The carer agreed and said although disappointed with the initial accusation, understood the reasoning behind it. The social worker concluded the meeting by thanking the carer for their honesty and participation in partnership working.

### Reflection in Action

- Emotion service carer: Possible feelings of embarrassment, denial and defensiveness
- Emotion professional (SW): A sense of relief the question was answered, confident in her professional approach
- Cognition professional (SW): The SW thought that the situation was dealt with as best as it could be, given the circumstances. She thought that despite the discomfort of the scenario and the questions posed, it was apparent there was an understanding of the situation from the carer's point of view. The SW intended to end the situation on a positive note.

## 5 Resources

### 5.1 Explanatory scholarly knowledge – Why do the people in this situation act in this way?

Defensive: 'All human beings have defences some of which are unconscious, that is, reactions that for the most part lie beyond our immediate awareness and control.' (Trevithick, 2013) In this particular situation, the social worker was not defensive but yet reacted to the carer's defensiveness. The carer displayed an immediate awareness of disagreement and conflict and the social worker responded to this. Perhaps this reaction by the carer was purely unconscious and yet the social worker was aware of this emotion immediately.

'Other defences are unconscious, that is, they lie beyond our immediate awareness and control and have two key features. On the one hand, their purpose is to guard us from further harm – protect us from thoughts, feelings, actions or events that are felt to be threatening, anxiety-provoking and painful – or that signal danger in some way'. (Jacobs, 2010, p. 110 in Trevithick, 2013). Self-Protection: Social workers must look after themselves and recognise their limits. In this situation, the social worker protected themselves by remaining calm and by responding in a practical, 'matter of fact' manner. Emotion was removed from the situation and the practicalities of the matter remained in the forefront of the social worker's mind. It could be argued resilience played a part in this scenario. The situation had meaning; there was an element of self-reliance and perseverance on the part of the social worker and thus the social worker had to rely on instinct and diplomacy to complete the visit.

Boundaries: 'It can be a fine line between befriending a client and getting too close but there are ways of making sure you stay on the right side' (McPherson, 2011). Being open about your actions is good advice and it gives colleagues the opportunity to point out how your actions could be misconstrued by the client or others. If you don't feel comfortable sharing what you are doing then you probably shouldn't be doing it. In this situation, the carer became defensive and boundaried. He immediately went into self-protection mode. However, the social did the same. The social worker maintained a boundaried professional manner and the careful choice of questions became a form of self-protection.

### 5.2 Scholarly intervention knowledge – How can I as a professional act in this situation?

Professional boundaries act as guidance and allows for a social worker's professionalism to grow (Dewane, 2010). In this situation, the social worker and carer dynamic boundary is apparent. Relationship based theory can therefore be applied and allows for an understanding of the power dynamic in this scenario. The social

worker must always remain professional. This however is not exclusive to service users and their carers but to fellow colleagues also.

Moreover, organisational procedures act as guidance and could be described as a major method in which to aid good practice. The social worker's tool kit and by the term 'toolkit' meaning a proficiency in observation skills, self-awareness, critical thinking and both verbal and written communication. Moreover, the use of theories along with the social worker's tool kit is vital to professional conduct. Social work is a profession that prides itself on the use of self, the person in the process (Mattison, 2000). Ultimately by remaining professional, by remaining calm and emotionally self-managed and by actively listening is appropriate this situation.

Carl Rogers (1961) however, in his person-centred approach recognised the benefits of building rapport and trust. The idea of 'unconditional positive regard' allows the individual to reach a level of self-actualisation. By this the social worker gains the ability to embrace the situation for what it is, accepts their responsibility in the situation and to trust their own judgement. This approach emphasises the individual and not the issue therefore it allows the individual to better cope with the situation and if necessary any future issues they may face. The primary technique involved in person-centred therapy is reflection, therefore when practiced appropriately will present an understanding of the individual's situation and thus promote empathy. In this situation, the social worker put herself in the position of the carer, no judgements made and therefore allowing the carer to express their opinion from their point of view.

### 5.3 Practice wisdom – What does this situation remind me of, what do I remember from similar situations?

This situation resembles many in life. However, through diplomacy, active listening and an ability to remain calm help to reduce the potential for conflict. I can recall many an incident where the potential for conflict has been high. Living in an inner city or any highly populated and built up area will always have this potential. It is in effect how you manage and avoid the conflict which is important. I can recall incidents while waiting for public transport or simply being in the queue at the local post office where the potential for a confrontational situation has been high. Again, it is the way in which you approach and manage a difficult situation and the methods of resolution which are key. The use of diplomatic language and maintaining a calm disposition, a non-threatening but firm approach is a skill developed over time. However, maintaining an understanding that not all outcomes will prove successful is realistic.

#### 5.4 Organisational- and contextual knowledge – Which underlying conditions and frameworks impact on my actions?

The Care Act 2014 sets out a clear legal framework for assessing, planning and safeguarding individuals and it allows individuals a voice. In this particular situation, the carer's voice is heard in the sense that under the new safeguarding rules the social worker was able to speak directly to the carer and find out in his own words an explanation. The Act protects adults at risk from abuse and neglect and in this scenario the carer is the accused. The social worker is therefore being transparent and direct in their approach to the situation.

Furthermore, the Making Safeguarding Personal agenda focuses on the individuals view point. By ensuring this view remains the focal point from the start of the process and thus allows working towards individual or personal outcomes. The Making Safeguarding Personal Toolkit (Local Government Association, 2015) addresses the Signs of Safety practice. Highlighting 'the direct experience of effective practice by social workers and the experiences of families'.

'The framework encourages a person-centred approach by involving the service user, their networks – social and professional – in developing intervention plans that aim to improve wellbeing. Signs of Wellbeing & Safety are an integrated practice framework for how to do adult social care work – it contains the principles to guide practice; tools for assessment and person centred planning, decision making and engaging adults and their families/ networks, including community and third sector partners. Goals of empowerment, person centred assessment and planning, and an improvement to wellbeing through a rigorous analysis process, is supported by an appreciative inquiry approach. By mapping out the case situation, the social worker and service user can see how wellbeing is defined and signs of improvement are found through a range of informal and formalised methods'. (Local Government Association, 2015).

Moreover, in this situation, consideration should also be given to The Mental Capacity Act (2005) and The Mental Health Act (2007). Naturally as professionals we must assumed a person has capacity to make specific decisions. If this is not the case then the appropriate capacity assessments should be carried out to distinguish otherwise. In this particular case, the service user has capacity therefore by law is allowed to make what we as professional may believe to be an unwise decision. In this situation, it appears detrimental for the service user's son, her carer to remain living in the same household, however the service user wishes her son to remain in the family home therefore this must be respected.

## 5.5 Skills – What Do I as a professional need to be able to do?

- It is important for the social worker to be, in the first instance calm and controlled.
- The social worker should also be non-judgmental and professionally bounded as well as diplomatic and empathic.
- The social worker should also be approachable rather than intimidating in manner. However, the 'power dynamic' between social worker and service user (in this instance the carer) may well create unavoidable tension and thus be seen as intimidating; especially if a service user refuses to engage.
- The relationship based approach emphasises this as a key issue within social work. Therefore, importance should be placed on good communication skills as well as the ability to self-reflect and be self-critical.
- Fundamentally rapport is the key to good social work practice. The ability to be able to adapt your approach to any given situation is vital.
- On a practical level, it is also vital to have good organisational skills and to be able to prioritise appropriately.
- Task centred or solution focused approaches are beneficial in the practical sense.

## 5.6 Organisational, infrastructural, time, material requirements – With what can I act?

The time constraints and limited resources do not go unnoticed in the day to day life of a social worker. The organisational responsibilities are paramount and there is a need to carry out operational procedures in a timely manner. Therefore, it is vital for a social worker to understand these 'constraints' and to work with them rather than try to fight them. This includes when the materials a social worker requires doing, the job fails, e.g. computer systems. The expectation is to continue no matter what. The social worker must therefore be creative in their use of time and to not see such system failures as a 'problem' but to work around them. The skill is to keep this at the forefront of your mind and therefore your frustration with the systems will be low.

## 5.7 Ethical and value knowledge – Whereupon do I align my actions? Which are the central values in this situation that I as professional need to consider?

In this instance, the social worker would apply the principles of The Care Act (2014) to this situation. The carers voice is an important part of this piece of legislation, 'putting carers on an equal legal footing to those they care for and putting their needs at the centre of the legislation' (The Care Act 2014) Clause 10 (3) of the Care Act defines a carer as 'an adult who provides or intends to provide care for another adult ("adult needing care")' The implications are that carers' have a right to achieve their day to day outcomes. The emphasis on prevention means that carers should receive support early on and before reaching crisis point and services now have a duty to make it easier for individuals to access support and plan for their future needs. The carer in this instance, although being the one investigated is eligible to an assessment of his own needs. Needs which may impact his relationship with his mother, the service user.

Furthermore, in terms of The Making Safeguarding Personal agenda, the focus is on getting the views of the adult at risk at the beginning of the process and working towards the outcomes they want. Again, in this instance the carers mother disagreed with the investigation however as a best interest decision the social worker decided it necessary to ask the potentially difficult questions. The outcome remained person centred, being in the best interest of the service user and carer.

## 6 Quality standards

1. Person-centred approach: The social worker is congruent and empathic.
2. There is a rapport and trust in the relationship between the social worker and the service user/carer.
3. Conflicting expectations and values and legal obligations are made transparent.
4. Empowerment: The service user and the carer voice is actively sought and heard.
5. Communication skills: To ensure the use of both verbal and nonverbal communication at all times. Verbal and nonverbal communication is professional
6. Resistance is recognised and discussed.

## 7 Reflection based on quality standards

*Person-centred approach:* I believe I was congruent and developed a rapport with the carer. My communication remained professional throughout the interaction; although in hind sight I could have improved on my delivery of some of the questioning.

*Rapport:* At all times, it was apparent the situation was tense but necessary and the carer understood the importance of the visit and ultimately the seriousness of the overall safeguarding concern. The situation ended in a way that kept the communication open.

*Empowerment:* I considered the notion of empowerment. I believe the carer was empowered and was given the space needed to voice his opinion clearly, for example in the third sequence where he continued to express shock and disbelief. He was able to speak openly and frankly.

*Communication skills:* My verbal and nonverbal communication was open and congruent.

*Transparency:* Time was spent informing the carer that this was a necessary process and I remained transparent in my delivery of the information. With regards to my legal obligation, this was made clear from the start of the interaction and therefore the carer was also able to be clear in his responses.

*Working with resistance:* The carer's autonomy was also promoted however resistance was acknowledged, perhaps due to the nature of the safeguarding concern. The carer could not help but feel the conversation was perhaps deemed interrogatory. With hindsight, I could have considered motivational interviewing's perspective of "rolling with resistance".

## 8 Alternative courses of action

On reflection, I was not fully prepared to have to question the carer as much as I did and I found it awkward and uncomfortable doing so. I expected a certain amount of defensiveness from the carer; however, felt I should have prepared more in advance. However, how much more preparation was needed, I cannot say. Moreover, I believe in this type of situation you have to be adaptable, transparent and prepared for any number of reactions. As an alternative course of action, I would be inclined to continue to stick to the context of the situation and let that be your guide.

## 9 Literature

Dewane, Claudia L. (2010). Respecting boundaries: The don'ts of dual relationships. *Social Work Today*, 10(1), 18-21.

Local Government Association (2015). *Making Safeguarding Personal: A Toolkit for Responses*. 4th Edition (January 2015)

Mattison, Marian (2000). Ethical decision making: The person in the process. *Social Work*, 45(3), pp.201-212.

McPherson, Blair (2011). Setting the boundaries in social work. The Guardian social care network: adult social care hub, 2. September <https://www.theguardian.com/social-care-network/2011/dec/02/setting-boundaries-social-work> [Accessed September 2015]

The Care Act 2014 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/23/contents/enacted> [Accessed September 2015]

The Mental Capacity Act (2005). London, Department of Health/HMSO.

The Mental Health Act (2005) London, HMSO.

Rogers, Carl R. (1961). *The characteristics of a helping relationship. On becoming a person*, 39-58.

Trevithick, P. (2011) 'Understanding defences and defensive behaviour in social work', *Journal of Social Work Practice*, Vol. 25(4): 389-412

## Appendix 3 – Ethical Approval

Department of Social, Therapeutic and Community Studies (StaCS)

Postgraduate Research Students Ethical Approval Form

CONFIDENTIAL

GOLDSMITHS University of London

Department of Department of Social, Therapeutic and Community Studies (StaCS)

Research Ethics Committee

NAME OF APPLICANT Adi Staempfli

Title of MPhil/PhD Programme: Social Work

This form should be completed in typescript and returned to the Research Administrator, Jennifer Mayo-Deman. All students should have read the appropriate guidelines on ethics (such as the BPS, BSA, AAA or ASA) and the ESRC Research Ethics Framework document. The decision of the committee regarding your application for ethical approval will be communicated to you via email.

**1. Title of proposed project:**

A Practice-Based Approach to Professional Development in Social Work: Reflective Learning on Key Situations.

**2. Brief outline of the project, including its purpose:**

This thesis addresses the challenge for social work to find ways to fuse knowledge, practice and values within and for a complex and uncertain practice world. The main question this thesis addresses is: How can social workers be best supported to continuously develop their professional knowledge, skills and values and integrate these with their practice? From a practice-based perspective, I suggest that a focus on typical and reoccurring practice situations in reflective learning in and for practice, as proposed in the Key Situation in social work model, offers an innovative form of continuous professional development. This model proposes a reflective learning process embedded in the social practices of communities and organised around typical, reoccurring social work situations<sup>19</sup>. However, there is no systematic account of what these key situations in English social work are.

The research question this project seeks to answer is: ‘What are the typical reoccurring situations in social work practice in England?’ The aim of the participatory data collection and analysis method with experienced social workers is to describe these key situations in face-to-face and online spaces.

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<sup>19</sup> TOV, E., KUNZ, R. & STÄMPFLI, A. 2016a. *Schlüsselsituationen der Sozialen Arbeit. Professionalität durch Wissen, Reflexion und Diskurs in Communities of Practice (key situation in social work. Professionalism through knowledge, reflection and discourse in communities of practice)*, 2<sup>nd</sup> revised ed., Bern, hep.

The original contribution to knowledge this thesis makes is to merge practice-based and situated learning perspectives on professional development with the KSM blended reflective learning model. The resulting innovative practice-based approach has the potential to significantly inform organisational learning, knowledge management and quality development and offers the basis for further practice-based research.

### 3. **Description of Methods of Data Collection:**

From a practice-based ontological and epistemological perspective, this research project will engage in two motions: first, starting with a zooming in on specific practice situations that are second, clustered in a zooming out motion to bring to light the general key situations in English social work. The current research project is part of a larger international action research project that aims to further the development of dialogical, reflective learning in social work and this project adopts an action research methodology that is aligned to the practice-based ontological and epistemological assumptions.

A purposive, criterion led and snowball sampling process will be applied to recruit experienced social workers (see criteria in section 4). For the purpose of participant recruitment demographic data and data in relation to the sampling criteria will be collected via questionnaire or by email, telephone or face-to-face conversation.

A CoRe method<sup>20</sup> will be adapted as the principal participatory data collection and analysis method. It will involve three one day workshops with social workers from three different fields (child and family; adult and voluntary, independent or health social work) in which data is dialogically collected and an initial analysis is carried out. Subsequently, I will analyse and synthesise the data from the three workshops and the resulting list of draft key situation titles will be uploaded to the key situation platform. All participants will then be invited to collaborate as part of the internal validation on this platform. The data collection and analysis in this participatory method are thus intertwined.

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**If the research involves human participants (whether living or recently deceased) or animal subjects, please continue. If the research involves historical, textual or aesthetic data or secondary data already in the public realm and does not directly involve the observation or direct engagement with human or animal participants, then please jump to Question 19.**

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### 4. **Specify the number of and type of participant(s) likely to be involved.**

To get the views of all social work sectors represented, I will run a minimum of three workshops with one group consisting of social workers working in the independent, voluntary or health sector and the others with social workers from statutory settings (child & family and adult social work). I will as far as possible pay attention to representation from different social groups and genders that is reflective of the profession. I aim to recruit six to ten participants from the third sector, and twelve to twenty from both statutory sectors. In total 18 to 30 participants will be recruited by a purposive criterion led and snowball sampling process. The selection criteria for participants are:

Participants must be:

- Registered social worker

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<sup>20</sup> GHISLA, G., BAUSCH, L. & BOLDRINI, E. 2011. CoRe. Kompetenzen-Ressourcen: Ein Verfahren zur Erstellung von Kompetenzprofilen und zur Entwicklung von Bildungsplänen. (Competence-Resources: A method to create competence profiles and to develop educational plans). Contone: Idea.

- Working in any social work/care sector: statutory child and family and adult social workers and social workers form the independent and health service
- Working in a job role that falls under the remit of the global definition of Social Work Profession<sup>21</sup>
- Working directly with any service user group (service users, carers, families, groups or communities)

Participants should:

- Have a minimum of 5 years' experience as a practicing registered social worker
- Work in a role that is respected by colleagues for their expertise, such as principal social worker and others

**5. State where the data collection will be undertaken.**

The workshops will take place at Goldsmiths, University of London. If preferred by participants, I will travel to another location and conduct a workshop in a social work organisation or university.

**6. State the potential adverse consequences to the participant(s), or particular groups of people, if any, and what precautions are to be taken. If any potential adverse consequences, please state how you will address these.**

A risk of Internet based research is the exposure of individuals, which can be avoided by preserving the anonymity of participants. However, in the context of this project – as with other Internet based methods - it will be difficult to maintain complete anonymity and privacy. The potential risk of disclosure of personal data is mitigated by the confidentiality procedures and these are discussed further in section 10 (confidentiality). Furthermore, participants may elect to participate openly and will be offered information to enable informed decision making. Informed consent for participation in the research will be sought prior to participation.

Besides the risk of breach of confidentiality, two other potential sources of harm are relating to questions asked that provoke emotional reactions and to the welfare of an online community<sup>22</sup>. However, risks also need to be seen in the context of potential benefits for the community and participants<sup>23</sup>.

As the Key Situation platform aims to support continuous professional development and professional discourse within a professional community, the participation and contributions from both researcher and participants are beneficial to the network as a whole and I cannot imagine any potential harm arising from this to the online community. Benefits of participation, in addition may be that in this research project I aim to start building a core of network members and participants in England. Therefore, participants may choose to continue contributing to the network and may in time become facilitators for reflective learning groups.

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<sup>21</sup> IFSW & IASSW. 2014. *Global Definition of Social Work* [Online]. Berne: The International Federation of Social Workers and The International Association of Schools of Social Work. Available: <http://ifsw.org/get-involved/global-definition-of-social-work/> [Accessed].

<sup>22</sup> CONVERY, I. & COX, D. 2012. A review of research ethics in internet-based research. *Practitioner Research in Higher Education*, 6, 50-57, page 52.

<sup>23</sup> AF SEGERSTAD, Y. H., KULLENBERG, C., KASPEROWSKI, D. & HOWES, C. 2016. Studying Closed Communities On-line: Digital Methods and Ethical Considerations Beyond Informed Consent and Anonymity. In: ZIMMER, M. & KINDER-KURLANDA, K. (eds.) *Internet Research Ethics for the Social Age: New Cases and Challenges*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, page 3.

Social workers may need to get permission from their employer if they intend to participate in the study as part of their working hours. I will therefore liaise with employers to support interested participants. In doing so, I will be mindful of the Social Research Association's guidelines<sup>24</sup> that point out that researchers in communicating with gatekeepers such as managers in social work organisations should be wary of disturbing their relationship and must adhere to the principle of informed consent directly from participants. I will liaise with employers and other organisations (see section 8) to gain access or to support interested participants in their negotiations with employers. In doing so I will be mindful of the employee-employer relationship and will not advocate for participation, if it is not the expressed wish of the potential participant. In any case, I will seek direct informed consent from the participant.

**7. State any procedures which may cause discomfort, distress or harm to the participant(s), or particular groups of people, and the degree of discomfort or distress likely to be entailed. Please also state how you will address these.**

The topic of research will be such that I do not envisage that any discomfort will result from participation as none of the questions I will ask in the research process are likely to cause distress or offence.

In participatory research the aim is to create a fair relationship and an interesting and meaningful experience for those taking part<sup>25</sup>. However, as this is a group process social dynamics will be impacting on the experience of all involved. Therefore, I will pay attention to group dynamic and from the outset of the collaboration focus on ethical treatment that is not discriminatory or oppressive and instead appreciative of diversity and the contributions from participants.

I will be mindful of participants' individual needs in relation to communication, disability and comprehension and will use non-discriminatory inclusive language and offer additional resources, such as for example large print or electronic information for listening programmes to enable participants with a communication impairment to fully participate in the research process. The participant information will outline the important contribution that participants are making, not only by providing access to data but moreover by analysing the data in the workshops and online.

In the workshop, I will begin with an introduction and information session aiming to create a collegiate atmosphere, establish ground rules and offer clarification. Furthermore, I am aware that my own background and emotions will affect the research and therefore I must be cognisant of my position in relation to the research context through reflexivity in respect of my own positionality in relation to participants and the topic. I will be mindful to pay attention to this both in the actual participatory process as well as when analysing the data and communicating with participants online.

Last, the online collaboration may be experienced as challenging by participants for two reasons: first, writing and reflecting takes time, thus placing additional competing demands on already busy practitioners. This will be mitigated by the asynchronous nature of communication. Participants will be able to participate whenever they have a moment and I will be flexible with regard to timescales. Second, participants may feel insecure about contributing online as they may think that posts have to be perfect before they can be shared, a sentiment that I have encountered a lot in my collaborations with others on the Key Situation platform. It is therefore important to encourage and motivate contributions through constructive feedback. The feedback from participants in the key situation pilot implementation in London has shown that this is helpful.

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<sup>24</sup> SRA 2003. Ethical Guidelines.: Social Research Association, page 29.

<sup>25</sup> NIND, M., WILES, R., BENGRIY-HOWELL, A. & CROW, G. 2013. Methodological innovation and research ethics: forces in tension or forces in harmony? *Qualitative Research*, 13, 650-667.

**8. State how the participant(s) will be recruited. (Please attach copies of any recruiting materials if used).**

As part of the criterion led purposive and snowball sampling method I will make use of existing networks and contacts such as the Social Work Education Network (SWEN), Skills for Care, the Principal Social Workers Network and the Teaching Partnerships to recruit potential participants. I will contact people by email, through Twitter and in personal conversations with interested professionals. I will offer information sessions for interested groups. These can be organised as face-to-face meetings or as webinars. Once participants are identified, I will seek to increase participation through allowing for snowball sampling. Any professional who is interested to contribute to the research will be given participant information and vetted against the inclusion/exclusion criteria.

As a further strategy to aid recruitment I will offer to conduct the workshops in a location of the participants choosing (for example in another part of the country).

I will provide written information about the project and outline what is involved in participation, any risk and potential benefits (including confidentiality issues and related choices and consent). I will be available for clarification and discussion of concerns.

I will offer monetary and non-monetary incentives as this has been found to be effective. I have been successful with application of funds and will be able to offer participants food and refreshments on the workshop day, a voucher (£40) in recognition of their time and will offer to liaise with employers if participants want support with negotiating paid time off for participation.

I cannot foresee any conflicting financial interests in this research. Funding, obtained through Goldsmiths' Teaching and Learning Fellowship, will enable me to offer the incentives and other than the publication of the findings, there are no other obligations that arise out of this funding. However, the provision of incentives is an ethical issue. There is tentative evidence that financial incentives can positively influence decisions of individuals to participate in a study and have a greater effect than other incentives. The literature reviewed suggests that the amount of the payment is less important and if paid in advance (at the point of consent) incentives are more effective than those paid after participation.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, incentives might offer a means of at least partially reducing sampling bias by influencing participation most strongly in individuals who are otherwise less likely to take part in research projects<sup>27</sup> Based on the above findings I will pay out the incentive at the point of participants' consenting to participation.

I will offer interested participants to negotiate with the employers that the employee can attend in their working hours. To support this, I will offer workshops and information sessions about the project, the overall KSM and the intended outcomes and benefits to employers and interested participants, relating to professional development, practice development through reflective learning, practice-based research, knowledge sharing and quality assurance.

**9. State the manner in which the participant(s) consent will be obtained (please include a copy of the intended consent form and cover letter).**

Participation will be voluntary, written information about the research aims and process will be provided and written consent will be sought. Informed written consent for participation in the research will be sought prior to participation. Before beginning the data collection and analysis I will ensure that I have obtained written informed consent from each participant and will ensure

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<sup>26</sup> SIMMONS, E. & WILMOT, A. 2004. Incentive payments on social surveys: A literature review. *Social survey methodology bulletin*, 1-11.

<sup>27</sup> GUYLL, M., SPOTH, R. & REDMOND, C. 2003. The effects of incentives and research requirements on participation rates for a community-based preventive intervention research study. *The Journal of Primary Prevention*, 24, 25-41.

that participants understand that consent can be withdrawn at any point in the research without any adverse implications.

In an online setting, an overt and active approach is important in relation to informed consent. Participants must be aware of the potential uses of their contributions, particularly if there is a possibility of dissemination of data outside the research setting that “might unintentionally or inadvertently reveal subjects’ personal identities”<sup>28</sup>

There will be a two-fold consent process. First, it is concerned with participation in the workshop and second with participation on the key situation platform. The initial consent will be discussed and taken before the workshop and the second regarding participation in the online data analysis and validation at the workshop. Information will be provided in relation to both (see section 10). It is important to consider that some participants may not want to participate because the online collaboration may not fit with their experience or their preferences. I will enable participation in the offline workshop for those who want to participate in this aspect of the research only and will maintain participant freedom about participation.

- 9a. Will the participant(s) be fully informed about the nature of the project and of what they will be required to do?  
Yes.
- 9b. Is there any deception involved?  
No.
- 9c. Will the participant(s) be told they can withdraw from participation at any time, if they wish?  
Yes.
- 9d. Will data be treated confidentially regarding personal information, and what will the participant(s) be told about this? How will data be stored and what plans do you have for eventually destroying it?

In terms of data, two sets need to be distinguished: personal data about participants and data regarding professional key situations. As the separation of personal data and research data in the online phase of this study are linked I will discuss this further in the next section.

To manage the selection process and to ensure a good fit for the group composition, data in relation to the selection criteria will be collected. These will be accumulated in conjunction with other demographic data (age, organisation, service users group, job title, ethnicity, age, sexuality, gender, social care sector, statutory or voluntary mandate, department, team, setting (residential, non-residential, hospital, community) and years of practice as qualified social worker, allowing for an analysis of the research process. To verify qualification status the HCPC registration number and in order to manage the research process contact details of participants will be recorded separately. This data in relation to participants will be stored on a password protected USB stick and will be deleted after 5 years.

In terms of offline and particularly the online collaboration additional issues arise. First, all personal data about participants will be treated confidentially, if participants elect to participate anonymously. If participants elect to take part without anonymity, partial data (full name and email address) will be made public on the key situation

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<sup>28</sup> NEUHAUS, F. & WEBMOOR, T. 2012. Agile ethics for massified research and visualization. *Information, Communication & Society*, 15, 43-65, page 45.

platform, which is password protected and only open to the professional and academic social work communities. Special data privacy regulations are in operation for this. Second, there is the data regarding professional activities and situations. This data is highly anonymised as it focuses on general, typical and reoccurring practice situations, rather than with specific, contextualised situations. This type of data is therefore less problematic and adheres to data protection legislation. However, it is important to note that if participants register under their real name their edits and comments on the data (key situations) will be visible to all participants, myself as the researcher and the administrators of the platform. I will inform the participants of the issues in relation to confidentiality and anonymity and ensure that they understand the difference and the consequences of participation before consenting to participation either anonymously or not. See section 10 for a fuller discussion.

- 9e. If the participant(s) are young persons under the age of 18 years or 'vulnerable persons' (e.g. with learning difficulties or with severe cognitive disability), how will consent be given (i.e. from the participant themselves or from a third party such as a parent or guardian) and how will assent to the research be asked for?

N/A

#### **10. Will the data be confidential?**

As outlined, I will offer participants the option of participating anonymously or as named participants (depending on their preference). I have no vested interest regarding either, as my concern is to create a valid list of key situations. However, I do not want to preclude participants of being recognised for their important and immensely valuable contribution they are making in the early stages of the development of an English key situation platform. In recognition of participation principles I will offer this choice<sup>29</sup>. This has implications for anonymity and confidentiality and I will outline the two processes planned for both scenarios. Before outlining the two it is important to outline the data privacy regulations and issues in relation to the Key Situation platform.

The platform is only open to social work practitioners and academics but at the same time every social worker may gain access. It is therefore a public space for the professional and academic communities but not for the general public. An important decision in relation to data security and privacy in Wiki research is related to the provider<sup>30</sup>. As part of the #keysituation project<sup>31</sup> a detailed analysis of different Wiki systems has been carried out. Confluence by Atlassian<sup>32</sup> was selected as the most suitable platform as it enables collaboration and ensures data protection as permissions can be set for each space (page)<sup>33</sup>. The Key Situation platform is hosted by a provider

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<sup>29</sup> ORTON-JOHNSON, K. 2012. Ethics in Online Research; Evaluating the ESRC Framework for Research Ethics Categorisation of Risk. In: HUGHES, J. (ed.) *Sage Internet Research Methods*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Dehli and Singapore: Sage.

<sup>30</sup> HARRICHARAN, M. & BHOPAL, K. 2014. Using blogs in qualitative educational research: An exploration of method. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 37, 324-343.

<sup>31</sup> [http://www.grstiftung.ch/de/portfolio/projekte/alle/y\\_2013/GRS-055-13.html](http://www.grstiftung.ch/de/portfolio/projekte/alle/y_2013/GRS-055-13.html)

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.atlassian.com/software/confluence>

<sup>33</sup> TSCHOPP, D., STÄMPFLI, A., KUNZ, R., TOV, E. & GONZALEZ, P. 2016. Konzept Netzwerk und Plattform Schlüsselsituationen. unpublished report ed. Basel and London: Association Network Key Situations in Social Work/Verein Netzwerk Schlüsselsituationen Soziale Arbeit.

(Bitvoodoo<sup>34</sup>) in Switzerland who hosts and maintains the system and guarantees adherence to the local data protection regulations. As the platform is protected, no data can be found or accessed by Internet search engines<sup>15</sup>.

The ordinary registration process on the Key Situation platform is set up, so that information (name, work email address, employer and department address) are collected. This information is necessary to ensure that only social workers can gain access to the platform. This data is verified by an administrator by means of a web search. To safeguard privacy, a data privacy lawyer with expertise in European and Swiss law (the platform is run by the Swiss Association under Swiss jurisdiction) was consulted. The recommendations to safeguard both platform user data and data in relation to social work situations have been incorporated in a 'data privacy statement' and 'terms of use'<sup>15</sup>. These state that "without consent from the person, sensitive personal data can only be processed, stored or passed on to a third party in anonymised form". Therefore registrants have to agree to both statements<sup>35</sup>.

All platform users can see the basic personal information of any platform member (Name, First Name, Email) but no other personal information (employer and department address or anything else) as this is added by the user voluntarily. Content produced by the user (such as comments, edits or whole pages) can be seen by all platform users if it is in an open space, or by those who have access to a specific closed space<sup>15</sup>. It is worth noting that the platform currently (April 2017) has about 1340 users mainly in Germany, Switzerland and Luxembourg.

For this research, the ordinary registration process can be waived, as only social workers will be selected as participants and I will carry out the checks that normally is part of the registration process during sampling and selection processes. However, participants will have to agree to the Terms of Use and the Data Privacy Statement<sup>17</sup>. I will therefore provide written information about the nature of the offline and online element of the data collection and analysis and a copy of these regulations for the Key Situation platform to all participants before giving consent.

To safeguard privacy and confidentiality further I will make use of a closed space (safe rooms as recommended<sup>5 12</sup>). This space can only be accessed by myself, participants and platform administrators of the Association Key Situations in Social Work. As a platform administrator, I have the ability and expertise to create a private space on the platform and to manage this space. However, once the research has ended, it is my intention to publish the key situation titles on a space open to the all platform members. I will therefore copy the title list to this space. In doing so only content and no related personal data will be copied and thus will not reveal the participants who co-produced it<sup>15</sup>.

The Terms of Use state that it is "explicitly forbidden to copy, paste and publish any data from the platform on the Internet." However, copying and storing of text for personal use for the purpose of learning, professional development or teaching is explicitly permitted<sup>17</sup>. To protect privacy further, I will ask participants not to print, scan, copy or distribute Wiki posts from the closed online research space as suggested in the literature<sup>12</sup>.

The data generated regarding key situations in the workshops will be transferred to the platform by myself or a research assistant. This will ensure that the situations will not be linked to any individual participants. However, for the following discursive online data analysis on the Key Situation platform participants must register on the platform. Here the outlined two options are open.

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<sup>34</sup> <https://www.bitvoodoo.ch/bitvoodoo-atlassian-platinum-expert-en>

<sup>35</sup> ASSOCIATION NETWORK KEY SITUATIONS. 2016. Data Privacy Statement. London and Basel: Association Network Key Situations. and ASSOCIATION NETWORK KEY SITUATIONS IN SOCIAL WORK. 2016. Terms of Use for the platform 'Key Situations in Social Work'. Basel and London: Association Network Key Situations in Social Work.

### **Anonymous participation**

If participants elect to participate anonymously, they will need to register on the platform with a private email address. Such a private address should then be created specifically for the participation and should use a pseudonym not otherwise used<sup>36</sup>. I will offer advice on how to create a pseudonym for those participants who wish to remain anonymous.

### **Non-anonymous participation**

Because participation may be empowering, an option is to allow participants to choose either “anonymity or disclosure of their personal data”<sup>37</sup> and “anonymity may not always be preferred as the default especially in a participatory culture”<sup>38</sup>. In this case it is important for researchers to be “sensitive to the preferences of research participants”<sup>18</sup>. I will therefore offer participants the option to be named as co-producers of the title list. This means that participants will register on the platform with their real name and their work email address. I will advise participants to clarify with their employer whether this is in line with the organisation’s social media and other regulations. As the platform is a protected professional space I do not foresee any potential of harm to research participants who choose to participate under their real name. Furthermore, I will explicitly list participants who have created the key situation list online and in a planned publication (monograph). This will be part of the consent information and process provided to participants, in order for them to make informed decisions.

10a. Will the data be anonymous?

The data published on the platform in an open space will, as outlined above be anonymous. That is to say that no participant, even if they participate under their real name will be able to be linked with the generalised key situation titles (see section 10).

10b. How will the data remain confidential?

To ensure that the research space remains confidential, following the publication of the key situation titles the closed space will be deleted (and with it any old copies of pages) no later than 6 months after publication. Therefore, once the closed space has been deleted no data will be held that allows links between participants and data to be made.

Any changes made by platform users on the open space, created following the end of this research project, will be traceable by platform users to the author. However, this will not be part of this research and if participants choose to continue to engage on the platform, they do so voluntarily. They will not be identifiable as research participants on the platform unless they choose to declare this, which is within their own power.

11. **Will the research involve the investigation of illegal conduct? If yes, give details and say how you yourself will be protected from harm or suspicion of illegal conduct?**

No.

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<sup>36</sup> ROBERTS, L. D. 2015. Ethical issues in conducting qualitative research in online communities. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 12, 314-325.

<sup>37</sup> ESPOSITO, A. 2012. Research Ethics in Emerging Forms of Online Learning: Issues Arising from a Hypothetical Study on a MOOC. *Electronic Journal of e-Learning*, 10, 315-325.

<sup>38</sup> LIU, S. B. The Emerging Ethics of Studying Social Media Use with a Heritage Twist - workshop Revisiting Research Ethics in the Facebook Era: Challenges in Emerging CSCW Research. The ACM Conference, 2010 Savannah, Georgia, US.

12. **Is it possible that the research might disclose information regarding child sexual abuse or neglect? If yes, indicate how such information will be passed to the relevant authorities (e.g. social workers, police), but also indicate how participants will be informed about the handling of such information were disclosure of this kind to occur. A warning to this effect must be included in the consent form if such disclosure is likely to occur.**

This is unlikely. The participating social workers may however talk about service users who are already known to the authorities. If any information is being disclosed about child abuse or neglect, which is not already known to the relevant authorities (which is very unlikely but may occur in a discussion of situations with social workers who are not working in child protection), I will discuss with the participant about how this information is passed on to the authorities and will agree a plan for this. I will follow up on this to verify that the plan has been implemented. Such occurrences will be documented by me for the purpose of follow up.

13. **State what kind of feedback, if any, will be offered to participants.**

The participants will be given access to the Key Situation platform where they can see the results of the research (key situation title list). They will be invited to further comment on this. I will inform participants of the planned book publication.

14. **State your expertise for conducting the research proposed.**

My expertise relates to both knowledge and skill in relation to participatory processes and research methods, going back 25 years.

My research experience goes back to my Diploma in Social Work, for which I conducted narrative interviews with young people with supervision of a social scientist (PhD level) in 1989. I have conducted focus group discussions in a previous study in 2005<sup>39</sup> and have recently designed two studies at Goldsmiths' and have in the first one organised recruitment and consent processes and carried out the data collection and quantitative analysis as well as contributing to the qualitative data analysis<sup>40</sup>. The second study involved focus groups on the newly introduced 'Intervision' model, one of which I have led. This study is ongoing. Furthermore, as part of the research for the key situation book I have carried out thematic analysis of written reflections. I am aware of issues in relation to rigorous and valid research practice.

Between 2002 and 2006 I completed an MSc Drugs in Society: Policy and Intervention. As part of this I completed an applied research methods module at masters' level. The assessment was by coursework and consisted of a 2500 word methodological critique of three research papers and a 2500 word research proposal. I passed both assessments with distinction. The subsequent mixed method research involved administering a standardised questionnaire at pre- and post-intervention points in time with quantitative

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<sup>39</sup> STÄMPFLI, A. (2005) *Fallkoordination in der interinstitutionellen Betreuung von Drogenabhängigen in Bern: Evaluation eines interdisziplinären Case Managements Projektes*. Ed. Soziothek.

<sup>40</sup> STAEMPFLI, A., ADSHEAD, L. & FLETCHER, J. 2015. Ready for Qualified Practice? A Comparative Study of Capability for Critical Reflection and Analysis of MA Social Work and MA Step Up to Social Work Students at the End of Second Placement. *Social Work Education*, 34, 952-966.

data analysis on SPSS and qualitative interviewing at follow up and thematic analysis<sup>41</sup>. I passed this dissertation with distinction.

As part of my professional activity as an educator I have worked with numerous groups in a teaching and learning context and hold a certificate of advanced studies in Higher Education from Berne University. I am familiar with and knowledgeable about both the CoRe process and the key situations and overarching characteristics of the Swiss chart. I have worked with students and practice educators with key situations in many reflective learning groups since 2009 in both Switzerland and England.

My IT skills in relation to managing the online data validation process are very good and should any issues arise, I have excellent support by IT specialists from within the network key situations.

Overall, I believe that my emerging research skills in combination with my IT competence and capability of working with groups as well as my knowledge are sufficient to carry out this study.

15. **In cases of research with young persons under the age of 18 years or ‘vulnerable persons’ (e.g. with learning difficulties or with severe cognitive disability), or with those in legal custody, will face-to-face interviews or observations or experiments be overseen by a third party (such as a teacher, care worker or prison officer)?**

N/A

16. **If data is collected from an institutional location (such as a school, prison, hospital), has agreement been obtained by the relevant authority (e.g. Head Teacher, Local Education Authority, Home Office)?**

N/A

17. **For those conducting research with young persons under the age of 18 years or ‘vulnerable persons’ (e.g. with learning difficulties or with severe cognitive disability), do you have Criminal Records Bureau clearance? (Ordinarily unsupervised contact with minors would require such clearance. Please see *College Code of Practice on Research Ethics, 2005*). Please provide evidence of such clearance.**

N/A

- 
18. **Will the research place you in situations of harm, injury or criminality?**  
No.

19. **Might the research cause harm to those represented in it? If so, how?**  
No.

20. **Will the research cause harm or damage to bystanders or the immediate environment?**  
No.

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<sup>41</sup> STÄMPFLI, A. (2006) *Can referrals and repatriations of heavy drug users increase service uptake? An evaluation of a multi-disciplinary, coercive intervention*. (Unpublished Master dissertation). Middlesex University,

21. **Are there any conflicts of interest regarding the investigation and dissemination of the research (e.g. with regard to compromising independence or objectivity due to financial gain)?**

I cannot foresee any conflicting interests. I am planning to publish the thesis as a monograph but experience has taught me that this is not a financially interesting endeavour. The funding obtained through Goldsmiths' Teaching and Learning award will only be used for the outlined purposes and will not pay for any of my time or expenses.

22. **Is the research likely to have any negative impact on the academic status or reputation of the College?**

No.

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**ALL APPLICANTS**

**Please note that the Committee should be notified of any adverse or unforeseen circumstances arising out of this study. Significant changes to the research design should be notified to your Supervisor and relayed to the Committee.**

**Signature of Applicant**

2017

**Date** 27 April

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**TO BE COMPLETED BY PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR**

**Please note that the Department Research Ethics Committee should be notified of any adverse or unforeseen circumstances arising out of this study or of any emerging ethical concerns that the Supervisor may have about the research once it has commenced.**

**Has the student read the appropriate guidelines on ethics (or equivalent ones, such as the AAA or ASA) and the ESRC Research Ethics Framework document? [Approval will not be granted unless the student has demonstrated to the supervisor that they have read such documents.] Yes**

**Has there been appropriate discussion of the ethical implications of the research with yourself as Supervisor? Yes**

**Are the ethical implications of the proposed research adequately described in this application? Yes**

**Signature of Principal Supervisor**

2017

**Date** 7<sup>th</sup> June

## Appendix 4 - Addendum to the Ethical Approval

(originally approved by Prof Claudia Bernard on 7 June 2017)

**PhD student:** Adi Staempfli

**Supervisor:** Prof Claudia Bernard

**Title of proposed project:** A Practice-Based Approach to Professional Development in Social Work: Reflective Learning on Key Situations.

### **Progress so far and proposed changes to the overall method**

Due to significant changes in the proposed research design, I am herewith submitting an addendum to the original ethical approval that outlines the changes in the design, including the revised methods of data collection, sampling strategies and the ethical considerations arising from the revised methods.

As a reminder, the research question to be addressed in this study is: what are the typical, reoccurring (key) situations that social workers encounter in their practice in England? In other words, I aim to establish what social workers say they typically do.

In the original ethical approval, I proposed an adapted CoRe (Competencies Resources) method (Ghisla et al., 2014; Ghisla, 2007; Kaiser, 2005) as the principal participatory data collection and analysis method. So far, I have successfully recruited 13 social workers from different fields and English regions and have held two one day workshops, in which data was dialogically collected and an initial analysis was carried out.

I have subsequently synthesised this data, resulting in a list of draft key situation titles and have analysed these in the light of current literature that describes the roles, activities and typologies of English social work. A comparison of the provisional key situation titles with the categorisations in the literature shows that these situations may well be falling under several of the typologies of social work (Payne, 2005 and Dominelli, 2009 in Moriarty, et al., 2015; and Beresford (2007) and tasks and responsibilities (Dominelli 2009 and Asquith et al. 2005 in Moriarty et al. 2015). I found that the descriptions of roles, responsibilities and tasks have first mainly a normative function and, second are at a higher level of abstraction and are therefore rather generalised. This led me to conclude that the analysis based on the current literature did not enable analysis at the concrete level of situation practice, thus I concur with Beresford (2007) who argued that there is a lack of understanding of what social workers actually do.

As planned, I have uploaded the draft titles to the key situation platform and invited all participants to collaborate as part of an internal validation process (as part of the CoRe method) on this platform. However, this last stage of the research process was unsuccessful and engagement from participants was minimal. Therefore, the draft developed key situation titles could not be agreed by the participants.

I therefore explored alternative methods to validate the draft key situation titles and I now propose to carry out a Delphi study. In revising the methods, I propose to reconceptualise the initial CoRe method as the first stage of the Delphi method. Such a qualitative data gathering method is required in Delphi studies, where little is known about the research area (Humphrey-Murto et al., 2017) as is the case in relation to what social workers actually do in practice. This initial phase is followed by two survey rounds, in which participants are invited to rate the key situation titles. The whole approach to data collection and analysis therefore looks as follows:

Zooming in	Zooming out			
<b>Development of draft key situation titles</b>	<b>Design and review of questionnaire</b>	<b>Delphi round I questionnaire</b>	<b>Review of questionnaire</b>	<b>Delphi round II questionnaire</b>
<b>CoRe workshops</b> Elaboration of tasks, areas of responsibilities and initial key situation titles.	<b>Analysis</b> and definition of key situation titles as items for questionnaire by researcher.	<b>Expert review and rating</b> of key situation titles and commenting on clarity and missing titles.	<b>Adaption of questionnaire</b> based on quantitative and qualitative data.	<b>Expert re-rating</b> of situation titles based on results report and rate any new titles from round I.
<b>Initial analysis</b> and clustering of tasks and development of draft key situation titles.	<b>Development of questionnaire and pre-tests</b> of questionnaire and survey tool.	<b>Quantitative and qualitative analysis</b> of rankings and comments and adaption of key situation titles.	<b>Preparation of results report</b> (feedback) to expert panel.	<b>Quantitative analyses</b> of expert rankings and qualitative analysis of comments.

For the purpose of this addendum, I will only outline the changes based on the revised methods, as the considerations outlined in the original ethical approval in relation to the CoRe workshops remain valid. These changed aspects are listed under the headings of the original ethical approval.

### **Sampling and sample size**

For the Delphi study, I will need to recruit a panel of experts. For this, I will apply a purposive and snowball sampling method to recruit participants who match the defined criteria for the two Delphi rounds.

In addition to the criteria used for the initial CoRe method, I will include the following two criteria that participants must meet:

- Have a minimum of 5 years' experience as a practicing registered social worker.
- Work in a role that is respected by colleagues for their expertise, such as Principal Social Worker, Advanced Practitioner, Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP), Best Interest Assessor or Independent Social Work practitioner.

I will also apply a non-probabilistic quota sampling strategy, seeking to ensure that participants are reflecting views from all English regions and the socio-demographics of the social work workforce. Therefore, I will strive to include at least 3 participants from every region and monitor representation of practitioners with diverse characteristics in relation to gender, race, ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation (but not age, as this is expected to be higher due to the experience required). However, this is not to say that the sample will be representative of the overall workforce (Teater and Chonody, 2017).

I will aim to recruit between 35 and 40 participants in the first round, aiming for a return of at least 20 questionnaires in the second Delphi round.

#### **State where the data collection will be undertaken**

I have selected SoSci Survey, which is a web-based survey platform ([www.soscisurvey.de](http://www.soscisurvey.de)). This tool was chosen for several reasons: it was designed for social sciences; it is a shared tool for a community of researchers that is supported by fee paying organisations who use it; it offers many different question types; it is free to use for individual researchers; it allows export of data to excel; it uses SSL encryption for data transmission and in the standard setting for the online survey it “only collects few meta data for each interview, such as the time and date when the interview started” (<https://www.soscisurvey.de/help/doku.php/en:survey:privacy>). This tool offers a good fit in terms of ethical principles and confidentiality and I will discuss the importance of data protection in the section on ethical considerations (see further outline below).

#### **Potential adverse consequences to the participant(s)**

The Delphi study’s internet-based survey rounds involve gathering data directly from participants. As with all research, the main risks are associated the risk of breach of confidentiality. In addition, consideration needs to be given to the demands on participants, who are all busy practitioners. However, risks also need to be seen in the context of potential benefits for the professional community.

The potential risk of disclosure of personal data is mitigated by the confidentiality procedures outlined below.

I have already carried out a pilot study and have found that five social workers took on average 18.5 minutes to complete the questionnaire, ranging from 12 to 24 minutes. However, these social workers completed the questionnaire together in a PC-lab and this may have influenced the completion time, as distractions were minimal. I would expect under other circumstances that completion will take between 15 to 35 minutes. Participants will be asked to complete the questionnaire twice with the second round including items for which no agreement was reached in the first survey round and with additionally suggested items (titles) from that first round. It is not possible at this point to make a judgement as to how long this list will be. I would expect it to be shorter.

As the Key Situation platform aims “to support continuous professional development and professional discourse” within a professional community (Association Network Key Situations in Social Work 2016:1), the participation and contributions from both researcher and participants are potentially beneficial to the network and the professional community as a whole. I have discussed the potential contribution the KSM could make to education and

professional development and the benefits to participants will be that they get to know the KSM and are able to substantially contribute to the development of the English Key Situation platform. They may do so as anonymous or named participants (depending on their preference in the first phase).

**Procedures which may cause discomfort, distress or harm to the participant(s)**

The topic of research will be such that I do not envisage that any discomfort will result from participation as none of the questions I will ask in the research process are likely to cause distress or offence.

**How the participant(s) will be recruited. (Please attach copies of any recruiting materials if used).**

As with the recruitment of participants for the CoRe workshops, I will make use of existing networks such as the Social Work Education Network (SWEN); Skills for Care; the Principal Social Workers' networks for both child and family and adult social workers; BASW's list of independent social workers and the Teaching Partnerships to recruit potential participants. I have already been provided with support from both Chief Social Workers who said they will support the call for participation and one co-chair of the Adults Principal Social Worker network is supportive and is enabling me to speak to the PSW conference at the beginning of February.

I will provide these gatekeepers and others social workers by email, through Twitter and direct contact with interested professionals, which will include a link to the first survey round. Participants who take part in the first CoRe workshop will also be invited to join the panel. In the Delphi study, I will also seek to increase participation by allowing for snowball sampling.

Therefore, for the first Delphi round, participants will be able to self-select. While Delphi expert panels are usually recruited before the first survey is sent, I hope by merging the recruitment and first survey round, to reduce the hurdles and address some of the common weaknesses of Delphi, related to survey fatigue. Participants will at the end of the first Delphi round be asked whether they would like to complete the second survey round and will be offered an opportunity to leave their email address for this purpose. In order to ensure as far as possible that the participants in the second Delphi round are reflective of the professional community across the country, I will use a non-probabilistic quota sampling strategy, outlined above.

**Manner in which the participant(s) consent will be obtained (please include a copy of the intended consent form and cover letter).**

The participants - in the internet-based survey - will receive a link to the online survey. This link will lead to a first page, which provides information about the research and asks potential participants to consent to taking part in the research. Participants need to opt in and if they do not, will automatically be referred to a page that thanks them for taking the time to read the participant information and explains that they have chosen not to participate in this survey. It will also offer my email address, should they have any questions. The consent question is set so that participants can only see the remaining questions, if they opt in. I will thus ask for written consent and explicitly state that consent can be withdrawn at any point in the research.

The participant information and consent form provided online is attached to this addendum.

### **Will the data be confidential?**

An important decision in relation to online research, data security and privacy is choosing an appropriate provider. The platform SoSci Survey (<https://www.soscisurvey.de>) offers a service that is compliant with European law and ensures privacy of respondents on several levels. This is guaranteed through a secure infrastructure with “encryption, secure software, security updates”; reliable technology; data avoidance that comprehensively controls data, ensures anonymisation with no cookies and collection of IPs in logfiles; and clear organisational structures with differentiated access rights and contractual regulations under German and European law, as SoSci Survey GmbH’s headquarters and computer centre, which houses the survey servers [www.soscisurvey.de](http://www.soscisurvey.de) and [s2survey](http://s2survey.de) are in Munich (Germany).

I will use a secure password to protect the data. When downloading data, the system uses SSL encryption for data transmission of any (personal) data collected as part of the online Delphi survey. SoSci Survey offers a serial mail function that allows tracking “whether an addressee has edited the questionnaire (e. g. for a reminder mail/review action) and at the same time ensures that the collected data remains anonymous”

(<https://www.soscisurvey.de/help/doku.php/en:general:privacy>).

The General Terms and Conditions (GTC) explicitly state that the data collected belongs to the researcher. I will store the information collected on a password protected and encrypted drive, as encrypted backups for the server [www.soscisurvey.de](http://www.soscisurvey.de) are only stored for a period of 12 months, “which is usually not compatible with the GDPR requirements for data deletion” (<https://www.soscisurvey.de/en/privacy>).

As part of the online survey rounds, two types of data will be collected: (a) personal data and (b) data in relation to responses to the items (key situations). It is important to distinguish between the two, as the first are considered to be sensitive data.

(a) Personal data are gathered by the survey tool and provided by participants after consenting to participation. The SoSci Survey tool will not record IP addresses. The tool also generates a unique ID number for each participant and records email addresses provided in a separate data sheet that does not allow the two to be merged to safeguard personal data. As I will provide feedback to participants on a general level in the second round this will be the safest option. The tool also allows for email and postal addresses to be collected separately for the purpose of the lottery (incentive). All of these features ensure that the participants' questionnaire details will remain anonymous

([https://www.soscisurvey.de/help/doku.php/en:general:privacy?s\[\]=%2Aprivacy%2A](https://www.soscisurvey.de/help/doku.php/en:general:privacy?s[]=%2Aprivacy%2A))

(b) Socio-demographic data in relation to job function, role etc. and in relation to social characteristics and any other data in relation to the review of key situation titles will be gathered anonymously. I will not ask for personal identifying data such as names, email addresses or phone numbers in the survey directly.

I will adhere to data protection legislation as set out in the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which is European Union law and the Data Protection Act of Great Britain.

**State what kind of feedback, if any, will be offered to participants.**

Once all data from the first round is collected, I will analyse it in a two to three-week period and for each area of responsibility with a set of key situation titles prepare a feedback report for inclusion in the second round for items that do not meet the criteria for agreement. This will include information on amalgamated descriptive statistical information about participants' scores (medians, range of scores and the proportion of participants selecting each point on a scale).

It is important to remind the reader that the key situation titles are produced for the purpose of a situation-based categorisation of social work on the Key Situation platform. Thus, the results will be documented on the Key Situation platform by the researcher. As the Wiki platform will be open to the whole social work community, participants will be able to access these after the end of the study.

**State your expertise for conducting the research proposed.**

The additional knowledge and skills required for the Delphi method are related to being able to collate and analyse quantitative data. I will need to be able to use simple descriptive statistics to analyse whether individual situation titles have met the criteria for agreement.

For the purpose of this study, I define agreement as follows:

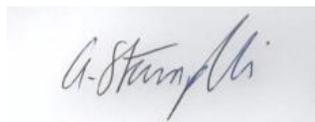
- If 70% of participants agree that in their area of practice a situation is encountered very frequently or frequently, then a situation will be defined as a key situation.
- If 70% of participants agree that in their area of practice a situation is encountered never or very rarely, then a situation will be excluded from the title list of key situations.
- If a situation title is neither included nor excluded from the key situation list, then the title will again be sent to participants for another round of re-ranking, providing them with the information of the analysis.

In order to analyse this, I will use the functions available in excel (an export from SoSci Survey is standard). This involves creating correlated scores of participants' responses and calculating medians, range of scores and the proportion of participants selecting each point on a scale. I will also need to carry out these calculations for groups of participants who practice in different areas.

I have good skills in using Excel and its statistical functions and have a good grounding in principles of descriptive statistics. I am confident that I will be able to carry out these analyses with rigour and apply the tests correctly. I also have a critical friend with a PhD in Statistics who I can call on should I need it.

In terms of analysing the qualitative data provided, I will apply the same principles and processed that I have already established in the analysis of the data generated in the first CoRe workshops.

Signed:



Adi Staempfli

Date: 12 January 2019

## References

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- Ghisla, Gianni; Bausch Elena and Boldrini, Luca. 2014. *SiD –Situation-based Didactics. A guide for teachers in vocational training*. Lugano and Zollikofen: Swiss Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training SFIVET.
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- Moriarty, Jo; Baginsky, Mary and Manthorpe. Jill. 2015. *Literature review of roles and issues within the social work profession in England*. Report. London: Kings College, Social Care Workforce Research Unit.
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## Appendix 5 – Participant information and consent form CoRe workshops

### Participant Information Sheet – Key Situations in Social Work

You are invited to take part in a PhD research project. Before you decide to participate it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask if anything is unclear or if you would like more information.

#### 1. Researcher:

Adi Staempfli, PhD student, Goldsmiths, University of London.

#### 2. Project Title

A Practice-based Approach to Professional Development in Social Work: Reflective Learning on Key Situations.

#### 3. Purpose of Project

The main question of this research is: How can social workers be best supported to continuously develop their professional knowledge, skills and values and integrate these with their practice? I and colleagues<sup>42</sup> propose that the reflective learning process proposed as part of the Key Situation in social work model. This model offers an innovative method for continuous professional development through reflection and dialogue in informal and formal workplace learning and university-based education. Learners engage in an eight-step reflection process, organised around typical, reoccurring key situations in social work, which are documented on a virtual platform. It is used in several universities and practice organisations in German speaking regions. To get a quick overview of the model have a look at this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-d0PzmxQM7c>.

I now would like to develop the model for English social work and for this we need to find out what the typical reoccurring situations in English social work are. I am therefore

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<sup>42</sup> STAEMPFLI, A., KUNZ, R. & TOV, E. 2012. Creating a bridge between theory and practice: working with key situations. *European Journal of Social Education*, 22/23, 60-78.

STAEMPFLI, A., TOV, E., KUNZ, R. & TSCHOPP, D. 2016. Improving professionalism through reflection and discourse in communities of practice: The key situations in social work model and project. *The Journal of Practice Teaching and Learning*, 59-79.

looking to the expertise of experienced social workers to define these key situations in a participatory group based research process. Therefore, you are invited to join a group of social workers first in a workshop and then on the virtual Key Situation platform to describe and analyse the situations you encounter in your everyday practice in dialogue with other social workers.

**4. Why have I been chosen? Do I have to take part?**

You were chosen because I am looking for registered social workers who work in any setting (e.g. the social work or social care sector, the third, independent or private sector or the health service). I am looking for participants who work to some degree directly with any service user group (e.g. child and family or adult social work or wider roles with service users, carers, families, groups or communities) and am particularly interested in participants who have at least five years' experience.

Participation is voluntary. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. You may withdraw from the research project at any time. You may access the situations on the platform or join the network at any time in the future whatever your decision is now.

**5. What will happen to me if I take part?**

If you decide to take part you will be invited to a one day workshop at Goldsmiths, University of London or another location of participants choosing. At the workshop, you will work with other social workers to describe and analyse the typical, reoccurring situations you encounter in practice in a facilitated process. Refreshments and lunch will be provided.

Following three such workshops, I will collate all situations and upload them onto a virtual platform. You will be invited to revise this list of key situation titles online. For this purpose, you will need to register on the platform. This second part should take no longer than two hours and you can do this in your own time. The platform is very user-friendly and you will be supported to access it.

**6. What are the possible disadvantages and advantages of participation?**

This is a great opportunity to get to know an innovative approach to reflective learning that is tried and tested in Europe and be at the heart of its development in England. You will be given a certificate of participation by the Association Key Situations in Social Work that you can use for your CPD portfolio.

Taking part in the one day workshop could be difficult and you may want to ask your employer to take part during your working hours. I am happy to discuss the project and its expected outcomes with you and your employer if you think this might help.

A risk of (Internet based) research is the exposure of individuals, which we can avoid by preserving your anonymity. On the other hand, you may want to be recognised for your vital contribution to the emerging Key Situation model in England and take part using your real name. The decision is yours.

The platform is password protected and can only be accessed by social workers (students, practitioners, academics). The content of the platform cannot be searched or accessed from an Internet search engine. The platform is run by the not-for-profit Association Network Key Situations in Social Work with seat in Basel, Switzerland and is governed by data privacy regulations and terms of use that incorporate EU and Swiss data protection legislation and best practice advice. All users agree to these when registering to safeguard confidentiality and ethical online behaviour (and if you join you will too).

In addition, I will set up a safe space so that none of the currently 1350 users can see what the research participants write. However, if you do decide to take part using your real name, your name and your (work)Email can be seen by all platform users (see paragraph 8 below).

Ethical approval has been granted by the Department of Social, Therapeutic and Community Studies (StaCS) Research Ethics Committee.

**7. What if something goes wrong?**

Paragraph 12 below gives you my PhD supervisor's address as a contact point for you, should you need independent advice about your rights.

**8. Will my participation be kept confidential?**

Any personal data gathered during the research process will be kept confidential in line with legal and ethical requirements. Data will be stored in a password protected data storage and will be stored for a maximum of 5 years. Any information collected will be presented in an anonymised way, which will not allow others to identify you.

Your participation will be kept confidential, unless you wish to take part using your full name. If you wish to be named on the platform and in subsequent publications as one of the contributors you will need to give your explicit written consent. Please check that if you use your work Email, your employer's social media and other regulations permit you to do so. If you wish, I can talk to your employer and send the data privacy statement and terms of use for the Key Situation platform. If you wish to take part anonymously, I will advise you on how to set up a unique pseudonym email address that you can then use to log in to the platform. Do not hesitate to contact me, should you have any questions regarding this.

**9. What will happen to the results of the research project?**

The results of the research will be published in the PhD thesis, a subsequent book publication and other academic and professional journals. The key situations will also be published on an open space on the Key Situation platform, which is open to social workers (see paragraph 6). The key situation list may be used for future research (for example international comparative studies on social work practices).

**10. Who is organising and funding the research?**

This research project is organised by Adi Staempfli, as part of his PhD project.

It is supported by the Association Network Key Situations in Social Work, which runs the virtual platform ([www.keysituations.net](http://www.keysituations.net) / [www.schluesselsituationen.net](http://www.schluesselsituationen.net)).

Financially the project is supported by a Goldsmiths' Teaching Fellowship awarded to Adi Staempfli (<https://goldsmithstalic.wordpress.com/2017/02/01/a-practice-based-curriculum-for-reflective-learning-in-social-work/>).

## **11. Reward**

The Teaching Fellowship funds the refreshments offered on the workshop days and if you decide to participate you will, as a small thank you gesture, receive a multi-retailer gift voucher of £ 40.00.

## **12. Contact for further information, including questions about the research and participants' rights.**

- A. Adi Staempfli, Social, Goldsmiths, University of London, Therapeutic and Community Studies (STaCS), 31 St James, London SE14 6NW  
Tel. 020 7717 2278, Email: [adi.staempfli@keysituations.net](mailto:adi.staempfli@keysituations.net)
- B. Prof. Claudia Bernard, Head of Postgraduate Research, Goldsmiths, University of London, Therapeutic and Community Studies (STaCS), 23 St James, London SE14 6NW  
Tel. 020 7919 7837, Email: [c.bernard@gold.ac.uk](mailto:c.bernard@gold.ac.uk).

## **13. Thank you**

Thank for taking the time to read this information and for your participation in the research.

### **Consent to participation in the research project (workshop and online collaboration)**

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information set out in the participant information for the study above. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have these answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.
3. I understand that I have the option of taking part either anonymously or under my real name and that I can change my mind about this at any time. I understand that my contribution is valued equally whatever I decide.
4. I understand that if I want to remain anonymous I will need to set up a pseudonym email address to log in to the platform. I understand that in this case my participation will always remain confidential.
5. I understand that if I take part using my real name all platform users will be able to see my name and (work) email, but not my contributions. I understand that I need to ensure that as an employee I adhere to my organisations social media or other regulations. I

understand that findings will remain confidential and that only my participation in the overall project may be made public on the platform and in publications.

6. I understand that whether I decide to take part anonymously or not, any information from the workshop and online collaboration may be used in publications and on the platform, but that any facts, and names which could identify me or my organisation will be changed in the written record of the workshop and in the reporting of the findings.
7. I understand that whether I decide to take part anonymously or not, I will have to agree to the data privacy statement and terms of use of the platform to ensure confidentiality and ethical practice regarding online behaviour.

**Consent to workshop participation – to be completed by 31 July 2017 (before the workshop) and returned to [adi.staempfli@keysituations.net](mailto:adi.staempfli@keysituations.net) or Adi Staempfli, Goldsmiths, University of London, 31 St James, Room 7, London SE14 6NW**

You need to consent to either anonymous or open participation:

<b>Consent to anonymous participation in the (face-to-face) workshop of this study</b>		
I agree to take part in the workshop in this study. I explicitly wish that my participation remains confidential at all times.		
-----	-----	-----
Name	Date	Signature
Employer organisation:		
Address:		
Mobile No:	Email:	
<b>(Please complete and send to Adi Staempfli)</b>		



**Consent to open participation in the online phase of this study**

I explicitly wish to take part online using my real name and with my work email. I therefore give explicit consent that my name and work email is used to log in to the platform:

-----

Name

Date

Signature

Mobile No:

Email:

## Appendix 6 - Participant information and consent form for the first online survey

**Note:** this form was included in the online survey and consent had to be provided to progress to the questionnaire.

Social workers in England are being invited to participate in a study entitled 'A Practice-Based Approach to Professional Development in Social Work: Reflective Learning on Key Situations'.

This research project seeks to gather views from experienced, registered social workers who are working in any sector or setting, in a role that involves working directly with service users and/or carers or families. It aims to seek agreement across the professional community in England as to what the key situations are that they encounter in their practice.

This study is being carried out by Adi Staempfli as part of a PhD research project at Goldsmiths', University of London. Before you decide to participate it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

The purpose of this research is to develop the reflective learning model 'Key Situations in Social Work' for social work in England. It is currently being used in several social work bachelor programmes in German speaking regions. It aims to support social workers to continuously develop their professional knowledge, skills and values and integrate these with their practice. The model offers an innovative approach to continuous professional learning through reflection and dialogue within and across social work organisations and universities. Learners engage in an eight-step reflection process, organised around key situations in social work, which are documented on a virtual platform.

Key situations are defined as the typical, regularly encountered practice situations that professionals describe as significant. A situation is a discrete and meaningful situation with a beginning, middle and an end. Key situations titles are formulated at a general level so that they are relevant across fields and roles. They do not include situations managers (practice supervisors, line managers, service managers) or other professional functions (e.g. training and development, education) encounter.

In the initial stage of the research 13 social workers together with the researcher have developed a list of key situations. The aim of this second phase is to get agreement on these situations and identify and fill any gaps.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to complete an online questionnaire. This questionnaire will ask you to provide socio-demographic information about yourself and comment on the typical reoccurring situations in English social work practice and it will take you approximately 15 to 35 minutes to complete. At the end of the interview, you will also be asked whether you would like to take part in a second round of the interview, in which any titles that are suggested by participants in this first round are reviewed and any titles that have not reached the criteria for agreement in the first round.

To participate, you must be a registered social worker in England and work directly with any service user group (e.g. service users, carers, families, groups or communities) in England. This includes any job role in any social work/care sector (e.g. statutory child and family and adult

social work; social work in the health, private, voluntary or independent sector). You must have a minimum of 5 years' experience as a practicing registered social worker and work in a role that reflects your expertise, such as for example Principal Social Worker, Advanced Practitioner, Experienced Social Worker, Senior Practitioner, Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP), Best Interest Assessor or Independent Social Work practitioner and other roles.

Taking part in this survey is a great opportunity to get a first insight into the newly developed key situation titles and to contribute to their development and validation. After the research, the list of titles will be made available to social workers on an online platform and support the implementation of the innovative approach to reflective learning in England. If you complete the questionnaire you will get an opportunity to be entered into a prize draw to win one of three £50 Love2shop Gift Vouchers.

I believe there are no known risks associated with this research study; however, as with any online related activity the risk of a breach of confidentiality is always possible. To the best of my ability your answers in this study will remain confidential. Data will be collected anonymously, and any personal data entered (e.g. email address for prize draw) will be stored separately. I will minimize any risks by keeping any personal data gathered confidential in line with legal and ethical requirements. Data will be stored in a password protected data storage and will be stored for a maximum of 5 years. Any information collected will be presented in an anonymised way, which will not allow others to identify you. Your participation will always be kept confidential. Ethical approval has been granted by the Department of Social, Therapeutic and Community Studies' (StACS) Research Ethics Committee at Goldsmiths'.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. You are free to skip any question that you choose.

If you have questions about this project or if you have a research-related problem, you may contact the researcher, Adi Staempfli, [a.staempfli@gold.ac.uk](mailto:a.staempfli@gold.ac.uk).

If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject, you may contact Prof. Claudia Bernard, Head of Postgraduate Research, Goldsmiths, University of London, Therapeutic and Community Studies (STaCS), [c.bernard@gold.ac.uk](mailto:c.bernard@gold.ac.uk).

By clicking "Yes" below you are indicating that you are at least 18 years old, have read and understood the above information and agree to participate in this research study. Please print a copy of this page for your records.

No, I do not agree to participate in this study

Yes, I understand the information and agree to participate in this study

## Appendix 7 - Participant information and consent form for the second online survey

**Note:** this form was included in the online survey and consent had to be provided to progress to the questionnaire.

Welcome back to the second survey on key situations in English social work!

Thank you very much for completing the first questionnaire and for coming back for the second round. 74 participants in total have agreed to take part in this second round and three lucky winners of a £50 Love2shop gift voucher have been notified. If you complete this second round you will be entered into a prize draw to win another £50 Love2shop gift voucher. Before explaining to you how this second round will work, let me give you some information on what happened in the first round.

Participation from the social work sector was excellent. The survey link was clicked nearly 1800 times and 155 people made it to the second page and 100 social workers completed the questionnaire. 88 participants met all the criteria for the expert panel and they represent all English regions and the views of different sectors (Child and family, adult, health and third, independent, or voluntary sector social work) and varied statutory and non-statutory social work roles in diverse settings. Participants also have brought their diverse experiences for example in relation to gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability to the study and I hope that you will complete this second round, so that the final key situations can be reflective of these diverse perspectives.

Of the 104 situations that you have previously reviewed, 33 were accepted as key situations, that is to say that at least 70% of all participants agreed that they encounter the situation 'very frequently or frequently' and 4 situations were rejected (70% said they never or very rarely encounter the situation). A further 22 situations were seen as key in a specific sector and 10 situations were rejected by sectors.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to complete this second online questionnaire. This questionnaire will ask you to provide socio-demographic information about yourself and to rerate 32 situations, where agreement was either not very strong or not reached. Based on the many helpful comments received in the first round, you are asked to review 18 situation titles that have been reworded and 41 new situation titles have been added. This will take you between 5 and 15 minutes to complete.

For your responses to be included, you must be a registered social worker in England and work to some degree directly with any service user group (e.g. service users, carers, families, groups or communities) in England. This includes any job role in any social work/care sector (e.g. statutory child and family and adult social work; social work in the health, private, voluntary or independent sector). You must have a minimum of 5 years' experience as a practicing registered social worker.

A brief reminder: the purpose of this research is to develop the reflective learning model 'Key Situations in Social Work' for social work in England. It aims to support social workers to continuously develop their professional knowledge, skills and values and integrate these with

their practice, for example in education or in continuous professional learning through reflection and dialogue within social work organisations. The study is being carried out by Adi Staempfli as part of a PhD research project at Goldsmiths', University of London. Ethical approval has been given by Goldsmiths'.

I believe there are no known risks associated with this research study; however, as with any online related activity the risk of a breach of confidentiality is always possible. To the best of my ability your answers in this study will remain confidential. Data will be collected anonymously, and any personal data entered (e.g. email address) will be stored separately. I will minimize any risks by keeping any personal data gathered confidential in line with legal and ethical requirements. Data will be stored in a password protected data storage and will be stored for a maximum of 5 years. Any information collected will be presented in an anonymised way, which will not allow others to identify you. Your participation will always be kept confidential.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. You are free to skip any question that you choose.

If you have questions about this project or if you have a research-related problem, you may contact the researcher, Adi Staempfli, [a.staempfli@gold.ac.uk](mailto:a.staempfli@gold.ac.uk).

If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject, you may contact Prof. Claudia Bernard, Head of Postgraduate Research, Goldsmiths, University of London, Therapeutic and Community Studies (STaCS), [c.bernard@gold.ac.uk](mailto:c.bernard@gold.ac.uk).

By clicking "Yes" below you are indicating that you are at least 18 years old, have read and understood the above information and agree to participate in this research study. Please print a copy of this page for your records.

No, I do not agree to participate in this study

Yes, I understand the information and agree to participate in this study

## Appendix 8 - Example of qualitative and quantitative data analysis over three Delphi rounds

This appendix serves to illustrate the whole data analysis process and serves as an audit trail of my empirical work. It illustrates the following analysis steps in relation to example in relation to visiting service users:

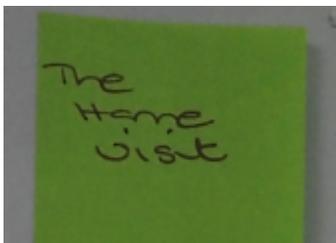
### Content

1. CoRe workshop qualitative data in relation to 'visits'.
2. Analysis of CoRe data
3. Formulation of situation titles for first survey round
4. Quantitative data analysis of first survey round data
5. Qualitative data analysis of first survey round comments
6. Quantitative data analysis of second survey round data
7. Qualitative data analysis of second survey round comments

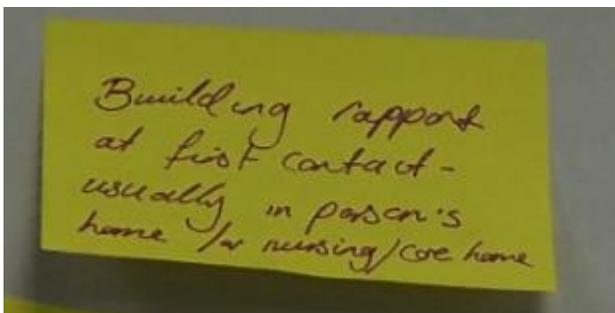
### 1. CoRe workshop qualitative data in relation to 'visits'

The following exhibit shows pictures of the original post-it notes from the first and second CoRe workshop. The transcribed post-it notes were colour coded **First** and **second** workshop with [area of responsibility] (in square brackets) under which they were placed in the workshops.

#### [Initial Contact]

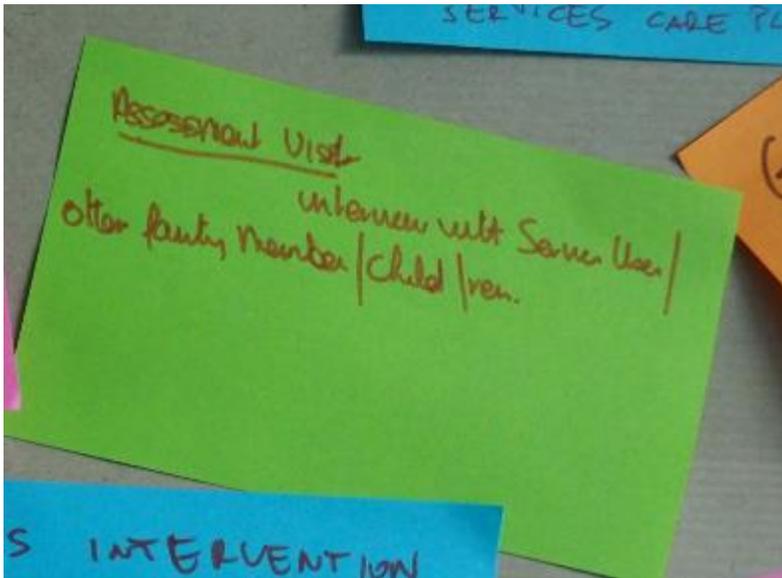


#### The home visit.

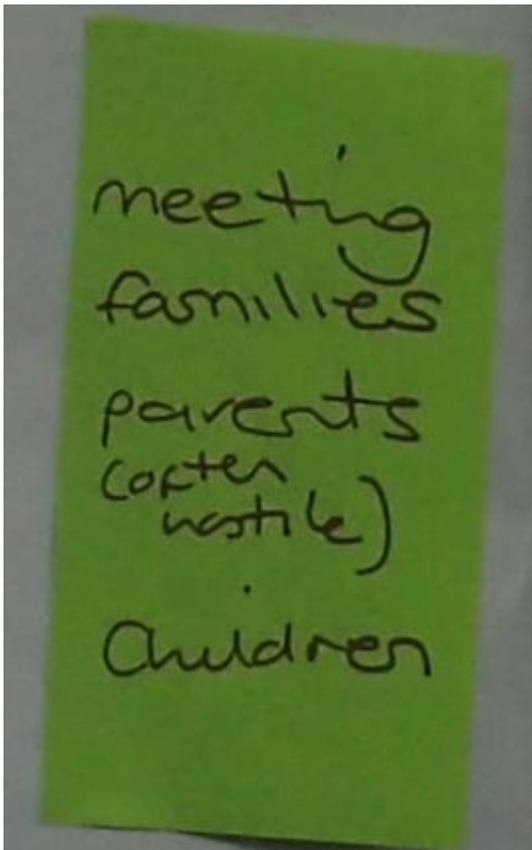


Building rapport at first contact – usually in person’s home / or nursing / care home.

[Initial Assessment]

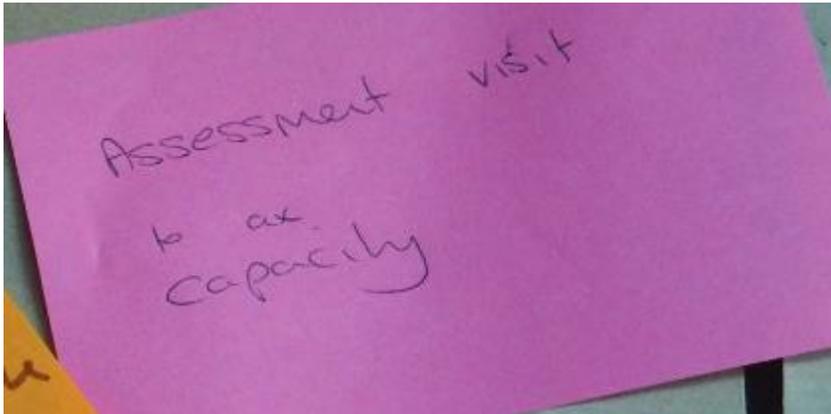


Assessment visit. Interview with service user, other family member, child/ren



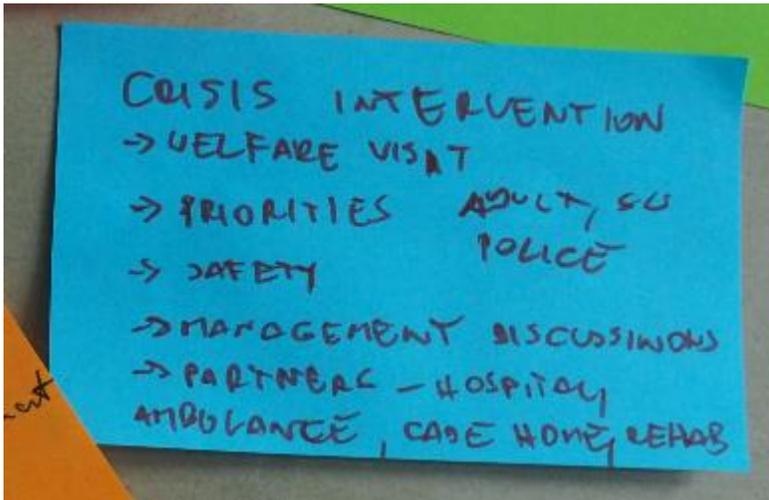
Meeting families, parents (often hostile), children.

[Specialist Assessment]



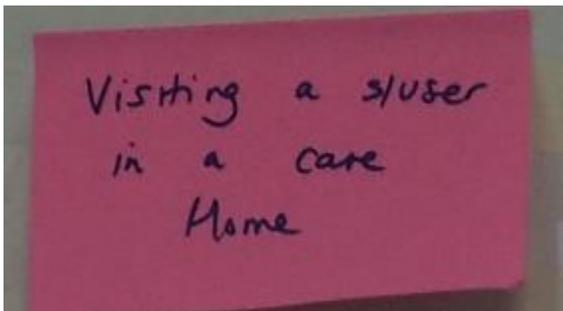
Assessment visit to assess capacity.

[Crisis Intervention]

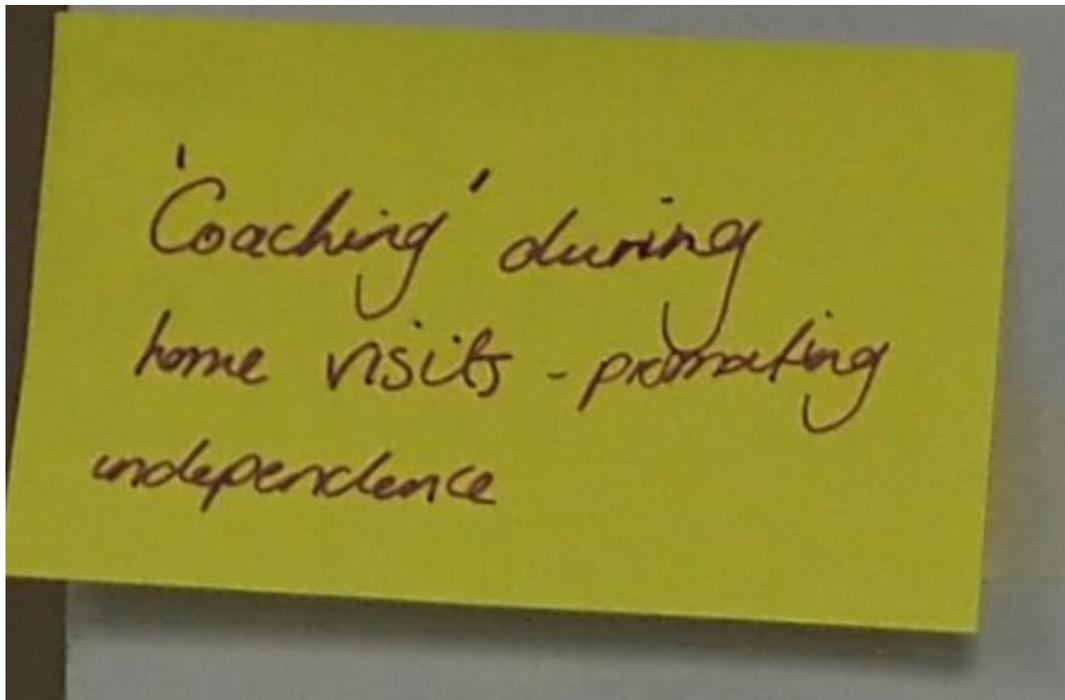


Crisis Intervention. Adult, Social Worker, Police. Welfare visit. Priorities. Safety. Management discussions. Partners – hospitals.

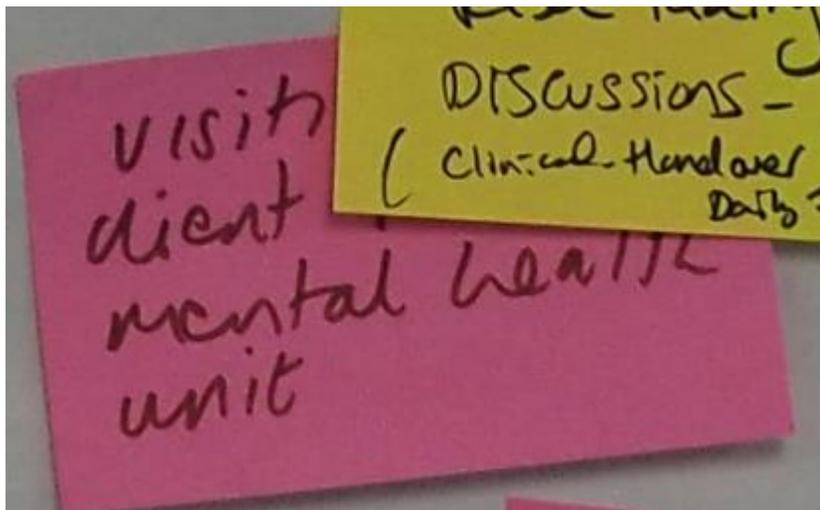
[Intervention / Direct work]



Visiting a service user in a care home.



"Coaching" during home visits – promoting independence.



Visiting a client in the Mental health unit.

meeting with  
service user

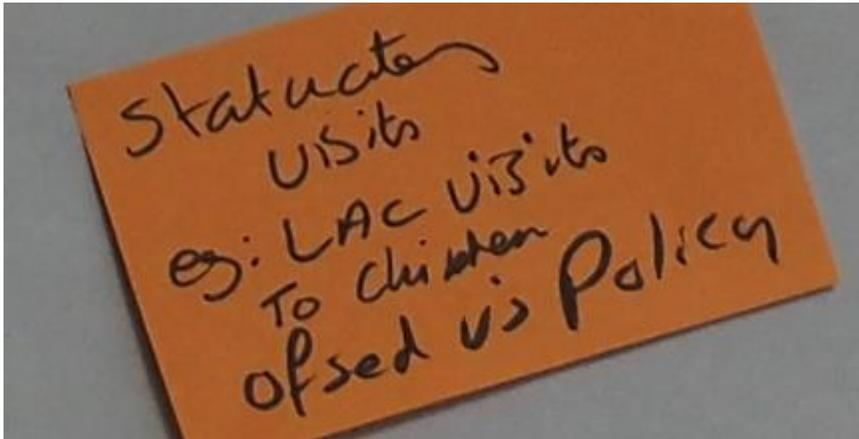
Meeting with service user

[Review meetings] [Reviews]

Home visit, working on PATHWAY PLAN  
Context: statutory home visits at least once  
every 6 weeks (3 months).  
PWP to be reviewed every 6 months  
↳ statutory doc.  
Cont: - Child & SW discuss sections of PWP.  
- SW assesses independent living skills,  
child and SW make plans to support  
child on developing ILS.

"Home visit, working on PATHWAY PLAN. Context: statutory home visits at least once every 6 weeks (3 months). PWP (statutory doc.) to be reviewed every 6 months. Content: Child and SW discuss sections of PWP. SW assesses independent living skills, child and SW make plans to support child on developing ILS."

## [Safeguarding, Risk assessment and management]



Statutory visits, e.g. LAC visits to children ofsed (???) vs. policy

### 2. Analysis of CoRe data

The following section demonstrates how the above qualitative data was analysed (using colour coded criteria for: **situation title**; **service users and/or carers**; **where does it take place?** and **professionals involved**.) and demonstrates how the four situation titles were created by following the guiding principles for formulation of (key) situation titles.

#### Initial analysis (colour coding):

The **home visit**.

**Home visit**, working on PATHWAY PLAN. Context: statutory home visits at least once every 6 weeks (3 months). PWP (statutory doc.) to be reviewed every 6 months. Content: **Child** and SW discuss sections of PWP. SW assesses independent living skills, child and SW make plans to support child on developing ILS.

Building rapport at first contact – usually in **person's home** / or **nursing / care home**.

Assessment **visit**. Interview with **service user, other family member, child/ren**

Meeting **families, parents (often hostile), children**.

Assessment **visit** to assess capacity.

Crisis Intervention. **Adult, Social Worker, Police**. Welfare visit. Priorities. Safety. Management discussions. **Partners – hospitals**.

**Visiting** a **service user** in a **care home**.

“Coaching” during **home visits** – promoting independence.

Visiting a client in the Mental health unit.

Meeting with service user

Statutory visits, e.g. LAC visits to children Oftsed (???) vs. policy

### 3. Formulation of situation titles for first survey round

#### Guiding principles for formulation of (key) situation titles:

1. **Medium level of abstraction:** can include any number of similar specific situations; not too abstract or general; relevant across fields, sectors and settings (e.g. C&F or Adult SW; Mental Health, Looked After Children, Child Protection; community, hospital settings).
  2. **Expressing social workers' activities clearly in title:** Starting with present participle.
  3. **Using shared language of social workers:** Using participants' own words.
- Visiting a service user, care or family in their home.
  - Visiting a service user in a care home, hospital, or prison (or another institution).
  - Doing a home visit with another professional.
  - Visiting children and young people in their home to work directly with them.

#### 4. Quantitative data analysis of first survey round data

The analysis of the scores is depicted in the following table. It shows how the 5-point Likert type scale was reduced to a 3-point scale, based on which the frequency in percentage was calculated.

Delphi I													
All Social Work Sectors													
	Never	Very Rarely		Occasionally		Very Frequently	Not answered	Total (n)	very frequently or frequently	never or very rarely	occasionally	% Accepted	% Rejected
Visiting a service user, carer or family in their home.	1	7	7	13	13	41	1	83	54	8	21	65	10
Visiting a service user in a care home, hospital, or prison (or another institution).	2	8	10	12	20	30	1	83	50	10	23	60	12
Doing a home visit with another professional.	3	8	4	23	26	18	1	83	44	11	28	53	13
Visiting children and young people in their home to work directly with them.	24	15	6	9	10	18	1	83	28	39	16	34	47
Children and Family only													
	Never	Very Rarely		Occasionally		Very Frequently	Not answered	Total (n)	very frequently or frequently	never or very rarely	occasionally	% Accepted	% Rejected
Visiting a service user, carer or family in their home.	0	2	3	4	3	17	0	29	20	2	7	69	7
Visiting a service user in a care home, hospital, or prison (or another institution).	1	5	7	6	5	4	1	29	9	6	14	31	21
Doing a home visit with another professional.	0	3	2	10	10	3	1	29	13	3	13	45	10
Visiting children and young people in their home to work directly with them.	0	4	3	3	5	13	1	29	18	4	7	62	14
Adult social work													
	Never	Very Rarely		Occasionally		Very Frequently	Not answered	Total (n)	very frequently or frequently	never or very rarely	occasionally	% Accepted	% Rejected
Visiting a service user, carer or family in their home.	1	4	4	7	9	20	1	46	29	5	12	63	11
Visiting a service user in a care home, hospital, or prison (or another institution).	0	2	3	5	12	24	0	46	36	2	8	78	4
Doing a home visit with another professional.	3	3	2	11	13	14	0	46	27	6	13	59	13
Visiting children and young people in their home to work directly with them.	18	12	3	5	4	4	0	46	8	30	8	17	65
Health Social Work													
	Never	Very Rarely		Occasionally		Very Frequently	Not answered	Total (n)	very frequently or frequently	never or very rarely	occasionally	% Accepted	% Rejected
Visiting a service user, carer or family in their home.	0	0	2	1	2	5	0	10	7	0	3	70	0
Visiting a service user in a care home, hospital, or prison (or another institution).	1	0	0	0	2	7	0	10	9	1	0	90	10
Doing a home visit with another professional.	0	0	1	5	1	3	0	10	4	0	6	40	0
Visiting children and young people in their home to work directly with them.	4	1	1	2	0	2	0	10	2	5	3	20	50
Third, independent and voluntary sector social work													
	Never	Very Rarely		Occasionally		Very Frequently	Not answered	Total (n)	very frequently or frequently	never or very rarely	occasionally	% Accepted	% Rejected
Visiting a service user, carer or family in their home.	0	0	1	1	3	2	0	7	5	0	2	71	0
Visiting a service user in a care home, hospital, or prison (or another institution).	0	0	0	0	3	3	1	7	6	0	1	86	0
Doing a home visit with another professional.	1	0	0	3	2	0	1	7	2	1	4	29	14
Visiting children and young people in their home to work directly with them.	2	1	1	1	1	0	1	7	1	3	3	14	43

The final results are depicted in see Figure 42 (Analysis of responses of ‘Direct Work with Adults and Children’ (part one) situation titles (in %) by sector (Delphi I) and all participants (Delphi I and II)):

Situation Title	Delphi survey round I									
	All Social Work Sectors (N=83)		Children and Family Social Work (n=29)		Adult Social Work (n=46)		Health Social Work (n=10)		PVI* (n=7)	
Visiting a service user, carer or family in their home.	65	10	69	7	63	11	70	0	71	0
Visiting a service user in a care home, hospital, or prison (or another institution).	60	12	31	21	78	4	90	10	86	0
Doing a home visit with another professional. / Undertaking a joint visit with another professional.	53	13	45	10	59	13	40	0	29	14
Visiting children and young people in their home to work directly with them.	34	47	62	14	17	65	20	50	14	43

The quantitative analysis in Delphi round I led to the acceptance of two titles in the first round:

- **Visiting a service user, care or family in their home.** *Accepted by Health and PVI SW and almost by Children and Families’ social workers.*
- **Visiting a service user in a care home, hospital, or prison (or another institution).** *Accepted by Adult, Health and PVI SW*

The following situations were neither accepted nor rejected and had to be reviewed in the second survey round:

- **Doing a home visit with another professional.** *No agreement in round I.*
- **Visiting children and young people in their home to work directly with them.** *No agreement in round I.*

## 5. Qualitative data analysis of first survey round comments

The qualitative data was analysed applying the same principles as for the CoRe data analysis process, as illustrated below:

### Comments about missing situations:

Joint visits with other professionals eg. finance/Day Centre planning further services (Analysis: This falls under: Doing a home visit with another professional.)

Unannounced visits eg. To Care Home: (Analysis: New situation under Quality Assurance Making unannounced visits to service provider (e.g. foster home, care home, residential service, etc.).

### Comments about meaning of situation titles:

Viewing and assessing the home environment-- I sometimes liaise or undertake joint visit assessment with a Community Occupational therapist to see how a service user can safely

manage at home. (Analysis: This fall under 'Doing a home visit with another professional.' But could be reworded as: Undertaking a joint visit with another professional.)

Based on the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data from Delphi I, the following situation titles were included in the questionnaire:

**Re-rate:** Undertaking a joint visit with another professional.

**Re-rate:** Visiting children and young people in their home to work directly with them.

**New:** Making unannounced visits to service provider (e.g. foster home, care home, residential service, etc.).

## 6. Quantitative data analysis of second survey round data

The two situations from round one were rerated using a binary include / exclude question:

	All Social Work Sectors					
	Include in key situation title list	Exclude from key situation title list	Not answered	Total (n)	% Accepted	% Rejected
Doing a home visit with another professional. / Undertaking a joint visit with	38	3	0	41	93	7
Visiting children and young people in their home to work directly with them.	35	5	1	41	85	12

The new situation was rated on three-point Likert type scale in Delphi II:

	All Social Work Sectors						
	No, exclude	Not sure	Yes, include	Not answered	Total (n)	% Accepted	% Rejected
Making unannounced visits to service provider (e.g. foster home, care home,	4	4	33	0	41	80	10

All three reviewed situations were accepted in the second round.

## 7. Qualitative data analysis of second survey round comments

Not sure about unannounced visits or peer reviews - these need doing but not sure by social workers as routine work - think they should be led by QA team. (Analysis: Situation was accepted by majority of participants as a typical reoccurring practice situation).

No further comments.

No changes were necessary based on comments made in the second survey round.