Theorising Social Work Sense-Making: Developing a Model of Peer-Aided Judgement and Decision Making

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Abstract

This article addresses the challenges of sense making in social work practice and presents a descriptive model of peer-aided judgement to facilitate critical debate and knowledge creation. The model is founded in Hammond's Cognitive Continuum Theory and developed in direct application to social work practice. It seeks to expand currently available models of social work judgement and decision making to include processes and outcomes related to informal peer interaction. Building on empirical studies and multiple contemporary literatures, a model of peer-aided judgement is hypothesised, comprising four distinct and interacting elements. By modelling these fundamental aspects of the processes and outcomes of peer-aided judgement, this article provides a tool for illuminating the everyday unseen value of peer interaction in practice and a framework for critical debate of dilemmas and propositions for professional judgement in social work practice. This article concludes by examining some of the implications of the model and its potential use in the further development of theory, methodology and practice.

Keywords: analysis, assessment, decision making, intuition, judgement, sense making

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Introduction

'Decision making is a core professional activity at the heart of social work with much of what social workers do involving making decisions *with others*.' (O'Sullivan, 2011, p. 1, emphasis added). O'Sullivan's

seminal text takes it as axiomatic that very few social work judgements and decisions are made by individuals in complete isolation. The nature of this shared decision making is complex and has been explored to a considerable depth in a range of domains. For example, direct involvement of service users and carers in decision making is a core social work value (Payne, 1989) and subject of considerable research (Beresford and Carr, 2012; Kennan *et al.*, 2018). Case reviews have identified failures of inter-professional assessment as significant contributory factors (e.g. Reder *et al.*, 1993; Munro, 2008). Furthermore, involvement of direct line-management in decision making (often through individual supervision) is also an accepted mainstay of support and guidance for professional practice (e.g. Kadushin and Harkness, 2002). Social work decision making is therefore seen as an activity inevitably carried out 'with others'. Whilst the literature on service user involvement, inter-professional practice and supervision is relatively extensive, less attention has been paid so far to the role of informal peer interaction in judgement and decision making; the kind of ongoing contact and informal case talk within social work teams, which is a daily reality in practice.

The author's own ethnographic study of sense making in a UK local authority child and family social work office provided new insight into the level and significance of peer-interaction as a process of informal shared sense making in social work (Helm, 2016, 2017a). A review of the relevant literature revealed a dearth of research and theory on peer supervision (or consultation) even though 'Much significant supervision takes place spontaneously among peers, with social workers commonly relying on colleague support, guidance and discussion in relation to their work with specific cases.' (O'Sullivan, 2011, p. 159). This article argues that such interactions between colleagues constitute a form of networked sense making, which plays a fundamental role in professional judgement. Drawing on multiple literatures, this knowledge gap is interrogated and a theoretical model of peer-aided judgement (Hammond, 1996) is proposed to help map and describe this new territory and its significance for further exploration.

Judgement and decision making in social work

Social workers are routinely required to make complex, subjective judgements in conditions of chronic uncertainty (Helm, 2010). Such practice is stressful and subject to the duality of error: Social work errors will include false positives as well as false negatives (Dalgleish, 2003) so no decision is risk-free. Social work may also be described as a 'wicked' learning environment (as opposed to a 'kind' one) as feedback on judgement and decision making is often delayed, inaccurate or simply

unavailable (Hogarth, 2001; Devaney and Spratt, 2009). This is a challenging environment for judgement and decision making (Dalgleish, 2003) and attention to the environment, or ecology, of judgement is of fundamental importance .

In an overview of different models applied to the study of social work judgement and decision making, Taylor (2012) recognised that much of the research in this field is atheoretical and that there is a need for theoretical, conceptual models of social work judgement to be developed to guide research, support practice and inform professional education.

Aims and purpose of the model

The proposed model is a simplified, descriptive model of the essential elements of peer-aided judgement in social work. It draws on psychological theory and a relatively small, but growing, set of data from a range of practice-near studies of judgement and decision making. It provides a framework for the closer examination of the way that intuition and analysis operate as integrated parts of social work reasoning processes. Such models can provide opportunities to gather empirical data and test hypotheses (Johnsson and Svensson, 2005) and the model is presented here with the primary purpose of stimulating debate and extending theory and research in this area.

Empirical studies

The original doctoral study (Helm, 2017a) which catalysed this contribution to the development of theory has been written up in previous papers and further details on background, methods and findings can be found in those papers (Helm, 2016, 2017b). A brief overview of research design and key findings will be given here and consideration will be given to the limitations of the study and their relevance for the model presented.

The original study was a non-participant ethnography of sense making in a social work office. Ethical approval was given by the General University Ethics Panel and ethical concerns identified were managed through existing arrangements for researcher and participant supervision. It was carried out in one local authority child and family social work team over twelve weeks with the researcher observing the duty social worker's movements and interactions with people and artefacts in the course of their work. The study was inductive, and Miles and Huberman's (1994) analysis framework was used to identify themes and patterns emerging from the data gathered through observation, contemporaneous notes and reflective recordings.

The study found that social workers were agentic in connecting with their colleagues to discuss many different dimensions of their work with children and their families. They actively managed proximity and choice of which topics to discuss with different peers (Helm, 2016, 2017a). Emotions play a significant role in sense making and findings made links between practitioners feeling secure and being able to exercise curiosity and critical rigour in their thinking (Helm, 2016). Practitioners were found to be discriminating users of peer-support and this kind of informal collegial or peer interaction was identified as a distinct form of support for judgement, bridging the gap between entirely individual sense making and more structured and formal shared decision-making forums (Helm, 2017a).

There has been little evaluation of naturalistic social work decision making (Hackett and Taylor, 2014) but a range of near-practice studies have now begun to provide valuable insight (e.g. Gillingham and Humphreys, 2010; Ferguson, 2011; Helm, 2016; Saltiel, 2016; Cook, 2017; Whittaker, 2018) and can be used to construct theoretical models of judgement and decision making in practice. By drawing on thick descriptions of actual practice (Geertz, 1973) it may be possible to counter the tendency to offer top-down solutions based on normative models of rationality (Helm, 2017a). The findings from my own doctoral study have accordingly been synthesised with the broader research findings to inform a hypothesised model of peer-aided judgement. The model focuses on social relational aspects of social work sense making instead of adopting more controlled research designs and tuning out such important variables as if a form of contextual white noise.

Cognitive continuum theory

The theoretical framework underpinning the proposed model was developed originally by psychologist Kenneth Hammond. Hammond's Cognitive Continuum Theory (CCT) (Hammond, 1996) provides a framework for the study of individual's engagement with information from the task environment to make clinical judgements (Hammond, 1955). I will summarise the main tenets of the theory before exploring its relevance to the further development of models of social work judgement and decision making.

Theories about modes of cognition tend to focus on the dual processes of intuition and analysis (e.g. Epstein, 1994; Sloman, 1996). Dual process theorists argue that there are two separate cognitive systems: System 1 being rapid, automatic and requiring little cognitive effort whilst System 2 is slow, deliberate and cognitively demanding (Kahneman, 2011). System 1 is often likened to the autopilot dealing with routine and ordinary judgement tasks with System 2 only taking over when the demands

of the judgement task are sufficiently high as to be warranted. In the field of judgement and decision making, System 1 equates to intuition and System 2 to analysis (Kahneman, 2003).

Most contemporary research on judgement and decision making has focused on the strengths of analytic cognition and the limitations of intuition (e.g. Gilovich *et al.*, 2002) and this has been echoed in social work (see e.g. Brandon *et al.*, 2008; Wonnacott and Watts, 2014). Despite the popularity of dual process models, there is little empirical data on the ways that these two systems interact (Dhami and Thomson, 2012) and this is a significant gap for social work as a profession where the gut instinct of intuition and the defensible logic of analysis are both required in combination.

CCT is based on a number of fundamental propositions (Hammond, 1996, 2000, 2001):

1. cognition moves on an intuitive-analytical continuum (our thinking is not fixedly either intuitive or analytical);
2. forms of cognition lie on the continuum between intuition and analysis; this 'quasirationality' includes elements of both intuition and analysis; and
3. the properties of different cognitive tasks will induce different forms of cognition: intuition, quasi-rationality and analysis.

Our cognitive strategies '. . . most of the time are neither fully intuitive nor fully analytical' (Hammond, 2007, p. 237). The term 'quasirationality' describes cognition between the poles of intuition and analysis. Quasirationality comprises different combinations of intuition and analysis to best fit with the properties of the judgement task and our level of expertise (Hammond, 2007). Judgement tasks that present large amounts of complexly related data to an unfamiliar judge with little time or access to feedback will induce intuitive cognition. Tasks that present less information in a more structured way, with more time and opportunities for feedback, will induce analytical cognition (Hammond *et al.*, 1987; Hammond, 1996).

A social worker is unlikely to employ a highly analytical mode of cognition as the nature of practice precludes the higher levels of manipulation required to create the required task environment (such as controlled testing or blinding) (Standing, 2010). Systems to aid judgement may include assessment frameworks, policies and processes (such as core group meetings) and these provide a supporting structure for clinical judgement through application of research findings and theory or checks and balances on individual judgements. However, these systems are not used in a vacuum. Social workers will share some high-level judgements with line managers but the majority are made intuitively or through informal interaction and discussion with colleagues. As such, social workers are highly reliant on peer-aided judgement to move

from strongly intuitive modes of cognition towards to the more conscious, explicable and defensible forms of analytical cognition.

Peer-aided judgement

Peer-aided judgement in health settings has been conceptualised as 'extending professional knowledge with experienced colleagues and seeking expert advice where required.' (Standing, 2010, p. 114). The great majority of judgements made by social workers are not made in collaboration with managers or consultants but in discussion with colleagues. Through informal discussion and non-deliberate sharing of information, judgements are regularly but perhaps unthinkingly co-created with peers. Sense making is a dialogical and social process (Cook and Gregory, 2020) and, in social work, peers play a fundamental but poorly understood role in this process.

A model of peer-aided judgement in social work

CCT provides a powerful mechanism for understanding the direct relationship between the structure of the judgement task (the task environment) and the form of cognition that it will induce. Social work practice is distinct in the levels of uncertainty faced in making judgements, the social/moral dimension of many judgement tasks and the tradition of working in teams. Social work is inherently social in its concerns and in its practices. We make judgements and decisions within complex networks and our peers play a fundamental role in how these responsibilities are carried out.
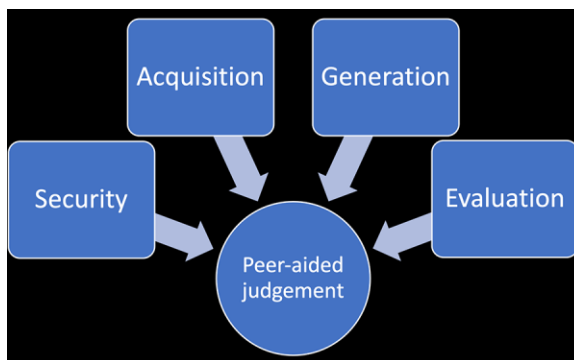

Figure 1: Core elements of peer-aided judgement.

The following diagram identifies core elements of peer-aided judgement (Fig. 1) and their role in relation to processes and outcomes. Each hypothesised element is addressed in turn so that propositions on peer-aided judgement can be made explicit and therefore subject to critical debate and further inquiry.

Accessibility

This component of the model acts as a mediator for all other elements and it is therefore addressed first. There are multiple barriers and facilitators to peer-aided judgement. The key variables in this part of the model include the temporal, spatial and psycho-social.

Time

Peer-aided judgement is more accessible when people have worked together long enough to understand each other's judgement policies and have a shared history of sense making (Hammond, 1996). Earlier studies suggest that these shared experiences may serve to develop trust and make it more likely that these peers will seek each other out in future judgement tasks (Kram and Isabella, 1985).

Judgement processes are played out over different timescales. Whilst intuitive judgements may be more or less immediate, more analytical judgements require more time. Found that proximity with peers over time in shared office allowed social workers to share uncertainties, hypotheses and reflections. For example, one social worker was observed speaking to their nearest colleague as a way of sharing their developing hypotheses, e.g. 'maybe I'm reading something into it...' as well as reviewing earlier judgements, e.g. 'reflecting back...perhaps I could have...' which was possible because of their shared history and understanding of these case examples (p. 391). However, whilst time spent together may help social workers to access peer-aided judgement it may not necessarily lead to more better judgements and this domain of evaluative function also requires consideration within any model of these processes.

Space

The richness of direct face-to-face communication may be facilitated by working spaces and team cultures where case discussion and sharing is encouraged between peers. Research comparing difference in practice between teams in large open-plan 'hot-desk' offices and teams in smaller,

'own-desk' offices (Ferguson, 2020) has identified benefits from these smaller more connected teams in relation to more supportive, reflective working practices. Jeyasingham (2015); Saltiel (2016); and Helm (2016) suggest that social workers actively engage with office layout to create more or less private spaces for peer interaction. Peer-aided judgement is now increasingly accessed through mobile technology and this rapid and generally uncritical move of social work sense making into the cyber-spatial dimension requires further attention in its own right.

Psycho-social needs

Policy and management practices that emphasise positivism and risk elimination over social constructionism and engagement with risk are less likely to create an environment where thinking and feeling are as highly prized or rewarded as action (Cooper *et al.*, 2003). Qualities such as open-mindedness and professional commitment have been correlated with capacity for engagement with uncertainty and complexity (Ruch, 2007b) but they are not fixed properties of the individual, and opportunities for peer support in judgement are likely to be influenced by a wide range of psycho-social factors. Other ethnographic studies have found that social workers gained catharsis from talking to colleagues after difficult home visits. This 'interpersonal emotional processing' was seen as built on trust:

> 'I think with informality you've got to trust the person haven't you?' (Cook, 2016, p. 197).

Diversity within the social work workforce requires a model of peer-aided judgement to include social and cultural dimensions. Consideration must therefore be given to dimensions such as gender, age or ethnicity within the workforce may influence access to peer-aided judgement.

Having considered some of those factors that influence 'access' to peer-aided judgement, I now consider core elements of the process directly: Security, Acquisition, Generation and Evaluation (SAGE).

Security

Emotions are central to social work sense making, including the impact of anxieties not being effectively contained (Bion, 1962; Ruch, 2005; Morrison, 2006). Social workers act as a focus for the projection of society's anxieties and blame (Taylor *et al.*, 2007) and this emotional context is both a challenge and an integral part of the judgement task. The supportive role of teams has been under-acknowledged (Ruch, 2007a) but practice cultures of collaboration, communication and case discussion can

support critical reflexivity (Helm, 2016; Ruch, 2007a). Peer-aided judgement occurs in spaces where emotions may be acknowledged and explored as a fundamental part of the sense-making process. Through these informal interactions, social workers gain opportunities for emotional listening (Ruch, 2007a), observing peers making judgements and critical reflection on their own sense making (Helm, 2016).

Acquisition

Knowledge can be acquired both explicitly and tacitly. The majority of professional endeavour is focused on the former and the gaining of formal or product knowledge with its attendant claims to objectivity and rigour (Sheppard and Ryan, 2003). Implicit learning (Polyani, 1967) is where expertise is developed through an individual's interactions with the practice world. Teams have traditionally been seen a source of explicit learning (e.g. through the sharing of books or conference notes) but they are also a source of implicit learning on how knowledge is developed, applied and reviewed in practice. Acquiring this knowledge of 'how' things are done is learned though 'doing' (Polyani, 1967) and the SAGE model allows interaction between peers to be scrutinised as a process through which knowledge may be acquired, articulated and made explicit.

Generation

Intuition has been linked to creativity (Fook *et al.*, 1997; Dane and Pratt, 2007) where solutions are frequently required for problems that are novel, and unique therefore not amenable to logical, linear thinking based on existing knowledge. A review of the literature (Pétervári *et al.*, 2016) has shown intuition to be associated with both generation and evaluation of phases of ideas in problem solving although the links are not fully understood (Dane and Pratt, 2007).

Informal peer interaction has been shown in some research to support professional curiosity (Helm, 2016). Curiosity is about 'stepping outside of one's comfort zone' and is perhaps more likely when practitioners believe that the discomfort associated with uncertainty can be managed effectively (Revel and Burton, 2018, p. 1512). In the face of bureaucratic managerialist organisational contexts, the non-judgemental non-accountable nature of peer-aided judgement may help practitioners to make their intuitive insights and explorations of uncertainty more explicit and subject to further testing and refining.

Evaluation

The development of expertise in judgement and decision making requires feedback which is diagnostic, accurate and timely (Klein, 1997). Peers represent an easily (often immediately) accessible source of evaluative feedback on judgements but the quality of such feedback is largely unknown and potentially questionable, given the lack of attention paid to peer-aided judgement in training and organisational policy. Achieving accuracy in social work assessments is an important and valid goal but we are reminded that, in social work, 'decisions are a negotiated process related to moral reasoning, identities, relationship and culpability.' (Keddell, 2011, p. 1266) and external measures of accuracy are not always readily available (Hammond, 1996). Informal peer discussion is understood to contribute to addressing practice problems such as deflection strategies and rising thresholds (Platt and Turney, 2014; Saltiel, 2016). Attention to the evaluative function of peer interaction may provide valuable insight into the way that social workers seek to achieve logical and defensible judgements in conditions of uncertainty.

Oscillation

Over time, cognition will oscillate between analysis and intuition (Hammond, 1996). Rationality is rarely seen to be wholly intuitive or analytical and this article has explored the role of peer-aided judgement as a form of quasirationality. By mapping out the main elements of peer-aided judgement, it is possible to consider how the interactions between these elements facilitate movement on the cognitive continuum.

Practitioners have been observed to move 'with some fluidity between intuitive and analytical modes of cognition' (Whittaker, 2018, p. 1975). These movements are determined by properties of the judgement task, such as amount and format of information, and/or the decision maker's familiarity with the task, opportunity for feedback, and extent of time pressure (Hammond, 1996, 2000; Dhami and Mumpower, 2018). A fast-moving and poorly structured task environment (such as a home visit) is expected to induce a more intuitive form or rationality. Where more time is available for thinking and information is presented in more linear forms, a more analytical form of cognition is induced.

It is easier to restructure the task environment than it is to purposefully alter one's approach to rationality (Hammond, 1996). For example, a social worker cannot deliberately 'be analytical' within the complex fast-moving judgement task of a home visit. However, they can become more analytical when writing up the visit back at the office. Informal interaction with peers effectively restructures the task environment for judgement. For example, talking to a colleague about what happened in

a home visit shifts a poorly structured set of complex data towards a coherent narrative structure with a focus on fewer selected indicators. This move in the task structure will provoke a similar move on the cognitive continuum from intuition towards analysis. Expressing emotions to a peer when 'stuck' with an assessment broadens the focus to include the affective dimension, with a change in task environment associated with more intuitive modes of cognition.

Restructuring the judgement task is a key element of supervision (e.g. examining decisions to check for biases or question weak hypotheses) but this is limited in frequency and scope. However, informal discussions with colleagues do offer frequent opportunities to reflect on judgements through iterative discussions. There is limited writing on ad-hoc peer supervision (Kadushin and Harkness, 2002; Golia and McGovern, 2015) and, whilst peer-aided judgement is not a substitute for management guidance and supervision, it is a form of daily practice which is under-researched and under-theorised (Taylor, 2017). Further studies may usefully focus on the role of informal case-talk as a mechanism for restructuring task environments to support movement on the cognitive continuum, and the potential for meaningful exploration of ethical tensions and positionality in practice.

Limitations

The study that highlighted the potential of peer-aided judgement and initiated work on the model was a small-scale UK-based ethnography and is therefore limited in capacity for generalising and transferring knowledge. Intersectionality in peer relationships is not addressed explicitly or in depth in many of the studies that inform this article, and this limitation needs to be acknowledged in both the potential application of the model and in an agenda for further research.

The literature review that was included in the original thesis provides access to relevant data from similar research as well as the underpinning theory. By grounding this work in established theory and then developing a hypothesised model, the aim is to facilitate critical debate and offer an initial framework upon which to develop further theory and research. Whilst the domains of the model are rooted in existing research findings, further work is required to extend the knowledge base and the potential utility of the model.

The model cannot be used to evaluate the quality of judgement and decision making. Indeed, the elements of peer-aided judgement that have been observed in social work practice and incorporated into this model may be negative influences on competence. For example, peers may be sources of knowledge that is problematic or incorrect, and networked judgements may accelerate rather than guard against common

errors of reasoning. This model is not a prescription for practice but a framework for developing a fuller understanding of the components which may ultimately contribute to improved practice.

Power and diversity

Peer relationships are commonly viewed as being informal, non-assigned and relatively equal. However, power flows from personal and structural sources (Fook and Gardner, 2007) across a broad range of dimensions such as age, gender, ethnicity, professional identity and knowledge. As power is invested at a societal level, so structural perpetuation of such inequalities must necessarily be included in individual constructions of peer status. Dominelli (2002) reminds us 'identity is a fluid and constantly changing terrain' (p. 39) so the impact of such influences needs to be viewed within a wider social and cultural perspective over time.

Implications

There is a 'distinct dearth of research on the operation and outcomes of quasirationality' (Dhami and Mumpower, 2018, p. 14). The proposed model allows some important aspects of social work judgement and decision making to be held up for greater scrutiny. In particular, it provides a lens on the inter-subjective nature of judgement and the influence that peers have on the process and outcomes of these judgements.

The category of 'Security' in the model recognises affect as central to sense making in social work. In this way, emotions may be viewed as a crucial element of human judgement, rather than a hindrance to 'good' rationality (Demasio, 2006). Uncertainty and anxiety are simultaneously fundamental and problematic in critically reflexive social work practice (Cooper *et al.*, 2003; Ruch, 2007a). '... for reflective practice to be possible, the appropriate physical, mental and emotional space—containers—need to be provided' (Ruch, 2007b, p. 664). Collegial practice within teams is an interpersonal space where containment can be offered. However, such opportunities are increasingly threatened by the individualisation of practice (Braye and Preston-Shoot, 2000) and agile working (Jeyasingham, 2015). Conceptualising peer support as a key element of social work judgement may support closer consideration of the contribution that team practices can make to working with anxiety and uncertainty.

Reflective practice as a concept tends to be based on practitioners' retrospective accounts their work, not direct observation of the work itself (Sheppard *et al.*, 2000; Johnsson and Svensson, 2005) and this ex post facto analysis risks developing explanations that are based on knowledge of an outcome not known at the time of judgement itself. It

is therefore beneficial to develop models for the study of judgement and decision making that do not rely on retrospective self-reporting but can offer structure to naturalistic research and theory development.

Failure in a particular cognitive mode is thought to provoke movement on the cognitive continuum (Hammond, 1996; Dhami and Thomson, 2012) yet we find that social workers can experience 'assessment paralysis' (Reder and Duncan, 1999) when their analytical cognition is overwhelmed and 'confirmation bias' when their intuitive judgement proves insufficient to the task (Munro, 1999). In pursuit of creative thinking and analytical rigour, the model provides a tool to consider the processes that facilitate movement on the cognitive continuum and the conditions that mediate access to these processes.

Peer interaction alters the task environment and this, in turn, induces oscillation on the cognitive continuum. For example, social workers naturally tell their colleagues what happened on a home visit when they return to the office. The role of discourse and narrative is well established across professions (Riessman and Quinney, 2005) and problematised in social work (e.g. Riemann, 2005; Doherty, 2017; Hood, 2018). The role of case-talk in inducing movement on the cognitive continuum is potentially highly significant and study of such processes is facilitated by this model.

Teams of professionals working effectively together represent collective memory (Förkby and Höjer, 2011) and emergent expertise gained through social work practice. Whilst this knowledge may be tacit and therefore not easily accessible to conscious defensible logic, it represents an opportunity to test the competency of judgement coherence (logic, consistency) as well as correspondence (empirical accuracy) (Hammond, 1996) This has implications for the construction and ongoing development of teams as well as professional education for judgement and decision making (Custers, 2019).

Evaluations of the Reclaiming Social Work approach have shown that specifically defined roles in social work teams can have a positive impact on judgement and decision making (Cross *et al.*, 2010; Forrester *et al.*, 2013) and the peer-aided judgement model may help to explore team composition and the potential benefits of team supports for effective thinking. Latent conditions for error (Reason, 2000) are those which lie buried in the heart of organisations and structures (De Bortoli and Dolan, 2015). Whilst the model facilitates a close examination of conditions within these organisational structures, the impact of latent conditions must also feature in that analysis. This is particularly relevant when considering power dimensions within peer networks, the domain of Security in this model and the factors moderating access to peer-aided judgement.

Managerial oversight plays an important role in terms of emotional, epistemological and procedural containment (Ruch, 2007b) and peer-aided judgement is not a replacement for such functions. However, the shortcomings of managerial supervision are well recognised (e.g. Wilkins *et al.*, 2017)

and the power imbalance between managers and social workers can result in social workers deferring to managers in decision making when greater rigour and scrutiny is called for. Authority should not be unquestioningly equated with expertise (Weick and Sutcliffe, 2015) and further study of peer-aided judgement, alongside line-managed decision-making processes, may help to strengthen judgement and decision making for both social workers and managers.

Conclusions

This article has proposed a hypothesised model of peer-aided judgement. By grounding the model in CCT there is an explicit acknowledgement of quasirationality as the predominant form of cognition in most judgement tasks (Hammond, 1996). A better understanding of the processes and outcomes of quasirationality has the potential to inform developments in many areas of social work practice.

The model provides a lens for the closer scrutiny of peer interaction as a key element of professional judgement and this article has identified implications in relation to the effective use of intuition (Munro, 1999, 2008), debiasing (Saltiel, 2016; Cook, 2017), and feedback loops on decision making (Kirkman and Melrose, 2014). Studies of social work judgement and decision making will benefit from the further development of models to explore the functions of peer-interactions.

The implications of the model have been highlighted in relation to those factors that mediate access to peer-aided judgement. Recognising the limitations of the empirical evidence to date on this matter, the proposed model has focused primarily on informal interaction within teams and there is a need for further exploration of how social work judgements, and their outcomes, can meaningfully incorporate and take account of the needs and perspectives of service users and minority communities.

Conflict of interest statement. None declared.

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