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AN HM INSPECTORATE OF PROBATION EFFECTIVE PRACTICE GUIDE



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# Middle manager: professional curiosity insights guide

Based on:

HM Inspectorate of Probation's findings from SFO reviews, adult  
core and thematic inspections

**October 2022**

# Acknowledgements

This effective practice insights guide is based on information sourced from HM Inspectorate of Probation's core programme, thematic inspections carried out between 2020 and 2022, serious further offence (SFOs) reviews and independent case reviews. Tammie Burroughs, effective practice lead, has drawn out the learning in relation to professional curiosity, with contributions from SFO inspectors Hannah Williams and Lizzie Wright, assistant inspectors Katy Davies, Kieran Gildea, Karen Grinney and Jodie Lewinson, senior research officer Kevin Ball and our senior management team. The results are presented in this pack to support the continuous development of practitioners and managers. The manager responsible for this workstream is Linda Neimantas.

We would like to thank all those who participated in any way in this guide, including those probation areas who sent current guidance (North West, East of England and Kent, Surrey, and Sussex). Without their help and cooperation, the inspections and effective practice guide would not have been possible.

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Please note that, throughout the pack, the names in the practice examples have been changed, and certain identifying details have been altered and/or merged with other cases to protect the individual's identity.

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# Introduction

## About this guide

HM Inspectorate of Probation has a duty to identify and disseminate effective practice.<sup>1</sup>

We assure the quality of youth offending and probation provision and test its effectiveness. Critically, we make recommendations designed to highlight and disseminate effective practice, challenge poor performance and encourage providers to improve.

This insights guide is designed for middle managers to help them consider how they can create a culture that enables and promotes professional curiosity. It is designed as a supplement to the practitioner insights guide, which explores what professional curiosity is, why it is important, errors, bias and barriers that impede its use, and how you can mitigate these. It also highlights themes where a lack of professional curiosity has impacted on the quality of case supervision. Both guides share case illustrations where the use of professional curiosity has improved quality.

I hope this will be of interest to everyone working in probation services and seeking to develop their practice. We welcome feedback on this and our other guides, to ensure that they are as useful as possible to future readers.



**Justin Russell**

HM Chief Inspector of Probation



## Contact us



We would love to hear what you think of this guide. Please find current contact details via the [HM Inspectorate of Probation Effective Practice page](#).

<sup>1</sup> **For adult services** – Section 7 of the *Criminal Justice and Court Services Act (2000)*, as amended by the *Offender Management Act (2007)*, section 12(3)(a). **For youth services** – inspection and reporting on youth offending teams is established under section 39 of the *Crime and Disorder Act (1998)*.

# How to use this insights guide

This middle managers' insight guide and the practitioners'<sup>2</sup> version have been developed using the learning from HM Inspectorate of Probation's core and thematic programmes. In addition, we have drawn from learning arising from our independent case and SFO reviews.<sup>3</sup>

The practitioner guide has been designed to provide a comprehensive introduction to 'professional curiosity' to stimulate thinking therefore, there are numerous opportunities to reflect, discuss and generate ideas. The practitioner guide covers the different definitions and descriptions of professional curiosity, what professional curiosity means to people who work in the criminal justice sector, how it is linked to the inspection standards and why it is important. It identifies learning from our independent case and SFO reviews, thematic inspections, and core inspection programme, to illustrate why professional curiosity is such an important part of practice, and provides examples from cases we have seen in inspections. We explore the core skills that underpin professional curiosity, errors, bias and barriers that can impede the skill, and strategies to mitigate these. And it explores the importance of being curious about learning, providing links to some useful theories to support practitioners. Each section provides information, exercises and reflection questions for the reader. We have also used different approaches to appeal to different readers; for example, in some sections we reiterate the messages in the videos for those who would prefer to read content and have a discussion rather than watch a video.

Middle managers may want to use the practitioner guide to facilitate professional development sessions with their teams, on an individual basis, in team meetings or by encouraging action learning sets to reflect on some of the content. Therefore, it is important that this guide is read alongside the practitioner's version.

The manager's guide identifies the leadership role of middle managers in promoting a culture that enables professional curiosity in practice, and encourages continuous professional development.

We recognise that people are busy; therefore, this is not designed to be read as a report. Instead, we encourage you, and practitioners, to dip in and out of the guides and to use them as a tool for continuous professional development for you and your team.

As the reader, you are encouraged to reflect on HM Inspectorate of Probation's standards and the examples and perspectives offered, and to analyse and critically evaluate these based on your own experiences, area of practice and protected characteristics, and then formulate a plan for you and your team to apply the learning in practice.

As you read, we encourage you to have some key questions in mind so that you can critically analyse the content:

- What impact did/does professional curiosity have on the quality of case supervision?
- What do you as an individual, as a colleague, and as a manager do to recognise and enable professional curiosity?
- What individual, structural and organisational factors are in place to support professional curiosity?

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<sup>2</sup> We use the term 'practitioner' for inclusive purposes to refer to probation officers, probation service officers, interventions staff, unpaid work, approved premises and all others who deliver services to people on probation.

<sup>3</sup> The names in the practice examples have been changed, and certain identifying details have been altered and/or merged with other cases, to protect the individual's identity.

## Finding your way: icon key



Denotes a task to undertake, alone or within a group



Denotes reflection questions



Denotes an external public video



Denotes a video from HM Inspectorate of Probation



Denotes a tool for practitioners, for example: poster, prompts



Denotes a link to further reading

# Professional curiosity: What does it mean?

It is important that practitioners, managers and senior leaders have a common understanding of what the term 'professional curiosity' means, especially if we are encouraging people to use this skill effectively. This shared understanding will help people to discuss professional curiosity and increase its use.

Achieving a shared understanding sounds straightforward, in principle. However, it can be hard to achieve, especially given the different definitions available and different perspectives. In teams with a high workload and low capacity, and where turnover is significant, it can be difficult to maintain.

Managers may wish to explore the different definitions available with their teams and agree how they would describe it, in line with the vision of the Probation Service. To assist with this, pages 8 to 13 of the practitioner guide explore the different definitions available from safeguarding and healthcare professionals, academics and HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). It also shares learning from a journal article that explores what professional curiosity means, and encourages practitioners to view it through different lenses, for example a person on probation and a victim. It also includes a video of different people across the Inspectorate and HMPPS responding to the question:

## **"What does professional curiosity mean to you?"**

Sonia Flynn, Chief Probation Officer, begins the video by explaining:

*"Professional curiosity features as a cornerstone of all probation practice ... it should be front and centre of our core purpose to assess, protect and change."*

*"We can only conduct good assessments if we have all the available information, and have collated that into a good, robust evidence-based assessment. We can only protect if we're professionally curious, so that we are checking and validating the information that we have about the individual. We can only support them to change if we see the whole person and really understand what's important to them and what's going to drive their change journey, their move away from crime to develop a different sense of purpose and identity."*



Once you have established a team understanding of professional curiosity, you may want to consciously develop a shared language across your team for when you are referring to the skill. Agree specific words, phrases and concepts that relate to your definition, and use them consistently to reinforce that shared vision, which should be aligned with the overall vision of the Probation Service.

Use professional curiosity when talking about practice, to help practitioners to understand what is working well and why, to ascertain if it can be replicated elsewhere, and to explore shortfalls in practice and what is causing them. Refer to it in individual and team meetings,



and when you see people actively using professional curiosity, recognise it and reinforce it among the team.

Also consider the broader definitions shared, such as how curiosity links with continuous professional development, enabling people to remain current and to understand the evidence that underpins their practice. And think about how professional curiosity supports effective leadership. As a manager and leader within the Probation Service, it is important to be curious about the culture you have created within your team, and the quality of the service being delivered.

Linda Neimantas, head of our probation inspection programme, shares some insights about professional curiosity and how it links with leadership, encouraging leaders to reflect on the following questions:

*"How are you enabling practitioners to be curious? How are you curious about how you run the best possible service, as a leader? Just as an example, are you looking at what does compliance look like across your PDU? Or, if working in unpaid work: why are some projects better attended than others? Is it the location? The type of project? Is it the day that's it's on? Is it the supervisor? There could be a whole heap of different things, so I think professional curiosity cuts across the piece. It's not just about the work, it's also about the learning as well; being professionally curious is about wanting to learn, and wanting to think about what are the best ways of doing things."*



### Reflection questions

Reflecting on this section, combined with the relevant part of the practitioner guide:

- As a leader, what kind of things are you professionally curious about?
- Think about how you would describe professional curiosity. Has this changed from your initial thoughts on the subject? How?
- How do your team understand the term professional curiosity?
- If you believe there are differences in understanding, how will you address this?
- How can you be assured of a consistent shared understanding (especially considering movement across teams)?
- How do/can you demonstrate your understanding of professional curiosity in your leadership?
- What is your role as a leader in enabling professional curiosity?
- Are you a leader who is open to challenge? How do you feel when challenged by others?



# How does professional curiosity link with HM Inspectorate of Probation's standards?



## **As a group or on your own:**

Scan the [Probation inspection standards](#) and consider which standards professional curiosity is relevant to in case management.



[In this 7:32min YouTube video](#), Helen Mercer, Head of Policy and Standards discusses what professional curiosity means to her (please note the first four minutes of this video are the same as that contained in the practitioner guide):

*"being interested and curious about the job that you do ... being motivated and driven and seeing that level of understanding, interest, curiosity getting to the detail of whichever piece of work you are doing, with whomever you are doing it, to make sure you are doing it to the best of your ability."*



She describes how it links to the HM Inspectorate of Probation case supervision standards:

*"whole of the standards framework is relevant to professional curiosity on the basis of the definition [above]. It's pivotal to everything a practitioner would do."*

Helen also describes how it is linked to the organisational delivery standards, noting:

*"professional curiosity is a way of being, a behaviour, a way of doing your job."*

For example, we:

*"expect leaders to be curious enough to really get under the skin ... and understand the characteristics of that group in order to make that work meaningful; whether that work is about commissioning services [or] delivering a strategy to meet the needs of those individuals. Without the level of understanding that comes with that degree of curiosity it would be difficult to do some of those things."*

This point is reinforced by Gabriel Amahwe, South Central Probation Regional Director, who noted:

*"So, if I talk about professional curiosity, as a Regional Probation Director, I meet with my Head of Operations and Head of Public Protection once a month to go through our high profile and noteworthy cases, and in doing so, I make sure I role model a professionally curious approach. I ask questions, explore, ask for alternative views, explore the current assessment in the context of the historical information and I ask about how people have come to their judgements and decisions."*

*I encourage professional curiosity to be modelled across the whole organisation, even in strategic meetings, for example around workforce planning. So, for example, looking at retention it's easy to come to the obvious conclusion that retention is predominantly linked to pay. But the more you look, the more information you have, the more you seek feedback from people as to why they're leaving; you start to get a very rich picture of some of the other things you need to do around retention. So, for me there are elements in ways we apply professional curiosity to our practice, regardless of your role across the organisation."*



### Reflection questions

Focusing specifically on the inspection standards in domain one, consider how professional curiosity can help you to:

- deliver your vision
- ensure the views of people on probation are considered in service delivery
- develop an understanding of the risks to service delivery in your team, Probation Delivery Unit and region
- understand the resources required to deliver a quality service
- explore the skill set required to deliver a quality service
- understand how engaged your team is
- understand the learning needs of your team and develop a plan to address them
- identify gaps in service delivery and address these
- understand the quality of your partnerships
- assess how reliable the data for your team is, both in terms of the people within your team and the service being delivered
- develop accountability processes and clear governance to drive a quality service

# As a manager how professionally curious are you?

Page 15 in the practitioner guide encourage practitioners to think about how curious they are in their practice. This section includes a practical exercise, based on case management, to examine how curious they would be in specific situations. You may want to use this exercise to facilitate a discussion about being professionally curious.

As highlighted in the quote from Sonia Flynn, being professionally curious is the *"cornerstone of good probation practice"*. This includes the leadership within the service.

Have you ever stopped to consider the following:

- How professionally curious are you?
- Does it change throughout your day? What do you think influences this?
- Does it change across the different people you line manage? What do you think influences this?
- Does it change with the different roles you take on throughout the day or throughout your career? If you were a practitioner, are you professionally curious about different things now that you are a manager/leader?

It may be beneficial for you to hold these questions in your mind as you reflect on the contents of this pack. Below is an exercise to help you start thinking:

**Part 1: Ask a colleague** to observe you in a supervision session and/or in a meeting and ask them to write down every question you ask.

If possible, ask them to do this on more than one occasion.

Once you have a list of your questions:

Review the list and categorise the questions, for example, how many are:

- closed questions?
- leading questions?
- affirming questions?
- rhetorical questions?
- probing questions?
- divergent questions?
- open questions?

Using this list, reflect on how many of the questions you ask stem from you being curious.

**Part 2: As a management group or on your own**, consider the following questions:

- How curious are you about the quality of the service your team is delivering?
- Do you understand what is working well, and why?
- What needs to improve, and why?

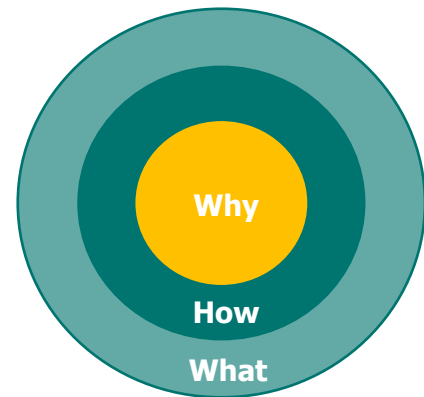


# Why is professional curiosity important?

To promote professional curiosity and improve the way it is used, it is essential to know why it is important and, as a leader, share this with clarity and conviction to motivate your team.

Simon Sinek, an author and inspirational speaker, refers to 'the why' as the golden circle, and this forms the central focus of his book 'Start with Why'. He says that, using this, leaders can inspire people into action to drive positive results.

The theory is based on science, as it corresponds to different parts of the human brain. 'Why' and 'how' are linked to the limbic system, which controls feelings, decisions and behaviour. 'What' is linked to the neocortex, which is responsible for analytical thought and language. This is what enables us to rationalise the decisions we make.



**Figure 1: The Golden Circle: Why, How, What**



You can [watch this 17:48 minute Ted Talk from Simon Sinek explaining 'How great leaders inspire action.'](#)



If you would like to read more, this [Harvard Business Review article presents 'The Business Case for Curiosity.'](#) It may be useful to compare this with the benefits you identified.

## As a group or on your own:

Consider the following questions:



- How has curiosity benefited you in various roles throughout your career?
- How does/can it benefit your team?
- What impact would curiosity have on the quality of practice in your team, in your PDU and within your region?

In the practitioner guide, we share an overview of why professional curiosity is so important from multiple perspectives, including:

- **Safeguarding** – we share research from the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (Broadhurst<sup>4</sup> et al, 2010) that identified 10 common pitfalls during the initial assessment process and ways to avoid these using professional curiosity (pages 16 and 17).

<sup>4</sup> Broadhurst, K., White, S., Fish, S., Munro, E., Fletcher, K., & Lincoln, H. (2010). *Ten pitfalls and how to avoid them: What research tells us*. National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

- **Learning from independent case reviews** – in a recorded interview, Simi Badachha, head of probation inspection programme, who also has oversight of independent case reviews and SFO reviews, highlights themes around professional curiosity that have arisen from this work (pages 17 and 18).
- **Learning from SFOs** – Hannah Williams and Lizzie Wright, our SFO quality assurance inspectors, provide a list of common sub-themes that relate to professional curiosity and share further insight into these in a recorded interview (pages 18 to 20).
- **Learning from thematic inspections** – in a short recorded interview, Helen Davies, head of thematic and joint inspections, shares the breadth of the themes arising in relation to professional curiosity. We also provide a link to a document containing the learning points about professional curiosity from thematic inspections conducted since 2020, including accommodation, recall, race, substance use, mental health, electronic monitoring and multi-agency public protection arrangements (page 20).
- **Learning from the core programme** – in a recorded interview, Linda Neimantas, head of probation inspection programme, highlights how professional curiosity can have a positive impact on the quality of case supervision (pages 20 and 21).

We share a document that lists common practice issues when a lack of professional curiosity has a negative impact on case supervision. We include top tips to address each of these themes, categorised across assessments, planning, implementation and delivery and reviews and evaluation (the ASPIRE model).

- **Effective practice case examples** – we share case illustrations of the positive impact of professional curiosity in practice (pages 22 to 25).
- **The impact** – using quotes from people on probation, we share the impact on people when practitioners work effectively using professional curiosity (page 26).

## In practice

The impact of a manager who creates a culture that enables professional curiosity and actively encourages this can be seen in the practice examples below.

### Example of effectiveness: addressing barriers to professional curiosity

During the MAPPA<sup>5</sup> thematic inspection, we reviewed the case below and noted:

*"Probation staff often have to work with extremely challenging individuals who attempt to manipulate or intimidate them; this can take its toll on the welfare of the practitioner. In this case, the manager allocated a co-worker, which relieved the pressure on an individual practitioner and helped to set clear boundaries with the person on probation."*



#### Case illustration

Cody was sentenced to 27 months in prison for stalking and harassment of his wife. This was his first conviction, but followed repeated breaches of a caution given for a pattern of similar behaviour. He was initially assessed as medium risk of harm; however, his level of preoccupation and complete denial that his actions were abusive led to the risk being escalated, and he was referred to MAPPA Level 2. The concerns were picked up by monitoring his communications while he was in prison, where he expressed that he still viewed the victim as his wife and had no intention of ceasing contact with her. There was good communication between the prison offender manager and the community offender manager, and they shared relevant information to enable a robust assessment and plan to be prepared for Cody's release. He was referred to approved premises outside his home area and then resettled away from his hometown. Through MAPPA, additional conditions were proposed and added to his licence to allow his mobile telephone and internet use to be monitored.

Cody displayed high levels of manipulation and extremely challenging behaviour towards staff. The practitioner recognised this and actively sought out the manager to discuss the impact. In order to support the practitioner, the manager allocated a co-worker. This arrangement worked well, as both gave consistent messages to Cody, which in turn reduced his constant challenges. Good communication between the two practitioners enabled reflection and discussion about the best ways to work with Cody. The original practitioner welcomed the arrangement, which reduced the pressure and stress that working with Cody brought. In addition, there was good management oversight recorded throughout the case.

<sup>5</sup> You can access the MAPPA thematic report, effective practice guide and associated reports via [Twenty years on, is MAPPA achieving its objectives? A joint thematic inspection of Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/twenty-years-on-is-mapppa-achieving-its-objectives-a-joint-thematic-inspection-of-multi-agency-public-protection-arrangements/)

## Example of effectiveness: innovative and persistent professional curiosity

In our thematic inspection of recall,<sup>6</sup> we inspected a case where inspectors commented:

*"This case demonstrates the benefits of effective communication and collaborative multi-agency work, in terms of the regular liaison with the police as part of case management. The practitioner was proactive in identifying concerns, and a possible escalating risk, and sought consultation from management regarding how to move the case forward. They were creative in how they verified information and when the concerns were confirmed the practitioner followed up with appropriate action."*



### Case illustration

Kevin was sentenced to three years' imprisonment for the assault of his partner. There were additional concerns about his level of maturity. Two months after release, routine liaison between the practitioner and police identified that he was associating with a young girl who was in the care of the local authority. The practitioner contacted children's social care for any relevant information and spoke to Kevin about the concerns that had been raised. Kevin denied any involvement in a relationship or any contact with young girls. The information from children's social care confirmed that the young girl was in a relationship, but they were unable to establish with whom.

The practitioner proactively consulted with the manager about their concerns and following this liaised further with children's social care. Through the exchange of a photograph, the responsible officer established that Kevin was in a relationship with the vulnerable young girl in care. There was also evidence of controlling behaviour.

In view of the imminent risk to the young girl, Kevin's dishonesty and his previous convictions for domestic abuse, a standard recall was instigated, and Kevin was recalled for breaching the licence condition that he must disclose all developing intimate relationships.

## Example of effectiveness: professional curiosity in enforcement decisions

During the recall thematic inspection, we also inspected the case described below, which inspectors noted illustrates:

*"excellent communication in the assessment, planning and delivery process. It was positive to note, as appropriate because of risk levels, attempts to contact the person on probation through partner agencies and family members before making the enforcement decision. In addition, the practitioner was supported to make the right decisions to move the case forward."*

<sup>6</sup> You can access the recall thematic via [A thematic review of probation recall culture and practice \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk)





## Case illustration

Don was sentenced to seven months' imprisonment for shoplifting following a fourth conviction for shoplifting over a 10-month period. He had a history of short prison sentences for similar offences. His history of cooperation with practitioners was poor, and on previous sentences he had been recalled to prison several times. Don's offending was primarily motivated by his addiction to class A drugs; there was also evidence of mental health needs. While Don was being supervised on licence, practitioners had attempted to engage him in addressing his addiction. However, these attempts had consistently met with failure and a swift return to further offences. Don's risk of serious harm was assessed as medium.

The support and supervision plan put in place for Don's release from the seven-month sentence was comprehensive. It included supported accommodation; intervention from an addiction agency, including provision for a methadone prescription; and mental health support, including medication. The practitioner liaised effectively with the key agencies, including the police, both before and after Don's release from prison. Don's cooperation with the supervision plan was sporadic. The practitioner worked hard to encourage him to attend appointments, both with probation and the key agencies. Although Don missed appointments, there was no evidence that the risk of serious harm had increased, so the focus was on re-engagement rather than enforcement. Recall was considered, but two licence warnings were issued instead, along with directions that Don should comply with the release plan.

Don's ill health associated with drug use resulted in his admission to hospital. The practitioner worked well with the medical services and accommodation was arranged for his discharge. Following discharge to the accommodation, Don failed to keep appointments and moved out of the accommodation. The practitioner contacted all of the key agencies and Don's relatives but was unable to contact him. Following information from the police that Don was suspected of further shoplifting offences, the practitioner discussed the case with the manager and instigated a fixed-term recall. Don's whereabouts were unknown, and he had breached his licence by failing to keep in contact with the practitioner. The recall was instigated to prevent further offences.

## Example of effectiveness: professional curiosity driving actions

From a core inspection, we noted:

*"This case illustrates the importance of thinking holistically about risk to ensure appropriate decisions are taken and actions are followed up on where there are safety concerns. It was positive that the manager had created a culture where practitioners felt able to actively consult on decisions and follow up actions."*



## Case illustration

Oliver was subject to a lengthy licence which included a residence licence condition. He attended the office for an unannounced visit and informed his practitioner that he had been the victim of a violent assault involving firearms and, as a result, he had left the authorised address.

The practitioner immediately raised this with the manager and was supported to address this in an appropriate manner, including instigating the appropriate checks on the new address, informing the police of the concerns for the individual, the previous address where the assault occurred and the new address, due to ongoing risks.

### **Example of effectiveness:** professional curiosity to understand culture and the impact on compliance and engagement

In the thematic inspection on race,<sup>7</sup> the significance of managers who were seen as very knowledgeable and interested was demonstrated. Some of these managers had made diversity a standard item on supervision agendas. One practitioner stated:

*"If discussing a case where the service user is from an ethnic minority background, my line manager will give support and advise on what will work best".*

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<sup>7</sup> You can access the race thematic inspection via <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/inspections/race-equality-in-probation/>

# Enabling professional curiosity

*"Professional curiosity needs to be owned by the individual, the workplace and the academic environment."*

*~Eason (2010)<sup>8</sup>*

As illustrated in the quote above, managers have a responsibility to facilitate and promote professional curiosity. The culture and environment in which people work can either impede this skill, or promote it, and help practitioners to develop it. This is driven by a number of factors, and the most significant of these are highlighted in this section.

## Enabling professional curiosity – Promote an understanding of what it is and why it is important

In order to promote the use of professional curiosity, it is important that practitioners understand what it is and why it is essential to use in their day-to-day practice. In addition to the exercises about definitions and why it is important, pages 27 to 37 of the practitioner pack highlight the core skills that underpin professional curiosity, which may be useful to explore with your team.

Pages 38 to 40 of the practitioner guide provide two practical exercises to illustrate how professional curiosity promotes a quality assessment.

## Enabling professional curiosity – Managing the dynamic demands of the job

Working for the probation service is a demanding, albeit rewarding, career. Workloads can fluctuate depending on staffing levels, resources available, the levels of experience among your team, caseload numbers, office footfall, release and recall rates, and the risks, needs and current circumstances of the specific people on probation seen by your team.

For some, this can feel overwhelming on occasions. It can paralyse people into inaction, making them feel as if they are just scratching the surface. And it can make you feel as if you have no time to be curious.

At these times, it is helpful to be professionally curious about what is driving these feelings. For example, is it the number of cases or demands from processes that are not working effectively to support your team? Reflect on this with individuals, your team, colleagues and your management, and explore strategies to address the underlying causes.

On pages 46 to 49 of the practitioner guide, we share some strategies that may be useful for practitioners to consider in these circumstances. Below are some tips that may be useful for middle managers:

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<sup>8</sup> Eason T. (2010). 'Lifelong learning: fostering a culture of curiosity'. *Creat Nurs*. 16(4):155-9. doi: 10.1891/1078-4535.16.4.155. PMID: 21140867.

- **Identify the risks associated with the current workload and communicate with your team** – be open and honest, and keep your team informed of the situation and the efforts you and senior leaders are making to resolve it. Encourage people to suggest strategies they think will help manage the situation, so that they can be a part of the solution. Consistently evaluate how effective these strategies are in practice, so that you can adjust them as appropriate.
- **Be visible** – walk the floor to check in with your team on a daily basis. People will find the presence of their manager reassuring and will appreciate the opportunity to have face-to-face contact. This also allows you to take a temperature check of how people are feeling.
- **Plan your individual supervision sessions and team meetings in advance and adhere to these** – it is important that supervision is prioritised by managers, especially at times when workload demands are at a peak. All too often this is neglected when operational pressures are heightened, yet supervision at these times can often help an individual to take stock of their work, plan and prioritise tasks, and focus on what is realistic. It also allows managers to support staff's emotional wellbeing. Therefore, it is often more essential at times when workflow peaks.

In addition, your own supervision is also a priority to allow you to discuss resources, workload and wellbeing.

- **Ensure people take breaks** – some staff may feel it is counterintuitive to take breaks when feeling overwhelmed, but it is important to do so. This includes not working late every evening, not working at weekends when not on the rota to do so, and taking annual leave, as appropriate. A healthy work/life balance is important to reduce stress, help prevent burnout and increase a sense of fulfilment.
- **Ensure the data accurately reflects the workload** – while workload is more than caseload numbers, and practitioners' capacity depends on the risks and needs of the individuals they work with, the numbers can still have an impact on how people feel. Therefore, support practitioners to close cases efficiently. In addition, ensure the intensity of practitioners' workloads is appropriately reflected in risk assessments and the risk registers. This information can then be used as evidence of the resources your team requires to manage the actual risks and needs on the caseload.
- **Provide clarity about what work/tasks to prioritise** – make individual and team plans to address any outstanding work/backlogs, and set clear deadlines and notable milestones to review progress. Ensure you review progress with the individuals and team to promote accountability.
- **Collaborate** – encourage people to work as a team and, where appropriate, trade tasks between themselves based on current workflow.
- **Leverage your internal and partnership networks** – refer people on probation to interventions and partnerships, where appropriate, as per risks and needs. Liaise with colleagues about what additional support can be offered and discuss this with your line managers.
- **Recognise and celebrate achievements** – collect and amplify the positive messages about people overcoming obstacles, showing kindness to colleagues, collaborating, providing innovative solutions or maybe remaining positive and productive.

At these times, it is also important to reflect on your leadership style and what your team may need. In the final section in this guide, entitled professional curiosity (on pages 34 to 37), we share some theories on leadership that you may find helpful.

## Enabling professional curiosity – Be curious about your team

Teams are made up of diverse individuals, with different backgrounds, values and beliefs. Get to know your team members so you can understand their personalities, perspectives, needs, work styles, goals, strengths and areas for development. This will help you to understand the team dynamics and build on the strengths of individuals to support the growth of the team. For example, if you are aware that one practitioner is stronger on risk, it may be that they can support briefings or co-work a case to share their knowledge.

Ask team members about themselves and their working style, for example:

- What do they need most from their manager?
- What motivates them?
- What demotivates them?
- What are their expectations of you as their manager?
- What do they think you can expect of them?
- What are their personal and professional goals? What help do they need with planning to work towards these?
- What do they think their personal and professional strengths are?
- What do they think their personal and professional areas for improvement are? How can you help them achieve this?



Equally, discuss these points with your own manager so they can understand more about you.

## Enabling professional curiosity – Recognise the personal challenges

Part of creating a culture that enables people to practise using professional curiosity effectively is recognising that probation work can take an emotional toil, and that, equally, it can be very rewarding. Therefore, it is important that managers care for their staff's personal wellbeing, and demonstrate this in their leadership. They can do this through empathy, communication, creating opportunities for staff development, providing feedback (both positive and developmental), allowing people to innovate for the shared vision of the team, encouraging a healthy work/life balance, and noticing when stress factors are escalating, and then supporting staff to address this.

Focusing on stress specifically, we know that the right balance of stress and pressure can drive performance (Yerkes and Dodson, 1908).<sup>9</sup> Too little pressure on us to do something

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<sup>9</sup> Yerkes RM, Dodson JD. (1908) 'The relation of strength of stimulus to rapidity of habit-formation'. *Journal of Comparative Neurology and Psychology*. 1908;18(5):459–482. Reprinted by *Classics in the History of Psychology*. An internet resource. Christopher D. Green, York University, Toronto, Ontario

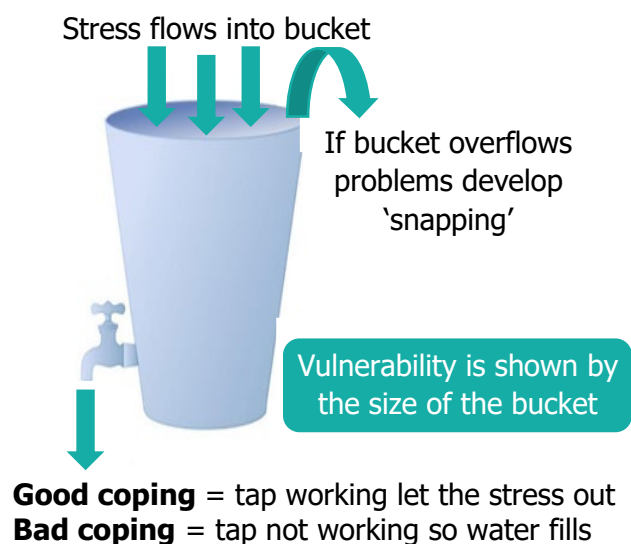
can impede motivation; too much, and we can feel overwhelmed and burnt out. Therefore, it is important for middle managers to monitor levels of stress and pressure, for themselves and their teams to maintain the right balance to support effective work.

We work in a sector where the whole purpose is focused on public protection and change, and where people are forced to engage. This means we have to balance high support and high challenge, which will undoubtedly bring about a certain level of stress. Furthermore, changes in structure and policies and, as recent inspections have highlighted, staffing and workload pressures can have a significant impact on staff's wellbeing and stress levels. They can make staff feel as if their work is never done, or anxious that they have missed something. Some feel additional pressure from anxiety that one of their cases may commit a serious further offence. As highlighted by Yerkes and Dodson, too much stress can lead to a dip in performance.

On occasions, an individual can suffer from stress without recognising it; consequently, some responsibility sits with managers to help people to identify the signs and develop strategies to address this. The 'stress bucket model' is a helpful way of looking at stress. It was originally developed by Brabban and Turkington (2002)<sup>10</sup> as a model for identifying and treating relapses in mental illness. The model, shown in figure 2, suggests we explore our ability to cope with pressure and stress in the same way we consider a bucket's ability to hold liquid. The size of our bucket will depend on predisposed vulnerabilities. Stress flows into our buckets from a whole myriad of things – work, home, finances and relationships – and rate of flow will vary greatly over time. When we have good coping strategies, the tap is open, so the bucket will not overflow. But if we are overwhelmed and/or we do not have good coping strategies in place, or they have been disrupted, the tap is closed and the water keeps flowing. To manage this, we either need to add more taps or holes in the bucket (although we must be mindful that too many holes and taps and the bucket will lose its integrity) or reduce the flow at the top, and ideally address it in both ways.

Individuals need to realise that they cannot pour from an empty bucket. Therefore, it is important, both for you as an individual and as a manager, to prioritise monitoring personal stress levels, work/life balance and self-care, and speaking to line managers when the signals suggest more support is needed.

Managers need to be curious about how functional an individual's 'stress bucket' is. Have honest conversations to help people recognise what their stress bucket looks like, and offer meaningful support to reduce the flow and relieve the pressure.



**Figure 2: The stress bucket model**

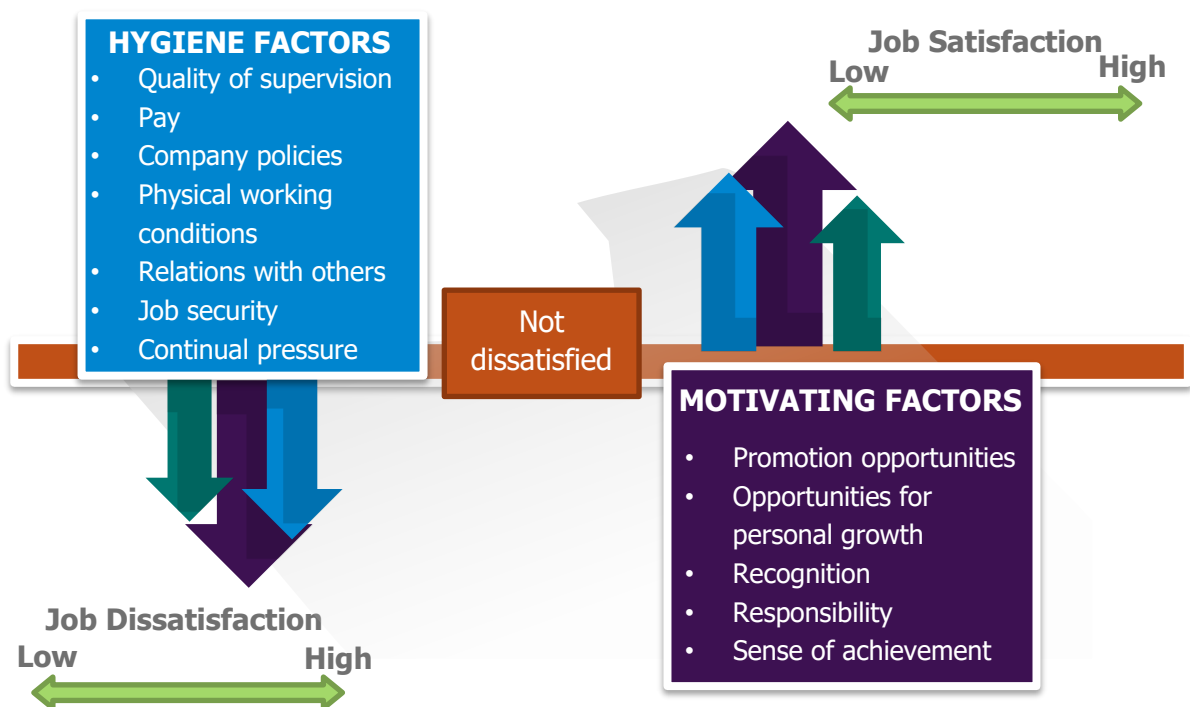
<sup>10</sup> Brabban, A. & Turkington, D. (2002). 'The Search for Meaning: detecting congruence between life events, underlying schema and psychotic symptoms'. In A.P. Morrison (Ed) *A Casebook of Cognitive Therapy for Psychosis*. Chapter 5, pp 59-75. New York: Brunner-Routledge

Examples include encouraging people to leave the office on time, ensuring they take their annual leave and/or reaching out to colleagues for support.

## Enabling professional curiosity – Monitor motivation levels

To exhibit professional curiosity, practitioners need to be motivated to want to know about the person under supervision, and then to keep exploring to know more, and then translate this into their practice.

Multiple issues will impact on an individual's motivation. A useful model to explore this is Herzberg's two factor theory. This indicates that there are certain factors in a work environment that are linked to job satisfaction and others that are intrinsically linked to job dissatisfaction, which he termed motivators and hygiene factors. These are illustrated in figure 3 below.



**Figure 3: Herzberg's two factor**

It is useful for managers to consider where team members are in relation to the line to help motivate individuals. While some things, such as pay and company policies, may fall outside your span of control, consider how you can bolster the things that you can influence, such as team relations, quality of supervision, recognition and opportunities for growth. Even in difficult circumstances, reflect on what you can do to ensure these factors are given priority.

## Enabling professional curiosity – Demonstrate the value of it

People need to see the value of professional curiosity. This is linked to an individual's motivation to pursue their role, and specifically to be professionally curious. Be clear about how the skill links to the core purpose of the work, and its importance within probation practice in order to promote its use. As highlighted, if people know why it is an important skill, they are more likely to pursue it. Managers can demonstrate how they value the skill by using it themselves and recognising when it has been used and the impact it has had on



quality. They can reinforce this through praise and sharing effective examples of its use with wider team members.

It is important to remember that there are many ways we give signals to others, some more subtle than others, so also consider what your unconscious messages are. One example is not challenging the practitioner who completes an OASys assessment in the early hours of the morning to ensure it hits the target, having previously discussed the importance of a healthy work/life balance with them.

Therefore, it is important to demonstrate the ongoing value of professional curiosity rather than routinely following processes without thinking about the why and the context.

## Pro-social modelling

A myth about professional curiosity is that it cannot be taught, and it is something you either have or don't have. This is not the case: as with any skill, the more we practice it, reflect and refine, the better we can become. Shenaar-Golan and Gutman (2013)<sup>11</sup> show how professional curiosity is influenced and strengthened through our social interactions. Therefore, it is important to model this skill, as this reinforces how you value professional curiosity. Generally, teams will look to leaders to set an example as culture is developed. So, if middle managers, and those in senior leadership, make an explicit commitment to promote a curious culture, this will increase the use of professional curiosity.

This means pursuing your role in a professionally curious manner: modelling the skills that underpin curiosity, such as critical evaluation; being investigative; being flexible and tenacious; and being reflective. Model to your staff that it is acceptable not to have all the answers, and the importance of seeking out information from others. Demonstrate that you value continuous professional development.

When managers consistently demonstrate being curious with problems they encounter, with their managers, with individual team members in supervision and in team meetings, it will encourage others to practise being curious. Model being curious about new policies, how they will be implemented operationally, what quality assurances are in place, how data is being analysed to understand practice, how messages are being communicated and how these are landing.

Consider asking your team to talk through the decisions they make using open questions. When people seek you out for advice, if time allows, explore what steps they believe they should take and explore their underlying rationale. Ask practitioners to evaluate their judgements from a different perspective. Discuss outcomes for individuals, people on probation and current and potential victims, as a way of understanding the impact of judgements and decisions. Encourage people to think through the evidence they used to reach their conclusion.

While this can feel counterintuitive, as it is resource consuming, it will encourage practitioners to think through next steps before approaching you. Furthermore, if your staff know you will ask them what underpins their thoughts, this will give them a sense of responsibility about explaining their decision-making process. When people have that sense

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<sup>11</sup> Shenaar-Golan V and Gutman C. (2013). 'Curiosity and the cat: Teaching strategies that foster curiosity'. *Social work with groups* 36(4). pp 349-359.

of responsibility, they are more likely to take ownership of their own continuous professional development.

This will also support practitioners in recognising when they are being rigid in their thinking, overlooking information, allowing bias to influence their thinking, missing alternative hypotheses, needing to see the information in the context of the big picture and/or tired and needing a fresh pair of eyes.

Also be curious about how you may inadvertently hinder professional curiosity, so you can mitigate this, to help promote the use of the skill. Consider the following:

- **Resources:** Do people have the time and space to exercise curiosity? Do you have the right services to meet the needs and demographics of your area? What are the different skill sets within your team?
- **Policies/process:** How does your allocation/duty process support curiosity? How do you maintain a balance between a performance culture and time for reflection? How do policies and processes, developed nationally and locally, help or hinder curiosity?
- **Supervision:** How well do you know your team members? How much do you understand about the levels of water in their 'stress bucket' (see pages 20 to 22)? What motivates them? What are their developmental needs and career aspirations? How do you explore the quality of individuals' and the team's work? How do you ensure you prioritise supervision?

Remember, establishing a culture is a process. Therefore, it is likely to take time, so be patient but also take the opportunity to celebrate and reinforce any incremental changes.



In the practitioner guide, in the section on why professional curiosity is important (pages 16 and 17), we referred to the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children's paper on the 'Top ten pitfalls and how to avoid them' in safeguarding assessments. We have [collated the 'questions for managers' into an attachment](#), to help you reflect on your team's service delivery.

## Enabling professional curiosity – Promote an open culture

Albeit in reference to the healthcare industry, Mantell and Jennings (2016)<sup>12</sup> have noted the importance of an open culture to drive professional curiosity in:

*'encouraging and enabling challenge to existing norms from frontline professionals and promoting innovative practice'.*

Invite inquiry, ask questions about the work being done and how it would be done if following principles of effective practice; about the targeted operating model and the vision; and about the quality of services, what is working well and what needs to improve, and invite staff to explore how this can be achieved.

Open cultures encourage staff to challenge existing practice, to ensure it is meeting the needs of people on probation and encourages the development of innovative practice.

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<sup>12</sup> Mantell, A and Jennings M (2016) Professional Curiosity and Traumatic Brain Injury. ICSW, Eighth International Conference on Social Work in Health and Mental Health, National University of Singapore 19-23/6/16.

You can encourage openness by making time for the people in your team, being accessible and encouraging debate. Allow people with different views and perspectives to discuss the rationale that underpins their views, through effective communication.

Encourage direct communication between different teams and across different departments and with partnerships, in order to avoid teams working in isolation.

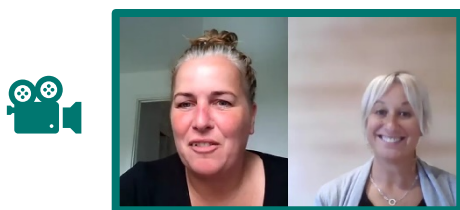
Take the information provided by your team, and feedback from people with lived experience and expertise of the criminal justice system, and critically evaluate this information to ascertain any next steps arising from it. Discuss with your team how you are using this feedback. Be specific about the changes being made as a result, or, where this is not possible, explain why this is the case, and the alternative course of action you intend to take.

## Enabling professional curiosity – Set clear expectations

Linked to pro-social modelling, and illustrating how you value the skill, consider how you set the expectations around people being professionally curious, and how you will ensure that these are maintained and reviewed.

It is important that you and the team evaluate what is working well and how it is contributing to the quality of the work, and what is not working so you can address this. Forums such as team meetings and management oversight are good opportunities to do this.

## Enabling professional curiosity – Management oversight



[In this 9:12min YouTube video Helen Mercer, head of policy and standards](#), discusses the importance of management oversight in supporting professional curiosity, what gets in the way and how to address this.

Helen says that:

*"Management oversight is crucial to creating a culture where professional curiosity is seen as the norm, and is seen as expected from practitioners ... it takes commitment, resource and time."*

It is important to build in:

*"the time, and space, and expectation to have those deeper discussions about what an individual's set of circumstances means for them, what it feels like to them, not just tick boxing through on the basis of, for instance, levels of risk. So, it's a whole load of things around creating a culture and establishing an environment through the management oversight process where professional curiosity becomes the norm and becomes expected."*

She also discusses how it can be self-perpetuating, as:

*"practitioners will expect to be asked about details of their case, their understanding of what particular factors mean for an individual, for instance, and they, therefore, will come prepared for that. They therefore will want to find that out, and they will understand their cases better,*

*and do better work with their cases as a result. So, I really believe it's driven from the top as a cultural issue, and management oversight is a really important vehicle to embed that, and to make that an expectation for staff and managers alike".*

It is about building on incremental learning:

*"in supervision, making sure that the focus isn't always about process, but it's about creating a high challenge high support environment ... and managers modelling behaviour for staff to see and learn from."*

## **Enabling professional curiosity – Promote the value of internal collaboration**

It is important to support collaboration, knowledge and information-sharing in support of common goals and the vision of the organisation. It is beneficial when managers, at all levels, promote this in order to reduce working in isolation and to support delivering the order of the sentence of the court. For example, those working in case management who proactively seek information from unpaid work supervisors and approved premises staff have a more holistic understanding of an individual's progress.

Create opportunities for teams to collaborate, for example shared team events (social and formal), and providing a standing team meeting agenda item for updates from other departments.

Encourage visits across directorates, such as unpaid work projects or court teams, for example; this will also encourage informal interactions to build effective working relationships.

Explore the shared accountability across teams, as everyone has a role to play in delivering the vision, and, ultimately, the sentence of the court. For example, a person successfully completing an accredited programme is likely to be influenced by how they are managed on the journey to the building (where applicable), how they are greeted at reception, and the facilitators on the course, as well as how the case manager encourages compliance and helps to embed the learning. Be clear about these shared accountabilities and discuss how teams can support each other to achieve them. To further reduce working in isolation, you may want to develop working groups to address specific issues from a range of different teams, for example addressing unpaid work backlogs, and present their findings to management.

Create cross-functional training events and/or action learning groups to improve your team's understanding of the different roles and responsibilities of different teams; this is likely to encourage perspective-taking.

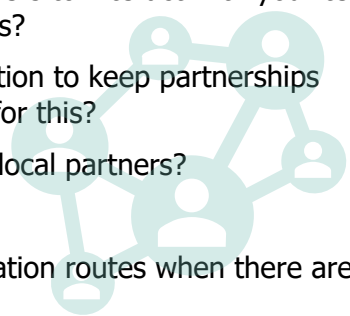
## **Enabling professional curiosity – Promote multi-agency working**

Multi-agency work is vital to support risk management and change. It allows you to build a comprehensive understanding of an individual's situation and you can coordinate different

activities across the partnership, to ensure the individual is getting the most effective support.

Consider the strength of the relationship your team has with partners, on an individual and agency level. Reflect on how you actively demonstrate their importance, for example:

- Do you expect new team members to proactively introduce themselves to your partners?
- Have you created consistent opportunities for partners to interact with your team, such as in team meetings or at regular briefing slots?
- If cases are reallocated, do you set a clear expectation to keep partnerships informed, and how do you hold people to account for this?
- What are the strategic working arrangements with local partners?
- How actively is your team engaging with partners?
- Are your team, and partnerships, clear about escalation routes when there are concerns regarding practice/blockers?



## Enabling professional curiosity – Promote a learning culture

A facet of professional curiosity is being sufficiently curious to drive continuous professional development. As a sector we also carry that responsibility in terms of our obligation to protect the public and facilitate change, and to keep current about the best ways to do this.

Managers can seek to optimise learning and development by focusing on the skills and principles to drive quality, not just processes and targets. This is a delicate balance, as processes are a helpful reminder of what needs to be done, but practitioners need to remain mindful of the dynamic nature of the work, as things may not always fit neatly into a process.

Recognise that learning is a process in itself. It is unlikely that an individual will automatically be competent from one training input. Therefore, seek incremental learning to help people build on their skills. Practitioners need to be motivated to develop their skills; they need to have opportunities to practise and hone them and receive feedback, both developmental and positive, to continue to build on and embed skills. A good way to think about this is the 70:20:10 approach to learning, illustrated in figure 4.



**Figure 4: 70:20:10 approach to learning**

The **70:20:10** approach describes how individuals learn best. Individuals acquire:

- **70% of their knowledge from experience**, for example job-related or life experiences.
- **20% of their knowledge from others**, for example interacting with peers and social learning.
- **10% of their knowledge from organised courses**, such as online or face-to-face training courses.

People learn from their experiences, especially where they have faced challenges, and they learn through interaction with others. So, in addition to providing feedback, create opportunities for people to reflect. This is a significant part of supervision (which we highlight in the section related to modelling the skill). However, it is also important in other scenarios, such as when proactively seeking management oversight, through formal arrangements such as action learning sets and team meetings with colleagues, and more informal discussions.

Focus on developing knowledge from others. Encouraging your team to have group discussions about practice can help stimulate debate, questioning and critical reasoning in relation to practice. Such reflection can allow individuals to learn from each other's experiences, including what worked well to achieve the desired outcomes and what did not. People can then generalise the principles and learning into their own practice.

Furthermore, you may wish to consider how you can cascade learning from experts within your team, through coaching, mentoring and championing roles.

Another important facet of promoting a learning culture is asking for feedback and being receptive to this. A useful model to consider is the 'EEC model', which focuses on an example, effect and change as follows:

**Example:** inform the practitioner what they did, provide specific details

**Effect:** discuss the effect the action had (either positive or negative)

**Change:** where it is a developmental example, discuss the change that is required and strategies to ensure the change happens

Or

**Continue:** where it is a positive example, reinforce the behaviour to maintain this

The following documents, which have also been shared in the practitioner guide, have collated some useful tips for:



[Receiving feedback guidance](#) and [giving feedback guidance](#).

The next section in this guide is about supporting practitioners mitigate the errors, bias and barriers to professional curiosity.



## Reflection questions

Reflecting on this section:

- What did you assume about enabling professional curiosity before beginning this section? Have your assumptions changed?
- How do you feel about the content of this section? Indifferent? Interested? Bored? Excited to implement?
- How far do you agree with the suggestions about enabling professional curiosity in your team?
- What other factors are important in promoting a culture that supports professional curiosity?
- Which do you think are the most important? Why?
- How might you implement some of these with your teams?
- How might you think of the learning points here in a month? Six months? 12 months?
- At times when workload peaks, how can you continue to promote a professionally curious team?
- How can you harness the power of the individuals in your team to promote a curious culture?
- What barriers are there to enabling a professionally curious culture? How can/do you mitigate for these barriers?



# Errors, bias and barriers to professional curiosity

Professional curiosity is a skill that supports effective probation practice. Despite its usefulness, inspections often see a lack of professional curiosity; therefore, it is important to explore what impedes the skill, for practitioners and managers.

On pages 41 to 45 of the practitioner guide, we encourage people to reflect on the different types of errors, bias and barriers to professional curiosity. We provide an overview of these, and share an Academic Insights paper by Professor Hazel Kemshall, which highlights bias and error in risk assessment and management, before providing some reflection questions for people to consider.

It can be hard to admit to our errors and biases, especially in our careers, as it can feel like this threatens our professional identity. In the practitioner guide, we highlight the fact that part of professional curiosity is approaching work with a growth mindset, showing professional humility. We illustrate the importance of reflection in continually developing practice. This includes recognising where we, and/or others, have made mistakes, so we can grow and learn from these; reflective practice is an excellent tool to support this culture.

**As a group or on your own** – reflect on an occasion when you made an error in your own practice by not being professionally curious. This could be as a practitioner or manager. You do not need to share the specific situation if you are undertaking this in a group.



Now consider:

- What factors hindered your ability to be professionally curious?
- What were the key takeaways from this experience?
- How did you reduce the probability of it happening again?
- Who could you have discussed this with at the time?
- How did you share your learning with colleagues, at the time and at a later date?
- What message would you have missed if you had not stopped and reflected on that situation?

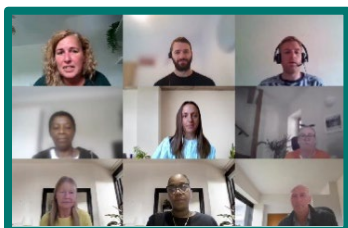
In the exercise above, it is likely that you recognised one or more lessons you took from the experience, and potentially shared these with others. Consider how you support practitioners to recognise errors, bias and barriers within their practice. Encourage practitioners to reflect on examples from their own practice and discuss how they overcame the errors. Promote conversations among your team to share strategies to address errors. Where there are examples of these strategies being successful, recognise them, share them and celebrate them among the team.

Once practitioners and managers accept the existence of errors, bias and barriers, they can understand where these originate from and develop an appropriate range of strategies to try to mitigate them.

**As a group or on your own, consider** – To help you explore some of the different types of errors, bias and barriers to professional curiosity in practice, we have collected some case illustrations to share. These are read in the video by staff within the Inspectorate. Please note that names in the examples, and certain identifying details, have been altered to protect the individuals' identity.



[Click on the link to the 6:20 minute YouTube video of people sharing insights into their practice.](#)



- Do you recognise what you have heard from team members?
- What errors/bias/barriers do you identify in what you have heard?
- Reflecting on pages 41 to 45 of the practitioner guide, which identifies some of the different types of errors, bias and barriers, how would you categorise the examples you have heard in the video?

You may want to consider creative ways to encourage people to open up about their errors, bias and barriers.

For example, you may elect to play the video used in the exercise above in a team meeting to open a discussion, or maybe turn it into game of 'barrier bingo' to start the discussions.



You can see [an example of a 'barrier bingo card' here](#); you could use this as a template to create a card for each member of your team, then play the video and encourage people to identify the different barriers discussed until they have crossed every barrier off the card and you have a winner. Or maybe you can think of other creative ways to get your team to further understand errors, biases and errors.



## Reflection questions

Reflecting on what you have read and heard in this section:

- Will you do anything differently with your team as a result of any of the content in this section?
- How safe, on a scale of 1 to 10, do you think people in your team feel about openly discussing errors, bias and barriers within their practice?
- Where appropriate, what can you and the team do to increase the score?
- How do you respond when colleagues and members of your team draw issues to your attention? What do you think are the consequences of this response?
- How can you promote an awareness of errors, bias and barriers among your team?
- How can you and the team proactively plan in order to minimise errors, bias and barriers?

## Mitigating the errors, bias and barriers

The first stage in addressing the errors, bias and barriers to professional curiosity is an awareness of them and how they are impacting on practice. However, there are also a number of tips, strategies and tools that can help to mitigate these barriers. On pages 46 to 59 of the practitioner guide, we explore a number of these, covering:

*recognising the demands of your workload, recognising the emotional labour of practice, plan your diary, structure sessions and record effectively, use assessment tools available effectively, use frameworks to support decision making, tune into information gaps and seek to fill them, deal with discrepancies, take a multi-agency approach, practise, adopt a growth mindset, practise self-awareness/self-scrutiny, be aware of the power dynamics, reflect on your practice, use action learning sets and seek continuous professional development opportunities*

This section explores how middle managers can support practitioners in mitigating the barriers. It is important to consider these alongside the information on how to promote professional curiosity, in the practitioner guide and in the section above, as this will also serve to address some of the barriers.

### Mitigating the errors, bias and barriers – Prioritise supervision

Inspections have found that active reflection on practice can be neglected as operational pressures increase. However, reflection is a valuable tool for learning. Quality supervision allows opportunities for staff to reflect on practice and critically analyse the work undertaken, and for managers to offer high support and high challenge. Practitioners will benefit from being encouraged to recognise the emotional labour of the work and the quality of their practice, and to make connections and generalise learning across their caseload. Therefore, it is important to plan your supervision time with team members and ringfence this time; and to plan your own supervision with your line manager.

The HMPPS Reflective Practice Supervision (RPS) Standards (2022) are shared on page 56 of the practitioner guide and the SEEDS2 documentation on EQuIP provides some additional tools to support your team's learning and development journey as part of RPS. You can search for this using the keywords 'reflection' or 'RPSS'.

It is important to encourage practitioners to be proactive in the process and bring cases for discussion, in addition to those you have identified to discuss.

### Mitigating the errors, bias and barriers – Support individuals to plan their diaries

As part of supervision, where appropriate, help practitioners plan their diaries. For example, build in adequate time to undertake an assessment and don't see people on probation back to back, as this allows no time for reflection. Help people to understand when they are more focused and the best times to undertake specific tasks.



With reference back to the stress bucket model (in the enabling section), monitor staff for signs of stress and discuss these in supervision. For example, are you receiving

emails/OASys assessments for countersigning at inappropriate hours? Are people working significantly over their hours? Are people taking their annual leave entitlement? Are people arriving late at the office, leaving insufficient time for interviews with people on probation?

In addition, it is important that you help practitioners develop strategies to cope with the reactive nature of the role, as sometimes things will not go according to plan due to the dynamic nature of risk.

## Mitigating the errors, bias and barriers – Promote the use of assessment tools to drive quality

In the practitioner pack, we highlight the benefits of using the available assessment tools effectively. Encourage your team to do so. Discuss how these tools can assist in decision-making and hold people to account to use them appropriately in order to improve the quality of their practice.

Consider how you quality-assure the service delivered by your team at each stage of the process.

Link quality assurance back to the importance of a good feedback loop, which recognises positives as well as areas for development.

## Mitigating the errors, bias and barriers – Promote the use of frameworks to support decision-making

Probation staff across all areas of practice often face complex situations. Sometimes they have to make decisions when there is uncertainty or ambiguity. As such, it is important that decisions are defensible and, again, that drive for professional curiosity can support this. There are a number of strategies and models which can aid this process. Encourage practitioners to actively seek these out and proactively use them. Then model your curiosity in enquiring how practitioners have reached their judgements and decisions, and what frameworks and/or theories have aided them.



### Reflection questions

Reflecting on what you have read, heard and discussed as a result of this section:

- Of what you remember from this section, what seemed to be the most important concept for you?
- If you could have written this section, what would you have included?
- What positive habits have you developed to mitigate errors, bias and barriers to professional curiosity?
  - How have they helped?
  - How have you shared these among colleagues and your team?
- Have you set a clear expectation around sharing learning across your team, especially in the context of learning from errors?
- How do/can you encourage individuals to share helpful strategies to mitigate errors, bias and barriers to professional curiosity across the team?

## Professional curiosity and continuous professional development

An important facet of professional curiosity is the desire to learn more. From page 60 to 66, the practitioner guide explores research in probation practice and offers some useful theories for frontline practitioners to consider. These look at the importance of understanding an individual's identity and the influence on their behaviour, and of blending risk and desistance in order to promote long-term change.

For managers, it is also important to be curious about the different theories of leadership available and how these may help when considering the most effective way to lead your team.

There are multiple theories available, so it would be beneficial to be curious about these and consider which model best suits you, your team and the current circumstances. However, we highlight two models below: situational leadership, which considers the competence and motivation of team members; and the primary colours model of leadership, a helpful theory we use within the Inspectorate when focusing on domain one: organisational delivery and complete leadership.

### Situational leadership

HM Inspectorate of Probation's standards are clear on the importance of taking a personalised and individualised approach; situational leadership is about adapting your leadership style based on the situation/task and the needs of the individuals in your team. The model was developed by Hersey and Blanchard<sup>13</sup> (1977) and is based on four different types of leadership style:

**Delegating** – entrusting a task or responsibility to another person to complete. The leader will set milestones and deadlines and monitor the progress of the delegated tasks.

**Supporting** – individuals receive support to complete a task while they develop the appropriate skills.

**Coaching** – leaders provide high support and high challenge, providing a high degree of direction and support when they encounter difficulties and/or setbacks. Leaders are required to give reinforcing messages, corrective feedback and support to move forward.

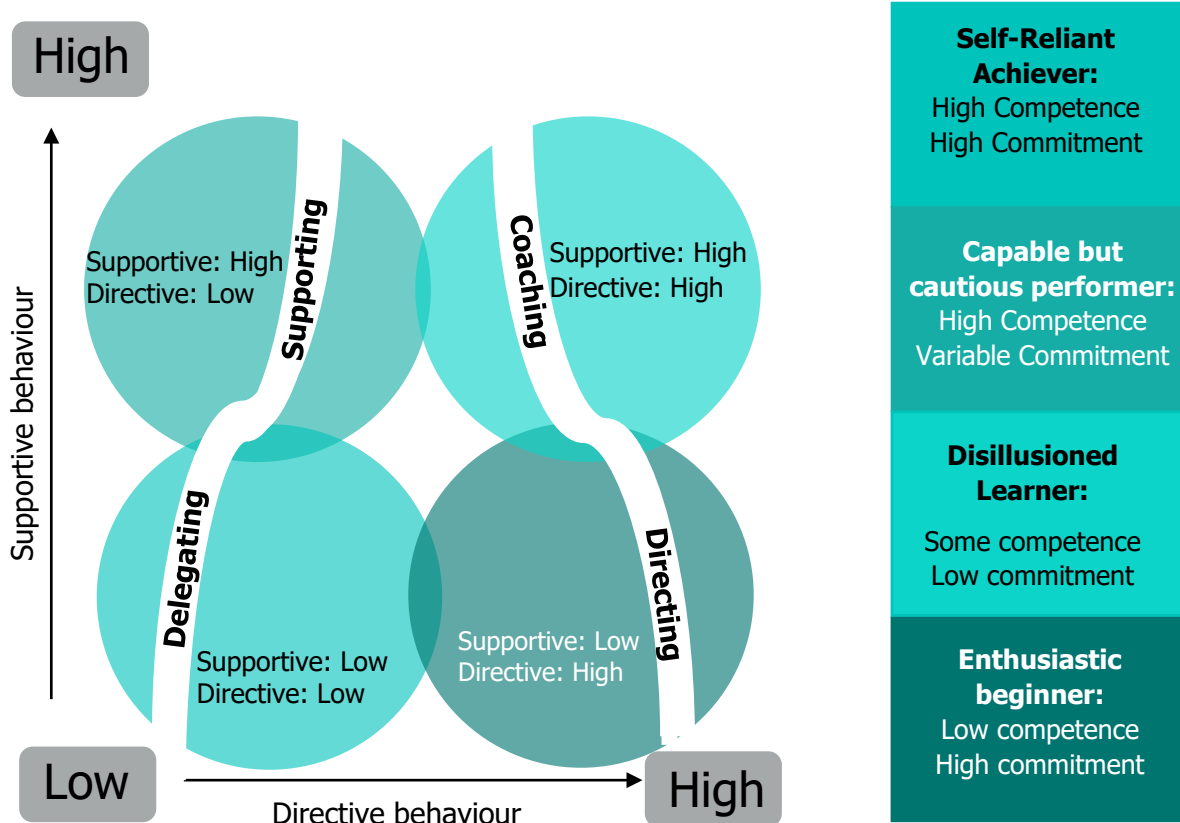
**Directing** – telling people what to do and how to do it. People are given clear goals and specific responsibilities. They are provided with consistent feedback on whether they are accomplishing their tasks appropriately, with corrective feedback if required.

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<sup>13</sup> Hersey, P., & Blanchard, K. H. (1977). Management of organizational behaviour: Utilizing human resources. Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall.

The most effective style of leadership to be used depends on: interpersonal factors; the specific task and what is required from people; maturity levels of individuals in terms of their abilities/competence and willingness/motivation levels; and the current situation. This can be summarised in the figure below.<sup>14</sup>

## Hersey-Blanchard Situational Leadership Theories



This graphic combines elements of the Hersey-Blanchard Situational Leadership **Development**

**Figure 5: Hersey-Blanchard situational leadership**

The leader, therefore, evaluates the situation and adapts accordingly. An example of when you may want to use each of the different leadership styles are:

**Delegating leadership** where individuals are self-motivated with high levels of competence and commitment, so potentially to collaborate on a task and finish group to address a specific process issue in your office.

**Supporting leadership** where an individual has progressed from a probation service officer to a Professional Qualification in Probation (PQIP) learner

**Coaching leadership** where new processes are being introduced, as individuals may well have the required skills but feel they need guidance through the change until they feel more competent.

**Directing leadership** where people are new to their role and may have a low level of competence and high commitment, or where people are in crisis so need clear direction as they may be unable to think clearly.

<sup>14</sup> Gunter, A (2019) The Gunter Group Blog, [The Gunter Group - SITUATIONAL LEADERSHIP](#), accessed 10.08.22

Being curious about individual team members' different strengths, levels of competence and current motivation can help you understand what individuals need from you as a leader. This in turn can help you tailor your approach to positively influence your team, as they are getting what they need to be effective and to increase their skills.

## The primary colours model of leadership

The primary colours model of leadership<sup>15</sup> was developed by David Pendleton and it defines the tasks leaders must perform to 'create the conditions for sustained success', across three domains: strategic, interpersonal and operational.



The **strategic domain**, sometimes referred to as the head, looks to the future, at setting the strategic direction.



The **interpersonal domain**, sometimes referred to as the heart, is focused on people and looks at building and sustaining relationships.



The **operational domain**, sometimes referred to as the hands, is focused on tasks and looks at delivering results.

The model shows each domain illustrated by a primary colour, as in figure 6 below. When combined, primary colours form white, which comprises all of the colours in the spectrum; thus, in the model, the white area signifies complete leadership, whereby all of the domains are operating effectively together with the right balance.



**Figure 6: The primary colours model**

The model highlights the importance of a leader in driving culture, employee engagement, satisfaction and performance. Managers can use this as a framework to be curious about

<sup>15</sup> Professor David Pendleton, Professor Adrian Furnham and Jon Cowell (Edgecumbe's CEO). (2021). [Leadership: No More Heroes](#). 3rd edition.



their leadership, to evaluate it against the domains and understand what they need to do to maximise the effectiveness of their team across the different domains. For example, do they need someone to inspire their team and help build relationships or do they need someone with exceptional organisational skills to help focus on current priorities?



## Reflection questions

Reflecting on what you have read, heard and discussed as a result of the contents of this section:

- Thinking specifically of the leadership models shared here, how might they help you within your leadership role?
- Consider the individuals in your team: which leadership style would be most effective with each individual?
- What are the barriers to taking an individualised approach to your leadership? How can you mitigate these?
- When you look at the primary colours model, what colour leadership do you feel most comfortable in? Why?
- What can you do to develop your skills in the other domains?
- What other leadership models are you aware of? How do they compare?
- How does your leadership change in different circumstances?
- How do you keep yourself up to date with the current research?
- How do you share your learning across your colleagues and team?
- Considering the theories shared in the practitioner guide: how can you enable your team to understand the evidence that underpins their work?
- How do you enable your practitioners to understand an individual's identity and how this influences their practice?
- What do you understand by blending risk management with desistance approaches? How are you assured that your team have a shared understanding and their practice focuses on engagement, risk and desistance factors?
- What barriers are there to this and how do you mitigate for these?

## Next steps

Effective practice to assess, protect and change people on probation relies on the balance between the practitioner's skills, knowledge and insight into this, the support available and the policies, procedures and organisational factors to create the right environment to foster professional curiosity. Therefore, we encourage you to cultivate an environment that enables curiosity to bloom.

Be curious as leaders about practice, your individual team members, how they work as a team, the quality of service that is being delivered, how your team is perceived by others, internally and externally, and why, how you can develop quality, how you can harness what is working well, and how you and your team can continuously develop.

There are a number of tools in this guide and the practitioner guide that you may find useful to support you. In addition, you may wish to explore what is available nationally and, in your region, via your Performance and Quality team, to support you with your development.