



PSDP—Resources and Tools: What object or image represents your transition to practice supervisor?

Introduction

This learning tool provides practice supervisors with the opportunity to ‘show’ as well as ‘tell’ how they transitioned into a new role. It’s based on the work of Angie Bartoli and her accompanying [Visual Social Work Project](#) website, which focuses on using objects and images to explore and understand the experience of making the transition from social worker to first line manager.

The website contains a number of reflections from practice supervisors who have chosen an object to represent their transition to first line manager. Practice supervisors who have used this resource have found that it’s helped with:

The first section of this learning tool gives you information about why it can be helpful to use an object to describe your experience of moving from being a social worker to a practice supervisor. This is followed in section two by some guidance and prompt questions that help you try this activity for yourself.

Their emotional transition from practitioner to manager.

Raising their professional confidence.

Raising their awareness to the type of support they might need.

Clarifying their successes and identifying areas for development.

Section one - using objects to reflect on the transition to being a practice supervisor

Images and objects can be powerful tools through which we can communicate and depict aspects of our cultures, and social and professional lives. The idea for using objects and images when trying to understand the role transition from social worker to first line manager was first used in a doctoral research study (Bartoli, 2019).

This study was concerned with understanding feelings associated with role transitions within social work, as it is an under-researched area of practice. The study was prompted by previous conversations with new managers and supervisors who suggested that their experience of transition didn't receive enough attention. New managers often described their transition in the form of visual metaphors like 'sink or swim' or 'being thrown in the deep end', which suggest feelings of isolation and being overwhelmed.

We often use visual metaphors to explain an idea or a feeling. They act as a bridge between the literal and symbolic, and can profoundly express what we think and how we feel.

Sometimes words can obscure the complex range of emotions associated with becoming a practice supervisor, whereas images and objects can better help us tell our story (Mannay, 2016; Ray & Smith, 2012). It is argued that, unlike words, images can evoke 'deeper layers of human consciousness' and so provide another way to communicate an experience Silverman (2011, p157).

Lots of new practice supervisors have now taken part in choosing an object and sharing their reflections about it on the website. These visual images of their transition between roles portray a range of feelings, and have helped them form connections between those feelings and their experiences.

This process can also help express difficult or elusive emotions. For example, during Susie's transition between roles, she describes feeling exposed and experiencing a sense of responsibility towards herself and others. This is reflected in the image of a goldfish swimming in a bowl. You can [read the full story](#) on the website.



‘When I moved into chairing meetings, I felt like I was on display as the chair of the meetings, I needed to know the procedures inside out and everyone looked to me for direction. After about a year I developed confidence in chairing meetings and knew the procedures inside out and so I felt less vulnerable, but initially I felt on show and vulnerable, despite quite a lot of experience in frontline practice.’

As well as evoking feelings connected with the transition, images also allow us to voice and give shape to ideas and experience. For example, Maureen chose to reflect on the type of manager she hoped to become. It was important to her that she was perceived as supportive and congenial in her new managerial role.

This is reflected in the images she selected of chains, links and walls, which convey a sense of inner strength through wider, interconnected systems. Find out more about [Maureen's experience](#) on the website.



For [Shabnam](#), using the tool allowed her to demonstrate positive growth through her career. For others, the images were unique and meaningful and represented aspects of new supervisors' personal and professional lives.

The interplay between work and life can form the basis of a new professional identity, which is an important aspect of transitioning into a new role. You can read more about this in [Maxine](#) and [Sandra's](#) stories on the website.

Section two - choosing an object which represents your transition to being a practice supervisor

Instructions

Select (or make) an image or object that represents your transition from practitioner to supervisor / manager. This might be an image you have taken / made yourself (e.g. a photograph or drawing that might describe how you felt when you became a supervisor) or one which you found (e.g. on the internet or in a magazine). Likewise, the object might be one you have made, own or found. What is important is that it is meaningful to you and in some way represents your transition. This activity is not about testing your artistic or creative abilities, but about asking you to reflect upon this transition and consider a visual representation of it. It is your transition and therefore the image / object you select is unique to you.

You might find that an image will come to mind instantly, or you might need more time to think, or you might choose more than one image or object. Once you have selected your image or object think about what it represents. On their own, images are open to multiple interpretations and so your thoughts and words will give shape and voice to your experience. What does it say about you and your journey to becoming a practice supervisor?

Reflective questions

Why and how did you select this image and / or object?

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How does your object / image reflect other aspects of your identity (e.g. gender, ethnicity, class, family background)?

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How does your object / image reflect your relationship to power or authority?

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What does this image and / or object represent to you in relation to becoming a social work supervisor / manager?

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Does this image / object have any other significance connected with other aspects of your life?

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Having completed the activity you might find it useful to consider what you have learnt from it and what this tells you about the support needs of social workers making the transition to being a practice supervisor. It may also be helpful to reflect on what support you need now as a practice supervisor to help you carry out your role effectively. You might find it useful to discuss this tool with a peer, or within your own supervision, if you'd like to progress some ideas or thoughts this activity has provoked.

You might also find it useful to read more about the images and objects chosen by other practice supervisors. Go to the [Visual Social Work Project](#) website for further examples.

Other ways you can use this tool

This activity can also help your supervisees reflect on their own role transitions, like the experience of becoming a social worker for the first time, passing the assessed and supported year in employment, or becoming a more senior member of the team with greater responsibilities for others.

You can use this tool in one-to-one supervision or team discussions, too.



We want to hear more about your experiences of using PSDP resources and tools. Connect via Twitter using #PSDP to share your ideas and hear how other practice supervisors use the resources.

References


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