The Importance of Supervision in Social Work

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Why discuss and what to discuss?

• What do we know? What should supervision be about – expectations, models, research
• What does supervision help with?
• Rhetoric and reality gap?
• What don’t we know?
• Do we need a refocus?
• What can supervisors and supervisees do make supervision more helpful/ effective?
Supervision in the news...the good, the ‘bad’..

❖ Ofsted criticises council where some social workers hadn’t had supervision for ‘months’ (*Luke Stevenson* March 26, 2018, Community Care about Wakefield Ofsted report)

❖ Council criticised over supervision that ‘rarely challenges poor practice’ (*Luke Stevenson*, February 26, 2018, Community Care about South Gloucestershire Ofsted report)

❖ ‘Inadequate’ authority improving despite ‘process driven’ social work supervision (*Luke Stevenson*, February 26, 2018, Community Care, about Worcester Ofsted report)

❖ Managers ‘too focused on compliance’ at service that needs improvements (*Luke Stevenson*, March 14, 2018, Community Care, about Rochdale Ofsted report)
Adults Practice Supervisor KSS consultation

• Practice Supervisors (PS) should support development of critically reflective practice through providing **reflective supervision**, including **coaching and mentoring**.

• PS should adopt, model and promote a **reflective, partnership and collaborative approach** to their role. Supervision should be collaborative and restorative.

• PS will promote reflective, curious and inquisitive practice by **appropriate questioning and encourage challenging conversations** to ensure decisions are defensible.

• PS will use **observation, critical reflection** and feedback methods to develop and assess practice.

• PS will understand and apply **learning theory** to recognise when their role is to teach, when to mentor and when to coach.
Adults Practice Supervisor KSS consultation

• PS should create a culture of *focused and critical thinking*

• PS should understand and be able to apply different methods of critical reflection to promote the development of critically reflective practice in others.

• PS should use an **explorative questioning style** to uncover assumptions and analysts judgement.

• PS should strike a balance *between employing a managerial, task focused approach and a reflective, enabling leadership style* to achieve efficient day to day functioning
What should supervision be about?

- Range of research / reports / SCRs
- Range of models, approaches to supervision

- Munro (2011) – 2 roles of supervision:
  - Managerial oversight – dominates
  - Professional supervision of practice – includes reflecting on experiences, ‘supervisory’ conversations creating “reflective thinking” (p. 53)
What should supervision be about?

• Research indicates that ‘good supervision’ can:

✓ Foster professional resilience and reduce burnout (Adamson et al, 2014)

✓ Help with task assistance and emotional support (Mor Barak, et al 2009)

✓ Help with job satisfaction and retention (Mor Barak, et al 2009; Carpenter et al 2012; Manthorpe et al 2013)

✓ Also expected to quality assure standards, enhance safe practice and increased worker effectiveness (Carpenter et al 2012)
"The conundrum facing managers is that the quick way of achieving a minimum standard of practice is through rule-and-process-driven practice, but this creates obstacles to the development of higher levels of practice...Evidence from studies of why social workers leave indicate the problem would be reduced if staff were given the work conditions that help them learn and develop, if they were more effectively supported in handling the emotional, moral and cognitive aspects of the work” (p.75)
...Good supervision can do this.....with provisos....... 

Influence of supervisory relationship

- safe base
- collaborative focus
- Style of supervisor – not a “tick box case management approach” but supervisors who are “approachable....sessions that are relaxed and supportive but also challenging, providing opportunities for reflection, analysis...sessions that support workers in reaching their own decisions, but offer clear guidance and direction when it is called for” (Turner-Daly and Jack, 2017)

Influence of context

- Local - supervisory policies and shared understanding of purpose and focus of supervision
- BUT ALSO organisational support/contextual support is key
- National – support (and training?) for a refocus on practice rather than process and space for analysis, reflection and opportunities for “critical appraisal” of work (Munro, 2011, p.9 ; Wilkins and Antonopoulou, 2018)
Impact of the organisational culture on practice

Forrester et al (2018) study, on training for M1 skills and impact on CF social worker practice; direct skills and engagement with service users.

Findings – modest impact only on social worker skills and engagement with families

Why?
Organisational *procedural understanding of practice*

- influenced pattern of supervision (focus on task completion)
- Influenced content of work with families

Conclusion “.... *practice is produced by organisations more than by individuals*” (p.189)
4 x 4 x 4 model of supervision (Morrison, 2005)

- Reflective supervision within the organisational context
- Who is affected by your work?
- What is impacting on your work?
- How can we understand this – what is / can be the story?
- “supervision is part of the intervention with service users”

(Morrison and Wonnacott, 2010)
Experiential learning cycle (Reflective learning cycle) and Supervision cycle (from Kolb 1984: Morrison, 2005)
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What do we know about supervision?

3 main areas of research:


2. NQSW experiences – research reports (Berry - Lound and Rowe, 2013; Manthorpe et al 2013)

3. Student experiences (Cleak and Smith, 2012; Jasper, unpublished)
1. Experiences of supervision - Community Care survey *(Wilkins, 2017)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What does supervision help with?</th>
<th>What makes supervision helpful?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓ Management oversight</td>
<td>✓ Collaborative</td>
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<tr>
<td>(accountability) - 71% of respondents</td>
<td>✓ Focus on family / service user</td>
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<tr>
<td>✓ Emotional support - 32% of</td>
<td>✓ Risk/ need clarity</td>
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<td>respondents</td>
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<tr>
<td>✓ Helped with analysis - 28%</td>
<td>✓ Decision making</td>
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<tr>
<td>✓ Helped with reflection - 24%</td>
<td>✓ Analysis and reflection</td>
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<td></td>
<td>✓ Emotional support</td>
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1. Experiences of supervision - Community Care survey (Wilkins, 2017)

- **Progress**: 2014 survey, 50% social workers not receiving regular supervision; 2017, 63% having monthly supervision

- ".........but is regularity enough? .....“ **having a good and supportive supervisor, who shares ideas and helps a social worker to think and reflect, leads to much higher ratings**” (p.16)

- **Those who found supervision more helpful:**
  - Group supervision – rated higher for analysis and reflection (and no lower for emotional support also)
  - More frequent and longer supervision sessions
  - NQSWs – increased helpfulness of supervision noted for decision making, quality of practice, collaboration, clarity about risk
2. What do we know about supervision of NQSWs? (Berry - Lound and Rowe, 2013; Manthorpe et al 2013; Wilkins, 2017)

- Dominant in NQSW supervision - discussion of individual cases, management oversight, performance issues; supervision was ‘regular’
- Did include personal support, encouragement, discussion of training needs
- Differences in what NQSWs and ASYE supervisors expected supervision to include and what it did include
- Help in applying theoretical approaches and/or reflection lessened over the year. After 1st year in practice only 1:10 social workers reported using supervision to discuss theoretical approaches to practice
- Provision of constructive challenge lessened over the year (as case work discussion/complexity increased?)
- Regular supervision helped with feeling workload was manageable; more confident and engaged; supportive team important
3. Student experiences – dimensions of supervision (Jasper, unpublished)
Rhetoric and reality gap?

• Focus in supervision on process, compliance, procedure, task completion - what and when, not why and how?

• Less focus on ‘professional supervision’ (Munro, 2011)
  - ‘practice’ skills?
  - underpinning knowledge development?

• Limited time on exploration, thinking, ‘questions around the supervisory cycle?’
Rhetoric and reality gap?

- What happens in supervision?

CF supervision, 30 recordings
( Wilkins et al 2017)

Verbal deluge
- Supervisee narrative update

Identify the problem
- Key problems are identified, usually by manager

Provide the solution
- Solution determined usually in the form of agency accountable actions
What don’t we know? (early stages of finding out...)

• Outcomes for service users – impact of supervision on service users? What is the link between supervision and outcomes for service users?

• What (real) ‘good’ supervision looks like? What are the key elements?

• What impact will KSS for practice supervisors in CF (and accreditation) and adults have on supervisory practice/understanding and ORGANISATIONAL EMPLOYER OWNERSHIP?
What should supervision be about?

• Asking critically supportive questions that foster professional curiosity

• Opportunities for thinking, analysis, questioning, exploration, reflecting = as basis for reasoning and decision making

• Developing a conversation (with a purpose) = a ‘learning conversation’ (sponges do not make their own water)

• Balanced with case management/ updates / next steps and action planning

• Balanced with task assistance ; guidance and clarity of role

• (what/when?) How and why?

• Emotional affect / effect on decision making
Do we need a refocus when thinking about supervision in social work?

• On needs of worker/supervisee at different stages of their careers? Does one size fit all? (Turner Daly and Jack, 2017)

• On needs of service user/outcomes?

• On quality of practice? Munro (2010) ‘doing the right thing not just doing things right’ (p.14)

• On training needs of supervisors (KSS adults – broad range of knowledge/understanding required)

• On wider environment and a culture shift in organisations? Reassert the link between “doing, thinking and learning” (Munro, 2010 p.14)
What can supervisors and supervisees do?
References


Forrester, D, Westlake D; Killian, M; Antonopoulou, V; McCann, M; Thurnham, A; Thomas, R; Waits,C; Whittaker, C; and Hutchison, D (2018) A Randomized controlled trial of training in Motivational Interviewing for child protection, *Children and Youth Services Review*, 88, pp180-190


References


Wilkins, D, Forrester, D and Grant, L (2017) what happens in child and family social work supervision? Child and Family Social Work, 22(2) pp1130-1140