

SUPERVISION IN HUMAN SERVICE AGENCIES

Patricia STOW BOLEA¹

Abstract

Supervision in Human Services provides an overview of the well-established knowledge of structures and functions in supervision. In addition, a model of skill-based supervision is reviewed as it applies to direct practice. Additionally the elements of relationships factors affecting supervision is included for review. Discussion of contemporary challenges in supervision related to political and economic changes is included for examination and discussion.

Keywords: Supervision; Supervisory Structure, Supervisory Skill, Supervisory Relationship, Supervisory Ethics

Introduction

Leadership in agencies assists in the movement of organizations toward goals and objectives. This leadership can take many forms, be provided in many structures, and have a variety of foci. Regardless of the leadership paradigm in operation, these leadership ideals and aims, goals and outcomes are mediated by the human service supervisor. For this reason, the topic of supervision in human service agencies requires closer examination. In many cases, the success or failure of agency leadership is determined by the quality and investment into supervision of individual employees. This article will explore the roles, functions, and tasks of supervisors in human service agencies, with a particular focus upon the specific components of effective clinical supervision.

The practice of social work and the administration of human services are fortified by professionally prescribed notions of competence and accountability. Macro practice as well as direct practice in human services is guided by ethical standards from a variety of disciplines across the helping professions. Supervision in these professional arenas goes hand in hand with the professional activities of the era. Noble and Irwin (2009) have recently reviewed the contemporary human service emphasis on efficiency, accountability, and performance in the face of current political and economic changes around the globe. While acknowledging the historic emphasis on the educational, administrative and supportive functions of supervision, they argue that such re-positioning permits an exclusive view.

¹Ph.D., M.S.W., L.M.S.W., A.C.S.W., Associate Professor: Grand Valley State University School of Social Work, Faculty Fellow, Pew Teaching and Learning Center, USA

The unique lens of the human service supervisor permits a close up view of the human condition as well as the strength and vulnerability of political, economic, and theoretical efforts to ameliorate human suffering.

Elements of Supervision

Supervision is generally defined as overseeing operations or performance of a person or groups (Free dictionary, 2011) Kadushin (1992) identifies three elements to effective human service supervision: Administrative, Education, and Support. Administrative supervision is primarily concerned with effective implementation of agency procedures and policies. This includes the responsibility of the supervisor to assist employees to work to their best abilities as well as insuring agency requirements are implemented. The Educational function of supervision is related to the development of knowledge, skill, and ability to serve clients. The historic process includes reflection, exploration, and discussion of client interaction (Kadushin, 1992). Lastly, the third element of supervision according to Kadushin (1992) includes Support. Workers are recognized to have job-related stressors which require support. This support is required as part of supervision in order to maintain quality services under duress.

Schulman's Interactional Supervision

In his examination of Interactional Supervision Shulman (1993) articulates a stage approach to his suggested methods of supervision. In the Preliminary Phase, the supervisor's task prior to engagement in supervisory interactions is to acknowledge and reflect upon the supervisory scenario. Supervisors must examine any dynamics that would interfere with successful supervision.

One example to consider is the training or experience of the supervisor. In cases where staff are more experienced, or perhaps more educated it can be difficult for the supervisor to embrace the power and authority needed for success. Another example might include the shift from the role of co-worker to supervisor, and the necessary reorganization of boundaries, responsibilities, and social components. Each of these scenarios may require an adjustment in approach, specific topics of communication, and consideration of the most appropriate goals for beginning work together.

During Shulman's Beginning Phase (1993), he identifies four tasks: Contracting for role, purpose, and authority; Getting feedback from workers on their perceptions; Discussing mutual obligations and expectations; Develop a relationship. By getting feedback from workers and establishing a working „contract” or agreement for the nature of the supervisor/supervisee relationship, each party involved recognizes and makes explicit what to expect, where to seek assistance, clarification of reporting requirements, and plans to go forward.

According to Shulman (1993), the Work phase in supervision includes cluster of skill sets that supervisors employ to facilitate growth and development in workers. These include, but are not limited to:

- a) sessional tuning in skills
- b) sessional contracting skills, or identification of agenda items with attention to staff concerns

- c) elaborating skills, to facilitate deeper and richer conversations
- d) empathic skills, which offer support and validation of staff experiences and feelings
- e) reaching for feelings, or reflection on affective messages
- f) acknowledging feelings, communication of understanding of feelings
- g) sharing feelings, which assist supervisor's presentation of self as human beings, with vulnerability, anger, warmth, etc.
- h) making a demand for work, necessary to facilitate continued work in the face of ambivalence and resistance
- i) understanding the change process, and the importance of acknowledging safety needs during change
- j) partializing worker concerns, breaking down complex challenges
- k) holding to focus, assisting staff who are distracted or avoidant (Shulman, 1993).

The expertise necessary for effective supervision is clarified by examining the historically defined structures identified by Kadushin (1993), and the contemporary skill model proposed by Shulman (1993). Beyond these parameters, supervisory practice requires yet an additional set of skills. Direct practice supervision examines the worker client relationship in close detail, analyzing the nature of assessment, intervention strategy, termination and the critical role of workers' use of self.

Supervisory Relationship in Direct Practice

Within the purview of structure of leadership, roles and tasks of supervisors, and examination of phases of work in supervision, a critical element that must be examined includes the nature of the supervisory relationship. Kaiser (1997) has written extensively regarding the nature and value of approaching supervision from a relational perspective. Her thesis includes the idea that the relationship has a profound influence on the quality of direct practitioners' work with clients. Munson (2002) proposes that when the evaluative role is layered upon Kadushin's focus on education and support, the relationship with direct practice workers can be compromised. Specific consideration must be given to relational variables that include trust, shared meaning and examination of the use of power. Frankl & Piercy (1990) posit that the most important predictors of positive client outcomes are 1) therapist relationship skills and 2) therapist structuring skills.

Kaiser delineates between two types of supervision common to direct practice in human services. There is the involuntary supervisory relationship in which the supervisor has the given power to evaluate and make decisions related to hiring, firing, promotion, salaries, and in teaching situations pass/fail and is responsible for education and support. Contrast that supervisory relation with that of consultative supervision, in which the supervisee hires or contracts with a supervisor for guidance in clinical work. In both situations, the goal remains the same; competent service to clients. Kaiser argues that two key elements must be explored. They are trust and shared meaning (Kaiser, 1997, 2003).

In either traditional supervision or consultive supervision, the practitioner is responsible for „telling the story” of their work with the client. Trust is a powerful variable if the story

is to be complete and inclusive of the vulnerability of the supervisee. Should the supervisee fear judgment or punishment for their oversights and errors, they may not share completely, placing their client in a vulnerable position relative to the needed guidance and expertise of the supervisor. Shared meaning has relevance to differences between the supervisor and supervisee. Worldview perceptions that derive from age, gender, race, culture, religion, theoretical orientation all impact client assessment and judgments regarding needed interventions. According to Kaiser (2003), development of shared meaning is crucial for growth and positive outcomes in supervision.

Within the supervisory relationship Kaiser (1997) argues for growth and development in three areas: Perceptual skills, the ability to consider what is occurring from the client perspective; Conceptual skills, the proficiency to interpret observations using knowledge and application of assessment, theory, and diagnosis, along with experiences of client and practitioner; and lastly Executive skill, the ability to make accurate decisions related to intervention in treatment.

Supervisory Risk and Ethics

Phillipson (2002), Jones (2004) and Adams (2007) each speak to the risk related to current shifts from public to private human service provision, with all the implications of a market driven efficiency focused approach. These authors highlight the new intersections for workers and clients when increased needs are present for clients impacted by growing poverty levels and workers arrive with supervision aimed at improvement of efficiency to benefit the „bottom line” of agency budget limitations. According to Thompson (2006) the established boundaries that separated managers from professionals are permanently blurred toward management, with loss of integrity and independence for supervision as a process for improving practice and providing space for reflection. If supervisors are not permitted the time and focus on client services, where will human welfare be measured?

Increasingly the supervisor bears the legal liability for worker actions and decisions. Given this layered structure of service provision and responsibility, the knowledge, skill and expertise of supervision is critical in the care of vulnerable clients. This vulnerability requires that leaders in agencies designate resources professionally and ethically in the form of time, education, and workload distribution.

Conclusion

Supervision as a tool in mediating leadership aims, as a tool for insuring competent service to clients, and lastly as a lens for the examination of „the personal is political” struggles of human beings demands our collective focus and attention. It is a long held belief that workers who do not receive the appropriate level of support are in fact potentially dangerous to their clients (Reder, Duncan, & Gray, 1993). As human service professionals we must ask difficult and challenging questions in our efforts to survive the move from a view of „collective societies” and „common” good to a view of market survival. Can we democratize the process of supervision to create a concern for social justice, social change, and human rights (Brookfield, 2005).

References

- ADAMS, J. (2007). *Managing people in organizations: Contemporary theory and practice*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- BROOKFIELD, S. (2005). *The Power of critical theory for adult learning and teaching*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- COOPER, L. (2002) *Social work supervision: A Social justice perspective*, in M. McMahon and W. Patton (eds.) *Supervision in the helping professions: A Practical approach*, pp. 185-95 Australia: Pearsons Education.
- FRANKL, B.R. AND PIERCY, F.P. (1990) *The Relationship among Selected Supervisor, Therapist, and Client Behaviors.*, 16(4). Pp.407.
- JONES, M. (2004). *Supervision, learning and transformative practices*. In N. Gould and M. Baldwin (eds.) *Social work, critical reflection and the learning organization*, pp. 11-22. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- KADUSHIN, A. (1992). *Supervision in social work* (3rd ed.). New York: Columbia University Press.
- KADUSHIN, A. (2002). *Supervision in social work*: Columbia University Press.
- KAISER, TAMARA L. (1997). *Supervisory Relationships: Exploring the Human Element* Brooks/Cole: Pacific Grove.
- KAISER, T. L. (2003). *Achieving shared meaning: Understanding a Hmong family's response to marital violence*. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Social Work* 12 (2), pp. 29-54.
- MUNSON, C. (2002). *Handbook of Clinical Social Work Supervision*. Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press.
- NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS (2008). *NASW Code of Ethics (Guide to the Everyday Professional Conduct of Social Workers)*. Washington, DC: NASW.
- NOBLE, C. & IRWIN, J. *Social work supervision: An Exploration of the current challenges in a rapidly changing social, economic, and political environment*. *Journal of social work*, 9(3), pp.345-358.
- PHILLIPSON, J. (2002) *Supervision and being supervised*. In R. Adams, L. Dominelle, and M. Payne (eds.) *Critical practice in social work*. pp. 244-51. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- REDER, P., DUNCAN, S., & GRAY, M. (1993). *Beyond blame: Child abuse tragedies revisited*. London: Routledge.
- SHULMAN, L. (1993). *Interactional supervision*. Washington, DC: NASW Press.
- THOMPSON, N. (2006). *Promoting workplace learning*. Bristol: The Policy Press.
<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/supervision> retrieved 1/27/11.

HUMÁN SZOLGÁLTATÓ KÖZPONTOK VEZETÉSE

Patricia STOW BOLEA¹

Összefoglaló

A tanulmány áttekinti a humán szolgáltató központok vezetéséhez szükséges világosan meghatározott vezetési struktúrákat és funkciókat.

A központok vezetéséhez speciális vezetői képességek kellenek, mivel az elképzeléseket, célokat és elérni kívánt eredményeket a vezető közvetíti a dolgozók felé.

A gyakorlati szociális munkát és a humán szolgáltatások irányítását szakmailag előírt kompetenciák és felelőségek támogatják, emellett elengedhetetlen a segítő szakmák tudományágakhoz köthető valamennyi etikai követelményének való megfelelés. A vezetés lényeges elemei a Kadushin által meghatározott adminisztratív, képzési és támogatással kapcsolatos összetevő, valamint az összhang a Shulman-féle interakciós vezetés fázisaival.

A vezetővel való kapcsolatnak, a vezető és a munkatársak viszonyának fontos szerepe van a megfelelő szolgáltatás elérésében. Ha nincs meg a bizalom a vezető és a központ dolgozói közt, vagy nem kapják meg a kellő támogatást, potenciális veszélyt jelentenek az ügyfelekre nézve.

A humán szolgáltató központok vezetője viseli a jogi felelősséget az alkalmazottak cselekedeteiért és döntéseiért. A szolgáltatás és felelőség bonyolult rendszerében a vezetés tudása, képességei és szakértelme kritikus fontossággal bír a könnyen sebezhető ügyfelek ellátásában. Ez a kiszolgáltatottság megköveteli, hogy a központok vezetői szakszerűen osszák meg a feladatokat a ráfordított időt, oktatást és munkamegosztást tekintve.

A humán szolgáltatás vezetője, mint a szolgáltatás céljainak közvetítője, mint a megfelelő szolgáltatások biztosítója, és végül, mint az emberek személyes és közösségi szinten folytatott küzdelmeinek tanúja, mindannyiunk odafigyelését és törődését megköveteli.

Kulcsszavak: vezetés; vezetési struktúra, vezetői képesség, vezetői kapcsolat, vezetői etika

¹PhD, M.S.W., L.M.S.W., A.C.S.W., egyetemi docens: Grand Valley State University School of Social Work, Faculty Fellow, Pew Teaching and Learning Center, USA