



# **SUPERVISION IN SOCIAL WORK**

**FIFTH  
EDITION**

**ALFRED KADUSHIN  
DANIEL HARKNESS**

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## ❖ PREFACE

The first edition of this book was published in 1976. A second edition was published in 1985, a third edition was published in 1992, and a fourth edition was published in 2002. A fifth edition at this time seems necessary, given the continued concern with supervision and the sizable number of books and articles related to social work supervision published since 2002. Some older concerns have become archaic, and some new concerns have become increasingly visible.

This book provides an overview of the state of the art of social work supervision. It is addressed to supervisors and those preparing to do supervision, whatever their formal educational background. It is also useful to social work supervisees, students, and workers in enabling them to make more productive use of supervision.

The book is designed to help the reader understand the place of supervision in the social agency, the functions it performs, the process of supervision, and the problems with which it is currently concerned. Although no book can directly further the development of skills, it provides the knowledge base that is a necessary prerequisite to learning how to supervise. The book frees the course instructor from the burden of presenting the general background of supervision so that more time can be devoted to consideration of clinical material and controversial points of view.

Developments in health and social welfare policy and practice during the past decade have intensified concerns about the preparation and size of the workforce and, given the key role that supervisors play in workforce training and retention, the diminishing availability of social work supervision. Against the backdrop of a fragile and stagnant economy, with political gridlock and widespread unemployment, our nation is divided about the appropriate size, scope, and sector of health and human services. The current situation is characterized by reductions in staff and retrenchment in programming, as agencies and institutions strive to get more from their workers with an uncertain future and fewer dollars to spend.

One possible, if difficult, solution is to increase the productivity of each worker. Increasing productivity requires greater managerial efficiency and more imaginative agency management. With the constriction of resources, practice has become more time limited and results oriented. This has intensified requirements for accountability and the need to justify the legitimacy of the agency through the demonstration of efficiency and effectiveness.

Organizational survival may hinge on the ability of administrative supervision to fine-tune agency performance, increase efficiency, and deploy limited staff more effectively. Supervisory personnel are the crucial element in dealing with worker efficiency and productivity as they were in meeting the earlier demands for increased agency accountability.

More limited resources and the demands associated with taxpayer revolts have made issues of accountability a matter of much greater concern than ever before.

Because agency accountability starts with the supervisor's review and evaluation of the work of the direct service staff, such issues intensify the visibility and importance of supervision.

The domination of managed care approaches to health care and "the new public management" in human services have intensified concerns with service efficiency and demands for accountability. The changing demographics of the client population and staff have increased the need for attention to the problems of diversity in supervision. The privatization of health and human services and government support for faith-based programs are often in conflict with traditional values of social work education and practice.

The increasing dependence of agencies on governmental funding, third-party payments, and legislative mandates have resulted in the increasing external regulation of agencies. The need for documentation of agency activities through periodic reports further increases the need for administrative supervision to ensure that such information is available. Compliance with external regulatory requirements of funding sources such as Medicaid, Medicare, and Title XX puts a premium on the need for supervisory personnel.

Regulatory developments during the past decade have once again increased the importance and significance of social work supervision. Legislation enacted by 2012 in the District of Columbia, the U.S. Territories, and all 50 states often requires that certified, licensed, or registered workers have formal access to supervision. This has particular relevance for the provision of health care, as third-party reimbursements by managed care organizations and insurers are typically limited to those social workers practicing at the highest level of licensure—an achievement that typically requires an intensive and extended period of supervision. Where exceptions exist, social workers are often required to receive formal supervision as a third-party condition for payment.

Reduction in services and resources available to the social worker has resulted in a greater need to prioritize work and to prioritize decisions regarding the allocation of scarce supplies. Now more than ever before the worker is faced with the necessity of making difficult decisions regarding what gets done, what is ignored, who is provided service, and who is denied service. Many triage decisions now require, if not the help, at least the shared responsibility of a representative of management. Such situations increase the need for supervisory personnel.

Supervision, in-service training, and staff development share responsibility for helping the worker learn what he or she needs to know in order to do the job effectively. The supervisor's critical role in the agency adoption and implementation of evidence-based practices has been increasingly noted (McHugh and Barlow 2010), and supervisors must often teach new workers how to document clinical services, for example, as social work education rarely prepares students to meet legal and managed care practice standards (Kane 2002). Cuts in agency budgets have frequently required cuts in in-service training and staff development programs. Agencies have increasing difficulty in funding worker attendance at workshops or

institutes and national meetings. As a consequence, supervision becomes increasingly more important as a source of training and often is the only resource available to help workers enhance their skills.

The ascendance of a political orientation that seeks to reduce or eliminate public development of social programs and limit access to resources increases the importance of supervision for preserving the commitment of social work to a political orientation that is more humanistic. An orientation antagonistic to the objectives and values of social work has been made evident not only in legislative changes but in attempts at imposing business management technologies on social agencies. The increasing tendency to appoint business managers to administer social agencies has been encouraged by the proliferation of business administration (MBA) graduates who are actively seeking such positions.

If social work, in defense of its own values, hopes to resist such impositions, it needs to be concerned with increasing the effectiveness of its own managerial practices. Concern by social agencies with improving the practice of supervision is one approach to contesting the imposition by outsiders of managerial practices that might conflict with the values, ethics, and philosophy of social work. "We" rather than "they" would formulate and implement the changes in managerial practice. In doing so, we would increase the certainty that social agency administration reflects social work ideology.

Changes in the relationship between human service organizations and the courts in recent years have also increased the significance of supervisory personnel. The last decade has been characterized by increases in the frequency of legal challenges to human service programs as courts more actively inquire into areas previously left to the discretion of agencies.

With increased attention to client's rights and malpractice suits, many ethical and professional issues have been transformed into legal issues. The increased possibility of legal action against agencies by clients and community groups highlights the need for supervision to prevent damaging challenges from developing.

In a chapter devoted to negligent supervision as a basis for malpractice suits, Austin, Moline, and Williams (1990) advised supervisors to keep records that are complete and up to date, to document meetings with supervisees, and to take care in seeing that insurance forms for clients are completed properly. Risk management has become a priority concern of supervision (Lynch and Versen 2003).

Since the publication of the first edition, the problem of worker burnout was "discovered" and given considerable attention in the literature. The relevance to supervision of this new development lies in the fact that the research on burnout has concluded that supportive supervision is a key prophylactic and palliative for burnout.

During the past decade, there has been an explosion in research and exposition of studies of supervision in social work and the helping professions, supporting, supplementing, correcting, and edifying the content of previous editions. Studies of supervision in counseling psychology, nursing, and psychiatry have provided additional updated material of relevance. The resulting accumulation of knowledge needs to be



recognized in keeping the text appropriately current. As a result, we have excised some discussions found in prior editions, which has allowed us to add new ones and to expand upon those we opted to retain.

Some readers have complained that this book presents an unrealistic, visionary picture of supervision—that it presents supervision as it should be rather than how it is. A letter from one reader said, “I just can’t help but wonder where all those supervisors are that you describe so beautifully with all their right techniques and all their wisdom and all their understanding and time and patience. I can tell you I have never seen such a one and neither has anybody else here.” Touché and mea culpa. In the real world of heavy caseloads, tight budgets, and increasingly difficult problems, these objections are admittedly well grounded. The text’s image of supervision is often an idealized image rather than a picture of supervision as it is actually practiced. Supervision as described in the text exists nowhere in practice. The reader need not feel guilt or anxiety that his or her experience with supervision falls short, in some measure, of the image presented in the text, as inevitably everyone’s will. There is, however, some justification for presenting a systematic synthesis of the best in social work supervision. It suggests the ideal against which we can measure our practice and reveals the direction in which changes need to be made. It reflects Cicero’s reminder that “no wind is favorable unless you know the port to which you are heading.” The modern translation of this is: “If you don’t know where you are going, you will probably end up somewhere else.”

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—D.H.

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# CHAPTER 1

## History, Definition, and Significance

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### Historical Development

There are few and scattered references to social work supervision before 1920. Many of the references listed under *supervision* in the index of the *Proceedings of Conferences on Charities and Correction* or in older social work journals refer, in fact, to quite a different process from the supervision of the past hundred years. Such references are usually concerned with the administrative supervision of agencies by some licensing authority or governmental board to which the agencies were accountable for public funds spent and for their service to the client. In this case, supervision referred to the control and coordinating function of a state board of supervisors, a state board of charities, or a state board of control. Originally, the term *supervision* applied to the inspection and review of programs and institutions rather than to supervision of individual workers within the program.

The first social work text that used the word *supervision* in the title—*Supervision and Education in Charity* by Jeffrey R. Brackett (1904)—was concerned with the supervision of welfare agencies and institutions by public boards and commissions. Sidney Eisenberg, who wrote a short history of supervision in social work, notes that Mary Richmond, “one of the most original contributors to the development of social work, made no mention of supervision in her published works” (Eisenberg 1956:1).

Although the term *supervision* originally applied to the inspection and review of programs and institutions rather than to supervision of individual workers within the program, over time supervision became infused with additional duties. In addition to the efficient and effective administration of agency services, the education and support of the social worker fashioned the three-legged stool of modern social work supervision. In the service of administering agency services and helping the case, social work supervision meant helping a social worker develop practice knowledge and skills and providing emotional support to the person in the social work role.

Starting with the publication of the journal *The Family* (subsequently *Social Casework*, and now *Families in Society*) by the Family Welfare Association of America in the 1920s, there have been increasingly frequent references to supervision as we know it today—that is, supervision of the individual social worker. Mary Burns (1958) commented that although components of the supervisory process were described in the literature as early as 1880 and 1890, the entity with which we are concerned in this book was not clearly recognized or explicitly identified until much later. It “was not included in the index of *Family* until 1925 and not until after 1930 in the *Proceedings of the National Conference on Social Work*” (Burns 1956:8).

Supervision as we know it today had its origins in the Charity Organization Society movement in the nineteenth century. Concern about the possible consequences of indiscriminate almsgiving led to the organization of charities on a rational basis. Starting in Buffalo, New York, in 1878, Charity Organization Societies soon were developed in most of the large cities in the eastern United States. The agencies granted financial assistance after a rigorous investigation, but such help was regarded as only one aspect of the service offered. A more important component of help was offered by “friendly visitors”—volunteers who were assigned to families to offer personal support and to influence behavior in a socially desirable direction. “Not alms, but a friend” was the watchword of the Charity Organization Society movement.

The visitors were the direct service workers—the foot soldiers—of the Charity Organization Societies. As volunteers, they were generally assigned to a limited number of families (Gurteen 1882). Limited caseloads coupled with a high turnover of volunteers meant that the agencies faced a continuous problem of recruiting, training, and directing new visitors. These tasks were primarily the responsibility of a limited number of “paid agents” employed by the Charity Organization Societies. The paid agents were the early predecessors of the modern supervisor. Each agent-supervisor was responsible for a sizable number of visitors. The few available statistics support the fact that the principal burden of contact with the client was borne by visitors under the direction of a limited number of paid agents. Burns (1958:16) indicated that “by 1890 there were 78 charity organization societies with 174 paid workers and 2,017 volunteer friendly visitors.” Initially, the paid agent shared responsibility for supervision of the visitor with the district committee. The district committee was in effect the local executive committee of the Charity Organization Society district office. It generally consisted of laypeople and representatives of local charitable agencies.

When a family requested help, the initial study was done by the agent, who then reported the findings at a weekly district committee conference. The committee discussed the case and decided its disposition. The fact that cases were brought directly to the district committee for determination of action meant that, initially, the paid agent-supervisor had relatively little managerial autonomy. The supervisor and the visitor both were “agents” of the district committee. Generally, however, district committees became more policy- and administration-oriented. Gradually over time, responsibility for decision-making on individual cases was given to the paid agent-supervisor. The visitors, and the paid workers who subsequently replaced them, discussed their cases with the agent-supervisor, who was responsible for the decision and its subsequent implementation by the visitor or worker. The agent-supervisor thus became the administrative-managerial representative of the organization who was most immediately responsible for the work of the direct service worker.

The agent was a dependable administrative point of contact for the visitor, gave continuity to the work, and acted as a channel of communication. “The agent is always to be found at certain hours and, giving all this time, naturally becomes the center of district work, receiving both from visitors and [the District] Committee information and advice to be transmitted one to the other” (Smith 1884:70). As Fields

said in one of the earliest social work texts, *How to Help the Poor*, “The agent becomes the connecting link for the volunteer visitors who come daily for advice and assistance” (Fields 1885:18). The agent-supervisor, acting as a channel of communication, needed to be “careful to represent the Committee faithfully to the visitors and the visitors faithfully to the Committee” (Smith 1887:161).

All of the significant components of current supervisory procedures can be discerned in descriptions of the activities of the paid agent-supervisors. From its inception in 1843, the New York Association for Improving the Conditions of the Poor “maintained a paid staff who were to supervise and train volunteers and thus provide continuity of service” (Becker 1961:395). The quote points to the historical antiquity of administrative and educational supervision.

Zilpha Smith, general secretary of the Boston Associated Charities and later director of the Smith College Training School of Psychiatric Social Work, was one of the first to write about the supervision and training of visitors. She exhorted the district agent to “look over the records of the visited families frequently to see if the work is satisfactory or if any suggestions can make it so” (Smith 1901b:46). Here, the administrative requirement of ensuring that the “work is satisfactory” is coupled with the educational task of supervision.

According to a Boston Associated Charities report from 1881, the agent was charged with the responsibility of

investigation and preparation of cases for the volunteer visitors and advising and aiding the visitors in their work. ... The visitors ... consult with the agent regarding the families they have befriended. Investigation by the agent precedes the appointment of a visitor in every case. This is necessary for the purpose of getting accurate and thorough knowledge; and when we know the family we can select the visitors whom we think most likely to persevere and be of greatest benefit. (Burns 1958:24)

Here the administrative task of differential case assignment is coupled with the educational task of “advising and aiding.”

In an extended discussion of educational supervision of friendly visitors, Tenny (1895–96:202) noted that “in the important work of starting a new friendly visitor,” the conference worker (supervisor) tries “to show one or more things which may be done by a friendly visitor at the first visit; to show how to gain access to a family without seeming to have come to visit; to explain why a friendly visitor should not say ‘I heard you were in trouble, what can I do for you?’ Detailing the training of Boston friendly visitors, Thwing noted that the visitors were first given educational literature with rules and suggestions. Subsequently, they attended weekly conferences and had periodic talks with the agent, “who gave her general instructions as to the nature of the work” (Thwing 1893:234). In reporting to the agent, “if mistakes are made they are more easily rectified” (Thwing 1893:235). This was echoed by Gardiner, who said that “ill results from mistakes” by friendly visitors “are easily guarded against by proper supervision” (Gardiner 1895:4).

Because visitors were always difficult to recruit, easy to lose, and often frustrated and disappointed, they needed supportive supervision from the agent-supervisor in addition to administrative direction and training. The paid agent or district secretary

had to deal with the feeling responses of visitors to their work. On meeting the family to which she had been assigned, a “visitor returned immediately to say that those children must be taken away, the home was too dreadful. Then she was persuaded to try to make the home fit for them to stay in. As in this instance the new visitor often needs another’s steady hand and head to guide her through the first shocks of finding conditions so strange to his her experience that she cannot judge them rightly”(Smith 1892:53).

In the 1889 annual report, the Boston Associated Charities stated that “a large part of the agent’s day consists of consultation with visitors ... and there is opportunity for much tact and personal power in helping new visitors to understand what aid will benefit and what aid would harm their families, and in inspiring those who become discouraged to keep on until things look brighter again.” Here the supervisor’s responsibility for consultation with visitors in furthering the visitor’s understanding is supplemented by the need to offer support and inspiration for discouraged workers. One way of showing support in times of discouragement was to commend the worker for progress with families to whom they had been assigned:

A lady who had shown herself a good visitor came to the office one day and said, “I think I may as well give up the Browns. I cannot see that I do any good there.” But the agent said: “Think over last week. Do you remember what you said then?” “No.” “You said those children’s faces were never clean; they are clean now. That surely shows a little improvement. Do go once more.” (Smith 1892:57)

The early literature points to many principles of supervision that are still accepted and desirable. For instance, the paid agents assigned work to visitors with a sensitive, contemporary-sounding regard for the visitor’s needs:

A visitor showed ingenuity and force of character but the first hint of responsibility frightened her. The Agent asked her to take a message to a serving woman, later to another, then when she was calling on a family near by, would she not slip in and see how she was getting on and after three or four times, the agent said, “Now I am going to put you down as a visitor to Mrs. B.” She has been drawn in such a way into visiting seven families in all, more than we usually think wise for one visitor but she can give her whole time, is interested and enthusiastic. If anything like so much responsibility had been urged upon her at first, she would have been frightened away from the work entirely. (Smith 1892:54)

More than a century ago, Gardiner (1895:4) noted the need for individualizing workers by stating that “our workers have quite as varied natures as our applicants and require to be dealt with in quite as varied a manner.” The literature also emphasized that the agent’s administrative, educational, and supportive responsibilities were most effectively implemented in the context of a positive relationship:

In order to make friendly visiting succeed ... the agents must care to really help the visitor—not merely to give what the visitor asks, but, with tact and patience what he needs and to go at it simply and informally. The agent ... must learn patiently to know and understand the new visitor.... Thought must be given to his problems and both direct and indirect means used to help him help himself in working them out with the poor family. (Smith 1901a:159–160)

Earlier, Smith had noted that “the agent should be one able to guide and inspire others, ready to step in and help when necessary in what is properly visitor’s work

but sufficiently patient with the imperfections and delays of volunteers not to usurp the visitor's place" (Smith 1884:69).

It was noted that education of visitors should emphasize the principles for worker action:

The meetings of visitors rightly managed are a great power of education. In these meetings, and in talking or writing to visitors, details should not be allowed to hide principles on which the work rests. The principles should be discussed and the reasons for them given again and again as new visitors come to the meetings or new knowledge invites a change of policy. (Smith 1887:160)

Although group meetings of visitors were frequently the context for such instructions, individual supervision, using the visitor's case record as the text for training, was employed more and more frequently.

Not only were the present functions and approaches of supervision foreshadowed in this earlier development of the process, but so were the implicit and explicit hierarchies of supervision. Although the paid agent acted as supervisor to the volunteer visitor, the paid agent supervisor was also supervised by the district committee, which had ultimate authority for case decisions. Early charity organization records speak of members of the central executive committee coming to "consult and advise with Agent concerning the work" (Becker 1963:256). The paid agent supervisor was then in a middle-management position, as is true of supervisors today—supervising the direct service worker but being themselves under the authority of agency administrators, licensing boards, and other regulatory bodies, including the heavy hand of managed care.

The amplifying effect of supervision in extending the influence of a limited number of trained and experienced workers was recognized early. "The agent's knowledge and experience was extended over a far wider field than he could have covered alone. The inexperienced worker was trained by actual service without the risk of injuring the beneficiaries in the process, and the family visited had the advantage of both the agent's professional knowledge and the visitor's more intimate and personal friendliness" (Conyngton 1909:22–23).

By the turn of the twentieth century, supervision was affected by a gradual change in the composition of agency staff. Difficulty in depending on a staff of volunteer visitors who needed to be constantly obtained, trained, and retrained became more evident as demands on agencies expanded. With the growth of industrialization and urbanization in the late nineteenth century in America and the large increases in immigration, the need for paid staff increased. As a consequence, there was a gradual decrease in the ratio of volunteer friendly visitors to paid staff. Although such staff still initially required training by more experienced agent-supervisors, a cadre of trained workers who remained on the job for some time was being built up, and the demands for supervisory education and support became somewhat less onerous. At the same time, the burden of educating workers in the supervisory context was partly relieved by other resources.

## **Development of Education for Social Work**

From the very beginning of the Charity Organization Society movement, discussion groups of visitors and agents had been encouraged. Evening reading groups met to discuss current literature and to share experiences. The 1892 annual report of the Charity Organization Society of Baltimore noted that short papers, followed by discussion, were presented at meetings of visitors on the following topics:

- How to Help Out-of-Work Cases
- The Treatment of Drunkards' Families
- Sanitation in the Homes of the Poor
- The Cost of Subsistence
- Deserted Wives
- Cooking and Marketing

The Boston South End District visitors and agents heard lectures on housing the poor, the sweating system of Boston, trade unions, the social situation at the South End, and one, by Professor John R. Commons of the University of Wisconsin, on the training of the friendly visitor.

The better-established Charity Organization societies gradually began to conduct more formal training programs, which involved systematic education of those selected to be paid agents. For instance, the Boston Charities Organization initiated in-service training programs for new agents in 1891. The new agents were "apprenticed" to more experienced workers, participated in group teaching sessions conducted by the general secretary of the organization, and were assigned readings from the well-developed agency library. The supervising experienced agents met periodically with the general secretary to discuss problems of educational supervision. By 1896, the Boston Charities Organization stated in its annual report:

We have a higher standard for our agents. When the society started, there were no experts at this work; the agents and committees had to work together to acquire their training as best they could; while now, we have a well-organized system for training agents by having them work under direction, both in the Conferences and in the Central Office, before they are placed in positions of responsibility; so that there is always an agent qualified for the place should a vacancy occur. ... We have undertaken to prepare our [agents] for their work by a system of preliminary training which we hope will make them more positively efficient and guard them from errors unavoidable among the untrained. ... We have had hopes of being able carefully to train new volunteer visitors. ... We have thought, thus, to develop wisely the good intentions of those who join us with the generous, if sometimes indefinite, purpose to do good.

State and national conferences offered an opportunity for the exchange of information and ideas among people working in welfare organizations and institutions. They were, in effect, a source of training. The first National Conference of Charities and Correction was held in Chicago in 1879. In 1882, Wisconsin organized the first State Conference of Charities and Correction. The published proceedings of such conferences provided material for education and training. These were supplemented by a growing body of periodical literature that spoke to the concerns of people



working in the field. Texts and tracts devoted to the work of charity agency personnel were also published. In addition to the texts referred to above, Mary Richmond, then General Secretary of the Charity Organization Society of Baltimore, published *Friendly Visiting Among the Poor: A Handbook for Charity Workers* in 1899, and Edward Devine, General Secretary of the Charity Organization Society of New York City, published *The Practice of Charity* in 1901. The 1887 annual report of the Brooklyn Bureau of Charities stated that “the nucleus of a library has been formed at the Central Office and now includes some twenty-five hundred books, pamphlets and papers relating to the principles and methods of charitable work and cognate subjects. The collection is already worth the attention of those interested.”

Gradually, a body of practice wisdom was being developed, codified, and made explicit for communication through published channels. A group of practitioners interested in a particular phenomenon that ultimately became known as social work was gradually being identified and was developing a sense of conscious self-identification. The development of a knowledge base was accompanied by growing recognition that sympathy and interest alone were not sufficient to make a good worker. The twenty-second annual report of the Charity Organization of Baltimore (1903) commented that the “day is long-passed when the only necessary qualifications for social service are good inclinations. To minister successfully to a family whose own resources have broken down requires intelligence and skill of a high order.” The prerequisites associated with the emergence of a profession gradually began to become clear.

The development of a knowledge base made it possible to offer courses on social work content in colleges and universities—the beginnings of professional education—by departments of sociology and economics. These disciplines were closely allied with “social work” at that time and saw it as applied sociology. Frequently, the academic courses used the Charity Organization Societies as social laboratories for student education. In 1894, it was reported that 21 of 146 colleges and universities contacted in a survey were giving courses in charities and correction (Brackett 1904:158). For instance, the University of Wisconsin offered courses in practical philanthropy in the early 1890s. Professor Richard T. Ely, who was responsible for the development of that program, arranged for a course of lectures on charities by Dr. Amos G. Warner: “Expanded and published as ‘American Charities’ in the Library of Economics and Politics edited by Dr. Ely, these lectures became the first standard book on the subject” (Brackett 1904:162).

These various approaches to training personnel for the emerging profession culminated in the movement for development of a formal comprehensive program of specialized education. Anna L. Dawes is generally credited with making the initial suggestion for “training schools for a new profession.” In a paper presented at the International Congress of Charities in Chicago in 1893, she argued that “it ought to be possible for those who take up this work to find some place for studying it as a profession.” Students in such a training school could be taught “what is now the alphabet of charitable science—some knowledge of its underlying ideas, its tried and

trusted methods and some acquaintance with the various devices employed for the up-building of the needy so that no philanthropic undertaking, from a model tenement house to a kindergarten or a sand heap, will be altogether strange” (Dawes 1893). The motion was seconded by Mary Richmond, who argued for the need for a training school in applied philanthropy at the twenty-fourth National Conference of Charities in 1897. Richmond reported that although it was true that each Charity Organization Society took some responsibility for training its visitors and its workers through the district-committee conferences and the activities of the paid agent-supervisors, such education was apt to be agency centered and parochial: “This training specializes too soon and our leaders have but the need for a more intimate and sympathetic acquaintance on the part of our agents with almshouse work, reformatory work, care of defectives and all the other branches of work represented at this [National] Conference.... The school that is to be most helpful to our charity organization agents, therefore, must be established on a broad basis” (Richmond 1897:184).

In June 1898, a six-week summer training program was offered to twenty-seven students by the New York Charity Organization Society. This program is regarded as the beginning of professional education in social work. The summer course was repeated for a number of years and then expanded to become the New York School of Philanthropy, the first full-time school of social work. It is now the Columbia University School of Social Work. A school for social workers was established by Simmons College and Harvard University in 1904, and in 1907 the Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy (now the University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration) was established.

By 1910, five schools of social work had been established in the United States. The primary responsibility for training a cadre of social work professionals was vested in such schools. Agency supervision was seen as a supplementary educational resource. Because the number of schools was so limited, the greatest bulk of paid agents (later called charity workers and ultimately social workers) still received their training through apprenticeship programs in social agencies under the tutorship of more experienced agent-supervisors. Although they were charged with this responsibility for educational supervision, almost none of the supervisors had any formal training in supervision because none was available. A short course in supervision was offered for the first time in 1911 under the aegis of the Charity Organization Department of the Russell Sage Foundation. The department was headed by Mary Richmond at that time.

Starting with the development of the Charity Organization Society movement in the 1880s, supervision gradually emerged as a necessary aspect of charity organization work. The agent-supervisor organized, directed, and coordinated the work of visitors and paid agents and held them accountable for their performance; he or she advised, educated, and trained visitors and paid agents in performance of their work and supported and inspired them in their discouragements and disappointments. The three major components of current supervision—administration, education, and support—were thus identifiable among the tasks assumed by the early agent-supervisor. The

case record had been identified as the principal vehicle for supervision and the individual conference as the principal context.

Early in the twentieth century, the educational apparatus of a profession was being organized and was assuming the main responsibility for training. Supervision continued to perform an educational function but was now more of a supplement to such formal training institutions. Over time, supervision achieved more visibility in the agency administrative structure, and the process itself gradually became more formalized. Time, place, content, procedures, and expectations of supervisory conferences received clearer definition. As social work became more diversified, supervision took root not only in family service agencies, where it had its origins, but also in correctional facilities, hospitals, psychiatric clinics, and schools. The primary responsibility for professional education migrated gradually from the agency to the universities, but agencies retained primary responsibility for the administrative and supportive aspects of supervision and for residual, supplementary educational supervision.

Now, in the twenty-first century, another migration is underway. Although universities retain primary responsibility for the professional education of degree-seeking social work students, much responsibility for their continuing, postgraduate education has been assumed by the state boards that regulate social work practice. This includes responsibility for the educational supervision of tens of thousands of social workers working toward licensure to practice clinical social work—an advanced status that 47 percent of their colleagues have already earned (Center for Health Workforce Studies 2006).

## **Toward a Definition**

The word *supervision* derives from the Latin *super* (“over”) and *videre* (“to watch, to see”). Hence, a supervisor is defined as an overseer—one who watches over the work of another with responsibility for its quality. Such a definition of supervision leads to the derisive phrase *snooper vision*. The orthodox definition stresses the administration aspect of supervision; that is, the concern with seeing that a job is performed at a quantitatively and qualitatively acceptable level.

In developing a definition of supervision for our purposes, it is helpful to discuss in turn each of the different considerations which, in aggregate, contribute to a comprehensive definition. These include the functions of supervision, the objectives of supervision, the hierarchical position of supervision, supervision as an indirect service, and the interactional process of supervision.

### ***The Functions of Supervision***

A review of the social work literature shows that supervision has been defined primarily in terms of the administrative and educational functions, although the emphasis varies with the author and with the times. Robinson, in the first social work text on this subject, *Supervision in Social Casework* (1936:53), defined supervision as “an educational process in which a person with a certain equipment of knowledge

and skill takes responsibility for training a person with less equipment.” The first edition of the *Encyclopedia of Social Work* defined supervision as an educational process, specifically as the “traditional method of transmitting knowledge of social work skills in practice from the trained to the untrained, from the experienced to the inexperienced student and worker” (Stein 1965:785). Reflecting the rapid expansion of programs of social welfare and health and human services launched by the War on Poverty in 1965, the 16th and 17th editions of the *Encyclopedia of Social Work* (published in 1971 and 1977, respectively) emphasized the administrative function of supervision, defining supervision as “an administrative function, a process for getting the work done and maintaining organizational control and accountability” (Miller 1977:1544).

On occasion, both the educational and administrative functions of social work have been included in the definition. Towle (1945) defined social work supervision as “an administrative process with an educational purpose” (95; similarly, Burns 1958:6). A standard group work text stated that “the supervisor’s responsibilities are both administrative and educative in nature. ... The ultimate objective of supervision is that through more effective effort on the part of its workers, an agency’s services are improved in quality and its central purposes come nearer to fulfillment” (Wilson and Ryland 1949:587).

However, each of the definitions presented is only partly correct. It is true that supervision is both an administrative and an educational process. The social work supervisor has responsibility for implementing both functions in contact with supervisees. There is, however, an additional and distinctively different responsibility that needs to be included in the definition: the expressive-supportive leadership function of supervision. The supervisor has the responsibility of sustaining worker morale, helping with work-related discouragements and discontents, and giving supervisees a sense of worth as professionals, a sense of belonging, and a sense of security in their performance. In enacting this function, the supervisor provides workers with support.

The 19th and 20th editions of the *Encyclopedia of Social Work* (published in 1995 and 2008, respectively) provided definitions of social work supervision that addressed the complementary nature of administration, education, and support. All components are necessary if the ultimate objective of supervision is to be achieved. Admittedly, there is an overlap between the administrative, educational, and supportive functions of supervision. However, each function is different from the others in terms of problems and goals. The primary problem in administrative supervision is concerned with the correct, effective, and appropriate implementation of governing policies, procedures, statutes, and laws; the primary goal is to ensure adherence and lawful compliance to policy and procedure. The primary problem in educational supervision is worker ignorance and/or ineptitude regarding the knowledge, attitude, and skills required to do the job; the primary goal is to dispel ignorance and upgrade skills. The primary problem in supportive supervision is worker morale and job satisfaction; the primary goal is to improve and sustain morale and job satisfaction. The above

components should be included in a functional definition of social work supervision.

### ***The Objectives of Supervision***

The objectives of social work supervision are both short and long range. The short-range objectives of educational supervision are to improve the worker's capacity to do his or her job more effectively, help the worker grow and develop professionally, and maximize the worker's clinical knowledge and skills to the point where he or she can perform autonomously and independently of supervision. The short-range objective of administrative supervision is to provide the worker with a work environment that permits him or her to do the job effectively. The short-range objective of supportive supervision is to help the worker feel good about doing his or her job.

However, these short-range objectives are not ends in themselves; rather, they are the means for achieving the long-range objective of supervision. This objective is to effectively and efficiently provide clients with the particular service the particular agency is mandated to offer and paid to provide. Therefore, the ultimate objective is to provide efficient, effective, and appropriate social work services to clients. It is toward this objective that the supervisor administratively integrates and coordinates the supervisees' work within the agency, educates the workers to a more skillful performance in their tasks, and supports and sustains the workers in motivated performance of these tasks.

### ***The Hierarchical Position of Supervisors***

Approximately 85 percent of the licensed social work supervisors in the United States are employed in organizational settings with administrative superiors to whom they report (National Association of Social Workers [NASW] Center for Workforce Studies 2004). Thus, the majority of social work supervisors have middle-management positions and roles defined by their place in the agency hierarchy. They are responsible for the performance of the direct-service workers under their supervision, and in turn they are accountable to administrative superiors in the hierarchy above.

Although most social work supervisors are middle managers, approximately 15 percent of supervisors in the licensed workforce have no one person to whom they report. Working primarily in the private sector, in for-profit and health care organizations, an estimated 21,000 supervisors supervise autonomously in group and solo private-practice settings or similarly "flat" organizations that neither provide nor require administrative oversight (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004). However, such exceptions may be misleading. Although this sizeable minority of the supervising workforce may be exempt from bureaucratic oversight, they enjoy no immunity from administration concerns. Free of the burdens of an *internal* bureaucracy, they do not have to report to anyone within the agency. Yet, absent the benefits of an internal bureaucracy to support their work, "autonomous" supervisors lack an administrative buffer and must report directly to external authorities in the fiscal, legal, social, and political bureaucratic environments.

In traditional agency settings, the supervisor is sometimes described as an "in-

between” functionary. The position of the supervisor was aptly described by Austin (1981:32), who noted that the supervisor has “one foot in the work force and one foot in the management module, not being clearly associated with either.” They are leaders of their subordinates but subordinate to agency administrators. The supervisor is sometimes referred to as the “highest level employee and the lowest level manager ... sub-administrator and a supra-practitioner” (Towle 1962). As a member of both management and the work group, the supervisor acts as a bridge between them.

Agency executive administrators are primarily responsible for program planning, policy formulation, agency funding, and community relations. Primary supervisory managerial responsibilities center on program management and program implementation. Unlike the supervisor, the administrator is externally oriented and is concerned with a broader perspective. The administrator’s eyes are on the image of the agency as perceived by the community and legislative boards, oversight bodies, and client groups. The administrator acts as a broker with other organizations, negotiating agreements for coordinated action and arranging the procedures for interagency accountability. The administrator is concerned with organizational stability and survival, external politics, and the donor or funding constituency. In contrast, supervisors are internally oriented, focusing on the work environment and the job that needs to be done. Supervision has a more pronounced focus on internal operations as opposed to the more external orientation of top agency administrators. It is said that administration controls the domain of agency policy and planning, supervisors control the domain of management, and workers control the domain of service.

Talcott Parsons (1951) identified the three different levels of organizational hierarchy as the institutional level (relating the organization to the larger society), the managerial level (mediating between the organization and the task environment), and the technical level (direct service to organizational clients). Others have somewhat similarly identified the three levels as policy, management, and service. Traditionally, supervisors find their home at the managerial level. In large organizations, the supervisor may be the only administrative person in immediate daily contact with direct service workers. The supervisor’s frontline position is in close contact with the coal face and the shop floor—the context where the work of the organization is actually done.

#### ***Supervision as an Indirect Service***

The supervisor’s position in the agency organizational structure further defines supervision as an indirect service. The supervisor is in indirect contact with the client through the worker. The supervisor helps the direct service worker to help the client. In exemplification of the indirect role, it has been said that supervisors “talk about clients, not to them,” although a recent study of the workforce has found that this no longer holds true (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004).

#### ***Supervision as an Interactional Process***

Supervision is defined as a process. In implementing the functions of supervision, the

supervisor engages in a sequential series of deliberately and consciously selected activities. There is an ordered beginning, middle, and end to the process of supervision. The activities engaged in at each point in the process are somewhat different from the activities engaged in at other points in the process.

The process of supervision is implemented in the context of a relationship. Being a supervisor requires having a supervisee, much as being a parent requires having a child. A supervisor without a supervisee makes as much sense as saying that your brother is an only child. Because at least two people are involved, their interaction is a significant aspect of supervision. The supervisor and supervisee(s) establish a small, interlocking social system that is ideally cooperative, democratic, participatory, mutual, respectful, and open.

### ***Supervision as the Means to an End***

The supervisor is socialized in the values and purpose of the social work profession, and he or she socializes others in turn. Continuing a process that begins in the classroom, the supervisor helps the social worker internalize the service aspirations of social work practice. In concert, the delivery of efficient and effective agency services, the development of the front-line worker's knowledge and skills, and the sustainment of the worker-as-person in the face of difficult challenges target the end of improved client outcomes, in accordance with NASW (2005a, 2005b) standards for direct-practice supervision.

## **Definition of Supervision**

A comprehensive definition of social work supervision attempts to combine all the elements noted in the five sections above. Therefore, as the term will be used in this book, a supervisor is a licensed social worker to whom authority is delegated to direct, coordinate, enhance, and evaluate the on-the-job performance of the supervisees for whose work he or she is held accountable. In implementing this responsibility, the supervisor performs administrative, educational, and supportive functions in interaction with the supervisee in the context of a positive relationship. The supervisor's ultimate objective is to deliver to agency clients the best possible service, both quantitatively and qualitatively, in accordance with agency policies and procedures. Supervisors do not directly offer service to the client, but they do indirectly affect the level of service offered through their impact on the direct service supervisees.

## **Empirical Validation of Definition**

Our definition is derived from a general analysis of social work supervision. To what extent do empirical studies of supervision support the validity of the definition, to what extent does the definition reflect the reality of social work supervision? Only limited empirical data are available to answer these questions. In 1977, the Wisconsin Department of Health and Social Services sponsored a study of the tasks performed by those holding the position of Social Work Supervisor I. A task book of 574 possible

supervisor tasks was developed, and the supervisors were asked to identify which of these tasks they actually performed. Usable responses were received from thirty-eight supervisors. The fact that only 20 percent of the 574 tasks were selected by 50 percent or more of the respondents indicates that there was considerable variation in the actual job tasks performed by those holding the similarly designated Supervisor I position.

In the study, the tasks performed by the largest number of supervisors were essentially administrative in nature. This group of tasks, which constituted approximately 60 percent of all tasks performed, included assigning, directing, reviewing, coordinating, and evaluating work; making personnel decisions regarding hiring, promoting, termination; program planning and budget development; intra- and interagency communication of policy; and handling complaints. Tasks related to educational supervision (staff development and training) constituted 10 percent of tasks performed. These tasks included activities such as assessing training needs of workers; facilitating training; suggesting, teaching, and demonstrating; orienting and inducting new workers into their jobs; and providing needed information. Tasks related to supportive supervision were rarely explicitly identified, although some of the task items selected indicated the supervisor's responsibility for maintaining productive levels of morale (Wisconsin Department of Health and Social Services 1977).

Patti (1977) asked ninety social welfare managers to delineate the activities they engaged in during a typical work week. The respondents included administrators, department heads, and supervisors. Differences in activities were related to differences in levels of management. Although executive-level administrators were more concerned with representing the agency in the community, negotiating with groups and organizations, setting agency goals and objectives, designing program structures, and budgeting, respondents at the supervisory level "spent a major portion of their work week in 'directing,' 'advising,' and 'reviewing' the work of their subordinates" (Patti 1983:45). Supervisors were seen as having day-to-day contact with frontline staff, maintaining work flow, delegating and assigning work, seeing that services were provided in a manner consistent with policies and procedures, consulting with frontline workers on case-level decisions, providing advice and instruction on technical aspects of work, providing opportunities for upgrading areas of knowledge and skills, pointing out deficiencies, and evaluating individual performance (Patti 1983:44). Administrative and educational functions and activities of supervisors are clearly identified in the findings.

Shulman (1982) reported on a study in which 109 supervisors were asked to "indicate the percentage of time they allocated to various tasks." Responses indicating that about 20 percent of the time was spent on management, 18 percent on coordinating, and approximately 11 percent on personnel (all of which can be regarded as administrative considerations) lead to the conclusion that approximately 49 percent of the supervisor's time was spent in administrative supervision. Approximately 40 percent of the time was devoted to "supervision-consultation," which can be interpreted to mean educational supervision (Shulman 1982:22).



Poertner and Rapp (1983) performed a task analysis of supervision in a large public child welfare agency. Through interviews with selected supervisors, they identified the tasks that supervisors performed. A refined listing of thirty-five explicit tasks of supervision was sent to 120 supervisors and 227 direct service workers. The supervisors were asked to state whether they performed the tasks listed, and the workers were asked to identify the tasks they perceived the supervisors performing. Responses indicated that supervisors primarily performed administrative-management tasks. Approximately 80 percent of the tasks performed were concerned with caseload management (evaluates case plans for compliance with department policy, projects case placements and service needs, examines case plans with case workers), worker control (assigns new cases, reviews forms for accuracy and completion, monitors team goal attainment), organizational maintenance (responds to instruction or requests from central office, determines recordkeeping procedures, checks and approves forms), and interacting with community (meets with community agencies to discuss service plans, participates with community groups to identify and define new service priorities, meets with community groups to elicit cooperation to meet department goals). The remaining 20 percent of tasks performed were divided between supportive and educational supervision. When implementing supportive supervision, supervisors said they encouraged, listened to, and responded to staff concerning cases. When implementing educational supervision, supervisors said they educated caseworkers on the role of the juvenile court and taught caseworkers court procedures. This empirical study of supervisors' tasks again confirms the fact that administrative, educational, and supportive components are responsibilities of the position. In ranking the allocation of emphasis, administrative supervision once again has clear priority.

In 1989, Kadushin (1992a) distributed a questionnaire about functions performed by supervisors to 1,500 randomly selected social work supervisors. Responses from 508 supervisors confirmed the fact that administrative, educational, and supportive functions were performed. In terms of ranking, 44 percent of the supervisors identified educational functions (upgrading problem-solving and practice skills; developing self-awareness; instructing, advising, and suggesting about alternative case understandings and interventions) as the most important tasks. Approximately 32 percent of the supervisors cited administrative functions (assigning and reviewing evaluating supervisee's work; planning unit work and unit budgets; coordinating the work of the unit) as the most important tasks, whereas 24 percent cited supportive functions (maintaining supervisee's motivation, morale, and commitment; resolving dissatisfactions and grievances; mitigating job stress; preventing burnout) as the most important tasks.

Research by Erera and Lazar (1994a) operationalized and tested the tripartite definition of social work supervision in Israel. First, the investigators derived an exhaustive list of supervisory "action items" from the literature. Second, they asked independent judges to validate the list of action items to cull and refine it. Third, 233 supervisors employed in three types of agencies described how frequently they

performed each of the remaining thirty-nine action items in the course of their daily work. Finally, the supervisors' reports were factor analyzed to determine the underlying structure of social work supervision. Seven distinct supervision factors emerged from social work practice in social service departments, social security and immigration agencies, mental health clinics, rehabilitation and addiction centers, probation offices, and hospitals: (1) policy modification, planning, and budgeting; (2) quality control; (3) contacts with community services; (4) professional skills and techniques; (5) professional boundaries; (6) knowledge and information; and (7) support. The first three factors were clearly administrative in nature, and the second three clearly served an educational function. The support factor stood on its own.

An interdisciplinary scholar, Milne (2007) has argued that supervision should be defined by the active ingredients that make it successful. As a point of departure, Milne identified a set of twenty-four empirical studies that contained an intervention that was designed to improve the effectiveness of supervision, evaluated the effectiveness of supervision in a field setting of clinical practice, occurred in any profession or with any theoretical orientation, recorded supervisor and supervisee behaviors, demonstrated effectiveness, and were published in peer-reviewed scientific journals from 1986 through 2005. Using this procedure, Milne defined supervision as the formal provision by approved supervisors of intensive, relationship-based, case-focused education and training that supports, directs, and guides the work of supervisees.

In a subsequent study, Milne et al. (2008) used a "best-evidence synthesis" to construct a basic model of how effective supervision works. More than a hundred supervision studies were evaluated against thirty-two criteria to compile a set of twenty-four best-evidence research studies to model. Supervisors used twenty-six different interventions to influence their supervisees' clinical interventions with 711 patients to achieve favorable outcomes. The most frequent interventions included teaching and instruction, corrective feedback, live or video-based observation, modeling, planning, goal setting, questioning and answering, review and reflection, collaboration, discussion, disagreement, self-disclosure, confidence-building, and praise and support.

Consistent with Milne's view that the key to defining supervision is a question of what makes it work, Mor Barak et al. (2009:3) identified active ingredients in supervision that produced beneficial outcomes for 10,867 workers by meta-analyzing twenty-seven "qualified" research articles published between 1990 and 2007. Their findings indicate that supervisory dimensions of task assistance, social and emotional support, and interpersonal supervisory interaction are positively and significantly related to good outcomes for workers and, conversely, that social and emotional supervisory support and interpersonal interaction are negatively and significantly related to detrimental outcomes. In summary, Kadushin's (1976) definition of social work supervision is well-supported by research.

## **Ecology of Social Work Supervision**

Supervision, like any other process, is embedded in some ecological system, the components of which influence the process. [Figure 1.1](#) describes a contemporary view of the more consequential components of the supervisor-supervisee ecological system. Each component in the expanding set of components exerts some influence on the preceding component, with the contiguous components of the system having the greatest influence on each other. As a rule, the more distant components are likely to exert less direct, immediate impacts. Wars, economic depressions, and other earth-shaking events are important and dramatic exceptions.

#### ***Community: The Economic and Political Environments***

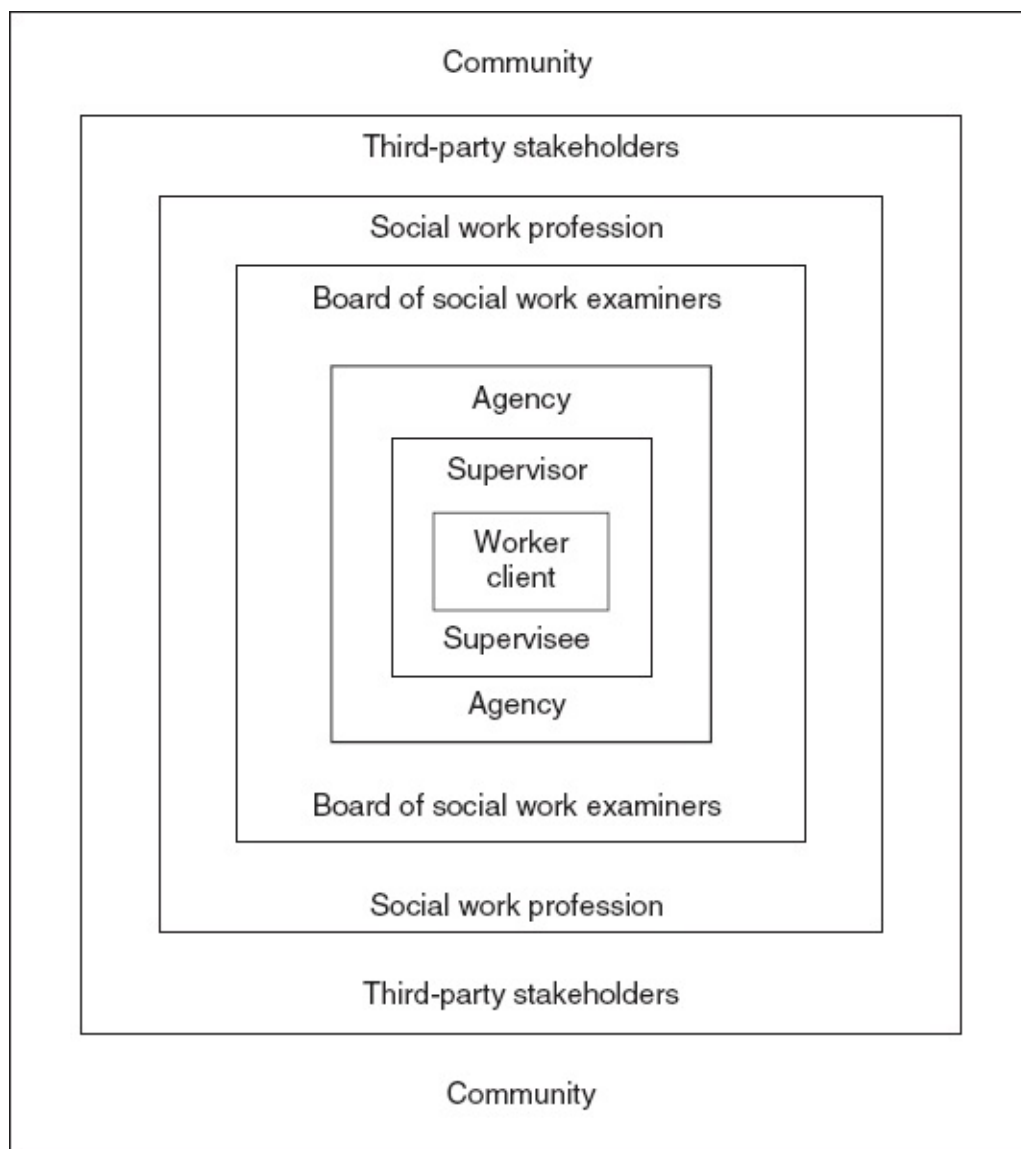
The general community affects the supervisory system in terms of the sanction, support, and attitudes it communicates toward the social work profession and the agency in which the supervisor operates. The general community provides the legitimation and funding that determines the organization's operations. When legitimation is restrictive and funding is inadequate, the supervisor works with considerable constraints and limited resources.

When the environment is stable, the impact of the community on social work supervision may go unnoticed. However, since the 1980s, the landscape of social work supervision has been changed by inexorable, often unpredictable forces. Many factors have shaped the practice environment: the so-called Reagan revolution and postmodern conservative government; welfare reform, managed care, and privatized human services; technological advances, globalization, the disappearance and creation of nations, human immigration, and the changing demographic profile of the nation; September 11th and "the War on Terror"; financial collapse, oil spills, and floods. As did the Great Depression and two world wars, these and other inexorable forces from inside and outside the U.S. borders have had an impact on social work practice and supervision.

In the 1980s, the Reagan revolution set a sea change in motion. Government sought to downsize federal administration of human services with the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981. In large measure, block grants returned dollars and discretionary spending to the states. An explosion in national health care expenditures alarmed the private sector and all levels of government. As public and private health care insurers adopted a variety of quality assurance standards to slow the runaway growth in the health care economy, supervisors in behavioral health care, for example, were compelled to review client charts by the thousands before the auditors saw them. Random errors in recording or practice jeopardized agency revenues, social work jobs, and client services.

In the 1990s, environmental demand for administrative supervision gathered force as welfare reform swept the nation. As foreseen by Stoesz and Karger (1990), "reform" meant funding mandated services through the states, privatizing human services, inviting bids for human service contracts to encourage private sector competition, and making clients pay for services. Following the signing of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act on August 16, 1996,

the organization, services, and administrative oversight of public welfare changed almost overnight (American Public Human Services Association 1998), and public welfare caseloads plummeted (American Public Human Services Association 1999). State and local social expenditures for social welfare (adjusted for inflation and the number of people living in poverty in the United States) began to spiral downward, but health care expenditures grew unabated (Gais, Dadayan, and Bae 2009). Rising costs of health care produced a managed care revolution in the largest field of social work practice (Lohmann 1997), and managed care took control of the health care service delivery system itself (Cohen 2003; Egan and Kadushin 2007). Carlton Munson (1998a, 1998b) observed that profiteering corporations were supervising social work practice.



**FIGURE 1.1.** The ecology of social work supervision.

As evidenced by the financial meltdown of the United States in the early twenty-

first century, the supervisory style of profiteering corporations can be heavy-handed and short-sighted, thoughtless and blunt. The sustained period of economic growth associated with an inflated domestic housing market came abruptly to an end in 2007. Large financial institutions began to collapse. In the stock market, the wealth of the nation—trillions of dollars—was lost overnight. As financial crises spread across the globe, governments sought to shore up their economies by bailing out banks, borrowing and spending more money. Businesses failed and unemployment and food stamp applications soared as economies slowed, shrank, or ground to a halt. In response, the United States sought to help the nation by extending benefits and food stamps to the newly and protracted unemployed. However, despite infusions of federal aid from a 2009 stimulus package, state governments began cutting health and human services expenditures to balance their budgets (Families USA 2008; Kneebone and Garr 2010). Social work supervision has been and will continue to be affected by these forces.

### ***Community: The Cultural and Demographic Environments***

From an international perspective, Tsui (2005) and Tsui and Ho (1997) argued that culture is the overarching environment of social work supervision. This requires thoughtful attention, as the United States annually may absorb more than 1.8 million immigrants. If current rates of immigration and population growth continue, the U.S. Census Bureau (2004) predicts that the nation's Hispanic and Asian populations will triple over the next half century, and non-Hispanic whites will represent about one-half of the total population by 2050. The African American population is projected to rise from 35.8 million to 61.4 million in 2050, raising their share of the country's population from 12.7 percent to 14.6 percent. The non-Hispanic white population will increase from 195.7 million to 210.3 million—an increase of 14.6 million or 7 percent. This group is projected to actually lose population in the 2040s and would comprise just 50.1 percent of the total population in 2050. Human diversity is reshaping the supervisory environment.

### ***Third-Party Stakeholders***

If the principal players in social work supervision are the supervisor and the worker, much as the worker and client are the principal players in social work practice, then third-party stakeholders are those who play a substantial or determining role in the interaction among the supervisor, worker, and client. Although public third parties might include city or county health or fire departments that provide facility inspections required for the certification or licensure of an agency or organization that seeks to provide human services, more typically the term is reserved for those tasked with responsibility for ascertaining that the human services provided meet appropriate standards of care that include social work supervision and licensure. A quasi-public institution, the Joint Commission ([www.jointcommission.org](http://www.jointcommission.org)) is an example of an accrediting body with strict guidelines for supervisory practice in health care. Private third-party stakeholders include Blue Cross, Blue Shield, Medicaid, Medicare, and managed care companies and insurers that subsidize or pay for social work services

in behavioral health care, the largest field of social work practice (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004). These organizations influence social work supervision by authorizing and monitoring social work practice for consistency with the standards of care used to determine which health and human services (if any) will be paid for. In summary, third-party stakeholders influence social work supervision principally by authorizing, credentialing, and paying for social work services.

### ***The Social Work Profession***

The social work profession exerts an influence on supervision in terms of the values it dictates for supervisor and supervisee allegiance and the practice technology it makes available for solving human problems. The professionally educated supervisee and supervisor share norms, values, and objectives derived from socialization to the profession, as well as ethical standards that determine their orientation and behavior in supervision. The profession as a source of identification for this ideology competes with the agency as a source of identification for determining behavior. The profession exerts a further influence on supervision through representation on boards of social work examiners that regulate licensure for social work practice.

The code of ethics of the NASW (2008) defines the values of the social work profession in behavioral terms that govern the transactions among the supervisor, the social worker, the client, and the practice environment. The abstract values underlying the ethical standards are immutable, but periodically the code of ethics is refreshed to clarify thorny issues of practice or rise to new practice challenges. In 2008, the NASW code of ethics was revised to address old ambiguities and new practice challenges in social work supervision. Because the social work supervisor bears legal responsibility for the supervisee's actions and the outcomes of service, as well as requires commensurate authority and resources to discharge his or her duties (Reamer 1998), supervisors have an ethical obligation to restrict the scope of their supervisory practice to their areas of competence, maintain up-to-date knowledge and skills, establish clear and appropriate interpersonal boundaries that avoid dual relationships, encourage their supervisees' professional development, evaluate their supervisees' performance, and promote and defend an ethical workplace (NASW, 2008). To these ends, NASW published supervision guidelines for clinical social workers in 1994 and 2003. The American Board of Examiners in Clinical Social Work followed with standards for clinical supervision in 2004, and NASW included supervision in its standards for clinical social work and health care in 2005.

With approximately 70 percent of NASW members now employed in private sector settings (Whitaker and Arrington 2008), social work supervisors must wrestle daily with private sector values. Supervisors who identify with social work's primary service obligation to clients have experienced ethical tension with the goals and methods of welfare reform, for example. Similarly, supervisors committed to the ethical mandates of informed consent and client confidentiality have found it challenging to practice in managed care environments (Munson 1998a, 1998b). Anecdotally, those conflicts find expression in the supervisory relationship. The new graduate, socialized in client

advocacy and empowerment practice, may view with suspicion the ethical accommodations to welfare reform made by an experienced supervisor approaching retirement. By the same token, the experienced supervisor may question the ethical judgment of the young entrepreneur who forms a for-profit case management agency, fresh out of school. In the changing practice environment, supervisors will address ethical issues that are nuanced, textured, and rarely clear-cut.

#### ***State Boards of Social Work Examiners***

In 1969, NASW resolved to pursue social work licensure in the fifty states. Under the Constitution of the United States, legal authority to regulate the professions resides with the states, and the states delegate that authority in turn to boards of social work examiners “when the public, through formal legislation and the regulatory or legal powers of the state, defines and regulates professional [social work] behavior and conduct” (Hardcastle 1977:14). NASW succeeded, and licensure is used to regulate social work practice in every U.S. state. NASW sought regulation to protect the development and interests of the social work profession as much as the interests of the public (Hardcastle 1977), and there are many indications that licensure has indeed advanced the professional status and rewards of social work practice (Harkness 2010). However, it is primarily the mission of protecting the public that guides state social work boards, although public protection may also advance the interests of the profession indirectly as a form of quality assurance.

In the service of protecting the public, the regulatory trend in social work has followed closely the professional regulation of medicine with increasingly rigorous regulation (Ameringer, 1996). This has been a source of concern. For example, Stoesz, Karger, and Carrilio (2010) estimated that the initial cost of a social work license for clinical practice may be \$3,344, with an estimated annual expenditure of \$1,410 for licensure renewal for each year of practice thereafter. On the other hand, more rigorous regulation of medicine has been required to protect the public because self-regulation has failed to protect too many patients from the hazards of health care (Ameringer 1996), and social work may prove to mirror medicine in this trend as well (Boland-Prom 2009; Harkness 2010; Reamer 2003).

State boards of social work examiners influence social work supervision in several concrete ways. In some states, newly licensed social workers may be required to practice with supervision, typically for a period of no less than two years. Social workers seeking advanced licensure for clinical practice are usually required to practice under the supervision of a licensed clinical social worker, again for a period of no less than two years and often in accordance with a written supervision plan reviewed and approved by the board, before taking and passing a written examination. Third, a growing number of state boards have adopted procedures for credentialing clinical social work supervisors, requiring formal training in clinical supervision. It remains to be seen whether the registration and licensure of social work supervisors heralds a national trend in professional regulation.

With growing recognition of the importance of social work supervision in the



training, performance, and retention of licensed practitioners (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004), the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB), that license social work practice, commissioned a study in 2007 “to identify the competencies and technical knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) required of individuals who provide supervision to social workers preparing for licensure” (ASWB 2009). The ASWB appointed a task force to conduct the analysis. Its thirteen members had considerable experience in social work practice, including roles as academicians, administrators, and practitioners. Using an iterative process that included brainstorming, sorting, refining, operationalizing, and ranking and rating items of critical importance, the expert panel identified forty-three critical competencies and KSAs that defined best practices in supervision. In essence, a behavioral checklist of supervisory duties and tasks (e.g., establish and maintain a positive supervisory relationship, guide/direct supervisee to ensure ethical practices within regulations and laws, follow up on case planning to identify what is working and offer guidance and support for improvement, develop learning plans with the supervisee, help supervisees develop strategies to increase wellness, including stress management), coupled with the requisite supervisory abilities, knowledge and skills, the ASWB analysis is an important contribution that comports well with our definition of social work supervision.

#### ***The Agency***

The agency system determines the structure of agency supervision, the entitlements and obligations of the supervisory role within the agency, and the occupants of the role set. The culture of the agency, its mission and procedures, are determinants of supervisor-supervisee interaction. The discussion of supervision throughout this book is at a level of abstraction that ignores the specific agency context in which it is practiced. It needs to be recognized, however, that different agency settings require different adaptations of supervision. Supervising in a public hospital is different from supervising in a voluntary family service agency.

#### ***The Unit Within the Agency***

The department within the agency in which the supervisor is located determines the specific tasks for which the supervisor is responsible and the situational specifics affecting supervision—the geography of the work unit, the support structure and resources available to the work unit, etc. The unit peer group is, additionally, an influence on supervision at this point in the ecology of supervision.

#### ***The Supervisor-Supervisee Dyad (Supervisee Group)***

The supervisor-supervisee dyad (or group) provides the specific interactional system in which the supervisory process occurs. This interactional dyadic (sometimes group) context is the ultimate subsystem through which the wider influences of the broader ecological system outlined above are filtered. What happens here (and this is the continuing concern of this text) depends on the idiosyncratic nature of the supervisor, the idiosyncratic nature of the supervisee, and the special chemistry between



particular supervisors and supervisees.

### ***The Worker-Client Dyad***

The worker-client dyad is the interactional system that serves as the principal focus of social work supervision, because it is principally through interaction that social workers help clients. To the extent that social work supervision exerts an influence that may help or hinder the interaction between worker and client, invariably the dynamics of the worker-client dyad and their interaction will exert a reciprocal influence on what transpires between worker and supervisor—a reciprocal influence that may ripple throughout the supervisory environment or system.

### **The Demography of Social Work Supervision**

In 2004, the NASW Center for Workforce Studies drew a random sample of 10,000 social workers from the social work licensure lists of forty-eight states and the District of Columbia to conduct a survey of the roles and uses of licensed social workers. We obtained and analyzed the database from that survey to generate a demographic overview of social work supervision. We used the survey question “*How many hours per week do you perform the following roles in all social work employment? Supervision?*” to identify the subset of social work supervisors—a sample of 1,377 licensed practitioners providing one or more hours of social work supervision per week. By extrapolating from the percentage of supervisors in the survey sample (38.3 percent of the 3,597 active and valid respondents), we can estimate that there may be as many 150,240 social work supervisors in the workforce of 392,274 social workers licensed for practice in the United States (Dwight Hymans, personal communication, July 11, 2012).

Most supervisors were women (82.2 percent) and between 35 and 54 years of age (56.4 percent). They described their race/ethnicity as Asian/Pacific Islander (1.5 percent), black/African American (6.5 percent), Hispanic/Latino (4.8 percent), white (non-Hispanic) (85.5 percent), Native American/Alaskan Native (0.7 percent), and other (1.0 percent). We found no relationship between the supervisory status of the licensed workforce and their ethnicity, race, or gender.

Although most supervisors (87 percent) had earned master of social work (MSW) degrees, the bachelor of social work (BSW) was the highest social work degree earned by 9.6 percent of the supervising workforce. Only 2.3 percent of the supervisors held a doctoral degree in social work. Social work supervisors reported somewhat more education than their supervisees, but the two groups had equivalent years of practice experience, with a mean of 15.1 years.

Most supervisors (88.7 percent) reported full-time employment. Most (68.9 percent) were employed in the private sector, in both nonprofit (44.7 percent) and for-profit (24.2 percent) settings, followed by positions in state (16.5 percent), local (11.6 percent), and federal (2.4 percent) governments; a handful of supervisors served in the military. Their employment was varied across more than twenty-five settings, but more than two-thirds reported primary employment in social service agencies (16.8

percent), private practices (14.5 percent), behavioral health clinics (13.2 percent), hospitals, medical centers, and health clinics (16.3 percent), or schools (7.9 percent), primarily in the fields of mental health (37.7 percent), child welfare (15.6 percent), and health care (10.4 percent). Although mental health was the primary employment focus for 36.8 percent of the supervisors and the focus of second jobs for 24.5 percent of who held them, only 17.6 percent of supervisors described private practice as their primary employment and only 15.1 percent of those with secondary jobs were engaged in private practice.

Wherever they worked, the supervisors had demanding positions. The majority (76.7 percent) provided 1–9 hours of supervision per week, although 13.3 percent supervised 10–19 hours per week, 4.8 percent supervised 20–29 hours, 2.5 percent supervised 30–39 hours, and 2.8 percent spent 40+ hours per week in staff supervision. As a group, the social work supervisors reported spending significantly more time than their colleagues in the roles of administrator, community organizer, consultant, planner, teacher, and trainer. In addition, 47 percent of the supervisors also reported delivering twenty or more hours of direct service to clients in each week of work. For nine out of ten supervisors, supervision was only part of the job.

In our sample, supervisors with full-time employment earned a median annual salary of \$48,383 in 2004. With an estimated mean annual salary of \$53,211, they earned approximately 20 percent more than their colleagues. Whitaker and Arrington (2008) reported that the majority of NASW members with full-time employment earned between \$20,000 and \$59,999 per year. In 2009, respondents to an NASW membership survey (Pace 2010:8) reported a median annual base pay of \$57,000 for social work supervisors, which was \$7,000 more than those who were not in a supervisory role.

In summary, licensed social work supervisors are primarily women with MSW degrees and 15 years of practice experience, working in the private sector in full-time positions. By and large, these supervisors hold more jobs, perform more duties, work longer hours, and earn more money than their colleagues (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004).

## **The Significance of Supervision in Social Work**

We have noted that, historically, supervision has always been an important element in social work. Of course, supervision is not unique to social work, but the function and process of supervision have achieved special importance in social work as contrasted with many other professions. This prominence might be explained by some distinctive aspects of the profession, the nature of its service delivery pattern, the problems with which it is concerned, the clientele to whom service is offered, and the characteristics of social workers.

As contrasted with other, more entrepreneurial professions, social work has traditionally offered service to the client group through an agency. Although this is less true than it once was, the majority of employed social workers continue to practice in bureaucratic organizational settings (Whitaker, Weismiller, and Clark 2006a), and this

seems likely to continue. An agency is a complex organization; therefore, it needs to develop some bureaucratic structure if it is to operate effectively. The work of different people, each performing some specialized task, has to be coordinated and integrated. The social agency thus requires a chain of command—a hierarchy of administrators. Because most social workers perform their professional functions within an agency, they find themselves in a bureaucratic structure in contact with the supervision that a bureaucracy requires. Considerable educational and training efforts are expended in helping social work recruits understand and identify with organizational models and values. Social workers are evaluated in terms of their identification with, acceptance of, and adherence to agency policies and procedures. Although other professions may still socialize recruits in terms of a professional image that is largely modeled after the independent entrepreneur, social work has always heavily emphasized the organization-agency context as the locus of the worker's activity. Consequently, as Scott noted, "social workers, unlike members of other professions, expect to enter an organization where their work will be subject to routine hierarchical supervision" (Scott 1969:92).

A significant component of social agency activity is concerned with the distribution of services and supplies that the agency does not own. Very substantial amounts of agency resources, supplied from community appropriations, are allocated through decisions made by workers. Assigning a child to foster care can involve the commitment of thousands of dollars over a five- to ten-year period. The decision to assign a homemaker to a family, provide day care at the community's expense, or institutionalize a brain-damaged child or a senile elderly person involves a substantial increase in community expenditures. The community feels entitled to know that such decisions are made with some oversight and procedural safeguards, not solely on the basis of the worker's autonomous discretion. As Levy noted, "Organization funds, materials, and all other resources placed at the disposal of staff members are not personal assets. They are assets held in trust for the community" (Levy 1982:51). Accountability to the community is also required by the fact that the community provides the agency with its clientele. Policies established by the community regarding eligibility requirements for certain programs and definitions of needs channel people to the agencies. As a result, social work faces great pressure from the community for the accountability provided by social work supervision.

In addition to the finances and resources that the agency employs to help its clients, the policies that the agency implements often originate elsewhere. Policy for public social-welfare agencies often is created by political bodies, such as public welfare boards and commissions. The agencies are then answerable to these political entities for correct implementation of policy. This circumstance also creates an organizational pressure for some system of accountability for workers' activity within the agency.

The external dictation of agency policy is justified not only by the fact that public and private funds are being used to offer or purchase the service, but also by the fact that social agencies are concerned with problem situations that present a great

danger to the community—situations in which the community has a strong vested interest. Mental illness, crime, dependency, discrimination, and family breakdown are particularly costly financial and ideological threats to society. Response to these problems involves the embodiment of society's values and its ideological commitments in sensitive areas—family structure, legal conformity, sexual mores, the work ethic, and racial conflict. The community and the corporation feel impelled to indicate how such situations should be handled through the articulation of social policy and the management of contracts. The fact that social work agencies are concerned with problems that pose not only a financial but also an ideological danger to the community again leads to external control of agency policy and internal agency control of work autonomy. The public is anxious about the kinds of decisions made by the agency that can affect public policy on controversial questions, and the legislative adoption of health care reform is proof positive that the public is equally anxious about the kinds of policy decisions being made in the private sector as well.

The degree of autonomy granted to a profession is a function of the extent to which there is general consensus about the profession's objectives, knowledge, and skill. To the extent that the community is hesitant about granting full autonomy to a profession, there will be pressure toward its regulation and the supervision of its members. Following the "golden age" of self-regulation in medicine in the twentieth century, for example, some of the autonomy granted to physicians and their boards of medicine has been withdrawn (Ameringer 1996), exercising the power of the purse through managed care and the force of the law through professional regulation. Parallels and paradoxes are evident in the autonomy granted to social work. In many states, the professional autonomy granted to licensed clinical social workers, for example, is on par with the autonomy enjoyed by physicians (Harkness 2010), and it appears that this trend will continue. On the other hand, perhaps because social workers tend to base their practice decisions on personal "experience; on their professional values and beliefs, and on an empathic understanding of their clients" (McLaughlin, Rothery, Babins-Wagner and Schleifer 2010:155) instead of professional knowledge (Rosen 1994; Rosen et al. 1995), supervision is one of the regulatory tools that boards of social work examiners use to protect the public, limiting or rescinding professional autonomy before or after things go wrong (Boland-Prom 2009; Reamer 2003); this includes the growing regulation of social work supervision itself (Kathleen Hoffman, personal communication, May 18, 2010). Community confidence in the competence of a professional group to effectively implement society's mandate is a necessary prerequisite for the grant of full autonomy. As confidence is lost, loss of autonomy follows soon.

Research suggests that when a profession such as social work performs nonuniform tasks in an uncertain and unpredictable context toward the achievement of diffuse and ambiguous objectives with heterogeneous populations, there is more decentralization of decision making and a greater need for worker autonomy (Dornbusch and Scott 1975:76–87; Rothman 1974:152–157). These findings logically argue for less bureaucratic structure because they suggest difficulty in codification of

procedures, formulation of standardized rules of action, and routinization of performance. They would also seemingly argue for a less elaborate supervisory apparatus. One can, however, deduce the opposite need from the same considerations. When objectives are unclear, there is great uncertainty as to how to proceed, the effects of interventions are unpredictable, and the risk of failure is high, workers may need and/or want the availability of an administrative representative who will share responsibility for decision making, provide direction, and give support. Consequently, the conditions under which the work of the profession is performed argue for the desirability of a supervisory cadre.

Because of the nonroutine, nonstandardized, unpredictable, and highly individualized nature of social agency activities, even the best reporting forms fail to collect a good deal of significant information about the worker's activity. Consequently, the nature of the social worker's function and activities requires that the administration gather information through other channels. The conference between supervisor and supervisee is such a channel. The need for such personalized, intensive, and flexible channels for gathering this information further highlights the value of social work supervision.

Many professionals perform their services publicly, thus exposing their work to public evaluation, but social workers may also perform their functions under conditions that rarely permit direct observation. Although other professionals such as doctors and dentists also perform their functions privately, the outcomes of their work are more objective and observable than in social work. Social workers hold interviews in private and discourage observation as an intrusion on the privacy of the encounter, contending that direct observation of their practice would interfere with effective worker-client interactions. Because this is the nature of social work, the client would be left without effective protection from practice that might be damaging if there were no system for supervisory review of what the worker is doing.

Two additional aspects of the social work delivery system create a need for supervision: the agency provides the workers with their clientele, and clients are often "captives" of the agency. The professional entrepreneur, such as the lawyer or the doctor, pays a price for ineptitude, inefficiency, and outmoded professional skills in a reduction of income owing to loss of clients. Social workers, operating in an agency that provides the clients, do not face the same kind of penalties that alert them to the need for examining and correcting their practice. Furthermore, the client's use of agency service is often involuntary, dictated by organs of social control such as schools and courts. Even without such formal directives, situational imperatives may deny the client freedom of choice. The need for food, shelter, or medical care may determine the client's need for an agency service—a service over which the agency is granted a virtual monopoly. In this context of limited client control, workers could afford to become somewhat more indifferent to client concerns. Given the chronic pressure of case overload, losing a client might even be perceived as rewarding. As compared with organizations that must compete for clientele in the open market, social agencies have been somewhat immune from client feedback through defection.

The fact that the client's use of the agency is often compulsory means that greater provision needs to be made to protect the client than would be the case in situations in which the client could choose to withdraw if dissatisfied with the service.

Despite the fact that social workers use resources provided by the community, are required to implement policies formulated by groups outside the agency, perform their tasks in private with clients who often have no alternative options, and are concerned with outcomes that are difficult to discern and evaluate objectively, is there a real need for supervisory review and control in regard to accountability and client protection? All of these conditions might accurately characterize social work and yet not require supervision. One would expect that the professional social worker would be personally concerned about protecting the client and implementing agency policy in a clearly responsible manner. Operating autonomously, the social worker would provide the controls of supervision for himself or herself. But does social work satisfy the conditions that ensure that the autonomously operating worker will be self-supervised, that agency policy will be adhered to, and that the needs of the client will be protected? These conditions include extensive professional education, a strong interest in the tasks to be performed, a commitment to the ends to which these tasks are directed, and periodic agency indoctrination reinforcing the saliency and legitimacy of these goals (Kaufman 1960). The result of these conditions is to socialize the worker so that he or she does, as a matter of personal preference and professional conscience, those things that are professionally required. The composition of social work agency staff, now and in the past, raises questions about the degree to which these conditions are met. In the absence of these conditions, there is greater pressure to develop a supervisory control system to ensure that work performance is in accordance with professionally desirable norms.

The process of professional recruitment, selection, and education has implications for the kind of supervisory system a professional establishes. If the process of occupational selection is deliberate and the program of training is prolonged, the need for elaborate supervisory procedures is lessened. A candidate who deliberately makes a choice of some profession after careful evaluation of alternatives is apt to feel a sense of commitment to the profession. The very process of applying for, and being selected by, a graduate professional school acts as a screen that ensures recruitment of those applicants who, in some way, share the values, assumptions, and predispositions characteristic of those performing the work. This is reinforced by the professional training experience.

The objective of professional training is not only to teach the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that would enable the recruit to do a competent job, but also to socialize the student to the ways of the profession and to develop a professional conscience. It is the elaborate process of professional socialization, during a prolonged program of intensive training, that permits workers in all professions to operate autonomously, free of external direction and control but subject to internal direction and control on the basis of competence and values incorporated during training. The supervisor is, in effect, internalized during the transformation of the lay person into a professional, and

supervision does not then need to be externally imposed. Discipline becomes self-discipline; accountability is accountability to one's professionalized self. Such constraints are further maintained and collectively sustained by strong professional organizations to which the professional feels an affiliation, even if he or she is not formally a member, and by periodic in-service training courses, conferences, meetings, and professional journals.

All this is often quite different from the situation that characterizes job entrance for a large percentage of social workers, both currently and throughout the history of the profession. For many social workers, entrance to their jobs was not the result of a serious commitment to social work as a lifetime career but rather a decision of limited commitment, frequently made because other, more attractive, alternatives were not available. Workers often come to the job with no previous knowledge of social work and no firm identification with the profession or its objectives, standards, and values—an identification that might have been developed during a prolonged period of professional training—and with no resolute commitment to the profession. Even among licensed social workers, arguably those most committed, nearly 5 percent plan to leave the profession to engage in other work; those planning to leave are more likely to be ages 26 to 34 years, have a BSW as their highest social work degree, and be in an early stage of their career (Whitaker et al. 2006a).

Even the question of how many of the people who carry the title *social worker* have been socialized and trained in schools of social work, and how many have not, is open to speculation (Wermeling 2009). Although the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that there were 642,000 social workers in the workforce in 2010, only about 56 percent were screened for social work education, tested, and licensed by a social work board because many states have significant licensing exemptions written into law for public agencies and other practice settings (Dwight Hymens, personal communication, May 24, 2010).

Therefore, there are, in effect, two different kinds of staff to which supervision is directed. One is composed of social workers who have made a career choice of social work after considerable exploration and deliberation, who have invested effort and money in a prolonged program of professional education, and who have thereby developed both some beginning competence in performing social work tasks and some identification with and commitment to the social work profession. At the same time, an approximately equal or even larger number of social workers have come to the job fortuitously because an opening was available. Often concentrated in large public welfare agencies, they have had no prior exposure to social work, have not considered it seriously as a career, have had little (if any) education or training for the job, and have little if any identification with and commitment to social work. This second group is, of course, highly diversified—a subset of the millions of human service employees in the workforce (Light 2003; Patti 2009). Thus, there always has been and will continue to be a need for agencies to induct, train, and socialize new recruits. Because of tenuous commitment or lack of prior opportunity to socialize toward a firm commitment to the mission of social work on the part of many recruits,

supervisory personnel have been assigned to perform the functions of educational and administrative supervision.

The need for organizational controls in supervision on the part of the agency is made more imperative by the absence of effective organizational controls on the part of the profession itself. Medical boards and bar associations are able to control entry into and expulsion from their professions; relative to social work, they have more authority under the law to limit abuses of professional autonomy and guarantee professional responsible behavior by policing their members. However, social work, medicine, and law use different methods and standards to screen applicants for admission to education and practice (Stoesz et al. 2010). Moreover, the force of law that social work boards can bring to bear on the conduct and competence of the social worker's performance is relatively limited. This absence of effective professional control groups in social work, as compared with more established professions, argues for a compensatory control system such as agency supervision.

Bureaucratization, of which supervision is a component, results not only from the limited training of a large number of people carrying the title of social worker but also from the limited knowledge base and technology available even to fully trained workers. In a profession in which the level of development of knowledge and techniques is such that the professional often finds himself encountering situations in which he or she cannot operate with full confidence, as is true in social work, there is a greater tendency to share the decisional responsibility with a supervisor and less readiness to resist supervisory suggestions and rules that dictate action. Social workers need to be very confident of their ability to make use of autonomy if they are going to claim it aggressively and defend it tenaciously. "Control over the work of semiprofessionals is possible because they lack the weapon—knowledge—with which professionals resist control. ... The motives which drive professionals to seek autonomy are strong intrinsic commitment to specialize knowledge and skills together with confidence in their ability to exercise such skills" (Simpson and Simpson 1969:198–199).

If perhaps some of the arguments we have used to emphasize the significance of social work supervision have created the impression that we subscribe to a "Theory X" view (McGregor, 1960) of human and organizational behavior in which social work supervision is required to protect clients from workers, let it also be noted that a body of research suggests that social work supervision, in addition to the important role it plays in preventing or minimizing negative practice outcomes, has a significant role to play in the achievement of positive outcomes for social workers (Mor Barak et al. 2009) and their clients (Milne et al. 2008; Milne 2009). This will be addressed in chapters to come.

The distinctive nature of the problems encountered and the tasks performed by social workers makes the availability of supportive supervision desirable, perhaps even necessary. Social workers are in constant contact with highly charged affective situations that make heavy demands on emotional energy on behalf of the client. The problems encountered—parent-child conflict, marital conflict, illness, death,



dependency, deviance—are those that a social worker struggles with in one way or another in his or her own life situation. The principal instrumentality for helping the client is the worker himself or herself, so that failure to help may be sensed as a personal failure. The responsibilities are great, the solutions available are ambiguous, and the possibilities for happy solutions are limited. The risks of guilt, anxiety, discouragement, and frustration are numerous. There are few professions that come close to social work in developing in the worker the need for support, encouragement, reassurance, and restoration of morale—a need met by supportive supervision.

The nature of social work not only argues for the need for supervision for new recruits, but also for the more experienced worker:

The nature of social work ... is work with people through relationships where the personality of the worker is one of the tools for the work. It can be argued that no one, however, skilled or experienced, can ever be entirely objective about the way they use themselves in relation to another person. A third person is essential to help the social worker stand back from the relationship and then return to it in ways which are helpful to the client. If one accepts such arguments then, in the words of one social worker, "supervision is essential for every social worker." (Parsloe and Stevenson 1978:205)

## **Summary**

In this chapter, following a brief historical review of supervision, we noted the variety of definitions of social work supervision. For the purposes of this book, the supervisor is defined as a member of the administrative staff who offers an indirect service that includes administrative, educational, and supportive functions.

In explaining the prominence of supervision in social work, we noted that organizationally based workers offer resources provided by the community to implement community-formulated policies. Working with clients who often have few options, workers who are often untrained and need frequent support offer service under conditions of privacy, with ambiguous outcomes.

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# CHAPTER 2

## Administrative Supervision

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### Organizational Bureaucracy

Supervision is a special aspect of organizational administration. Most social work supervisors work in organizational settings (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004), with the attendant obligations of a contract for employment (Malcomson 1999). “Contributing to achievement of the agency’s goals and adherence to its policies and rules” (Henderson 2009:3) is at the heart of those obligations, not unlike the duties of a service to his master (Hacket 1893). Moreover, because a license is required to practice social work (Bibus and Boutte-Queen 2011; Groshong 2009), the supervisor has an overarching duty to abide by the “codes of ethics and qualification requirements [that] serve to control how individual practitioners do their work” (Vanderstraeten 2007:625). Administered by a board of social work examiners, these rules vary from state to state and govern both practice and supervision (Association of Social Work Boards [ASWB] 2010b).

Serving both the agency that they work for and the profession that they practice is a burden that all professions bear when they become employed (Blau and Scott 1962; Engel 1969; Hoff 2003). Invariably, when a number of employees are brought together and then provided with the necessary equipment and facilities to perform a particular job, there needs to be systematic coordination of effort if the objectives of the group are to be efficiently accomplished. The systematic cooperative, coordinated effort of a group of people in getting a desired job efficiently accomplished, if sustained for any period of time, leads inevitably to the development of some kind of formal organization of the work. Schein (1970:9) defined organization as “the rational coordination of the activities of a number of people for the achievement of some common explicit purpose or goal through division of labor and function and through a hierarchy of authority and responsibility.” More tersely, Blau and Scott (1962:1) defined an organization as “a social unit that has been established for the explicit purpose of achieving certain goals.” Organizations are thus consciously planned and deliberately structured so as to increase the probability of achieving organizational goals and objectives.

A bureaucracy is a specialized kind of organization. Although Charlton (2010:961) described bureaucracy as a parasitic “cancer,” the term *bureaucracy* is used here not pejoratively but descriptively and neutrally, to designate a particular organizational form. Theoretically, a bureaucracy is the most rational, efficient, effective organizational format for coordinating the cooperative efforts of a sizable group of people, each of whom is engaged in a different task necessary for the achievement

of common organizational objectives. A bureaucracy may be characterized as follows:

1. There is a specialization of function and task—a division of labor—among units of the organization and among different employees within each unit.
2. There is a hierarchical authority structure, with different people being assigned positions of greater or lesser responsibility and power.
3. People in the hierarchy exercise authority on the basis of the position they hold.
4. People are recruited, selected, and assigned to positions in the organization on the basis of objective, impersonal technical qualifications rather than on the basis of who they are or who they know.
5. There is a system of rules and procedures, universally and impersonally applied, which determine the rights and duties of people occupying each of the positions in the agency.
6. All organizational activities are deliberately and rationally planned to contribute to the attainment of organizational objectives. Bureaucracy is sometimes described as the “rational organization of collective activities.”

These are the essential characteristics of the bureaucratic organizational structure in its ideal form; actual bureaucracies achieve the ideal in varying degrees. Consequently, any bureaucratic organization can be more or less bureaucratic.

Most social work organizations have employees who engage in specialized tasks and have an administrative hierarchy, a set of clearly formulated policies and procedures, and clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and functions, which are all designed to achieve specific objectives. In short, not only are social agencies organizational in nature, but they conform to the definition of a particular kind of organization—a bureaucracy.

Any organization—particularly a bureaucratic organization—needs administration. Administration is a process that implements organizational objectives. Stein describes it as a “process of defining and attaining the objectives of an organization through a system of coordinated and cooperative effort” (Stein 1965:58). In organizations with highly differentiated hierarchical structures, there are first-line supervisors, who are the administrative personnel directly responsible for and in contact with the direct service workers. Our concern here is primarily with these front-line supervisors who supervise direct service workers.

The supervisor is a link in the chain of administration—the administrator who is in direct contact with the worker. Both have a duty to achieve agency objectives in accordance with agency policies and procedures, but the two have different roles. As an administrator, the supervisor has responsibility for agency management and is assigned specific, clearly defined, administrative-managerial functions. “To be effective, the process entails reciprocal interpersonal relationships between an administrative supervisor ... and supervisees” (Henderson 2009:3). These functions are the essence of administrative supervision.

## Tasks

What specifically are the tasks the supervisor is called upon to perform in discharging the responsibilities of administrative supervision? They include the following:

1. Staff recruitment and selection
2. Inducting and placing the worker
3. Explaining supervision
4. Work planning
5. Work assignment
6. Work delegation
7. Monitoring, reviewing, and evaluating work
8. Coordinating work
9. The communication function
10. The supervisor as advocate
11. The supervisor as administrative buffer
12. The supervisor as change agent and community liaison

### *Staff Recruitment and Selection*

The effective achievement of organizational objectives requires making a collectivity out of a group of individuals (Henderson 2009). There has to be some consensus as to how individuals will work together, how they will perform their assigned tasks, and how they will coordinate their activities with others in the collective. Harnessing a group of people to work cooperatively and collaboratively toward a common objective necessitates limiting the effects of human variability.

One step in limiting variability lies in the process of selection for membership in the organization. Supervisors charged with hiring people as agency social workers seek to select candidates who are likely to “fit in.” This task requires selecting those applicants who have the values, knowledge, and skills to do the job, as well as the personal characteristics, attitudes, and maturity that will allow them to feel comfortable and accepting in implementing agency objectives. Counterbalancing the goal of fitting in with the companion risk of inadvertent discrimination, supervisors must recruit and hire in compliance with federal laws that champion affirmative action and equal employment opportunity in the workplace. These include provisions of the Social Security Act of 1935, the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, the Equal Pay Act of 1962, Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the Civil Rights Act of 1991 (Pecora 2009; Strom-Gottfried 2006). Noting that there are 25 employment laws administered by the U.S. Department of Labor alone, Henderson (2009) encourages supervisors to visit the U.S. Department of Labor website ([www.dol.gov/elaws](http://www.dol.gov/elaws)) for an introduction.

The process of prolonged education and licensure in other professions is a sorting mechanism that selects out those recruits who are not likely to be a good fit for the

job, but social work education and licensure are not required for many positions that social workers are hired to supervise (Zlotnik 2006). Moreover, although most states now require at least a baccalaureate social work degree for social work licensure, some states still have exemptions that allow people to obtain a license to practice social work without a social work education (Dwight Hymans, personal communication, May 24, 2010). Hence, a license to practice social work may not be a guarantee that its holder brings social work values and ethics or knowledge and skills to the job. Furthermore, the nature of a given job is so ambiguously defined in the mind of applicants that many cannot clearly determine whether they want to do it. Therefore, as an administrative gatekeeper, the supervisor has an important function in the selection of social work and service staff.

Supervisors who are in immediate contact with direct service workers are in the best position to know if additional staff needs to be recruited. They are the first to know about anticipated resignations and staff turnover. Once again, their position in the agency calls attention to their administrative responsibilities in regard to recruitment and hiring.

Because personnel recruitment and selection involve fitting people to a particular job, the nature of the job that needs to be done requires specification. The supervisor is often in the best position to know the details of the job that needs to be done and the attitudes, skills, and knowledge required to do it. Consequently, the supervisor should invite the unit workgroup to generate, test, and refine descriptions of essential job tasks before advising agency management about the position for which recruitment is being suggested. The workgroup not only has the most intimate and practical knowledge of the day-to-day job, but their participation in this process tends to enhance human relations and build job satisfaction (Pecora 2009).

Because supervisors know the work that needs to be done, they should also participate in establishing the criteria and procedures for hiring staff and in implementing these criteria and procedures in screening and interviewing job applicants. In addition to defining the job and recruiting and screening for applicants' strengths, the prudent supervisor will also exercise due diligence in screening for applicants' risks. Based on the findings of a recent national study of regulatory sanctions against social workers, Boland-Prom (2009:359) encouraged supervisors to conduct "criminal background checks and fingerprinting" applicants for social work jobs, "particularly in services for children," because "the [licensing] boards are not able to independently identify which individual licensees' behavior may pose a risk to the public."

From a risk management perspective, Sarratt (1999) encouraged employers to establish and follow uniformly a formal policy for pre-employment screening that includes (1) obtaining a credit report, (2) checking for criminal convictions, (3) verifying the applicants' education, residences, and dates of employment for a minimum of 5 years, and (4) speaking with all employment and personal references. "The worst mistake an employer can make is rushing the interview process. Take your time. Do every background and criminal check for every employee. Don't let

expediency cloud your thinking” (Sarratt 1999:13).

Having screened, vetted, and interviewed applicants, supervisors provide input into decisions about hiring. Although supervisors make a contribution to the hiring process, this may be a secondary administrative function of supervision in some settings. In large organizations, primary responsibility for developing position descriptions, recruitment, and hiring may fall within the purview of human resources. Even if they do not always make the final determination, the supervisors’ recommendations are invariably given careful consideration.

### ***Inducting and Placing the Worker***

Once an applicant has been recruited and hired, the supervisor to whom the new applicant is assigned has the function of placement and induction. Workers need to find their place in the organizational framework. Knowing clearly to whom they report (and who reports to them) enables workers to find their “particular location in the invisible geography” of the agency’s human relations network. In a study of the supervisory needs of beginning workers, Charles, Gabor, and Matheson (1992:31) found that supervisees wanted help “fitting into the organization” and that supervisors “needed to consciously and consistently work at assisting the beginning worker to feel accepted as a valued member of the work environment.” Through the supervisor, who is their immediate administrative link, workers are tied into the total organizational apparatus.

The process of such placement and identification has its beginning in the worker’s induction into the agency, a function for which the supervisor is administratively responsible. The supervisor prepares to induct the worker by prompting the office manager or personnel office to obtain required information and paperwork from the new social worker, reviewing the worker’s personnel folder, informing other workers in the unit that a new worker has been hired, finding an office and a desk, selecting some reading material about the agency and its functions, and selecting a limited number of tasks to discuss with the worker for possible assignment.

Induction involves locating the new worker physically, socially, and organizationally in the agency. Because first experiences are very important in determining a person’s feelings about the job, induction is a significant task. On meeting the newly hired worker, the supervisor should discuss the function of the unit to which the worker has been assigned, how it fits into the total agency operation, the relationship of the supervisor to the worker and their respective roles and responsibilities (Freeman 1993), the worker’s relationship with other workers in the unit, and the complex objectives of supervision (Harkness and Poertner 1989).

Hopefully, questions about job specifics have been discussed as part of the formal job offer, but they may need further clarification. Such specifics include details around the duration of the probationary period, salary or fee-for-service arrangements, pay periods, work hours, health insurance, retirement plan, vacations, holidays, absences, overtime, sick leave, reimbursement for travel, national meeting and workshop attendance support policy, use of the internet, and receiving and making local and

long-distance telephone calls. Induction includes sharing helpful information about parking, local eating facilities, and the location of restrooms. The supervisor should also make arrangements for a door and/or desk nameplate and for a mailbox. One social worker in a family service agency said:

If only my supervisor had provided me with a desk. When I started I had no surface for writing reports, notes, etc. My office became wherever a chair was to write on or my lap. Talk about not being one of the group. I also had the feeling a lot of the time that either what I was doing wasn't worth even a card table or that my comfort level and sense of feeling that I belonged didn't really matter. Six months after starting I got a real desk. The desk gave me a space of my own and a sense of finally belonging.<sup>1</sup>

The supervisor should tell the worker how to obtain business cards, forms, and office supplies, as well as how and under what conditions to use the printer, the fax, and the copy machine. One supervisor said:

All this is nitty-gritty stuff but I have found that it is essential to outline these things for my supervisees so that they could provide themselves without having to ask me something or other every five minutes, but more important so that they could develop a sense of belonging to the agency. Knowledge of office operations allowed for a feeling of confidence, competence, and comfort and a sense of being one of the group.

If the worker is new to the city as well as the agency, there may also need to be at least an offer of help in finding housing, child care, a doctor, and a dentist.

The supervisor should personally introduce the new worker to peers, office personnel with whom he or she will be working, and administrative officers. A new employee in a new organization is likely to be lonely. The supervisor might ask one of the more experienced employees in the unit to act as sponsor for the new worker, answering routine questions and being available to help the new worker during the first week or so. It also may be a great comfort to the new staff member if he or she is not isolated at lunch time during the first week but is included in some group.

Unfortunately, employee recruitment and selection may engender or exacerbate organizational conflict in agency settings. The addition of new staff introduces change in the workplace, threatening the group hierarchy of its members. Although some members of the workgroup may look forward to the new social worker's arrival with eager anticipation, others may view personnel changes with anxiety or foreboding. As a result, some workers may embrace the new employee as others ignore him or her; a third group may circle its wagons.

For the new hire, an overdetermined supervisor response to workgroup behavior will make joining the workgroup more difficult, not easier. If the new worker has difficulty joining the workgroup, the best supervisory actions will be even-handed and restrained. Hurlbert (1992) contended that the supervisor who brings workers together for "open communication" may exacerbate the problem and impair organizational performance. The prudent supervisor will allow time to pass and weigh carefully whether further supervisory action, neither intrusive nor evasive, is called for.

Some of the hazards of induction, and the supervisor's handling of them, are detailed in this social worker's recollection of her first day as a clinical social worker in an inpatient setting:

From the start, the supervisor seemed to be sensitively aware of possible anxiety on my part. The first day she arrived fifteen minutes early and met me at the door. We went to her office; she took my coat and offered me a cup of coffee. She then took me with her to get it so that I would know where the pot was for future use. We had to go through two locked doors and as we did so, Ms. B. explained that she would see that I got a set of keys for my own by the end of the day. (She did this, and I was to find that she was equally prompt with other matters as well. If I asked a question she would either answer it or be on the phone immediately to find out from someone who knew.) These two gestures served to make me feel like one of the staff and, as such, accepted and very comfortable.

New workers may have little, if any, idea of the purpose and nature of supervision, so there is a need for some kind of preparation for the role of supervisee. This will give the supervisee some idea of what to expect and will ensure more active participation of the supervisee, who might otherwise see himself or herself as “receiving” supervision.

### ***Explaining Supervision***

The supervisor needs to explain the ground rules of supervision (Dolgoff 2005). As Langs observed:

The ground rules of supervision establish the roles and responsibilities of each party, the scope and limits of acceptable behavior, the means by which the supervisory process is to unfold, the quality of the inherent hold and support of the supervisor for the supervisee and the appropriate ways that the supervisee secondarily can hold and support the supervisor (e.g., by preparing proper process notes, attending supervision regularly, listening attentively, etc.), and a host of other contextual considerations. (Langs 1994:60)

To set the stage, the supervisor should explain that social work practice is regulated by law, and that supervisors assume a large measure of legal responsibility for the practice of their supervisees. Because the rules and statutes that regulate social work practice vary from state to state, each supervisor has an affirmative duty to investigate, analyze, and comply with the “law of the land” in his or her jurisdiction. The supervisor should provide his or her supervisee with a hard copy of these rules and regulations, as these define the qualifications, requirements, and scope of social work licenses recognized by the state. Providing a hard copy of licensing rules and regulations will help the supervisee develop an understanding of the legal basis for supervision, and this transaction should be documented in the supervisory record (NASW 2003). Invariably, a code of professional conduct will be central to the rules and regulations. Although social work education provides some assurance of familiarity with the NASW Code of Ethics (NASW 2008), social work supervisors have a fiduciary duty to review the elements of the state code of conduct with supervisees (Caudill 2002) because the two codes often differ, both in content and in clout. Boards of social work examiners can and do enforce state rules and regulations that govern the professional conduct of licensed social workers’ professional conduct (Boland-Prom 2009; Kurzman 2006), whereas NASW has limited code enforcement powers; only members of NASW—a minority of licensed social workers—are subject to its authority.

Many states require social workers to practice with supervision until the legal requirements for independent practice have been met, and a growing number of states regulate social work supervision as well (ASWB 2010b). In addition to



certifying that supervisors have appropriate credentials, experience, and training, states may require that supervisors and supervisees comply with provisions of a board-approved contract or plan for supervision (ASWB 2010b; Sutter and McPherson 2002).

In the service of protecting the public, boards may require supervisors to submit periodic reports that describe the practice and evaluate the supervisees' performance and progress. Toward this end, NASW (2003) recommended the establishment and maintenance of a supervisory record that documents the following:

1. The dates and duration of each face-to-face supervision session
2. An outline of the content and focus of each session, including questions and concerns, learning goals and progress, recommendations, and resources
3. Follow-up plans and their rationale
4. Session cancellations
5. The dates of all electronic and telephonic contacts and their nature

Ongoing documentation of the supervisee's licensure and liability insurance are important additions to the record, and NASW (2003) also recommended the inclusion of the written supervisory contract or plan. At a minimum, documentation of the number, frequency, and format of supervisory meetings is typically required, as well as the number of direct service hours performed by the supervisee and any ethical or legal concerns about his or her behavior (Falvey and Cohen 2003). This presupposes that supervisors are well-grounded in broad ethical and legal principles of social work practice (e.g., competence, confidentiality, conflicts of interest, continuity of care, documentation, dual and multiple relationships, due process, duties to report and to warn, informed consent, self-determination, standards of care) and that the supervisory frame is firmly grounded in ethical decision-making and behavior. For rich and detailed discussion of these issues, see Reamer (2003, 2004, 2006) and Bernard and Goodyear (2009).

### ***Work Planning***

Once the social worker has been recruited, hired, inducted, and placed, the supervisor has to plan what the agency needs him or her to do. Administration sets general policies and objectives, consistent with legal and contractual third-party obligations and duties, which then need to be broken down into specific duties and, ultimately, into specific tasks (a certain unit of work to be completed within a given period of time). This is a process of progressively greater refinement of general policy objectives at each descending administrative level so that they can be parceled out in small, manageable units. It is at the first-line supervisory level that agency policies and objectives get their ultimate translation into direct service social work tasks.

As an administrator, the supervisor is directly in charge of a group of employees responsible for maintaining a productive flow of work, which flows from points of

decision to points of action. In less elegant terms, this key administrative responsibility of supervision is called “getting the work out” or “putting the job description to work.” As a licensed social worker, the supervisor also bears primary responsibility for aligning the work of his or her supervisees with the codes of ethics and jurisdictional conduct that govern social work practice, as less than half of the social work supervisors in the workforce report to an administrative superior with social work credentials (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004).

Providing service to the group of clients for which any unit has responsibility requires planning and the delegation of tasks. A unit may be allocated responsibility for three hundred clients with a variety of health and social problems. Each supervisor, perhaps allocated five to seven workers (Child Welfare League of America 2010; Gibelman and Schervish 1997a), has the responsibility of delegating to each worker some component of the entire unit caseload so that in aggregate the three hundred cases are covered. The supervisor is provided with human resources, staff resources, and service resources. The supervisor has to plan to organize the workforce available, divide and assign the work, and allocate staff and service resources so as to accomplish the work assigned to the unit in a way that contributes to achieving the mission of the agency.

Planning the distribution of cases is not, however, an automatic mathematical process. Good planning requires familiarity with the supervisees and with the cases requiring action. It also requires familiarity with the tasks the unit is responsible for, so that all tasks will be concluded within a given timeframe without unduly overloading the workers or requiring unreasonable overtime work. The supervisor has to have the competence to plan for judicious deployment of his or her workforce. Planning then involves deciding what needs to be done and how it is going to get done through selective assignment and delegation of tasks to staff. Planning involves decisions regarding scheduling and prioritizing work—not only who will do it, but when it has to get done. In deploying workforce resources, the supervisor has to monitor absences, tardiness, vacation, and sick leave so as to know what personnel are actually available to cover the work at any time. Thus work planning, of necessity, precedes work assignment.

The unit supervisor has some responsibility for long-range planning as well as for immediate planning. Long-range planning involves preparation of a unit budget as a component of the total agency budget. This is based on some assessment of the future workload of the unit and the fiscal, technical, and human resources that might be required to complete it.

### ***Work Assignment***

Having planned the overall work of the unit, the supervisor selects tasks for individual workers in line with the total unit work plan. In negotiating task assignments, the supervisor needs to take a variety of factors into consideration

*Criteria for Assignment* In the agency, case or group assignments are generally

made in terms of the credentials, experience, and interests—as well as individual limitations and strengths—that each worker brings to the office (Hanna 2009; Heppner and Roehlke 1984). In clinical settings, for example, the appropriateness of an assignment may be governed by the scope of practice associated with a worker's social work license or the completion of advanced and specialized course of training. Consequently, in discharging this responsibility, the supervisor needs to know the individual worker's capacities intimately. Implied here is not only a knowledge of the areas that are likely to be problematic for a certain worker, but also the level of complexity of clinical demands that the worker can handle, ethically and lawfully, with some likelihood of success (Bogo and Dill 2008).

Selection for assignment may depend on job pressures carried by the different workers for whom the supervisor has responsibility. Good administration requires an attempt to equalize the demands made upon workers at the same license, title, and salary. The supervisor needs to consider the current total caseload carried by each worker in terms of number of cases, their difficulty, and the challenge of each new assignment. The supervisor then negotiates new case assignments so as to ensure some equitable distribution of workload. Otherwise, for instance, a worker might be stigmatized by his or her peers as one who is not really carrying his or her load in the group.

Another criterion in assignment of tasks should be variety. Too great a concentration on one particular kind of task, case, or problem denies the worker the satisfactions and feeling of competence derived from variety in job assignments. This criterion needs to be balanced against assignment in terms of workers' ambitions, limitations, and strengths. Some workers do better and derive greater satisfaction from highly concentrated job assignments. Others find this stultifying and resent it (Coyle-Shapiro 2002).

The worker needs the stimulation of challenge as well as variety if motivation is to be sustained and professional growth increased. Assigning tasks that are clearly below the level of the worker's capacity is likely to be less desirable than the opposite. Whenever possible, workers should have an opportunity to express preference for certain kinds of case situations in which they may have a particular interest (Latting 1991).

Nuanced consideration might need to be given to the question of the worker's cultural competence (Constantine 2002; Miville, Rosa, and Constantine 2005; Roysircar 2005) and the complex questions of striving to match worker and client in terms of age, gender, sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity. There are no easy answers here, but Harbin, Leach, and Eells (2008), Ladany, Friedlander, and Nelson (2005), Nilsson, Barazanji, Schale, and Bahner (2008), Toldson and Utsey (2008), and Tsui (2003, 2005) provide rich discussions of these issues.

Work assignment and caseload management involve scheduling. Assignments need to be made and tasks allocated with some understanding of the timespan in which the work needs to be completed, so that deadlines can be met. The pressure for timely completion of mandated tasks and the legal necessity for documenting

practice actions (Kagle and Kopels 2008; Reamer 2003) make agency practice deadline driven in the age of electronic billing and records (Miller and Sim 2004).

Notwithstanding the importance of generating billable hours to make payroll in many settings, the supervisor is responsible for negotiating realistic workloads that afford workers sufficient time to work effectively with their clients (Poertner and Rapp 2007) without inducing mind-numbing stress (Lloyd, King, and Chenoweth 2002). The scheduling of meetings, supervisory conferences, time for documentation, and report due dates must be made with some appreciation of the total load imposed on the workers and the time available to do the work.

To the extent that worker satisfaction with caseloads is affected by the availability of resources, the workers' ability, and supervisory support (Juby and Scannapieco 2007), joint discussions of case assignment might assuage the workers' subjective reactions to workloads (Cole, Panchanadeswaran, and Daining 2004). While having the same number of cases as peers, a worker may nevertheless feel overloaded. Sharing his or her sense of resentment with the supervisor can be helpful. In addition, the supervisor has the opportunity to discuss techniques of caseload management with the worker. The total caseload might be reviewed and some decision made as to those cases on which minimum effort might be expended because the situation is stable and not subject to much change. Other cases might be selected for more intensive consideration. The client in such cases may be more vulnerable, or the client and situation may be open to positive change in response to active intervention by the worker. At the same time, the supervisor can make clear to the worker where the agency's preferred priorities lie, which cases should receive service if time and energy are limited, and which cases may be waitlisted safely until time is available.

*Work Assignment Procedures* To some extent, the procedures used to assign work are a function of agency culture, resources, sector, and setting. A study of case assignment procedures in voluntary and public welfare agencies found that the most frequent system, by far, was for the supervisor or other administrator to assign cases "based on knowledge of case characteristics, worker ability and experience, etc." (Haring 1974:5). In only about 5 percent of the agencies did the procedure entail "division of labor by staff members among themselves either at periodic meetings or by rotating responsibility for intake" (Haring 1974:4). A high percentage of the workers reacted favorably to the assignment of work by the supervisor. In other settings, those that employ licensed clinicians providing behavioral health care, for example, the negotiation of work assignments has been the norm.

A supervisee wrote about her reaction to case assignments by her supervisor:

I, personally, felt that the supervisor's distribution of cases and task assignments provided me with a far greater array of experiences than would have been available had I selected cases and assignments more in accord with my own preference. Under these circumstances, I was often forced into situations that, had I been operating of my own volition, I might have tried to avoid. I think that this produced an environment for substantial personal growth. Allowing an individual to select only cases or work assignments which he feels are suited to his personal preferences may lead to stagnation, rather than the development of a flexible individual who can work with a diversity of problems and people. Too often personal preference can be used as an avoidance mechanism or a "cop-out." This does not mean that individual preferences should be categorically ignored or denied, but that the supervisor should evaluate the

request for certain assignments or cases critically before giving her assent, to insure that such action would primarily be in the best interests of the client and/or the agency and not just the worker.

Although some evidence suggests that “top-down” caseload and workload assignments may have become the rule in human service agencies (Blosser, Cadet and Downs 2010; Bradley 2008; De La Ronde 2009), an alternative to assignment of cases by the supervisor alone is assignment by unit members in a group meeting. The cases to be assigned are introduced and summarized, and supervisor and supervisees decide on assigning the cases together. Although this ostensibly is a more democratic procedure, a study of this procedure among social work teams showed that group pressure replaced supervisor authority. One worker said, “The allocation meetings allegedly allow a democratic choice. In reality, it works out that the less strong-minded get lumbered. ... However, in practice it was apparent that the social workers felt under an obligation to take a fair share of the referrals and not to leave all the work to their colleagues (Parsloe and Stevenson 1978:73).

Group allocation did involve a considerable expenditure of worker time and worked best if the supervisor was willing enough and strong enough to exert authority to shield some workers from weakness or excessive self-demands. However, workers were stimulated by the discussion, got a better overview of the total referral caseload, and welcomed the status that came with involvement.

Keeping social workers on the job has “long been a topic of concern” (Landsman 2007:105), if only because those who remain must take up the slack, with “implications for the workforce in terms of the interaction between stress, burnout, and turnover” downstream (Stevens 2008:207). In a study of the quality of working life in a social work bureaucracy, Packard (1981) found that worker participation in case assignment decisions was associated with measures of worker performance and job satisfaction. To the extent that workers who feel included in decision-making are more likely to remain engaged in their work (Travis and Mor Barak 2010), increasing worker participation in case assignment decisions should be considered.

*Problems in Work Assignment* When assigning cases, the supervisor faces a number of contradictory pressures that are difficult to resolve. Although willing to accede to a worker’s preference, the supervisor still must strive to assign every case for service (Drake and Washeck 1998), establish a waiting list (Lindsay and Feigenbaum 1984), or refer clients elsewhere. Even if no supervisee has expressed preference for some particular kind of client—or worse, even if all supervisees have expressed dislike for that kind of client—the supervisor must nonetheless assign the client for service:

Ms. P., a medical social worker, has been assigned cases on the Pediatrics Ward. The large number of disabled children, especially children requiring institutional placement, has been disturbing to her. After three months at the hospital a case is assigned of a three-year-old disabled boy to discuss an institutional placement with his parents, who are felt to be receptive. Rather reluctantly, Ms. P. tells her supervisor that she would rather not be assigned this case, mentioning that the child of a friend was institutionalized a year ago. Ms. P. visited the child with her friend, and found the setting depressing.

Rather than acceding to or rejecting the request or resorting to her positional authority to back up her assignment

of the case, the supervisor engaged Ms. P. in examining her feelings about the assignment. The supervisor did this with the acceptance of the fact that every worker has limits to tolerance and there are some cases that should not be assigned because the worker has strong negative feelings about the assignment. At the same time, there was a recognition that workers have to be helped in extending their limits of tolerance. To permit Ms. P. to reject every assignment with which she might feel uncomfortable might limit her capacity for growth. In addition to discussing with Ms. P. her own feelings about the situation, the supervisor reviewed emerging knowledge about the advantages and disadvantages of institutionalizing children with similar disabilities. She helped Ms. P. apply this knowledge to the particular situation of the family of his particular child.

There are further conflicts between the supervisor's desire to assign every case to the most competent and experienced worker and the need for equitable distribution of caseloads, and between the desire to give each client the best worker and the need for new, inexperienced workers to learn the job. These are difficult issues to weigh, and the decision stakes are high (Stevens 2008).

A more global problem of case assignment for the supervisor is determining whether or not a case assignment or referral is appropriate. This is a gate-keeping function that guards against the agency, unit, or worker being saddled with cases that may be better served in a more congruent setting or by another worker with more expertise. In assigning tasks, the supervisor has the additional problem of deciding on the amount of direction given in assigning the task and the level of discretion permitted the worker. However, this is a problem that relates more directly to another major function of supervision—work delegation.

### ***Work Delegation***

In assigning work, the supervisor not only has to deal with the problem of task selection (using the criteria discussed previously) but also has to decide how explicitly to instruct the worker about action that needs to be taken in implementing the assignment. Task assignment indicates what work needs to be accomplished. Task delegation indicates how it is to be accomplished. When work is assigned under conditions of maximum worker autonomy and discretion, the objectives of task assignment are clearly stated; the worker is permitted to initiate any action, at any time, that he or she feels will result in accomplishment of the objectives. Typically, however, the third parties that pay for social work services exercise the payers' prerogative of predetermining the nature and scope of authorized or reimbursable services.

As traditional social work services "are replaced by specific standards of practice and standards for supervision, there is a growing expectation that supervisors need to clearly specify the effectiveness of practice activity and supervision" (Munson 2004:86). In the diagnosis of mental disorders, for example, a clinical supervisor has a duty to supervise social work practice that conforms to the standard of care (Harkness 2010), limiting the degrees of freedom available to the supervised worker. Moreover, the practice of social work is rife with ethical and legal challenges (e.g., the suspicion of child abuse) that may require supervisors to take directive action with supervisees in order to comply with ethical and legal mandates. Thus, under conditions of more limited autonomy, the worker may be delegated authority to act only after obtaining prior approval, to practice in accordance with an evidence-based

protocol, or simply told what to do. An experienced supervisor provided the following example:

I once had a bright and talented supervisee who provided social work services to parolees, probationers, and work-release clients in a private, for-profit setting that trained, supported, and employed “second-chance” workers, many with a history of addictions and mental disorders. One of her clients was a young woman with preschool-aged children, a girl and a boy, and a live-in boyfriend—another parolee, with a history of alcohol and child abuse and domestic violence. In our weekly meeting, my supervisee described an assessment scheduled after her client failed a routine urinalysis required in the workplace. Presenting with a black eye, the young woman reported relapsing after receiving a beating from her boyfriend. My supervisee had wanted to report to child protection her concerns for the safety of the children, as boyfriend had been described as an active meth dealer and addict, because the children had been in the home and witnessed the beating. But after she raised her concerns and plans, the client began sobbing violently and begged her not to make a report. Overwhelmed by her feelings, my supervisee acquiesced to the plea of her client and agreed to tell no one what had happened, as she requested, and it took several more days before she finally, and sheepishly, told me what had transpired. Without going into all of the details of this case, this is a good example of a situation that required telling a supervisee exactly what to do as a mandated reporter who feared for the safety of the children of her client.

Even when complying with legal mandates or conducting evidence-based supervision (Milne 2009), there are a variety of procedures that can be used to delegate tasks in a way that can modulate the extent of autonomy granted. One can provide a series of explicit and detailed directives as to how the task should be carried out; one can provide a very general series of directives, giving the worker considerable flexibility on detail; one can plan cooperatively in discussions with the worker how the task should be carried out; or one can merely leave the worker free to implement the task with no particular restrictions other than general objectives and a time limit. Supervisors tend to direct delegated tasks in terms of suggestions or advice, such as “It might be helpful if ...” or “It might be advisable to... .” However, advice, suggestion, or persuasion may not always be sufficient to direct or redirect the worker. In such cases, the supervisor has responsibility for being explicitly directive.

Frequently, the more adequately trained and experienced workers are given the freedom of deciding the details in implementing an assignment. The supervisor assumes little responsibility for specifying how the assignment is to be implemented. In supervising the less adequately trained and experienced worker, the supervisor may have to take more administrative responsibility for the specifics.

Just as involving workers in decision-making helps supervisors build work teams (Gilley et al. 2010), intrinsic job satisfaction, heightened motivation, and increased productivity tend to be associated with greater autonomy in implementation of job assignments (De Varo, Lee, and Brookshire 2007). When the supervisee is given more discretion, he or she is more likely to feel trusted and worthy of trust. Consequently, on a continuum of directivity, the supervisor should permit the workers as much discretion as they can safely and productively handle (Veeder 1990). Whenever possible, the supervisor indicates what results need to be achieved without specifying the procedures to be employed. However, the supervisor should be ready, when necessary, to be more directive—not only by assigning the task but clearly specifying how it should be done.

On the other hand, even the more experienced worker may want some directive

assistance in task implementation. This function—analysis and planning of client contact with supervisees—is rated by supervisors as one that occupies a very high percentage of their time (Kadushin 1992a). In effect, such planning is like a briefing session. The assignment is explained, the objectives are clarified, and the method of implementation is discussed.

Even maximum worker autonomy, however, is exercised within constraints that derive from social work's ethical concern for the self-determination and best interests of the client, the roles and duties of licensure, governing standards of care, provisions of law, and agency objectives and institutional maintenance. Autonomy in task implementation is an exercise of discretion toward prescribed ends, within prescribed limits.

Delegation goes beyond the assignment of a task. It involves the supervisor sharing some measure of his or her authority with the supervisee, who is then empowered to make decisions and to take action in the performance of the assigned task. Yet, although responsibility for the task and the authority to take action can be delegated to the supervisee, it cannot be relinquished by the supervisor in the final analysis (Hurlbert 1992).

Delegating in social work, unlike some other supervisory situations, is risky because limited subsequent controls permit a check on the work. If the activities of a workforce are visible and subject to supervisory observation, ongoing application of controls is possible if the decision to delegate proves to be an error. In social work supervision, few controls are readily available to correct improper delegation (Boettcher 1998). In behavioral health care, supervisors may audit charts to identify problems with the work, but the consequent options for corrective action might be described as "a day late and a dollar short" in managed-cost environments (Munson 1998a). Supervisors have also tested information systems that provide feedback about worker performance in child welfare settings (Moore, Rapp, and Roberts 2000), but there is little evidence of their widespread adoption (Collins-Camargo 2007; Shackelford et al. 2007). It appears that most supervisors continue to check on the work the old-fashioned way: they keep in touch and talk with the workers.

Task delegation is a complex function dependent on a number of interacting variables, including supervisor attributes, supervisee attributes, the nature of the task delegated, and organizational and third-party climates—all of which will be discussed in some detail in this section. The amount of discretion that the worker is granted to operate autonomously is a function of the supervisor's ability and willingness to delegate responsibility, which in turn are affected by a variety of factors. Supervisors differ in the anxiety they feel about delegating tasks. Some are less willing than others to accept the risk of mistakes and failure in their supervisees, for which they might be held accountable. This unwillingness may stem from a supervisor's lack of confidence in himself or from an anxious relationship with his or her own supervisor. Some are less ready to encourage the development of independence on the part of their supervisees and are gratified by the continuing dependency exemplified by controlling the work decisions of supervisees. Some obtain satisfaction by vicarious



involvement in direct practice. More active direction of the work of their supervisees gives them a sense of being involved in the worker-client relationship. The more authoritarian, controlling supervisor will be less ready to delegate than will the democratic, egalitarian supervisor. The supervisor who is oriented toward upward mobility and anxious to please administration is less likely to delegate responsibility than is the supervisor who is free of such internal pressures. In summary, "The ability of a supervisor to delegate effectively depends on the way he relates to his job, his subordinates, his superior and himself" (Bishop 1969:112).

Other factors that determine delegation relate to the worker rather than the supervisor. A supervisor may be reluctant to delegate because he or she perceives the worker as incapable, at this point, of operating independently and reliably. The worker may be ambivalent about accepting responsibility because this implies accepting blame for failure as well as commendation for success. The supervisor may be deterred from delegating because the worker communicates a reluctance and discomfort in accepting independent responsibility for the task. However, worker readiness to accept responsibility reciprocally affects the supervisor's readiness to grant responsibility.

Supervisees who feel uncertain about their competence to do the job will press for greater direction and more precise delegation from supervisors than will their more confident peers. Supervisees who feel a strong need for independence, who are ready to risk mistakes, and who need less structure will encourage the supervisor to delegate tasks in a less specific way. Workers have different levels of readiness to tolerate ambiguity in a situation that is not clearly defined or structured for them.

Other factors that determine readiness to delegate relate to the task situation itself. If the nature of the situation is one that is likely to have high visibility, relates to a sensitive public policy question, or affects personnel and/or organizations that have considerable power, there will be increased hesitancy to delegate because the embarrassing or legal consequences of any error are more likely to be intensified.

In situations with more vulnerable clients (e.g., children who might be subject to abuse and/or neglect), decisions that involve commitment of scarce resources (e.g., large amounts of public money or large amounts of worker time), or when errors in worker judgment might have serious consequences for the client, the situation may dictate a reduction in delegated discretion (Reamer 2004; Wimpfheimer, Klein, and Kramer 1993).

The complexity of the task and the pressure of time available for completion also affect the nature of delegation. More complex tasks may require more precise specification in delegating. The pressure of time allows for fewer errors and less experimentation with possible false starts and consequently a greater measure of supervisor control.

Still other factors that determine the supervisor's willingness and readiness to delegate lie with administration. Supervisors are more apt to delegate responsibility if they have the assurance that administration will support rather than berate them if the worker commits an error. When there is pressure for precise accountability of agency

activity from groups and third parties to which the agency is responsible, supervisors will feel a greater pressure to delegate tasks with clear boundaries that limit worker discretion. The supervisor may have little latitude for discretion in the provision of mandated services or in managed care systems.

Operating in a host setting alongside professionals of other disciplines increases the hesitancy to delegate. In schools, hospitals, and psychiatric clinics, supervisors are sensitive to the fact that their supervisees are being closely observed by others. Supervisors further have to negotiate with other professionals for the position and prerogatives of social work within the host setting. This situation is more tenuous than one in a setting controlled by social workers.

In summary, the decision around task delegation and the degree of autonomy granted the worker in implementing a task are determined by such factors as the state of the art, the complexity of the task, level of worker skill and interest, worker caseload in terms of nature and number of cases, vulnerability of and risk to the client, sensitive nature of the problem, likely visibility of error, readiness of supervisor and supervisee to incur risk, and administrative penalties for supervisory failure.

#### ***Monitoring, Reviewing, and Evaluating Work***

At this point, the process leads to another distinctive function of administrative supervision. Having delegated the assigned task with the appropriate level of discretion, the supervisor has the further responsibility of monitoring the task assignment to see that it gets done in the allotted time and in a way that is in line with agency procedures.

An interview study of twenty supervisors in a state public welfare department found that 55 percent of the supervisors saw their primary role as monitoring worker performance (Weatherly 1980). "As the social work landscape has to contend with a more conservative and fiscally restrictive environment, so too has practice supervision become more focused on efficiency, accountability and worker performance," said Noble and Irwin (2009:345). Monitoring may involve obtaining verbal reports from workers, reading records, and reviewing statistical reports. At minimum, the objective of performance monitoring and review is to see that no harm is done to clients. However, in addition it may involve sharing favorable feedback and verbal approval. Work review is necessary to determine if the work is being accomplished as planned. Work review also involves the general responsibility of seeing that supervisees are available to cover the workload.

This function then involves monitoring both the worker and the worker's work. Monitoring workers has been associated with "snoopervision," a managerial approach to social work decried by Beddoe (2010), and by Noble and Irwin (2009:345), who fear that monitoring workers comes "at the expense of professional and practice development." Yet, its champions believe that monitoring performance can be used to provide workers with systematic feedback, a beneficial use that may enhance treatment outcomes (Harmon et al. 2007) and strengthen counselor self-efficacy (Reese et al. 2009). Moreover, some evidence points to advantages associated with

monitoring the working relationships and client outcomes of practice to provide workers with performance feedback in supervision (Carlson, Rapp, and Eichler 2010; Drake et al., 2010; Reese, Norsworthy, and Rowlands 2009). Although negative performance feedback may have a negative short-term impact on worker self-efficacy and anxiety (Daniels and Larson 2001), systematic feedback has been called the cornerstone of supervision (Cantillon and Sargeant 2008) because improving worker performance (Veloski et al. 2006) can improve working relationships (Norcross and Wampold 2011) and client outcomes (Harmon et al. 2007; Lambert and Shimokawa 2010). Thus, systematic monitoring of worker performance and client outcomes plays a central role in the implementation and maintenance of evidence-based practices (Carlson, Rapp, and Eichler 2010; Drake et al. 2010), and the scope of their use has increased in some jurisdictions (Lambert and Berlingame 2007). It remains to be seen whether the cost, complexity, and unintended consequences of such information systems can be sustained in social service environments (Marty et al. 2008; Swain et al. 2010), and whether an unintended consequence of monitoring technology is worker burnout in managed care (Acker 2010; Acker 2011; Beddoe 2010). We will revisit some of these issues in [chapters 6, 8, and 10](#).

The principal resource the supervisor has available to ensure that the work of the agency gets done is the time and skill of the supervisees. In accepting the role of employee of an agency, the supervisee implicitly agrees to place his time and skill at the disposal of the agency for some specific period during the day and week. Consequently, the supervisor has the responsibility of knowing when and if the supervisees are available for work during the agreed-upon period. The supervisor needs to be concerned with tardiness and absences, requests for time off and sick leave, vacation schedules, and projected and emergency overtime personnel needs, to ensure adequate coverage of work assignments. If the supervisor does not have final authority with regard to these questions, he or she often has the power of decisive recommendation. Paradoxically, supervisors have reported spending relatively little time monitoring worker performance; monitoring worker performance has been an unsatisfying duty that supervisors have tended to abjure (Kadushin 1992a).

Tardiness and absenteeism reduce the human resources available to the supervisor for getting the work done. Both are such routine occurrences that they need to be accepted by the supervisor as a fact of life. In time, supervisors get to know the tardiness and absentee patterns of their supervisees. They make decisions as to whether they are avoidable or unavoidable, controllable or accidental. Allowing for a certain amount of sanctioned tardiness and absenteeism, supervisors try to follow a policy that is clearly and explicitly communicated to supervisees and one that is reasonable, fair, and equitable.

In implementing the work-assignment and work-delegating responsibilities of administrative supervision, the supervisor is concerned with assuring continuity of service. The worker represents the agency to the community. The supervisor represents the agency as well, although once removed. If a worker leaves the

agency, the supervisor is there to step in and ensure that the agency is still responsible for offering service, so that there is no break in the continuity of contact, but merely an interruption and possible delay. If the worker is absent or sick, the supervisor again ensures continuity of contact and work coverage.

The supervisor or administrator not only has to review the assignment to be assured that it is actually being accomplished (and accomplished in accordance with agency policies and procedures) but further has to make some judgment as to whether it is being accomplished at a minimally acceptable level. The supervisor then has responsibility for evaluation. Formal evaluation of the workers' performance is an administrative act. If the agency is to operate efficiently, then someone has to share clearly with the workers an objective appraisal of the things they are doing right, as well as the things they are doing wrong, to point out the behaviors that require changing. Agency procedures regarding raises, promotions, and changes in job assignment require periodic formal evaluation if such decisions are to be implemented in a rational manner. Because evaluation is a very important function of administrative supervision and is the source of much confusion and difficulty, we have reserved a more detailed discussion for [chapter 8](#).

Monitoring, review, and evaluation are the inspectional aspects of administrative supervision. Inspectional supervision deserves the onerous reputation it has achieved only if done autocratically and to excess. These are not inherently undesirable procedures. They are functions that are administratively necessary if the client is to receive satisfactory service. The administrative supervisory function of monitoring, reviewing, and evaluating work implies further the supervisor's responsibility to take corrective action if the work is clearly unsatisfactory.

### ***Coordinating Work***

The overall agency objectives have to be subdivided into manageable and differentiated tasks that are assigned to different units and then are once again subdivided and assigned to individual workers. If organizational objectives are to be effectively implemented, all of this breaking down has to be coordinated and integrated. Coordination puts the pieces of the total work context together—relating one member of the unit to another, this unit to other units, this unit with support services, and a unit in this agency with a cooperating unit in another agency.

Through coordination, the supervisor brings workers into relationship with other workers involved in activities that are reciprocal, supportive, or supplementary to their own work. Coordination unifies different workers' efforts toward achievement of agency objectives. Cooperation among workers and work units is maximized, conflict minimized, and greater complementarity assured.

The supervisor also coordinates and integrates his or her own unit with other units of the agency and with other agencies in the community's network of health and social welfare. The supervisor thus not only occupies a position in the vertical hierarchy but relates horizontally to other administrative units on the same hierarchical level. The supervisor in the children's services unit of a nonprofit outpatient mental health clinic,

for example, might help coordinate the activities of his or her supervisees with the case management unit of a private for-profit program, a special education program in a public school, an extracurricular parent training program, and a guardian *ad litem* appointed by the district court.

The supervisor activates support staff resources to facilitate the work of the direct service practitioners. Through coordination, the supervisor makes available to the worker the human, fiscal, and physical resources required to do the job. He or she might help coordinate the supervisees' activity with information technology (to make sure that new printers on the unit are networked with staff computers), with clerical support (to make sure that the appropriate ink cartridges have been ordered for the printer and that an adequate supply of paper is always on hand for the copy machine), and with accounting (to make sure that authorization has been received and paperwork processed to order a digital video recorder for educational case supervision). He or she might help contract for psychiatric consultation and psychological testing to assist supervisees with differential diagnosis and case planning. The supervisor functions here to ensure the availability and smooth scheduling of a variety of different agency and community resources for the supervisees.

The supervisor organizes and orchestrates the activities of a number of different workers so that their joint efforts are cooperatively directed toward accomplishing some significant aspects of the mission of the agency. Coordination involves ensuring that the different workers understand the goals and objectives of the agency in the same way and accept them—or at least behave as though they accept them—so each worker can operate in the confident expectation that others in the group are working together rather than at cross purposes.

Coordination requires that the supervisor adjudicate conflicts between workers in his unit and between his unit and other units of the agency. Two workers may be competing for the same assignments or may disagree about who should be doing what with regard to a complex problem for which they have joint responsibility. The unmarried mothers' unit may be dissatisfied about the availability of adoptive homes for which the adoptive unit is responsible; the family care worker may be getting little cooperation from the agency's employment unit or housing unit. The supervisor has the responsibility of seeing that such conflicts are satisfactorily resolved. Put positively, the supervisor maintains harmonious working relationships within the unit and between his units and other units in the agency. The failure to do so may hamper organizational performance (Gilley et al. 2010; Hurlbert 1992).

Supervisors need the authority to require that facilities be made available. Strong chief unit clerks often contend with weak supervisors about the allocation of facilities and the work time of word-processing specialists and file clerks. Despite the fact that the agency table of organization gives the supervisor greater authority, inability to effectively exercise this power may put the supervisor's workers at a disadvantage regarding access to the resources they need to do their work effectively.

### ***The Communication Function***

The supervisor acts as an integral link in the chain of administrative communication. In the vertical line of authority, he or she faces two ways—toward the administrators above in the hierarchy and toward the workers below himself or herself in the larger organization. Even in small agency settings that include private practice, the supervisor faces two ways: Although there may be no one above to report to *within* the “flat” organization (Carzo and Yanouzas 1969) of a small private practice, invariably the supervisor still faces upwards (albeit outwards) in administrative communication with the state board that regulates social work practice, with the third-party administrators who authorize and contract and pay for agency services, and with the auditors who monitor compliance with third-party contracts. The supervisor’s position is, then, one of the “administrative control centers” for gathering, processing, and disseminating information coming from above and below in the chains of command that govern social work practice.

A small group cooperatively performing certain tasks can rely on face-to-face communication among all members of the group. A large and complex organization, in which administrators rarely have sustained direct contact with workers, requires other approaches if messages are to reach their proper destinations and be understood and accepted. Formal channels of communication need to be provided, and the nature of the work to be done and the conditions under which it is to be completed need to be precisely stated and clearly defined.

Communication permits more effective coordination of the work of the agency through linkages provided by the flow of information and feedback. The volume of communication varies with the degree of diversity in a social agency. There is a greater necessity for communication in more complex organizations. Communication as a vehicle for coordination is particularly necessary in organizations such as social agencies, where tasks are ambiguously defined and when it is difficult to explicitly codify procedures for task implementation. Rather than being able to rely exclusively on written manuals and handbooks, administrators need to make frequent efforts to augment and clarify, checking to see if messages have been understood.

“In a sense the formal structure [of an organization] acts as a highway system guiding both the direction of information flow (up, down, sideways) and the distribution pattern and its terminal points” (Steiner 1977:1980). The supervisor is one of the principal gatekeepers in the communications highway system—gathering, interpreting, distilling, and evaluating information received *from* others in the hierarchy in order to transmit this information *to* others in the hierarchy.

*Process in Organizational Communication* When administrators have information to pass to the workers about agency objectives, policies, procedures, structure, and proposed agency changes, the information is channeled through the supervisor, who is administration’s spokesperson to the workers. “Downward” organizational communication has been described as the top telling the middle what it wants the bottom to do.

“Upward” messages from workers to administration also have to be channeled through the supervisor. The administrator needs to depend on the supervisor to find out how agency policies and procedures are being implemented, the successes and problems in implementation, and the workers’ feelings about agency objectives, policies, and procedures. This is the kind of information that only the direct service worker possesses, and it is the kind of information the administrator needs to know about if the agency is to be successfully run. However, notwithstanding experiments in participatory human-service management (Pine, Warsh, and Malluccio 1998), the organizational chain of command in traditional settings sanctions only one primary upward channel of communication—from worker through supervisor to administrator.

The supervisor has the responsibility of encouraging relevant communication from supervisees and establishing a climate of receptivity and a readiness to listen. Conversely, the supervisor has to demonstrate a readiness to share relevant information with supervisees, keeping them informed, indicating a willingness to answer questions fully and to correct misconceptions. The supervisor should avoid assumptions: “Don’t assume that the supervisees know; tell them. Don’t assume that you know how they feel; find out. Don’t assume that they understood; clarify” (United States Civil Service Commission 1955:22).

A large-scale study found adequate and effective communication within the agency to be a very important determinant of worker satisfaction. The study of 1,600 workers in thirty-one agencies found that “the biggest problem is that higher levels in an organization usually assume communication is adequate but lower level personnel do not agree. The great majority of personnel feel they do not have all the information they need to do their jobs effectively” (Olmstead and Christensen 1973:13).

A study by Gilley et al. (2010) reinforced the central importance of supervisory communication. In a survey of 689 graduate students in business administration and organizational development, respondents from across the United States were asked to identify the extent to which certain managerial behaviors within their organizations predicted effective teamwork. Effective communication was identified as one of the key competencies, along with coaching and motivating workers, helping them grow and develop, and involving them in decision making.

Almost every aspect of the supervisor’s work involves skill in communication. Clear, unambiguous communication is required in inducting the worker, assigning and delegating work, reviewing and evaluating work, giving feedback, and coordinating work. If communication between supervisor and supervisee is to be effective, it needs to be relevant, free of distortion, prompt, and sufficiently detailed.

When acting as a channel of communication from administration to the direct service staff, the supervisor has a responsibility beyond mechanical transmission of information. The additional responsibilities are to see that the message is understood and accepted and to motivate the worker to act in accordance with the information transmitted.

Concern with effective communication requires some decision as to how the message from administration to supervisees might best be transmitted. The

supervisor has a variety of channels through which to communicate administrative information: personal face-to-face communication, voice communication with a telephone, distributing a written memorandum or report, or sending an e-mail or text message. The personal face-to-face choice provides instant feedback, which enables the supervisor to tailor the communication to fit the individual recipient. The message is likely to be more potent because it is transmitted personally. Text and phone messages are apt to be shorter or more abbreviated with less opportunity for feedback, both verbal and nonverbal.

However, both face-to-face and phone communication may get sidetracked and be dominated by other concerns. In addition, because there is no record of the communication, it is not repeatedly visible as a reminder. Also, face-to-face and phone communication require additional time because the message has to be repeated to every recipient. Furthermore, oral messages can be distorted in transmission.

When using the written channel of communication, the supervisor can be more precise. There is greater possibility for control of the content of the message. There is a record of the communication that can be reread by the recipient at his or her own convenience as a reminder. There is time saved in simultaneous distribution of the message to a number of recipients. However, written messages are less flexible, and there is no possibility of interpretation and elaboration to the individual recipient.

E-mail communication and texting combine the advantages and disadvantages of face-to-face, telephone, and written communication. E-mail and texting permit the rapid composition of messages but lack the contextual nuance and texture of nonverbal communication. Taken out of context, text and e-mail messages sent in haste invite misunderstanding. For that matter, electronic messages are easy to redistribute, allowing their recipients to forward received messages to others. Moreover, e-mail and other records generated or held in the public sector may be subject to public disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act (U.S. Department of Justice 1996), and electronic communications that identify clients or include client health information may require encryption in accordance with rules and provisions of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2010). Because the generation, transmission, retention, and storage of e-mail messages and other work products used in professional communication is governed by law, legal consultation should be obtained periodically to review relevant agency policy and procedure. A review of *Standards for Technology and Social Work Practice* (NASW/ASWB 2005) is a good place to begin.

The supervisor may choose to employ multiple channels for repeated transmission of the same information. Redundancy in communication has the effect of reducing the possibilities of message distortion.

Because office geography affects communication, the supervisor should, if possible, arrange location of unit staff so that they are physically available for contact (e.g., on the same floor, with contiguous offices).



*Problems in Organizational Communication* The foregoing discussion suggests one of the principal barriers to the free flow of communication up and down administrative channels. The supervisor may be reluctant to communicate negative information to people for whom he or she is administratively responsible, or to persons for whom he or she is administratively accountable, because the supervisor fears incurring hostility or displeasure. Similarly, the supervisee is reluctant to communicate negative information to the supervisor because he or she fears rejection, a negative evaluation, or a censuring reaction (Bleiweiss 2007). Consequently, rather than a sharing of dissatisfactions and problems in offering service, communication is carefully restricted to telling others only what they want to hear or what will reflect favorably on one's own performance (Pisani 2005; Pitariu 2007). The safest procedure may be to act the part of a not-too-obvious "yes man" and "play it close to the vest." Freedom to speak is felt only as freedom to agree. This pattern operates more intensely for supervisees who are motivated to obtain and maintain the approval of supervisors and who are seeking a good evaluation.

Barriers to organizational communication result from conflicting group loyalties as well as from a need for self-protection (Latting 1991). The supervisee is reluctant to share information that may discredit peers or groups of clients with whom he or she might identify (Pine, Warsh, and Malluccio 1998). Supervisors may be reluctant to share with administration their critical, but accurate, assessment of some subsection of the agency with which they must continue to work (Boettcher 1998).

Information is power. It is not true that "what people don't know won't hurt them." They can very well be harmed because they have not been informed about things they need to know in order to perform effectively. This suggests an additional barrier to the free flow of communication. The supervisor may withhold information from supervisees because this increases their dependency on him or her. If these barriers to the free flow of communication do not result in withholding information that should be shared, they more often result in "selective emphasis" and "selective omission" in transmission. Communication takes place but is tailored to the needs of the communicator.

One might realistically anticipate that every agency faces impediments to the free flow of communication. Even in the best of circumstances one might expect supervisees to be pragmatically self-protective in the information they choose to share. However, if one cannot hope to achieve the best communication, one might perhaps attain better communication—and here the supervisor is a key figure. Olmstead claimed that

[T]he climate created by an individual's immediate supervisor is probably the most important influence affecting his communication. Every encounter with the supervisor teaches him something. When the supervisor gives an order, reprimands, praises, evaluates performance, deals with a mistake, holds a staff meeting or contacts [supervisees] in any other way (or fails to contact them), the [supervisees] learn something. They learn about the kinds of information that will be rewarded or punished and the means of communication which the [supervisor] views favorably or unfavorably. (Olmstead 1973:47)

Credibility is important for effective communication. Supervisees need to have an

attitude of confidence and trust in the motives and sincerity of the supervisor (Ramos-Sanchez et al. 2002). This attitude develops when supervisors are truthful in their communications and when words and action go together. Supervisees are constantly engaged in “search behavior” in an effort to distinguish the reality from the rhetoric.

In general, it might be said that communication in the agency flows down more easily than it flows up. Communication in the organizational hierarchy often has been described as a system in which information flows up through a series of filters and comes down through a series of loudspeakers. Good news is easy to communicate. Bad news—information about staff reduction, reduced agency funding, client complaints, etc.—intensifies the supervisor’s communication hesitancy. However, the supervisor needs to clearly accept that he or she has the obligation to promptly and fully disseminate bad news. Bad news is included in “need to know” messages.

Even in a communication system free from inhibiting influences, the supervisor still has the problem of deciding what information needs to be shared and can be shared. Not all the information that comes from administration should be communicated automatically to supervisees, and not everything shared by supervisees needs to be transmitted to administration. Applying some general principle of selectivity, such as that one should transmit only information that helps supervisees do their job more effectively, implies that the supervisor needs to have an intimate, detailed knowledge of the worker’s job. Only on the basis of such knowledge and understanding can the supervisor assess the value of information for the supervisee.

Making human relationships work is supposedly the stock in trade of social work, and it applies as well to making for effective communications between supervisor and supervisee. A respectful, empathic, understanding orientation; a willingness to listen; and an accepting, nonpunitive attitude establish the context for good communications. Supervisees’ willingness to talk is a function of their perception of the supervisor’s willingness to listen understandingly, particularly to discomforting messages.

Because the orientation of the direct service workers to task-related information is different from that of the supervisor, the supervisor needs to be sensitive to the fact that the same communication may be perceived differently by them. A message from the administrator to the supervisor may consist of asking that the agency be more accountable to the community. This is translated by the supervisor to mean that he or she will need to assign tasks so that they are more objectively measurable, and this message is communicated to the workers. The workers translate the supervisor’s message to mean that they will have to fill out more forms with greater care than previously. The responses to essentially the same message are apt to be different at the different levels of communication because at different levels the message has different implications for action.

*Lateral Communication* We have noted that the supervisor is a channel of communication in the vertical hierarchy. The supervisor also communicates horizontally—within the agency and with other agencies, between his or her unit and other units—through peers at the supervisory level. Lateral communication from

supervisors in one unit to supervisors in related units is concerned with problems of conflict and overlap, changes that might make for more effective coordination of efforts, and information about impending changes which may affect coordination of activities. Such communication may be for the purpose of reducing duplication of services, soliciting resources, increasing utilization of services, making referrals, reducing inappropriate referrals, or integrating services. Vertical channels of communication are hierarchically based on authority. Lateral channels of communication, based on a need to cooperate for purposes of coordination, are not hierarchical.

*Informal Communication* The supervisor needs to be aware that in addition to the formal organizational communication network described here, there is a parallel communications network operating through the agency's informal structure. Colleagues and peers are a very rich source of information about the organization and about the work. Despite the aphorism "If they are talking, they aren't working," productivity increases with increases in interaction between staff members (White 1997). Informal communication among peers is an important source of support as well as education.

Although this network transmits much in the way of gossip and rumors, it also acts to amend, interpret, and elaborate on the supervisor's communications up and down the hierarchical ladder. The informal channel is particularly active when the situation is ambiguous or unpredictable, or when the formal channel has not provided sufficient information. Rumors and gossip, which may form a large component of such communication, needs to be the concern of supervisors only if such rumors are apt to be damaging to morale and disruptive distortions and half-truths need to be corrected.

An active rumor mill might suggest a failure of supervision. Grapevines are most active in the absence of sufficiently detailed communications from supervisors about concerns that interest the staff: the more adequate the supervisory communication, the less need for the grapevine.

#### ***The Supervisor as Advocate***

Advocacy is tied to communication. It is through vertical and horizontal communication that the supervisor advocates for staff with administration, other agency units, and with the community of agencies. Downward communication requires being understood and accepted. There is no similar mandate in upward communication from supervisor to administrator. Such communication achieves acceptance through the supervisors' persuasive communication of the message and through active advocacy in behalf of the message with administration.

To be effective, the supervisor has to do more than act as a messenger. Lacking direct contact with administration, supervisees look to the supervisor to represent their interests and actively press for the implementation of necessary changes. Effective administrative supervision requires active representation of supervisees'

interests and viewpoints as an intermediary with administration (Noble and Irwin 2009). Blau and Scott (1962:155) found that those supervisors in a public welfare agency who related to administrators in an independent manner and who regularly backed their subordinates commanded high loyalty from their supervisees. In the NASW Code of Ethics (NASW 2008), advocacy is prescribed as a supervisory duty.

The act of communication is abortive unless it is accompanied by some confidence in the possibility that the message will have an effect. Supervisee satisfaction with supervision appears to be related to the level of influence the supervisor has with administration. There was dissatisfaction with the supervisor who promised much but was able to deliver little. There was high satisfaction with the supervisor who communicated worker requests and was able to get action. The lesson for administrators is that they should make a sincere effort to respond to communications from supervisees via supervisors. The lesson for supervisors is that they must honestly share with the supervisees the limits of their power so as to forestall unrealistic expectations about the effects of upward communication.

Some studies have shown that workers are not confident that supervisors will take responsibility for decisions when these are questioned by higher-ups (Greenleigh Associates 1960:133). Cousins (2004:182) observed that “supervisors miss signals [and] fail to represent staff feelings to administration.” The most frequent complaint about supervisors listed by supervisees in a questionnaire study of NASW members is that the supervisor was “hesitant about confronting agency administration with the needs of his or her supervisees” (Kadushin 1992a:19).

Mr. E., a school worker, was indignant at the judgmental attitude of the Board of Education’s policy regarding admission of unmarried mothers to special school programs. The supervisee informed his supervisor that it had been his experience that school officials were discouraging unmarried mothers from attending school by erecting unnecessary procedures for admission to school. Mr. E. had hoped that the supervisor would either join him in talking with Board of Education officials or support him in doing so. Instead the supervisor chose to focus on Mr. E.’s “indignation” and hostility” toward the Board of Education and was insensitive to the need for change in school policy.

The supervisor has to assertively advocate for and protect his or her supervisees with clerical staff as well as with administrators. A worker in a large public welfare agency said:

A member of the clerical staff (a very assertive person) has a number of social workers and their supervisors intimidated. Paperwork must be turned in according to the clerical person’s format, or it is returned to sender (or, worse, it may be left floating in “the system”). It has been interesting to watch those “weak supervisors” and their workers doing their own clerical duties (time consuming and a poor use of social worker time) while the “strong supervisors” who are assertive with the clerical person get most of their documents printed.

When implementing advocacy, administrators appreciate and are more likely to be receptive to supervisor communications that outline the problem clearly and suggest alternative solutions for consideration. Because the balance of power in this relationship rests with the administrator, the supervisor has to rely on rational arguments, ingratiation, or negotiating some kind of exchange in advocating for acceptance of suggestions. The sophisticated supervisor needs to be able to formulate the suggestion in the most acceptable or the least objectionable manner.

### ***The Supervisor as Administrative Buffer***

The supervisor serves as a buffer in relation to agency clients (Mor Barak et al. 2001, 2009). Administration looks to the first-line supervisory staff to handle problems relating to service. Consequently, the supervisor performs the function of dealing with clients who want to discuss a complaint with someone other than the worker. A child welfare worker wrote the following:

When an irate and emotionally disturbed parent wished to visit her child in foster placement and I had denied her request, she contacted my supervisor when I was out of the office. My supervisor listened supportively, gathered the facts, upheld me in my decision but suggested that the client come to the office to discuss the situation with both my supervisor and me.

The parent came in a day or so later...and we had a very productive meeting. Client was able to express some of her hostility and anger at the child's removal from her home—which anger had been focused on me—however, my supervisor completely supported my position, which then freed me from becoming defensive and allowed me to support the client also. The result was a better relationship with the client and more cooperation from her, which ultimately worked to her advantage in the later return of her children to her.

Having reviewed the case material, my supervisor had decided to support my decision. However, she also gave client respect and courtesy, which eased the tensions of the interview and allowed us all to gain by it. The client did not feel we were in league against her as she could have if my supervisor had not been skilled in encouraging her feelings and right to them, nor did the client manage to manipulate my supervisor and me into opposite corners.

The supervisor should be ready to accept appeals from clients who are dissatisfied with a worker's decision and want to speak to a higher authority. In doing so, they protect the worker from having to deal with clients' strong feelings about a negative decision, and from a possible arbitrary or incorrect decision. They provide a channel for managing client complaints. Without such a channel, direct service workers may become overloaded with the extra time and effort required to deal with vigorous client dissent.

While serving as a buffer between client complaints and the agency, the supervisor also functions as a buffer between the worker and agency (Dolgoft 2005). The supervisor strives to protect the worker from imposition by administrators of unreasonable work load standards, for example. The supervisors can modify the environment or act as a buffer in an agency that may be too bureaucratic, too authoritarian, or too undemocratic. Providing a "protective umbrella," the supervisor softens the climate.

The supervisor as a buffering person helping in negotiating organizational complexity is described by a supervisee as follows:

She was an intricate part of the system and really familiar with it; and I wasn't. And I think a knowledge of the hierarchy—of the system, the relationships that exist in it—is very important, and an ability to deal with those. If I had trouble with someone within the agency, she always dealt with it. She didn't do it for me but she helped me to deal with it. (Herrick 1977:128)

In addition, the supervisor is expected to protect the organization from potentially embarrassing deviance and heresy. Deviance involves behavioral contravention or subversion of agency regulations; heresy involves ideological opposition to the presuppositions on which the rules were formulated. The worker in a Catholic child welfare agency who helps an unmarried pregnant girl obtain an abortion is deviant in that context. If he or she champions the point of view that there is nothing wrong with

an out-of-wedlock pregnancy and questions the legitimacy of agency efforts to help women conform to society's traditional sexual mores, he or she would be heretical.

An agency operates in, and is tied to, an external environment whose components include clients, funding sources, regulatory agencies, and the general public as well as other agencies with which it competes for income and resources. The agency needs to maintain the goodwill and support of the external environment. Activities that undermine the legitimacy of the agency with its donor constituency threaten its existence.

Agency self-preservation is a legitimate objective. More than a question of opportunistic defense of selfish vested interests is involved. If agency workers have a sincere belief in the value of the agency's mission, their concern for agency preservation is ultimately a concern with providing a needed service. The failure to obtain continued funding results in denial of this service to a client group.

The supervisor acts as a guardian of the organization's belief system. For workers to reject significant aspects of agency policy and procedure is regarded as an act of hostility and a challenge to organizational authority. It threatens agency operation because "it suspends the rules that produce loyalty and cohesion" (Peters and Branch 1972:290), without which the agency finds it difficult to operate.

On the other hand, "although social work employees are generally expected to adhere to commitment made to their employers and employing organization, they should not allow an employing organization's policies, procedures, regulations, or administrative orders to interfere with their ethical practice of social work" (Reamer 1997:120). The supervisor's duty becomes onerous in such cases.

The conflict between worker and organization is manifested first at the level of contact between worker and supervisor. Consequently, "in many organizations it seems systematically to become part of whomever is formally designated as first in command of each particular work unit to occupy the buffer zone which contains heretical confrontations between the individual and the social organizations" (Harshbarger 1973:264). The function is one of "crisis absorbency" and prevention of a threat to the agency's relationship with its supporting constituency.

This administrative function of supervision is implemented by offering workers the opportunity to discuss with the supervisor their questions and doubts about the agency's philosophy, rules, and procedures. Patient, open discussion of the workers' views in an accepting atmosphere is designed to help them understand the rationale of the agency's approach. If the workers remain unconvinced, the supervisory conference still offers a safe channel for the open expression of opposition. The cathartic effect of such an opportunity results, as Goffman (1952:451) said, "in cooling the mark out"—a reduction in the intensity of feeling of indignation, an increased readiness to conform to organizational demands. Another frequent procedure in the management of heresy is cooption, an attempt to retranslate the worker's opposition so that it can be channeled into kinds of behavior that the agency can accept.

The responsibility of acting in defense of agency policy can be a source of

considerable dissatisfaction for supervisors. Frequently, they find themselves in disagreement with some particular agency policy, rule, or procedure. Nevertheless, their role requires communication of the policy and attempts to obtain compliance with it. Forced by their position to perform such functions, supervisors feel uncomfortably hypocritical. In a survey of shortcomings among social work supervisors, the need to enforce policies and rules that give little meaning for work done with clients was among the dissatisfactions most frequently checked by supervisors and supervisees (Kadushin 1992b).

#### ***The Supervisor as Change Agent and Community Liaison***

Buffering client complaints and worker deviance and heresy suggests the exploitation of the supervisor in the service of preserving the agency status quo. Preserving organizational stability is, in fact, a function of administrative supervision. However, the supervisor also has an equally significant, parallel administrative responsibility as an organizational change agent. Buffering contributes to the preservation of the agency, but rigidity and unresponsiveness to change threaten the preservation of the agency.

There is a danger that too rigid management of deviance and heresy—the “absorption of protest and domestication of dissent”—may be counterproductive for the agency. An unperceptive supervisor would then be performing a disservice. The agency must balance contradictory needs by accepting change while maintaining stability. It would be impossible to run an efficient organization and maintain effective working relationships with other agencies if the agency were not essentially stable and predictable. However, too much stability can foster rigidity. Ossification can disable the agency’s ability to respond to a turbulent environment. Consequently, while defending the agency against deviance and heresy, the supervisor has to be open to suggestions for useful innovation. As Reich (1970:100) said, agency administration “is always neutral in favor of the Establishment.” The bias needs to be explicitly recognized but lightly held.

The supervisor can be an active participant in the formulation, or reformulation, of agency policy. Having learned from the direct-service workers about client and community needs and having learned about the deficiencies and shortcomings of agency policy when workers have attempted to implement it, the supervisor should do more than act as an inert channel for upward communication of such information. The supervisor has the responsibility of using his or her knowledge of the situation to formulate suggested changes in agency policy and procedure. The supervisor is in a strategic position to act as an agency change agent (Hair and O’Donoghue 2009). Standing between administration and the workers, he or she can actively influence administration to make changes and influence workers to accept them.

Supervisors may, however, hesitate to advocate change because of apathy, lack of conviction in the change being requested, competing pressures from routine work that demand all of their time and energy, or an unwillingness to take the risk of punitive reprisals if they challenge administration. In general, the administrator prefers

a passive, conforming supervisor, whereas the supervisees want an aggressive advocacy-oriented supervisor.

In the service of agency preservation, supervisors have to be sensitive and receptive to pressures from direct-service workers for changes in policies and procedures that they perceive as archaic, unworkable, ineffective, unproductive, inequitable, or oppressive. If the supervisor sees a need for changes, then he or she should actually encourage and collaborate with supervisees in seeking those changes, rather than being a mere mediator. He or she must collect and organize supporting information, help staff clearly identify what it is they want changed, and help staff articulate as clearly and as honestly as possible why they want change. Unless the desired change can benefit the agency and client group and receive the support of the staff, the chance for change is diminished. The supervisor has to mobilize allies in the agency who would support the change, maximize receptivity to the message, and minimize opposition and defensiveness on the part of the administration.

If unconvinced about the necessity for change, the supervisor may act as a mediator between direct service staff and administration around changes that supervisees see as necessary. The supervisor may arrange to have the administrator meet with the supervisee group to explain and, if necessary, defend policy in response to staff challenges.

It is at this juncture that conflict between the worker and the organization often most clearly manifest. The philosophical debate regarding the obligation of civil disobedience to unjust laws is applicable to the problem faced by social workers in meeting agency requirements for conformity to policies and procedures that they are convinced are oppressive. Workers are encouraged to seek redress and change within the agency. There is a rich literature available on tactics that workers can employ in attempting to effect changes in agency policy and procedures in the face of resistant or inaccessible administrators (Gummer 1990). Going outside the agency and outside of channels that include the supervisor as the first point of contact are typically enjoined, yet there have been frequent examples of "whistle blowing" (Peters and Branch 1972; Nader, Petkas, and Blackwell 1974), suggesting, as Hair (2008) contended, that concerns for social justice and change are sometimes neglected in supervision.

Although the problem that generates the most indignation is agency temporization, or outright rejection, of workers' suggestions for changes, there is often a problem in the other direction. Progressive, innovative administrators often have difficulty getting supervisees to accept changes in policies and procedures.

A host of factors understandably stand in the way of acceptance of change. Additional energy needs to be expended in overcoming habitual patterns of dealing with work problems, in unlearning old ways, and in learning new ways of working; there is anxiety about whether one can adequately meet the demands of new programs and new procedures; there is reluctance to accept an increased measure of dependency while learning new patterns; there is a struggle involved in developing a conviction in the value of the change; and there is anxiety about rearranged



interpersonal connections in the agency as work procedures change.

Change is best accomplished if supervisees participate from the start in planning the change; if they are informed early of the nature of the planned change; if the change is introduced slowly, preferably with some initial trial effort; if expectations are made clear and understandable; if the change is in line with perceived agency norms and objectives; if there is some assurance that the change will have the predicted effect; if the administration, including supervisors, communicate strong belief in the desirability of the change; if there is some appreciation of, and empathy with, the difficulties that change generates for the staff; and if provision is made to reduce the costs of change to the staff. By putting themselves in the supervisees' place, supervisors have to make an effort to understand the possible costs and benefits the change implies for them.

Not only is the supervisor responsible for changes within the organization, but he or she must be sensitive to needs for changes in the network of agencies whose operations affect the work of his or her supervisees. In reviewing, coordinating, and planning work, supervisors may become aware of a lack in the community social service system of some needed service. The supervisor contributes to facilitating the increased effectiveness of the work of his or her supervisees by advocating in the community for support of the needed service. By doing so, the supervisor enriches the resource network for both clients and supervisees.

## **Summary**

The following principal administrative functions of supervision were identified and discussed: 1) staff recruitment and selection; 2) inducting and placing the worker; 3) explaining supervision; 4) work planning; 5) work assignment; 6) work delegation; 7) monitoring, reviewing, and evaluating work; 8) coordinating work; 9) acting as a channel of communication; 10) acting as an advocate; 11) administrative buffering; and 12) acting as a change agent and community liaison.

In implementing his or her administrative responsibilities and functions, the supervisor organizes the work place, agency facilities, and human resources to achieve agency administration objectives in a way that, quantitatively and qualitatively, is in accordance with agency policies and procedures.

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## CHAPTER 3

# Administrative Supervision

### *Problems in Implementation*

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#### **The Problem of Vicarious Liability**

Having outlined the functions, tasks, and responsibilities of administrative supervision in [chapter 2](#), we are concerned in this chapter with some of the principal problems encountered by social work supervisors in implementing administrative supervision.

It was noted in the preceding chapter that the supervisor is ultimately responsible—and indeed, liable—for the work that is assigned and delegated. *Liability* is a legal term that means an obligation or duty of care owed a client (Black 1968), and any deviation from the duty of care that results in harm to the client may become a cause of malpractice (Kutchins and Kirk 1987). Malpractice complaints and legal decisions have clearly confirmed the principle of the supervisor's responsibility for decisions and actions of supervisees (Reamer 1998). This is supported by doctrines variously termed *vicarious liability*, *imputed negligence*, and *respondeat superiore*. The doctrine states that the superior is responsible for the acts of his or her agents within the scope of their employment. The supervisee is legally regarded as an extension of the supervisor, and thus the two are considered a single persona.

When a social worker takes action, the supervisor is perceived to have reviewed and sanctioned the social worker's behavior. If the action was performed incompetently, the supervisor is responsible for having entrusted the implementation of the decision to a worker who he or she should have known was not competent to perform it. "It is assumed that the supervisor ... knows or should know what is going on and that the supervisor has an impact on the quality of work done" (Slovenko 1980:60). Because a worker's incompetence is an indictment of the supervisor, the supervisor may be implicated as an accessory in an ethics complaint or malpractice suit against the worker (Harrar, VandeCreek, and Knapp 1990). This is an example of the legal principle of *respondeat superiore* ("let the master answer").

Recupero and Rainey (2007:188) noted that "nearly all of the case law and scholarship on supervisory liability has occurred in the context of surgery, obstetrics, psychology, and social work." Reviewing malpractice claims drawn from the records of the NASW Insurance Trust for the period between 1969 and 1990, Reamer (1995:597) found that 12 (1.89 percent) of the 634 claims filed against social workers were for "failure to supervise properly." To help us update those findings, NASW Assurance Services agreed to provide summary statistics from American Professional Agency for claims against social workers since the inception of its "claims-made" program in 1990 through December 31, 2008 (NASW Assurance

Services, personal communication, November 5, 2009). “Failure to supervise properly” accounted for merely 0.49 percent of malpractice claims made from the inception of the program through 2008, less than one in two hundred. But how many claims against supervisors does that percentage represent? Alas, insurers are generally reluctant to provide detailed information about malpractice claims, and NASW did not provide us with that information. To fill in the blanks, we have interpolated a lower-level “guestimate” that at least 49 malpractice claims of “failure to supervise properly” have been made against insured members of NASW, an annualized rate of less than two claims per year, from the statistics provided, in addition to the cases reported by Reamer (1995). This, we believe, is a conservative estimate because *any* of the causes of action reported, from “incorrect treatment” to “failure to refer,” might form the basis for a malpractice suit against a social work supervisor under *respondeat superior*.

Although malpractice claims against social work supervisors have become more frequent, few claims go to trial and even fewer are proven in court (Corcoran 1998). A study of 5,832 medical malpractice claims found that 43 percent were dropped without payment, 51 percent were settled with payment out of court, and 7 percent were litigated to a verdict, with the plaintiff winning roughly one in four, or 1.9 percent of the time (Danzon and Lillard 1983). Yet all malpractice claims against clinical social workers that result in a payment must be reported to the National Practitioner Data Bank (NPDB) under Title IV of Public Law 99-660 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2001). We obtained and analyzed the NPDB Public Use Data File of “disclosable” reports and found that malpractice insurance companies, state insurance guarantee funds, and other mandated reporters made malpractice payments for 233 social workers from September 1, 1990 through June 30, 2009. The majority of those payments represented malpractice settlements, but for settlements and judgments combined the mean payment was \$367,866.67, with a minimum payment of \$3,500, a median payment of \$47,500, and a maximum payment of \$1,950,000. Although only 3 of the 179 classified allegations<sup>1</sup> (1.7 percent) were for “failure to supervise,” any cause of action could be used to bring a malpractice suit against a social work supervisor.

A state board of social work examiners is often the first to receive, investigate, and adjudicate complaints alleging malpractice in social work supervision, and some of these are among the claims represented by NASW Assurance. In her important national study of social workers sanctioned by 27 state licensing boards between 1999 and 2004, Boland-Prom (2009:358) found that only six (0.7 percent) of her sample of 874 cases were for “supervision below standards.”

Allegations of supervisory malpractice are also tried in courts of public opinion. The NASW News once reported that “employees of the El Paso, Texas, Department of Human Resources, including the Director of the Child Welfare Division ... were indicted by a county grand jury for criminal negligence in a child abuse case in which a fourteen-month-old girl under child welfare supervision died. ... The *supervisor* of the social worker handling the case was also indicted” (NASW News, June 1982:10).

Following the death of an abused five-year-old boy under guardianship of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, a state legislator “demanded that the family services division caseworker and supervisor be suspended without pay pending an investigation (*Capital Times*, Madison, January 14, 1981).

In another case, a child who had been returned home by the agency after a short stay in foster care was fatally abused by the biological parents:

An investigation by top state child welfare administrators into the events surrounding the decision to return the child to her home led to the highly publicized and controversial dismissal by DPW officials of social workers and two supervisors for professional negligence in the case....The supervisors and administrators were found to be negligent because they failed adequately to review the clinical judgments of the workers under their supervision. (Aber 1982:217)

Slovenko (1980:469) reported the case of a client referred by the court to a mental health clinic for evaluation:

A social worker did the interviewing, found that he was without mental disorder, and the supervising psychiatrist signed the report without interviewing him. A few days later, [the client] killed his wife and children. The supervisor was sued in a malpractice action.

A probation officer made a discretionary decision, in violation of department rules, not to take a probationer into custody upon complaint by the probationer’s girlfriend that he had physically and sexually assaulted her. Six weeks later, the probationer sexually assaulted and killed a ten-year-old child. The probation officer “was suspended for three days without pay and his supervisor was suspended for five days without pay” (*Capital Times*, Madison, May 11, 1982).

A psychotherapy clinic supervisor assigned a client to a counselor who allegedly engaged in sexual intercourse with the client. Under the doctrine of vicarious liability, the client initiated a lawsuit against the supervisor, who was named as the defendant rather than the counselor (Cohen 1979).

Reamer (1998:152–53) described the following case of a social work supervisor in a family services agency:

[The supervisor] was named as a defendant in a lawsuit filed by a former client. According to the client, who injured herself badly during an unsuccessful suicide attempt, her caseworker failed to properly assess her risk of committing suicide. Under the doctrine of vicarious liability, the client also alleged that the caseworker’s supervisor was negligent because the supervisor did not meet regularly with the caseworker for supervision or talk to the caseworker specifically about suicide assessment procedures.

In 2011, a New York City child welfare worker and his supervisor were indicted on charges of criminally negligent homicide by the Brooklyn district attorney, who said “that their failures had contributed to the death of a 4-year-old [girl] who had been repeatedly beaten and tied to a bed and weighed just 18 pounds at the end of her life.” Allegedly, the child welfare worker and his supervisor were negligent because they “had missed or ignored signs that the girl’s mother, who had a history of drug use, was incapable of caring for her. ... [They failed to make] visits to the home that they said they had made ... and [in the case of the worker] falsified records.” The supervisor “was accused of failing to properly oversee and monitor” the work of the

worker (Secret 2011:A1). Needless to say, the “caseworkers [were] dispirited over charges in the girl’s death” (Buckley and Secret 2011:A21), as the *New York Times* reported the following day.

Beddoe (2010:1280) worried that “because of public intolerance of mistakes in human services organizations, ‘the sole goal of supervision is in danger of becoming the elimination of risk through the micro-management and surveillance of practitioners and their outcomes’,” citing Peach and Horner (2007:229). Yet, the doctrine of vicarious liability places the supervisor in a very vulnerable position. Schutz (1982:49) advised that “basically, any major decision that the [supervisee] makes ought to have been reviewed—and modified if necessary—by the supervisor.” Discussing the concepts of *respondeat superiore* and vicarious liability, Cormier and Bernard (1982) noted that they have far-reaching implications for supervisors, asserting that “the supervisor needs to ensure that supervision does occur [and] to prevent negligent supervision, the supervisor has to be familiar with each case of every supervisee” (Cormier and Bernard 1982:488). Moreover, the supervisor must understand and uphold ethical, legal, and professional practice guidelines and standards (Caudill 2002; Harkness 2010) and, Henderson (2009) would add, help supervisees understand and enact them. By the same token, the supervisor has to be clear about the level of competence of each supervisee to be able to guarantee that a case assigned can be competently handled, although Bernard and Goodyear (2009:71) observed that “research seems to support that helping professionals have great difficulty in judging peers’ or sometimes supervisees’ competence ... and are reluctant to report” the impairment or known ethical violations of their supervisees.

Rowbottom, Hay, and Billis (1976:130) believed that because the worker is accountable “through the supervisor to the agency administrator and through the agency administrator to the legislature and ultimately to the public means that the supervisor not only has the managerial right but also the managerial duty to direct, instruct, review, appraise, and if necessary, discipline the worker.” Although supervisors rarely make direct observations of supervisee behavior (Ellis 2010; Kadushin 1992a), and despite evidence that what workers share with their supervisors may be highly selective (Ladany, Hill, Corbett, and Nutt 1996; Farber 2006) or inaccurate (Bernard and Goodyear 2009), empirical research suggests that social work supervision is the single most important factor affecting ethical decision making in social work practice (Landau and Baerwald 1999). This has not escaped the notice of the state licensing boards, imposing supervision upon those sanctioned for a gamut of unethical and illegal behavior, on one hand, and sanctioning licensed social workers for “supervision below standards” on the other (Boland-Prom 2009:358).

With this in mind, NASW (2008) has adopted ethical guidelines standards for social work supervision. Ethical social work supervisors have the necessary knowledge and skill to supervise the services that clients receive, limiting the scope of their practice to those areas in which they have expertise. According to Reamer (1998), this obligates the supervisor to

- Provide information for supervisees to obtain informed consent from their clients.
- Identify errors made by supervisees.
- Oversee workers' efforts to develop and implement comprehensive planned interventions.
- Know when supervisees' clients must be reassigned, transferred, or have services terminated.
- Know when supervisees need consultation.
- Monitor workers' competence, addressing incompetence, impairment, and ethical lapses.
- Monitor the boundaries between workers and clients.
- Review and critique workers paperwork and case records
- Provide supervisees with regularly scheduled supervision.
- Document supervision provided.
- Avoid dual relationships with workers.
- Provide workers with timely and informative feedback and evaluate their performance.

## **The Problem of Authority and Power**

### ***Rationale for Authority and Power***

If one agrees that the functions of administrative supervision reviewed in [chapter 2](#) must be performed if the agency is to operate efficiently and effectively, and if it is further agreed that the supervisor is ultimately responsible for seeing that these functions are efficiently, effectively, and ethically implemented, it follows that the supervisor needs to be granted the authority and power that would enable him or her to satisfactorily enact these tasks. As Studt (1959:18) said, authority is delegated and sanctioned when "in order to get the job done properly a person in one position in an organization is authorized to direct the role activities of a person in another position." Assigning supervisors the responsibility for implementing the essential functions of administrative supervision without at the same time granting them the necessary authority is the organizational equivalent of asking them to make bricks without straw. The organizational and professional axiom is that delegation of authority is a necessary concomitant of administrative responsibility.

The need for administrative authority in an agency derives from organizational complexity and task specialization. If groups of individuals are to work together to accomplish desired ends, their efforts must be integrated. Some administrative officer, in this case the supervisor, has to be given authority to direct and coordinate individual activities toward the achievement of a common purpose, to review and evaluate work, and to hold workers accountable. Formal channels of authority must be established because it must be clear who has the authority to assign, direct, and evaluate work and who is being directed and evaluated.

Because compliance with directives toward the achievement of joint efforts cannot

be left to chance, individual desires, or whim, some kind of authority-control system is an organizational imperative. It is designed to “minimize discretion based on subjective considerations” (Stein 1961:15). Vinter said, “All organizations create means for ensuring that cooperative action is oriented toward desired objectives. To avoid a state of anarchy among participating personnel, an explicit structure of authority and responsibility is defined in every social agency. ... This structure seeks to ensure predictable behavior of workers in conformity to policy” (1959:199–200). Otherwise, “lawlessness” may prevail, as Handler (1973:ix) documented in *The Coercive Social Worker*.

In a study of the social work profession Toren (1972:65) stated: “Supervision is the institutionalized built-in mechanism through which the attitudes and performance of social workers are controlled.” The rationale for any supervisory control review system is to assure that the workers will act in ways that will lead to the achievement of organizational and professional objectives. Weinbach (2003:218) noted that “controlling is an absolutely essential part of the job of the social worker as manager and for effective and efficient service to our prime beneficiary, the client.”

The danger of indifference to procedures for controlling and/or influencing the behavior of workers is the possibility that the workers will make decisions and act in ways that reflect their own desires and preferences, whether or not they are congruent with organizational objectives and professional standards. Unless there is some predictability in the decisions and behavior of one worker—a predictability that reflects adherence to agency objectives and procedures—it is difficult to coordinate and integrate that worker’s performance with that of other workers. By the same token, gross deviations from standards of practice established by convention and law put the public and the profession at risk.

The authority delegated to the supervisor ultimately derives from the community. In public agencies, the collective intent is embodied in the statutes that established the agency. In private agencies and practice, the collective intent is manifested in the support the agency obtains for its existence and continuation through commercial contracts and grants, fees-for-service, voluntary contributions, and third-party payments. The community is also the wellspring of authority vested in state boards of social work examiners, codified in regulatory statutes and rules, and delegated to supervisors through contracts and social work licensure. Agency and professional objectives reflect what the community wants done, and use of supervisory authority to ensure achievement of these objectives can be seen as an act in furtherance of the collective will.

Legal authority derives its legitimacy from the fact that it supposedly represents the common good. The objectives of the agency and the profession similarly are supposed to represent the common good. Authority employed to achieve the common good is regarded as legitimate authority. The legitimacy of this ultimate authority may be questioned by workers, who thereby also question the legitimacy of the supervisor’s authority. They may not believe that community will is well-represented by agency policy and procedure, practice protocols and guidelines, or statutes and

rules.

The agency, the profession, and the public depend on the supervisee's acceptance of the legitimacy of supervisory authority to achieve their respective aspirations and goals. When supervisees are committed to the same objectives, the supervisee will more freely grant the right to be controlled if this contributes to the achievement of common good, which justifies acceptance of authority.

### ***Supervisory Authority and Sources of Power***

Authority needs to be distinguished from power. Authority is a right that legitimizes the use of power; it is the sanctioned use of power—the accepted and validated possession of power. Authority is the right to issue directives, exercise control, and require compliance. It is the right to determine the behavior of others and to make decisions that guide the action of others. In the most uncompromising sense, “authority is the right to demand obedience; those subject to authority have the duty to obey.”

This right of authority is distributed to the supervisor through the agency administrative structure. The supervisory relationship is established through authority delegated to the supervisor by the agency and through the supervisee's reciprocal acceptance of the supervisor's legitimate entitlement to authority. A parallel source of supervisory authority derives from the state board that regulates social work practice. A third source of supervisory authority flows from the client. The ethical and legal principle of informed consent goes beyond the client's property right to control personal information; it affirms the client's right to decide whether to enter a contract for supervised social work services. Informing the client means providing the client with information about the supervisor's qualifications; the goals, methods, and responsibilities of the supervisor and supervisee; and any limits to client confidentiality (Bernard and Goodyear 2009; Falender and Shafranske 2004). The informed client who contracts for supervised social services delegates oversight authority to the supervisor (Harrar, VandeCreek, and Knapp 1990).

Authority is the right that legitimizes the use of power; power is the ability to implement authority. The word *power* derives from the Latin *potere* (“to be able”). If authority is the right to direct, command, and punish, then power is the ability to do so. The distinction is seen clearly in situations in which a person may have authority but no power to act, and vice versa. Extreme examples are the hijacker of a plane, who has power but no authority, and the prison warden held hostage by prisoners, who has authority but no power.

The distinction between authority and power is aptly illustrated by this discussion between a judge and a priest: The priest claimed that his position was the more important one because he could condemn sinners to hell; the judge countered by saying that his position was more important because when she condemned people to be hung, they actually were hung. The priest had the authority to condemn people to hell, but there was considerable question about his power to enforce the verdict. The same distinction is illustrated in Canute's law: “Even a king cannot control the tides.”



Authority is the right to supervise; power is the ability to effectively exercise that right. Authority can be delegated. Power cannot be delegated.

The sources of the supervisor's authority are the agency administration, the profession, the state board of social work examiners, and the client, which in turn represent community will. What are the sources of power that energize authority and make possible the implementation of the right to command? Recognizing the legitimacy of the authority invested in the supervisor, what prompts the supervisee to actually comply with the supervisor's directives?

There are a variety of descriptive systems that categorize sources of power (Etzioni 1961; Schein 2010; Weber 1946). Among the most frequently used is the classification developed by French and Raven (1960), who have identified five distinctive bases of social power: reward power, coercive power, positional power, referent power, and expert power. We will attempt to apply these categories to the social work supervisory situation.

*Reward Power* The supervisor has the ability to control tangible rewards for the supervisees, such as promotions, raises, more desirable work assignments, new computers, extra secretarial help, recommendations for training stipends, agency-supported attendance at conferences and workshops, a good reference on leaving the agency, and licensure recommendations. The supervisor further controls the work environment of the supervisee (i.e., office location and office appointments) and controls the level of work assignments and work procedures. Rewards can be psychic as well—approval, commendations, supervisory expressions of appreciation.

Rewards such as pay increases and promotions are zero-sum. There is just so much to go around, and distributing these goodies to some means denying them to others. However, there are many unlimited non-zero-sum rewards. Praise, recognition of achievement, and providing a feeling of satisfaction in work done can be freely given to one person without denying them to others.

If reward power is to be effective, it needs to be individualized and clearly related to differentials in performance. If rewards become routinized, as in the case of across-the-board raises, they lose their power to stimulate improvements in worker performance. The supervisor, therefore, has to be knowledgeable about the quality of the performance of different workers if he or she is to make a fair determination of allocation of rewards. Furthermore, the supervisee needs some confidence that the supervisor does, in fact, control access to rewards—that administration has granted him the authority to make crucial decisions relating to dispensation of available rewards.

As contrasted with certain other employers, social agencies have limited reward power because they control only a limited range and variety of rewards. Production incentives, stock options, and so on are not available as possible rewards. Uniform pay scales dictated by civil service and/or union regulations make it difficult to reward meritorious performance.

A desirable reward system is one in which the supervisor has access to, control of,

or at the very least, decisive input into the allocation of rewards; the basis for rewards is explicit and clearly communicated; rewards are not politicized but based on competent contribution to agency objectives. Except for some formal occasions, rewards should be continuous in response to good work at the time good work is done.

The ethos of social work favors equality of rewards and decries the competition involved in striving for rewards. Consequently, this source of power tends to be employed sparingly and with uneasiness.

*Coercive Power* The supervisor has the ability to control punishments for supervisees. These include demotion, dismissal, a poor performance appraisal, a less satisfying work assignment, and a negative reference. The talionic client has the ability to seek a legal remedy for malpractice. This may include a financial payment to the client and the loss of a license to practice. There are psychic punishments as well—expressions of disapproval and criticism, snubs, and avoidance. Reward power and coercive power overlap because the withholding of rewards is in effect a punishment.

Whereas in the case of reward power supervisees are induced to comply with supervisory directives and the contract with the client in order to achieve a reward, here compliance results from the effort to avoid punishment. The strength of coercive power depends on the extent of belief in the likelihood of disciplinary action. If the supervisees have reason to believe that little serious effort will be made to apply punishments, this is not an effective source of supervisory power. However, “while most competent supervisors are reluctant to exercise coercive power, except in extremely serious conditions, the important point is that most subordinates behave in accordance with the belief that such power could be exerted at any time” (Austin 1981:21).

Yet if the promise of coercive power is omnipresent, the supervisee may experience it as “power over” (McAdam 2001) and respond with resentment and resistance (Murphy 2002). Unless the supervisee is sailing in truly dangerous waters, the ethos and ethics of the profession are more congruent with the “soft, mindful, and judicious” power of mutual collaboration (de Boer and Coady 2007:32) and empowerment in the supervisory relationship. The general discomfort with punitive actions and the reluctance to hurt makes coercive power a relatively ineffective avenue for control in social work.

*Legitimate or Positional Power* Holloway and Brager (1989:30) defined authority of position as “the organizationally sanctioned right by virtue of occupying the role to initiate action, make decisions, allocate organizational resources and determine outcome for others.” People have been socialized to accept and respond to positional power through experiences with parents, teachers, police, priests, lifeguards, athletic coaches, etc. We have learned the script and almost automatically play it with people who occupy positions of authority. We respond to the authority associated with the position without reference to the particular person occupying the position. Positional

incumbency activates a norm of compliance. The position evokes a sense of obligation to conform and the expectation that the obligation will be honored.

By virtue of being invested with the title, the supervisor can claim the authority that goes with the position. We accept the authority of the office and, in doing so, accept as legitimate the authority of the person occupying it. The supervisee, in taking a job with the agency, has implicitly contracted to accept direction from those invested with agency and professional authority. There is a sense of moral obligation and social duty related to the acceptance of positional authority. Consequently, the supervisee feels that the supervisor has a legitimate right, considering his or her position, to expect that his or her suggestions and directions will be followed.

Positional power derives its force not only from prior reinforcing experiences in which obedience to those in positions of authority was rewarded by acceptance and approval but also from its effect in making one's job easier. Barnard (1938) noted that the initial presumption of the acceptability of organizational authority enables workers to avoid making issues of supervisory directives without incurring a sense of personal subservience or a loss of status with their peers.

*Referent Power* The supervisor has power that derives from the supervisee's identification with him or her—a desire to be liked by the supervisor and to be like the supervisor. Referent power has its source in the positive relationship between supervisor and supervisee, in the attraction the supervisee feels toward the supervisor. It is relationship power (Beinart 2004; Frawley-O'Dea and Sarnat 2001; Milne 2009). In effect, the supervisee says, "I want to be like the supervisor and be liked by her. Consequently, I want to believe and behave as she does," or "I am like the supervisor, so I will behave and believe like him." The supervisor is perceived as a model of the kind of social worker the supervisee would like to be.

A worker graphically described the potency of referent power and some associated problems:

My identification with my supervisor has allowed me to be influenced by him. Somewhere along the way, through his modeling in casework sessions, his respect for clients and his compassion for their struggles, I decided that I wanted what he had. I decided that I wanted to know how to do therapy as well as him. My desire and respect for his abilities has encouraged me to trust his advice and accept his direction.

The relationship, once established, provides the supervisor with a power base for influence. The stronger the relationship, the stronger is the power of the supervisor to influence the behavior and attitudes of the supervisee.

As a consequence of a strong interpersonal relationship, the supervisee is receptive to influencing efforts on the part of the supervisor. As a result of identification, the supervisor's expectations become internalized. Supervisees then act as their own supervisor, behaving as they expect the supervisor would want them to.

*Expert Power* Expert power derives from the special knowledge and skills that the supervisor has and that supervisees need. This is the power of professional competence. The supervisee who attributes expertise to the supervisor must have

trust in his or her decisions and judgments. The supervisor has the power to influence the kinds of behavior that supervisees will manifest because the supervisor has the knowledge that indicates the way in which it is desirable or necessary for them to behave if they are to deal satisfactorily with work problems.

Referent power has a potentially broader influence than expert power. The influence of expert power is confined to the content areas defined by the expertise. Expert power is difficult to achieve because the evidence of expertise needs to be validated continually. It can dissolve as the supervisee comes progressively closer to the supervisor in level of expertise. A supervisor's continued absence of contact with direct services can result in technical obsolescence and a consequent reduction in expert power.

#### ***Interrelationships Among Types of Supervisory Power***

The sources of power frequently have been subdivided into two groups: functional and formal power. Functional power, which includes expertise and referent power, depends on what the supervisor knows, is, and can do. Functional power resides in the person of the supervisor. Formal power is related more directly to the title the supervisor holds and the authority with which the title is invested. Formal power includes positional power and the power of rewards and punishments. The two groups of power are complementary. The most desirable situation for effective exercise of power is one in which the formal power and functional power are congruent. This is the situation when the person accorded positional authority and the power of the office to reward and punish is, by virtue of his or her human relations skill and knowledge of the job, also capable of demonstrating the power of expertise and of developing referent power. Functional authority tends to legitimize and make acceptable formal authority. Difficulty arises when the person with formal authority knows less or has less work experience than the supervisee or does not gain the respect of the supervisee. The supervisee is therefore less willing to grant the person's entitlement to the power of his or her position and this tends to attenuate and undermine his or her formal authority.

Because formal power is related to the office of the supervisor and functional power is related to the person of the supervisor, the latter is apt to be more variable. There is little difference between one supervisor and another in the same agency in their positional, reward, and punishment power. There may be considerable difference, however, in their total ability to implement their authority because of differences in their expertise and relationship skills.

The supervisees' readiness to accept the supervisor as an expert and as an object of identification and emulation is subject to change. Expert power tends to erode if supervisees find, as they grow in knowledge and experience, that they are less dependent on the supervisor for help in solving their work problems or that, when testing the supervisor's advice and suggestions in practice, they conclude that the supervisor is not the expert he or she claims to be or was previously perceived to be.

Formal authority is received automatically by ascription when a person is assigned

to the position of supervisor. Functional authority has to be achieved by the supervisor and continuously validated. If the supervisees do not perceive the supervisor as an expert, the supervisor has no expert power. If supervisees feel no attraction to the supervisor and do not care whether or not the supervisor likes them, the supervisor has no referent power.

The different sources of power available to the supervisor to induce behavioral change in supervisees, and to control their actions, have different kinds of applicability and costs associated with their use. Both reward power and coercive power relate to specific kinds of supervisee behavior that are either encouraged or discouraged. The effect of using such power is apt to be rather limited in scope. Both require the opportunity and constancy of surveillance. Only if the supervisor knows what the supervisee is doing or not doing can these sources of power be applied (Holloway 1995). Supervisees feel a pressure to engage in the required behavior only if there is some chance that the supervisor will know about it. The use of reward and coercion as sources of power only achieves compliance.

Expert power and referent power, by contrast, are more diffuse in their effects. Once these sources of power have been established, it follows that whatever the supervisor says or requests is likely to be considered seriously by supervisees. The effect of such power is internalization of the supervisor's authority, which then exerts pressure toward conformity whether or not the supervisor can witness the behavior. Although reward and punishment power can achieve compliance and a change in behavior, the exertion of expert and referent power in achieving internalization of influence can achieve changes in feelings and attitudes as well.

Referent and expert power give the supervisory relationship a leadership orientation. As a consequence of the supervisee's liking the supervisor and admiring and respecting his or her expertise, the authority of the supervisor is freely accepted rather than felt to be imposed. The supervisee is voluntarily motivated to conform to the requests, suggestions, and tasks assigned by the supervisor. The supervisor obtains supervisee compliance with a minimum of resistance. The supervisee is open to and accepting of the efforts of the supervisor to guide and influence, and the supervisee feels led rather than bossed. Yet, perhaps even liking and admiring the supervisor, and feeling led rather than bossed, have their limits. Although expert and referent power were significantly associated with supervisee disclosures related to personal issues and feelings about clients in a study of fifty-nine doctoral students by Bleiweiss (2007), expert and referent power were not predictive of supervisee self-disclosures about the supervisor or the supervisory process. Murphy (2002) believes that supervisees withhold information to counterbalance the power of the supervisor with power of their own.

Tsui, Ho, and Lam (2005:51) provided a rich description of the power relationship between social work supervisors and frontline social workers in Hong Kong, where "the Chinese attitude towards hierarchical relationship" is "the practice of subordination to authority." Whereas supervisors dominate the decision-making process, supervisees comply by seeking concrete supervisory directions that leave

the supervisor responsible for their outcomes. Perhaps to mitigate their burden, supervisors consult with workers frequently and strategically, to read the between the lines and reach polite consensus. Thus, a “false harmony is maintained as long as both parties ... play the game.” (Tsui, Ho, and Lam 2005:62)

Warren (1968) analyzed the various sources of power as related to conformity to agency norms under conditions of the low-visibility performance characteristic of social work. Under these conditions, expert power and referent power are most effective in ensuring both attitudinal conformity (implying internalization of norms) and overt behavioral conformity.

Because the force of positional power as felt by supervisees is the result of earlier socialization, this source of power is vulnerable to problems concerning a supervisee's relationship to authority figures. The supervisee who has had developmental experiences that result in opposition to, and hostility toward, parents and parent surrogates is more likely to resist the power of position (Itzhaky and Ribner 1998).

Studies of worker satisfaction in a variety of contexts as related to supervisory sources of power show expert power and referent power to be positively related to supervisee satisfaction. Coercive power was least frequently related to satisfaction (Burke and Wilcox 1971; Okon 2010; Preslar 2001).

Studying the relationship between supervisees' satisfaction with supervision and the perceived source of the supervisor's authority, Munson (1981) found that satisfaction with supervision was clearly related to competence and experience as the source of power. By contrast, supervisors whose power was perceived as deriving from hierarchical sanction of their position were seen as less friendly, less open, and less understanding.

Coercive and positional power may be sufficient to induce supervisees to work at a level that meets the minimal requirements of the job. This is what they have technically contracted for in accepting the job. Referent and expert power, however, can induce supervisees to exert themselves beyond this level. They want to do better to please the supervisor, whose referent power makes him a person of significance for the supervisee. They get satisfaction doing a better job as they are helped to solve job problems through the supervisor's use of expert power. Reward power also can have this effect if the range of rewards available is sufficiently attractive to the supervisees and if they feel assurance that better work will, in fact, be rewarded.

The various sources of power are interrelated. Reward power increases the likelihood of developing a positive relationship. A positive relationship, once established, increases the potency of psychic rewards (praise, approval) offered by the supervisor. The use of coercive power tends to increase the difficulties of establishing a positive relationship and hence impedes development of referent power as a possible source of influence (Brehm and Gates 2004).

The exercise of power, when accepted by the supervisee, results in some change in his or her behavior. The supervisee acts, and refrains from acting, so that his or her behavior conforms to the needs of the organization in achieving its objectives. Power

is used to attain some deliberate, intended effects. When power is successfully applied, we can talk of control.

What sources of supervisory power are perceived by social workers as influencing their behavior? In a study of non-MSW supervisees supervised by non-MSW supervisors in a public welfare agency, positional power was most frequently mentioned, followed by expert power (Peabody 1964). Referent power was seen as a less significant source of influence. In a second study involving MSW supervisors and supervisees, both groups saw expert power and professional competence as the main source of the supervisor's influence (Kadushin 1974). The supervisors saw this as almost the exclusive source of their power. A sizable percentage of supervisees, however, saw positional power as a significant source of supervisory influence. Apparently, supervisees were more ready to grant supervisors the power of their position in the administrative hierarchy than supervisors were ready to accept. If social work values and hierarchical relationships are incompatible, as Munson (1997) contended, then recognizing that the supervisor's power derives not from competence but from the supervisory position may induce cognitive dissonance in the supervisor. It is interesting that in neither study was referent power or relationship power seen as a significant source of supervisory influence. As was expected, neither reward power nor coercive power was seen as a preferred source of power, and Munson (1997) argued that power derived from position is incompatible with social work values.

A 1989 follow-up questionnaire study of 508 social work supervisors and 377 supervisees indicated, once again, that only expertise and positional power were perceived by both groups as salient (Kadushin 1992a). Supervisors overwhelmingly saw expertise as the source of effective power. Although supervisees generally agree, a high percentage of supervisees saw positional power as the reason for agreeing to do what supervisors wanted them to do. A negligible percentage of respondents saw referent power, reward, or punishment as significant.

A study of some sixteen thousand employees in thirty-one social welfare and rehabilitation agencies showed the same relative ranking of the sources of supervisory power. Expert power was listed as the principal reason that induced supervisees to do things their immediate supervisor suggested or wanted them to do, followed by positional power as the second source of supervisory influence. Referent power was given middle-range ranking. Reward power and coercive power were perceived as the least potent sources of influence (Olmstead and Christensen 1973).

Although it is clear that expert power is the kind of power most readily acknowledged and most comfortably employed between social work supervisor and supervisee, the question might be raised whether this is a viable and potent power base for the social work supervisor.

The base of reward, coercive, and positional power is the community through the agency. The base of referent power is the person of the supervisor. The base of expert power, however, is the profession. The profession provides the knowledge that makes the supervisor an expert. Consequently the potency of expert power depends on the state of the art of the profession. If a profession has well-developed, highly

sophisticated techniques and the supervisor is well educated in what the profession has available, the gap in expertise between the supervisor and the supervisee recruit is very wide. If, however, there is little specialized knowledge available or the techniques that the supervisor possesses are limited, the gap is narrow and can be eliminated within a short period. Rapid changes in the field with reference to what are accepted theory, techniques, and interventions tend to erode the supervisor's authority of expertise. If socialized in terms of an earlier view of social work or skilled in approaches generally used in the immediate past but somewhat outmoded in the present, the supervisor may know less than the supervisee about what is *au courant*.

As difficult as it is for the supervisor to maintain authority on the basis of expert power when there is, objectively, little real expertise, the task becomes even more difficult in an ideological climate in which possible differences in expertise are explicitly rejected (e.g., Hair and O'Donoghue 2009). When the ideological emphasis is toward a declaration of equality between client and worker, teacher and student, supervisor and supervisee—when differences in roles are denied and all become peers and colleagues—authority based on expert power is further eroded.

It must be noted, however, that the preceding paragraphs refer to the extent of the gap in expertise relating general professional knowledge and skills. Expert power may be validated on the basis of other kinds of information. If the supervisor has more experience in the agency than the supervisee, as is usually the case, his or her greater expertise may only derive from his or her specialized knowledge of the policy, procedures, and operations in that particular agency.

This base of expert power is supplemented by the supervisor's strategic position in the agency communications network. Not only does the supervisor know more about agency operations because he or she has had more intra-and interagency experience, but the supervisor also possesses much-needed knowledge about agency policies and procedures because he or she has initial access to such information from administration.

Furthermore, every agency deals with a special social problem and a special clientele. The supervisor's specialized, more definitive knowledge of the particular agency's clientele and the particular social problem that is the focus of its concern may be a measure of the gap between the supervisor's expertise and the supervisee's need to know.

### ***Legitimation of Authority***

The exercise and expression of raw supervisory authority, hierarchy, and power are in palpable tension with the social work values of mutuality and self-determination (Hair and O'Donoghue 2009). Yet, despite our distaste for the words and our resistance to the activities implied, social work authority is built into the supervisory relationship because the supervisor "bears ultimate power and responsibility in legal matters (*respondeat superior*) as well as liability for supervisee actions," and because "ensuring protection of the client is the primary supervisory duty" (Falender 2010:23). Thus, Miller (1960:76) suggested that "it would help a great deal to give up the



sentimental shame that the worker-supervisor relationship exists between equals or between professional colleagues who happen to have different functions and responsibilities. This kind of well-meaning distortion obscures the power and authority inherent in the supervisory function.” This is a sentiment with which collaborative feminist and postmodern theorists also agree (Falender 2010; Frawley-O’Dea and Sarnat 2001).

In an analysis of social welfare administration, Patti (1983:26) said, “We acknowledge that authority is inherent to the administrative and management process. The manager does indeed direct and control and there is nothing to be gained by clouding the reality.” Furthermore,

Authority is intrinsic to the [supervisor’s] role. Its constructive use is indispensable to the manager’s performance and that of the organizational unit for which he or she is responsible. ... The manager who consistently shrinks from using the authority of the office when there is disagreement with subordinates ultimately loses the ability to coordinate activities toward the achievement of organizational objectives. (Patti 1983:218–17)

The supervisor must accept, without defensiveness or apology, the authority and related power inherent in his or her position, lest they become submerged, hence covert (Cearly 2004). The use of authority may sometimes be unavoidable. Supervisors can increase their effectiveness if they feel, and can communicate, conviction in their behavior. If supervisors act with confidence and with an expectation that their authority will be respected, their directives are more likely to be accepted.

A supervisee in a school setting said:

My supervisor told me directly and without any equivocation that my frequent coming late upset the schedule of the unit. She was straightforward and serious. She did not apologize, minimize, or press the comment. She just made the point, gave me a chance to respond (which I didn’t, because she was right), and then she just moved on to the next time. Although uncomfortable, I had to admire her frankness and honesty.

### ***Nonauthoritarian Authority***

If the supervisor must be granted and must exercise some measure of authority and power in order to perform functions that are necessary for achievement of organizational objectives, how can this authority be most effectively manifested? The likelihood of the supervisees’ accepting the supervisor’s authority is increased if certain caveats are observed. They are designed to help the supervisor exercise authority without being officious or authoritarian.

In general, the most desirable use of supervisory power is “exerting power with minimal side effects and conflicts” and seeking approaches “for the limiting of the exercise of power to the least amount which will satisfy the functional requirements of the organization and for maximizing role performance without the exercise of power” (Kahn 1964:7). Bogo and Dill (2008:141) called this “walking the tightrope.”

Voluntary compliance with supervisory authority is apt to be greater if its sources are perceived as legitimate, the methods employed in its exercise are acceptable, the objectives of its use are understandable and approved, and it is exercised within the limits of legitimate jurisdiction. The attitude and the spirit with which authority is employed are significant. If authority is used only when the situation demands it—

when it is required to achieve objectives to which both supervisor and supervisee are jointly committed—it is more likely to be accepted. If it is exercised in a spirit of vindictiveness, in response to a desire for self-aggrandizement, a pleasure in dominance, or a delight in self-gratification, it is less likely to be accepted. The best use of authority comes out of an expression of care and concern for workers and clients.

Supervisees can more easily understand and accept the exercise of authority if it is clear that authority is being used for the achievement of organizational goals rather than because its use is intrinsically pleasurable to the supervisor. If supervisees are committed to the achievement of the organizational goal, acceptance of authority is then congruent with their own needs and wishes.

If authority is employed in a manner that indicates that the supervisor is flexible and open to suggestions for changes in “commands,” on the basis of relevant feedback from supervisees, it is less likely to be viewed as capricious and arbitrary. If, when exercising authority, the supervisor shares with his or her supervisees the reasons that prompt the directive and if the supervisor gives an opportunity for questions and discussion of the directive, the supervisees’ feeling that this is a rational procedure over which they have some control is further enhanced. Through such participation the supervisees share control.

If authority is exercised in a predictable manner, the supervisees again feel they have some control over the situation. They can clearly foresee the consequences of certain actions on their part. Arbitrary exercise of authority is unpredictable and inexplicable.

Authority needs to be used with a recognition that supervisees, as adults, tend to resent the dependence, submissiveness, and contravention of individual autonomy implied in accepting authority. Also, authority is best exercised if it is depersonalized. Even in the best of circumstances, people are predisposed to resent and resist authority. It is, in its essence, antiegalitarian. It suggests that one person is better than another. Depersonalizing the use of authority is designed to mitigate such feeling. The attitude suggests that the supervisor is acting as an agent of the organization rather than out of any sense of personal superiority. The supervisee is not asked to acknowledge the superiority of the supervisor as a person but merely his or her assignment to a particular function in the agency hierarchy.

If it is not to be resented, authority has to be impartially exercised. Impartial does not necessarily mean equal. It means that in similar situations people are treated similarly. If there is an acceptable reason for unequal, preferential treatment, this is not resented. One worker can be assigned a much smaller caseload than another. If, however, the smaller caseload includes difficult, complex cases, the assignment will not be regarded as an unfair exercise of supervisory authority.

The supervisor needs a sensitive awareness that his or her authority is limited and job-related. The administrative grant of authority relates to a specific set of duties and tasks. The legitimacy of the supervisor’s authority is open to question if he or she seeks to extend it beyond recognized boundaries. For example, attempting to

prescribe a rigid dress code for supervisees or to proscribe private, off-the-job behavior causes difficulty because the supervisor is exceeding the limits of her legitimate authority.

The supervisor has to be careful to refrain from using authority unless some essential conditions can be met. Barnard (1938) pointed out that supervisory directives will tend to be resisted unless the supervisee can and does understand what needs to be done, believes that the directive is consistent with his or her perception of the purpose of the organization, believes it is compatible with his or her personal interests and beliefs, and is able to comply with it. Similarly, Kaufman (1973:2) noted that supervisee noncompliance results from the fact that the supervisee does not know clearly what needs to be done, cannot do it, or does not want to do it.

The most effective use of authority is minimal use. Persistent use of authority increases the social distance between participants in supervisory relationships and results in a greater formality in such relationships. It intensifies a sense of status difference between supervisor and supervisee and tends to inhibit free communication. The supervisor therefore should make authority explicit as infrequently as possible and only when necessary.

Using other means of influence as alternatives to the use of power is desirable. The desirable procedure is for the supervisor to use the least amount of authority and power to achieve the aims of supervision. If one can induce the supervisee to behave in the desirable manner by providing certain information, modeling, or using expressions of empathic understanding and acceptance, this should be the most preferred intervention. As Sennett (1981:174) noted, "Naked power draws attention to itself. Influence does not." Power is humanized behind a veil.

Supervisory authority can be more effectively implemented if agency administration observes some essential considerations. Most basically, only those who are qualified as supervisors should be appointed to the office, and appointment should be a result of fair and acceptable procedures. Only then will supervisees be likely to grant the supervisor's legitimate right to the title and to the authority associated with it.

Administration needs to delegate enough authority to enable the supervisor to perform the functions required of him or her, as well as to delegate it in a way that conforms to the principle of unity of command. This principle suggests that a supervisee be supervised by, and answerable to, one supervisor. The exercise of authority is difficult if more than one administrative person directs the supervisee with regard to the same set of activities. There is difficulty, too, if no one has responsibility for some significant set of duties that the supervisee has to perform. Both gaps and overlaps in administrative responsibility create problems.

When agency administration, as the immediate source of the supervisor's authority, consistently supports the authority of the supervisor, this tends to stabilize his or her power. Inconsistent, unpredictable support from the administration of a supervisor's authority tends to erode his or her power. The administration needs to make clear to both supervisors and supervisees the nature of the authority delegated

to the supervisors, the limits of that authority, and the conditions under which the authority can be legitimately exercised.

### **Problems in the Implementation of Supervisory Authority**

Although theoretically social work supervisors have an impressive array of potential sources of authority and power, the available descriptive and empirical data tends to indicate the following:

1. Social work supervisors are reluctant to use the authority and power they have available.
2. They are particularly reluctant to use their power and authority for implementing the administrative-instrumental productivity objectives of supervision (i.e., “getting the work out”).
3. Even if social work supervisors were more motivated to use their authority and power toward the administrative objectives of supervision, the likelihood of their success in achieving this objective can often be effectively blunted by the countervailing power possessed by supervisees.

### ***Avoidance and Abrogation of Authority and Power by Supervisors***

As Holloway and Brager (1989) noted, the use of power and authority is based on the assumption that one person has the right to tell another person what to do and to expect compliance. The implication of superiority in this assumption embarrasses social workers and robs them of the ability to employ power without discomfort. Social workers resort to power and authority self-consciously, hesitantly, and apologetically. It evokes a sense of shame and guilt.

Administrative exercise of authority and power is perceived as being ideologically antithetical to some of the fundamental values of social work—values that emphasize egalitarian, democratic, noncoercive, and nonhierarchical relationships (Munson 1997). Wielding power and authority in supervision may feel like an expression of paternalism (Greene 2002) that threatens the mutuality of the helping relationship (Robinson 1949), with transitive implications for how workers treat their clients (Frawley-O’Dea and Sarnat 2001; Nelson, Gray, Friedlander, and Gray 2001). These practice precepts reinforce supervisors’ ideological uneasiness about the exercise of administrative authority and power.

Vinter (1959), speaking to this problem, said that a “strain arises from juxtaposition of the non-authoritarian ideology of social work and the exercise of authority and control within the administrative context. Valuation of autonomy and self-determination for the client has pervaded the administrative structure of social welfare” (262–63). Indeed, as Levinson and Klerman (1972:66) said, “The predominant view of power ... in mental health professions is much like the Victorian view of sex. It is seen as vulgar, as a sign of character defect, as something an upstanding professional would not be interested in, stoop to engage in.”

Unfortunately, but inevitably, it is difficult to respond to the need to exercise

authority, power, and control in functional terms alone. Although authority, power, and control are functionally necessary for achieving organizational objectives, they get mixed up with feelings of prestige, self-esteem, superiority, inferiority, dominance, and submission. Strong currents of feeling are evoked by power relationships in any context because they reactivate memories of the first encounter with authority and control in the parent-child relationship.

Organizational studies of social agencies show that very few human service organizations have “management control systems that are in any way comparable in quality to those in the private sector” (Herzlinger 1981:207). Although some observers report that human services organizations have adopted private-sector management methods (e.g., Harris 2003; Poertner 2009), complex measures of quality control and customer satisfaction are used infrequently in social work settings (Lambert and Hawkins 2001; Reese, Norsworthy, and Rowlands 2009). “Even if such data were present it is unclear that they would be used for control” because they are managed by professionals “whose norms are antithetical to the hierarchical corporate version of the control process” (Herzlinger 1981:209). Paradoxically, the private sector has begun to adopt management practices resembling in some respects those used in social work (Boettcher 1998). In Britain, for example, Poole, Mansfield, and Gould-Williams (2006:1073) reported longitudinal data from large manager samples suggesting points of “two-way convergence” in public- and private-sector management practices that include, for example, more frequent consultations between private-sector supervisors and workers.

The question of power and authority in the supervisory relationship is just a special instance of the problem of authority in social work generally—a difficulty that has received special attention in the professional literature (Yelaja 1971). The reluctance of supervisors to express their authority was noted in an empirical study of supervisors in Israel:

[As middle managers, agency] supervisors will often find themselves in an “in-between” position, a vulnerable situation which may impact on their relationships with supervisees. This may make it difficult for them to provide negative (though necessary) feedback or to carry out appropriate confrontations due to the fear of creating conflict, resistance, and unnecessary “interference” in the system. (Itzhaky 2001:82)

In an interview study, more than three hundred British direct service social workers identified “checking on their work” as an appropriate purpose of supervision. On the other hand, supervisors were more reluctant to acknowledge the “checking process.” They “seemed to fight shy of what they regarded as authoritarian aspects of their role and concentrated on the supportive rather than the controlling aspects of supervision” (Parsloe and Stevenson 1978:202). A study of supervisors’ activities found that they frequently fail to implement actions related to “performance evaluation and monitoring of supervisory activities” (Ladany et al.1999:457). Using standardized research instruments to inventory managerial styles and managerial philosophy, a number of different research reports concerning the approaches of social work supervisors lead to similar conclusions. They show social work supervisors having limited concern for monitoring task performance and worker productivity and greater concern for the

human relations aspects of supervision.

Using a standardized Leadership Opinion Questionnaire, Olyan (1972) obtained responses from 228 supervisors in three different settings. One scale included in the questionnaire concerns structure and is designed to reflect

the extent to which an individual is likely to define and structure his own role and those of his subordinates toward goal attainment. A high score on this dimension characterizes individuals who play a very active role in directing group activities through planning, communicating information, scheduling, criticizing, trying out new ideas and so forth. A low score characterizes individuals who are likely to be relatively inactive in group direction in these ways. (Olyan 1972:172)

Low scores on the structure scale suggest a reluctance to exercise control and authority.

A second scale included in the questionnaire was the consideration scale, designed to measure

the extent to which an individual is likely to have job relationships with his subordinates characterized by mutual trust, respect for their ideas, consideration for their feelings, and a certain warmth between himself and them. A high score is indicative of a climate of good rapport and two-way communication. A low score indicates the individual is likely to be more impersonal in his relations with group members. (Olyan 1972:172)

While the social work supervisors scored relatively high on the consideration scale as compared with thirty-five other occupational groups for which scores are available, they ranked lowest of all thirty-six occupations on the structural scale. Olyan concluded that the data “suggests that supervisors in this study group are not oriented toward goal attainment techniques such as planning, communicating information, scheduling, criticizing” (1972:178). These are the activities central to implementation of the responsibilities of administrative supervision and related to the exercise of authority.

Granvold (1978) found along with Olyan (1972) that the 108 social work supervisors he tested using the Leadership Opinion Questionnaire were high on consideration but low on the structure dimension that was “considered” to measure the supervisor attitudes that reflect a commitment to satisfying organizational objectives. Results indicated that “the study group ranked rather high on the consideration subscale and extremely low on the structure subscale” (Granvold 1978:42).

A major implication of this study is that social work supervisors “had the appropriate attitude set to effect worker objective satisfaction.” However, with regard to organizational objectives, the findings suggested that respondents not only failed to manifest supervisor behavior in support of these objectives but that their attitudes toward such responsibilities were weak (Olyan 1972:44; see also Cohen and Rhodes 1977). Patti (1987) quoted a doctoral dissertation by Friesen, who studied first-line supervisors in community mental health centers and found that they tended to score much higher on consideration and support than on task-oriented behavior. Patti (1987:379) noted that the research literature indicates that social agency supervisors “tend to score low in task oriented behavior and high on consideration behaviors,” where task-oriented behaviors included “specifying rules, procedures and methods

and assigning specific tasks to subordinates.” Patti concluded by saying that “apparently task related supervisory behavior needs to be emphasized more in outcome oriented agencies” (Patti 1987:379).

A questionnaire study of supervisors and supervisees (Kadushin 1990) asked each supervisor to indicate briefly “their two greatest strengths displayed in performing the role of supervisors” and “their two greatest shortcomings.” A total of 483 supervisors generated 809 comments about their shortcomings. The largest cluster of comments by supervisors identifying shortcomings concerned the exercise of managerial authority. In all, 224 comments (28 percent) from supervisors identifying shortcomings cited problems around the use of administrative authority in reviewing, evaluating, and delegating work and a general antipathy to the bureaucratic requirements of a middle management position. This was the single largest coherent grouping of shortcomings cited. In detailing their shortcomings in supervision, supervisors said the following:

- I have a very hard time telling people what to do.
- I do not like to confront my staff with problems or inadequacies in their work.
- I hate having to reprimand or discipline a supervisee.
- I have difficulty confronting transgressions.
- I have difficulty terminating an employee even though it might be clearly indicated.
- I have weak limit-setting confrontation skills.
- I avoid performance evaluations by prolonged procrastination.
- It’s hard for me to set limits, to say “no.”
- My problem lies in confronting poor, negative performance.
- I don’t like to deal with monitoring, paperwork requirements.
- I find it extremely difficult to enforce policies and rules which give little meaning for work down with clients.
- I must say that I lack optimal assertiveness in proposing unpleasant, but necessary, tasks to supervisees.
- I am too tolerant of incompetence and not enough of a disciplinarian.
- My disdain for bookkeeping, quality assurance, red tape is one of my principle shortcomings.
- I am reluctant to give negative feedback.
- I hate the evaluation process, and I hate to reprimand and discipline.
- One shortcoming is that I hesitate to delegate work, out of concern for my supervisees, so that I end up doing a lot of the work myself.
- I find it difficult to confront supervisees on their failure to perform (repeatedly) necessary tasks. I tend to put it off.

Copeland, Dean, and Wladkowski (2011) noted that social work supervisors are frequently confronted with ethical dilemmas associated with the use of power and authority. In response, we might note that power and authority are intrinsically neutral.

They can be used to coerce and dominate and to achieve socially undesirable objectives. However, power and authority can also be used to achieve highly desirable objectives, and not all supervisors are reluctant to use them. In Minnesota, for example, Ferguson (2006:56–57) reported that child welfare supervisors spend as much of their time “monitoring, reviewing, and responding to caseworker’s activities and progress to ensure the attainment of policies and procedures,” as they do “listening, guiding, and directing the caseworker to assist ... clients in solving ... problems.” The most benign, productive use of power in social work is not for the purpose of control or self-aggrandizement, but rather is for the purpose of organizing human resources to achieve agency objectives—to get things done that help clients by helping workers.

#### ***Organizational Factors Attenuating Supervisory Power and Authority***

Reluctance and avoidance in the exercise of administrative authority by supervisors may be only partially the consequence of the fact that vigorous exercise of power and authority is antithetical to social work values and practice precepts. It may also derive from, and be reinforced by, a recognition that the supervisor’s actual power and authority is more apparent than real.

Although the supervisor uses his or her authority to control, he or she is at the same time controlled by that authority. The nature of the delegated authority sets clear limits to the supervisor’s jurisdiction and clearly prescribes boundaries to his or her authority. The supervisor is not authorized to employ certain sanctions, offer certain kinds of rewards, or intrude on certain aspects of the workers’ behavior. Authority is the domestication of unregulated power; it explicates the prerogatives and limitations in the exercise of power (Dornbusch and Scott 1975).

Some of the attenuation of supervisory power results from factors that are inherent in a human service agency’s organization and structure and in the nature of the social worker’s tasks. Effective exercise of supervisory authority and power requires that certain prerequisite conditions be operative. Administrative control requires clarity in goals and objectives so that both the worker and the supervisor know the activities the workers should undertake. It also requires the supervisor to know clearly what the worker is doing and to judge whether or not what the worker is doing is being done correctly. None of these conditions, however, have been generally characteristic of the social work supervisory situation. Human services very often have had multiple, sometimes even conflicting, goals expressing the ambivalence of the community regarding the problem the agency addresses and the clients they serve.

Handler pointed to the fact that the enabling legislation establishing most social service programs is replete with vague, ill-defined, ambiguously stated objectives and criteria. “Vague language in the statutes creates a ‘downward flow’ of discretion until the lowest level field officer interprets rules and guidelines for specific cases” (Handler 1979:9). The direct service worker was thus invested with a considerable amount of discretion in selecting objectives in individual cases.

In many fields of practice, managed care, performance contracting, privatization,



and welfare reform have effectively reduced supervisory and worker discretion by prioritizing policy goals and monitoring compliance (Cohen 2003; Morgen 2001). However, even if agency objectives have in the short run become less open to multiple interpretations, in time those reforms will be compelled to respond to the need to individualize the application of agency service. As observed by Evans and Harris (2004:871), “The proliferation of rules and regulations should not automatically be equated with greater control over professional discretion; paradoxically, more rules may create more discretion.” Lipsky (1980:15) noted that the characteristics of the direct service social workers’ jobs “make it difficult if not impossible to severely reduce discretion. They involve complex tasks for which elaboration of rules, guidelines, or instructions cannot circumscribe the alternatives.” The situations encountered are too complicated, too unpredictable, too individualized, and too idiosyncratic to “reduce to programmatic formats.” Workers need discretion “because the accepted definition of their tasks calls for sensitive observation and judgments that are not reducible” (Lipsky 1980:15) to specific rules, regulations, and procedures. However, because each client is in many respects unique, discretion must be given the worker in responding to the unique aspects of the situation (Savaya and Spiro 1997). Invariably, both the external policy environment and the need to individualize social work practice compromise supervisory authority.

If, in the past, direct service workers enjoyed “considerable discretion in part because society [did] not want computerized public service and rigid application of standards at the expense of the individual situation” (Lipsky 1980:23), in recent years this has changed in some venues (Moses, Weaver, Furman, and Lindsey 2003)—often with unintended consequences for client outcomes (McBeath and Meezan 2009). Only the worker can know the details of the individual situation. The nature of the social worker’s job makes it difficult to control, without producing unintended consequences, because each situation encountered is nonstandardized, diffuse, uncertain, unpredictable, and highly individualized (Rzepnicki and Johnson 2005). These are the characteristics of a work situation that demands allocation of a large measure of discretion to the person in actual contact with the client—the supervisee. The relevant research shows that the less specific the task and the less standardized the job, the less likely it can be controlled (Litwak 1964), which is apparently a rule-of-thumb that applies to robots as well (Jenkins, Nicolescu, and Mataric 2004).

Complex, ambiguous, and uncertain situations can best be responded to incrementally, with each step determining the next step. Only the worker in direct contact with the client and aware of the details regarding each step is in a position to implement such a strategy.

Not only are the situations the worker needs to address nonstandardized, but so are the intervention techniques that the worker needs to apply. The services provided by most social agencies

rely heavily on the application of technologies that are nonroutine, complex, and indeterminate. The variability of client needs and requests and the difficulties involved in understanding the problems they present when combined with the relatively unspecific nature of the techniques employed and the still considerable uncertainty about their

effects, make it unfeasible for the organization to prescribe uniform technical processes. (Patti 1983:137)

Social work activity is characterized by what has been variously termed *role performance invisibility* and *low compliance observability*. This factor, inherent in the work situation, further attenuates the supervisor's administrative power. The possibilities of direct control and observation of workers' behavior are very limited. Consequently, although the supervisor can "order" that certain things be done and that they be done in a prescribed manner, there often is no way he or she can be certain that the directives will be carried out. Ultimately, the supervisor is dependent on the worker's report to him or her that work has been done in the way it should be done. As Gummer noted:

In social agencies supervision is based on the workers' reports of what they are doing rather than a supervisor's direct observation of the work. Organizations with this structure have significant control and accountability problems since the line workers are able to operate with a high degree of autonomy and can screen their behavior from the direct surveillance of administrators. These structural conditions promote discretionary behavior of workers, who in the privacy of the interviewing room are free to interpret and apply agency policy and procedure as they see fit. While confidentiality is designed to protect the client, it protects the worker as well. (Gummer 1979:220)

Arguing that workers have too much autonomy, Handler observed the following:

It is extremely difficult to monitor social service activity (i.e., to obtain reliable information on decision making so that performance can be evaluated); and if activity is not readily susceptible to monitoring then supervisory offices lack the necessary information to assert control. A system that limits the amount of information available to supervisors and controller increases the discretionary power of field-level personnel. (Handler 1979:18)

The less information the supervisor has about the worker's activity, the less amenable is the "worker to supervisory control and discipline" (Handler 1979:108).

Gambrill and Wiltse (1974), in their study of California foster care, found workers that had considerable decisional discretion. However, they noted that the supervisor's failure to adequately monitor the worker's activity is inherent in a situation in which a typical unit caseload for which the supervisor is responsible consists of 245 children:

Even if the supervisor was extremely conscientious there would have to be a well-developed monitoring system to enable him/her to keep up with what is happening to 245 different children....The problem of too great a discretionary component is heightened by the impossibility of adequate supervision under the current system. (Gambrill and Wiltse 1974:18)

Hasenfeld (1983:157) concluded that "these characteristics ... accord line staff [the direct service worker] considerable discretion."

To sum up briefly, authority and power are difficult to exercise effectively in the face of ambiguous objectives, uncertain procedures, and indeterminate interventions about which the supervisor has only speculative knowledge.

The problem of control is intensified in the context of increasing caseload pressure. In an empirical study of the effects of higher caseloads on worker autonomy and discretion, Brintnall (1981:296) found that "caseload pressures tend to make effective supervision of staff by upper level officials unusually difficult increasing the latitude afforded lower level staff to act independently."

### ***Supervisee Countervailing Power***

The supervisor's authority and power are limited not only by ideology, reluctance, and organizational considerations but also by the countervailing power of the supervisees (Savaya and Spiro 1997). The traditional social work literature has underestimated the power of the worker and overestimated the power that the supervisor is actually able to exert in implementing the functions of administrative supervision. Although control in the relationship is asymmetrical, it is not unidirectional. The supervisor has, clearly and admittedly, more authority and power than the supervisees, but the supervisees also have some power in the relationship even though they may lack formal authority (Mechanic 1964; Janeway 1980). Supervisors have their measures of control; supervisees have their countermeasures. Both authority and power are transactional in nature. The reciprocal (in this case, the supervisee) has to grant the authority of the supervisor and respond to the power the supervisor has the ability to exercise. Authority can be rejected, and power can be resisted.

The concept that power is ultimately based on dependency might be usefully applied in analyzing the countervailing power of the supervisees. The supervisees depend on the supervisor for rewards, for solutions to work problems, for necessary information, and for approval and support. However, the supervisor is also dependent on the supervisees. The supervisor may have the formal power to assign, direct, and review work, but he or she is dependent on the supervisees' willingness and readiness to actually do the work. If supervisees fail to do the required work because of opposition or resistance, the supervisor is in trouble with the administration, which holds the supervisor responsible for getting the work done. If the supervisee exercises his or her prerogative to find another job, the supervisor may be left "holding the bag." Supervisees thus have the power of making life difficult for the supervisor. In discussing her present assignment, a supervisee said the following:

[She could] drive her supervisor frantic if she wanted to—and she sometimes did. She was responsible for processing foster home applications. If she wanted to gum up the works she just took longer to do them—always for legitimate reasons—it was difficult to schedule an interview with the father or the last time she scheduled an interview with the family they had to cancel it when she got out there because of some emergency, or there were special problems which required more detailed exploration, etc.

A supervisee wrote that a supervisor newly appointed to the unit had the tendency to "command" his supervisees to carry out specific tasks and responsibilities, refusing to discuss the reasons behind them and replying coldly, "Because I said so," when asked. The group of supervisees resented this approach to the extent that they "boycotted" the supervisor, flatly refusing to do anything more than minimum work required and giving him the "silent treatment." Once this reaction became apparent to the supervisor, he began to be more communicative and understanding and less strictly authoritative than he had been previously.

The willingness to obey is sometimes given key consideration in defining authority. In this view, authority is not delegated from above in the hierarchy but granted from below; it is based on the consent of the governed. If this is the case, then the legitimacy of the supervisor's authority is, in fact, controlled by the supervisees and

can be withdrawn by them (Barnard 1938). Although agency administration legitimates the authority of the supervisor, such authority must be endorsed by supervisees before it can be fully implemented. Both official legitimation and worker endorsement of authority are necessary (Dornbusch and Scott 1975). The power of the supervisees lies in their ability to withhold their work (as in the case of a strike) or to withhold their best effort in a slowdown or indifferent approach to their work.

The power of supervisees is of course constrained by ideological considerations. Professional ethics dictate an obligation to be available for client service that inhibits the power available in withdrawal of effort, tardiness, and absenteeism. However, in the last analysis, the supervisees have the ultimate veto power. They can refuse consent to be governed by resigning from the organization: "You can't fire me; I quit." Power and authority are actualized as influence only as the reciprocal is responsive to these sources of power. The power associated with the authority to fire a person has no significance for someone who does not care if he or she keeps the job. The hijacker has no power over the passenger who is indifferent as to whether he or she lives or dies. The fact that power is given potency only in the response of the recipient to the manifestation of power gives substance to the contention that power and authority cannot be imposed; they need to be granted.

Workers not only have the power of not cooperating; they also have the power of overcompliance or rigid compliance. *The Good Soldier Schweik* (Hašek, Selver, and Lada 1962) was able to bring the army to its knees by compulsive, meticulous compliance with every order in the rule book. Supervisees can effectively sabotage the work of an agency by the literal application of all policies, rules, and procedures. This is sometimes termed *the control paradox* (Miller 2004) or *malicious obedience*.

The worker is the only one who has the knowledge of the intimate details of the client's situation. The worker comes into possession of this knowledge on the basis of a contact that the supervisor cannot observe. The worker then is in possession of considerable knowledge about the case situations for which the supervisor has ultimate responsibility. Such information, which only the worker possesses, can be shared freely, shared partially and selectively, distorted, or withheld in communications with the supervisor. This means that while the worker has no formal grant of authority in relation to the supervisor, the worker has considerable actual power in this relationship.

As a consequence, the supervisor is dependent on the worker for the information that is basic to the exercise of authority. Such information is provided by the workers in verbal reports and/or written records, the substance of which is determined by the worker. Although we would like to believe that outright falsification in social work records or verbal reports is infrequent and atypical, Dresselhaus, Luck, and Peabody (2002) identified a "false positive" rate of 6.4 percent of measured items in their review of medical records compiled by physicians, noting that the individual rate of false positives varied widely. However, rarely are there independent sources of information by which to check the reports made by the worker whose work is being supervised. The written and spoken records either support the worker's decisions or

do not include information that might arouse doubts about the decision. Because the record is written by the worker, “it is not unreasonable to suppose that information would not be included that contradicts [the direct service worker’s] judgments or that reports his unsanctioned behaviour” (Prottas 1979:153). The worker controls the nature of the information obtained from the client and controls the processing of selected information obtained (Yourman and Farber 1996), with as many as 91 percent of supervisees reporting “that they do not always inform their supervisor when they have interacted with patients in ways they believe the supervisor will disapprove” (Farber 2006:186–87). Studies of information shared by supervisees with their supervisor (Pisani 2005) can be summed up by noting that “supervisors should be aware that there is significant information that supervisees do not disclose about themselves, their work with clients, and the supervision relationship” (Ladany, Hill, Corbett, and Nutt 1996:22). Where deceptions, distortions, and omissions are reflected in documentation, the worker, the supervisor, and the agency may be exposed to significant ethical and legal risks (Reamer 2005). The supervisor should assume that spoliation—the intentional or negligent altering, destroying, distorting, hiding, or withholding of agency records—is illegal.

In a detailed study of organizational interaction in a social agency, Pithouse (1985:78) described workers’ “adroit management of supervisory encounters.” In reporting on contacts with supervisors, one worker said:

Louise [supervisor] is great. You know you could tell her anything—you can trust her. But when it comes to supervision I know my cases, so really I tell them from my point of view, do you see? I tell her what I want her to hear. I decide what to talk about and where I want advice, so in a sense it’s not really supervision. If you like, I’m supervising her by what I say. I sort of control it—but it’s alright, she knows how I work and I know how she ticks.

By “knowing” the supervisor, the worker skillfully assembles the information to be shared: “She is able to select, filter or avoid those aspects of the case that might elicit unwanted interest or interference from the supervisor” (Pithouse 1985:86).

The power of the individual supervisee in controlling the workflow (how much work or what kind is done within a given period of time) and his or her control of information fed to the supervisor may be augmented in coalition with other supervisees. Supervisees acting as a group can develop considerable power in controlling their supervisor. The supervisee peer group not only provides support, but it is also a base of organizational allies—a solidarity group that provides a source of power.

The supervisor is also dependent on the supervisees for some kinds of psychic rewards. Approbation from supervisees and expressions of commendation and appreciation from supervisees are sources of intrinsic job satisfaction for the supervisor. It hurts the supervisor never to be told by a supervisee that he or she has been helpful or is a good supervisor. Supervisees can manipulate supervisors’ dependence on such gratification by studied deference and apple-polishing. Blau and Scott (1962) found that one significant source of emotional support for the supervisor was the loyalty of his or her supervisees. The threat of withdrawal of loyalty acts as a constraint on the supervisor’s exercise of his or her authority and power.

The power of the supervisee also derives from the supervisors need to be

considered a “good” supervisor as described in the literature—a self-image the supervisor seeks to establish and maintain. By manifesting attitudes of unconditional acceptance and respect, adhering to the principles of participatory democracy and mutuality, and communicating approachability and openness, the supervisor is vulnerable to pressure from a strongly motivated and assertive supervisee. The fact that the direct service worker has considerable power despite the fact that there is no formal grant of authority is aptly illustrated in the following vignette written by a supervisor in a daycare agency whose supervisee, Joan, was a child care worker:

There were times that I thought Joan was taking advantage of my understanding nature. For example, I felt it was important for her to be on time so she could greet all the children when they arrived. This would establish for the children a mood for the day, a feeling of continuity, a trust that all is going to be well again. Often Joan would be late or would arrive early only to leave in order to buy coffee across the street. She had a million excuses—buses not being on time, dying of hunger, and alarms not going off. I had a feeling that Joan’s most creative part of the day was in the morning thinking up excuses to give me for not being in the room when the children arrived. There was a point where I should have said something like, “All right, Joan, either you’re here in the classroom at 8:40 or I will start taking money out of your paycheck.” Why didn’t I take action? There were several reasons, the most unattractive being that I didn’t want Joan to see me as unfriendly, insensitive, and unempathetic. This was a mistake on my part. (Miller, Mailick, and Miller 1973:88)

The supervisee can control the use of power by the supervisor by appealing to the norms of fairness, collegueship, and professional behavior. This is not the way one should treat another human, another colleague, or another professional. To the extent that such norms are accepted by the supervisor, they act as constraints on his or her behavior. Holloway and Brager (1989:194) pointed out that the “culture of human service organizations” constrains the supervisor’s options: “The centrality of themes in social work such as self-determination and empowerment, respect for the needs and interest of others, openness and mutuality...prescribes how human beings should interact with one another.” These values then prescribe the parameters that dictate some of the supervisor’s behavior in supervision.

The countervailing power of supervisees relative to their supervisors has increased by subordinating both parties to the moral authority of the social work profession, embodied by NASW (Strom-Gottfried 1999) and the oversight authority of the state licensing boards (Boland-Prom 2009; Gray 1986) and the courts (Guest and Dooley 1999). In a review of 894 ethics complaints filed with NASW between 1986 and 1997, Strom-Gottfried (1999) found that 174 were filed against supervisors by their supervisees, typically for “poor supervision”—the failure to share or maintain performance standards with workers, flawed performance reviews, irregular supervision, or holding sessions that were ineffective or unclear. Improper supervision, Guest and Dooley (1999) argued, makes the supervisor liable to the supervisee for malpractice.

Being in a one-down position relative to the greater power of the supervisor, the supervisees can claim the status of victims of oppression. Having generally become sensitive to the plight of victims, supervisors tend to respond with guilt to anyone implicitly or explicitly claiming the status of victim. The supervisees can use the power conferred by victim status to control the behavior of the supervisor. Appeals to

professional values, the immorality associated with “blaming the victim,” and appeals to fair play empower the supervisee.

A knowledge of agency rules can be used effectively by the supervisee in exerting influence on the supervisor. The supervisor is as much constrained by agency rules as is the supervisee. Quoting a relevant rule to the supervisor is among the more effective techniques used by supervisees in studies of upward influence procedures (Schilit and Locke 1982:310). Comprehensive knowledge of agency rules and procedures helps the supervisee equalize power with supervisors.

The countervailing power of the supervisee vis-à-vis the supervisor is central to the question of worker autonomy and the demands of the organization mediated by the supervisor. The strain between these often-conflicting pressures is a persistent theme in organizational literature. This will be discussed once again in [chapter 10](#) in dealing with the question of worker independence from supervision and the problem of the professional in a bureaucracy.

### **The Problem of Rules, Noncompliance, and Disciplinary Action**

Although the considerations cited above indicate the problems involved in implementing authority and power in monitoring and controlling supervisees' decisions and actions, it does not absolve the supervisor of the responsibility for performing those functions. The supervisor still has to implement administrative supervision in accordance with agency procedures and rules.

#### ***The Functional Value of Rules***

By monitoring conformance to agency rules, standards, and procedures, the supervisor permits the agency to get its work done effectively. By prescribing, proscribing, and monitoring what should be done and what cannot be done, the supervisor is ensuring predictability and reliability of performance. Workers doing different things, whose work needs to be coordinated, can be assured that the work their partners are doing will be in accordance with some uniform expectations. The worker in the unit of the agency offering service to the unmarried mother interested in placing her child for adoption can discuss the characteristics of an approved adoptive home without having herself seen one. The worker can do this because he or she knows the requirements and procedures that regulate the work of colleagues in the adoptive home-finding unit. Workers have to have confidence in the reliability with which these fellow workers will follow prescribed procedures as a prerequisite for performing their own tasks.

The supervisor, as protector of agency and professional rules, standards, and procedures, has the responsibility of seeing that policy is uniformly interpreted. If each worker were permitted to establish his or her own policies or to idiosyncratically interpret centrally established policies, this would ultimately set client against client and worker against worker. A liberal interpretation of policy by one client's worker is an act of discrimination against the client of a second worker. It would encourage competition among workers in an effort to tap agency resources to meet the needs of

their own clients, with whom they are, understandably enough, primarily concerned.

The general emphasis in social work on autonomy, self-determination, and individualization tends to encourage a negative attitude toward rules. Rules suggest that people are interchangeable rather than unique and different. The negative attitude toward formalization of prescribed behavior in rules and procedures has, of course, support in the real negative consequences that can result from their application. They do limit the autonomy of the worker; they discourage initiative; they tend to make the agency muscle-bound, less flexible, and less adaptable—"set in its ways." They predispose toward a routinization of worker activity. Rules can become ends in themselves rather than means for achieving organizational objectives. They restrict the freedom to individualize agency response in meeting particular needs of particular clients and encourage deception and duplicity as workers feel a need to "get around" the rules.

Social workers are generally well aware of, and sensitive to, the negative consequences of rules. It might be helpful to the supervisor who inevitably faces the responsibility of communicating and enforcing rules and uniform procedures if some conviction could be developed regarding the positive aspects of rules.

Although each rule, standard, and prescribed procedure, if taken seriously, limits worker autonomy by deciding in advance what action should be taken in a particular situation, the rules permit more efficient agency operation. When the recurrent situation to which a rule is applied is encountered, it need not be subject to an exhaustive process of review and decision making. The supervisee does not need to discuss the situation with the supervisor and can act with the assurance that the decision, congruent with the procedure, has agency sanction. This relieves anxiety and frees the supervisee's energies to deal with those unique aspects of the client's situation that cannot be codified in some formal policy statement. If everything in every case had to be decided afresh, the worker could easily be overwhelmed and immobilized. Here, as elsewhere, there is no real freedom without clearly defined laws. They provide a structure within which workers can operate with comfort, assurance, and support. Rules provide a clear codification of expectations. They communicate to the worker how he or she is expected to respond in a variety of recurrently encountered situations. This understanding is particularly important in social work, where the various groups the social worker faces communicate contradictory, and often conflicting, expectations. The community may expect the social worker to respond in one way to a client's problems, whereas the client and professional colleagues may expect the social worker to respond in different ways. The rules offer a worker the serenity of unambiguous guidelines as to how the agency expects him to respond in defining clearly the "minimum set of behaviors which are prescribed and proscribed." The rules mitigate conflicts to which workers might otherwise be exposed.

Although rules and regulations have the negative effect of decreasing worker discretion and autonomy, they have the positive effect of decreasing role ambiguity and increasing role clarity. As a result of a set of formalized rules and procedures and



a detailed job description, the worker knows more clearly and with greater certainty what he or she should be doing and how he or she should be doing it.

If the agency wisely formulates its rules, standards, and procedures with active worker participation and if it further provides for a periodic critical review of them, the agency, of necessity, must make a systematic analysis of professional practice. The best rules are, after all, merely a clear codification of practice wisdom—what most workers have found is the best thing to do in certain situations. The call for rules and procedures is, consequently, a call for a hard analysis of practice.

Ultimately, rules protect the client because the procedures to which all workers adhere in a uniform manner assure the client of equitable service. The client is assured that another client will not be given preferential treatment because the worker likes the other client better, nor will the client be treated worse because his or her attitude or bearing have antagonized the worker. If a client meets the qualification as codified in agency procedures, the worker is under some constraint to approve an application for adoption or authorize a request for a special assistance grant, for example. Rules and regulations are definite; the worker may be capricious. Disregard for agency rules and procedures enable the worker to meet client needs more effectively in some instances. However, it may also free the worker to act in arbitrary, inequitable, and opportunistic ways toward a client in other instances.

Rules reduce the possibility of friction between supervisors and supervisees. They set impersonal limits to exceptions that the supervisee might press for. They are also a source of support and sanction to the supervisor in making decisions that threaten the relationship. Rules depersonalize decisions that might be resented as a personal affront by the supervisee: "I wish I could go along with your request, but agency regulations prevent this." More positively, the procedural norms substantiate the desirability of the decision the supervisor is making: "In these kinds of problems, we have found such an approach is not particularly helpful. In fact, based on our experience, we have developed a procedure which requires that the worker not take such action."

Rules protect the worker from arbitrary, personalized decisions by the supervisor, from favoritism, and from discriminating acts based on irrelevant criteria. Although rules constrain those "to whom they are applied," they constrain the "behavior of the rule applier as well." Rules provide protection to the supervisee. If rules are followed, even a bad outcome is excusable. "Rules and regulations [are used] for the purpose of legitimizing errors" (Benveniste 1987:16). If rules and professional standards are followed and mistakes are made, the agency has the obligation to defend a worker in attempts at innovative practice.

Rules reduce the possibility of supervisor-supervisee friction because they operate as remote controls. Supervision can occur *in absentia* through adherence to a universally applied rule rather than through the direct, personal intercession of the supervisor suggesting that something be done in a particular way. Control takes place at a distance in the absence of the supervisor. A rule is a "definition of expectation." The explicitness of a rule makes it clear when a required action was not taken or

when a prohibited action did take place. A rule therefore provides the supervisor with a guideline to nonperformance and objectively legitimates the application of sanctions.

Gouldner (1954) pointed out that rules can be used as devices to create social obligations. By deliberately refraining on occasion from enforcing rules, the supervisor can create a sense of obligation on the part of supervisees. Because the supervisor has been lenient about enforcing certain requirements, he or she can more freely ask the supervisee to extend himself to do some things which need to be done. Blau and Scott (1962) found that supervisors in a county welfare department differentially enforced rules to attain the effect of developing loyalty and social obligation. The supervisor employing such an approach, however, needs to have a sophisticated knowledge of the work situation so that he or she can “judge which operating rules can be ignored without impairing efficiency” (Blau and Scott 1962:143):

The wise supervisor knows which rules should and can be ignored to facilitate worker morale or to promote unit goals and she will either modify them or look the other way as they are violated. Rules are the chips with which organizations stake supervisors to play the organizational game. (Holloway and Brager 1989:82)

The supervisor gives priority to behaviors that are “required” and those that are “prohibited.” The rationale for designating the behaviors as either required or prohibited is, we assume, that they have greatest potency for helping or hurting the client. Consequently, they have to be most carefully monitored. But between “required” and “prohibited,” there are many behaviors that are less crucial and critical for the effective implementation of tasks the worker performs in offering service to clients. Consequently, the supervisor can view such modifications of prescribed role behavior with greater permissiveness and equanimity, formulating a zone of indifference.

The relaxed supervisor can adopt a flexible attitude toward agency rules. He or she accepts the fact that some degree of noncompliance is, in all likelihood, inevitable. He or she recognizes that not all procedures are of equal importance and that some can be ignored or subverted without much risk to agency or client.

Helping the staff to understand clearly the nature and purpose of the agency’s rules lessens the dangers of ritualism and overconformity. Rules, standards, regulations, and procedures often become ends in themselves rather than a means of more effectively serving the client. If workers are encouraged to participate in the formulation of rules and procedures, if they are helped to understand and critically evaluate the situations that required formulation of the rules, they will have less of a tendency to apply them in a rigid, routine way. Supervisees will be able to apply the rules more flexibly, more appropriately, and with greater conviction. Furthermore, understanding clearly the rationale for a particular rule, the worker will be in a better position to suggest modification in those situations in which the procedure seems inappropriate or self-defeating. To encourage and reward such initiatives, the supervisor needs to be receptive to such suggestions for change communicated by the supervisees.

Steggert (1970:47) spoke to this issue when he asked, “How then does the

[supervisor] in a bureaucratic structure resolve the conflict between the organization's legitimate need for predictability (and thus for a variety of formal controls and coordination procedures) and the human unpredictability resulting from allowing subordinates to function more autonomously?"

### ***Understanding Noncompliance***

The supervisor should make an effort to understand (and, if possible, help the supervisee understand) what lies beneath failure to adhere to and implement agency rules, regulations, and standards. Here, as always, the assumption is that behavior is purposive. It may be that the supervisee does not know clearly what is expected of him and does not clearly understand what it is he or she is supposed to be doing. Noncompliance might then yield to a clarification of what is called for by agency policy. The worker may understand what is required and may be in agreement with what is required, but he or she may be unable to meet the demands of the rule or procedure. The worker may not know enough or is not capable enough to comply. Education and training are required, rather than criticism, to obtain compliance.

Although it had been agreed that Mr. F. would arrange for group meetings of the patients on his ward, he had consistently and adroitly avoided scheduling such meetings. Despite repeated discussion of the need for this and tentative plans, no meetings were held. Finally, in response to the supervisor's growing insistence and impatience, Mr. F. shared the fact that he knew very little about how to conduct a group meeting, despite all his early verbalized knowledge, and was very anxious about getting started with a group.

The rules, standards, and regulations of managed care, public policy, and large, complex social agencies are often voluminous and sometimes contradictory, and they are frequently undergoing revision and modification. Noncompliance may result from failure to know which rule to apply or how to apply it. Such actions might more properly be classified as practice errors rather than noncompliance. They are mistakes that are not due to any willful deviance or negligence.

The ability to fulfill task responsibilities may also relate to the client and the client's situation rather than to any inadequacies on the part of the worker. The client may be so resistive to help, or the resources that are available to change the situation may be so limited, that the worker avoids contact with the family:

Children in foster care had been ordered by the court to be returned to the physical custody of the mother against agency recommendations. The worker, prior to this order, had been working with one of the teenage children, Sally, around school adjustment, adolescent conflicts, etc. Following the return of Sally to the mother, the worker failed to keep a scheduled appointment with Sally and did not schedule another appointment. When this was discussed in a supervisory conference, the worker indicated that with Sally's return to her own mother she felt no confidence that she could be of any help. The situation in the house was such that she did not feel that anything she could do would enable Sally to change.

Noncompliance may result from a disagreement with policy or procedure. The worker may regard compliance as contrary to his or her definition of the agency's objective. This might require some discussion of the purpose of the policy in an effort to reconcile it with the worker's view of agency objectives. The worker may in fact be correct in claiming that agency objectives would best be served by ignoring the rules in this instance and amending or revising them. For instance, during the 1960s, social

workers in West Coast public welfare departments were fired after they refused to conduct “midnight raids” to check on the continued eligibility of Aid to Families of Dependent Children clients. They strongly felt that such procedures were a violation of clients’ rights and their own professional standards.

Noncompliance may result from some incompatibility between agency policy and procedures and the worker’s personal values or the values of her reference group (Handler 1973).

Mrs. R’s caseload included an African American family with four children. Part of the difficulty resulted from inadequate housing and Mrs. R, was helping them to find a larger apartment. However, she avoided exploring the possibilities which might be available in a large neighborhood housing project. In discussions with the supervisor, she indicated that she felt it inadvisable for black and white families to be living together and was reluctant to help her clients move into the housing project. This was in contradiction to the nondiscriminatory policies of the agency, and illegal.

And by the same token,

A point of persistent difficulty in Mrs. L’s handling of her caseload was her consistent failure to inform clients of the different kinds of services and financial help to which they might be entitled, despite the fact that the procedure called for sharing this information. She had a strong feeling that many of the clients were getting as much, or more, than they needed and that sharing this information was just inviting a raid on the county treasury.

Noncompliance may result from a conflict between bureaucratic demands and casework goals, as perceived by the supervisee:

Ms. B had accepted a gift from a client. Her supervisor called attention to the fact that acceptance of gifts from clients was not in accordance with agency policy. Ms. B. said, in response, that she was aware of this but felt that if she had not accepted the gift the client would feel that she was rejecting her. She had accepted because this helped strengthen the relationship.

In general terms, this is the classic conflict between the bureaucratic orientation and the service orientation.

Workers may decide that some actions need to be taken in behalf of service to the client, even though the actions conflict with agency policy. In this sense, noncompliance comes close to innovation, permitting individualization of agency policy and enabling the agency to serve the client more effectively. It illustrates the fact that noncompliance may be functional. Such noncompliance was noted by a participant observation researcher in a British social agency:

Sometimes social workers found themselves in a situation of conflicting loyalties, particularly when a client was in conflict, or potential conflict, with authority—usually doing something that was illegal or which involved deception of some kind. Examples of this were dealing in stolen goods, taking drugs, “fiddling” with the gas meter, or withholding information about earnings from [the Department of Health and Social Security, DHSS]. Social workers, as part of “the authorities” themselves, felt that they were, at least in principle, expected to be on the side of respectability and observance of the law. But they also felt that their relationship to the client necessitated loyalty to him or her. In this situation there was a range of strategies that social workers could adopt. They could, first of all, avoid knowing about the client’s deviant behaviour. Sometimes social workers confided in their colleagues that they suspected that Mrs. X was on drugs, or Mrs. Y had a cohabitee, but would not discuss this with the client concerned. Often clients played along with this, and withheld information from the social worker about some of their activities. Thus, Mrs. J only told her social worker that she was on drugs when the police had raided her flat and she was about to appear in court.

Second, the social worker might know what was going on, but maintain a neutral attitude in relation to the client, neither encouraging the deviant behaviour nor informing the relevant authorities.

Social workers might, on the other hand, side with the client secretly, so long as the conflict did not come out into the open. They might, for instance, encourage the client to earn extra money and not notify the DHSS. For some social workers, being “in on” the deviant act was to them a token of being trusted, which they valued for its own

A clear majority of the sixty-five social workers Pearson (1975) interviewed in a study of "industrial deviance" in a social agency admitted complicity in such acts of client violation of rules and procedures of the agency. Pawlak (1976) reported a similar kind of "tinkering" with the system on the part of the worker.

A survey study of thirteen hundred workers in a state department of public welfare found that "more than two-thirds of the workers reported they bent, ignored, conveniently forgot or otherwise subverted departmental rules" (O'Connor and Spence 1976:178). By the same token, a survey of 362 clinical social workers "revealed that the misuse of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders ... in under- and overdiagnosing clients [was] often intentional" (Kirk and Kutchins 1988:225).

Such noncompliance may be a necessary and useful expedient in dealing with conflicting and irreconcilable demands. The worker, subjected to the pressure of client needs in the context of bureaucratic rules and procedures that make difficult the satisfaction of such needs, bends or breaks the rules. In such instances, supervisors often tolerate or ignore nonconformity (Jacobs 1969).

Green (1966) pointed out that the pull toward overidentification of social workers with the client is likely to be greatest in large, highly bureaucratic organizations and systems. The client is often viewed as a "victim" of the same bureaucracy in managed care: "Thus the social work victim unconsciously identifies with the client victim" (Green 1966:75). This leads to the temptation to make an alliance with the client against agency regulations and procedures, resulting in noncompliance with agency policy.

Noncompliance may result from the fact that the supervisee is subject to a variety of pressures from the client and is dependent on the client for psychic gratification. In this sense, the client has power over the supervisee that may force him to act in contravention to agency or third-party policy. Supervisees are subject to rewards from clients such as expressions of gratification, praise, affection, and friendship. They are subject to punishments from clients such as expressions of aggression, hostility, deprecation. Supervisees would like to be told that they have been helpful to the family, that they are loved for it, and that they are wonderful people; supervisees tend to avoid taking action that might result in the client's telling them that they are "stupid bastards who never did know what it was all about and have never been of much help to anybody." Noncompliance may then follow from supervisees' being pressured by the client to do what the client wants them to do, not what the agency or their professional conscience dictates to be necessary and desirable. A supervisee in protective service wrote:

The agency is reasonably clear as to the circumstances which require initiating a petition for removal of the child. Of course, only the worker knows the specifics of a particular case so a lot depends on the worker's discretion. But in this instance of a black four-year-old boy in the home of a single-parent [Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, TANF] family, I really knew the kid was being abused. Yet whenever I even hinted at starting procedures to remove the child, which is what I should have done according to agency policy, the mother began to get hostile and abusive, accusing me of being a "meddling white racist." She knew how to manipulate me, making me feel anxious, guilty,

and uncertain. I could, of course, have discussed this with my supervisor but I was afraid that it would end in a firm decision to remove the child and, given the control this mother had, I did not want to have to fight with her in implementing such a decision.

Supervisee noncompliance may be prompted by a desire to make the job easier, less boring, or more satisfying. Noncompliance is, in such instances, a response to the worker's effort to "increase his own power and status and freedom and security while shedding uncongenial work and unwelcome responsibilities" (Jay 1967:89). These are the pragmatic rewards of noncompliance. As Levy noted in discussing the activities of some workers in a county welfare department:

Employees begin to identify with and work within the logic of the "system." This entails the playing of a highly elaborate game in which the general idea is to make one's job as easy as possible through meeting enough statistical requirements to keep administrators and supervisors off one's back, doing just enough for clients so [one] won't be bothered by them and keeping [one's] caseload as low as possible by "transferring out" as many cases as possible and accepting as few as [one] can. (Levy 1970:172)

Noncompliance may result from the effort to cope with the requirements and stress of the work. It may be an expedient adaptation in managing the work so as to get it done with the least possible harm to the client and reduced discomfort and increased satisfaction to the worker. The nature of the work they do and the stringent constraints that limit their ability to be of help pressures direct service workers to adopt such expedients in implementing their jobs. Noncompliance or modified compliance may then be seen to be the direct service worker's response to the problems the job poses for her. A supervisee wrote:

After a time you get to be self-protective. You learn how to "manage" the clients so that they impose less of a burden. I remember one case of a middle-aged woman in marital counseling. She was very dependent, talked incessantly, and called me continually. Even though I recognized it was part of the service, I always "arranged" to be going out if she caught me in. She gradually got the message, "Don't call us, we'll call you."

A supervisee in corrections wrote:

There are a number of different circumstances which require revocation of parole. But that's a lot of extra work and a lot of harder work because it means a big hassle with the parolee. Okay, if something is very serious you play it according to the regulations. But if it is something ambiguous and you figure that even if something happens you can justify not having revoked parole, you figure, "To hell with the regulations, why bust your ass?"

Noncompliance may be due to psychological considerations, as in the case of the worker who fails to turn in a sufficiently detailed record because of anxiety regarding self-exposure. Similarly, noncompliance may relate to developmental experiences. A supervisor wrote:

I had a twenty-five-year-old worker who seemed unable to follow rules. When she first came to the unit, she seemed bright, eager, and intelligent. I was aware her father was a judge in a small town in another state. I did not realize how this was affecting her until several months passed. She never let me know, through "out" slips, where she might be in case of emergency. One day she was needed for an emergency, had not left an "out" slip or any word of where she might be located. I kept going to her office and asking other workers if they had seen her. Finally, she came bursting into my office where my secretary and another worker were and started blasting me. I stated, "Just a minute, young lady." The two people in my office quickly left. I pointed out to her that certain rules and regulations are necessary for running our unit efficiently and why I had been requesting "out" slips from her. What I had failed to realize was that her actions were those of an adolescent, that she still was rebellious and was projecting some of her own rebellion toward her father (an authoritarian figure in two ways—father and judge) on me and the

department (the “System”).

The supervisor, of course, is making a speculative inference that needs confirmation in discussions with the supervisee. If confirmed, the incident illustrated noncompliance based on personal developmental problems.

Noncompliance may also be an act of hostility toward the supervisor or the agency he or she represents, as when the worker deliberately fails to implement agency policies or procedures as an act of defiance. There is personal satisfaction in such covert manifestations of hostility.

Noncompliance may be a deliberate act of defiance in a conscious effort to call attention to policies that need to be changed. In such cases, the worker is pointing to the need for change by challenging the system (Merton 1957:360).

Noncompliance may be a response to real dangers encountered on the job. The worker—often a young, white female—is obliged, in many instances, to go into apartment buildings in areas characterized by high rates of crime. Social workers have, in fact, been mugged, assaulted, and molested during the course of their work. Given the question, *Are you faced with personal safety issues in your primary employment practice?*, 44 percent of the respondents to the Workforce study of licensed social workers answered affirmatively, and 30 percent did not think that their employers adequately addressed the safety issues they faced (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004). When social workers are anxious about their safety, visits to clients may be resisted and not scheduled (Mayer and Rosenblatt 1975a).

#### ***Monitoring Noncompliance: Supervisor Responsibility***

Understanding the worker’s behavior is not the same as excusing it. Even though there may be understandable reasons for noncompliant behavior, clients are still harmed as a result, and the agency’s objectives are not implemented. Being “therapeutic” to workers in permitting them to continue to operate contrary to agency policy may be antitherapeutic to the clients.

From an ethical perspective, supervisors are in a defensible position in requiring workers to do what the agency asks of them and in enforcing agency policy, rules, and procedures. The Milford Conference Report (1929) placed early emphasis on the professional obligation of the worker to adhere “to the policies and regulations of the organization. ... Policies once adopted by an agency are binding upon its entire personnel.” The Code of Ethics of the NASW (2008) states that the social worker should adhere to commitments made to the employing agency. Levy (1982:48, 50) noted that “the very acceptance of employment in a social organization constitutes, in itself, a promise of loyalty to the organization and devotion to its purpose and function ... whatever procedures have been defined for accomplishing the work of the social organization nonadministrative staff are obliged to follow.”

Compton and Galaway (1975) strongly supported this obligation. They clearly stated that they do not believe that a “worker who accepts a position as a member of an agency—and who utilizes agency resources—can act as though he were a private practitioner. As a staff member, the worker is bound by the policies of the agency”

(Compton and Galaway 1975:481). Of course, “loyalty and devotion to the employing organization is neither absolute nor infinite” (Levy 1982:48). The NASW Code of Ethics (2008) mandates opposition to (and deviance from) agency policy where clients are harmed by policy and the policy itself is unethical. Deviation is then justified on the grounds of superseding values.

The profession of social work and the community has looked to the supervisor as the first line of defense in behalf of the client, the agency, and the community, in responding to worker behavior that might represent a danger to the client, agency, or community. This charge is embodied in the monitoring, review, and evaluative functions of administrative supervision. When the supervisor has failed, either because of ideological hesitancy, incompetence, or indifference in implementing the functions of administrative supervision, the community has imposed external review-control procedures on the agency.

The child welfare services system reflects the consequences of such failure. Widespread criticism was directed against foster care throughout the 1960s and 1970s. It was said that children were unjustifiably placed and replaced, that children were lost in a system insufficiently and carelessly monitored, and that damage was done to children who lived for long periods of time in limbo because of failure to review their situation. In the drive to achieve “permanence for children” as early as possible, procedures were developed outside the agency, in court review of placements and in citizen review boards and panels.

In many states, Juvenile, Family, and Tribal Courts are authorized to review child welfare cases to determine whether the worker’s decision is in the child’s best interest; this in effect is judiciary supervision of the agency’s work (Badeu n.d.). By 1980, most states had some external agency that monitored and reviewed the decisions and the work of the direct service child-welfare social worker. In 1996, an amendment to the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act called for the implementation of three or more Citizen Review Panels in each state, and the law was reauthorized by the Keeping Children and Families Safe Act of 2003 (Jones and Royse 2008). Now, all states have Citizen Review Boards (Litzelfelner 2001) or Panels (Jones, Litzelfelner, and Ford 2003) authorized to monitor and review the worker’s activities to determine, among other things, “what efforts have been made to carry out permanent placement” plans for a child and “make recommendations” about actions that might be taken (Conte et al. 1981). The ultimate explanation of and justification for such procedures was the perceived failure of the internal agency monitoring and review system—a failure of agency supervision.

The fact that Citizen Review Boards and Panels, generally consisting of volunteers, were legally authorized and established to monitor and assess the performance of direct service workers and recommend changes in service intervention is a testimonial to the perceived failure of supervisors, who initially had this review responsibility (Conte et al. 1981). It is clear that if first-line supervisors inadequately review and monitor the work of their supervisees, others outside the profession will take over a measure of this responsibility.



A more committed adherence to the implementation of the essential functions of administrative supervision may help to modify the stereotypical perceptions of “policy makers, governmental executives, and top level agency managers” as well as the public “that somehow social work is antithetical to good management.” The training and personal predispositions of social workers, in this view, “make them ill-suited for managerial positions that require, among other things, rational analysis, a willingness to ferret out inefficient practices and force compliance with policies and procedures” (Patti 1984:25).

### ***Taking Disciplinary Action***

It needs to be noted that most workers, on most occasions, do conscientiously comply with agency policies, rules, and procedures. Noncompliance is the exception. However, the limited number of exceptions give the supervisor a maximum amount of difficulty. A disproportionate amount of time and psychic energy needs to be devoted to the few workers who frequently are noncompliant.

The supervisor in his or her role as protector of agency policies, rules, standards, and procedures may have to get supervisees to do some things in some particular way or have them stop doing some things in some particular way. The supervisor may find himself in a position in which he or she has to employ sanctions to obtain compliance with agency policy, rules, and procedures, in which he or she has to take corrective action. Supervisors face situations in which workers consistently fail to get work done on time; are consistently late or absent; fail to turn in reports or complete documentation; complete forms carelessly; conspicuously loaf on the job; disrupt the work of others by excessive gossiping; are careless with agency cars or equipment; are inconsiderate, insulting, or disrespectful to clients; or fail to keep appointments with personnel of cooperating agencies and services.

Such situations should not be permitted to develop unchecked. If a worker, aware of agency requirements, chooses to violate them, the supervisor has little choice but to engage in some form of discipline, including documentation (Reamer 2005). There generally are prior indications of resistance or opposition to compliance. If earlier manifestations have been ignored and the supervisor “looks the other way,” it becomes progressively more difficult to take action when action can no longer be avoided. The supervisee can rightly claim that the supervisor has been remiss in never having earlier discussed the behavior he or she now wants stopped. The supervisor’s effectiveness in dealing with the situation is reduced by feelings of guilt and defensiveness. A supervisor wrote:

In our last conference of the year, I hesitantly raised the question of B’s persistent lateness to meetings and conferences. I had been aware of this failure on her part, but for a variety of reasons, had overlooked dealing with this directly. At this time, my opening this issue resulted in [B’s] unburdening herself of a number of severe personal and family problems. I dealt with these as appropriately as possible, but referred back to the lateness, etc. B acknowledged her discomfort with her behavior, but felt she had not been sure about my expectations because I had not previously made an issue of this. I agreed...and we ended with some appreciation for not having completely overlooked an important part of her development. The timing was unfortunate, in that this problem should have been dealt with much earlier in the year for it seemed to be symptomatically tied to important personal blockings that were interfering with [B’s] development. Perhaps my “better late than never” behavior was similar to what she had been

doing all year!

The supervisor should discuss in private the problem that calls for a reprimand. To criticize a worker in front of his or her peers makes it more difficult to help him change his or her behavior. A supervisee wrote that she was late in submitting a monthly statistical report:

The supervisor, meeting me in the hall, loudly reprimanded me in the presence of other workers and threatened to put my report-lateness in his evaluation. The supervisor returned to his office without giving me a chance to reply. The supervisor had a chance to release his anger but he was unsuccessful in getting my report in any sooner. I was sore. He publicly called attention to what I had done. It was nobody else's business. He never gave me a chance to explain—or even asked for an explanation.

A reprimand is also best delivered at a time when the supervisor is not upset about the incident. These last two suggestions, which require delay, contradict a third suggestion, that a discussion of the incident should take place as soon as possible after it occurs. However, they can be reconciled by noting that while a delay is desirable for cooling off and for provision of privacy, the delay should be as short as possible.

In the following account, a supervisor took peremptory but necessary action in dealing with noncompliance in a probation and parole office:

I happened to be passing by Helen's door as a client was leaving and overheard her say that he shouldn't worry about completing auto operation and permission forms (an agency requirement) because "they weren't that important." I felt upset that she was cooperating with a client to decrease compliance with important agency regulations. I asked that she meet with me and asked if her client had secured a car, if she had seen proof of a driver's license, insurance, and really thought about giving him permission to drive? I was being accusatory and Helen stated that it was stupid that a grown man should have to have our permission to own and operate his own car. I suggested that perhaps she wasn't aware that without completing the procedures with the required proof, if he committed another offense in which the vehicle was used, the agency would be accountable—that if he were stopped without a permission form he would be taken to jail. It became more of a rebuking lecture than I meant it to be. She said that she wasn't aware of all of this (another failure on my part) and thought that it was just a repressive measure to keep the clients under control. I left her office with the comment that the forms must be completed (an order), that they protected the agency, the client, the community, her, and myself.

The best approach is one which communicates concern for the supervisee, a willingness to listen to his or her explanation of what happened, a desire to understand how he or she sees the situation, and a readiness to help him change. The emphasis is on a change of behavior so as to increase the agency's effectiveness of service rather than on the apprehension and punishment of noncompliance. If the supervisor perceives noncompliance as a threat or an act of hostility, any discussion of the incident is apt to be emotionally charged. Regarding it as a learning opportunity for the worker or as an opportunity for improving the supervisor-supervisee relationship generates a different, more positive attitude.

The objective of such supervisory intervention is preventative and corrective rather than punitive. In reprimanding, the supervisor must be impersonal, specific as to the facts, and consistent in his or her approach. The supervisor needs to be aware that in disciplining one he or she is disciplining all. Supervisor behavior manifested in dealing with one supervisee in a disciplinary action will affect the reactions of all supervisees.

Discipline effectively requires some confidence on the part of the supervisor in the correctness of what he or she is doing, a lack of defensiveness, and an ability to calmly control the interaction. The supervisor should make some record of the incident so that if there is a recurrence and more severe sanctions need to be employed, they can be justified by the record. There is a series of actions the supervisor might take, graded in terms of increasing severity. The first is a joint review of the situation by supervisor and supervisee. The supervisor can offer the worker a warning; if the behavior continues, it can be followed with a verbal reprimand. This might be followed by a written reprimand placed in the record, a lower-than-average evaluation rating, suspension for a limited period, demotion, and, ultimately, dismissal.

Serious disciplinary action such as suspension without pay for a period of time, demotion, or firing requires documentation. Such action will in all probability require a defense in response to a grievance procedure currently operative in most agencies, particularly those under civil service or union contracts.

If individual noncompliance is not effectively dealt with at the supervisory level, the administration may make it a matter for agency policy decision-making. Such matters, when made agency policy, reduce flexibility at the direct service level. All the workers then suffer from some reduction in autonomy as a result of the dereliction in compliance by a few workers. Because of the possibility of such an eventuality, workers tend to support supervisors in their efforts to obtain compliance.

However infrequent termination might be, it is a necessary option in the case of a supervisee whose work is clearly inadequate, clearly unethical, or in consistent clear violation of agency procedures (Rivas 1984). The supervisor is generally the agency functionary who is allocated dismissal responsibilities.

## Summary

This chapter reviewed some of the significant problems in implementing administrative supervision. The supervisor is responsible for the actions of his or her supervisees in accordance with the principles of vicarious liability and *respondeat superiore*. The supervisor is granted a measure of authority and power in support of this ultimate responsibility by the agency, the client, the licensing authority, and the supervisee. Authority was defined as the legitimation of the use of power. Power was defined as the ability to implement the right of authority. Five sources of power were discussed: reward, coercive, positional, referent, and expertise. A further distinction was made between functional power (relating to the personal attributes of the supervisor) and formal power (inherent in the position of supervisor).

The supervisor needs to come to terms with the delegation of authority and power. Power and authority should be used only when necessary to help achieve the objectives of the organization in a flexible, impartial manner and with a sensitive regard for worker response.

Despite the grant of authority, supervisors are reluctant to actively employ their power. Power and authority are further eroded by the nature of social work tasks and

by the countervailing power of supervisees. As a consequence of the reluctant and difficult utilization of supervisory power, external sources of control have been developed in child welfare. In many settings, managed-care oversight has compromised the authority and power of the social work supervisor in behavioral health.

In implementing the functions of administrative supervision, the supervisor needs some appreciation of the utility of rules and an understanding of the factors relating to noncompliance. The process of disciplining workers for noncompliant behavior was reviewed.

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## CHAPTER 4

# Educational Supervision

*Definition, Differentiation, Content, and Process*

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**E**ducational supervision is the second principal responsibility of the supervisor. Educational supervision is concerned with teaching workers what they need to know in order to do their jobs and helping them learn it (ASWB 2009; Hess, Kanack, and Atkins 2009). Every job description of the supervisor's position includes a listing of this function, such as instructing workers in effective social work techniques; developing staff competence through individual and group conferences; and teaching, mentoring, and/or facilitating learning about specific job duties.

Studies of functions that supervisors identified as those they performed included educational activities such as teaching, facilitating learning, training, sharing experience and knowledge, informing, clarifying, guiding, helping workers find solutions, enhancing professional growth, advising, suggesting, and helping workers solve problems.

Educational supervision is concerned with teaching the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for the performance of social work tasks through the detailed analysis of the worker's interaction with the client. In the general literature on supervision, this function is frequently identified as clinical supervision, for which the standard definition is that of a situation in which a more experienced professional oversees the work of a less experienced professional with the objective of helping that person develop greater adequacy in professional performance (Bernard and Goodyear 2009; Milne 2007). Although *clinical supervision* is a popular term in wide usage, credentialing boards have expended considerable resources to identify and operationalize its active component parts (American Board of Examiners in Clinical Social Work 2004; ASWB 2009). The necessity of deconstructing the term suggests that clinical supervision is an amalgamation of supervisory roles, functions, and duties that regulators have found imprecise and unwieldy. Milne (2007:439) boiled down the standard definition to the administrative, educational, and supportive ingredients used in this book: "The formal provision by senior/qualified ... practitioners of an intensive relationship-based education and training that is work-focused and which manages, supports, develops, and evaluates the work of colleagues (supervisees)." We use the term *educational supervision* rather than clinical supervision here and throughout the text because we see it as the more precise, less ambiguous term.

## Educational Supervision Distinguished from In-Service Training and Staff Development

We noted earlier that one of the singular aspects of social work is that a very sizable percentage of agency staff may come to the job with little or no prior training (Turcotte, Lamonde, and Beaudoin 2009). For that matter, even those with baccalaureate or graduate degrees from accredited schools of social work find gaps between the knowledge and skills acquired through social work education and the requirements of social work practice (Black and Whelley 1999; Perry 2006). There is also considerable turnover and lateral job movement from agency to agency. Consequently, there is a constant need to train people to do the job of the social worker and to do the job in a particular setting (Kleinpeter, Pasztor, and Telles-Rogers 2003).

Some distinction needs to be made between staff development, in-service training, and educational supervision (Gleeson 1992). *Staff development* refers to all of the procedures an agency might employ to enhance the job-related knowledge, skills, and attitudes of its total staff, and includes in-service training and educational supervision. Training sessions, lectures, workshops, institutes, information pamphlets, and discussion groups for caseworkers, administrators, clerical staff, and supervisors are staff-development activities.

*In-service training* is a more specific form of staff development (Clarke 2001). The term refers to planned, formal training provided to a delimited group of agency personnel who have the same job classification or the same job responsibilities. In-service training programs are planned on an a priori basis in terms of the general educational needs of a group of workers. The generic teaching content is applicable to all members of the group but is specifically relevant to none.

*Educational supervision* supplements in-service training by individualizing general learning in application to the specific performance of the individual worker. Educational supervision is a more focused form of staff development. Here training is directed to the needs of a particular worker carrying a particular caseload, encountering particular problems, and needing some individualized program of education.

The supervisor, in discharging the responsibilities of educational supervision, helps the worker implement and apply the more general learning provided through in-service training. The supervisor teaches “the workers what he needs to know to give specific service to specific clients” (Bell n.d.:15) and helps the worker make the learning transition from knowing to doing. In-service training and educational supervision complement each other. Supervisors reinforce, individualize, and demonstrate the applicability of the more general content taught in planned, formal in-service training sessions (Meyer 1966).

In-service training is context free and is concerned with practice in general; educational supervision is context-bound and concerned with practice in specific situations. Educational supervision provides personalized learning concerned with the supervisee’s assigned clients and tasks.

## **Significance of Educational Supervision**

The need for educational supervision in response to the lack of previous training of public agency social workers is noted in three different national studies of children's services made at three different periods. In the first study, Children's Bureau (1976:72) noted that "often the first line supervisor is practically the only source of in-service training." The second study indicated that the largest percentage of the caseworkers (75 percent) "were dependent on in-service training and supervision to acquire the knowledge and skill needed for the work" (Shyne 1980:31). The third study reported, "Case staffing and case reviews are the bread and butter of supervision in terms of protecting the safety and well-being of children and families" (Hess, Knak, and Atkins 2009:16).

Shulman (1982) studied reports from supervisees and supervisors regarding the actual functions the supervisors were perceived to perform and the functions they preferred. Both groups indicated that a considerable amount of the supervisor's time was spent in teaching-consulting. Furthermore, the "largest increase of preferred to actual time spent" indicated by both supervisors and supervisees involved increased time in "teaching practice skills" (22–23). Although case consultation occupied only 40 percent of time on the job for a sample of 68 social work supervisors examined by Shulman (1993), interacting with supervisees in case consultation was their most satisfying duty.

Educational supervision is a very significant dimension of the supervisor's activities and responsibilities. Supervisors want to do a good job (Baum 2007), and two of the three strongest sources of satisfaction for supervisors are "satisfaction in helping the supervisee grow and develop as a professional" and "satisfaction in sharing social work knowledge and skills with supervisees." Two of the three main sources of supervisee satisfaction with supervision are related to educational supervision: "my supervisor helps me in dealing with problems in my work with clients" and "my supervisor helps me in my development as a professional social worker." In addition, both supervisors and supervisees agreed that "ensuring the professional developments of the supervisee" was one of the two most important objectives of supervision (Kadushin 1974:1990).

Conversely, when supervision fails, the failures may be felt most keenly in the area of educational supervision. Summarizing studies of ineffective supervision, Watkins (1997:166) found that failure to teach or instruct was consistently identified as among the negative aspects of poor supervision. Two major sources of dissatisfaction expressed by supervisees relate to this function: "my supervisor is not sufficiently critical of my work so that I don't know what I am doing wrong or what needs changing" and "my supervisor does not provide much real help in dealing with problems I face with my clients" (Kadushin 1974:1990). Unless detected and repaired, dissatisfactions such as these, coupled with other "negative supervisory events" (Ramos-Sanchez et al. 2002:197), may accumulate over time and become "lousy" supervision (Bernard and Goodyear 2009).

A study of sources of knowledge social workers use in practice by Demartini and Whitbeck (1987) confirmed the crucial importance of educational supervision. Questionnaire returns from ninety MSW direct service workers indicated that supervision was cited as the principal source of knowledge for practice, in terms of frequency of use as well as importance to practice of such knowledge. Social work education provided the general framework of the knowledge needed for practice, but supervisors (along with on-the-job experience, on-the-job training, and colleagues) provided the instrumental translation of the general knowledge to the specific requirements of the tasks workers performed. Supervision was noted as more important than graduate training in determining the actual use of knowledge. Interviews with supervisors and supervisees found that good teaching/instruction was associated with effective supervision; it included processes involved in the teaching and learning connected with becoming a competent clinician (Henderson, Cawyer, and Watkins 1999:67).

This is consistent with our own analysis of the NASW Workforce study of 10,000 licensed social workers (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004). Social workers whose continuing education and training had come in the form of practice supervision (including clinical supervision) were significantly more likely than their peers to report helping their clients address a range of problems, including psychological, medical, and social issues; key problems that would improve client lives; and crisis situations. Workers with supervision also reported significantly more effectiveness in responding to the number of requests for assistance made by clients and their families, more satisfaction with their ability to access agency services and community resources (including appropriate medical care) for clients, and more satisfaction with their ability to respond to clients' cultural differences. Finally, supervised workers were significantly more satisfied with the amount of time they had to conduct investigations, provide clinical and other services to clients and their families, and address issues of service delivery.

In a systematic review of 27 research articles published between 1990 and 2007, Mor Barak, Travis, Pyun, and Xie (2009) found that educational supervision predicted a number of beneficial worker outcomes. The ability of supervisors to help workers engage in problem solving was associated with worker satisfaction with the job (Gimbel et al. 2002), and with job resources and workload (Juby and Scannapieco 2007). The perception that supervisors offered skill-development opportunities was associated with workers' citizenship behaviors and performance (Hopkins 2002). Workers were more likely to stay in their jobs if their supervisors discussed their individual learning needs in preparation for training (Curry, McCarragher, and Dellmann-Jenkins 2005).

In a companion meta-analysis of studies with a combined sample of 10,867 workers, Mor Barak et al. (2007:7) found that supervisory task assistance (e.g., "tangible, work-related advice and instruction [that] focuses on educating, training, and developing workers ... to perform on their jobs") had a beneficial effect on worker-reported outcomes in child welfare, social work, and mental health settings.



Although the size of the task-assistance effect was only “moderate” in size, it was larger than the effects of supervisory interaction or support, and a “moderate effect size” can have “practical (clinical) importance” (Hojat and Xu 2004:241).

## **Educational Supervision and Client Outcomes**

Although not without controversy (Freitas 2002), some evidence suggests that educational supervision may also affect client outcomes (Bambling et al. 2006; Callahan et al. 2009). For example, Harkness (1997) reported a panel study designed to test causal helping links and outcomes in the chain of interaction among a social work supervisor, four workers, and 161 clients across 16 weeks of practice in a mental health clinic. Findings included a direct causal path between repeated weekly worker ratings of supervisory “problem solving” and independent client ratings of goal attainment in subsequent weeks of service, a link that bypassed worker assessments of the supervisory relationship and its helpfulness. In this case, educational supervision appeared to help clients above and beyond the degree of supervisory help that their workers experienced. For a best-evidence review of this literature, see Milne (2009).

## **Relationship of Educational Supervision to Administrative Supervision**

Administrative supervision and educational supervision share the same ultimate objective: to provide the best possible service to the clients (Henderson 2009). Administrative supervision provides the governing structure and the resources directed toward this goal; educational supervision provides the training and guidance that enable workers to achieve it. Although complementary, administrative and educational supervision are independent. In their factor analysis of supervisory practice across a wide range of human service organizations in Israel, Erera and Lazar (1994) found that the functions of administrative and educational supervision were empirically discrete.

Administrative supervision is concerned with structuring the practice environment and providing the resources that enable the workers to perform their jobs effectively. Educational supervision provides the knowledge and instrumental skills that are the workers’ necessary equipment for effective practice. Administrative supervision serves the needs of organizational, professional, and regulatory bureaucracies; educational supervision serves the needs of the profession in developing competent, professionally oriented practitioners. If administrative supervision requires that the supervisor have managerial skills, educational supervision requires technical and pedagogical skills. Looking ahead to [chapter 6](#), human-relations skills are required for supportive supervision.

Educational and administrative supervision are mutually reinforcing (Tromski-Klingshirn 2006). Educational supervision provides the supervisee the opportunity to develop practice skills, but administrative supervision provides the “learner’s permit,” a practice vehicle, and the “rules of the road.”

Educational supervision is designed to increase the efficiency of administrative supervision. As a consequence of educational supervision, the tasks of administrative supervision are implemented with less constant effort. "Training and guided experience [take] the place of detailed and close supervision as a means of accomplishing the same control functions" (Olmstead 1973:90). With more education, workers can act more autonomously and independently, reducing the burden of administrative supervision.

Attitudes of commitment and loyalty to agency values, aims, and procedures are developed through educational supervision. If the agency can, through education, indoctrinate workers with a personal interest in doing what the agency wants done in the way the agency wants it done and toward objectives the agency wants to achieve, the agency will be less hesitant to delegate authority for autonomous performance. Educational supervision provides administrative controls through a process of helping the worker internalize such controls.

Educational supervision involves the communication of a belief system that has as one of its tenets the legitimation of the agency's authority structure. Such socialization has as one of its aims the "engineering of consent," so that ultimately the supervisee voluntarily endorses the legitimacy of the supervisor's positional authority.

Simon cogently summarized the relationship between the functions of educational and administrative supervision:

Training influences decisions "from the inside out." That is, training prepares the organization member to reach satisfactory decisions himself without the need for the constant exercise of authority or advice. In this sense training procedures are alternatives to the exercise of authority or advice as means of control over the subordinate's decision. ... It may be possible to minimize or even dispense with certain review processes by giving the subordinates training that enables them to perform their work with less supervision. Training may supply the trainee with the facts necessary in dealing with these decisions, it may provide him with a frame of reference for his thinking; it may teach him "approved" decisions: or it may indoctrinate him with the values in terms of which his decisions are to be made. (Simon 1957:15-16)

Social work recruits from a wide variety of backgrounds and with different sets of experiences, having learned the language and mind set of different academic disciplines, need to be educated to a common frame of reference, a common view of agency objectives, and a uniform commitment to common professional goals. Unless differences can be reduced, there is little possibility of having a staff operating in some consistent manner. One of the educational tasks of supervision is to help the worker accept the frame of reference, point of view, and objectives to which other workers in the agency subscribe and which guides their actions and behavior.

Although the bureaucratic control apparatus, manifested in administrative supervision, exerts an external pressure encouraging workers to conform to agency policies and procedures, educational supervision ultimately results in an internalization of such influence efforts. Both administrative and educational supervision are directed toward changing worker behavior in the direction necessary for effective performance as an agency social worker. The achievement of this objective in moving from administrative supervision to educational supervision is the movement from direction by the supervisor to self-direction by the supervisee.

Professional socialization involves the reduction of idiosyncrasy. Lay attitudes and approaches to problems are diverse; professional approaches tend to be more homogeneous. Professional socialization involves taking on a professional identity and a special outlook regarding one's work which is shared with colleagues. Educational supervision is the context for role transition from lay person to professional, providing the supervisee with this sense of occupational identity.

Because administrative supervision and educational supervision provide complementary procedures for control of workers' performance, more of one requires less of the other. Hall (1968:104) concluded from a study of the relationship of bureaucracy and professionalism in a number of different professions, including social work, that "an equilibrium may exist between the levels of professionalization and bureaucratization in the sense that a particular level of professionalization may require a certain level of bureaucratization to maintain social control." Higher levels of professionalization were associated with lower levels of bureaucratization. Similarly, Hage and Aiken (1967:90), in a study of sixteen social welfare and health agencies, found that "close supervision is less likely when members of an organization ... have been professionally trained."

Development of knowledge and skills, as a consequence of educational supervision, permits relaxation of administrative controls. Not only will the worker feel a personal obligation to do a good job, he or she will have the necessary competence and capability to do so.

Educational supervision permits smoother administrative coordination and more effective communication. Having learned how the agency operates and what the functions of other people are in the agency, the worker can coordinate his or her own work with others. Having learned the specialized language of the agency and the profession, the worker can communicate with colleagues with fewer risks of misunderstanding. The shared "universe of discourse" aids communication. Making decisions on the basis of mutually shared values, presuppositions, and knowledge increases the predictability of the workers' actions. This is achieved as a consequence of the fact that educational supervision provides, in effect, a socialization experience acculturating the supervisee to the culture of the social work profession. The supervisee is socialized in the language of therapeutic discourse, value orientation, and modes of thinking and problem-solving that are characteristic of the profession (O'Brien and Rosenberg 1998:46). Thinking in a way that is similar to the thinking of their fellow professionals, they are likely to come to the same conclusions independently. Homogeneity of thinking among fellow agency workers makes it easier to coordinate the work of different groups in the agency.

Education of the supervisee to the consensus of values, uniformity of perspectives, and standardization of language shared by other workers in the agency reduces the likelihood of intra-agency conflict while increasing the level of intra-agency cooperation.

As a result of educational supervision, the worker is in a better position to evaluate his or her own performance. The worker learns the difference between good and

poor practice and has some criteria by which to be self-critical. Thus, the administrative supervisory functions of control, coordination, communications, cooperation, and evaluation are all made easier as a consequence of educational supervision.

Despite these elements of complementarity between educational and administrative supervision, there are aspects of incompatibility as well (Erera and Lazar, 1994b), suggesting a potential for conflicts of interest between the two supervisory roles (Association for Counselor Education and Supervision 1993; Tromski-Klingshorn, 2006). Yet, although nearly half of the 158 respondents to a survey by Tromski-Klingshorn and Davis (2007:294) reported that their clinical supervisor was also their administrative supervisor, no statistically significant differences in satisfaction with supervision were found between the two groups. The majority of supervisees receiving administrative and clinical supervision from the same person did not view the dual supervisory role as a problem, and 72.5 percent reported specific benefits. Although there is always a potential for conflicts of interest to emerge in the supervisory role, to some extent concerns about conflicts of interest between administrative and educational supervision have receded (American Counseling Association 2005). Supervisors are expected to recognize and avoid or manage conflicts of interest to prevent harm to their supervisees (NASW 2008).

## **Content in Educational Supervision**

Any delineation of the content of supervisory teaching has, of necessity, to be general. An overview of supervision such as this book is directed toward workers in many different kinds of agencies who must learn different kinds of content to do their jobs well. However, because all social work agencies have elements in common, there are certain uniformities in what needs to be taught. The following discussion of the basic content of educational supervision is derived from material developed by Helen Harris Perlman. Perlman (1947) pointed out that what every social worker needs to know is concerned with people, problems, place, and process—the four *Ps*. To this might be added a fifth *P*—personnel, the person of the worker offering the service.

The nuclear situation for all of social work is that of a client (individual, family, group, or community—*people*) with a *problem* in social functioning coming, or referred, to a social agency (*place*) for help (*process*) by a social worker (*personnel*).

Supervisors in every social agency will be teaching something about each of these five content areas. However diverse the specifics of *people*, *place*, *process*, *problems*, and *personnel*, these will be matters for the agenda of educational supervision (Holloway 1997). Despite differences in specifics, in each instance there is a particular group of people, either an individual or collectivity, presenting a particular kind of social problem and seeking help from a social worker who is affiliated with a particular social agency and offers some particular approach to helping. The worker, in order to perform his or her job effectively, would need to know

about the process by which he or she hopes to help, about the agency through which help will be offered, about the people with whom he or she will be working, about the problems they present, and about himself or herself as the principal instrumentality for helping.

For each of these content areas—people, problem, place, process, and personnel—there are objectives in terms of knowledge, attitudes, and skills. However diverse the agency, the supervisor has to teach something about how this particular agency (*place*) is organized and administered, how it relates to other agencies and fits into the total network of community social services, what the agency's objectives are, what kind of services it offers and under what conditions, how agency policy is formulated and can be changed, and what is the nature of the agency's statutory authority. Knowledge of place (agency) also includes knowledge of the community of social agencies in the area with which the agency is related, as well as the geographical community in which the agency is embedded. Systems knowledge is critical for social work practice with HIV-infected persons in medical settings (Itzhaky and Atzmon 1999), for example.

However diverse the social problems with which different agencies are concerned, the supervisor will have to teach something about the causes of social problems, the community response to particular social problems, the psychosocial nature of these problems, the impact of social problems on different groups in the community, the effect of a particular problem on social workers' and people's lives, and the relationship of agency services to the social problems that are of primary concern to the agency's mandate. This may be nowhere more evident than in the supervision of child protective work (Potter and Brittain 2009).

However diverse the clientele served, the supervisor will have to teach something of human behavior in response to the stress of the social problems faced by these particular clients (*people*). Although the casework supervisor might be primarily concerned with teaching how individuals and families respond to social problems and adjust to them, the group work supervisor and community organization supervisor might be more concerned with teaching how people in collectivities such as groups and communities behave in responding to social problems. For the supervisee to understand problematic individual and collective responses to social stress, the supervisor needs to teach something of "normal" individual and collective development and behavior.

Whatever the processes employed in helping the client to a restoration of a more effective level of social functioning or ameliorating or preventing social dysfunction, the supervisor will have to teach something of the technology of helping. In managed care-settings, for example, the technology of social work practice far exceeds what students typically learn in graduate school (Acker 2010a; Acker and Lawrence 2009) and, in all realms of social work, the pressure is on to adopt evidence-based practice (Luongo 2007; Milne and Westerman 2001). Educational supervision, in the end, is where everything gets put together. Knowledge about people, problem, and place is taught because ultimately it enables the worker to help more effectively. The

supervisor has to teach what the worker is to do and how to act in order to help individuals, groups, or communities deal effectively with their social problems. In addition, the supervisor has to teach something of the theory that explains why the particular helping technology the agency espouses—whatever it is—is likely to effect change.

In any agency, whatever the methodology for helping, the supervisor teaches something of the sequential nature of the helping process. It is described in a variety of ways: assessment, diagnosis, treatment; data gathering, data processing, intervention; obtaining information, processing information, exerting social influence. All of these descriptions, however diverse, imply a process of remedial action based on understanding derived from the facts.

The supervisor further has to educate the worker (*personnel*) toward the development of professional identity. This includes helping the worker develop those attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that initiate, enhance, and maintain effective helping relationships with clients. This means revising prejudiced and stereotyped ageist, racist, sexist, and homophobic attitudes, as well as education toward acceptance of social work values regarding self-determination, confidentiality, and nonjudgmental respect. This is, in effect, socialization to the frame of reference and ethos of the profession.

People are, of course, not helped by a social agency in dealing with problems of social functioning but by social workers representing the agency. Furthermore, the principal instrumentality for helping is generally the social worker himself or herself. There are, of course, social utilities administered by social workers that are essential resources for helping, such as homemaker service, foster care, institutional care, child care, and health care. Most frequently, however, the principal resource the agency makes available in the process of helping people is the skill and competence of the worker. It is the social worker who leads the group, organizes the community, acts as advocate, supports, sustains, clarifies, offers himself or herself as a model for identification, rewards and shapes behavior, and so on. In social work, where the worker is the main instrumentality, the person of the worker determines what is done and how it is done.

Because the worker's personality and behavior are significant determinants of what happens in the worker-client interaction, the supervisee himself or herself, with his or her attitudes, feelings, and behavior, become a necessary and inevitable subject of educational supervision. The aim is to develop a greater measure of self-awareness in the worker so that he or she can act in a deliberate, disciplined, consciously directed manner in the worker-client interaction so as to be optimally helpful to the client. The capacity to perceive one's behavior as objectively as possible, to have free access to one's own feelings without undue guilt, embarrassment, or discomfort is a necessary, if not sufficient, prerequisite for the controlled subjectivity the helping process demands (Williams 2008). The freedom to use feelings imaginatively and creatively for helping also requires considerable self-awareness.

Nathanson (1962:32) defined *self-awareness* as “the capacity of an individual to perceive his responses to other persons and situations realistically and to understand how others view him.” Grossbard (1954:381) noted that “broadly speaking, self-awareness is a person’s ability to recognize with a reasonable degree of accuracy how he reacts to the outside world and how the outside world reacts to him.” Self-awareness is central to the social worker’s professional development.

Self-awareness involves objectification, as the self examines itself. Developing self-awareness is an exercise in self-reflection in which the self is the object of attention, study, and examination. Educational supervision needs to be concerned with the purposeful, consciously directed use of the professional self, which requires self-awareness as a necessary prerequisite.

Developing a high level of worker self-awareness is further necessary because the social problems that are the professional concerns of the worker also affect him personally. Here, unlike the situation in many other professions, there is considerable interpenetration between life and work. The worker may be involved, to some extent, in many of the kinds of problems encountered by the client—parent-child conflict, aging, marital conflict, deviance, illness, financial problems, death. “Living on a job that is so closely allied to life itself makes separation of work from other areas of life exceptionally difficult. Since, in social work, the work task and living are often simultaneously experienced, anxiety is greater than in many other fields of endeavor” (Babcock 1953:417).

Education toward a greater development of self-awareness permits the worker to think objectively about these matters. It provides a greater assurance that the worker’s personal reactions to these professional problems will not adversely contaminate the helping relationship. A worker in a mental health clinic said:

I have always been uneasy with clients about anything that has to do with money. In my family money was never discussed. It was a secretive thing; I see this affecting my work now. I was never comfortable asking my parents about their financial situation, and there is a twinge of uncomfortableness when I ask my clients. Because it was not normal to talk finances in my family, it is difficult for me to discuss it in a casual way with my clients. This is problematic, because the more anxious I am about it, the more anxious they will be. Ah, a new discovery in self-awareness.

In the following brief excerpt the worker is talking to the supervisor about a twelve-year-old girl named Thelma. The youngster is described by the worker as provocative, snide, impudent, and upsetting. She teases adults, including the supervisee:

As the [worker] talked about Thelma’s behavior and described it in some detail in response to my questioning, she suddenly looked as though a thought had struck her and said, “You know, I was very much like her when I was her age.” The [worker] went on to describe how she had taunted a Junior High School teacher with certain remarks, daring the teacher to punish her. I felt that the worker was really working on something and confined myself to listening and encouraging her to speak, with an occasional comment. (Gladstone 1967:11)

Awareness of similar life experiences permits the worker to understand the client’s behavior.

The use of educational supervision to help the worker develop self-awareness

brings its own set of problems. Any systematic educational program is in essence a program of planned change, with the teacher being the change agent and the learner being the target for change. Teaching involves a deliberate effort to change behavior in some selected direction. However, the pressure to change, resulting from learning, generates ambivalence and resistance (Itzhaky and Ribner 1998; Webb and Wheeler 1998).

The particular content that needs to be learned and the attitudes that need to undergo change sometimes result in blocks or problems in learning. We learn only what we can emotionally afford to learn. If the content to be learned threatens our self-esteem or challenges our core attitudes and beliefs, the lesson is avoided. The repertoire of maneuvers that permit us to shield ourselves from such threats includes all the mechanisms of defense. Educating toward self-awareness may help the supervisee resolve some of these resistances to learning. Persistent blocks to learning are the exception rather than the rule, however, and such problems are encountered in a less intense and less pervasive form by all learners. Although the beginning practitioner may prefer directive supervision, with more of a focus on tasks than introspection (Lazar and Eisikovits 1997), the work of the ego in the service of adaptation is sufficient to counter the work of the ego in the service of defense for the reasonably mature learner. Learning takes place despite resistance because of the learner's need and desire to meet the demands of the job.

In a supervisory context that supports personal exploration with freedom and safety, the healthy supervisee is open to introspective self-analysis. Introspectively examining his or her responses, the worker is in a double position—both the subject and the object of self-examination. Aware that he or she is reacting resentfully or punitively, or warmly or sympathetically, to some clients, or feeling intimidated or threatened or repulsed by other clients and introspectively examining the basis for such responses, helps the worker develop self-awareness. The supervisee, in applying knowledge of human behavior to himself or herself and his or her own interactions, understands this material in a more meaningful affective way. Education in self-awareness has as one of its objectives this kind of heightened affective sensitivity.

This discussion of the justifications for concern with development of self-awareness reflects the fact that it is an important content area of educational supervision. The supervisor has the responsibility of advancing the worker's self-knowledge as well as teaching the worker about people, problems, place, and process. Apparently, social workers tend to perceive education toward self-awareness as one of the unique aspects of social work supervision. In a study that asked about factors that differentiated social work supervision, the most common theme expressed by the one hundred social work respondents was the following: "Because the skill to be developed is the disciplined use of self in professional relationships, supervision in casework affects personality more closely than supervision in other fields which are more dependent on objective skills" (Cruser 1958:23).



Self-awareness is a central feature in models of the development of the helping professional (Stoltenberg and McNeil 1997), just as the requirement of a didactic psychoanalysis for certification as an analyst serves as an institutionalized testimonial to the importance of self-awareness in the people-helping professions (Mackey 1994). The desirability of this objective of educational supervision receives support from several empirical studies of professional helpers, which suggests a relationship between level of self-awareness and practice competence (Bruck 1963; Epstein and Hundert 2002). However, self-awareness by the worker of his or her contribution to the interaction does not necessarily automatically result in behavior change. The supervisor has to exploit self-awareness in helping the worker to achieve behavior change.

An additional aspect of educational supervision that has received growing recognition is the need to help the supervisee develop a sensitivity to and awareness of internalized attitudes toward ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation (Falender and Shafranske 2004; Fuertes and Brobst 2002). The increased responsibility of supervisors to educate toward a greater knowledge and acceptance of cultural factors is related to the ever-increasing ethnic diversity of the client population, as well as increased sensitivity toward “microaggressions” and related forms of unconscious discrimination in social work practice (Rasmussen and Salhani 2010). Developing greater multicultural clinical competence involves education toward recognition that culture may contribute some component to the client’s problem. In addition, for interventions to be maximally effective, cultural factors may need to be taken into consideration. This involves helping the supervisee develop a greater consciousness of his or her own ethnic, gendered, and racial identity; the nuances of his or her sexual orientation; and a clearer recognition of his or her own biases and prejudices.

A male supervisee said:

I once was a member of a men’s “consciousness-raising” group. We spent a lot of time trying to identify ways in which “macho” socialization had developed attitudes relating to oppression of women. Without realizing it, I became more solicitous, deferential, and protective in my interactions with women clients. In some dim way maybe I was trying to make up for what men had done to women or maybe to prove how enlightened I was. In any case, I had become less helpful to my women clients as a result. I became aware of this in supervision as my supervisor pointed out the differences in the way I related to women clients previously as contrasted with my more recent interactions.

A white female supervisee said:

I was assigned to work with an African-American male with alcoholism. I found myself becoming uncharacteristically impatient and pushy in my interviews with him. My supervisor noted my change of tone. As we discussed this, I became more aware than I would have liked that there were some aspects of racism as well as sexism in my attitudes toward the client. I sensed that I didn’t feel you could accomplish much with an African-American client and felt antagonistic in response to my perception of African-American men as being generally macho and irresponsible.

Bruss et al. reported:

One of the authors supervised a trainee who expressed openness about [gay/lesbian/bisexual] issues. However, in working with a lesbian client on relationship issues and on her partner’s family’s lack of comfort with their lesbian relationship, the trainee managed to avoid any discussion of sexuality or sleeping arrangements during visits with

the partner's family, even when these seemed natural questions in some of the sessions. Rather than explore the client's feelings further, the trainee immediately launched into ways for the client to avoid the visit altogether. (1997:70)

Developing a heightened sense of self-awareness and educating toward changes in attitudes, feelings, and behaviors have therapeutic connotations. By assuming the dual roles of educator and therapist, the supervisor may activate the confusion, conflict, and ethical risks associated with dual relationships (Lazarus and Zur 2002).

Of the considerable teaching syllabus outlined above, what content deserves priority? Findings gathered from structured interviews with fifty public welfare supervisors concluded that they gave high ratings to content involving interpersonal skills—"know how to relate well, communicate, listen, interview and understand the client" (Brennen, Arkava, Cummins, and Wicks 1976:20). Lowest priority was given to content "concerning the role of the social worker in relating to the community and in bringing about change in the agency" (Brennen et al. 1976:21), although one recent study reports that social workers in Ontario have expressed a need for "supervision to intentionally promote ... the social work mission of social justice and change" (Hair 2008:iii).

Supervisees tend to view problem-solving content as most important. York and Hastings (1985–86) found that among supervisees at all levels of professional development the supervisors' work facilitation (i.e., shows how to improve performance; offers new ideas for solving job-related problems) was highly conducive to supervisees' satisfaction in supervision. York and Denton (1990) received questionnaire responses from ninety-three direct service workers evaluating the leadership behavior of their supervisors. The objective was to determine which supervisory behaviors were most clearly associated with a positive evaluation by the supervisee of the supervisor's job performance. The behavior that was by far most clearly associated with positive evaluations was that the supervisor communicates to his or her people what they need to know.

The normative view of expert opinion sheds additional light on the educational content of supervision. In addition to the supervisory emphasis on the development of interpersonal skills and the problem-solving concerns of the supervisee, Hawkins and Shohet (2006) argued that the educational content of supervision should also address the internal processes of the worker (with an emphasis on the worker's reactions to the client) and the supervisor (with an emphasis on the supervisor's reactions to the worker). In addition to the details of worker-client interaction, for Hawkins and Shohet the relationship between the worker and client, as well as the relationship between the supervisor and the worker, are critical content. For Teufel (2007), educational supervision should include discussions of best practices, boundary violations, client development, countertransference, ethical dilemmas, practice theory, specific cases, treatment modalities, treatment planning, using supervision, vicarious traumatization, workers' personal issues, and working with systems. In its authoritative *Analysis of Supervision for Social Work Licensure*, the ASWB (2009:1) prescribed forty-three discrete content areas of best-practice supervision, including documentation and

recordkeeping, social work ethics, measurable outcomes for learning and performance, practice laws and regulations, risk management, and safety.

What is the *actual* content of educational supervision? Without direct observation, this is difficult to ascertain. As much as practitioners apparently distort what happened when they describe their practice in supervision (Hess et al. 2008; Ladany et al. 1996; Noelle 2002; Pisani 2005; Pitariu 2007; Walsh 2001; Webb and Wheeler 1998), it appears that supervisors may distort what transpired when they describe the content of supervision (Lanning, Whiston, and Carey 1994). To assess the agreement between supervisory self-reports, Henry, Hart, and Nance (2004) asked 112 masters students and their 78 doctoral-student supervisors to identify the most important content discussed in supervision from menu of topics: treatment planning, trusting and using the counselor's feelings in responding to clients, making appropriate independent decisions and interventions, theoretical conceptualizations of the case, the counselor's personal issues affecting work, skills and techniques, the supervisory relationship, personal awareness, the dynamics of the counselor-client relationship, the status of clients and caseloads, and evaluative feedback about counselor performance. Although supervisors and supervisees agreed that personal issues and skills and techniques were the most important issues they discussed, supervisors attached more importance to the topic of performance appraisal—although the dyads agreed that was rarely a topic of discussion in supervision. A replication by Dow, Hart, and Nance (2009) found a statistically significant degree of agreement between student supervisors and their supervisees about what the important topics of supervision were, but only 24.5 percent of the time were the dyads in agreement about what it was they discussed.

In general, it is reported that educational supervision is dominated by *practical* content that speaks to case management (Aasheim 2007). Some direct observations of the focus of educational supervision appear to confirm those reports (Keller, Protinsky, Lichtman, and Allen 1996; Teufel 2007), but others do not. Although one hundred respondents to a survey by Aasheim (2007) reported that 90 percent or more of their typical supervision session focused on clinical tasks, Harkness and Hensley (1991) found that a supervisor and her four supervisees spent 35 percent of their time discussing cases in audiotapes of their supervision. It seems safe to conclude that the actual content of educational supervision varies widely (Aasheim 2007; Paessler-Chesterton 2009).

Synthesizing findings from a systematic review of 52 studies of effective supervision, Milne (2009:120) advanced an evidence-based view of what supervisors should do to help their supervisees learn and develop their knowledge and skills, such as observe their practice; discuss their cases; assign and check their homework; monitor their client outcomes; prompt and instruct them with demonstrations, rehearsals and role-plays; and offer feedback with constructive criticism and praise.

## **The Individual Conference**

The individual supervisory conference is a process with three phases. To begin the

process, the supervisor structures and schedules the conference and prepares for the meeting. In the middle phase, the supervisor adopts an orientation to the process of teaching and offers helpful feedback to the worker. The supervisor ends the conference, finally, by setting the stage for subsequent meetings.

### ***Beginning the Conference***

*Structuring and Scheduling* The most frequent context for supervision is the individual conference (Grant and Schofield 2007; Milne and Oliver 2000). It is often supplemented and sometimes replaced by alternatives such as the group conference (see [chapter 9](#)). Nevertheless, the individual conference is still the principal locus of supervision; 82 percent of supervisors and supervisees indicated, in response to a questionnaire, that this was true in their experience (Kadushin 1990).

Although the ASWB (2010a) Model Practice Law and many state boards (ASWB 2010b) make limited provisions for group as well as individual supervision for licensure, it appears that one weekly hour of individual supervision for new workers meets the supervisory standard of care required to balance the supervisor's duty to the organization, its staff, and its clients (Knapp and VandeCreek 1997; Rubin 1997). Fearing the erosion of professional autonomy from too much supervision, Baretta-Herman (1993) and Veeder (1990) once discouraged the individual supervision of professional social workers. However, supervision has become the prevalent mode that practitioners use to resolve ethical practice dilemmas (Landau and Baerwald 1999; Falender and Shafranske 2007), and even the most seasoned social worker values the learning to be found in "good" supervision (Grant and Schofield 2007; Spence et al. 2001). Moreover, failing to supervise may be in violation of social work ethics (NASW 2008) or lead to malpractice (ASWB 2010a; Guest and Dooley 1999), which are concerns of administrative supervision. Even if workers withhold their ethical violations and practice mistakes (Farber 2006; Ladany, Hill, Corbett and Nutt 1996)—whether to assert their autonomy, in the service of professional development (Itzhaky 2000), or defend against shame (Yourman 2003)—*respondeat superior* remains the law of the land.

The individual conference is essentially a dyadic interview to fulfill the administrative, educational, and supportive functions of supervision. It is, for educational purposes, an individual tutorial. Like all interviews, the individual conference requires certain formalities, structure, and differential role assignment. It should be a regularly scheduled meeting at some mutually convenient time. It should be conducted in a place that ensures privacy and protection from interruption, is physically comfortable, and is conducive to good, audible communication.

Availability relates to the regularity with which scheduled meetings are held, holding to the scheduled length of the meeting, and protection from frequent interruptions during the meeting. Time is a necessary prerequisite to accomplish any of the tasks of supervision.

A questionnaire study involving 885 supervisors and supervisees found that conference time was identified as a problem in supervision. In identifying their

shortcomings in supervision, 18 percent of the supervisors noted that they did not readily make themselves available to supervisees, did not make sufficient time for supervision, and tended to allocate their time so that supervision was given low priority. Supervisors commented that supervision suffered from the multiple responsibilities and heavy workload that they carry. Comments from supervisors included the following:

- I am not always there when they need me.
- I am not as available to supervisees as frequently as I would like.
- Not making enough time to meet with workers on a weekly basis.
- Too busy with other things to give much time to supervision.
- Overworked and tend to have too many things going at once to maintain consistency in supervision.
- I shortchange supervision time due to a busy schedule and emergencies.

If supervisors identify a lack of time to devote to supervision as a significant shortcoming in their supervisory practice, supervisees concur. Eighty-three comments (17 percent) by supervisees point to lack of time available for supervision due to missed, shortened, and interrupted conferences. Supervisees had such comments such as the following:

- He needs to hold our time sacred.
- Tries to do too much in her job so that there is little time available for supervision, or less than desirable.
- He shows a chronic inability to structure conferences so as to avoid interruptions.

Interruptions occur because the majority of social work supervisors have competing administrative or direct-service assignments (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004). However, interruptions in supervision may have negative consequences for the working relationship between supervisor and supervisee (Angus and Kagan 2007; Shulman 2010). The effects of failure to guard against interruptions and of differences in supervisor-supervisee orientation to conferences are illustrated in the following comment by a supervisee:

We only have one hour, which is really poor because when I do see him there are constant interruptions. And I make a list before I go in there. First of all because I know I have to go boom, boom, boom. And John doesn't go boom, boom, boom. He's much slower than me in his pace of communicating, much more thorough. I would take a quick answer and go on to the next thing. ... Today he couldn't see me at the regular time but could see me for half an hour after the staff conference. Well the conference was late and then there were interruptions. So it's gotten so that I reduce my discussions to the most specific, concrete kinds of things. (Amacher 1971:71)

Although formal scheduling is desirable, there may be occasions when informal, on-the-spot conferences are necessary. Social work is full of stressful emergencies that often cannot wait for the regular conference. At the point of crisis, the worker's

motivation for learning is apt to be most intense. Consequently, it is good to seize the teachable moment.

However, the unscheduled, off-the-cuff conference has its own disadvantages. Because it does come up suddenly, there is no time for preparation. Judgments are made without sufficient opportunity to carefully consider alternatives. A worker in a family service agency said:

Only when we finally were able to establish a set time for individual conferences did the disadvantages of the "I'll-catch-you-when-I-can" type of conference become clear to me. In these kinds of conferences, I now recognize that I had always felt as though I were imposing, that I needed to be as quick, specific, succinct, and brief as possible, and I generally forgot to ask something I needed to know. I was never able to explore the wider implications of the questions I did raise.

Because such conferences snatch time from other scheduled activities, they are apt to be hurried and harried. The worker may feel guilty and apologetic about intruding on time the supervisor had scheduled for other activities. In contrast, the worker can comfortably use the scheduled conference time with a guilt-free sense of entitlement. A separate time, a separate place, and a planned encounter symbolically affirm the importance of supervisory conferences. Persistent requests for conferences on the run tend to depreciate their significance.

An attempt to understand the individual worker's pattern of using supervision may be helpful. Some workers may deliberately, if not entirely consciously, force the supervisor into frequent informal conferences as a way of avoiding formal conferences. This pattern may express the worker's undue dependence on, or hostility toward, the supervisor. The supervisor must decide when an emergency is truly a crisis and when it is more an expression of a supervisee's rather than a client's need.

Meetings between supervisor and supervisee may not be regularly scheduled because the supervisor has confidence in the worker's performance. But if meetings are not scheduled because of confidence rather than indifference, can the supervisor make explicit the basis for such confidence—and does the supervisee share a similar level of confidence in his or her work in the absence of regular supervision?

*Preparing* A scheduled conference begins before it actually starts, and this is one of its prime advantages. It begins in the preparation for the conference by both supervisee and supervisor. The supervisee submits some record of his or her work, such as a written recording, audio or video recording, case files, work schedules, reports completed, or a work plan. The supervisee's formal preparation of this material requires some explicit self-review of his or her work.

A good conference requires necessary preparation. A study of "lousy supervision" noted that such supervisors "would approach supervisory sessions without adequate preparation ... with no particular goal in mind ... and without reviewing notes before meeting with the supervisee" (Magnuson, Wilcoxon, and Norem 2000:198).

Supervisors differ with reference to deciding on cases for review. Some supervisors review selectively, spot checking some percentage of the worker's

caseload or records. Some cover the entire caseload over a period of a limited number of conferences, so that all cases receive some review. Some review only the cases with which the worker is having some difficulty or is expected to have some difficulty. Some review with the worker only those cases that the worker has selected for discussion. Giving the worker total discretion or covering the caseload selectively might do a disservice to clients who are receiving less than adequate service but whose cases are never reviewed.

Having made a selection of some aspect of the worker's performance for conference discussion, the supervisor reviews this material in preparation for the conference. Reviewing the material with the responsibilities of educational supervision in mind, the supervisor develops the teaching syllabus for the next conference or series of conferences. A conscious effort is made to select some cluster of information or concepts for teaching. The supervisor, in preparation for teaching, might review his or her own notes and the relevant literature on the material he or she plans to teach. Preparation for a tutorial deserves the same care as teaching a seminar in a school of social work.

The worker's activity, as evidenced in the material submitted, is the "textbook" for the "course." It provides the basic relevant material for teaching, and the teaching objectives selected should be tied in with the worker's on-the-job activity; therefore, the supervisor not only needs to know the content to be taught, but also to be thoroughly familiar, through preparatory review, with the worker's activity.

In administrative supervision, case records, worker's reports, and other forms are reviewed for evidence of services rendered in compliance with agency procedure; in educational supervision, the same records are reviewed for evidence of deficiencies in performance that require training.

In addition to the content and context of the material to be taught, the supervisor also has to review his or her knowledge of the learner. Given the special learning needs and unique learning patterns of this particular supervisee, how can the selected teaching objectives best be presented? What teaching techniques and approaches might work best with this supervisee? To answer these questions, the supervisor should review the educational diagnosis of the supervisee and where he or she is now in his or her learning. In preparation, the supervisor reviews both the material presented by the supervisee and the supervisee who is presenting it.

Preparation involves ensuring the availability of instructional materials that might be needed in conference teaching. If the use of certain agency forms is to be taught, copies should be at hand. If policies are to be discussed, the agency manual should be accessible. If references are to be cited to support teaching and to stimulate out-of-conference reading by the supervisee, the books and articles should be obtained in advance and made available.

The advance planning and preparation provide the supervisor with a focus and a structure that he or she holds lightly and flexibly, ready to discard or change in response to a supervisee's learning needs as they are actually manifested in the conference. Selectivity in choosing what to teach is a significant aspect of

preparation. To attempt to teach everything, all at once, is to guarantee failure to teach anything. The supervisor has to sharpen the focus of supervision for teaching and learning.

Conferences concerned with the supervisee's clinical work generally have two interrelated objectives. One focus is on case management—enhancing an understanding of the client in his or her situation, planning strategies for intervention, monitoring and coordinating the delivery of services, etc. The second focus is on developing the knowledge and skills of the worker, the worker's professional self and identity.

In summary, to paraphrase Kalous (1996), in planning the conference the supervisor should be prepared to do the following:

1. Evaluate and address the learning needs of the supervisees
2. Review legal and ethical issues
3. Monitor and document the progress of supervisees and their clients by observing actual work samples
4. Evaluate the performance of supervisees and elicit their feedback

The evidence suggests that supervisory structure supports and advances social work practice.

#### ***The Middle Phase***

*Teaching and Learning* Once the conference is under way, how does the supervisor teach? We have noted that the starting point for educational supervision is the report of the worker's activity on the job, shared with the supervisor in advance or verbally during the conference. "Supervision is 'post-facto' teaching, a retrospective scrutiny of interactions and their reciprocal effects" (Fleming and Benedek 1966:238). The supervisor engages the worker in a systematic, explicit, critical analysis of the work he or she did and the work he or she is planning to do with an individual client, a family, a group, or a community. The endeavor is to provide the worker "with a structured learning situation which facilitates maximum growth through a process which frees potentialities" (Ekstein and Wallerstein 1972:10). The conference is an opportunity for guided self-observation, for systematic introspective-retrospective review of work that has been done, and for thinking about the work as "recollected in tranquility." Experience is fragmented and seemingly chaotic. The supervisor helps the supervisee impose some order and meaning on experience and identify the principles that can guide the worker in understanding what he or she needs to do.

The supervisor does this by asking questions, requesting clarification and freeing, supporting, stimulating, affirming, directing, challenging, and supplementing the worker's thinking. The supervisor calls attention to errors in the worker's performance, missed opportunities, apparent misunderstandings, gaps, and inconsistencies. The supervisor introduces new ideas, shares relevant knowledge and experience, and explains and illustrates similarities and differences between this and



other situations, enlarging the worker's perspective. The supervisor poses relevant alternatives for consideration. A study of tape-recorded conferences indicated the following:

[The supervisor's questions rarely suggested] "I am testing you to see if you know this," but more often as "What do you think, because we have to decide this together?" or "What do you know about this, because I want to help fill in what you don't know so you can help the client more effectively?" That is, [supervisors] seemed interested in knowing what the [worker] thought, to put their ideas together or to help the [worker] become more knowledgeable, not to evaluate in the judgmental sense the worker's amount of knowledge. (Nelson 1973:190)

The supervisor should engage in a dialogue with the supervisee. It is a voyage of joint exploration in which the supervisor, through probing question and response, provides the supervisee with the opportunity to think more perceptively about the client's situation and what interventions might be helpful. The questions and response encourage divergent rather than convergent thinking, postponing premature closure. What are the possible explanations for the client's situation? What observations can the supervisee offer in support of an explanation and alternative explanations? What inferences is he or she making from these observations, and what theory is he or she employing in making such inferences? What theoretical presuppositions are available that might lead to alternative inferences?

The dialogue is not over until explanation and understanding are tied to some plan for helping. The intent in educational supervision is to transform information into knowledge, knowledge into understanding, and understanding into action. Theory is reformulated as practice principles, which are then adapted to the situational requirements of the tasks the supervisee is asked to perform.

The supervisor has some idea, based on knowledge and experience, of how a competent professional would have responded to the client at the specific point in the case interaction being discussed. Using this image of competent professional behavior as a template, the supervisor makes some assessment of what the supervisee actually did in this situation. The supervisor can offer a small lecture, engage the supervisee in a Socratic dialogue or a give-and-take discussion, offer a demonstration, role play, listen to and analyze with the supervisee a practice recording, and offer material for reading.

Many supervisors use a mix of expository didactic teaching and dialectical-hypothetical indirect teaching procedures. Didactic teaching amounts to "telling"; dialectical-hypothetical teaching involves questions and comments that help supervisees think things out for themselves and attempt to find their own answers. It comes close to the guided discussion method.

The supervisor acts as a catalyst to induce self-initiated learning. Some things the worker can learn himself from an analytical examination of his or her own experience with the client. For such kinds of learning, the best approach by the supervisor is to be like a midwife, helping the worker give birth to his or her learning, assisting by active listening, guiding questioning, clarifying, paraphrasing, and encouraging elaboration: "Tell me more of what you felt at that point," "Could you explain that?" "What prompted you to say that then?" "What were you thinking when the client told

you that?" This kind of learning depends on supervisee self-discovery, but the supervisor engages in actions that increase the probability that self-discovery will take place. This approach is in line with the recommendations of the classical educator Comenius, who noted that the principal objective of the educator is "to find a method of instruction by which teachers teach less but learners may learn more." Comenius is seconded in this by Rousseau, who noted that "our urge to instruct leads us to teach that which the student could better learn on his own."

Some things cannot be learned by even the most astute, insightful examination of the worker's interactional experience with the client. Some things have to be taught didactically—the agency's eligibility requirement for the variety of services it offers, research findings regarding factors associated with success in adoption, community resources available to help with problems of single parenthood, and so on.

Most of the teaching for which the supervisor is responsible in implementing educational supervision results from a process of reciprocal interaction between the teacher and learner, with both actively participating in and contributing to the process. It is a combination of didactic teaching and dialectical-hypothetical self-discovery learning.

Some significant content cannot be taught either didactically, through discussion, or experientially. Such content can only be taught through modeling. A good deal of what is most effective in social work is based on a special human attitude and approach to the client. As Grotjohn (1949) asked, "How can this be taught? How do you teach patience and devotion, tact and timing, decency and tolerance, empathy and intuition, modesty and honesty and frankness ... the dangers of abusing a position of confidence and trust?" Such things are learned more effectively through an emotionally charged identification with a supervisor who models such attitudes rather than through didactic teaching or discussion, although experiential lessons may be "enhanced by purposeful ... guidance" (Gerdes and Segal 2011:141).

Modeling involves deliberately selected displays of behavior by the supervisor for didactic purposes. Imaginative modeling involves more than watching the supervisor, as implied by the term *role modeling*. Modeling involves observing desirable worker behavior, which is available from a wide variety of sources—reading transcripts of interviews, listening to audio recordings, watching movies and video recordings, watching interviewing through a one-way mirror, or sitting in on an interview. All of these procedures provide the supervisee with a model of how a worker should behave in contact with a client.

It should be noted that incidental learning goes on side-by-side with intentional teaching. Much is caught that is not explicitly taught. Consequently, the supervisor has to be careful that his or her interpersonal behavior is congruent with his or her teaching about such interpersonal behavior. The supervisor who behaves unacceptingly toward workers is not likely to teach the concept of acceptance successfully. In this instance, the supervisor does not exemplify in his or her own behavior the attitudinal approach he or she is professing to teach. The supervisor who says, "I am telling you that what you are supposed to do is to let the client make his

own decision about what he wants to do,” is not teaching what was intended—namely self-determination. The supervisor not only models attitudinal behavior but, by analyzing the case along with the supervisee, the supervisor models the procedures employed in the problem solving approach.

Good supervision is good social work practice once removed. Much of what is desirable behavior in the worker-client interaction is analogous to desirable behavior in the supervisor-supervisee interaction. Good supervision is then a model for what the supervisee needs to learn and an instrumentality for facilitating such learning. Educational supervision is both a model and a method.

Given the fact that supervision is conducted in the context of an interpersonal dyadic relationship, with the objective of effecting change, it is not surprising that the approach that supervisors adopt in supervision often reflects the approach they employ in direct practice. (Frances and Clarkin 1981; Woldsfeld and Haj-Yahia 2010). Lacking training in teaching but possessing clinical skills, the temptation for the clinician-turned-supervisor is to use his or her preferred clinical approach in teaching.

The behavior modification caseworker is a behavior modification supervisor. The cognitive-behavioral social worker is a cognitive-behavioral supervisor; the psychodynamic clinician is a psychodynamic supervisor. Even the family therapist is likely to transform supervision into a replica of family therapy.

Detailed studies of the supervisory interactions of leading theoreticians supervising the same supervisee substantiated the hypothesis that “the work of the supervisor like that of the counselor will be affected by his or her theoretical orientation.” (Goodyear, Abadie, and Efros 1984:236). McDaniel, Weber, and McKeerer (1983) found that a supervisor’s choice of supervisory techniques is isomorphic with his or her theoretical orientation, a finding supported in a study by Wetchler, Piercy, and Sprenkler (1989). Moreover, the client may benefit from theoretical congruence of worker and supervisor. In the clinical supervision of multisystemic therapy, for example, Schowenwald, Sheidow, and Chapman (2009) found that supervisor adherence to principles of multisystemic treatment not only predicted greater adherence by supervisees, it predicted client outcomes as well.

Although Pashler, McDaniel, Rohrer, and Bjork (2008) described the evidence base for matching styles of teaching and learning as inadequate in their review of the literature, some evidence does suggest that social workers bring global “people-oriented” or “task-oriented” learning styles to supervision, thus affecting both the lessons they learn and how they evaluate the effectiveness of supervision (Itzhaky and Eliahou 2001:19). Paradoxically, where common sense might suggest that more efficient learning will occur if the supervisor selects his or her approach for congruence with the learning preferences of the supervisee, Itzhaky and Eliahou (2001:27) argued that supervisors should “diagnose their supervisee’s dominant learning styles and help them adopt the style they tend to prefer *less* [emphasis added], in order to increase the effectiveness of the supervision.” The rationale for this argument is that social workers appear to adapt their learning styles to supervision (Itzhaky and Eliahou 1999).

In the final analysis, the teaching style should be appropriate for the content being taught. Agency forms and procedures can be taught didactically and by providing relevant reading material. Interviewing techniques cannot be effectively taught in that manner alone. Role playing is the more appropriate teaching approach for this kind of content. However, the choice of approach should depend not only on the nature and evidentiary base of the content to be taught and the supervisor's preferred approach, but also on the nature of the learning preferences of the learner. Even content that lends itself to learner self-discovery through Socratic questioning by the supervisor some learners may prefer to learn didactically. A supervisee said:

I am aware, or at least I hope, that the supervisor knows some of the answers. Maybe it's better to do things for yourself. You may learn better by trying to reach for the answers by yourself. But I know myself and I learn what I need to learn pretty effectively if I am just told what answers others have formulated. I can use their experience and know-how.

Ideally, the approach of choice is based on the fit between the content to be taught and the learning preferences of the supervisee, with supervisor theoretical preference being given lower priority. In practice, however, the supervisory style of a given supervisor may vary little over time or between one supervisee and another (Hart and Nance 2003; Worthington 2006).

One supervisor said, "The worker expressed his anxiety about medical terms and his limited understanding of them, and I recommended a book which contained useful information about them," illustrating an appropriate approach for the content to be taught. In a different situation, however, another supervisor said that her supervisee "faced a difficult decision whether to recommend foster care for these children or placing a homemaker in the home. I engaged [her] in a discussion [in which we thought] of the advantages and disadvantages of each of the alternatives." In each of these conferences, the teaching methods were appropriate for the different content that needed to be taught.

The methods employed have to be appropriate to the ultimate objective of educational supervision, which is knowledge for use. Rapoport's (1954) definition of *supervision* as a "disciplined tutorial process wherein principles are transformed into practice skills" calls explicit attention to this focus. The classroom teacher can be satisfied with intellectual acquisition of content by the learner. Educational supervision has to aim at emotional assimilation of the content so that behavioral changes result from teaching. The progression is from information into knowledge, knowledge into understanding, and understanding into changed behavior in interaction with the client. New behavior is then tested in interaction with the client to see whether the change is effective. Feedback from the client and the supervisor permits the worker to correct his or her learning, modify his or her behavior, test it again, and examine the next wave of feedback.

To promote transfer of learning so that the same problems do not have to be rediscussed as they are encountered in different cases, the teacher directs learning toward a clarification of general principles that can be validly applied from case to case. He or she moves from the specific to the general, relating the case situation to

the principle and the principle to the case.

Situational learning of the technical requirements for dealing with the particular case situation, which is the subject of the conference, is supplemented by an effort to conceptualize and generalize what is taught. Conceptual teaching generalizes the particular experience; practice teaching particularizes the generalization. The supervisor's approach in moving from the specific to the general, in helping the supervisee conceptualize practice, is illustrated in the following comment:

Oh, one other thing that I think has to do with his teaching style is that when we're talking about a specific client, he will often now—he didn't at first—but now he will say, "Well, what do you think about this general issue of——?" and then he'll take what we're talking about—say it's a very verbal client or a very nonverbal client, or it's a client who has terminated early—he'll say, "What do you think about this style in general?" not just related to this client, but with others. Or a client who terminates: "If you had it to do over again with this client, what might you have done differently now that you have hindsight?" I guess it's typical of him to say, "Now that we're operating on the basis of hindsight, what might we do differently?" which does not mean to me, "Well, schmuck, what could you have done better with this case?" But "Now that we have all the data in, thinking back on it, do you have any thoughts?" So he pushes me to think in a more general way about the processes of therapy with particular kinds of people or particular kinds of techniques or whatever, and how I would do that again in the future—how I would use that. I guess sort of asking me to conceptualize things on a broader level, to think about things on a broader level than just one client. (Herrick 1977:143)

Teaching techniques have different effects depending on the attitude, skill, conviction, and appropriateness with which they are used. "What do you think?" and "How do you feel about it?" can sound like tired clichés. Alternatively, these questions can be asked in a spirit suggesting that the supervisor warmly welcomes the more active participation of the supervisee in the learning process. The aim is to develop an interactional pattern of mutuality. Despite the elements of mutuality in the relationship there is (or should be) an imbalance in the knowledge and skills the participants bring to the encounter. The supervisor has to accept the responsibility for having more experience, being more knowledgeable and skillful, and having available what the profession provides in practice wisdom and problem solutions. Supervisor and supervisee are not peers. As Robinson (1949:42) said, "To start with an assumption of equality is to deny the student her right to any learning process." The supervisor has the ultimate responsibility for what takes place in the teaching-learning situation.

In the following passage, a supervisor describes how she found her own congenial approach to educational supervision in offering leadership in the context of mutuality:

Perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of the role of supervisor, for me, was making criticisms and suggestions. As nice as my supervisory theory sounded, when I attempted to put it into practice, I had trouble.

I found myself saying to Ruth, as she reported her meetings to me, "Did you find out about...?" "Did you turn this in yet?" "Well, did you think of trying this...?" Ruth's reaction to all of these "did you's" was, naturally, very defensive. Her answer was, most often, something like "Well, I didn't have time" in a very cold, flat voice, or "It seemed more important to. ...". I was sounding more like a policeman-mother than a helpful supervisor.

I began to experiment with different ways of saying the same things, or getting the same point across, without such an authoritarian ring. My first idea was to hedge a little, to not come on so strong. I began saying "Well, you know, you might be interested in trying something like this ..." or "Maybe one thing you could do, too, is to attempt to ...." When I hedged and hawed in this manner, Ruth wasn't nearly as defensive, but I still wasn't getting the desired result. Now she wasn't taking me seriously. I seemed to have no authority at all now, rather than too much. Her answer very often was "Maybe I'll try it" or "I'll think about it," very lethargically. When I realized that this approach was failing also, I put my head to work, and came up with another idea. I was trying to learn from Ruth and she from me. I needed to respect her and encourage her: I needed to give her the chance to express herself in an open and

nonjudgmental atmosphere.

What I was attempting to teach her was my own techniques, my way of doing things and of thinking, of handling groups, of being a social worker. Therefore, when I suggested something to Ruth, I was giving her my ideas, what I thought, what I needed to know, what I would do. Individual supervision is a very personal experience. Therefore, I felt I could say these things to Ruth in just that way. At our next meeting together I said to Ruth, "I think what I would like to know from this girl is. ..." "I think the first thing I might try would be to..." "For me to do this. ..."

At first I was afraid of what Ruth's reaction would be to my great emphasis on "I," but my fears were quickly dispelled. It worked beautifully. Ruth's reactions were something like, "Oh yeah? I didn't think of that" or "Wait a minute, why would you do that?" When I gave her my thoughts, as a person in a supervisory capacity, she was able to relate herself to me as a person in the student role.

I realize this type of approach wouldn't work well for everyone, although it did work for me in this one case. One snag, however, that came hand in hand with this new way of doing things, was that it evoked questions such as "Why would you do that?" I was pleased she wanted to know my thoughts and that she wanted to discuss it further. Nevertheless, I didn't feel comfortable just telling her my reasons, without her having to think about it. Yet I dislike it when someone tries to "play teacher" with me, and turns my questions back around on me. I didn't want to answer, "Because X, Y, and Z," nor did I want to reply, "Well, why do you think?"

My solution again stemmed from the philosophy I tried to adopt: that I was there to learn from her as well as she from me. The next time she asked me my reasons why, I told her of this dilemma: that I didn't want to give her all the answers, but I didn't want to be the quiz master either—and then we struck a compromise. If she would tell me some reasons she could find for doing it that way, I might learn some new things. Then I would tell her my reasons for taking that approach, and she might learn some new things from me.

As funny as it all sounds right now, and was at that time too, it really worked well. Whenever Ruth started to ask why, she would stop herself and say, "Is that because...?" To which I would always reply politely, "Yes, and not only that. ..." It became a kind of a game I suppose, but the game, and the very ritualized aspect of it, provided some very necessary elements to our interviews. It helped us both to realize our roles more fully, through spelling them out so clearly in this one aspect of the supervisory relationship. It added humor to our sessions. It helped us deal with our embarrassment, by laughing a little and thereby relieving the tension. And perhaps most importantly, it brought us closer to each other; we began to like each other and to work much better together.

*Orientations to Teaching and Learning* Several distinctly different orientations to the supervisory process have been identified that tend to result in different approaches to teaching and learning social work practice. An experiential-existential supervisee-centered orientation sees supervision as concerned with the development of supervisees' self-understanding, self-awareness, and emotional growth. The emphasis is on the worker's feelings. The supervisee has major responsibility for what he or she wants to learn, and the focus of supervision is on the way the worker does his or her work and the nature of his or her relationship to the client.

A didactic, task-centered orientation sees supervision as primarily concerned with the development of the supervisees' professional skills. The emphasis is on the workers' thinking. The supervisor has the primary responsibility for what is taught, and the focus of discussion is on the content of *what* the worker is doing, his or her activities with, and on behalf of, his or her clients. (For an applied illustration, see Harkness and Hensley 1991.)

An experiential-existential orientation to educational supervision involves establishing a relationship with the supervisee and engaging in interaction that is analogous to the worker-client relationship. The focus of interaction is the supervisee and the content for discussion is the supervisee's feelings about the case problem, his or her reaction to and feelings about the client, the client's response to the supervisee as the supervisee perceives it, the supervisee's feelings about the client's response, and so forth. The supervisor concentrates on this focus by reflecting, clarifying,

probing, and interpreting the feelings of the supervisee. Suggestions, advice, and evaluative comments that might reinforce or discourage certain supervisee behaviors are held to a minimum. The goal of educational supervision here is to help the supervisee to find his or her own orientation through an exploration of his or her own experience. Attempting a balance between challenging and being supportive, the supervisor acts as a catalyst in helping the supervisee experience self-initiated discovery.

A scale listing these two orientations (didactic versus experimental) as opposite poles was offered to supervisors and supervisees (Kadushin 1990). They were asked to indicate the point on the scale that denoted the orientation that they thought worked most effectively for them. The tendency for both supervisors and supervisees was to check the midpoint, indicating that the most desirable orientation was a rather even mixture of the two approaches. Despite the general overall agreement, however, supervisors leaned toward the didactic, task-oriented professional-growth approach somewhat more decidedly than did supervisees.

The supervisor's orientation affects how supervisees learn to practice. A comprehensive review of ninety-seven studies of counselor supervision and training by Lambert and Ogles (1997) suggested two overarching conclusions. First, reading and viewing examples are the most efficient methods of mastering basic interviewing skills and goal-setting with clients, but didactic-experiential training is the most effective way to master the interpersonal helping skills of empathy, mindfulness, warmth, and respect. Thankfully, supervisees may acquire such skills without especially high levels of supervisory empathy, genuineness, and unconditional positive regard, as long as they perceive that their supervisors are trying to be helpful. Second, systematic training advances the development of interviewing and interpersonal skills, but helping skills learned in the classroom may not generalize well to actual practice settings. A period of retraining is often required; if counselors are to retain and generalize those skills, supervision is helpful. Although the acquisition of advanced interpersonal skills takes time, those skills improve with modeling, rehearsal, and feedback (Gerdes et al. 2011).

Perhaps there is no one best way to teach and, similarly, and no one best way to supervise, given the infinite variety of supervisors, supervisees, and their interactions. Yet the question that has been posed more and more insistently for social work research generally seems equally applicable here: What kinds of approaches to educational supervision work best with what kinds of supervisees, under what kinds of circumstances, and with what practice outcomes? Milne (2009:60) employed the metaphor of a tandem bicycle to explain what we know about educational supervision, based on the best available evidence: "It takes two: both supervisor and supervisee need to be active contributors ... for it to be effective."

*Providing Helpful Feedback* The supervisor teaches and the supervisee learns through feedback. Supervisees need to know how they are doing, what they are doing right, and what needs to be changed. Building on Milne's tandem metaphor, the

supervisor and supervisee would be unable to ride their bicycle-built-for-two without exchanging enough mutual feedback to coordinate and calibrate their direction, route, and pace—to stay upright and move forward. Feedback reinforces lessons that “work” and helps correct faulty learning. We learn from our mistakes only if we can find out what they are and have the opportunity of analyzing them. As Middleman and Rhodes noted (1985:36), “practice makes perfect” needs revision—it is “practice plus feedback (knowledge of results) that makes perfect.”

Feedback has been identified as the key to learning and mastery in fifty-two studies of effective supervision in clinical practice (Milne 2009). Feedback had a positive effect on physicians in 70 percent of the studies examined by Veloski et al. (2006), in their best-evidence review of the impact of assessment and feedback on performance in medical education. Feedback was second only in importance to the supervision relationship in the review of effective supervision in clinical settings by Kilminster and Jolley (2000:834), who concluded that “trainees need clear feedback about their errors.”

Goldhammer, discussing supervision of schoolteachers, made this point:

Perhaps the most rapid and efficient way to alienate one's supervisees is by hedging and by pussyfooting. Teacher: So you think I was really sarcastic with them? Supervisor: Uh, no. I didn't really say that. You are generally sympathetic and friendly with the youngsters, but some of your remarks today, were, uh, less kindly than I've known them to be in the past. Teacher: Some of my behavior today was unkindly? Supervisor: Well, uh, no, not really, but, uh ... (1969:344)

On the other hand, engaging in the following kind of dialogue is not very helpful either:

Supervisor: “You’re doing fine! Keep it up.”

Supervisee: “Keep what up?”

Supervisor: “Just what you’re doing.” (Ekstein and Wallerstein 1972:145).

The supervisor’s explicit, constructive feedback will be appreciated, particularly if it can be translated directly into action (Cushway and Knibbs, 2004). Although supervisees may be more receptive to constructive criticism prefaced with a “strength-based and normalizing statement (Redmond 2007:ii), we can expect the workers, as reasonably healthy people, to be able to take valid criticism without falling apart. It is, therefore, not necessary to balance every criticism with a compliment. Not only does this often put the supervisor in a false position, it is also demeaning to the worker. One supervisee said, “I knew something bad was coming up because she started to give me all that sweet-talking praise.” A supervisor expresses her own response to the dilemma:

Should I always temper a criticism with a compliment? Should I make up compliments or pick out small good points if I can't find enough to go around? Should I just offer each compliment as it occurs to me? I'm sure it sounds silly now, but at the time, it was really a problem. The solution I arrived at was simply to play it by ear. I couldn't bring myself to make up phony compliments or pick out petty points to compliment her on or to temper each criticism with a compliment. My main focus here was to be open, honest, and realistic. If something could have been done better, I felt it was important to let Carol know. If something was done well, this was also important information.



Surveys have found that among the main sources of supervisee dissatisfaction was that supervisors were not sufficiently critical so that the worker did not know what he was doing wrong or what needed changing (Kadushin 1974; 1992b). A lack of critical feedback was cited in 27 percent of the comments provided by supervisees in a study that asked for their perceptions of their supervisor's shortcomings. Supervisees said:

- There is a lack of periodic feedback about quantity and quality of work performance. I need to have more constructive criticism so I know what I need to change.
- I sometimes feel I am manipulated by praise. Where is the criticism?
- She is almost too complimentary. Sometimes I do not feel that her evaluation of my work has too much basis in fact. I can't fix it if I don't know it's broken. (Kadushin 1990:191)

Why would supervisors withhold helpful feedback from their supervisees? Ratliff, Wampler, and Morris (2000) have researched the delicate dance involved in concern for the supervisee's feeling about his or her work and the supervisor's responsibility to ensure competent clinical practice. Discussing 120 episodes in which some corrective action was required, they found that "supervisors made suggestions and evaluations in a very tentative manner and [supervisees] responded with deference and cooperation" (Ratliff, Wampler, and Morris 2000:385). In a systematic functional linguistic analysis of audiotaped interactions between student speech-language pathologists and their supervisors, Ferguson (2010:222) found that supervisor feedback expressing "positive appraisal was associated with explicitness (82.4 percent), whereas negative appraisal was associated with implicitness (93.5 percent) of expression." Noting that "most speech-language pathologists would clearly recognize the 'corrective feedback' in such [negative and implicit] expressions" (223), Ferguson (2010:217) concluded that "the interactive achievement of both feedback and maintenance of interpersonal harmony requires considerable discourse management skills." It appears that supervisors prefer to offer supportive and corrective feedback respectively in large and small doses (Knox, Burkhard, Edwards, Smith, and Schlosser 2008), to manage the "tension between fostering a collaborative supervisory relationship and maintaining supervisory accountability" (Falender 2010:22).

Supervisors may withhold feedback to protect their supervisees from shame (Doherty 2005; Hahn 2001), which diminishes receptivity to feedback—however well-intentioned that feedback may be. Hoffman et al. (2005) interviewed fifteen counseling center supervisors who had given easy, difficult, and no feedback to their supervisees. Feedback was easy to give if the supervisee was open to receive it or if client care would clearly suffer if feedback were withheld. Feedback was difficult to provide, however, if supervisees were "doing egregious things that were interfering (either indirectly or indirectly) with their clinical work" (Hoffman et al. 2005:12), if

there were negative consequences to withholding feedback, or if the supervisor felt that the cost of giving feedback might outweigh its benefits. Feedback was withheld if supervisors were concerned that it might exceed the scope of their role, unduly strain the supervisory relationship, or had the potential to harm the supervisee. Yet, by and large, the supervisors reported that withholding feedback had negative consequences, and “that they would do it differently if they could” (Hoffman et al. 2005:3).

“Perhaps when supervisors only provide positive feedback and do not confront trainees with nonfacilitative behaviors, trainees question what is not being said and subsequently the trustworthiness of the supervisors” (Heppner and Handley 1981:244). Receptivity to feedback is a function of the source of the message and the nature of the message. If the source of the feedback has credibility for the receiver, has power over the receiver, or is regarded as an expert, the feedback is more likely to be regarded seriously. Heppner and Handley (1981:244) researched the behaviors of supervisors that correlated with counselor trainees’ perceptions of their supervisor’s trustworthiness, finding that the results “seem to indicate the importance of providing honest evaluative information on teaching within a supportive relationship.”

Supervisors frequently meet these conditions, increasing receptivity to their feedback, yet some studies suggest that guarded supervisees may be more open to corrective feedback from an external supervisor who lacks the positional power to reward or punish employees (Webb and Wheeler 1998; Itzhaky 2001). A study by Sobell et al. (2008) suggests a more cost-efficient approach that used motivational interviewing (Rubak et al. 2005). To set the stage for corrective feedback, supervisors would do well to ask supervisees to transcribe episodes of audiotaped interactions with clients and prepare systematic self-critiques of their practice.

The supervisor should not apologize for corrective feedback. This discounts its importance and attenuates its impact. The supervisee needs feedback to help him overcome his or her performance deficiencies and do better work. Feedback helps make learning explicit and conscious. The supervisor has the perspective, the objectivity, and the knowledge of what good performance is supposed to look like—a *super vision*, so to speak.

Although the supervisor is ultimately responsible for supervisee performance, typically the supervisor relies on reports from the worker, through whose eyes the process is filtered, to get the job done. Perhaps this should be a source of concern, as a growing body of evidence argues that workers “often miss or are unaware, misinterpret, or inaccurately recall that which transpires” in their practice (Ellis 2010:105), which implies that supervisors would do well to base their feedback on direct observations of the worker’s interaction with clients. On the other hand, direct observations are more time consuming and expensive to obtain than practitioner reports (Bernard and Goodyear 2009), and many supervisors are squeamish about observing practice directly (Hoffman, Hill, Holmes, and Freitas 2005). Others might ask, “Who cares what actually happened?” (Noelle 2002:129).

In settings that eschew the direct modes of practice observation and feedback we describe in [chapter 10](#), some evidence suggests that using supervision to elicit client feedback through the worker creates a context for learning that improves client outcomes. Harkness and Hensley (1991), for example, described an experiment in which the focus of social work supervision in a mental health setting was changed by asking experienced workers a series of questions designed to elicit client feedback. Across workers and caseloads, the findings included several dimensions of increased client satisfaction following the introduction of “client-focused” supervision. Although client outcomes may improve if supervision is used to reach for client feedback on an ongoing basis, supervisees may perceive the supervisor as having less empathy for the worker (Harkness 1997), as some workers are more receptive to client feedback than others (De Jong et al. 2012). For additional details, see [chapter 10](#).

Ellis and Ladany (1997) have called client outcomes the acid test of supervision, and a number of large-sample studies have demonstrated that using systematic client feedback in educational supervision can catalyze teaching and learning to a degree that improves client outcomes (Harmon et al. 2007; Worthen and Lambert 2007). In the past, Erera and Lazar (1994b) argued that overreaching for client feedback breaches the firewall between administrative and educational supervision; moreover, practitioners may resist it (Savaya and Spiro 1997). However, Reese et al. (2009) found that using client feedback in supervision not only improved client outcomes, but it reinforced the supervisory alliance and strengthened both counselors’ self-efficacy and satisfaction with supervision.

Feedback is important for the supervisor as well as the supervisee. When monitoring verbal and nonverbal responses and specifically requesting reaction where only limited or ambiguous reactions are communicated, the supervisor needs to be constantly alert to whether teaching is resulting in learning. What has been well taught is not necessarily well learned. The communication of feedback about performance does not in and of itself necessarily generate a change in performance. The information needs to be accepted by the worker as descriptive of his or her performance. There needs to be motivation to change, and the problem needs to be perceived as susceptible to change.

Aside from the client and the worker, the supervisor is the only other person who has detailed knowledge of the supervisee’s performance. However, the supervisor is the only one sanctioned and obligated to give feedback and is explicitly charged with this responsibility. Given these considerations, the supervisor is most often the primary source of feedback for the supervisee, and supervisees are eager to receive it.

Feedback is more effective if certain guidelines are observed by the supervisor in offering feedback (Veloski et al. 2006; Wheeler and Richards 2007):

1. Feedback should be given as soon as possible before and after the performance. This increases motivation and interest in learning what might have been improved. Rewarding commendable performance by praise as soon as possible after the

event increases the potency of reinforcement. A second round of feedback given within a few hours of seeing the client again increases the likelihood that practice will change

2. Feedback should be specific. One should be able to point to a specific act, behavior, comment, or intervention that needs praise or correction. A specific illustration of poor question formulation or a ragged, ambiguous transition is better than general feedback that suggests a need to improve interviewing skills.
3. Feedback should be operational. One should be able to point to the concrete behavior that illustrates a deficiency in performance. Vague, general, and global statements have less credibility.
4. Feedback should be descriptive rather than judgmental. For example, the supervisor should say, "I notice that your response to Mrs. P. resulted in her becoming silent and changing her focus," rather than, "Your response to Mrs. P. was not very good."
5. If possible, it is desirable to highlight the effects of good performance. For example, the supervisor should say, "I was glad to see that you were more accepting of Mrs. H., and I notice she was less resistant to sharing her troubles with the nursing home."
6. Feedback should be focused on the behavior of the supervisee rather than on the supervisee as a person. For example, the supervisor should say, "After he told you he was gay, your next series of comments had a punitive phrasing," rather than, "From your comment, it seems that you don't like gay people or are uncomfortable with them."
7. Feedback should be offered tentatively for consideration and discussion rather than authoritatively for agreement and acceptance.
8. Try to tie feedback as explicitly as possible to what you want the supervisee to learn and what you think he or she needs to learn.
9. Good feedback involves sharing ideas rather than giving advice and exploring alternatives rather than giving answers. It is focused on behavior that can be modified and is accompanied by specific suggestions for change.
10. Feedback needs to be selective in terms of the amount that a person can absorb. The principle is to keep the amount to what the supervisee can use, not all of the feedback you have available to give.

### ***Ending the Conference***

A supervisory conference, like an interview, is hard work. Consequently, after an hour, it is likely to be progressively less productive. The end of the conference should be planned at the beginning so that the agenda selected for the conference can be completed within the allotted period of time.

Toward the end of the scheduled time, the supervisor should be looking for a convenient point of termination. It should be at a point where closure has been obtained on a unit of work. The emotional level of the interaction should not be intense. The worker should have been given some prior opportunity to ask those

questions and discuss those issues that were of most concern to him or her. To say to the supervisee, "We have two minutes left for the conference. Was there something you wanted to bring up?" is very frustrating.

Termination involves a summarization of the conference, with a recapitulation of points covered and content taught. A supervisor said:

The sessions seemed more worthwhile when I reiterated at the end what we had talked about because it made it seem like we covered a lot. The ending seemed much more together and planned out when I summarized. We both saw these conclusions as a pronouncement of the end of the session. We consequently then proceeded to relax.

Because the conference terminates before it actually ends in the minds of the participants, it might be good to finish with some explicit questions for the worker to think about or some specific reading suggestions that are relevant to what has been discussed and in line with his or her interests. The questions might serve as a transition to the next conference. By thinking about the questions raised, both the supervisor and supervisee are preparing for their next meeting.

In general, it might be said that a good conference in educational supervision has the following characteristics:

1. It involves planning and preparation by both supervisor and supervisee.
2. It has a shared, consensually agreed-upon objective.
3. Its focus is the clinical work of the supervisee.
4. It gives priority to critical self-analysis by the worker of his or her performance, assisted by the guidance of the supervisor and supplemented by his or her contributions as a resource person.
5. It provides the worker with clear, unambiguous, relevant feedback designed to help improve performance.
6. It takes place in the context of a facilitative learning atmosphere.
7. It follows desirable principles of learning-teaching.
8. It provides follow-through and a tie to the next conference.

Although the supervisor has the principal responsibility and sanction for formal education of the supervisee, the supervisor needs to remember that considerable informal, unsanctioned education of the supervisee is going on at the same time. Workers turn to their peers in learning how to do the job. The client is actively engaged in teaching by his or her responses to what the worker does. When interventions work, the client is helped and the worker is rewarded. The worker learns that this is a good way to go. As Langs (1979:205) noted, the "ultimate supervisor for the therapist is the patient." Supervisors need not feel competitive about these auxiliary teachers but should welcome their assistance.

## **Process Studies**

There are few social work studies available that attempt a systematic and detailed examination of what actually goes on in individual supervision conferences, and

Mallinckrodt (2011) and Scheel et al. (2011a, 2011b) noted that the number of process studies published annually has declined over time.

Nelson (1973, 1974) studied tapes of sixty-eight supervisory conferences conducted in a variety of casework agencies. Although these conferences were between students in a school of social work and their field-instructors (supervisors), the findings are applicable to supervisory conferences generally. In response to the question, "What do participants really talk about in supervisory conferences?" Nelson found the following:

By the fourth taped conference, the following discussion pattern was fairly common. First, field instructor and student would together go case by case through the student's submitted written material, with field instructor asking questions for clarification or student volunteering extra details, with interrelated discussion of dynamics and handling, with occasional brief exposition by the field instructor of relevant theoretical or skills information which the student had apparently not known, and with eventual agreement on what was going on with the client and what to do next. Second, there might be brief discussions of cases on which there had been new developments but not dictation, e.g., a broken appointment requiring further action from the student. Third, there might be some, usually brief, discussions of learning content such as whether a student was recording properly, or agency-field content such as monthly statistics or the need to find a resource for a client. (Nelsen 1973:189)

Furthermore, Nelson (1974:149) noted that "both field instructors and students usually participated actively [in the discussion]. The field instructors freely gave didactic material although not often lengthy exposition."

Supervisors also engaged in supportive activity (discussed in [chapter 6](#)) and gave directives requiring particular behavior by the supervisee, such as "Fill in social service cards in each case" and "To find a nursing home, call the homes. Find out whether they have a bed. If not, find out when they will. Find out the cost." Directives tended to be associated with agency administrative procedures and concrete services. The context in which the directives were given indicated a sort of summing up of mutual discussion rather than the issuing of an order. The reciprocal interaction between supervisor and supervisee is suggested by the fact that supervisors gave more directives to supervisees who often requested direction than to those who did not.

Busso (1987) studied thirty audiotapes of educational supervision sessions between three social work graduate students and an experienced MSW supervisor. The basis for the supervisory conferences was the audiotapes of the first, third, and last interviews with three of each of the students' clients in a medical social work setting. The tapes of the educational supervision conferences were analyzed by independent raters in terms of the task-centered approach to social work practice. The analysis showed that by far the greatest amount of time in the educational supervision conference was devoted to "understanding problems" and "examining what was a problem to a client and who supported the problem in the client's environment" (Busso 1987:70). Much less time was devoted to "selecting a strategy; designing specific steps of strategy" (Busso 1987:69). Supervisory behaviors in support of the worker were not included in the analysis.

Studies of supervisory conferences in closely related fields are instructive. Culatta and Seltzer (1976, 1977) developed an instrument for scoring categories of

interactional events in supervisory conferences of communicative disorder clinicians. Six categories were related to the interventions of the supervisor and six to analogous contributions by the supervisee. The supervisory conference event categories included positive or negative evaluation statements (supervisor evaluates observed behavior or verbal report of supervisee and gives verbal or nonverbal approval or disapproval), strategy interventions (statement by supervisor given to clinician for future therapeutic intervention), questions (any interrogative statement made by the supervisor relevant to the client being discussed), and observation or information statements by supervisor.

The two different studies yielded very similar findings. The principal activity in the supervisory interaction tended to be concerned with provision by the clinician-supervisee of "information about therapeutic sessions while supervisors essentially used this information to suggest strategy for future sessions—the picture that evolves is one of the clinicians feeding raw material to the supervisors who used it to plan overall therapy strategy for the clients." This was in marked contrast to the supervisors' perceptions of "themselves as sounding boards to be used by the supervisee as resource people" (Culatta and Seltzer 1976:12), which is a perception similar to the one generally held by social work supervisors of their activity. When analyzing differences in talk-time by supervisors and supervisees in the conference, supervisors almost invariably talked more than supervisees.

Questioned about their style of supervision, supervisors were sorted into three distinct groups: "Those who felt they were directive in style by providing specific suggestions and comments about methodology and client performance; those who believed they were nondirective, using a nonprescriptive method relying on the clinician to explain the methodology employed; and a group who said they favored a combination of approaches" (Culatta and Seltzer 1976:12). However, analysis of the content and sequence of the conference revealed that all supervisors seemed to function in similar patterns regardless of their own evaluation of their supervisory styles.

A surprising finding was the very limited number of evaluation statements made by supervisors. This generally left the supervisee with little explicit guidance as to what he or she was doing correctly and/or well and what was done incorrectly and/or poorly.

Schubert and Nelsen (1976) corroborated the Culatta and Seltzer findings using a somewhat different instrument for explicitly analyzing supervisors in the conferences. They found that supervisors were most frequently engaged in providing opinions or suggestions. The second most frequent behavior was providing information. In this study also, supervisors talked more than supervisees.

Keller, Protinsky, Lichtman, and Allen (1996) used direct observation to describe the communication content and patterned interactions of supervisors and supervisees. They found that imparting knowledge, achieving personal growth and self-understanding, and managing the hierarchical supervisory relationship dominated communication in a four-stage pattern that emerged across supervision meetings: (1)

rapport building, (2) getting down to work, (3) resolving questions and options, and (4) wrapping up.

Another direct observation study provides a somewhat different view of interactional styles and patterns found in supervision. Heppner and his colleagues (1994) observed six dimensions of supervisory intervention behavior: (1) directing-instructing versus deepening, (2) cognitive clarification versus emotional encouragement, (3) confronting versus encouraging the client, (4) didactic-distant versus emotionally involvement, (5) joining versus challenging the trainee, and (6) providing direction versus resignation. What remains to be seen is how supervisees respond to supervisory interventions.

In a discourse analysis of videotaped interaction among clinical educators, students, and clients in the hands-on discipline of physiotherapy, Laitinen-Vaananen et al. (2007:95) noted that three themes emerged from the data: “directing the interaction,” “making limited room for the student,” and “encouraging the student’s participation.” The investigators authors also noted that students “expected to be treated equally during their supervisory practice,” but also “wanted their stage of study to be taken into account” by their clinical supervisors, “whereas clinical educators have not rated these supervisory behaviors as highly as the students” (Laitinen-Vaananen et al. 2007:96).

Ferguson (2010) used transcripts from the audiotaped supervision of speech-language pathologists to conduct a systematic linguistic analysis of feedback. Among the variables of interest were the speakers’ expressions of interpersonal and performance appraisal, judgment, and appreciation, which varied by on such dimensions as frequency, and grading (e.g., very good or bad). In addition, Ferguson (2010:218) measured the degree, frequency, and manner with which speakers embraced or distanced themselves from what they were saying, such as the difference between “I was happy with the way you did that task,” and “You did that task in accordance with the evidence-based research literature.” In most instances, but not all, the supervisor did most of the talking, and supervisors “used proportionally more resources to express judgment in contrast with students who used proportionally more resources to express evaluation of affect. Most judgments were expressed positively and directly, whereas negative judgments tended to be expressed implicitly” in the service of harmony (Ferguson 2010:215).

Finally, another important series of process studies, drawn from the supervision of psychotherapy, has examined what supervisors and supervisees disclose or withhold in their meetings. Hoffman et al. (2005) reported, for example, that supervisors frequently withhold critical feedback from their supervisees (and later regret it), whereas their supervisees are often reluctant to disclose interpersonal conflicts, practice gaffes and errors, evaluative judgments, sexual attractions, and other highly-valenced interactions with their supervisors and their clients, in supervision (Ladany et al. 1996; Maroda 2003; Mehr et al. 2011; Pisani 2005; Walsh et al. 2002; Yourman 2003). These are not inconsequential omissions, as they invariably have a bearing on the helping process and its outcomes. If “accurate and honest” supervisory “feedback



is crucial” for the development of the social worker’s practice skills, as noted in a recent review of the literature by Weatherford et al. (2008:46), then “supervisees failure to disclose relevant information to supervisors hinders their learning. It also puts the supervisor at risk legally, for the supervisor is liable if the supervisee is engaged in unethical or illegal activities” (Bernard and Goodyear 2009:164). To manage risk, a “reflective” supervisory response is preferable to an environment of “surveillance” (Beddoe 2010:1279), and a discretionary dose of supervisory self-disclosure may serve to prime the pump of open communication (Weatherford et al. 2008:46). Although excessive self-disclosure by the supervisor should be avoided (Ladany and Walker 2003), an open and balanced approach appears to catalyze learning and strengthen the supervisory relationship (Davidson 2011; Knox et al. 2008; Ladany and Walker 2003; Shulman 2010).

## **Case Illustration**

The following vignette illustrates the supervisor implementing the responsibilities of educational supervision in an individual conference with a worker in a child welfare district office regarding a child in foster care.

Jim began by saying that he wanted to talk about Frank. He brought out that it was important to preserve Frank’s placement—he did not think the problem would be solved by replacing him and I agreed. He thought he had made some impression on the boy, and that Frank realized he wanted to help him. I said this was good, and suggested that worker was really on the spot with [the] foster mother, ready to put Frank out if his behavior did not change. He agreed to this and said he had made it clear to Frank that he must get a job and stay away from the old crowd, since they are undesirable. I said from his recording I could see he had tried very hard with Frank—did he think it had worked?

The worker here selects the content for the teaching agenda (“he wanted to talk about Frank”). This is in accordance with the principle that learning takes place when the supervisee actively participates in the learning process. It also ensures a higher level of motivation to learn because the worker, given the opportunity, will select for discussion that content which presents a problem for him.

The supervisor helps to clarify and define the nature of the problem situation that confronts the supervisee. The problem is not Frank’s replacement but how to preserve his current placement for him.

The supervisor rewards by explicitly commending (“I said this was good”), in accordance with the principle that we learn best when we receive rewards for learning.

The supervisor communicates empathic understanding and acceptance of the worker’s situation (“he was really on the spot”). This probably will be regarded as emotionally supportive by the worker, and this helps to establish a good atmosphere for learning. Recognition that the supervisor is empathic and accepting makes the supervisee more receptive to content. The supervisor, however, might be concerned with teaching in saying that the worker is “on the spot.” The supervisor is redefining this matter as a problem for him in his responsibility as the social worker assigned to the case. The supervisor is not concerned with Frank’s behavior. That is Jim’s

responsibility. The supervisor is, however, concerned with Jim's behavior and case planning. The worker, rather than the client, is the immediate responsibility of the supervisor.

After Jim has shared with the supervisor what he has done on the case, the supervisor confronts Jim with a challenging question: "Did he think it had worked?" Because the question is challenging and apt to induce defensiveness, it is preceded by an introduction that makes it emotionally easier to accept: "I said ... I could see he had tried very hard with Frank." The question, "Did he think it had worked?" solicits an objective, self-critical analysis. In inviting reflection, the supervisor is increasing the worker's involvement, intensifying his level of participation in learning.

Didactically stating that the approach was mistaken or, more gently, that it left something to be desired, might have engendered a need for Jim to defend his behavior, because this might be perceived as an attack. People learn less effectively when psychic energy is devoted to self-defense. Encouraging self-examination may result in the worker's explicit recognition of some of the shortcomings of his or her approach. He or she may then be more ready to consider alternatives.

It might be noted, too, that the supervisor has actually read the record and is using his or her knowledge derived from it in this conference. This in itself is encouraging to the supervisee because it indicates that the supervisor is serious about these encounters, is interested in preparing for the supervisory sessions, and is keeping to their mutual agreement. Because the justification for recording lies partly in its utility in supervision, use of the recording in the supervisory session rewards the worker for having done the work. It further helps develop a positive supervisor-supervisee relationship. Emotional interaction between the two is more apt to be positive if the supervisor shows respect for the supervisee by respecting his product—the recording.

As yet, the supervisor has not taught much, at least not explicitly, although he or she has taught something about good human relations. He or she has taught too, by implication, that it is helpful to define a problem clearly and to partialize it if possible. He or she has encouraged an attitude toward work—a reflective, self-critical approach—that is a necessary prerequisite for the development of self-awareness. Principally, however, the supervisor is not so much concerned with teaching at this point as with developing an atmosphere that is conducive to learning.

Jim shook his head, indicating he was very doubtful, then burst out with, "Frank makes me mad; he's just lazy like Mrs. D says. He doesn't ever try to get work." He went on to tell how at Frank's age he had been earning his own spending money for several years by doing odd jobs that he found himself. I agreed that it would be hard for him to understand why Frank could not do this too—could he see any difference in Frank's situation and his own? He thought for a moment and then pointed out that he had his family and Frank was in a foster home. I wondered what difference that would make? He could not see that it would make any. After all, Frank was only two when he went to a foster home and does not even remember his own family—it was probably the best thing that could have happened because his mother did not take care of him.

Here the atmosphere of psychological safety established by the supervisor permits the supervisee to express his negative feelings about the client. It frees the supervisee to express disagreement with some of the things for which social work

supposedly stands. In effect, Jim says the client is lazy and no good; if he's in trouble, it's his own fault; he makes me mad; each man is the architect of his own fate, and if Frank just tried harder, he would be able to resolve his problems.

The supervisor is understanding enough to accept this outburst and, rather than express disappointment or chagrin that a social worker should react to his client in a manner which suggests rejection, expresses empathy with the supervisee's difficulty in understanding Frank. Responding in this way, the supervisor is teaching, by example, the concept of acceptance—that judging the client and his behavior in moral terms may be satisfying, but it is not very helpful; in problem-solving, it is more helpful to try to understand than to judge. The supervisor then asks a question that shifts the focus from an evaluation of Frank's behavior to an attempt to understand the behavior: What helps to explain Frank's actions, and what prompts him to act differently from the supervisee?

The supervisee, whose thinking has been channeled by the question, comes up with a descriptive statement of difference. The supervisor further questions him because this, as yet, does not explain why people should behave differently when confronted with similar situations. A less perceptive supervisor might be satisfied with the answer and develop a short lecture on the implications of differences in developmental history. This supervisor prefers to elicit the supervisee's perceptions of the implications that differences in developmental history have for behavior. This, once again, maximizes supervisee participation in learning. Implicit in the supervisor's questions are some behavioral concepts, such as the past is structured in the present, behavior is purposive, all generalizations need to be individualized, and feelings are facts that determine behavior. These ideas, however, are not taught explicitly.

The worker continues to voice doubts about the point the supervisor is making. He questions whether this difference in background explains the difference in behavior between himself and Frank.

I suggested we think back to when all this happened. I asked how he thought Frank felt when he had to leave his parents and go to a strange place, or did it seem that he was too young for it to make any difference? [Jim] looked dubious and remarked that, after all, a kid of two could hardly talk. We discussed this for a while, and he was thoughtful at my suggestion that it might even be harder for a little child like Frank who could feel, but was too young to understand what was happening, than for an older child. I said here we were talking about what had happened to Frank and about his feelings when he was two years old; perhaps this did not seem to have much connection with the present. He said, thoughtfully, that he could see it might, adding that Frank never hears from his family and that must be "rough on the kid"; I said he was telling me that out of Frank's life experiences and his own they would bring something different in terms of feeling to the present. With an expression of surprise, Jim commented that he felt sorry, not angry at Frank anymore. How come? Did he think it was because we were trying to understand Frank? He decided this was it, and wondered why he had not thought about all that before.

The supervisor does not directly counter the worker's doubts about his implied "explanation." The supervisor invites the worker to examine his thinking further, but this time by attempting to empathize with Frank (e.g., How did he think Frank felt?). The supervisor goes on to suggest a line of thought which the supervisee grasps ("Or did it seem that [Frank] was too young for it to make any difference?"). Such an approach can be helpful if the supervisor senses that this is the nature of the worker's

thinking but that he is either not ready or not clear enough to articulate it. The supervisor, in making it explicit, exposes it so that it can be discussed. Unless the message from a worker is clear, however, there is danger that this kind of interpretation will project onto the worker the supervisor's own conception of the situation, which the supervisee then employs for his own ends.

In any event, the supervisor is trying to make a teaching point: that a two-year-old can "know" and his "knowing" does affect later behavior—an idea with which the supervisee disagrees. At this juncture the supervisor, if he or she thinks the point important enough to warrant concern with its acceptance, should be prepared with didactic research material to reinforce it. What studies, if any, support the contention that a child of two can remember and that such memories affect later behavior? What clinical material supports the contention? The student has a right to know and the supervisor has an obligation to make this information available. Otherwise, the supervisor is exploiting the authority of his or her position to solicit acceptance of what may well be a presumption with little supporting evidence.

The past is of concern, however, not for itself but only as it affects the present. The supervisor shifts the discussion back to this area of greater importance. This is done with a question that suggests another principle in learning—that we learn best when the material being presented is meaningfully related to problems that concern us. The supervisor is trying to relate the questions raised about Frank's past to the problems that the worker faces in dealing with Frank. The supervisee makes this connection and makes a deduction in line with what the supervisor is attempting to teach about the effects of the past.

The supervisor then summarizes and makes explicit the meaning of the interaction (e.g., "I said he was telling me ..."). In summarizing, the supervisor uses another principle in learning—namely, we learn best and retain best if we are clear about what we have learned, if we can put it into words and look at it.

What needs to be taught is not only a change in thinking or the injection of new ideas for the worker's consideration (some of which may affect his thinking, some of which may not), but a change in feeling as well. The supervisor's approach, which focuses on understanding rather than judging, leads to a change in feeling. The worker begins to feel sorry for Frank rather than angry at him. This is an advance toward greater helpfulness but still not as helpful as an understanding of Frank, which the supervisor is aiming to teach. The approach toward developing understanding is only partly in the questions the supervisor raises (e.g., "Could he see any difference between Frank's situation and his own," "I wondered what difference between Frank's situation and his own," "I wondered what difference that would make," "I asked how he thought Frank felt"). It is also in the supervisor's approach to the worker. The supervisor is not judging the supervisee and his responses but rather attempting to understand why he answers in the way he does. The supervisor presents a pattern for identification, which the worker might emulate in thinking about Frank.

Jim then reminded me of the foster mother's complaints and of how he had tried to handle this with Frank by telling him he should find a job and give up his "bad" associates. I said he seemed to be questioning this himself—Did he

think people always did what they were told to do? In the Army, they did. This was always true? What about the men who went AWOL? He pointed out that they took the consequences and I agreed that we all have to do that. He reminisced about the difference in officers, how some were not liked and had a lot of trouble because the men would not obey them. In other words, I said, it made a difference how the men felt about their superiors. Of course, if they trusted them it was okay. I said I was sure this was true, and suggested we get back to Frank. "You mean with Frank it's different; I'm not still in the Army." I thought it must be hard getting away from giving orders or carrying them out. "Yes, I see what you mean. I don't think mine are going to work with Frank."

Earlier in the conference the worker has allied himself with the foster mother against Frank ("He's just lazy like Mrs. D. says"). Here, the supervisee is separating himself from the foster mother, and this change follows from his change of feeling about Frank.

The supervisor uses comparison and contrast to teach sensitivity to the unique, individualized aspects of this situation. The supervisor helps Jim factor out the essential differences between this and an apparently comparable situation, his army experience. The supervisor employs a context that is meaningful for the supervisee and also follows the principle of moving from the familiar to the unfamiliar. The supervisor keeps to a relevant focus, however, by relating this situation to the problem that is of concern to them—how best to help Frank. To the good teacher, nothing introduced by the worker is irrelevant. It is the responsibility of the supervisor to take what has been presented and relate it to the tasks of the supervisory conference.

I asked Jim how, then, he thought he could help Frank, and he replied ruefully that he was not sure—it had seemed simple before, he would just tell him what he should do. Now he realizes Mrs. D. has been doing this right along and it hasn't worked. I asked if he thought he could help the foster mother understand Frank better. He thought he could try and added that he guessed she felt annoyed at Frank like he did. "How do you think Frank feels?" He said he had just been thinking about that and thought he might well be feeling all alone, like nobody cared, and that must be awful. I agreed and said, "I can see you do care what happens to Frank and I think if you got that over to him, maybe in time Frank can learn to trust you."

Having helped Jim come to the conclusion that the approach he had been using with Frank was not likely to work and having helped him learn why it was not likely to work, the supervisor returns to the basic question that is the focus of the conference—how to help Frank. Now the question can be discussed with greater clarity and with greater motivation on the part of Jim to consider new approaches. The preceding discussion has made possible a teachable moment. The supervisor optimizes the supervisee's involvement by asking how he now thinks he can be helpful to Frank.

The supervisor recognizes and accepts the supervisee's dependence on him or her for suggesting possible new approaches at this point. In response to this need, he or she suggests an approach ("I asked if he thought he could help the foster mother understand Frank better").

Jim is not only achieving a greater understanding of Frank, but, in applying a general approach focused on understanding rather than judging, he is achieving greater empathy with the foster mother as well ("He guessed she felt annoyed at Frank like he did"). The supervisor teaches here, as was done somewhat earlier ("It made a difference how the men felt about their supervisors"), the importance of feelings in relationships—the fact that people behave toward one another in terms of

how they feel about one another (“You do care what happens to Frank and ... maybe in time Frank can learn to trust you”). The supervisor goes on to teach that the worker is part of this complex interaction; that his feelings toward the client are a determinant of the interaction in the relationship (feeling frustrated, he might feel angry toward Frank); and that the worker’s feelings that intrude on the relationship, once identified, can be controlled.

Jim said he too could see how it would take time, whereas he had thought he could do it all in one interview. I said it was hard to realize that change comes slowly in people. I thought he had made a good beginning and realized that he had noticed Frank seemed more cheerful and spoke more easily at the end of the interview. He hoped so but felt he needed to do a lot more thinking before he saw Frank again.

He guessed it wasn’t the way he thought, that you can learn all about casework in ten easy lessons. I laughed and said it was good that he was realizing this, but I knew it was hard too when he wanted so much to know all the answers. When we didn’t, we could feel frustrated, and perhaps that was some of the reason he had felt angry at Frank. Jim was very thoughtful and said this helped him to understand something that had happened in another interview and we went on to discuss that.

Utilizing the experience Jim has just gone through, the supervisor teaches about expectations for change. Inferentially, the supervisor reassures and supports Jim by indicating that he or she does not expect him to change Frank overnight—nor should Jim expect this for himself. The supervisor supports and excuses his frustration at not being able to learn all about casework in a few lessons.

The supervisor’s general approach is consistent with that communicated throughout the conference. Accepting, understanding, supportive attitude, readiness to praise the worker where commendation is warranted, and willingness to grant the worker autonomy and to move at his pace have created a nonthreatening climate favorable to learning.

The approach is not so permissive, however, as to be totally without anxiety. There is clear indication that although the supervisor accepts Jim’s current professional deficiencies, he or she does expect him to learn to do better. This is the best kind of anxiety for learning—anxiety based not on fear but on the discrepancy between what the worker needs to know and perhaps wants to know and what he does, in fact, know.

This section of the conference concludes before the conference itself is ended. The next section is introduced by the supervisee once again, this time on the basis of association with related problems—a natural and desirable procedure for transition, indicating the supervisee’s ability to generalize his learning.

Some readers might regard the supervisor’s approach as too passive or too Socratic. The supervisor might have been more active in stimulating Jim to think about certain significant aspects of the case that were largely ignored. It might have been helpful to clarify the target of change efforts—Frank, the foster mother, or both. Although it was suggested that Jim help the foster mother to understand Frank better, no effort was made to develop how this might be accomplished. There was little exploration of how the foster mother felt and the basis for her reaction in the situation. Rather than agreeing readily with Jim that replacement was undesirable, the supervisor might have helped him clarify his thinking about the advantages and

disadvantages of replacement in this particular situation. Although indicating the importance of developing Frank's sense of trust in Jim, the supervisor offers little in the way of specifics as to how this might be accomplished. The worker needs help in more clearly identifying the kinds of approaches and interventions on his part that will enhance trust. Little effort was made to explain the nature of the general social situation relating to Frank's employment and job-training opportunities. The fact that some things are not covered may reflect the principle of partialization. Only so much can be included on the teaching agenda of any one conference, and the supervisor always has to be somewhat selective.

We further note that the supervisor's efforts were aided by an apt, willing, and capable supervisee; the conference might have gone less smoothly if Jim had been less cooperative and more resistive. This observation illustrates that teaching and learning require the cooperative efforts of all the participants in the interaction. The best supervisor will fail with some highly sensitive supervisees with limited capacity for learning, and the worst supervisor will succeed with some highly cooperative and capable supervisees.

## **Summary**

Educational supervision is concerned with helping workers learn what they need to know in order to do their jobs effectively. Educational and administrative supervision have the same objectives. Educational supervision supplements administrative supervision by furthering the internalization of administrative controls and developing a professional orientation and a sense of loyalty among colleagues.

The supervisor has the responsibility of teaching the worker content regarding people, problems, process, and place and developing the self-awareness of personnel with regard to aspects of functioning that are clearly job related.

The regularly scheduled individual conference is the main locus of educational supervision. The teaching content is the supervisee's performance, and the teaching approach is based on an educational diagnosis of the supervisee. Preplanning and preparation are necessary, and during the conference the supervisor engages the supervisee in a systematic, critical analysis of the work he or she did and is planning to do.

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# CHAPTER 5

## Principles and Problems in Implementing Educational Supervision

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### Conditions for Effective Teaching and Learning: Introduction

In implementing the responsibilities of administrative supervision, the supervisor acts as a manager. In implementing the responsibilities of educational supervision, the supervisor acts as a teacher. The previous chapter was concerned with *what* the supervisor teaches. The present chapter is concerned with *how* the supervisor teaches to catalyze learning. It is further concerned with some of the problems in implementing the process of educational supervision.

The supervisor's principal responsibility in educational supervision is to teach the worker how to do the job. Our task here is to delineate what promotes effective teaching and learning. The teacher can organize content, provide a suitable atmosphere for learning, and make learning available; however, the teacher cannot ensure its acceptance and certainly not its use—only the learner can do that. Teaching is essentially the art of assisting another to learn. As Robinson (1936:128) said, "Teaching provides the subject matter, the stimulus, the materials, sets the tasks and defines the conditions. But learning is the process of utilizing opportunity and limits in one's way for one's own ends." Learning is a creative personal experience.

The supervisor, in implementing educational supervision, has the responsibility of knowing the content that needs to be learned, of knowing how to teach it effectively, and for creating, sustaining, and managing an interpersonal environment that facilitates learning. The good teacher has expert knowledge of the content to be taught, is highly motivated to teach it, has a high level of teaching skills, is capable of designing an effective learning program, is enthusiastic about his subject, and has respect for and confidence in his learners. The necessary knowledge base required for good educational supervision is not confined to the subject matter of content to be taught. It extends as well to necessary knowledge about teaching techniques, knowledge about the student who is the learner, and knowledge of the teacher about himself or herself.

Our interest is in how learners learn. The supervisor needs to be aware of some of the factors that facilitate learning and know something about techniques that maximize it. In this section, we outline some general principles of learning and some techniques derived from these principles that are applicable to the supervisory conference.

***Principle 1: People Learn Best If They Are Highly Motivated to Learn***



In applying this principle, the supervisor can use the following techniques.

*1. Explain the Usefulness of the Content to Be Taught* The supervisor owes workers some explanation as to why it might be important for them to know the material if they are to discharge his professional responsibilities effectively. Motivation increases as usefulness of the content becomes clear. The new worker may not appreciate the importance, for instance, of learning effective referral procedures. If the supervisor can show, by citing the relevant research, the sizable percentage of people who need referral service and the effects of different referral procedures on subsequent client experience, the worker may better understand the significance of this unit of learning. The adult learner (Goldman 2011; Memmott and Brennan 1998) is concerned with current problems that require learning for solution. In teaching-learning situations involving adults, the supervisor can take advantage of this orientation by stressing the utility and applicability of what is learned.

*2. Make Learning Meaningful in Terms of the Individual Worker's Motives and Needs* However useful or significant the material is generally, the worker is not likely to be motivated unless one can show its usefulness and importance for a problem or situation that is meaningful to him or her. Showing how the supervisee could have improved on the last interview if he or she had had a surer grasp of the dynamics of behavior will do more to increase motivation than lectures on the general importance of such knowledge.

When the training is close to the job of the worker, it is more specific to the worker's problems and more directly perceived by the worker as meeting his or her needs and satisfying his or her concerns. This has been found repeatedly in studies of in-service training in child welfare (Brittain and Potter 2009).

*3. Tie Areas of Low Motivation to Areas of High Motivation* The worker may be highly motivated to help the client but indifferent to the content the supervisor is attempting to teach (e.g., evaluating social work practice). If the supervisor can demonstrate that monitoring practice outcomes permits the worker to be more helpful to the client (Worthen and Lambert 2007), the worker may then be motivated to learn ways to do it.

One needs to be aware of the variety of the possible motives for learning. Motivation is "an internal process initiated by a need that leads to goal seeking." Intrinsic motives are tied to the content itself. People want to study the content because they are interested in the material, because there are intrinsic rewards in meeting and mastering the challenge of the content (Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi 1988), and because there is pleasure in acquiring knowledge that helps solve professional problems (Gleeson 1992).

Motives may be largely extrinsic, however. Learning the content is only a way of reaching subsequent goals. There may be psychic rewards from the approbation of peers, the supervisor, parents, and one's own professional superego. Other psychic

rewards are derived from competitively learning better than sibling-peers in the agency. Learning the content may be motivated by a desire for autonomy and independence, so that one does not have to turn to the supervisor for help. There may be administrative rewards, such as pay raises and promotions.

Motives for learning may result from a developing commitment to the agency, its staff, and its objectives. Having a strong conviction in the agency's objectives, the worker wants to see them achieved as effectively as possible. Motivation is strengthened by identification with the agency and colleagues. Feeling identified with the agency, the worker wants the agency to be favorably perceived by the community; feeling loyal and close to his colleagues, the worker wants their good opinion. As a consequence of these considerations, the worker is motivated to learn so as to be as competent as possible.

Research on the nature of job satisfaction helps clarify the incentives that are likely to motivate on-the-job learning. Influential studies on job satisfaction have been done by Herzberg and his group in a wide variety of contexts (Herzberg 1968; Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman 2005). Although the work itself may be the best predictor of job satisfaction after controlling for personal and job characteristics (Smerek and Peterson 2007), five factors were identified as the principal sources of job satisfaction for most people. Arranged in order of frequency, these factors are achievement (feeling pleased with something done in which one would take pride), recognition (good work was commented on and complimented), the work itself (the work was interesting, challenging, varied), responsibility (freedom to do the work independently and autonomously), and advancement (the possibility of moving up to more responsible positions). These factors can be used to motivate learning (Weikel-Morrison 2002). For instance, there is greater possibility of meeting the need for achievement if the worker learns how to do the job more effectively; learning to do the job increases the probability that the worker will be granted more responsibility and more opportunity to work independently; and learning to do the job enhances the possibility of advancement.

Supervisors would do well to utilize any and all motives to optimize learning. If the worker wants a promotion or raise or a student wants a high grade, these motives can be tied to the need to learn the content as a requirement for achieving their goals.

Motivation increases receptivity to learning and makes energy available for learning. It thus sets the stage for learning and provides the teachable moment, but it does not in itself make for learning. The supervisor has to take advantage of the teachable situation to teach something of significance. Motivation needs to be provided with a learning opportunity and direction. The supervisor provides guidance to the learning that motivation seeks.

*4. Safeguard, Stimulate, and Instill Motivation* Because motivation is of such crucial significance, the supervisor needs to safeguard and stimulate motivation where it exists and instill motivation where it does not. Motivation indicates a readiness for learning. A worker who lacks motivation to learn certain content may have no felt

need for it. The worker is satisfied with what he or she is doing and in the way he or she is doing it. The worker has no problem that requires additional learning for its solution. The worker may be right, in which case the supervisor has nothing to teach him or her.

If the supervisor, however, is convinced that the worker's perception of his performance is wrong and that there is much the worker needs to learn, the supervisor would first have to stimulate dissatisfaction with the worker's performance. The supervisor may want to confront the worker with the gap between what he or she is doing and what he or she can do, needs to be done, or wants to be able to do. Dissatisfaction with current performance is a necessary prerequisite before the worker is ready to learn new and better ways of working with the client. The worker is more likely to be motivated when he or she is somewhat uneasy (Stoltenberg and McNeill 1997).

Consequently, the supervisor should make a deliberate but compassionate effort to create some desire for, or curiosity about, the learning he or she has to offer. Rather than being passive in the face of lack of motivation, the supervisor acts as a catalyst for change, creating tension that needs to be resolved. The worker's equilibrium needs to be disturbed if receptivity to learning is to be stimulated.

At times, the "supervisor must awaken anxiety by penetrating the rationalization and defenses that bind it. If the supervisor avoids conflict for purposes of keeping the supervisory relationship untroubled and outwardly smooth, he will have abdicated his responsibility to the supervisee and will have compromised his trustworthiness" (Mueller and Kell 1972:30–31).

Motivation for learning follows the general principle that all behavior is purposive. People learn only when they want to learn or when they feel a need to learn. Although this justifies stimulation of a need, such a procedure may be unnecessary. The first assumption about an apparently unmotivated supervisee might well be that the supervisor is not sensitive enough to discern the motives that the worker has. It would initially be better to attempt to understand and use those motives that the learner himself brings to the situation. The supervisor might need to recognize that in some cases the problem is not that the worker is unmotivated but that he or she is differently motivated. The problem is not lack of motivation but difference in motivation. Discovering the nature of these different motivations, the supervisor might be able to exploit them in the service of motivating learning.

#### ***Principle 2: People Learn Best When They Can Devote Most of Their Energies to Learning***

Energy needed to defend against rejection, anxiety, guilt, shame, fear of failure, attacks on autonomy, or uncertain expectations is energy deflected from learning. Using the following techniques, the supervisor can maximize the amount of energy available for learning.

1. *Provide Structure* Providing structure means clearly establishing the time, place, roles, limits, expectations, obligations, and objectives of supervision (Freeman 1993).

Providing structure mitigates anxiety by focusing learning. If workers are anxious because they are uncertain of what is expected from them in the role of supervisee, then they are not fully free to devote full attention to learning (Costa 1994). Therefore, the nature of the supervisory relationship should be clear. The frequency of supervisory meetings, the length of such conferences, the respective responsibilities, expectations, and obligations of supervisee and supervisor in preparation for, and in the conduct of, such conferences should be clearly established, mutually understood, and mutually accepted. Such details provide the comfort of an unambiguous structure.

Clarity relates to learning objectives as well (Ching 1993; Talen and Schindler 1993). The supervisor needs to know, and to share with the supervisee, some idea of where he or she hopes the learner is going—what the worker will know and be able to do after learning what the supervisor hopes to teach. Objectives give meaning to each discrete learning unit and permit the supervisor to measure progress. As Seneca said, “No wind is favorable if you do not know your destination.” People learn best if the objectives of learning are clearly identified, if they know what to look for, and if they have a sense of priorities. However, Shulman (1991:166) reported: “When I ask participants in my supervision workshops to spell out their sense of their role ... most tell me they never had a supervisor who was clear about purpose and role.”

*2. Respect the Worker's Rights, Within Limits, To Determine His or Her Own Solutions* The structure, although supportive in its clarity, should not be so rigid that it becomes restrictive. Supervisory rigidity contributes to poor supervisory experiences (Nelson and Friedlander 2001; Quarto 2002). Some flexibility needs to be permitted the supervisee so as to prevent psychic energy from being diverted from learning to deal with rising hostility and resentment at infantilization. This is particularly true in adult education because the learner operates with considerable freedom and autonomy in other significant areas of his or her life. Here, however, the worker is partially dependent, as is every learner who needs to turn to others to teach what he or she does not yet know. As a generally independent adult, the learner is more apt to resent this necessary dependency. The supervisor should then permit the greatest amount of independence that the learner can profitably use without danger to the client. Respect for the worker's autonomy and initiative ensures that psychic energy necessary for learning will not be dissipated in defense of autonomy.

*3. Establish a Safe and Secure Atmosphere* Establish an atmosphere of accepting, psychological safety and a framework of security (Shulman 2010). Learning implies a risk of mistakes and a risk of failure. It implies, too, a confession of ignorance. A worker who fears censure and rejection for admitting failure or ignorance will devote psychic energy to defense against such anticipated attacks. The supervisor should be the supervisee's mentor rather than tormentor. An atmosphere of acceptance permits a freer involvement in risk-taking and a greater psychic concentration on learning rather than on self-defense. Learning takes place best in an

interaction that permits, if it does not condone, mistakes and recognizes the ambiguity and indefiniteness of the available answers.

The effects of the supervisor's attitude of acceptance on the worker's performance were described by a worker:

I didn't feel that I was getting criticized for what I was doing. So a lot of my feelings of anxiety and discomfort began to dissipate as I was not getting criticism from him: therefore, I wasn't criticizing myself—as harshly anyway. And I was feeling more comfortable. As I began to feel more comfortable—the more comfortable I felt, it's like the more ready I was to take that more critical look at what I had done. The more sure I felt that I wasn't a complete asshole, that I wasn't blowing it right and left, that I was OK in the room—I wasn't going to permanently damage anybody or any of that—and that the person I was presenting was really myself and not something that I was trying to do for my absent supervisor, the more ready I became to ask questions of myself and what I was doing in technique and all that. It wasn't laden with all the feelings and all the anxiety and all that. (Herrick 1977:136)

The impact on the supervisee of a supervisor who communicates nonacceptance was described by a supervisee:

I would just get angrier and angrier inside and I would get tighter and tighter and more closed, and whatever it was that we were supposed to be talking about around my client no longer became important because the dynamics that were going on between the two of us were so heavy that I couldn't even think about whatever it was that I was supposed to be thinking about. (Herrick 1977:95)

Learning does not merely result in adding knowledge and skills to those already available to the learner. Learning involves the risk of change in attitudes, values, and behavior as the new learning modifies the perception of the world and of people. The risk of change is anxiety provoking. People often fear what the consequences of change might be for them. If the supervisor is empathic in regard to the anxiety created by change resulting from learning and is supportive, there is less of a need to devote psychic energy to defend against change and to bind associated anxiety.

However, acceptance involves expectations. Psychological safety does not mean a permissiveness that ignores the demand for adequate performance on the part of the worker. The supervisor must make firm demands on the worker for learning what he or she needs to learn. However, those demands should be made in a friendly way, out of a desire to help rather than to hurt. They do create tension. However, such tension is necessary to motivate the supervisee to learn.

The supervisor has to be consistently helpful to the supervisee rather than consistently popular. This means challenging error, calling attention to ignorance, and pointing to mistakes and deficiencies in performance. The supervisor has to offer a judicious balance between stimulus and support. The supervisor is responsible for maintaining the balance between a degree of tension that motivates and challenges and a degree of tension that immobilizes. The supervisor should use the tension that derives not from the fear of failure but from the discrepancy between what the worker knows and what he wants to know. It involves making demands with the utmost possible respect, compassion, and understanding. It would be foolish to pretend that balancing these contradictory and vaguely defined variables is anything but the most difficult of tasks.

#### *4. Acknowledge and Use What the Worker Already Knows and Can Do This*

technique decreases anxiety because it indicates to workers that they can draw on what they already know to meet the demands of supervision. Affirmation and use of the already-rich learning the worker brings to the teaching-learning situation is an advantageous aspect of adult education.

*5. Move from the Familiar to the Unfamiliar* The unfamiliar provokes anxiety. If the supervisor can relate new material to familiar material, the new learning seems less strange and less difficult to learn.

*6. Demonstrate Confidence (If Warranted) in the Worker's Ability to Learn* Workers may have doubts about their abilities—doubts against which they need to defend themselves at some expenditure of psychic energy robbed from learning. Communication of a feeling of confidence in the worker's ability, where warranted, helps to allay feelings that detract from learning. Confidence in the learner's ability to learn is contagious. Communication of confidence increases motivation for, and interest in, learning.

At the same time, the supervisor has to accept, and make allowances for, the fact that learning is a growth process and takes time. One must expect nonproductive plateaus where little progress is being made. There needs to be time for reflection, absorption, and consolidation of learning. There is likely to be some regression in learning—much zigging and zagging. Like all growth processes, it is uneven and variable, and different kinds of content are learned at different rates of speed.

*7. Know Your Content; Be Ready and Willing to Teach It* The supervisor needs not only the wish but also the ability to be helpful. The worker does not know what he or she needs to know, which makes the worker anxious. The worker's anxiety is tempered, however, by the fact that at least the supervisor knows the answer to some of his or her questions—and is willing to share this knowledge with the worker, if necessary. If the supervisor does not know or seems unwilling to share this knowledge, tension increases because it suggests to the supervisee that he or she faces the prospect of dealing with situations for which no adequate assistance is available. Inevitably, on some occasions, the supervisor might have to say, "I don't know." However, the supervisor then needs to add, "We will try to find out."

Lack of knowledge in a situation that requires responsible action is anxiety provoking. Knowing that someone knows and is ready to provide the helpful knowledge diminishes anxiety. It might be noted that supervisor competence rather than omniscience is all that the supervisee does, and can, expect. However, the greater professional competence of the supervisor can help to meet the supervisees' legitimate dependence needs. The supervisor has to be capable and ready to meet these needs (Bennett 2008; White and Queener 2003).

The negative effect on the supervisee when perceived legitimate dependency needs are thwarted was described by a supervisee:

And sometimes her tone would get condescending: "Now, B., you're bright. You can think of that." For instance, if I

was having difficulty with something and asked for some suggestions, that would be the sort of response she would give me. It was like, unless I did everything on my own, I wasn't putting forth enough effort. I could've used at times more help from her—very direct help—rather than, “What do you think?” There were a couple times when we went back and forth—it's amazing—where she'd say, “Well, what do you think?” after I asked for help; and I'd say, “I don't know, what do you think?” And she would—very straight-faced—come back with, “Well, what do you think?” And I'd say, “Look, H., I really thought about it very hard; and I can't come up with anything else. That's why I'm asking you.” (Herrick 1977:154–55)

***Principle 3: People Learn Best When Learning Is Successful and Rewarding***

These techniques help the worker repeat what is satisfying and avoid repeating what is painful.

*1. Balance the Skills of the Worker and the Challenges of Practice* Set conditions of learning so as to ensure a high probability of success by optimizing the balance between the skills of the worker and the challenges of practice (Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi 1988). Intrinsically rewarding each successful experience in one's practice reinforces the behavior associated with the successful experience.

It would be inadvisable to present the worker with a learning demand that is clearly beyond his or her capacity to meet. If there is little chance of success, there is little motivation to try. Learners need some assurance that they can succeed if they are going to risk trying. On the other hand, the task needs to be sufficiently challenging to engage the worker's interest and prompt the worker to extend himself or herself. If a task is too easy, one is not likely to experience a feeling of success in achieving it. Selecting a learning task that is challenging but not overwhelming is a neat trick. It is, admittedly, much easier to describe than to do—particularly without any gauge by which to measure how much challenge a worker can hope to meet successfully.

*2. Praise Professional Accomplishments* Supervisors can increase positive satisfactions in learning if they praise, where warranted, success in professional accomplishment. Praise is a psychic reward that reinforces the behavior that prompted the commendation. Indiscriminate praise is counterproductive, however. The supervisee is an adult capable of independent critical assessment of his or her own performance. If the supervisor praises a performance that he or she recognizes as substandard, the supervisor loses credibility in the worker's eyes and subsequent assessments are discounted. The worker might feel that he or she cannot trust the supervisor's judgment. It is therefore important to commend only what can be defended as objectively praiseworthy. The supervisor should be specific about the behavior that has elicited approval—not using a general statement such as, “You really indicated your understanding of Mr. P.'s behavior,” but rather a specific statement such as, “You really indicated your understanding of Mr. P.'s behavior when you said ... in response to his comment about. ...” Such specificity not only ensures that learning is attended by positive satisfactions because it is being rewarded but also makes conscious and explicit the behavior that the supervisor hopes to reinforce.

Pleasure and pain—reward and punishment—overlap with the question of motivation in learning. People are motivated to learn so that they can avoid the pain

that comes from an inability to deal successfully with problems in job performance. They are motivated to learn so as to feel the pleasure of doing a job competently and effectively, to avoid the punishment of being dependent, and to obtain the reward of acting autonomously. People are motivated to learn so that they can avoid the pain of criticism and guilt and be rewarded with praise and approbation from themselves and from “significant others,” including the supervisor. People are motivated to learn to avoid the dissatisfaction that comes from the uncertainty of not clearly knowing what they are supposed to be doing or how to do it. Also, people are motivated to learn in order to feel the satisfaction in the security that comes from knowing, with assurance, what it is all about.

*3. Praise Through Positive Feedback* Such reinforcement is most effective if offered while the learning situation to which it applies is still fresh and vivid. This fact emphasizes the importance of regularly scheduled conferences at reasonably frequent intervals (once a week perhaps) so that the supervisor can offer his critical reaction to recently encountered experiences in which learning has been applied by the supervisees. Assessment of results is necessary if the learner is to experience a feeling of success, which is a reward.

*4. Evaluate Progress Over Time* Periodic stock-taking provided in a formal evaluation conference at less frequent intervals (e.g., every six months) further ensures learning attended by positive satisfaction because it permits a perspective on long-range progress. The supervisee can get some sense of progress in learning over time, which is rewarding.

*5. Partialize Learning* The supervisor can ensure a greater probability of success by partializing learning: “A man can eat a whole steer, one steak at a time.” Offer learning in digestible dosages. The agenda for a particular conference should cover a limited, defined unit of learning that is clear, acceptable, and attainable.

*6. Present Material in a Graded Sequence* Success and positive satisfactions in learning are more likely if the material is presented in a graded sequence—from the simple to the complex, from the obvious to the obscure. It involves moving from more concrete consideration of case material to more theoretical conceptualizations of cases.

It is easier for a worker to understand concrete situational needs, such as a home for a totally dependent, abandoned infant, than it is to understand the psychological dependency needs of a middle-aged neurotic. It is easier to understand that feelings are facts than to grasp the idea of ambivalence. Grading the complexity of content is more difficult in social work than in mathematics or chemistry. Seemingly simple situations have a tendency to present unanticipated complexities. However, to the extent that the supervisor can discern the measure of comparative difficulty of material to be taught, he or she should attempt to teach the simpler content first.

There are some general criteria for differentiating between simpler and more



difficult social-work learning situations. The client who is motivated to use the service, has good ego strength, is not unduly defensive, and with whom the worker can in some way identify presents less difficulty. A situation in which cause-and-effect relationships are clear, for which remedial resources and services are available, and in which the problem is well focused presents less difficulty. These characteristics represent treatable clients in treatable situations, ensuring greater probability of the successful application of learning.

*7. Prepare the Learner for Failure* The supervisor can ensure the greater probability of positive satisfaction in learning if he or she prepares the worker for failure. It may be necessary to expose the worker to situations of a complexity and difficulty for which he or she is not yet fully prepared. The demands of case coverage may not always permit the assignment of cases that are within the worker's competence. In such instances, it would be helpful to explicitly recognize with the worker the possibility of failure in the encounter. The worker is then less likely to be overwhelmed by personal guilt or shame and be more open to learning from the experience.

***Principle 4: People Learn Best if They Are Actively Involved in the Learning Process***

*1. Encourage the Worker's Participation in Agenda Planning* The supervisee should be encouraged to participate in planning the agenda for the supervisory sessions. This technique ensures the supervisee's active involvement in the learning situation. In addition, it increases the probability that content of primary interest and concern to the supervisee will be discussed.

Active participation in selecting the content for learning tends to heighten commitment to the task of learning; the learner himself or herself suggested that he or she was motivated to learn the content. The objectives of the learning-teaching encounter are therefore probably acceptable to the worker. However, although the supervisor might need to start where the worker is, the supervisor has an obligation to educate toward where the agency wants the worker to be. There are objective performance standards that need to be met. The supervisor cannot, in a gesture of mutual egalitarianism, give priority to the worker's educational choices. Supervisors are constrained to teach what the worker needs to learn, not what the worker wants to learn. But the two are often reconcilable, and knowing what the individual learner is interested in learning may enable the supervisor to bring "wants" and "needs" closer to each other.

*2. Encourage Discussion* The supervisor can ensure greater active involvement of the supervisee in learning by encouraging and providing opportunity for the worker to question, discuss, object, and express doubt. The supervisor should supplement, rather than substitute for, a supervisee's thinking. Thinking is trial acting. The worker will use what is being taught in active encounters with clients. The worker can, however, also be encouraged to engage with the content to be learned through discussion. This is a cognitive rather than behavioral engagement with the learning but

one that nevertheless requires active participation in learning. Such involvement of the supervisee is only possible in an atmosphere of psychological safety in which the supervisee feels comfortable about questioning the supervisor and presenting his or her own, perhaps opposing, point of view.

*3. Provide Opportunities to Use Knowledge* The supervisor should provide the explicit opportunity to use and apply the knowledge he or she seeks to teach. If supervisors are teaching the worker some of the principles of client advocacy, they would need to provide an assignment that involves the worker in client advocacy. The worker then, of necessity, is actively engaged in testing the learning through use. People learn by doing. Learning determines action, but successful action reinforces learning.

The worker may, however, engage in incompetent practice. Consequently, providing practice experience has to be followed by a critical review of what was done. Such feedback enables the worker to know specifically what might need correction and change. This review should again be followed by the opportunity to practice the corrected learning.

***Principle 5: People Learn Best if the Content Is Meaningfully Presented***

*1. Select Content That Interests the Learner* As much as possible, select for teaching the content that is of interest and concern to the supervisee. Readiness for learning is often related to some specific situation. Workers need to know what will help them to deal with problems they are having with a particular client. This is the teachable moment for the presentation of the relevant content. At this point, the content has meaning for the supervisee and can be most effectively taught.

*2. Present Content Within a Theoretical Framework* Content is meaningfully presented if it fits into some general theoretical framework. Notwithstanding the important and growing emphasis on evidence-based practice (Howard et al. 2009; Morago 2010) and supervision (Stoltenberg and Pace 2008; Milne 2009), different supervisors adhere to different theoretical systems, such as psychodynamic psychology, cognitive-behaviorism, and existential psychology (Calley 2008). Barring a preponderance of evidence, the choice of system may not be as important as the fact that there is belief in some comprehensive, internally consistent configuration that satisfactorily explains the mysteries of human behavior—at least for its adherents (Frank and Frank 2003). In social work, the subject matter is people. Workers need some cognitive map—some cosmology—that makes sense of why people do what they do in the way they do it.

It is difficult to learn discrete, unrelated details of behavior. If, however, the supervisor is knowledgeable about some well-articulated scheme, he or she can relate details to principles that act as an organizing focus for details. Whatever one's opinion is regarding id-ego-superego or drive-stimulus-response, one needs to recognize that these ideas suggest large-scale, coherent, explanatory frameworks of human behavior that meaningfully organize details regarding the human condition. The

supervisor needs to have available some reasonably comprehensive explanatory framework that meaningfully organizes the content that he or she is attempting to teach. Such ideational scaffolding provides the unity behind the plurality of experiences and gives a sense of connectedness to discrete lessons.

Bruner (1963) noted that “perhaps the most basic thing that can be said about human memory after a century of intensive research is that unless detail is placed into a structured pattern it is rapidly forgotten” (24); “organizing facts in terms of principle and idea from which they may be inferred is the only known way of reducing the quick rate of loss of human memory” (31). Bruner further commented that “the principal problem of human memory is not storage but retrieval” and that “the key to retrieval is organization” (32). People learn best if they can organize discrete data in terms of some unifying concepts and some unifying theoretical framework. An ideational framework helps to organize the chaos of unfamiliar and seemingly unrelated data.

*3. Teach Selectively* Meaningful teaching is selective teaching. Some things are more important than others. Some content requires more attention, emphasis, or repetition than other content. The supervisor needs to have priorities that guide the choice of content to be taught.

*4. Use Imaginative Repetition* Imaginative repetition makes learning more meaningful. If the supervisor selects a number of experiences that teach the same idea in different ways, the idea is easier to grasp and accept. Through comparison and contrast—an illustration of similarities and differences—the same content is more meaningfully presented.

Practice of skills is, after all, the opportunity to repeatedly exercise of such skills in different situations. However, this repetition is not haphazard. It is carefully selected in terms of organizing principles. As Tyler (1971:83) stated, “In order for educational experiences to produce a cumulative effect they must be organized so as to reinforce each other.” The best repetition involves not sheer drill of old learning but some variation that includes new elements to capture the learner’s interest. People learn best if the material is presented in a way that is novel, varied, and challenging. Such presentations tend to keep the learner stimulated and interested.

*5. Plan Your Teaching* Teaching that is planned in terms of continuity (reiteration of important content—deepening learning), sequence (successively building toward greater complexity—broadening learning), and integration (relating different kinds of content to each other) is apt to be teaching presented in a more meaningful context. Content has to be thoughtfully organized and systematically presented if it is to be taught effectively.

Some of the techniques mentioned in relation to previously cited principles of learning are applicable here as well. The content is more meaningful if the supervisor can relate new learning to previously acquired learning, moving from the familiar to the unfamiliar, and if the content can be presented in logical progressions, moving

from simple to complex.

6. *Make Learning Conscious and Explicit* Learning is more meaningful if it can be made conscious and explicit. People are not always aware of what they have learned. To the extent that they can consciously articulate and label what they have learned, the learning is apt to be more meaningful and transferable. This fact calls attention to the need for periodic recapitulation and summarization of units of completed learning.

***Principle 6: People Learn Best If the Supervisor Takes into Consideration the Supervisee's Uniqueness as a Learner***

1. *Individualize the Learner Using Educational Diagnosis* Educational diagnosis involves a precise definition of the knowledge and skills that a particular worker needs in order to do the specific tasks required of him or her at a level of proficiency that meets agency standards, as well as how the worker might best learn this. The supervisor should study the learner to understand how he or she learns (Ladany, Marotta, and Muse-Burke 2001).

Educational diagnosis of a supervisee includes a statement regarding what the worker already knows well, what he or she needs to learn, what he or she wants to learn, and how he or she wants to learn it. To individualize teaching, the supervisor needs to know not only where the worker is but where he or she wants to go. With such an educational diagnosis, the supervisor is in a better position to fit the learning situation to the learner rather than the learner to the learning situation. The advantage of tutorial teaching in the supervisory context is precisely that the supervisor can tailor the choice of approach and content to the learning needs of the individual supervisee (Memmott and Brennan 1998).

In making an educational diagnosis of supervisees, one needs to consider the special attributes of the adult learner (Cartney 2000; Tusting and Barton 2003). Adult learners have a long attention span, can sustain learning activity, and can postpone gratification for long periods. A good deal of adult learning might more properly be termed *relearning* rather than primary learning, and the learning process therefore involves some necessary unlearning. There is more resistance to accepting the temporary dependency that learning often requires (Nye 2007). Adult learners are, of course, often able to articulate what they want to learn and why they want to learn it. Maximum participation of the learner in the teacher-learner interaction is not only desirable but eminently feasible. The adult learner has a fund of learning and life experience that might be adapted to the current learning situation.

As in many professions (Polanyi 1966), much of what the social worker needs to learn is experiential in nature. In an analysis of the experiential learning patterns of social workers as compared with other professional groups, Kolb (1981) identified the social worker's learning orientation as "concrete-active." The pattern suggests a preference for learning through active involvement rather than detached, reflective, analytic observation of phenomena, learning through immersion in experience, a tendency to solve problems in an intuitive trial-and-error manner: "The dominant

philosophy is pragmatism and truth as defined by workability. Inquiry centers on the question of how actions shape events. The case study is the common method of inquiry and analysis" (Kolb 1981:244).

Kolb's diagnostic methods have attracted attention in social work education (Anderson and Adams 1992; Cartney 2000; Kruzich et al.1986; Raschick, Maypole, and Day 1998; Tsang 1993; Van Soest and Kruzich1994; Wolfsfeld and Haj-Yahia 2010) and practice (Fox and Guild 1987), leading Ing (1990) to encourage their use to guide supervision. Although Kolb's research has been challenged (Koob and Funk 2002) and there may not be "adequate evidence base to justify incorporating learning style assessments" of adult learners (Pashler et al. 2008:105), some findings suggest that social workers with varied styles of learning tend to shift (Tsang 1993) and converge over time (Wolfsfeld and Haj-Yahia 2010), adapting to the demands of their job (Gypen 1981). Thus, where Fox and Guild (1987) and Raschick et al. (1998:65) have encouraged supervisors to use learning style assessments to "start where the worker is," Wolfsfeld and Haj-Yahia (2010:68) have found that most supervisors "exhibit [learning] styles congruent with the styles typically found among social workers" and "supervisors tend to stick to their 'natural' supervision style irregardless [sic] of the learning style of the specific supervisee." Research has not identified a significant relationship between the learning-style match between supervisors and supervisees and subordinate satisfaction with supervision (Jacquot 1988) or performance (Epstein 1996). Apparently, some degree of contrast or tension between the teaching style of the supervisor and the learning style of the supervisee is beneficial (Tsang 1993), and those supervisors who do adjust their style to their supervisees "seem to prefer some degree of difference—but not too much" (Wolfsfeld and Haj-Yahia 2010:86). It appears that social workers and their supervisors tend to prefer a person-oriented supervisory style, characterized by "mutual communication, support, and emotional expression" (Itzhaky and Eliahu 1999:77).

The educational diagnosis of the individual adult learner is developed through supervisory interaction and assessment. The supervisor observes the supervisee's use of supervision, the level of motivation manifested, the balance of rigidity and flexibility in learning, the level of preparation for and participation in conferences, and the general attitude toward the content to be learned and toward the learning situation. The supervisor attempts to discern the procedures that elicit the supervisee's best response. Some people learn best in a highly structured situation; some people learn best in a loosely structured situation; some learn through listening, others through reading; some learn only through action in a practice situation; some cannot begin to act until they have learned; some learn best in an individual tutorial situation; others learn best through group interaction; some learn best through ready acceptance of teaching; some learn best through active opposition to content presented; and some are ready to learn but are less ready to be taught.

Is resistance to learning (Itzhaky and Aloni 1996) manifested in submissiveness, detachment, arrogance, aggression, self-deprecation, dependence, and ingratiation?

What failures in performance are due to ignorance or inexperience, amenable to change through education and experience, and what problems are the results of personality difficulties? What character defects impede learning and tie up psychic energy that might otherwise be available for learning? Is content learned for self-protection or for mastery of problem situations? Is learning collected as a possession or acquired for the aggrandizement of status? Does the supervisee think his or her way through a problem or feel his way through it? Is the supervisee responsive to a deductive pattern of instruction, moving from the general idea to the particular situation, or does the supervisee learn more readily inductively, requiring an experience with a series of similar situations before he or she can truly grasp the relevant generalization? Is the supervisee a fast learner, always ready and anxious for new material, or a learner who needs to take more time in integrating learning? Does the supervisee acknowledge his or her learning deficiencies and demonstrate a readiness to learn, or is the response characterized by denial and defensiveness? To what extent is the supervisee ready, willing, and able to take responsibility for his or her own learning needs? To what extent is the learner comfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity in the knowledge base available? To what extent does the supervisee need the certainty of unequivocal answers? The marginal learner needs to be distinguished from the resistant learner and the neurotically resistant learner from the situationally resistant learner.

How can the worker be described in terms of the variety of motives that energize people's interest and behavior? In McClelland and Burnham's (1976) terms, is the worker motivated by a need for interpersonal affiliation, for task achievement, or for power to influence others? In terms of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow 1943), is the worker motivated by a strong need for belonging, love, and social interaction, by a need for esteem and status, or by a need for self-actualization? In Herzberg's terms (Herzberg et al. 2005), is the worker motivated by maintenance needs, job security, salary, and working conditions, or by needs for growth and development, increased responsibility, and recognition of accomplishment? What is the degree of cognitive complexity with which the worker approaches a situation—the extent to which he or she can perceive the multidimensional aspects of a problem?

A comprehensive educational diagnosis that individualizes the supervisee also includes some attention to learning problems associated with more personal aspects of the supervisee's functioning in interaction with the clients, such as learning problems relating to the reactivation of the worker's personal developmental problems in the interaction with the client and problems of selective identification with one aspect of the case situation. As a result of transference, the worker's perception of the client is distorted by seeing the client as representing significant others from the worker's past in some measure. As a result of reactivation of developmental problems, the worker may distort the client's situation by avoidance of significant content that would be important to recognize. As a result of selective identification, the worker may distort perception of the client's situation by "taking sides" with the child in a parent-child problem or with the wife in a marital problem. There are also

difficulties that result not only from developmental problems but maturational problems—problems posed for the worker in moving from one state of life to another, from single to married, from nonparent to parent, from midlife crisis to retirement.

An educational diagnosis requires some attention to these sources of distortion that can adversely affect the worker's ability to offer effective service. In the effort to identify such difficulty, the supervisor needs to be aware of some relevant symptomatic manifestations. The consistent failure on the part of the worker to discuss content that might logically be presumed to be important is a diagnostic one. The total absence of any mention of the husband-father in the case of a child with a behavior problem, or lack of any information regarding sexual adjustment in the case of a marital problem, might be suggestive.

An atypically sharp, disproportionate feeling reaction to some aspect of the client's situation might be another cue. The worker's response, if exaggerated, might suggest that the source of the reaction is only partially the client's situation and more due to the worker's own problems. Persistent stereotyping of the client based on limited evidence might suggest distortions in perception stemming from the worker.

Individualization implies some understanding of what the learner risks in learning this content, and there are both internal risks and external risks. The internal risks relate to the meaning this learning has for the worker's self-image and current belief and attitudinal system. The external risks concern the worker's relationship with his or her reference group. Those who believe that the Bible is literal truth, for instance, may not accept proof in support of the theory of evolution. The conservative worker might feel out of place with friends if he or she accepted liberal ideas about social welfare.

*2. Apply the Educational Diagnosis* The supervisor, in preparation for a conference, would need to review what the supervisee most needs to learn at this particular time, how best to approach teaching the content to this particular supervisee, how the supervisee is likely to react in response to the efforts to teach this content, and so on.

Individualization implies that each person has his or her own unique, best way of learning. However, although it is recognized that the supervisor may not always be capable of modulating an approach to be neatly congruent with the needs of the learner, the supervisor should at least be understandingly aware of the nature of the learner's educational diagnosis.

*3. Actively Engage the Learner in Assessment* It is desirable to actively engage the supervisee in an assessment of what he or she already knows and wants to learn. Once again, this individualizes the learning needs of the particular supervisee, spares him or her the boredom of redundant learning, and spares the supervisor the effort of teaching what does not need to be taught. In addition, the learner's employment record and record of experience at the agency give relevant information about his or her educational and experiential background.

Adult learners have at their command a variety of previously learned skills that may be retranslated for use in a social work context. When implementing educational supervision, the supervisor might try to help the supervisee identify these skills and help the supervisee to use them appropriately.

*4. Consider the Worker's Pace of Learning* The supervisor should individualize teaching according to differences in the pace of learning. It takes time to integrate newly learned material, assimilate it with previous learning, and make an accommodation to a new equilibrium in thinking and feeling that the incorporation of learned material requires. Being asked to absorb too much too quickly threatens internal coherence and stability.

Although it is true that people learn more effectively when they learn at their own pace, there needs to be some recognition that both the agency and clients pay a heavy price for the pace of the slow learner. Neither can tolerate for long an excessively slow learner.

## **The Significance of the Supervisor-Supervisee Relationship for Educational Supervision**

Throughout this chapter, we have made allusions to the supervisor-supervisee relationship as having crucial significance for learning in supervision. The term *relationship* as used here includes the strength of the working alliance between teacher and learner (Efstation, Patton, and Kardash 1990; Horvath and Greenberg 1989), the quality of their emotional interaction (Kaib 2010), and the strength and resilience of their bond (Fitch, Pistole, and Gunn 2010; Renfro-Michel and Sheperis 2009). A growing body of evidence suggests that interpersonal relationships have a potent effect on the neurobiology of learning throughout life (Latawiec 2008; Cozolino 2010). In a review of the research, Lambert (2001) described the interpersonal relationship as the most powerful helping ingredient determining psychotherapy outcomes (Lambert 2001).

Learning takes place best when student and teacher are both in concert and at ease with the lessons to be learned and their respective duties, obligations, and tasks (Tsong 2004). Not only must the learner be motivated to accept the content of what needs to be learned, but he or she must be motivated and ready to accept it from the teacher. A worker resists accepting content offered by a supervisor he or she does not like, trust, and respect. The relationship, if positive, is the bridge over which the material passes from teacher to learner. If the relationship is negative, communication is blocked.

A positive relationship intensifies the impact of the supervisor's educational efforts. There is considerable empirical support for the contention that the nature of the supervisory relationship is a powerful variable in determining the supervisee's openness and receptivity to the supervisor's efforts to educate toward change (Bernard and Goodyear 2009). Relationship propels learning and makes content acceptable.



Identification with the supervisor heightens the worker's motivation to learn. As a consequence of identification, the worker wishes to be like the supervisor, to have the supervisor's competence, and to learn in order to emulate the supervisor. Only if the relationship is positive will the worker identify with the supervisor.

The supervisor as model for identification is aptly described in the following, written by a supervisee:

I guess his personal way of being was very strong in supervision. It was very warm, very relaxed, very comfortable—he smiled, laughed, sat back in his chair, and then gazed away as he listened. He was very interested but wasn't like sitting on the edge of his chair waiting for the next thing I would say so that he could respond to that. And I perceived that as indirectly giving me a model 'cause I figured that must be in some ways what he's like in therapy; and that's more what I would be like in therapy if I were myself. And it would also kinda make the client a lot more comfortable since it made me comfortable in supervision. "Aha!" I figured. "I should try to do that." It's very relaxing, and he uses strokes—makes a supportive, reinforcing comments, but not overbearingly so—just does enough of that that I can believe it when he does it. And he never makes harsh, critical statements and his suggestions are usually specific, and he explains what he means by them and gives an example of it but somehow manages to do that without making me feel like a jerk for not having known to do that in the first place. (Herrick 1977:139–40)

In learning through identification, the supervisor needs to give the supervisee the freedom to accept what he or she can use and reject or discard what does not seem appropriate. Such freedom leads to selective identification and selective learning rather than an indiscriminate mimicry of the supervisor.

The educational alliance between supervisor and supervisee is analogous, in significance and importance, to the therapeutic alliance between worker and client. Establishing and maintaining a positive relationship with the supervisee teaches essential social work skills. In developing such a relationship, the supervisor is modeling the way in which the supervisee might effectively relate to the client (Bogo 1993; Shulman 2010). Having experienced a helping process in educational supervision, the worker is then in a better position to understand what is involved in seeking and using help. As Robinson stated, "Since supervision in social casework teaches a helping process, it must itself be a helping process so that the [worker] experiences in his relationship with the supervisor a process similar to the one he must learn to use with his client" (1949:30).

Just as change can be awkward or painful for clients, the "deeper" lessons of professional development are "typically associated" with episodes of personal discomfort and subjective distress for the worker as well (Lombardo, Milne and Proctor 2009:213). Therefore, supervisors and supervisees, as well as workers and clients, must work to monitor, nurture, and tend the bonds that ally them (Falender and Shafranske 2004; Gard and Lewis 2008), if they are to repair the ruptures that invariably occur in otherwise-healthy working relationships (Bordin 1983). A rupture is "a problematic emotional response which interferes with intellectual functioning" that "arises out of the universal lag between intellectual grasp and ability to perform until the individual integrates knowledge through experience" (Burns 1958:7). Thus, the supervisory relationship itself, its nature and use, is an educational exemplification of what needs to be taught in developing clinical competence. The supervisory relationship is both the context for learning and a learning experience in itself.

Since Ekstein and Wallerstein (1972) emphasized the importance of the supervisory relationship, it has become the subject of considerable interest to researchers. Although empirical evidence “affirming the importance of the supervisory alliance ... is surprisingly wanting (Milne 2009:93), some evidence suggests that the supervisory relationship affects both the process (Inman and Ladany 2008) and the outcomes of supervision (Bernard and Goodyear 2009), including client outcomes (Harkness 1997; Shulman 2010). Such findings highlight the importance of research that seeks to identify additional factors and variables that influence the development and quality of the supervisory relationship (Jacobsen and Tanggaard 2009). This includes individual and developmental differences among supervisees and their supervisors on such dimensions as anxiety, attachment style, cognitive complexity and development, ego development, ethnicity and culture, experience, gender, learning and cognitive styles, personality, power, race, self-efficacy and self-presentation (of anxiety, interpersonal attachment, and self-monitoring), and sexual and theoretical orientation. Lyon and Potkar (2010) provided a succinct review of the research and, for an extended discussion, Bernard and Goodyear (2009) devoted three chapters to this literature.

### **The Supervisor’s Problems in Implementing Educational Supervision**

To teach the content that is the curriculum of educational supervision, the supervisor needs to know the content. There is a growing demand for evidence-based practice, and staying current with the rapid proliferation of evidence-based knowledge is demanding. Practice knowledge and competence are indispensable for effective first-line supervision generally, and for educational supervision in particular. These fuel the power of expertise, a principal source of the supervisor’s administrative authority. The responsibilities of educational supervision further require a solid grasp of the subject matter relevant to agency practice. The supervisor—as a source of identification, an admired practitioner, and a model of effective practice—needs to project the image and the reality of competence. Consequently, the supervisor faces the problem of assessing—and if necessary, upgrading—theoretical knowledge and expertise.

Scott (1969) found that professionally oriented workers preferred a supervisor “to know the theoretical fundamentals of their discipline—be skilled in teaching casework methods and capable of offering professionally competent assistance” (94–95). The supervisee looks to the supervisor to have available a fund of previously developed solutions to practice problems. Studies of student evaluation of teaching show that a thorough knowledge of subject matter content is a necessary, if not sufficient, requirement for good teaching.

In fact, in response to a question designed to identify their principal “strengths” in supervision, supervisors most frequently cited clinical knowledge, skill, and experience. Listing their greatest strengths, supervisors said the following (Kadushin 1992b):

- I have extensive knowledge and experience and am able to use that in

developing skills in my supervisees.

- Experience and firsthand knowledge of the services I am supervising.
- Knowledge about what skills are needed to do the job and ability to impart that knowledge.
- My knowledge of public social service from budgeting to therapeutics.

Many supervisees, responding to an analogous question about their perceptions of their supervisors' strengths, cited clinical expertise. Supervisees said the following (Kadushin 1992b):

- One of her principal strengths lies in her knowledge of theory and in her willingness to share this knowledge.
- Expert clinical knowledge which allows him to offer suggestions.
- Excellent knowledge he has of the theory, applied theory, agency dynamics and case work.

In addition to the demand for practice expertise, there are additional problems in implementing educational supervision. Supervisors may exploit educational supervision to meet their own needs without being fully aware of it. The situation provides the opportunity for developing protégés, for making workers over into the supervisor's own professional image. The supervisor becomes, in such instances, more an object of direct imitation than an object of identification. The worker's success is the supervisor's success; the worker's failures are perceived as the supervisor's failures. The supervisee is less an independent entity than an extension of the supervisor.

The supervisor who, in response to the triadic situation of client-worker-supervisor, is still more a worker than a supervisor, may focus too heavily on the client. Such a supervisor is still primarily interested in practice, albeit vicariously through the supervisee. This supervisor has not yet made the psychological transition from worker to supervisor. The consequence for educational supervision is that the supervisor denies the supervisee his or her freedom to learn. Giving exclusive priority to client needs, the supervisor is so fearful of mistakes by the supervisee that he or she tends to be overdirective and overcontrolling. The supervisor acts more like a guard than a guide.

A supervisor may be hesitant to share his or her knowledge and expertise with the supervisee out of anxiety about competition, from a "sibling." If the supervisor derives gratification from the supervisee's dependency, he or she will perennially tend to perceive the supervisee as "not yet ready" for the next steps in education. In both these situations, the supervisor tends to teach the content of educational supervision grudgingly, in small doses, at an inappropriately slow tempo. Evidence of workers' growing independence and competence is viewed with anxiety rather than pleasure. An imperious "need to be needed" on the part of the supervisor will further conflict with the responsibility to grant the supervisee as much autonomy as he or she can responsibly handle.

Overidentification with the worker may make the supervisor overly protective, shielding the worker from possible mistakes, anxious that the worker may not be able to accept normal failures: "She was afraid to take the risks necessary for learning and I was afraid to let her."

A supervisor who is anxious about his or her own relationship with the administrator may overcontrol the worker to prevent embarrassment at worker errors for which the supervisor is held responsible. Conversely, supervisors may act out their own rebellious impulses toward the agency through their supervisees, from the safety of middle-management positions.

The supervisor who has considerable therapeutic skills but limited pedagogic skills, or who feels more comfortable with the role of clinician than that of teacher, may convert educational supervision into psychotherapy. There is greater gratification in casting the supervisee in the role of client than in that of learner. Questions brought into the supervisory conference by the supervisee tend to become personalized and interpreted as problems of personal pathology with which the supervisee might need help.

Supervisors may be sufficiently uncertain about their own knowledge that they cannot permit the supervisee the freedom to experiment and to learn. A supervisor wrote:

Because of my discomfort with the supervisory relationship, I found it easier to simply introduce final decisions matter-of-factly, rather than risk challenge of my own choice of alternatives in a give-and-take process. I was perfectly happy with this "dictator" method but feared an open exercise of authority which might be called for in joint democratic decision-making if the worker didn't accept my reasons as valid and challenged my choices.

Such a supervisor may tend to be defensive and find it difficult to acknowledge ignorance.

Educational supervision provides the opportunity for a narcissistic display of knowledge and skills. Whether or not this is educationally helpful to the supervisee becomes a secondary consideration. The supervisor who made the following comment caught himself indulging in such behavior:

In discussing the client with the worker during that session, I made another mistake: that of "lecturing" the worker on the psychological, social, cultural and economic factors affecting clients' behavioral patterns without any reference to the particular situation at hand. And when I did talk about the client, I started to discourse on the effects of emotional and cultural deprivation on the lives of children, and the psychoanalytical implications of Henry's father having run away from the home. ... I finally caught myself in the middle of the oedipal complex bit. "B.S.!" I said to myself and changed the subject immediately, hoping that the worker had not realized the pompousness of it all, and if she did, that she would forgive me for it. I then realized how easy it is to get carried away when one has a captive audience. The "teaching" aspect of supervision is an art not easily mastered. I must remember to do more teaching and less preaching.

Some egalitarian-oriented supervisors may, on the other hand, be afraid of showing what they know. Revealing that they are actually more knowledgeable than the supervisee destroys a pretense of equality in the relationship. Teaching freely requires the ready acceptance by the supervisor that he or she does, in fact, know more than the supervisee and is entitled to teach it.

Some supervisors are made uneasy by the inherently unequal nature of the

supervisor-supervisee relationship in educational supervision. It needs to be noted that the superordinate-subordinate role relationship still holds, even in the educational component of supervision. The supervisor is sanctioned by the agency to engage in educational activity. Second, the supervisee, while participating in determining what should be taught and learned, faces constraints determined by what the agency requires that he learn to do. Educational supervision needs to maintain a balance between what the supervisees want to learn and what they need to learn. Consequently, the supervisor has considerable responsibility for what is included in the educational program. Third, the supervisor is responsible for evaluating whether or not the supervisee has in fact learned what it is that the supervisee has to know and what the supervisor is mandated to teach. These considerations make it clear once again that supervisor and supervisee are not acting as equals in educational supervision.

Every supervisor has his or her own likes and dislikes regarding supervisee learning patterns. If the supervisor is not aware of such predilections, there is less probability that he or she can control differences in response to different supervisees. Some supervisors like rapid, avid learners who absorb teaching quickly and voraciously; some like the slow, plodding learners who are less challenging and for whom considerable repetition of content is required. Some supervisors like the supervisee who presses the supervisor-supervisee educational relationship in the direction of peer consultation and collegiality; others find gratification in the supervisee who accepts a parent-child relationship. Some like the exuberant, extroverted learner; some like the shy, introverted learner. Some are more comfortable with learners who do best in the individual tutorial situation; some are more comfortable with group-oriented learners.

### **Differentiating Educational Supervision from Therapy**

One of the persistent problems encountered by educational supervisors is the task of differentiating supervision from therapy—differentiating teaching from treating (Ganzer and Ornstein 2004; Kernberg 2010). The supervisory context is in many essential characteristics similar to the therapeutic context. Both situations involve a continuing, intimate, highly cathected, dyadic relationship in which an effort at exerting interpersonal influence to effect change is made by one member of the dyad toward the other (Shulman 2005). Both interactions are designed to develop a heightened sense of self-awareness (Frawley-O'Dea and Sarnet 2001; Rosenfeld 2008).

How then does the supervisor develop self-awareness in the supervisee without being accused of “social working the social worker”? A distinction needs to be made between educational supervision and therapy to prevent problems in boundary violations and conflicting dual relationships.

#### ***Differences Between Supervision and Therapy***

Differences between educational supervision, concerned with developing self-awareness and therapy, relate to purpose, focus, and roles.

*Purpose and Focus* The supervisor recognizes and respects the limits and restrictions of his or her purpose. The supervisor's responsibility is to help the supervisee become a better worker, not necessarily a better person. A legitimate concern is with the professional activities of the supervisee, but the supervisor has no sanction to intrude into the personal life of the supervisee. The concern is with changes in professional identity rather than changes in personal identity. The supervisor should ask, "How can I help you do your work?" rather than "How can I help you?" Ekstein and Wallerstein (1972) noted that "in supervision we aim at a change in skill, a change in the use of the professional self while in psychotherapy we aim at changes which embrace the total adaptive functioning of the individual" (92).

The valid focus of attention is the supervisee's work, rather than the supervisee himself or herself. Only if the supervisee's behavior, feelings, and attitudes create some difficulty in the performance of professional tasks—then and only then—do they become a legitimate matter for supervisory concern. The supervisor is not entitled to intervene with regard to behavior, feelings, and attitudes that, however problematic or deviant, are not clearly manifested in some job-related interaction.

In educational supervision, one is not primarily dealing with the total person as in therapy. The supervisor is dealing with only one of the many roles that make up the worker's total identity—the specific, particular role of agency employee. The supervisor, unlike the therapist, is not concerned with the causes of personal pathology, but only with the consequences of such problems for the worker's performance on the job.

This is not to deny that professional growth does have consequences related to personal growth. The professional self is, after all, a significant aspect of the total personal-self configuration. However, if the personal self undergoes growth and change, as is likely, this happens as an incidental, serendipitous, unplanned, unintended byproduct of the focus on professional growth.

Although the following comments by Ekstein and Wallerstein (1972) relate to supervision of the psychiatric resident, they are pertinent to this discussion:

Both supervision and psychotherapy are interpersonal helping processes working with the same affective components, with the essential difference between them created by the difference in purpose. Though both are helping processes, the purpose of the helping experience is different. Whatever practical problems the patient may bring to his psychotherapist, they are always viewed in the light of the main task: the resolution of inner conflict. Whatever personal problems the student may bring to his supervisor, they are likewise always seen in terms of the main task: leading him toward greater skill in his work with his patients. ... If the main purpose of a relationship is maintained throughout, the difference is clearly apparent between the type of relationship called psychotherapy and the one called supervision. ... In psychotherapy the patient essentially sets his own goals. The therapist has no vested interest in any particular degree or direction of change. In supervision, on the other hand, the clinical setting, whose representative is the supervisor, sets both its requirements and its goals in terms of standards of professional performance and clinical service currently rendered and to be attained. (Ekstein and Wallerstein 1972:254–55, reprinted with permission of International Universities Press)

The therapist is free to work toward any goal that the client selects. The supervisor is responsible for the behavior of the supervisee and is not free to work toward any goal the supervisee selects. The agency requirement is that the supervisor help the worker become an effective agency employee. The therapist

helps the client achieve an individualized, personally satisfactory solution to his problem. The supervisor helps the worker achieve a resolution to his or her problem that is satisfactory to the organization. The objective of the supervision is improved technical performance in contrast with the therapist's objective of personality reconstruction or remediation. The objectives of educational supervision and therapy are different. Supervision is oriented to the needs of the client; therapy is oriented to the needs of the worker.

If the supervisee becomes a client of the supervisor in a shift from educational supervision to psychotherapy, the focus of supervisory attention must shift from the agency client to the worker. The needs of the supervisee as client then take precedence over the needs of the agency client. This is a subversion of the primary responsibility and obligation of the agency toward its client. Instead of the focus of attention being on service, the client is used to advance the therapy of the worker. This is an inequitable manipulation of the client, without the client's permission and in contravention to the client's objectives in coming to the agency. The client becomes an involuntary coparticipant in the worker's therapy.

To accept the supervisee for psychotherapy requires a modification of work standards. The criteria for a decision regarding enforcement of agency standards become the therapeutic needs of the supervisee-client rather than the needs of agency clients. This too is contrary to the primary obligation of the agency. Exercise of administrative sanctions required in maintaining adequate standards may be antitherapeutic for the supervisee-client. The evaluation of worker performance is an inalienable supervisory duty (Campbell 2006; Milne 2009). The supervisor cannot at the same time be a psychotherapist to the supervisee and a guardian of agency standards.

In implementing the focus on supervision as against therapy, the supervisor keeps the discussion centered on the client's situation and experience rather than the worker's situation and experience. The discussion is work-centered, not worker-centered. Further, the focus is on *what* the worker did or failed to do rather than *why* he did it. If there is any discussion of the reasons that may help explain the worker's behavior, it is centered on the current work situation rather than in any psychodynamic exploration of developmental antecedents.

Current reality as an explanation of workers' problems should always be examined first. Personal problems should be discussed only through their derivative manifestations in assigned work.

Unlike therapy, in supervision problems are alluded to but not explored for their developmental genesis. As Towle (1954:89) noted, "Our task is education not therapy. ... We should deal with the student's emotional difficulties only insofar as they are interfering with his learning." Therapy explores the personal implications of problems; supervision explores the professional implications of problems.

*Difference in Role Relationships* Shifting from educational supervision to psychotherapy involves an unwarranted and inappropriate shift in roles. As Stiles

(1963) said, "A supervisory relationship contains an implicit contract: the worker is responsible for attempting to maximize his performance and continuing his professional development; the supervisor is responsible for helping him achieve these goals" (24). The parameters of the contract, as noted, are the worker's "performance" and "professional development." Concern with personal development is an unwarranted and unanticipated extension of the explicit contract. Having consented to an administrative-educational process, the worker cannot legitimately have a psychotherapy process imposed on him or her. "Therapizing" the relationship suggests that the supervisor is entering areas of the worker's life concerning which the supervisor has no organizational sanction or authority.

Unlike the client in psychotherapy, the supervisee did not voluntarily select the supervisor as a therapist and is not free to terminate the relationship with the supervisor (Campbell 2006). Thus, attempted transformation of educational supervision into psychotherapy is even more likely to be resented by the captive worker.

In educational supervision, the worker contracts for knowledge and guidance, not the alleviation of symptoms. There is no treatment contract that would sanction the supervisor to subject the supervisee to some of the psychic pain that may be necessary for effective therapy. There is no contract that would make the supervisee aware that he or she might have to accept some of the inevitable discomforts of therapy.

In accepting the role of patient to therapist, certain prerogatives of privacy are waived. In a supervisory relationship that is redirected to a therapeutic relationship, there is no clear agreement on the part of the supervisee that he or she has agreed to the suspension of such entitlements.

Subverting educational supervision so that it becomes psychotherapy in disguise not only contravenes the agreed-upon nature of reciprocal supervisor-supervisee role relations, it also violates the conditions for effective therapy. To the extent that personal therapy potentiates supervision and professional growth (Bike, Norcross, and Schatz 2009; Gold and Hilsenroth 2009), merging supervision and therapy may weaken them both (Rosenfeld 2007; Latawiec 2008). Effective therapy is not likely to be possible unless a complete detailed history has been taken and a clear diagnosis of the problem formulated (Harkness 2010). Effective therapy would require considerably more detailed exploration of developmental data and current functioning than is possible, or acceptable, in the supervisory relationship.

Effective therapy requires a psychosocial diagnosis of the client and a therapeutic alliance between therapist and client. Effective educational supervision requires an educational diagnosis and a teacher-learner alliance between supervisor and supervisee. In therapy, unconscious feelings are explored for their genesis and worked through for their resolution. In supervision, unconscious feelings may be identified but are neither explored nor resolved. While listening with the understanding of a therapist the supervisor responds, not as a therapist but as an educator. Even in psychoanalytic training, the following holds true:



Supervision should not become a psychotherapeutic process: conflating the two usually leads to regression in the supervision, tends to blur the clarity of the supervisory process, and may interfere with the collegial aspects of the relationship. It may also foster transference displacement and acting out by a supervisee. ... (Kernberg 2010:611)

The supervisor seeks to promote identification, but not transference. If therapy depends for some of its effectiveness on transference elements, then converting the supervisory situation into a therapeutic relationship increases the probability that therapy will fail. In the usual therapy situation, the contact between patient and therapist is confined to their interaction during the therapy sessions. Supervisor and supervisee, on the contrary, have contact with each other in many different contexts in the agency. This tends to dilute the potency of transference for effective therapy.

The evaluative component inherent in supervision makes it difficult to effectively engage in therapy. In addition to the risk of loss of self-esteem, of possible rejection and blame in sharing intra- and interpersonal problems, there is the added risk that this content might be used in evaluating the supervisee's potentialities for professional performance and advancement. There is increased tendency to share selectively rather than fully and openly. The responsibilities of supervision compromise the requirements for effective therapeutic interaction.

Yet, in flesh-and-blood practice, the boundary between supervision and therapy can become indistinct. In an exploration of that borderline region, Frawley-O'Dea and Sarnat (2001) have argued for a more permeable, intersubjective approach to supervision in which the power and authority of the supervisor is muted, the distinction between teaching and treating is relaxed, and the unconscious dynamics of both the supervisee and the supervisor are shared and explored (Ganzer and Ornstein 2004; Miehl 2010). Although Frawley-O'Dea and Sarnat (2001) did not view "the supervisees' dynamics as taboo and off limits," they are not "advocating an *anything goes* approach, but rather a careful and reflective investigation of the interpersonal world of the participants" with "boundaries and limits ... negotiated and co-constructed by the participants" (Miehl 2010:372).

Personal factors are frequently addressed in supervision (Henry, Hart, and Nance 2004; Rosenfeld 2007), as clinicians draw on both personal and professional sources in their practice (Falender and Shafranske 2004). However, in therapizing the supervisor-supervisee relationship, the supervisor risks doing the supervisee an injustice. It reduces the supervisee's incentive to get outside help clearly designed to provide therapy and thus denies the supervisee the full benefit of a relationship exclusively devoted to his therapy (Bike, Norcross, and Schatz 2009; Gold and Hilsenroth 2009). And where practitioners of "relational" supervision tread in the grey zone, Miehl (2010:372) noted that the needs of the client and the treatment should be the primary focus of supervision, urging caution if the supervisee has not had his or her own treatment.

To summarize, confusion results from the fact that educational supervision toward developing job-related self-awareness and psychotherapy are similar in some essential respects. Both encourage self-examination in the context of a meaningful relationship; both are directed toward personal growth and change; both provoke

anxiety. The psychodynamics of both processes and the techniques employed are the same. The distinction lies primarily in purpose and focus and role parameters of the relationship.

### **Problems in Implementation of Therapy-Educational Supervision Distinction**

One of the problems that all supervisees face is learning what issues to bring to supervision. “[I]n virtually every therapeutic model supervisors expect comprehensive and accurate information about therapy sessions and the trainees internal processing of the case,” (Farber 2006:181), yet most supervisees withhold information from their supervisors (Ladany, Hill, Corbett, and Nutt 1996; Farber 2006). Mehr, Ladany, and Caskie (2010:103) asked, “What are they not telling you?” and admonished that trainees must “disclose information about their clients and clinical interactions, as well as their own experience within the supervisory relationship ... [i]n order for supervisors to promote the development of [their] clinical competence.”

On the other hand, there are limits. A venerable psychoanalyst wrote:

After telling me that her patient had expressed sexual fantasies about her in a clearly seductive way, the candidate—a highly intelligent woman who was usually secure and open—told me that this had made her feel very insecure. We explored this further, and she finally said: “I have to confess that if I met this man one evening in a bar without any prior knowledge of him, I would be tempted to go to bed with him.” (Kernberg 2010:611)

In response, the psychoanalyst continued:

I commented that she was making it clear he was attractive to her as a man, but what was it in him that made her afraid of him? This led us into a discussion [in which] I expressed appreciation of the candidate's capacity to talk honestly about her feelings with me, but I focused on the meaning of the patient's induction of those feelings, and I respected the candidate's privacy regarding the particular unconscious tendencies that might have made her feel particularly attracted to this man. (Kernberg 2010:611)

Problems such as these “leave the supervisor in the dilemma of having to be more than a teacher, but less than a therapist. Inevitably this demands sensitive and difficult decisions on the part of the supervisor, who must always be aware of when his professional concern becomes personal intrusiveness and yet deal directly and realistically with counter-transference phenomena that interfere with the ongoing therapeutic work (Gizynski 1978:203).”

Furthermore, “It is a matter of extreme delicacy to maintain a warm and interested human relationship on the one hand and on the other not to respond to the therapeutic needs that the [supervisee] may reveal either directly by the development of symptoms or indirectly in the handling of case material” (Zetzel 1953).

Consequently, establishing guidelines for what is appropriate in a supervisory conference is easier than applying them (Sarnat 1992). The following excerpt is a supervisor's introspective review of the difficulty in making a decision in such a situation. The problem lies in deciding when a worker's difficulty is purely personal and when it is task-related:

Vera [the worker] brought up the fact that she was experiencing some confusion herself about the prospect of marrying her present boyfriend and that the two of them were involved in premarital counseling. She expressed doubt as to her ability to help someone else deal with a problem similar to the one she herself was experiencing.

I was caught a little off guard and likewise experienced a certain element of confusion—a few quick thoughts ran through my mind, and I responded by doing “nothing.” My quick thoughts leading to this response went something like this: avoid taking on the role of therapist; personal problems of the supervisee are not relevant here unless they interfere with job or learning performance and there is not yet sufficient evidence to this effect. In starting the process of evaluating Vera’s work, I have become aware of a tendency on her part to shy away from offering help to clients in the area of marital conflict, although not hesitating to offer and provide it in other problem areas (housing, child-parent relationships, etc.). Also, it now occurs to me that Vera may not have been asking for any help with her personal problems (she was already involved in outside counseling), but only for help in resolving her concern about being able to help someone else with a problem she saw was similar to her own. If this was the case, I would consider her concern to represent the kind of emotional aspect of learning which is the responsibility of the supervisor to deal with. In retrospect, viewing the pattern of Vera’s work performance I think the problem was more job related than I had originally thought.

The problem was noted by another supervisor in the following vignette:

A recurrent problem was Dick’s hesitancy about helping a family arrange for a nursing home placement for an aged client, even when this seemed clearly necessary. At some point, I felt that it was important to explore Dick’s feelings toward nursing homes to be sure that he wasn’t allowing a personal bias to interfere against nursing home placement. I attempted to deal exclusively with job-related awareness, but when Dick admitted that much of his feeling came from the experience of his own father being placed in a nursing home, the session began to focus more and more on the supervisee rather than on the work-related issue. We became caught up in dealing with the psychology of Dick’s relationship with his father, but eventually I was able to redirect our attention and move back with some difficulty to the issue of nursing homes for his clients.

This problem is a difficult one because the worker is likely to react negatively to both indifference and excessive interest. If the supervisor ignores the supervisee’s comment about what is apparently a purely personal problem, the worker is likely to feel rejected. If the supervisor shows excessive interest in the problem, it can be interpreted as an unwarranted intrusion. Recognition of the worker’s statement without pursuing it might be the difficult response of choice. A frank, explicit statement by the supervisor of what he or she is doing might help: “I appreciate that this must be a difficult problem for you but I really don’t think it is appropriate for us to discuss it at length here.” However, it needs to be recognized that a “rigid boundary between the personal and professional lives of (supervisees) seems simplistic and artificial” (Gurka and Wicas 1979:404; Rosenfeld 2007). What supervisees want and need from educational supervision tends to change over time (Glidden and Tracey 1992), although advanced practitioners “have repeatedly expressed a willingness to examine personal issues that affect their relationships with clients” (Sumerel and Borders 1996:269). Schroffel (1999) reported that supervisors rarely offer the advanced educational content that experienced practitioners want, contributing significantly to worker dissatisfaction. In general, the evidence suggests that educational supervision is dominated by *practical* content, whether the supervisee is a student, a new social worker, or a senior practitioner (Charles, Gabor and Matheson 1992; Gray, Alperin and Wik 1989; Greenspan, Hanfling, Parker, Primm and Waldfogel 1992; Henry, Hart and Nance 2004; Dow, Hart, and Nance 2009). Apparently, experienced workers yearn for supervisory content that advances their personal growth, whereas supervisors emphasize content that gets the job done. However, the interest in supervised personal development shown by workers with experience may signal their desire for more challenging work, not psychotherapy (Goodyear and Bernard 1998).

## **Acceptance of Distinction between Supervision and Therapy: Empirical Data**

The available data suggest that most supervisors and supervisees understand, and accept, the limited definition of the supervisor's responsibility as outlined here. Most of the 853 respondents to a questionnaire made a clear distinction between professional development and personal development. The professional development of the supervisee was selected by both supervisors and supervisees as one major objective of supervision. Conversely, both groups selected "ensuring the more complete development of the supervisee as a mature person" as among the three least important objectives. Satisfaction "in helping the supervisee grow and develop in professional competence" was the main satisfaction in supervision for the largest percentage of supervisors (88 percent). Less than 1 percent of them, however, checked "helping supervisees with their personal problems" as a source of satisfaction. Similarly, the statement of dissatisfaction in supervision least frequently checked by supervisees was "My supervisor tends to become too involved in my personal problems," indicating that transformation of supervision into psychotherapy was not currently a problem for most of the respondents (Kadushin 1974).

Supervisors responding to admonitions that they have no right to "casework the caseworker" adhere to the dichotomy of professional versus personal development even more rigorously than do supervisees. If anything, supervisees indicate a greater willingness to accept the therapeutic intrusion of the supervisor than supervisors appear willing to offer it. In response to the incomplete sentence "If personal problems came up in my work with clients I would prefer that my supervisor ..." 48 percent of the supervisees said that they wanted the supervisor to "identify the problems and help me resolve them," whereas only 30 percent of the supervisors preferred this response. Conversely, 44 percent of the supervisors would "identify the problem and help supervisees get outside help," but only 11 percent of the supervisees preferred this response. Supervisors, more often than supervisees, saw the legitimate source of help for job-related personal problems as lying outside the supervisory relationship (Kadushin 1974). Kadushin (1992a) obtained similar responses in an updated survey of supervisors and supervisees. In a study of supervisor behavior as identified by ninety-three direct service workers, York and Denton (1990) found that the behavior least frequently engaged in by supervisors was to "advise people on their personal problems," going on to comment that perhaps supervisors "are not engaging in therapy as supervision to the extent that some of us might have suspected" (99).

The hesitancy of social work supervisors to therapize the relationship reflects a similar tendency in psychotherapeutic trainers of psychiatrists. Goin and Kline (1976) videotaped conferences between twenty-four supervisors of second-year psychiatric residents for the purpose of examining how the supervisors dealt with the residents' countertransference reactions to their patients. Countertransference was defined as the "therapist's conscious as well as unconscious reactions toward and feelings about their patients" (41). Surprisingly "for a discipline that often stresses the need for open communication" (42), only twelve of the twenty-four supervisors discussed

countertransference at all, despite the fact that it was evident in each case. Of the twelve supervisors who did, only four discussed it at any length. The supervisors tended to avoid such discussion because of hesitancy about converting the educational situation to therapy and because of hesitancy in creating anxiety in the supervisee.

When countertransference was discussed effectively, the supervisors (in a frank, no-nonsense way) called attention to the therapist's feelings about the patient that were affecting his work. There was no attempt to "explore personal motivations, conscious or unconscious, for residents acting or feeling as they did. It was merely an attempt to acknowledge the feelings that were there" (Goin and Kline 1976:43). The objective in raising these feelings for discussion was to make the resident aware of them so as to give him "a greater chance for rational control over his interactions with the patient" (42). The objective was not to "probe deeper into the roots of these feelings" for the purpose of therapeutic resolution (see also Hunt 1981). As Haley (1977:187) noted, "A person's personal life is too important to be tampered with by teachers," including supervisors (see also Mayer and Rosenblatt 1975b).

Yet, another study reported the following findings:

Three-quarters of the [eight] participants felt that their overall supervision was mostly adequate or effective in processing countertransference. Participants liked when supervisors communicated to them that they not only considered difficult countertransference reactions to be a normal and expected aspect of psychotherapeutic work, but also welcomed the discussion of these reactions and regarded them as an important and valuable component of the treatment process. ... [Yet] half the participants also felt that their supervision had at some point in time blurred into personal therapy when discussing countertransference. Most of these respondents found this blurring to be a mixed experience. (Latawiec 2008:iii-iv)

An awareness of the parallel process phenomenon in supervision interaction is an additional consideration in appropriate application of the principles of teaching-learning and is related to the teaching-therapy dilemma just discussed.

### **The Parallel Process Component in Educational Supervision**

The parallel process, sometimes called the *reflection process*, has been identified as a phenomenon in supervisory interaction that has considerable significance for educational supervision (Kernberg 2010; Mothersole 1999).

The parallel process suggests that the supervisee reenacts in the supervisory conference the behavior that the client manifests in the casework interview. The supervisor then has available in the here and now of the supervisory conference this additional experiential dimension for understanding the worker's performance. Without being consciously aware of this, the supervisee, in attempting to understand the client's behavior, identifies with it and mimics it for presentation in the supervisory conference so as to obtain help in dealing with it.

The isomorphic nature of service and supervision is encapsulated in the statement that what the client does with the supervisee, the supervisee will, in turn, do with the supervisor. The client "comes" to supervision through this process. Parallel process events are replications across system boundaries. The problem is transferred from

the worker-client setting to the supervisor-supervisee setting.

A client who evokes a sense of disorganization, confusion, and puzzlement in the worker is paralleled by the supervisee's evocation of confusion and puzzlement in the supervisor when the supervisee presents the case for discussion. After experiencing a client who is evasive and resistant, the worker, in discussing the case, displays an analogous kind of evasiveness and resistance in interaction with the supervisor. Just as the client generated a feeling of helplessness, frustration, and anger in the worker, the worker evokes feelings of helplessness, frustration, and anger in the supervisor. If the supervisor is aware of the source of his feelings in the parallel process, he or she can more effectively help the supervisee in working with the client.

The parallel process has traditionally been explained with the vocabulary of the unconscious, such as identification, introjection, projection, projective identification, and related psychodynamic verbs. In a recent review of the considerable controversy about how this may work, Latawiec (2008) noted evidence for a neurobiological explanation rooted in the discovery of mirror neurons (e.g., Cozolino 2010; Gerdes and Segal 2011):

Through a mirror neuron system, the neural circuits that are activated in someone who is, for example, expressing an emotion, performing a movement, or feeling a sensation, are the very same neural circuits activated in another person who is merely observing the other emote, move, or sense. It has been suggested that this mirroring action allows the observer to automatically and unconsciously know what the other is feeling and experience. (Latawiec 2008:92)

If mirror neurons are “the physiological component that mediates empathy in the brain,” enabling social workers to “experience and understand the emotions and intentions/states of mind” of their clients “just by hearing and watching them” (Gerdes et al. 2011:114), then the physiology that mediates empathic interaction between supervisors and workers is presumably the same. This idea has led to neuroscience-based speculations regarding the intersubjective dynamics of the parallel-reflection process (Latawiec 2008:92); for example, the empathic supervisor may find herself mirroring the experience of the empathic worker, as the worker recapitulates his mirrored experience of the client, in supervision. In this neurobiological model of parallel-process phenomena, empathy—rooted in “nerve cells that allow humans to understand one another’s experience by undergoing a kind of involuntary neurological ‘echo’ while observing one another’s behavior” (Gerdes et al. 2011:114)—is transitive.

The parallel process has also been described as an exemplification of isomorphism—the tendency for patterns to repeat at different levels of the system. The supervisor-supervisee-client interaction can be viewed as one large system that includes two subsystems: the worker-client subsystem and the supervisor-supervisee subsystem. Isomorphism would suggest that the worker’s dealings with the client in the worker-client subsystem would tend to get reflected in the supervisor-supervisee subsystem as a parallel process, and vice versa. The isomorphic nature of service and supervision is encapsulated in the statement that what the client does with the supervisee, the supervisee will, in turn, do with the supervisor. The client “comes” to supervision through this process. Parallel process events are replications across

system boundaries.

Whether parallel process events are explained as neurobiological, systemic, or unconscious phenomena, they are transferred from the worker-client setting to the supervisor-supervisee setting, where their recognition and management has been identified as a “key competency” in social work supervision (ASWB 2009:B-1). Manifestations of parallel process supposedly enable the supervisor to perceive what is occurring in the situation between worker and client as it is replicated in the supervisory interaction. Parallel process thus permits second-hand “observation” of the worker performance with the client through its reflection in supervision. A supervisor said:

I became aware of the parallel process dynamics when I experienced an interaction that illustrated it. Penny, my supervisee, would shift away from troublesome significant problems by talking, apparently revealingly, about less important matters. Gratified at her open sharing, I rewarded her by going along with the shift and responding to her. In retrospect, I noticed that the client did the same thing with Penny. When Penny raised really difficult questions for discussion, the client would deftly digress to content, that while relevant, was less significant and less difficult to deal with. Penny rewarded the client's digression by responding and accepting the shift. Thinking about it, I planned to hold Penny to the difficult matters that needed discussion and in this way help Penny, in turn, to be less accepting of the client's evasions.

Parallel process events thus further the diagnostic and instructional objectives of supervision. Perception of a parallel process event enables the supervisor to hypothesize about the worker-client relationship as he or she sees it reenacted in the supervising interaction. It is a form of communication through which the worker, identified with the client, is trying to tell the supervisor about the problem. In responding therapeutically to the supervisee enacting the role of the client, the supervisor may model behavior that the supervisee can, in turn, manifest productively toward the client. This might include a tentative “diagnosis” of the transaction as a parallel process event, for example, paired with an invitation to participate in collaborative reflection on the supervisory relationship, in the here and now—a possible model for worker-client interactions in the future. For related models, see Cajvert (2011) and Morrissey and Tribe (2001).

If empathy is transitive, the parallel process may also work in reverse, as “what happens in supervision can affect the way supervisees interact with clients” (Lietz and Rounds 2009:124). If the supervisor does not actively extend himself to help the supervisee, the supervisee may repeat this by being indifferent to the client. If the supervisor dominates the supervisee, the supervisee may dominate the client. One of the more frequently cited reverse parallel process examples is one where the supervisor refuses a request for an “emergency” meeting with the supervisee, followed by the supervisee's refusal of an “emergency” meeting with the client. Although these are examples of negative practice events, Shulman (2010) teaches supervisors to use parallel-process dynamics to be helpful, because “the way the supervisor demonstrates the helping relationship with workers may influence the manner in which staff members relate to clients” (14), and some evidence suggests that training helps supervisors develop competencies in this method (Tebes et al. 2011).

It is difficult to differentiate parallel processes in supervision from analogous processes that mirror interactional situations that may relate to each other. Much happens in the supervisor-supervisee relationship that is similar to what happens in the worker-client situation because of contextual, structural, and dynamic similarities. The worker-client interaction involves a process of growth and change. This is also true of the supervisor-supervisee interaction. In both interactions, feelings of anxiety, dependency, anger, and resistance are activated. Both interactions involve differences in power and authority and evoke problems regarding openness and defensiveness. Both are highly affective, dyadic contexts in which emotionally charged material is discussed in private. Both contexts are conducive to transference and countertransference evocations. Given these similarities in the two situations and the fact that the dimensions of human relationships are limited and repetitive, that similar things happen in the two situations would not be surprising.

The supervisee is the constant element in the two dyadic subsystems. Both involve interaction; both are concerned with the process of helping. Similar psychodynamics operate in both sets of relationships. It might be expected, then, that the feelings evoked in one context by and in the supervisee might be similar to the feelings evoked in the other context in and by the supervisor. This provides the basis for a parallel process. From the vantage point of the parallel process, the two dyadic systems—worker-client and supervisor-supervisee—become one triadic system.

If the worker acts so as to obtain the approbation of the supervisor, this is parallel to the behavior of the client in attempting to solicit the approbation of the worker. In both situations, however, the “parallel” behavior is a very natural response to a person having positional power with reference to significant aspects of one’s life. Structural and dynamic similarities between therapy and supervision foster parallelisms. Analogous situations evoke analogous behavior (Geidman and Wolkenfeld 1980). As Frawley-O’Dea and Sarnat (2001:173) noted in their literature review, “analytic and supervisory processes overlap and therefore invite regressive and progressive enactments of multidirectional parallelisms.”

Although many supervisors and supervisees have observed parallel processes in their practice (Raichelson et al.1997), very limited empirical research (Ellis and Ladany 1997; Mothersole 1999) is available beyond anecdotal and clinical accounts of the phenomena. Doehrman’s (1976) frequently quoted study involved four psychology counselor trainees, and a study by Friedlander, Siegel, and Brenock (1989) involved one counselor trainee. More recently, Gray (2005) studied critical incident interactions among six supervisors, four psychotherapy trainees, and their eighteen psychotherapy clients across 84 supervision and 182 therapy sessions. Following each session, trainees or their clients were interviewed for the most helpful and hindering in-session events, thoughts, and feelings, generating a total of 984 qualitative responses from supervision session interviews and 2,256 qualitative responses from psychotherapy session interviews. These were coded into categories (e.g., “gained deeper understanding or insight”) by judges and sorted for serial-session qualitative matches in chronological order across all eighteen triads. A total of



216 (156 helpful and 60 hindering) critical incident parallel process interactions were identified, of which 105 involved “the senior partner of the dyad” providing *Guidance* to the junior partner in the form of direction, suggestions, feedback, or solutions” (Gray 2005:112).

Findings from two larger studies of parallel process, lacking the nuance and texture of case studies, are difficult to interpret. In a sixteen-week field study that examined the supervised practice of one supervisor and four workers serving 161 clients, worker ratings of the supervisory relationship were not associated with client ratings of the practice relationship (Harkness 1995). But in a study of twenty-five supervisors, seventy-five counseling students, and seventy-five clients, Patton and Kivlighan (1997) found that student ratings of their working alliances with their supervisors were associated with client ratings of their working alliances with their counselors.

Albeit an article of faith in clinical practice, Ellis and Ladany (1997:487) have argued that there is too little evidence to support “inferences from the observed links between therapy and supervision to the parallel process,” and Mothersole concluded that parallel process is a concept with a long history of wide use, “yet there is very little empirical evidence for its existence. What is required is further study” (Mothersole 1999:116).

## **Developmental Supervision**

In discussing the different orientations to teaching in educational supervision, we concluded that it is difficult to select one best, most appropriate approach because much depended on the context of teaching and the content of teaching. Here we discuss an additional variable that contributes to the difficulty: developmental supervision. As foreshadowed, the teaching-learning principles discussed previously need adaptation and revision at different points in the professional development of the supervisee. This reflects the findings regarding developmental supervision. The basic idea of developmental supervision is that the supervisee changes over the course of his development as a competent professional, and such changes in the supervisee require changes in the supervisor’s approach. As learning needs change, educational supervision needs to change. Some early, classical expositions of stages in learning to become a social worker by Reynolds (1942) and Towle (1954) embody the ideas of developmental supervision.

A number of different attempts have been made to formulate the process of educational supervision in terms of stages of development. Detailed statements of the concepts and stages of developmental supervision are presented in texts by Falender and Shafranske (2004) and Bernard and Goodyear (2009). Ellis (2010), Milne (2009), and Stoltenberg and McNeill (1997) have reviewed the related empirical research.

A developmental approach to supervision presupposes that there is growth in the supervisee and that each stage of such growth requires modification in the supervisor’s approach to the supervisee. The modifications are required in response to changing needs of supervisees at different levels of the growth process.

The central idea in these formulations is that the supervisee moves through a series of identifiable, characteristic stages in learning to be a professional social worker, counselor, or clinical psychologist and in developing an identity as a professional.

According to the available research, at the beginning stages in the growth process supervisees need high levels of instruction, structure, and support. They are method and technique oriented with a considerable concern for skill development. The focus in instruction is on the worker-client relationship and the instructional-expert role of the supervisor is given emphasis. The supervisee has a variable sense of professional identity. A coherent theoretical conception of practice is in the process of formulation. Expectations need modification toward a greater acceptance of realistic limitations. The supervisor is directive in a support-security context.

Dependent, anxious, and insecure supervisees at this point in their development are highly motivated to acquire technical skills. A considerable amount of learning is through imitation in a relationship that is hierarchical, with the supervisor being expert-teacher and proactive in terms of supervisee's performance.

Initially, the supervisee's theoretical base of practice is undifferentiated and unsophisticated. The image of professional identity is not clearly defined and not clearly owned. The supervisee's concern is primarily his or her performance. The supervisee is very concerned about competence, needs answers to survive on the job, and is averse to risk taking. There is a naive optimism on the part of the supervisee that achieving a proficient level of competence would invariably permit him or her to be helpful to all clients.

With professional development, changes are made. There is progressively less need for structure, directivity, and didactic instruction. Learning through identification and internalization takes the place of learning through imitation. There is a growing need for independence and autonomy as the ability to make use of such freedom increases. However, the movement in development is not uniformly linear. The supervisee who has achieved self-assured independence may temporarily become dependent again when encountering a difficult client.

The supervisor-supervisee relationship becomes less hierarchical and more collegial, and the supervisor is reactive to supervisees. Practice and theory become more integrated and theory more differentiated. There is a growing freedom to explore self-awareness issues and dynamics in the worker-client and supervisor-supervisee interactions, with a focus on the supervisee's contribution to transference and countertransference. There is a growing ability to see the situation from the client's perspective and a growing ability to individualize the client. The image of self as a professional social worker becomes clearer and more stable, and there is growing consolidation and integration of professional identity. Confrontation and supervisor self-disclosure is more appropriate at this point in the supervisee's development than was true earlier. There is a growing acceptance of the limitations of what the profession can accomplish and acceptance of the reality that only some of the clients can be helped some of the time.

Professional development over time involves the growth of technical skills and the growth of a professional identity. The development is from a focus on and concern with self on the part of the supervisee to a gradual freedom to become aware of and appreciate the self-other transactions and their reciprocal effects. This implies a greater willingness to accept the collaboration of the client in problem solving. There is a gradual greater acceptance of the complexity, ambiguity, and multicausality of human behavior and the inevitability of failure in achieving definitive understanding.

Originally a figure of omniscience and transference, the supervisor came to be perceived as less infallible and more human. There is increased individuation and separateness from the supervisor (Watkins 1990). A Socratic approach involving a series of challenging questions having an implied direction, stimulating inductive reasoning and self-discovery, is more appropriate with supervisees at more advanced developmental levels than with beginners (Overholser 1991). Stoltenberg et al. (1987:25) summarized these changes as being “a) from greater to lesser need for supervisor-imposed structure; b) from greater to lesser need for didactic instruction; c) from greater to lesser need for direct feedback of counseling behavior; d) from greater to lesser need for supervisory support and e) from greater to lesser training/supervision needs in general.”

Over the course of professional development, some needs—such as the need for continuing support and encouragement from the supervisor, the need to develop technical skills, and the need for a facilitative relationship—remain constant, if somewhat attenuated.

Although the concept of developmental supervision seems eminently sensible and intuitively logical, some scientists find the evidence lacking. Ellis and Ladany (1997), for example, described the research on supervisee development as plagued with disheartening conceptual and methodological problems. Arguing that such models neglect the relationship component and erroneously assume that all supervisees are highly anxious, Ellis (2010:101) concluded, “We have evidence that our supervision models are not accurately depicting what is happening in supervision.” At the heart of the matter is whether studies of the short-term training of practicum students in university settings can serve as viable models of supervisee development across the professional lifespan in agency practice.

Attempts have been made to empirically determine whether supervisors actually modify behavior as supervisees change. These findings are contradictory. Some studies tend to show that supervisors do make changes in their approach to accommodate differences in needs of supervisees at different stages in development (more or less), but extensive reviews of the literature conducted by Stoltenberg, McNeill, and Crethar (1994) and Worthington (2006) found only weak support for the idea that they actually do so. In direct observation research, for example, Shanfield, Mohl, Matthews, and Hetherly (1992) were unable to determine that supervisory behavior with multiple supervisees varied at all. How supervision affects the development of novice therapists into seasoned professionals has not been fully explored (Bernard and Goodyear 2009; Neufeldt, Beutler, and Banchemo 1997).

Applying the suggestions of developmental supervision requires some daunting prerequisites. It requires that the supervisor has a clear idea of the particular stage in development of the supervisee. It requires the supervisor to have a sufficiently varied repertoire of responses and flexibility in application so that he or she can select and implement the response most appropriate to the supervisee's changing needs. In addition, given the varied competing pressures faced by supervisors, it requires the motivation and energy to make the changes. As Fisher (1989) said, developmental supervision suppositions may be valid and their validity acknowledged by supervisors, but given the fact that "practicing different supervisory approaches is a complex and challenging task" and—given the "many demands on the supervisor—customizing supervision sessions may be unrealistic" (71–72).

The literature on developmental supervision has considerable heuristic value, however. It provides the field of supervision with greater clarity regarding the subtle changes that supervisees experience over time and a more refined definition of the variables involved in such changes. These general considerations regarding modifications of supervisory behavior with increasing professional development and professional maturity of the supervisee need review, however, when applied to an individual supervisee. Other more idiosyncratic elements, aside from the level of professional development of the supervisee, need to be given consideration—among these, the supervisee's motivation to achieve and willingness to accept responsibility (York and Hastings 1985–86).

The educational supervisor-supervisee situation is not only developmental, it is persistently interactional, which further complicates the choice of teaching approach. Unlike classroom instruction, educational supervision is primarily tutorial. The one-on-one context demands the individualization of the teacher-learner interaction. Because the recipient of the supervisor's efforts is not inert but reacts in a highly idiosyncratic manner to the supervisor's actions and in turn affects the supervisor's response, this is a highly interactional situation. The same intervention by the supervisor may evoke different responses from two different supervisees whose learning needs, styles, and preferences are different. Hence, like the good social worker, the good supervisor has to be sensitive to how her interventions are being received and modify his or her approach to optimize the learning situation for the supervisee.

## **Summary**

The following conditions make for an effective learning situation in the context of a positive relationship. People learn best in the following conditions:

1. They are highly motivated to learn.
2. They can devote most of their energies to learning.
3. Learning is attended by positive satisfactions.
4. They are actively involved in the learning process.
5. The content to be learned is meaningfully presented.

6. The uniqueness of the learner is considered.

There are differences between educational supervision and therapy relating to purpose and focus, role relationships, and process. The distinction is difficult to apply with precision in supervision, although supervisors generally accept the distinction. Educational supervision requires recognition of the different needs of supervisees at different points in their professional developments, with these differences having been identified in studies of developmental supervision. Parallel process phenomena—reenactments in supervision of clinical problems—may be a component of the educational supervisory process.

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# CHAPTER 6

## Supportive Supervision

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This chapter is concerned with the third major component of supervision—support. If the supervisor acts as a manager in implementing administrative supervision and acts as a teacher in implementing educational supervision, then the supervisor acts as an adjustment counselor in implementing supportive supervision. Social work supervisees and supervisors face a variety of job-related stresses (Arrington 2008; Light 2003)—significantly more so than other professions (Johnson et al. 2005). Unless some resource is available to help them deal with their stresses, their health (Kim, Ji, and Kao 2011; Siebert 2001, 2006) and their work (Mor Barak, Travis, Pyun, and Xie 2009; Travis and Mor Barak 2010) may become impaired, and they may frequently feel too ill to go to work (Mohren et al., 2005) or even quit their jobs (Kim and Lee 2009), to the detriment of agency effectiveness. The supervisor is responsible for helping the supervisees cope with job-related stress, a problem that may be particularly acute in public child welfare (Kim 2011). The ultimate objective of this component of supervision is the same as the objective of administrative and educational supervision—to enable the workers, and the agency through the workers, to offer the client the most effective and efficient service.

The NASW *Standards for Social Work Practice in Child Protection* (1981) made this responsibility of the supervisor explicit. As one of the supervisor's tasks, the *Standards* lists "management of work-related stress and assistance to staff in coping with their work-related stress."

If one were to categorize the research findings on characteristics associated with effective supervision and leadership, two clusters of factors turn up repeatedly. One cluster relates to getting the job done—seeing that the people who do the job are provided with the facilities, information, services, and skills they need to do the job (Jones, Washington, and Steppe 2007). These are the task-centered, instrumental considerations of supervision. The second cluster is associated with seeing that the people who do the job are comfortable, satisfied, happy in their work, and enjoy a sense of psychological well-being. These are the people-centered, expressive considerations of supervision. Expressive tasks meet the needs of system maintenance. They are the equivalents of oiling the parts and cooling the works of a mechanical system to reduce abrasion and the possibility of overheating. Such expressive system-maintenance functions permit the achievement of instrumental goals.

Blake and Mouton (1961) employed these two variables in the development of their managerial grid—concern for production (the instrumental consideration) and

concern for people (the expressive consideration). The best managerial style, both psychologically satisfying and economically productive, is an optimum combination of the two concerns. The Ohio State Leadership Studies (Stodgill and Coons 1957) identified initiating structure and consideration as the two basic dimensions of leadership. A leader who rates high on initiating structure is task oriented, organizes the work to be done, and clearly defines work objectives, group member roles, and expectations. This is a concern with the instrumental aspects of the job. The leader who rates high on consideration communicates trust, warmth, friendliness, and support—a concern with expressive considerations. The Ohio studies found that the most effective leaders were those who rated high on both dimensions. The Michigan Studies on Management (Likert 1967) came to the same general conclusions. The supervisor who communicates both support and high performance-goal expectations is likely to have the most effective workgroup.

Fiedler's (1967) research on leadership suggested that the optimum mix of these two major dimensions was largely a function of the situation. Some jobs and some settings require a greater component of instrumental, task-oriented, production-centered concern; other situations require a greater emphasis on the expressive, worker-oriented, human-relations aspects. The mix also depends on idiosyncratic needs and characteristics of the supervisees, with some requiring more structure and direction and others requiring a more decidedly expressive orientation.

In studies of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction, these two aspects of supervision are, once again, clearly distinguishable. Although job satisfaction is in part a function of the work itself (Smerek and Peterson 2006) and individual disposition (Staw and Cohen-Charash 2005), Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman (2005) found that workers dissatisfaction might be related to either technical supervision or interpersonal supervision. Dissatisfaction with technical supervision resulted from the fact that the supervisors lacked competence in the technical skills they were assigned to supervise, which is the instrumental component of supervision. Dissatisfaction with interpersonal supervision resulted from failures in the human-relations responsibilities of the supervisor, which is the expressive component of supervision.

If these considerations operate even in the organizations that depend most strongly on robots as the means of production, they are substantially more important for social work organizations in which the medium of service offered is the worker himself or herself. Robots do not have to feel a conviction in the work they are doing in order to do it well; they never suffer from depression, guilt, or a sense of inadequacy. They are not jealous or envious of the achievements of other machines and do not feel competitive. They do not need to be inspired in order to work at an optimum level. But these kinds of feelings—and more—determine the effectiveness of the social agency worker. Consequently, the social work supervisor must be concerned with the feeling reactions of supervisees to their jobs and their job situations. Where the technology is centered mainly in human resources, the protection and development of human capacities will be a dominant supervisory concern.

In terms of the categorization of the major components of supervision as used in this book, both administrative and educational supervision are primarily, although not exclusively, directed toward instrumental considerations. The supportive component of supervision primarily is concerned with expressive considerations.

Administrative supervision is responsible for relating effective workers to effective organizations, increasing the effectiveness of the organizational structure and the resources available to the worker. Educational supervision is primarily concerned with increasing the effectiveness of the worker through upgrading knowledge and skills. Supportive supervision is primarily concerned with increasing effectiveness of the worker through decreasing stress that interferes with performance and increasing motivation and intensifying commitment that enhances performance.

Performance is a function of ability, commitment, and motivation. Effective administrative and educational supervision may increase the supervisee's ability to do an effective job. The worker, however able, may still perform inadequately because he or she is not sufficiently committed or motivated. Motivation determines how vigorously, conscientiously, and persistently abilities will be mobilized to do an effective job. Motivation energizes behavior and sustains involvement in the work. Job commitment is associated with a feeling of loyalty to the organization, a conviction in the objectives of the organization, a positive identification with the organization, and a desire to remain with the organization (Glisson and Durick 1988).

Social services are labor intensive. Productivity depends to a considerable extent on the strength of motivation and commitment of the workers. Given limited access to powerful extrinsic rewards, such as high pay, the level of motivation and commitment is in response to intrinsic work factors—how workers feel about their jobs, the rewards of the work itself, and how they are treated on the job (Wilkinson and Wagner 1993). Elpers and Westhuis (2008) examined the effects of leadership in a national study of 833 BSW and MSW social workers employed in social service organizations. They found that the “difference between social workers’ expectations and perceptions of their supervisor’s behavior” in two domains affected social workers’ job satisfaction: (1) “satisfaction with the leadership behavior of one’s supervisor,” and (2) “the quality of supervision received” (Elpers and Westhuis 2008:36). “Leadership affects organizational performance positively by creating a committed organizational climate within which workers can function” (Glisson 1989:113). Supportive supervision is concerned with increasing motivation, job commitment, and job satisfaction.

If administrative supervision provides supervisory authority with the power of position, reward, and coercion and educational supervision provides the power of expertise, then supportive supervision provides supervisory authority with referent power. The worker complies with agency policies and procedures so that he or she can obtain the interpersonal support the supervisor can make available.

Once again, it might be noted that administrative, educational, and supportive components of supervision are interrelated rather than categorically distinct. For instance, educational supervision, by helping the worker become more skilled, results



not only in increased competence but also in greater job satisfaction and reduced anxiety about ability to meet job demands (Kavanagh et al. 2003; Mor Barak et al. 2009). By the same token, some research suggests that supportive supervision may affect the neurobiology of adult learning and performance. A clinical social worker explained:

When a mentor is supportive, caring, and encouraging ... learners are assisted in moving their thinking activity into the higher brain regions (the frontal cortex), where reflective activity and abstract thinking take place. ... During this process, the learner's neurotransmitters that power the frontal cortex (dopamine, serotonin, and norepinephrine) are stimulated, leading to greater brain plasticity and hence more neuronal networking and meaningful learning. ... If the mentor creates a safe, trusting relationship and holding environment, learners are much more able to reorganize their thinking and move through the progressive stages of the developmental journey. (Johnson 2006:64–65)

Supportive supervision includes such procedures as reassurance, encouragement, and recognition of achievement; realistically based expressions of confidence, approval and commendation, catharsis ventilation, desensitization and universalization, and attentive listening that communicates interest and concern (Erera and Lazar 1994a). When implementing the responsibilities of supportive supervision, the supervisor attempts to help the workers feel more at ease with themselves in their work. As Bloom and Herman (1958) stated, "one of the major functions of the supervisor is to provide certain emotional supports for the worker. She must encourage, strengthen, stimulate and even comfort and pacify him" (403). The supervisor seeks to allay anxiety, reduce guilt, increase certainty and conviction, relieve dissatisfaction, fortify flagging faith, affirm and reinforce the worker's assets, replenish depleted self-esteem, nourish and enhance ego capacity for adaptation, alleviate psychological pain, restore emotional equilibrium, comfort, bolster, and refresh. Supportive supervision is concerned with tension management on the job (Itzhaky and Aviad-Hiebloom 1998).

If social workers are to do their jobs effectively, they need to feel good about themselves and about the jobs they are doing. The reality is, however, that they often feel discouraged, disaffected, powerless, frustrated, devalued, inadequate, confused, anxious, guilty, apathetic, alienated, and burdened with a sense of futility, for a variety of reasons explicated in this chapter. A supervisor expressed disillusionment as follows:

The supervisee is a male caseworker in a public welfare setting. He had had graduate training and this is his first job. He has been with the agency for nine months. While a number of clients have marital and parent-child problems, he feels that because of the size of his caseload he cannot furnish the psychosocial service would like to offer and is trained to provide. Disillusioned, he says "The things I am doing, any intelligent clerk could do; they are hardly professional."

A supervisee expressed dismay as follows:

I don't really know what the things are that are making me draw back. I think it's not really wanting to get involved in the world of Mrs. Garcia because it's such a horrible world. She has seven children and no husband and lives in a project and now she's very sick. You know that's not the nicest world and I'm not sure I want to be there. (Amacher 1971:164)

Another worker expresses discouragement in this situation:

First, the girl ran away from home, fine. She took an overdose, fine. Then her mother's boyfriend is living in the house; her father's an alcoholic; her boyfriend just gave her VD and then she found out she is pregnant. Bang, bang, bang, right down the line. (Amacher 1971:159)

Supportive supervision involves "care for the carers," who feel disillusionment, disappointment, disenchantment. If these feelings are frequent in an agency, the low level of morale results in high turnover, repeated absenteeism and tardiness, loafing and inattention to work, noncompliance, frequent grievance reports, and interpersonal friction—not a happy way to run an effective agency. Furthermore, only as the workers feel confident can they communicate confidence and hope to the client. A feeling of hope is an important variable in determining the success of worker-client interaction.

Thus far, the general responsibilities of supportive supervision have been stated in a negative sense. A similarly restricted definition of physical health would be the absence of disease. We might broaden the definition of health to suggest well-being rather than merely the absence of disease. In the same way, we might define psychological well-being—the goal of supportive supervision—as a state of complete emotional health, the maximum a person is capable of achieving.

In this sense, the supervisor, by implementing the responsibilities of supportive supervision, not only relieves, restores, comforts, and replenishes, but more positively inspires, animates, exhilarates, and increases job satisfaction. Such supervision makes the difference between joyless submission and eager participation, between playing notes and making music. A supervisee wrote:

I am not sure what the supervisor did or how she did it, but the spirit she inspired in the group was unmistakable. Somehow we felt hopeful, light, cheerful, and optimistic. We felt confident that we could accomplish much that was good and worthwhile. It's a good feeling and it's hard to sustain but while it lasts it's a wonderful high, a really good trip.

The need for supportive supervision has long been recognized in social work supervision. One of the earliest studies of worker turnover, in 1927–28, noted "unhappiness in work," a question of worker morale, as the second largest category of reasons for leaving the job. It included such reasons as "dissatisfaction with social work," "depressing work," "clients hopeless," and "caseload too heavy" (Pretzer 1929:168). These problems would have been the concerns of supportive supervision at that time.

Supportive functions currently are seen as an important responsibility of supervision. A study of supervision in thirty-one social welfare and rehabilitation agencies, based on questionnaires to sixteen hundred employees and detailed interviews with a sample of direct service workers, showed *support* to be one of the key functions of supervision. It was defined as "provision of emotional support to subordinates and enhancement of subordinates' feelings of importance and self-worth. ... Overall, personnel report that supervisors provide a great amount of support. ... In fact, in comparison with scores on other scales, providing support is what supervisors do best" (Olmstead and Christensen 1973:189). An earlier study found that *support and encouragement* and *appreciation of efforts* ranked second

and third in a twelve-item listing of helpful aspects of supervision (Cruser 1958:20).

Nelsen (1973, 1974) studied tape recordings of a series of sixty-eight supervision conferences. She found that 69 percent of the taped units “contained three or more supportive comments” (1973:266), indicating the high frequency of such kinds of interventions. Relating the level of supervisor support to strain in the supervisor-supervisee relationship. Nelsen concluded that “the use of support was one of the most important skills for the [supervisor] to master if the relationship strain was to be avoided” (1973:340). She notes that the “technique of ... offering support was used both more extensively and more flexibly than might have been expected” (1974:153).

In a study that asked supervisors to identify their strengths in supervision and asked supervisees to identify their perception of their supervisors’ strengths, supportive behaviors were frequently mentioned (Kadushin 1992b). A total of 347 supervisors offered 186 comments related to expressive aspects of the supervisor-supervisee relationship. Supervisees said the following:

- My supervisor provides recognition and positive reinforcement about my work.
- She is sensitive to work stresses and concerned for my well-being.
- He is consistently available for support but makes it safe for me to be independent.
- He frequently uses positive feedback, giving appreciation and recognition for good work.

Supervisors listed their supportive behaviors as among their principal strengths. A total of 483 supervisors provided 138 comments identifying supportive behavior as among their strengths in supervision. Supervisors said the following:

- My ability to relate positively, fairly, and supportively.
- Providing an empathic, supportive environment in which workers can comfortably discuss their clinical issues.
- I am empathic, respectful, caring, and provide a safe learning environment.
- My ability to relate to supervisees in an empathic, direct, understanding, and non-authoritarian manner.

A worker described her supervisor as a “master of supportive supervision”:

She somehow had the ability to locate me when I was having a particularly bad day, would sit down and listen to me for awhile and would then find some way to make me laugh. She has a wonderful sense of humor. Then we would discuss the case or the situation that was troubling me and she would maybe offer a couple of suggestions. But I would leave these sessions feeling motivated and ready to go again. The connections we made seemed to change my whole outlook.

Our analysis of the NASW Workforce study of licensed social workers (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004) underscores the broad importance of supportive supervision. Measured by agreement that “I receive support and guidance from my supervisor,” more than 2,500 respondents indicated that supportive supervision was

associated with helping their clients address medical, psychological, and social problems and meet their objectives. Supportive supervision was also linked with how workers evaluated their ability to respond effectively to requests for assistance, access agency and community services, help clients navigate the system, coordinate their care, work with organizations to adapt service delivery systems on their behalf, address complex and chronic care, influence service design, respond to cultural differences, and spend time with clients. Not surprisingly, those reporting low levels of supportive supervision were significantly more likely to report plans to leave social work, within two years, for another line of work.

## **Burnout: Definition, Signs, and Symptoms**

Work stresses adversely affecting human services personnel have received explicit, almost explosive, attention with the identification of the burnout syndrome. First named in the literature by Freudenberger in 1974, Schaufeli, Leiter, and Maslach (2009) estimated that over 6,000 books, chapters, dissertations, and journal articles had been published on burnout, thirty-five years later. Our own WorldCat search of the literature indicates that “burnout” in “social work” has also been the subject of a small library, with more than 562 journal articles, 129 dissertations and theses, and 87 books published through 2009. Clearly, burnout remains a hot topic, as more than a hundred articles and dissertations on social work burnout were published in 2010 alone. A major component of these studies is devoted to defining burnout and identifying the attitudes, behavior, and feelings associated with burnout, as well as its consequences for social work practice and retention. For the supervisor to help a worker with problems of burnout, the supervisor needs to be able to recognize its manifestation.

A transnational phenomenon (Savicki 2002), “burnout can be defined as a syndrome of physical and emotional exhaustion” resulting from occupational stress “involving the development of negative self-concepts, negative job attitudes, and a loss of concern and feeling for clients” (Pines and Maslach 1978:233) that develops in the face of “a persistent imbalance of demands over resources” (Schaufeli et al. 2009:208) when a conflict exists between social work and organizational values (Schaufeli et al. 2009:209). Burnout has been defined as an “exhaustion reaction, the result of constant or repeated emotional pressure associated with the intense involvement with people over a long period of time” (Pines, Aronson, and Kafry 1981:15). Burnout is not the same as job dissatisfaction (Onyett 2011); it more closely resembles battle fatigue, and some evidence suggests that it may affect social workers more than other occupational groups (Johnson et al. 2005; Lloyd, King, and Chenoweth 2002). In a study of 751 social workers practicing in North Carolina, for example, Siebert (2005) found a current burnout rate of 39 percent and a lifetime rate of 75 percent.

In characterizing a worker as burned out, we are not pointing to the transient, temporary feelings every worker experiences when a case has blown up. The term is validly applicable only to a persistent, chronic condition that results from a cumulative,

prolonged, undissipated buildup of stress.

Mechanical devices have fuses that shut the machines down on overstress; computers may lock up and freeze when demand exceeds their capacity, much as old-fashioned pinball machines displayed *TILT* when jostled or abused. Lacking the protective governors built into machines, human beings with burnout may develop severe health problems (Honkonen et al. 2006; Morrisette 2004), home problems (Kahill 1988), work problems (Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter 2001), and disengage from or leave their jobs (Kim and Stoner 2008; Mor Barak, Nissly, and Levin 2001), “which causes disruption in continuity of care, diminishes access to care while a position remains vacant, and poses financial hardship on the provider organization through costs related to recruitment, orientation, and training of a new hire” (Paris and Hoge 2010:519). In addition to causing problems for the afflicted employee, burnout may be contagious (Melamed, Shirom, Toker, Berliner, and Shapiro 2006), create problems for coworkers (Ducharme, Knudsen and Roman 2008), and affect client outcomes (Yoo and Brooks 2005).

An awareness of the signs and symptoms of burnout enables the supervisor to more easily recognize its onset. The symptoms are physical, emotional, and behavioral. Workers experiencing burnout manifest weariness and chronic fatigue. Feeling physically drained, they are more susceptible to colds, tension headaches, digestive difficulties, and sleep disorders (Cohen, Tyrrell, and Smith 1991; Link and Phelan 1995).

Emotionally burned-out workers feel a sense of disenchantment with the work and alienation from the work. Discouraged, hopeless, and pessimistic about the work they are doing, they feel depressed and emotionally depleted. Workers experiencing burnout tend to feel angry and resentful as a consequence of a sense of work failure and futility. There is a loss of enthusiasm, excitement, sense of mission, and a gradual erosion of commitment and interest in the job. Instead of being interesting and satisfying, the job becomes something to be tolerated and survived.

Behaviorally, workers suffering from burnout, or impending burnout, manifest a resistance to going to work, with increased tardiness and absenteeism. When at work, they tend to watch the clock, postpone or cancel client appointments, and take more frequent and longer coffee breaks. Where workers may have previously felt concern when a client failed to show up, they now feel relieved. They resist taking phone calls from clients and postpone calling back. They display a more cynical, detached, indifferent, apathetic approach to clients in an effort to distance themselves emotionally from the clients. There is an increased tendency to treat clients in a mechanical, rigid, petty, bureaucratic manner, making less of an effort to help. In discussing clients, they are more likely to stereotype and disparage them, show a loss of caring and concern, and talk about them as “cases” rather than as individuals (Kahill 1988).

When interacting with clients, burned-out workers are more likely to avoid eye contact, increase their physical distance from the client, subtly discourage the client from sharing emotional material, and keep the interview as short as possible. Feeling

physically tired and emotionally depleted, burned-out workers tend to be more impatient with clients and more easily irritated by them. Burned-out workers do only those things that enable them to get by. They are going through the motions, merely putting in their time.

A worker described some of her behavior that she identified as associated with burnout:

Sometimes I would be late for home appointments. I would make stops on my way to home visits and do my errands just to have time that had nothing to do with my work. I sometimes spaced out during interviews with clients and I started referring people to other agencies or counselors. I would have a negative attitude before I even went in; I would be very curt, with no warmth at all. In retrospect I think that I was fighting to create this distance so the clients wouldn't like me. I thought that if I wasn't helpful and I wasn't sympathetic, when I asked if they wanted another appointment, they would say no. (Pines, Aronson, and Kafry 1981:47)

Overall, the worker's behavior suggests emotional withdrawal from the job and emotional distancing and detachment from clients. Empathic, accepting, and authentic responses are difficult to communicate when one is psychologically detached from the client.

Burnout results in a dehumanization of the client. Empathy, understanding, and individualization require a psychological effort that the worker can no longer emotionally afford. A worker in a community mental health agency expressed the sense of frustration and futility that characterizes burnout:

The situations started looking so much alike to me. I could never see changes. It was always the same people, in the same situations. I would get angry when I'd go in. After a while, I stopped listening. I stopped being empathetic. I had to lose my compassion in order to survive emotionally. It wasn't a job where you got many thanks from the clients. It was a vicious circle: because the more angry I became, the less I felt like putting out in the counseling sessions, so of course less happened with the clients. (Pines, Aronson, and Kafry 1981:46)

Another worker detailed the changes she experienced in the development of burnout:

When I started, I was deeply involved in every aspect of the sixty families I had. I really cared and was supportive of everything that went on. But if you continue at this level of involvement you get to be crazy very soon. So I started to withdraw a bit and see things as the client's problem. I went from total involvement to a kind of standing back. In the end I developed callousness towards the people I was working with. I was so emotionally detached that I might as well not have been there. I was earning money, but I didn't feel the work was part of my life. (Pines, Aronson, and Kafry 1981:58)

The feelings that contribute to the development of burnout are circular. Feeling disenchanting, hopeless, and cynical, sensing a growing hostility toward and resentment of clients and their unending problems, the conscientious human service worker responds with guilt, shame, and discomfort. The additional stressful emotional burden associated with such feelings further contributes to the development of burnout.

Burnout is a self-reinforcing process. The behavior associated with burnout reduces the likelihood of achieving a successful, satisfying case outcome. This then reinforces feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, intensifying burnout.

The supervisor needs remain aware that there is an element of contagion in the

loss of morale in the development of burnout. One worker's depressed, disenchanted feelings tend to contaminate other workers and reduce their own level of enthusiasm for the job, affecting even their supervisor (Dill 2007; Strand and Dore 2009), who may ask "How can I help staff stay positive when I'm on the verge of burnout myself?" (Jud and Bibus 2009:425).

## **Sources of Job-Related Stress for the Supervisee**

Having learned to recognize burnout and the stresses and symptoms associated with its gradual development, the supervisor has to understand its etiology and the nature of the specific, recurrent sources of stress encountered by supervisees. The sources of stress include (1) various aspects of supervision itself; (2) agency clients; (3) the nature and context of social work tasks; (4) the social work organization; (5) community attitude toward social work; and (6) the worker himself or herself. We will discuss each of these sources of tension in turn. The purpose of explicating this admittedly depressing litany of causes of stress is to help supervisors become more aware of the problems that might require their intervention.

### ***Administrative Supervision as a Source of Stress***

The previously discussed components of supervision are in themselves sources of tension for the worker. As discussed in [Chapters 3 and 8](#), administrative pressures toward compliance with agency policies and procedures and the requirement for work assessment and evaluation are sources of tension for the worker. Administrative supervision that demands that workers "do more with less" can lead to burnout (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter 2001), particularly if workers are denied opportunities to recover from their emotional exhaustion (Maslach and Leiter 2008). If administrative supervision exacerbates the role conflict between working both as an employee and a professional helper (Acker 2003; Lloyd, King, and Chenoweth 2002), then burnout may result (Acker 2011; Itzhaky and Aviad-Hiebloom 1998), whereas administrative supervision that reduces job uncertainty (e.g., providing performance feedback and clear information about rules and policies, task-specific instructions, and service goals) may ameliorate role stress and buffer social workers against burnout (Kim and Lee 2009). Thus, although good administrative supervision is in and of itself supportive, supervisors in a turbulent practice environment may find it difficult to provide their supervisees with a well-defined structure in which to operate, a clear definition of realistic and appropriate objectives, and a chance to participate in agency decision making (Kim and Stoner 2008; Rafferty, Friend, and Landsbergis 2001; Schaufeli, Leiter, and Maslach 2009).

### ***Educational Supervision as a Source of Stress***

Similarly, educational supervision is a source of both tension and support. Education implies change, and the target of change efforts is the worker. Change involves, of necessity, a temporary disequilibrium—an "unfreezing" of the old equilibrium. Educational efforts, then, inevitably induce some anxiety (Ellis, Krenzel, and Beck

2002).

New situations are encountered for which the supervisee does not have a readily available solution. Ideas that were thought correct are explicitly examined and questioned; some are found to be incompatible with new ideas to which the supervisee is introduced. The transition period is characterized by anxiety and a temporary loss of confidence. The old procedures are being rejected, but the new procedures are not yet fully accepted. In addition, the supervisee is ambivalent about taking the next step. He is “not sure that he is willing to change what it took him so long to learn” (Rothman 1973).

All learning presents the learner with a need to adjust to these emotional concomitants, but their intensity varies, depending on the nature of the subject matter. The subject matter of social work is likely to develop the kinds of intrapersonal reverberations that make the changes resulting from learning more problematic. Social work content is emotionally charged and ego-involved. It is content that reflects the way a person views himself or herself and the world around him or her. In learning about human behavior, we are learning about ourselves, our defenses, our motives, and our unflattering impulses. Whereas the usual educational situation asks that the student critically examine and hence possibly change his or her ideas, social work supervision is often directed toward a change in behavior and perhaps personality (Rosenfeld 2007). The concomitants of such lessons may include embarrassment (Sabini, Garvey, and Hall 2001) or shame (Hahn 2001), reducing openness (Chorinsky 2003) and disclosure (Yourman 2003) in supervisory communication.

The threat of change is greater for the adult student because learning requires dissolution of long-standing patterns of thinking and believing. It also requires disloyalty to previous identification models. The ideas and behavior that might need changing represent, in a measure, the introjection of previously encountered significant others—parents, teachers, highly valued peers—and the acceptance of other models implies some rejection of these people. The act of infidelity creates anxiety.

Much of social work education is concerned with secondary socialization. As a consequence of primary socialization, strong attitudes have developed toward minority groups, welfare recipients, divorce, discrimination, racism, human sexuality, crime, juvenile delinquency, interpersonal violence, and the class struggle, among others. The learner has become accustomed to particular patterns of behavior in relating to other people. Socialization in educational supervision requires changing those attitudes and behavioral patterns that impede competent job performance.

The supervisory tutorial is a threat to the student's independence. Readiness to learn involves giving up some measure of autonomy in accepting direction from others, in submitting to the authority of the supervisor-teacher. Supervisees also face a threat to their sense of adequacy. The learning situation demands an admission of ignorance, however limited. In admitting ignorance, supervisees expose their vulnerability. They risk the possibility of criticism, shame, and perhaps rejection because of an admitted inadequacy.



Supervisees have the choice of being anxious because they do not know how to do their work or being anxious about confessing ignorance and obtaining help. The recognition and acceptance of ignorance is a necessary prerequisite to learning.

Although educational supervision produces these kinds of anxieties, it also contributes to reducing tensions (Lizzio, Wilson, and Que 2009). The knowledge, skills, and the problem solutions that educational supervision make available give the worker a feeling of confidence and a sense of assurance in job performance. In learning what he or she needs to know, the worker can adapt more successfully to the demands of the work situation. This, in itself, is gratifying and supportively ego-enhancing.

### ***The Supervisor-Supervisee Relationship as a Source of Stress***

The relationship between supervisor and supervisee is another main source of both tension and support (Angus and Kagan 2007; Foster, Lichtenberg, and Peyton 2007). Mayer and Rosenblatt (1973b), who obtained some 233 protocols of stress situations encountered by social work practitioners, stated that “the worker’s anxieties appeared to be basically a function of the two main relationships in which he was involved, his relations with his supervisor and those with his clients” (3).

In her treatment of social workers, Babcock (1953), a psychiatrist, maintained that they felt “less inadequate with clients than with the supervisor to whom they fear to reveal their inadequacies. ... These patient-workers in discussing their work experience accept intellectually that they need the supervisor yet ... they often admit to unreasonable anxiety” (418).

Why should the supervisory relationship—arguably the single most important factor for the effectiveness of supervision (Kilminster and Jolly 2000; Shulman 2010)—be a source of tension? The supervisory relationship is an intense, intimate, personalized situation that has considerable emotional charge. As is true for any highly cathected, meaningful interpersonal relationship, it becomes infused with transference elements, with ambivalence and resistance, with residuals of earlier developmental conflicts. It is a particularly fertile context for the development of transference (Bennett 2008; Lewis 2001) and countertransference (Counselman and Abernethy 2011).

The supervisor-supervisee relationship recapitulates elements of the parent-child relationship and reactivates anxiety associated with this earlier relationship. By the same token, if the supervisor is a potential parent surrogate, it follows that fellow supervisees are potential siblings competing for the affectional responses of the parent—a situation that threatens to reactivate residual difficulties in sibling-sibling relationships. Peer and supervisory interactions have a direct neurobiological bearing on the levels of stress experienced in the workplace (Cozolino 2006, 2010; Divino and More 2010), mediated by the interpersonal bonds of attachment among and between the participants (Kaib 2010; Fitch, Pistole, and Gunn 2010; Foster, Lichtenberg, and Peyton 2007; Renfro-Michael and Sheperis 2009). Invariably, considerations such as these govern adult learning and performance (Johnson and Taylor 2006). For example, conflict and tension may result from the supervisor’s legitimate need to

discuss some of the emotional responses of the worker to the case situation. A supervisee said:

Feeling that “honesty” was the hallmark of the good caseworker, I included in my process recordings all of the doubts, fears and anxieties that I experienced in my interviews. At first the supervisor was delighted with my openness. However, in time she began to question what lay behind all my uncomfortable feelings. At one point, we were spending more time in discussing me than in discussing my patients. We explored my pathology in all its gory details. I would come out of the supervisory conference shaking with self-doubt and feeling vulnerable and picked apart. (Mayer and Rosenblatt 1975b:186)

In one case, a worker experienced stress as a consequence of unmet expectations from supervision:

Well, I don't get supervision, I don't get evaluation of cases and of me. When I get a problem case, I grab hold of Barry and force his attention—but that's not supervision. What all this means is that I'm not going to develop professionally unless I choose to read books. (Fineman 1985:57)

Another worker experienced stress related to supervision as a consequence of differences in style:

Although technically I'm supervised by Joe, I soon found I couldn't stand his paternalistic style—and I told him this. He got very hurt. He's a very kind man, but he doesn't question things in a way that suits me. So I get my supervision and advice elsewhere. (Mayer and Rosenblatt 1975b:51)

For another worker, the conflict between the need to share and the possible consequences of this for evaluation was a source of stress:

I have regular meetings with my supervisor, but always steer clear of my problems in coping with my report work. Can I trust her? I need her backing for my career progress, but will she use this sort of thing as evidence against me? There are some painful areas that are never discussed but need discussing so much. It's an awful dilemma for me. (Fineman 1985:52)

Responses by supervisees to a questionnaire recapitulate some of the additional sources of stress they associate with their supervisors in [table 6.1](#).

Although the supervisory relationship may be inherently stressful, research suggests that supervisors vary on interpersonal dimensions that mitigate relationship stress (Nelson and Friedlander 2001), including a willingness to acknowledge shortcomings and learn from mistakes (Nelson, Barnes, Evans, and Triggiano 2008). Shanfield, Mohl, Matthews, and Hetherly (1992) and Shulman (1991, 2006) have reported that supervisees find empathic supervisors more effective and, consistent with the neuroscience of interpersonal relationships (Gallese 2003; Gallese, Eagle, and Mignone 2007), that the quality of the supervisory relationship hinges on supervisory empathy (Falender and Shafranske 2004; Itzhaky and Eliahou 2001). Thus, it appears that supervisory relationships both exacerbate and ameliorate stress for the worker.

**TABLE 6.1** Sources of supervisee dissatisfaction in supervision

Item	Percentage of supervisees checking item as a strong source of dissatisfaction (n = 384)
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My supervisor is hesitant about confronting agency administration with the needs of his (her) supervisees.	35
My supervisor is not sufficiently critical about my work, so that I don't know what I am doing wrong and what needs changing.	26
My supervisor does not provide much real help in dealing with problems I face with my clients.	25
My supervisor tends to be capricious and arbitrary in the use of his or her authority.	23
My supervisor does not provide enough regularly scheduled, uninterrupted conference time.	21
My supervisor is too controlling and dominant, so that he or she restricts my autonomy and initiative as a professional.	20
My supervisor shows little real appreciation of the work I am doing.	15
My supervisor tends to encourage unnecessary dependency.	14
My supervisor is hesitant about making decisions and/or taking responsibility for decisions, so that the total burden of case decisions rests with me.	12
10. Other (miscellaneous)	22

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Source: From Kadushin, A. (1973). *Supervisor-supervisee: A questionnaire study*. Unpublished manuscript. Madison: School of Social Work, University of Wisconsin.

### ***The Client as a Source of Stress***

Relationships with clients are an additional source of stress for the worker (Acker 2010c, 2011; Savaya, Gardner, and Stange 2011). Workers deal with people who are living under considerable stress, including children in need of protection and their families, the elderly, emergency room clients, HIV-infected individuals, homeless families, persons with mental illness, perpetrators and survivors of domestic violence, sexually abused youth, persons who attempt to commit suicide, and victims of trauma. Such clients are encountered at a time of crisis, when their emotional reactions are overt and strong.

It is very enervating to deal with a great deal of raw emotion—anxiety, anger, depression, grief, terror—and with the constant exposure to highly charged emotional situations while under the necessity of controlling one's own emotional responses. "The worker, face to face with the client in the interview, is exposed continually to an onslaught of unrepressed primitive feelings. The avalanche of feeling with which the ... social worker is confronted is an unusual stress situation peculiar to the task of extending psychological help. It is, in a sense, an occupational hazard" (Feldman, Sponitz, and Nagelberg 1953:153).

Social workers exposed to the experience and expression of strong feelings by their clients may experience those feelings themselves through a process of "contagion" (Siebert, Siebert, and Taylor-McLaughlin 2007) that accesses the emotional dimension of empathy (Shamay-Tsoory 2011). Brain scans of persons tasked with emotional empathy under experimental conditions demonstrated the following:

[They showed heightened] affectivity in the limbic areas involved in emotion processing (thalamus), and also in

cortical areas involved in face (fusiform gyrus) and body perception, as well as in [neural] networks associated with mirroring of others' actions (inferior parietal lobule). ... [This] suggests that emotional empathy is special ... [facilitating] somatic, sensory, and motor representation of other peoples' mental states, and resulting in more vigorous mirroring of the observed mental and bodily states than cognitive empathy [as well as] increased activity in brain networks involved in processing of negative or unpleasant emotions. (Nummenmaa, Hirvonen, Parkkola, and Hietanen 2008:571–78)

Processing negative or unpleasant emotions—by the hour, by the day, by the week—qualifies social work a form of “emotional labor,” in which empathic experience and displays are part of the job (Hochschild 1983). Anecdotally, many social workers report feeling drawn to the profession by their empathic predisposition which, paradoxically, may serve in some ways to protect them from burnout as long as their empathy is an automatic and authentic response to their clients (Martinez-Ingo, Totterdell, Alcover, and Holman 2007). Moreover, the effect of their exposure to clients' feelings may be intensified by the fact that social work training is designed to increase sensitivity and response to such feelings (Gerdes and Segal 2011; Gerdes et al. 2011). The need to be empathetic implies the need to feel with the client. If the worker is truly empathetic, he or she must feel some of the pain, the anguish, the despair, the hurt that many of the clients feel. A supervisee said:

When you're working with people then you're under pressure straight away. You can't just treat a person like a piece of paper and file it away to be forgotten until another day. If that person came in to you with what to them is a very pressing problem, you have to do your damndest to help them and therefore you put yourself under pressure, this is part and parcel of the work. (Parsloe and Stevenson 1978:300)

Yet, over time, the cumulative emotional expenditures over a series of interviews may leave the worker emotionally depleted and exhausted. Therefore, it is no small wonder that susceptibility to feeling the feelings of others has been associated with burnout, depression, and professional impairment (Siebert et. al. 2007), especially once social workers have nothing but acting “left in the tank” to get through the rest of the day (Martinez-Ingo et al. 2007). A worker said:

A really bleak day. I had a series of four interviews, one right after another with several depressed women. The atmosphere in my office became progressively more funereal as the day went on. Gloom and doom, dejection and despair. And the very worst was the last interview of the day with Ruth, who, having been told by her lover that he was breaking off with her, wanted me to convince her that she has some reason for living. I had been contaminated by the mood of the other clients and feeling dejected, had a hard time screwing myself up to sound positive about life.

Working with difficult or challenging clients was stressful for 16 percent of the social workers who participated in the NASW Membership Workforce Study (Arrington 2008). Many such encounters, over time, may lead to “compassion fatigue” (Adams, Boscarino, and Figley 2006; Adams, Figley, and Boscarino 2008) or “vicarious trauma” (Cunningham 2003). Summarizing findings from a survey of 600 master's-level social workers, Bride (2007:63) reported that “social workers engaged in direct practice are highly likely to be secondarily exposed to traumatic events through their work with traumatized populations, many social workers are likely to experience at least some symptoms [of secondary traumatic stress], and a significant minority may meet the diagnostic criteria for [posttraumatic stress disorder].”

Workers encounter “clients” who have neither asked for nor want agency service and who are hostile and resistant to their efforts to help. The caseload also includes groups of clients whose behavior is offensive to many workers—child molesters, wife beaters, rapists, and child abusers. Despite such hostility and the workers’ own very human reaction of antipathy to some clients, professional practice principles require that they act acceptingly. In the following excerpt, a worker describes her feelings before an interview with a hostile client. The worker was scheduled to visit a mother whose children had been removed and who wanted them back:

I was very frightened of the upcoming visit. I have a difficult time dealing with hostility and I expected Mrs. P. to be quite hostile. ... My anxiety mounted steadily the morning of the visit. I lingered at the office as long as I could, wanting to remain in the presence of other workers. Finally I left to drive to Mrs. P’s house. I arrived at her neighborhood only too soon. I trudged up the steep hill with dragging feet, wishing with all my strength that I was going in the other direction. ... I remember hoping that Mrs. P. would have forgotten the appointment and wouldn’t be at home. But there she was, opening the door for me. I felt somehow like a condemned man at his own execution. (Mayer and Rosenblatt 1973:8)

With limited capacity to effectively use the kind of help we can make available, often indifferent or resistant, if not openly hostile, some clients can usually make only a limited tenuous adjustment, despite the best efforts of the social workers. The problems are often relatively intractable. The client’s interpersonal environment is often unsupportive and deprived, if not actually noxious. Such clients make very heavy and stressful demands on the worker’s time and emotional energy and offer limited professional satisfaction in return. Dependent and emotionally taxing clients drain the worker’s store of emotional energy, leaving the worker feeling emotionally depleted and exhausted, powerless and impotent (Acker 1999).

There is often no sense of closure—a feeling that the work is finished and objectives accomplished. Experience has taught the worker that contact frequently is recurrent and episodic, and rates of recidivism are high. A community mental health clinic worker said:

This woman had a boyfriend who moved in and out. While he was living with her, he gave her a lot of support with her children. Whenever they quarreled and he walked out, she’d call me in despair. At first I would go out and spend two hours saying whatever was needed to lift her out of her misery. This happened pretty regularly every few months, and after a year or so I became less responsive to her. Instead of going to see her, I’d talk to her on the phone. “So he left again,” I’d tell her. “He’s left before.” If she remained upset, I’d tell her I’d be out to see her within a few days. Sometimes I never did go. I was beginning to put things off. (Brotsky and Edelwich 1980:186).

In a study of the satisfaction and stresses of psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers, Farber and Heifetz (1981) found that “doubts regarding the efficacy of therapy was one of the principal sources of stress” (626). They were stressed by “giving so much, receiving so little, and through it all remaining vulnerable to doubts that one’s efforts are effective” (674). “Most therapists cited lack of therapeutic success as the single most stressful aspect of therapeutic work” (Farber and Heifetz 1982:5).

A study that explored psychotherapists’ perceptions of sources of stress pointed to clients. Clients who expressed anger, lacked motivation, made no observable progress, and terminated prematurely were cited most frequently by respondents as

sources of stress (Deutsch 1984).

There also is stress associated with physical dangers encountered on the job. Reviewing a series of surveys and studies in England, Norris (1990) concluded the violence is an occupational hazard for social workers and that, proportionately, "social workers face a greater risk of violence than any other non-military profession apart from police" (17). The book "highlights a major but as yet largely unrecognized form of stress for social workers" (168).

"A survey commissioned by The [British] National Institute of Social Work found that almost a quarter of field social workers had been physically assaulted at work, nearly half threatened with violence, and over three quarters shouted at or insulted." (Wilmot 1998:24; also Weinger 2000). Nearly half of the respondents to the NASW Workforce Study reported that client violence was a concern in the workplace (Whitaker and Arrington 2008). Moreover, in mental health settings, 30 percent of licensed social workers reported experiencing violence from their child or adolescent clients and 43 percent reported experiencing violence from their adult clients within the last six months (Whitaker and Arrington 2008:17).

Although actual physical abuse may be relatively infrequent in most practice settings, the worker is more often subjected to verbal abuse. Clients under considerable stress are not always in full control, so that angry feelings are openly expressed in verbal attacks on workers. A foster care worker said:

The interview left me shaken. When I told Mrs. N, that given her situation, we could not return Johnny home, she said "Could not? You mean you don't want to." Her voice rising and her face getting flushed, she lost her cool and she yelled. "You lousy bitch. You shit. I knew all along you didn't like me, but I didn't think you would go so far to hurt me, you little bastard." It's hard to get talked to like that without feeling upset.

When subject to abuse, the worker is not in a position to walk away or answer back, which are the usual measures of self-defense. The worker is obliged to continue client contact, making continued efforts to help. The worker's decisions often have considerable implications for the client's living situation. A child is placed for adoption, a parolee can be released from prison because a job has been found, or an abused child is separated from his or her parents. This is an awesome responsibility, and awareness of the possible consequences of such decisions is a source of occupational stress, anxiety, and guilt. Often, the worker has to make these crucial decisions in the face of unnerving uncertainty, ambiguity, and limited information and with a recognition that full understanding of the prodigious complexities of unpredictable human situations is beyond the wisest person's true comprehension.

Many situations encountered by child welfare workers have all the essential elements of Greek tragedies. They involve conflicting but legitimate and justifiable interests and needs. There may be a conflict between the rights and privileges of a foster parent and the rights and privileges of a natural parent. The conflict may be between the right of grown children to live autonomously and the rights of aged parents for protection and support. Moreover, workers face the unnerving prospect of having their decisions reviewed. Social workers are accountable to the public generally, and to their clients specifically. Clients now have the right to have access to

their records and are entitled to activate complaint procedures and initiate lawsuits that name their social workers as defendants.

There are also problems of deciding between competing needs of different clients. Devoting a considerable amount of time to one client means neglecting another. As one worker put it:

The conflict that I felt was not only between the regulations and the clients but between client and client. If you want to help clients get schooling or job training or discuss personal problems with people who may be very eager to talk to you about them, you do so with the knowledge that you are not using this time to help get basic material things to people who just as desperately need them. (Miller and Podell 1970:24)

### ***The Nature and Context of the Task as a Source of Stress***

Stress can result from the nature of social work tasks and the conditions under which the work is done. We noted earlier that the task in which the worker is engaged interpenetrates with his or her own life. Encountering separation experiences, the worker is made anxious as he or she remembers his or her own separation fears at the hospitalization or death of a parent, the threat of divorce, and so on.

If the “work itself” is the strongest predictor of job satisfaction (Smerek and Peterson 2007:229), then “Living on a job that is so closely allied to life itself makes separation of work from other areas of life exceptionally difficult. Since the work task and living are often simultaneously experienced, anxiety is greater than in many other fields” (Babcock 1953:417). A worker said:

Sue was pregnant out of wedlock again. She went on and on about how easy it seemed for her to become pregnant—said it with pride as well as with some regret. And as she went on and on about this, my insides knotted with envy. Why so easy for her and so hard for me? We had been trying for a year and with increasing desperation, to have a child. I, who wanted a child so much, could not get pregnant; Sue, who did not want a child, got pregnant effortlessly. It was hard to keep listening to Sue discuss her problem, since listening increased the hurt I felt so deeply.

Other stresses result from the fact that the workers’ responsibilities exceed their power and resources. Society supports social work agencies because they are part of the necessary apparatus for social control. They mitigate the effects of situations that might lead to social conflict and alleviate the most extreme effects of social dysfunction. The limited support given to agencies allows them to perform this secondary function. The support necessary to carry out their primary functions—to provide adequate measures for prevention and rehabilitation—society is not yet willing to grant. The workers therefore have to implement a policy that reflects society’s ambivalence toward the groups whom they are asked to help. Increasingly, what they are asked to do is in conflict with society’s willingness to provide the resources to enable them to do it.

Furthermore, neither the worker nor the profession has the power to change those significant social pathologies—discrimination, unemployment, housing shortages, etc.—that directly limit what the worker can do. These crucial externalities, beyond the workers’ power to remedy or change, affect their practice and determine the outcome of their efforts.

The results of the workers’ best efforts to help the client in the face of overwhelming odds, under conditions which are beyond their control, lead to a sense

of impotence, frustration, and failure. A clear sense of achievement is hard to come by. A worker wrote about her reaction to trying to help in the face of overwhelming odds:

I'm tired of hearing about rats and roaches, and politely ignoring the latter as they crawl over walls and floors. I'm tired of broken boilers, toilets, and refrigerators, plumbers who never come, junkies in the halls and junkies who break into apartments and steal clocks, irons, sheets, children's clothes, food—anything they can lay their trembling hands on. I'm tired of hearing about asthma, high blood pressure, anemia, arthritis, toothaches, headaches, and “nerves....” I don't want to hear the same things: “He just left ... not enough for ... I don't know where he ... like to work but ... think he's you know, slow ... not sending up heat ... some mornings it's so bad ... went to the clinic but they ... do you give money for ... teacher sent him home because he ... only got to the eighth. ...” Poverty jams into a mold which permits few variations. (Walton 1967)

There is stress in working in the context of ambiguous objectives. Society often gives the agencies a poorly defined charge. The community sometimes does not make clear what response it expects from agencies in the face of social problems. Workers ultimately have the task of making decisions in the face of poorly defined or even conflicting objectives. Should the TANF mother be forced to work if her children need her at home? Should prisons serve the purpose of punishment or rehabilitation? Should the community share with the parents the burden of care for the severely disabled child? Should gay men, lesbian women, and transgendered persons be recruited as foster parents? In these situations, and others, workers frequently face the stress of making decisions and taking action about moral and ethical questions on which both they and the community are still undecided.

Some of the occupational stress to which workers are subject stems not only from uncertainty about what they should be doing but also how they should be doing it. Techniques and approaches for helping the client are rarely so well established as to provide clear-cut guidelines for the workers' behavior. For many situations, there is no validated professional consensus on the most effective approach. In addition to incomplete or imperfect mastery of available knowledge, workers have to accept the limitations of professional knowledge itself.

The worker is faced with the stress of balancing antithetical demands and expectations. He or she is required to be objective and maintain some emotional distance from the client. But at the same time, he or she is required to be empathetic, feeling what the client feels, putting himself or herself figuratively in the client's situation. These are contradictory demands.

The worker is required to individualize the client, seeing the client in all of his or her special uniqueness. At the same time, the worker is often required to label the client for diagnostic reimbursement and administrative purposes. Labeling inevitably involves some deindividualizing and stereotyping. There is a need to nonjudgmentally accept clients as they are. At the same time, the worker is expected to make assessments about the client's behavior, the client's treatability, the client's motivations, and the client's manipulations. The worker is asked to accept and respect the client as a person, but reject his or her dysfunctional behavior—to reject the sin but not the sinner. This is a difficult separation to make because the behavior is a significant component of a person's identity. The worker is asked to accept the client as is, but



is expected to help the client to change because what he or she is is not acceptable. The worker thus has to balance antithetical attitudes of acceptance and expectations of change.

Workers are asked to be authentic and genuine and at the same time consciously controlled in their interview behavior. The requirement for “spontaneously controlled” behavior once again involves contradictory demands. Workers are asked to respect client self-determination and at the same time protect the client from self-harm.

There is stress associated with the antithetical pressures of being a professional in a worker-client relationship, on the one hand, and a humanistic tradition on the other. The professional relationship implies inequality in knowledge and power in the worker’s favor; the humanistic tradition strives for equality and collegiality in the relationship. As professionals, workers are “better,” in the specific sense of their expertise, than the clients. The therapy relationship is inherently a relationship of unequals. Social workers are the helpers; the clients are the ones needing help. But this inequality offends social workers, and they feel a sense of stress from the dissonance between the reality of difference and their egalitarian orientation.

The factor that tends to provide satisfaction and hence counter negative feelings in most jobs is the recognition by oneself, confirmed by others, that the work has been well done and that there is a desirable outcome. The work social workers do does not confirm itself. Typically, there are few observable, objective, tangible indications of whether interventions have been successful. Social workers do not see the car they helped build roll off the line, a defective heart corrected by a coronary bypass, or a jury verdict in favor of their client. Social workers are not often rewarded by unmistakable indications that their interventions have made a difference.

Because the work is done in private, workers do not get the confirmation of their competence from other professionals who, having witnessed the performance, might commend the worker. The doctor in the operating room or the lawyer in the courtroom might be congratulated by peers who have observed the competent professional in action.

The performance of actors, athletes, and musicians are applauded by their clients, the audience. Applause is an overt, instant expression of approval. In contrast, workers rarely get direct confirmation of their competence by applause from their clients. Most clients are too absorbed in their own troubles to concern themselves with efforts to express commendation or gratitude for the worker’s efforts. By working in private toward objectives the worker can only guess have been achieved, and only rarely receiving spontaneous and voluntary gratitude by the client, the worker is under stress from doubts about his or her competence and about the significance of his or her work.

The worker is the principal instrumentality for helping the client. Failure in social work is more directly felt as a reflection on the adequacy and competence of the worker as a person than in many other kinds of work. A facilitative relationship is the necessary, if not the prime, ingredient for success in much of our work. Developing such a relationship depends to a considerable extent on what we as people contribute

to the interaction. Consequently when things go wrong, we tend, in an exercise of self-awareness, to focus on ourselves to identify how our needs and feelings might have intruded in the interaction. More so than in most other jobs, the social worker is his or her work. Failure, then, is more easily personalized.

A license to practice social work arouses expectations in others, which result in stress. Just as people who hold the title of minister, priest, or rabbi are expected to be more perfect morally than the population at large, the licensed social worker is expected to be better adjusted, be more successful in interpersonal relationships, be better parents, and have better marriages than others. Workers may feel a stressful pressure to live up to the expectations communicated by the title. When they encounter difficulties in relationships with their children and spouses, as is inevitable in any complex human relationship, workers may feel more keenly than others a sense of disappointment and failure.

Faced with difficult—and sometimes violent—clients, tasked with responsibilities that exceed power and resources, addressing ambiguous goals and conflicting demands, and having “heavy workload[s],” “lack of time to do the job,” and “inadequate compensation” also contribute to the stress of the social work job (Arrington 2008:3).

#### ***The Organization as a Source of Tension and Stress***

As Barford (2009) noted, the work setting is strongly related to burnout. Organizational turbulence, frequent reorganization, and rule changes are stressful. An organization oriented toward managed care with a high degree of centralization of decision making, a highly formalized hierarchical system, and elaborately structured rules and procedures is associated with a greater likelihood of a stressful work context (Acker 2010b; Kim 2008; Lindblom, Linton, Fedeli, and Bryngelsson 2006).

Workers in many large public agencies face the stress of adapting to constantly changing directives:

Frequent interruption of routine income maintenance and service activities further overburden caseworkers. An Atlanta caseworker says: “We get so many manual transmittals with so many changes that it's impossible to stay on top of everything.” Changes are so frequent that agencies cannot keep manuals up to date. (Galm 1972:30)

Because the client's welfare is not necessarily equivalent to the agency's welfare, professional and bureaucratic orientations provide competing claims upon loyalty. Billingsley studied this conflict in child welfare agencies and found the following:

In spite of the social worker's intellectual and emotional commitment to meeting the needs of his client it is apparent that these needs must be met within the framework of structured approaches imposed by the agency ... even over the worker's own estimation of the needs of the client. This is consistent with findings in studies of other professions. (Billingsley 1964:403)

The conflict between the two orientations leads to a strain between the agency demand that a given number of units of work be performed and the desire of the professional to do the best possible job. Billingsley (1964) identified this as the conflict between quantitative output and qualitative performance.

There is stress associated with the salaries paid many workers, especially if

coupled with high workloads (Arrington 2008; Strolin, McCarthy, and Caringi 2006). Admittedly, income may not have been a strong source of motivation in the choice of social work. Other kinds of satisfaction had greater priority. However, if adequate income is not of first importance, it is, as someone said, “wonderfully soothing to the nerves,” especially if faced with unrelenting demands for superhuman performance. We cannot ignore the fact that salary is often perceived as an objective measure of one’s worth to society. Because lower income levels signify that someone is considered to be of lesser importance, this makes it difficult to maintain a respectable level of self-esteem. Pay levels become particularly important as an objective measure of society’s estimate of a person’s worth in those instances where there is an absence of other objective measures of work, as noted previously.

The actual salary is not as important as equity, which requires remuneration consistent with one’s workload, performance, and reference-group peers. An equitable social work salary is one that provides reasonable compensation for performing a high volume of difficult work in comparison with persons of similar education, achievements, and background. The worker with an MSW compares his or her salary and associated possible lifestyle with people in other professions who have also invested six years in professional preparation. The comparison often puts the social worker at a disadvantage. Organizational justice has been found to have a direct impact on health in longitudinal research (Liljegren and Ekberg 2008), much as equity and fairness in the workplace buffer burnout (Maslach and Lieter 2008:500).

Workers in some special settings face particular stresses. All organizations interact, of course, with the environment in which they are embedded. However, not all professionals are required to interact on intimate terms with other professionals. The social worker in a host setting (the medical social worker in a hospital, the school social worker in a public school, the clinical social worker in a mental institution) is placed in this position. They have to justify and define their decisions to a critical audience of other professionals. They have to learn a pattern of deference in interacting with higher-status professionals. Research indicates that such “boundary positions” are apt to produce tension (Blosser, Cadet, and Downs 2010; Nelson and Merighi 2003). Even though doctors, for instance, are supposedly colleagues and peers of the social worker in a hospital or mental health facility, the reality is that the doctor is *primus inter pares*—first among equals. A clinical social worker on an inpatient hospital psychiatric ward said:

My feelings of anxiety and stress have been mainly a result of working in a host setting. Initially, I was extremely anxious about working with residents and psychology fellows. I felt inadequate even though I thought I had much better training and had better skills in working with people. I tended to be concerned with status, prestige, etc. They were psychiatrists—they had medical degrees or else they had PhDs. I was really intimidated by their status.

When I began to work with residents, I tended to defer to them. I was sure that they knew what was best and that I shouldn’t question them. Besides, if I did question them, I would have to be damned sure I could justify my position.

My one-down position became problematic and stressful for me. And the fact that I am a woman and almost all of the residents and psychology fellows are men didn’t help either.

The hazards of sexism and the resentments associated with hierarchical elements in interprofessional relationships interact with each other. Hierarchy and gender

segregation overlap. The higher-status psychiatrists and clinical psychologists are more apt to be male. Social workers are likely to be female.

There is stress that derives from the necessity of working cooperatively with other institutions in society that are based on values somewhat at variance with the values to which the social worker owes allegiance. The worker often has to work with the legal system, with the educational system, and the managed-care system, which see the problems of his or her clients from different vantage points. The worker faces the stress of communicating in different universes of discourse and accommodating to different points of view regarding the same problematic situation.

### ***Community Attitudes Toward Social Work as a Source of Stress***

The worker is affected by the general community attitude toward social work and the function it performs (Huxley et al. 2005). Although the community has always been ambivalent about the profession, more recently there has been an intensification of the negative components of that ambivalence (Veigel 2009), prompting a social work campaign to improve our public image (Murdach 2011).

Earlier in the history of the profession, the effectiveness of social work interventions was not critically questioned. It was presumed and generally accepted that interventions had positive results. Not only was social work previously granted unquestioned presumptions about its expertise and effectiveness, it was also granted a presumption about the benign nature of its intentions. There was a consensus that what the social worker did was done altruistically and unselfishly for the benefit of the client. The community attitude toward social work was generally respectful and approving; it had been given high marks and prestige for moral integrity, altruism, and disinterested benevolence.

However, in the recent past, the thrust has been to challenge those assumptions. Some critics contend that any apparent benevolence is a mask that that social workers don to exercise social control over the lives of their clients. Others believe that the majority of social workers have become “unfaithful angels” who “blame the victims” of social pathology, forsaking the traditional social work mission. The entertainment media frequently portrays social workers in a negative light (Zugazaga, Mendez, Surette, and Otto 2006), and the front page of the *New York Times* is usually reserved only for those rare social workers charged with homicide in the tragic death of a child (Rivera 2010). Although a nationally representative telephone survey of public perceptions of social work found that a majority of the public understood the social work profession and recognized its value (LeCroy and Stinson 2004), that was before the “Great Recession” of 2008. Once viewed as selfless, if feckless, now social workers risk being painted as “the new welfare moms,” feeding at the public trough in Wisconsin (Albelda 2011; Turnbull 2011).

Thus, over the years, public attitudes toward social work have moved from approval, trust, and confidence through questioning ambivalence, to a greater measure of critical mistrust and cynicism. Certainly, past public attitudes were less stressful for workers than more current, more negative attitudes have become.

Workers face the stress of explaining and defending their actions, contributions, decisions, and value.

In summary, it is noted that the supervisor providing supportive supervision has to understand the stresses and tensions workers encounter on the job. Such understanding is a prerequisite to offering interventions that are likely to be helpful. The source of stresses and tensions include such factors as administrative and educational supervision, the client, the nature of the work itself, the social agency organizational structure, and the attitude of the general community toward social work and social workers. The worker encounters problems of role ambiguity, role conflict, role overload, and role strain (Acker 2011).

### **Worker Personality as a Factor in Burnout**

In effectively implementing supportive supervision, not only does the supervisor have to be aware of the various stresses cited above that are encountered by the worker, but he or she must understand the individual worker's reaction to stress. Some workers are more resilient than others, and different workers exposed to the same stressors will experience different degrees of burnout (Adams, Figley, and Boscarino 2008). Among the many worker characteristics associated with burnout are abuse and trauma history (Bride 2007; Cunningham 2003; Siebert 2006), age (Lindblom, Linton, Fedeli, and Bryngelsson 2006; Siebert 2006), attachment style (Kaib 2010; Renfro-Michel and Sheperis 2009), coping style (Acker 2010a, 2010c); education (Travis and Mor Barak 2010), ethnicity and race (Arrington 2008; Travis and Mor Barak 2010), gender (Lindbloom, Linton, Fedeli, and Bryngelsson 2006; Purvanova and Muros 2010), hardiness (Alarcon, Eschelman, and Bowling 2009), income (Fakunmoju, Woodruff, Kim, LeFevre, and Hong 2010; Siebert 2005), life and work experience (Cunningham 2003; Travis and Mor Barak 2010), personality (Alarcon, Eschelman, and Bowling 2009; Maslach and Leiter 2008), self-efficacy (Alarcon, Eschelman, and Bowling 2009; Chen and Scannapieco 2010; Ellett 2007, 2009), and substance use and abuse (Arrington 2008; Siebert 2001). Clearly, individual differences affect worker burnout.

Therefore, just as the supervisor is guided by a diagnostic assessment of the learning needs and learning style of the supervisee in educational supervision, a diagnostic assessment of the needs for emotional support is useful in supportive supervision. For social workers providing services to trauma victims (Cunningham 2003), for example, signs and symptoms of burnout may include "intrusive imagery related to the client's traumatic disclosures, avoidant responses, physiological arousal, distressing emotions, and functional impairment" (Bride, Jones, and MacMaster 2007:69), including "irritability," difficulty "concentrating" and "sleeping," disturbing dreams about clients," "hypervigilance," and "emotional numbing" (Bride 2007:66). These symptoms may be exacerbated in workers with a personal trauma history who use alcohol and other substances to cope with distress.

The attitudes that people bring to the job are also a factor (Koeske and Kirk 1995; Alarcon, Eschelman, and Bowling 2009). The worker who is relaxed and does not

take his or her work too seriously, who has a high self-esteem that is not threatened by occasional failures on the job, or who is not too self-demanding and self-punitive is less frequently a candidate for burnout.

The worker who consistently tends to blame himself or herself for failure rather than realistically assigning some component of failure to the client and the social situation is more likely to respond negatively to job stress.

The paradox is that the more conscientious, concerned workers may be more susceptible to burnout. It is said that “one has to be on fire in order to burn out.” The commitment and dedication that characterize “determined idealists” may result in a greater discrepancy between great effort expended, intensified expectations, and limited outcome. The sense of disappointment in their work is apt to be greater for such workers. The worker becomes a prisoner of his or her own sensitivity.

The self-image that is characteristic of many people who select social work as a career—the image of an accepting, tolerant, understanding, helpful person—increases vulnerability to burnout. When encountering difficult problems, many workers find that they are, after all, not angelic, but only human. When angry, unkind, or critical feelings about clients begin to surface, a considerable amount of psychic energy is expended in defending against such feelings in an attempt to preserve the more acceptable self-image. This reaction is often intensified when the client is of a different gender, race, or sexual orientation and the worker feels self-accused of sexism or racism or homophobia.

Yet, if caring too much is a danger in itself, the worker who cares deeply about his or her clients and retains a basic belief in his or her ability to be helpful may “have high frustration tolerance, be able to depersonalize job stresses, and stay focused on work outcomes” that are “personally rewarding and satisfying, all of which serve to reinforce caring about their clients and their work” (Ellett 2009:84). Thus, when conscientious concern is yoked with self-efficacy, the resultant attitude of competent caring helps immunize the worker against burnout (Ellett 2007).

There are differences among workers in the significance that the job has for them in regard to their total life configuration. For some workers, the job is the most important thing in their lives, having clear priority over other interests. For other workers, the job is a more peripheral aspect of their lives. The worker who builds his or her life around the job is more likely to risk burnout. Investing more of himself or herself in the job, he or she is more likely to be disappointed and depressed if things go wrong on the job. Workers who have difficulty in separating work from the rest of life or are unable to judiciously balance idealism and realism are more likely candidates for burnout.

Asked to identify factors that contribute to work-related stress, 31 percent of the 3,653 participants in the recent NASW membership workforce study indicated that “lack of time to complete the necessary tasks of their jobs was a major issue,” and 25 percent “acknowledged that their heavy workloads contribute to their stress” (Arrington 2008:2). Frequently experienced and expressed as somatic concerns, most participants reported symptoms of fatigue, approximately one-quarter reported

sleep disorders, and many participants reported problems with cardiovascular functioning, heart palpitations, impaired immune functions, and musculoskeletal disorders (Arrington 2008:6). To cope with their stress, approximately three-quarters of the participants in the NASW membership workforce study (Arrington 2008) used exercise, followed by meditation (one-third), personal therapy (one-quarter), prescription medication (one-fifth), and drinking alcohol (one-sixth).

Acker (2010a, 2010c) examined the relationships between social workers' burnout, perceived competence in managed care environments, coping strategies, stress-related somatic symptoms, and workplace support in a sample of 591 social workers practicing in New York. The study hypothesized that workers' competence, as well as their differential focus on emotions or problems to cope with stress, would be associated with burnout and somatic stress symptoms. Examples of "emotion-focused" coping included wishing that the situation would go away, refusing to think about it, and eating, drinking, and smoking. Expressions of anger, fighting for what was wanted, and speaking with someone who could resolve a problem served as examples of "problem-focused" coping. As expected, workers employed both coping strategies, and both were significantly associated with burnout and somatic symptoms of stress. However, it was their sense of competence in managed-care practice that buffered workers most against influenza-like symptoms of stress and emotional exhaustion. Social workers who felt competent working with managed care were more likely to eschew "problem-focused" coping strategies, perhaps because they did not need them, whereas workers who felt incompetent relied on "emotion-focused" escape and avoidance behaviors. Although workplace support buffered workers against stress and burnout in a related study by Acker and Lawrence (2009), in this study Acker (2010a, 2010c) found that workplace support from supervisors and colleagues was less important than how workers coped in predicting burnout.

The overall effectiveness of those coping techniques is an unanswered question, however, as Siebert (2001) found that 12 percent of social workers were at risk for alcohol and other substance abuse, 22 percent reported current depression, and 27 percent reported current burnout in an anonymous survey of 1,000 members of NASW in North Carolina—a study designed to assess work and well-being in social work practice. "Altogether, 52% admitted to some kind of professional impairment" (Siebert 2001:129). By the same token, a study of 460 mental health service providers in New York found that "more than half of the workers (56%) reported high to moderate levels" of emotional exhaustion, 73 percent reported moderate to high levels of role stress, and half (50%) considered quitting their job" (Acker 2011:10). Yet, as Morse et al. have noted:

Most burnout programs have focused on changing the individual to improve burnout, typically... with the goal of reducing work stress by improving the person's coping skills or social support. ... Most of these interventions, however, fall within the broad category of cognitive-behavioral interventions, including providing educational information, cognitive restructuring, progressive muscle relaxation, social skills training, communication skills training, and skills to enhance social support. ... [Although] evaluations of individual-level interventions suggest that coping skills programs are often effective for reducing burnout, especially emotional exhaustion, and some of these programs also have led to positive physiological results (e.g., lower blood pressure) for employees ... the significant

improvements in burnout that accrued from individual-focused interventions often disappeared 6–12 months after the completion of the intervention, unless booster sessions were included in the program. (Morse et al. 2012:347)

Clearly, “coping strategies alone do not preclude burnout” in human services practitioners (Jenaro, Flores, and Arias 2007:80), as “only 20% to 21% of its symptoms are explained” by “individual variables, such as coping strategies and job and salary satisfaction” (Jenaro, Flores, and Arias 2007:85). In general, a stressful workplace is the strongest predictor of burnout (Siebert 2001), but stress is cumulative and incremental. Consequently, the worker whose off-job life is generally unstressful can withstand considerable stress on the job without risking burnout. However, if the worker’s economic, social, marital, or parental situation is stressful or if the worker has a troubled parent or experienced abuse as a child, even limited additional stresses on the job may make him or her more vulnerable. Stress from the homefront spills over, as does stress from the past, adding to stress on the job.

Workers who are new to the job (Juby and Scannapieco 2007; Kim 2008; Siebert 2005), those with flagging faith in their ability to be helpful (Chen and Scannapieco 2010; Maslach and Leiter 2008), and “wounded healers” (Lloyd et al. 2002; Siebert 2006) will require supportive supervision.

Workers who have limited personal investment in their work, who are not strongly oriented toward seeking emotional fulfillment from their client contacts, who tend to make situational rather than personal attributions of failure in their work, or who are bureaucratically oriented toward acceptance of rules, regulations, and procedures are likely to have less need for supportive supervision. The nature of their orientation defends them from emotionally disturbing aspects of their work.

A worker who is concerned about but not emotionally involved in the job, who is satisfied with meeting minimal standards, and who is primarily concerned with extrinsic rewards—pay, job advancement, desirable office space—is likely to be in moderate need of supportive supervision when some situation is encountered that threatens job security.

Workers who are idealistic, independent, individualistic, and nonconforming are likely to need more supportive supervision. They are strongly affected by the conflict and the discrepancy between what they think service to the client should be like and what they actually experience it to be. They are sensitive to ethical conflicts in their work and affected by the frustrated impulse to effect change. They chafe at requirements to conform to organizational needs. Such workers need supportive supervision in reconciling their conflicts, discontents, and disappointments. Where reconciliation is not possible, supportive supervision would at least provide the opportunity of openly discussing their disagreements with a receptive representative of the organizational hierarchy.

The more dedicated the worker, the greater the likelihood of the need for supervisory support. Workers who feel a strong sense of “calling,” who are imbued with a dedicatory ethic toward their work, or who have a strong professional superego are more strongly affected by inevitable failure. Such workers, who bring the best of what is needed to social work, are more likely to require the guilt-



dissolving absolutism of a supervisor—someone in a position of authority who gives permission to moderate the demanding rigidity of a strong, punitive superego. Supportive supervision provides the antidote to the tyranny of the ideal—the unrealistic expectations that such highly committed workers impose on themselves. Supportive supervision is designed to help such workers take themselves less seriously.

The worker who is upwardly mobile and achievement oriented may need the frequent reassurance from supportive supervision that he or she is doing well. Any imputation of work failure is threatening and anxiety provoking to such workers, calling for supportive supervision.

To maintain supervisor awareness of the negative effects of job stress and raise supervisee consciousness of this, the periodic scheduled evaluation conferences might include a stress-check review. This would keep both supervisor and supervisee alert to the development of dangerously high levels of chronic tension.

### **Implementing Supportive Supervision**

Having learned to identify burnout and understand the factors that help explain its development, the supervisor has the responsibility of responding to the problem in a way that might prevent the development of, and/or mitigate the effects of, stress and tension.

Supportive supervision is often implemented not as a separate, explicitly identifiable activity, but rather as part of the work of educational and administrative supervision. Assigning work, reviewing work, or training for the work can be done in a manner that is supportive. The functions of educational and administrative supervision can be performed in a way that communicates respect for, interest in, and acceptance of the supervisee. If administrative supervision cannot alleviate burnout by reducing the ambiguity and conflict of the social work role, then supportive and educational supervision may help. Using supportive supervision to recognize personal accomplishments, increase job performance, and improve competence through educational supervision provides a sense of accomplishment, makes the job more meaningful, and leads to greater job satisfaction. In a study of how human service professionals cope with burnout and the suggestions they have for coping with burnout, “building competence” is the most frequently cited response (Shinn and Morch 1982:231).

Helping the worker do his or her job and providing the information the worker needs may be more effective in ameliorating stress than other kinds of supportive supervisory interventions such as emotional support, such as “being warm and friendly” (Harkness 1997; Kim 2008; Mor Barak et al. 2009). Contributing to worker competency and job mastery is perhaps the most important thing a supervisor can do to help ameliorate worker stress. Mullins (2011) argued that that supervisors can help workers prevent burnout by cultivating the skills of emotion regulation, mindfulness, and perspective-taking that help protective service workers empathize with abusive parents and facilitate their participation in services that lead to family reunification. A

number of studies have found that mindfulness training helps health care providers manage burnout (Shapiro et al. 2005), and this has led to calls for mindfulness training in social work education (Lynn 2010; Mishna and Bogo 2007) and supervision (Andersson, King, and Lalande 2010). A central finding in a study of social workers providing mental health services in a managed care environment was that social workers who felt competent in their practice abilities reported lower levels of roles stress and burnout (Acker and Lawrence 2009). Successful achievement of job objectives may ultimately be the most effective antidote to burnout.

Beiser (1966) noted that it is very difficult to separate the precisely educational from the purely supportive components of supervision. In discussing her own supervisory practice with child psychiatry residents, she said:

Although I gave a great deal of didactic information both as to theory and specific skills, sometimes this was to alleviate anxiety, sometimes to encourage identification or to demonstrate a model of flexibility. When I tell of my own errors I use them not only to illustrate a particular point but to encourage a less experienced therapist or to interfere with hopes of omnipotence through identification with me. (Beiser 1966:138)

The supervisor's availability, in and of itself, is reassuring and supportive. A questionnaire study of worker reaction to supervision indicated that supervisors' availability and regularity of contact were positively correlated with satisfaction with supervision and the level of perceived helpfulness of the relationship (Shulman 1982:27–28). A replication of that research found that supervisors' availability was associated with worker ratings of supervisory skill, trust, rapport, helpfulness, morale, and stress in the social work job (Shulman 1991).

The negative effect of a harassed supervisor and her lack of availability in response to a worker's need for support is illustrated in the following:

I had just completed my home visit with an extremely angry, hostile mother. She was angry with me because I had had to remove her child some time ago and still did not feel she was ready to assume her maternal responsibilities. I had endured her curses and hysterics; now, as I left her home I was trembling and angry. But, I was also filled with self-doubt. Was I doing the right thing? Maybe there was something I should have done differently or might do now so that mother and child could be reunited? I returned to the office absorbed with the incessant dialogue taking place in my mind and proceeded to my supervisor's office. As she looked up, I blurted, "I am so angry with Mrs. S." Before I could finish my story we had several interruptions and then the phone rang. After the phone conversation, she said, "What is it you were saying?" "Nothing," and sulking I stalked out of her office. I was frustrated all afternoon.

The supervisor's response to the development of stress and tension on the part of the worker and the ultimate danger of burnout should involve a series of specific interventions. The supervisor can act to (1) prevent stress and tension from developing, (2) remove the worker from the source of stress, (3) reduce the impact of stressors, and (4) help the worker adjust to stress.

### ***Prevention of Stress***

At the very beginning, the probability of burnout might be reduced by the supervisor's effective performance of the administrative supervisory function of hiring and inducting. This permits the selection of personnel so that there is a "best fit" between applicant and the work that needs to be performed.

Providing accurate information about the job permits the applicant to make a more

objective decision as to whether it is the kind of job that fits his or her needs and expectations. As a consequence of clearly learning what the work realistically entails, some applicants who might have had difficulty on the job select themselves out.

However, accurate objective information about the job is also helpful to those who decide to accept the position. As a result of having been clearly told what they might expect, there is less likely to be disillusionment and disappointment when they encounter the realities of the job. Such anticipatory guidance and realistic preview is a psychological inoculation associated with increased survival rate on the job.

Workers are hesitant to report incidents of violence or threatened violence—sometimes because it might suggest a failure on their part in interacting with the client and sometimes because they believe that working with difficult clients is part of the job (Macdonald and Sirotich 2001). Because workers worry that they might have done something to annoy, irritate, or frustrate the clients (Norris 1990), supervisors need to help supervisees report and process such experiences because “workers who are better able to reflect on their thoughts, feelings and beliefs ... are likely to be more resilient to stress” (Kinamn and Grant 2011:270). The supervisor must also help them recognize danger signals that suggest impending violence so as to prevent associated stress (Lowe and Korr 2007). We return to this issue in [Chapter 7](#) because supervisors and the agency have a duty—if not always the means—to protect workers from violence on the job (Kilminster, Cottrell, Grant, and Jolly 2007; Occupational Safety and Health Administration 2004).

### ***Reducing and Ameliorating Stress***

Owing to the risk of burnout in social work practice, the supervisor can play a role in the development of organizational-level programs for managing stress (Nielsen, Randall, Holten, and Gonzalez 2010), augmenting the coping strategies that social workers employ on their own (Arrington 2008). A broad range of interventions and programs appear to be effective (Martin, Sanderson, and Cocker 2009), although some are more effective than others (Goldgruber and Ahrens 2010; Richardson and Rothstein 2008). “From a public health perspective, it is recognized that a small effect applied to a larger number of people may produce overall greater improvement in a population health than a larger effect applied to a smaller, targeted group of persons” (Martin et al., 2009:8).

More directly, the supervisor can supportively help to reduce stress impinging on the worker or remove the worker temporarily from a stressful situation. These procedures are analogous to environmental modification procedures in working with the client. The supervisor can arrange for a temporary reduction in caseload or a temporary shift to less problematic clients. The supervisor might also arrange for a temporary increase in clerical help available to the worker.

Conferences, institutes, and workshops not only provide learning and stimulating personal contacts but also enable the worker to get away from the office and the caseload. They are, in effect, supportive “rest and recreation” devices that remove the worker from stress.

The supervisor might sanction timeouts as a tension-reducing measure. A day off in the middle of the week or an afternoon off after a difficult morning might be permitted, with the time made up when the worker feels more in control.

Imaginative, flexible work scheduling and arranging for job sharing of high-stress tasks are stress-reducing procedures. Helping the worker organize his or her workload, sanctioning the prioritization of tasks so that some responsibilities are temporarily neglected, and allowing for deadlines to be delayed with the supervisor's authorization help reduce the development of stress (Stevens 2008).

The supervisor can remove the worker from stress by job enrichment, job diversification, and job rotation. As Davis and Barrett (1981) noted, "Rotation of workers to alternate services within the agency can be used to provide a change of pace with relief from stressors" (59).

Job enrichment attempts to help the worker find more meaning in tasks assigned while job diversification involves increasing the variety of job-related tasks. Caseworkers might be assigned to work with a group, teach homemakers or foster parents, engage in work-related research, or write a work-related report for administration.

A temporary change of assignment from the field to the office with temporarily diminished responsibility for contact with clients helps the worker to catch his or her psychic breath and recharge emotional batteries.

Careful assignment of a reasonable caseload balanced between cases with a high risk of failure and cases that might provide an experience of success prevents tensions arising from quantitative or qualitative role overload. Overwhelming caseloads are stressful, and the supervisor can ameliorate this situation by helping the worker prioritize cases. Some cases may need less intensive contact than others. Giving permission to provide differential levels of service to clients may be helpful.

In an attempt more specifically related to helping the worker cope with developing tension, supervisors in some agencies have arranged for stress management workshops. This might include instruction on biofeedback, meditation, relaxation techniques, or yoga to augment physical exercise, which is the stress-management strategy that most social workers use to cope (Arrington 2008).

The supervisor can be supportive by frankly sharing some of his or her own difficulties with the supervisee. This confirms the fact that examined failure is acceptable and that the supervisee need not feel so guilty and inadequate:

Gretchen then commented that it was so hard to know when she should say something to someone and when she should keep quiet. I asked her what she meant. She said ... "If the girls want to talk about sex, I let them talk about sex even if I know that maybe I am going further than they want to go." I agreed that this was a rough struggle, one that I was going through too. I elaborated by saying that many times I was torn when Gretchen asked me something as to whether or not to tell her or to let her do the work. This struggle, I said, I could feel with her since it was a struggle that I had too. Gretchen looked at me and said, "Do you really?" I said that I did. She looked very comfortable and at ease with this. (Gladstone 1967:9)

The worker may be upset about a problem he or she is facing with the client. Discussing it with a supervisor who is calm about the situation is supportive. Some of the supervisor's calmness is contagiously communicated to the worker. A supportive

orientation encourages expression of feelings, which is in itself supportive. Nelsen (1973) found that supervisees “volunteered feelings after they had been encouraged *and* supported in expressing feelings on a conference by conference basis” (209).

It is presumed that anxiety is reduced by externalization, by open expression of anxious feelings. Perception by supervisees of the level of a supervisor’s helpfulness was positively associated with the supervisor’s encouraging such ventilation. Positive responses to the statement “When I am upset about something my supervisor says or does, he/she encourages me to talk about it” were highly correlated with supervisory helpfulness in Shulman’s studies of social work supervision (1982:157; 1991:176; 2010:116).

Some workers may avoid or resist expressing themselves openly with their supervisor during periods of stress (Bennett 2008; Foster et al. 2007). In such cases, journaling may be helpful (Alford, Malouff, and Osland 2005), but more active cognitive-behavioral treatments have been found more effective (Goldgruber and Ahrens 2009; Richardson and Rothstein 2008). If an intervention such as this is warranted, the worker may be referred to an employee assistance program to preserve the firewall between supportive supervision and psychotherapy, as well as to protect the privacy of the worker. Not all agencies and organizations are able to provide for their own programs of employee assistance, but some agencies have been able to offer each other’s employees reciprocal assistance on an informal basis.

The supervisor who suspects that the supervisee feels anxious about his or her next visit to a family, next group meeting, or next community-action planning conference might supportively ask, “How do you feel about this meeting?” Alternatively, the supervisor might hazard an inference coupled with an invitation: “You seem somewhat upset about this upcoming meeting. Would you like to talk about it?”

Considerable stress is encountered in exercising control and communicating acceptance in response to a client’s hostility and rejection. To react with anger, defensiveness, or withdrawal (eminently human and socially acceptable reactions) would be regarded as a violation of professional norms. Such a response would then evoke guilt and a feeling of professional failure. Even the thought of such reactions creates discomfort. “The client aroused some negative feelings in me—like anger, impatience, and frustration. And I became angry at myself for having these feelings” (Mayer and Rosenblatt 1973a:8).

While holding to the norms of professional conduct, the supervisor can supportively sanction such feelings. All thinking and feeling is acceptable as long as it is not manifested in unacceptable behavior. A worker said:

I think that one of the important functions of supportive supervision is to help the worker deal with negative feelings about the client. Social work attitudes tend to reinforce general societal constraints about thinking negative thoughts about other people. So this is quite a job for supervision. In my case I was asked to physically describe a client. I proceeded along the line of height, weight, etc. When my supervisor asked me if the person was attractive, I was really caught off guard and felt hesitant about expressing my thoughts that, no, the person wasn’t attractive at all. With the supervisor’s support I have become more at ease with expressing negative thoughts and feelings and have come to accept these as part of any relationship.

The supervisor reduces stress by normalizing unprofessional feelings, noting that

workers may often feel negative or critical about some clients (Walsh 2002). The normalization of unprofessional behavior, however, is another matter altogether. Fourteen percent of the respondents to a national random sample of 1,029 members of NASW reported that they had committed “an assault on a client within the past year” (Ringstad 2005:305), primarily but not exclusively in the form of “verbal aggression” (309), including “a total of 311 incidents of psychological assault and 86 incidents of physical assault in the past year” (309). “Stomping away from a client during a disagreement” (309) may be a mild form of assault, but having “shouted or yelled at a client ... having insulted or sworn at a client ... having grabbed a client [or] having physically assaulted a client” (309) may be a violation of ethical and legal standards of social work practice that compels the supervisor to report the offense to NASW or the governing Board of Social Work Examiners. At the very least, an assault on a client should trigger an administrative postmortem review to identify and correct any problems with agency policy and procedure, including those of social work supervision. Although we have differentiated the administrative, educational, and supportive dimensions of social work supervision for the purpose of discussion, there is nothing more supportive than providing an appropriate administrative and educational structure for learning from mistakes (Copeland, Dean, and Wladkowski 2011).

The supervisor supports workers in carrying out tasks that must be done but that cause anxiety. Workers are often initially reluctant to reverse the usual pattern of amenities and ask intimate details about the life of a relative stranger, the client. Such behavior is seen as an unwarranted intrusion on client privacy, a manifestation of unacceptable aggressive voyeurism. The supervisor supports the workers by reassuring them about their entitlement to such information if they are to do the job of helping the client.

Reinforcement, or confirmation, of the workers' decisions is supportive because it assures them that the supervisor shares the responsibility for what they are doing or planning to do. It is reassuring for workers to know that their decisions are in line with more expert opinion.

The supervisor mitigates stress by supportively sharing the responsibility for difficult decisions with the worker. A social worker in a TANF program said:

In talking with Mrs. H. about how she disciplined the children, she told me that yesterday she had caught her four-year-old playing with matches—lighting them and tossing them in the air. Frightened and anxious, she grabbed the kid, slapped his hand repeatedly, then lit a match and burned the kid's hand slightly. Mrs. H. thought that feeling the pain would teach the kid to keep away from matches. She sure handed me a tough one. According to the law, I was really supposed to report Mrs. H. for child abuse. But if I reported her I would blow the chances of continuing a relationship with Mrs. H. and possibly being of help to the children. What to do? After discussing this with my supervisor, I held off reporting Mrs. H. for abuse. That shares the guilt for the decision.

When discussing this stressful aspect of the social worker's job, Brearley (1982) made explicit the relationship between work stress and sharing responsibility in supportive supervision:

Social workers are subject to many pressures which create stress. Working in a situation of uncertainty, having to

deal with a lack of knowledge and often with uncontrollable factors in an environment which militates against change inevitably creates stress. Social work has therefore developed techniques to manage stress, particularly the supervision process. ... Supervision is a way of sharing the burden of uncertainty, of gaining support in a practice context in which decisions are almost invariably made with incomplete information and knowledge. Through supervision, the worker is helped to manage his own response to being unsure and also helped to clarify decisions and share responsibility for decision making. (Brearley 1982:136, 139; see also Shapiro 1982)

Mayer and Rosenblatt (1973a; 1973b) found, in their study of stress among social workers, that new workers had an unrealistically high expectation of what social work could accomplish. When this overly optimistic picture met with inevitable failure, the workers tended to blame themselves. The supervisor can offer the exculpation of a practiced professional who reduces guilt by excusing failure. The supervisor helps workers move from an unrealistic sense of idealistic omnipotence to an acceptance of a realistic limitation of themselves, social work technology, and the clients. The shift is supportive and results in less anxiety and guilt. The supervisor legitimizes limits of expectations. The supervisor depersonalizes responsibility for some failures and relieves the worker of the burden of unearned guilt.

One significant aspect of supportive supervision is concerned with what Stelling and Bucher (1973) have identified as *vocabularies of realism*: “Acquiring a language for coping with failure and human fallibility can be seen as part of the process of acquiring a professional orientation and frame of reference toward the work of the profession” (673). Some research suggests that supervisor self-disclosures “with information similar to the issues and concerns on which the supervisee is working,” including weakness or failure experiences, as well as strengths or success, may be helpful in this (Davidson 2011:271).

Vocabularies of realism help the worker cope with stress by a cognitive restructuring of his or her approach to the work. It helps to reduce the pressure of work demands, providing sanction for detached concern and psychological distancing from the client. It revises expectations so that they are less idealistic and more realistic, and depersonalizes failure when it occurs.

The need for vocabularies of realism is greater in those professions where risk of failure is high and the consequences of failure are significant. “A profession which rests on a body of knowledge characterized by uncertainties and gaps runs a relatively high risk of error and failure” (Stelling and Bucher 1973:673). These factors are operative in social work, even in an era of evidence-based practice (Mullen, Bledsoe, and Bellamy 2008). As a consequence, collective responses to recurrent probabilities of failure have tended to develop, and the supervisor passes these on in supportive supervision. Stelling and Bucher, studying these procedures in medicine and psychiatry, identified basic exculpatory themes that are similar to those employed in social work. One theme is “doing one’s best”; a second is “recognition of limitations.” In the following example, we see the doing-one’s-best theme communicated supportively by a supervisor to a psychiatric resident:

Another very important time came when one of my supervisors said to me, in dealing with this very manipulative patient, “Look, you know, she may commit suicide, we may lose her—we could try, but there is a very good chance that she will kill herself sooner or later, no matter what you do,” and I think once I had accepted that idea that patients

do kill themselves and that ... there are some things I can do to prevent this, but there are also some things that I can't, I think I had kind of an "aha" experience. (Stelling and Bucher 1973:667)

The second theme supportively communicated in supervision is a recognition of limitations, expressed by the following psychiatric resident:

One thing one learns in this residency program is not to have therapeutic ambitions in anywhere near the quantities that you have when you first come here. Patients thwart that right, left, and center, and you learn that it is therapeutically unhelpful to have a large therapeutic ambition for patients. ... I can now say that there are large numbers of people who suffer symptomatically, but who are untreatable. ... I had many sorts of rescue fantasies about patients when I came into the residency, and it's taken me a long time to shift focus and learn that I didn't have to rescue everybody, that, one, it wasn't necessary, and two, it wasn't possible. (Stelling and Bucher 1973:669)

The supervisor helps the supervisee accept the reality of human fallibility and imperfection, the limits of technology, and the fact that all approaches are effective sometimes but never effective all the time. Supportive supervision is sometimes implemented by retranslating behavior deserving of criticism in a way that highlights the positive aspects of the worker's action. A supervisor talks about Jill (a worker):

[Jill was under] constant pressure from a visit to a difficult family—she's spent months getting them back on their feet—very disorganized lot—and when she went back the other day they had slipped back into the same old mess, kids screaming, they hadn't learned anything—no movement at all. Just back in the same old mess and Jill lost her temper, got up and walked out! [laughs] She was overwrought but you see she had displayed temper to the client, she'd displayed emotion, she was showing she cared for them. Anyway she came back to the office and told me all about it. Well we had to laugh—she'd worked so hard with them, but I know she cares, she'll go back there and sort it out. (Pithouse 1987:70)

The worker demonstrated an awareness of failed performance and shared this openly with the supervisor. The supervisor saw the behavior as true evidence of the worker's concern for the client and recognized the "constant pressure" faced by the worker. The worker confessed and received supportive absolution from the supervisor.

The supervisor can help the supervisee in modifying stress-producing self-statements through reframing and cognitive restructuring (Itzhaky and Aviad-Hiebloom 1998; Richardson and Rothstein 2008). Some of the kinds of disabling self-statements that the supervisor can help change include the following:

- I must make the right decision, or something terrible will happen to the client.
- I should never feel bored or angry or disrespectful toward a client.
- I must always try to help if asked, even if it involves setting aside my own personal needs.
- When a client fails to make progress, I must have done something wrong.
- I should be a model of mental health.
- I must show my supervisor how perfect I am.

The supervisor can communicate some ideas that help the supervisee become more realistic about the work, such as "Knowledge does not always lead to a solution," "Reality is contradictory and often characterized by mutually incompatible



tendencies,” and “Small changes, which is all than one can legitimately expect, are big victories, so that one can take satisfaction in doing some good some of the time.”

When the elusiveness, ambiguity, and lack of clearly identifiable signs of success rob the worker of a significant source of work satisfaction, supportive supervision can be helpful. A protective service worker said:

I find it extremely disheartening when so much of my work seems to have little or no effect. At times when I have been particularly discouraged and thinking about taking a construction job, a few words from a supportive supervisor have done wonders to boost my morale. I don't mean that he/she merely repeated empty clichés. Rather, they took the time to listen to what happened and had the insight and sensitivity to see and point out some positive effects in my interactions with clients.

The supervisor can reduce tension by helping the worker resolve the problem of conflicting role obligations. If the worker is torn between finishing a report and helping a client facing an emergency, perhaps the supervisor can sanction delaying the report so that the worker can devote full attention to client needs. Where two performance objectives conflict—for instance, detailed intensive interviews with clients at intake and the need to expeditiously complete intake interviews so as to process more applicants—the supervisor can reduce anxiety by officially assigning clear priority to one of the objectives.

The supervisor provides the support of perspective. The view that both the client and the relationship are fragile often inhibits workers from doing what may be helpful. The supervisor can validly reassure the worker that both the client and the relationship can survive a mistaken intervention, a poor interview, or a temporary lapse in professional conduct. Unlike the experienced worker, the new worker does not have a backlog of successful cases to which he or she can refer in reverie when things do not go well with the client who is sitting across from him or her (Bandura 1977). “When things go awry in relationship to a particular client, nothing can shore up a therapist's defenses faster than his recall of the many successful cases he has terminated” (Mueller and Kell 1972:104). Borrowing the perspective of the more experienced supervisor can be supportive (Ellett 2007).

A beginning worker might express doubts about his or her ability to be helpful to the client. The supervisor can supportively universalize by sharing the fact that most new workers feel this way, that he or she has been able to assist others to be helpful, that he or she has confidence in the worker's ability to learn, and that he or she would be available to discuss with the worker the problems met in trying to be helpful. This single intervention contains a number of different kinds of statements, all of which have a supportive intent.

Supervisors provide support for workers in helping them formulate a clearer conception of agency policies, their own work goals, and their role within the agency. Unless supervisees have a reasonably clear idea of what they are supposed to be doing, why they are doing it, and toward what objectives, they are likely to be burdened with unnerving doubt and confusion. Uncertainty is generally related to increased tension. A worker whose supervisor clearly communicates performance objectives, performance standards, and performance expectations feels a sense of

support in such clarity.

If role ambiguity is a potential source of tension, clarity in definition of work objectives, expectations, and reciprocal responsibilities prevent the development of such tension. In the following, a supervisee writes of the nonsupportive effects of lack of clarity regarding objectives:

I was given the task of being an indirect leader in a new setting. I continually reported back to the supervisor what I was doing and what problems existed. The supervisor briefly commented that what I am doing is good. When I asked direct questions such as what goal does the agency have as a priority now, or what are new developments from conferences, the supervisor answered that there are no new goals, no new developments, you do your own thing. I feel that a task like the above is extremely difficult and threatening, demanding support and a certain amount of direction from the supervisor, which serves the purpose of giving the supervisee a sense of direction and support in the work setting itself. The supervisor's lack of direction made my task more difficult.

The supervisor, in discharging the responsibilities of supportive supervision, attempts to provide workers with the opportunity to experience success and achievement in performance of professional tasks and provides increasing opportunities for independent functioning. Like Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman (2005), Warr (2007) found that feelings of achievement and responsibility were two of the most potent sources of job satisfaction. Both help people feel good about the job they are doing (Smerek and Peterson 2007).

The supervisor supports by praising and commending good performance and communicates agency appreciation for the workers' efforts. Short written communications can be helpful. One worker talked about "kudos memos," complimenting something the worker had done, that the supervisor occasionally dropped into the worker's mailbox.

Compliments from the supervisor are particularly gratifying and ego-enhancing because they come from someone who is identified as capable of making valid evaluations. In sharing their victories with an appreciative supervisor, workers know that they are talking to someone who understands the difficulty of the task they have successfully achieved. To perform this support function effectively:

[A supervisor] must fulfill two important criteria: he or she must be an expert in our field and someone whose honesty and integrity we trust. In other words this person must understand the complexities of the job we do and must be courageous enough to provide honest feedback. If these requirements are met we can accept support as genuine. Mothers, spouses, or non-expert friends can provide general encouragement but that is probably not as meaningful as support from someone who can appreciate the technical intricacies of our job. (Pines 1982:158)

Partial praise should be offered where warranted: "It was good you realized something was going on here, but I am not sure this was the best way to respond to it. Let's talk about how to handle clients' anxiety." The worker is commended for knowing that something needed to be done, even though what she did was not especially helpful. One supervisor wrote about her supportive intervention:

On the days I didn't find a lot of glory to give her, I gave her encouragement and pointed out that at least she was aware of what she did wrong and how it could have been improved. When she had a miserable meeting with the girls and was angry with herself, I tried to interject some realistic reassurance. When she had a good meeting, I tried to help her feel justified in her high spirits. I'm sure that getting along together as people had a great deal to do with it as well.

Unwarranted praise, however, is antisuportive. It may reflect the supervisor's rather than the supervisee's anxieties, which then tend to decrease the supervisee's self-confidence: "He seems much too worried about me, like I am about to fall apart or something"; "I get the feeling that he is afraid to criticize me, afraid that I can't take it"; "I don't think I am so fragile, but he is so supportive about not hurting my feelings that I begin to wonder if he thinks I am fragile"; or "I appreciate the gentleness of her approach to me, but it suggests a kind of condescension that I tend to resent."

As was true for educational supervision, the act and its intent may be at variance with the effect. Just as teaching is not learning, supportive activity on the part of the supervisor may not be perceived as supportive by the supervisee. The supervisor must be sensitive to any feedback that gives information as to the actual effect of his or her behavior. Reassurance may not reassure; catharsis may lead to an increase in anxiety.

The following are two examples of situations that were regarded by workers as good examples of supportive supervision:

One conference dealt with the relationship of the supervisee in working with a group of severely mentally handicapped children. The worker mentioned the fact that such children "make me physically ill," "they are repulsive to me." I pointed out how I could understand her feelings and how I myself had at one time shared somewhat the same feelings. I went on to talk about my growth in this as a result of experiences I had had in working in a school for retarded children, the warmth of relationships that had developed. I do not know if she has changed her bias, but I know that she did a good deal of thinking about it, and told me how I had helped her manage her feelings so that she could work more effectively in that program. What helped the supervisee was some understanding and sympathy toward her feelings, coupled with warmth and empathy and a positive stand on what this type of work could entail, how it could be meaningful, etc.

A worker in a surgical ward of an acute-care hospital expressed to her supervisor her resistance to visiting a patient, long known to her, who was in terminal stage of cancer. Supervisor helped worker to express her fear, and then to look at why she was afraid. Worker finally concluded that she was afraid patient might die while she [worker] was visiting her. Further exploration revealed that the worker had many warm, close, and positive feelings about the patient, and the worker was afraid she would break down and cry. The supervisor's response to this was, in effect, "So what!" Discussion followed regarding the reality of such fears and emotions, the need for the worker to remain an individual whose real feelings are not to be confused with concepts of "professionalism," and that expression of honest feelings can only serve to strengthen relationships between people. Subsequently, the worker reported freedom to share feelings with the dying patient. The supervisor had effectively provided support to the worker, had accepted her fears and emotions, enabled her to express them, and freed her to overcome fears.

## **Recapitulation and Some Caveats**

In general, the supervisor, when implementing the responsibilities of supportive supervision, engages in the same kinds of intervention that characterize supportive psychotherapy. The supervisor acts to prevent stress, reduce stress, or temporarily remove the worker from stress. The supervisor praises the workers' efforts where warranted, reassures and encourages, communicates confidence, depersonalizes and universalizes the workers' problems, affirms their strengths, shares responsibility with workers for difficult decisions and/or lends his or her sanctions to the workers' decisions, and listens attentively and sympathetically, providing an opportunity for cathartic release. All of this takes place in the context of a positive relationship characterized by respect, empathic understanding, acceptance, and sympathetic interest in and concern for the worker as a person. The fact that such interventions

are employed in the context of a meaningful positive relationship increases the saliency of the supervisor's communications. Praise, reassurance, encouragement—any supportive comment expressed by the supervisor—have greater significance for, and effect on, the supervisee because they come from somebody whose responses he or she values highly.

Lastly, but far from least, the supervisor should not underestimate the importance of adequate salary levels and fringe benefits for increasing job satisfaction and reducing stress. As a consequence, the supervisor has to be an active advocate with management for salary increases for staff.

It needs to be recognized, however, that even the best supervisory relationship is not potent enough to resolve some dissatisfactions and job-related conflicts that derive from the nature of the work itself and the conditions under which it frequently has to be performed. Some potential dissatisfactions are inherent in agency structure, the social work task, the state of available professional technology, and the position of the social work profession in modern society. It would be asking far more of supervision than it is capable of achieving if a good supervisory relationship is expected to eliminate work dissatisfaction, worker disenchantment, and worker turnover. This is part of the vocabulary of realism for supervisors.

Because of the emphasis on stresses and tensions associated with the social worker's job, there is a decidedly negative bias in the material presented above. Although the stresses and tensions noted are real, we argued that "most social workers do not burn out, and most social workers find considerable satisfaction in their work" in the last edition of this book. We retain our conviction that social work is a rich and rewarding profession that makes an important positive contribution to the people it serves, but it appears that the practice environment has changed in ways that make social work more stressful (Abramovitz 2005; Acker 2010b; Stalker, Mandell, Frensch, Harvey, and Wright 2007). As a consequence, perhaps social workers are now more vulnerable to burnout.

In the introduction to the report on *The Health of the Human Services Workforce*, "a first-of-its-kind national random-sample survey of 1,213 childcare, child welfare, youth services, juvenile justice, and employment and training workers," Light observed:

The survey reveals ample cause for concern about the health of the human services workforce: 81 percent of the human services workers interviewed for this study strongly or somewhat agreed that it is easy to burn out in the work they do, 70 percent also strongly or somewhat agreed they always have too much work to do, 75 percent described the work they do as "frustrating," and another 51 percent described it as "unappreciated." (Light 2003:6)

In their review of social work, stress, and burnout, Lloyd et al. (2002) noted evidence that social workers were experiencing high levels of stress, high levels of general anxiety and depression, and consequent burnout. With "reports of turnover rates" that range "from 30 to 60 percent in a typical year," "retention of employees in child welfare, social service, and other human service agencies is a serious concern," and the "major predictors of leaving" include "burnout, job dissatisfaction" and "stress" (Mor Barak, Nissly, and Levin 2001:625–26). In a study of twenty-six diverse

occupations, from accountants to veterinarians, Johnson, Cooper, Cartwright, Donald, Taylor, and Millet (2005) found that social services workers in direct practice ( $n = 535$ ) reported worse than average scores on highly-correlated measures of physical health, psychological well-being, and job satisfaction, ranking third and fifth from the bottom in physical health and job satisfaction, and worst of all among occupations in their psychological well-being. Although it appears that many licensed social workers continue to find considerable satisfaction in their work, the size of their caseloads, the severity of their clients' problems, and the volume of their paperwork are increasing, even as their job security, levels of staffing, rates of reimbursement for services, and the availability of supervision have diminished (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004). Among registered social workers in California, Kim and Stoner (2008) found levels of emotional exhaustion that were higher than the national norms provided by Maslach and Jackson (1986). In child and youth care, Barford (2009) observed that burnout is a plague—a major cause of the high rates of turnover rampant in an industry where workers generally only last between two and five years before changing jobs. As noted earlier, Bride (2007) believes that 15 percent of social workers in direct clinical practice meet the diagnostic criteria for posttraumatic stress disorder. In addition, an anonymous survey of distress and impairment among one thousand members of the North Carolina Chapter of NASW found the following:

Conservatively, 12% were at risk for alcohol and other drug abuse, 22% reported current depression, and 27% reported current burnout. Lifetime rates were 60% for depression and 75% for burnout, and 52% reported some kind of professional impairment as a result of their distress. (Siebert 2001:iii–iv)

Thus, where “the expected working life of a physician is 25 years, compared with 15 years for nurses and 28 years for pharmacists,” the expected working life of a social worker in England is merely eight years (Curtis, Moriarty, and Netten 2010:1628).

Are things as bad as they sound? Although social work is a demanding job, Collins (2008) noted that social workers, compared with other occupations, enjoy high job satisfaction. Although social workers reported less job satisfaction than hairdressers, farm workers, and speech therapists in England, for example, Rose (2003) found that 59 percent of social workers scored above the median for all occupations ( $n = 7,365$ ), higher than the job satisfaction of accountants, computer analysts, medical practitioners, nurses, and professors. Curtis et al. (2010) argued that much has changed in social work since 1999, the year that Rose (2003) obtained his data. However, a study of job satisfaction among 4,595 public service employees in seven countries (Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Norway, and the United States) reported the following:

On average, the respondents from the seven countries were “fairly satisfied” with their jobs, and considered it “important” to have a job that allows them to help others and is useful to society. In terms of intrinsic workplace attributes, they, on average, “agreed” that their job is interesting and provides some independence and autonomy. They, however, were less agreeable when it came to extrinsic workplace attributes. They “neither disagreed nor agreed” that their job provides high income, high job security, and high prospects for advancement. On average, they described their work relations with their co-workers and managers to be “quite good,” although their relations with the former appeared to be better than the latter. (Taylor and Westover 2011:739)

Drawing on a study of 1,729 child welfare workers in thirty-six states and ninety-two counties from the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being, Barth et al. (2008:206) reported similar findings in the United States, noting that “job satisfaction showed little variability and suggested that workers as a group are somewhere between undecided and somewhat satisfied with their jobs.”

While acknowledging that many social workers score high on measures of burnout, Stalker et al. (2007) pointed to a number of studies reporting the coexistence of high levels of emotional exhaustion and strong job satisfaction in child welfare and social worker samples. How can this be? In addition to the many variables already reviewed, supportive supervision helps workers manage stress and burnout and derive satisfaction from their work.

### **The Value of Supportive Supervision: Research Findings**

Many studies have demonstrated the positive effects of supportive supervision. One study experimentally tested the effects of supportive and nonsupportive orientations to supervision (Blane 1968). Counseling students who experienced supportive supervision showed a significant difference in emphatic understanding after such supervision as compared with scores before supervision. Students who experienced nonsupportive supervision did not show this change.

Another study testing the differential consequences of the two approaches showed that nonsupportive supervision tends to shift the worker’s focus of concern away from the client and toward himself or herself (Davidson and Emmer 1966). Blau (1960) found that reductions in the level of workers’ anxiety as a result of supportive supervision were related to a less rigid use of agency procedures and encouraged better service to clients.

In the fourth edition of this book, we reviewed twenty-one studies supporting the supposition that good supervision reduces the development and negative effects of burnout. Subsequently, cross-sectional studies by Bogo et al. (2011), Kim (2008), Kim and Lee (2009), Kim and Stoner (2008), Stalker et al. (2007), and others have found that supportive supervision reduces burnout. Additional confirmation comes from an important longitudinal study by Kim (2008), from Halbesleben’s (2006) meta-analysis of 118 studies, and from Mor Barak, Travis, Pyun, and Xie (2009:29), who concluded, from their meta-analysis of 27 research articles with a combined sample of 10,867 social service employees, that “workers who experience good supervision through task assistance, emotional support, and effective relationships with supervisors reciprocate with positive feelings and behaviors toward their jobs and the organization.”

Noting three decades of research describing an annual turnover rate of between 23 percent and 60 percent among child welfare workers, McGowan, Auerbach, and Stroling-Goltzman (2009) and Strolin-Goltzman, Auerbach, McGowan, and McCarthy (2008) have published findings challenging the conventional wisdom that supportive supervision contributes to worker retention, but other studies have found that supportive supervision is associated with worker self-efficacy (Collins-Comargo and

Royse 2010), worker ability and workload management (Juby and Scannapieco 2007; Stevens 2008), worker job satisfaction (Barth et al. 2008; Mena and Bailey 2007; Stalker et al. 2007), and worker retention (Chen and Scannapieco 2010; Ellett, Ellis, Westbrook, and Dews 2007; Jacquet, Clark, Morazes, and Withers 2007; Landsman 2007). Workers' intention to resign or leave their job has been associated with *unsupportive* supervision (Ellett, Ellis, Westbrook, and Dews 2007; Kavanagh et al. 2003; Kim 2008; Travis and Mor Barak 2010). As a tonic for happiness at work and as an antidote for unhappiness at work, Peter Warr (2007:128) described supportive supervision as "crucial."

## **Additional Sources of Support for Supervisees**

### ***The Client***

The supervisor is not the only source of support for supervisees in dealing with stresses encountered on the job. Clients can be a source of support as well as stress (Huxley et al. 2005; Washington et al. 2009). In their responses to workers and to the service offered by workers, they confirm the workers' competence and sense of self-worth (Stalker et al. 2007). Appreciative comments regarding the workers' efforts are supportive. Client movement and change for the better provide workers with a feeling of achievement (Chen and Scannapieco 2010; Ellett 2009), explaining as much as 29 percent of the variance in job satisfaction in a study of 232 social workers licensed for practice in Maryland (Cole, Panchanadeswaran, and Daining 2004).

### ***The Peer Group***

The supervisee peer group is an additional source of support for the supervisee that can supplement the supervisor's efforts (Ellett 2009; Travis and Mor Barak 2010). Workers turn to peers with whom they feel comfortable to talk about their dissatisfactions, discouragements, or doubt about the job and to express feelings of anxiety about inadequate performance and feelings of guilt about mistakes made. The peer group on the job—the work clique—is very often the primary resource to which workers turn to talk about such concerns. These are people who most likely have experienced similar problems. They are knowledgeable about the job situation and can discuss these matters with some sophistication. The worker who feels the need to talk about these feelings and the peer group to whom he or she turns share experiences and a common frame of reference, increasing the likelihood of empathic understanding. In addition, they have no administrative power to evaluate the worker. Consequently, the worker may feel freer in sharing his or her doubts and dissatisfactions with fellow workers than with his or her supervisor. The peer group has the additional advantage of being not only psychologically accessible, because social distance between peer and peer is minimal, but also physically available. You do not have to make an appointment with coworkers.

In providing supportive supervision, the supervisor can actively mobilize the assistance of the peer group resource. The supervisor can stimulate supportive peer-

peer interaction and encourage cooperative, mutual interactions among staff by reinforcing the supportive activities of the supervisor. Supervisors might facilitate the development of the peer-peer interactional system by arranging for group supervision and frequent unit meetings. The supervisor might also encourage supportive peer-peer interaction by helping to organize peer supervision and consultation.

Although peer group support is an important resource, supportive supervision has some advantages not available from the peer group. Unlike peers, the supervisor has the power and authority to make stress-reducing changes in the worker's situation. Being responsible for evaluating the workers' performance, supervisors who make supportive statements have a more potent impact than peers who make similar statements.

### ***Social Support Network***

The supervisee's social support network also supplements supportive supervision (Collins 2008; Pines, Ben-Ari, Utasi, and Larson 2002). Although family and friends do offer a haven against stress, their lack of intimate knowledge of the nature of on-the-job stress limits the impact of their emotional support.

Because stress originates in the workplace, the workplace is the best context for dealing with work stress. The supervisor, intimately aware of the sources and nature of work stress, can offer the most relevant feedback to help the worker. Unlike family and friends, the supervisor is also more immediately available to deal with on-the-job stress.

To be effective, social support needs to be significantly related to the particular stress that is the source of strain. General undifferentiated social support may not provide effective buffering. The particularity of the supervisor's support directly related to specific work stress is likely to have more significant supportive effect.

In the last analysis, then, despite the availability of these additional sources of support, the supervisor is the best resource for dealing with supervisee work stress.

### ***Supervisees' Adaptations***

Supportive supervision is further supplemented by the workers' own adjustive capacities. Supervisees respond to the stress of supervision by actively "psyching out" the supervisor. Their purpose is to determine the kinds of behavior that will obtain acceptance and those that will elicit disapproval. Supervisees then manage a presentation of self that will net maximum approval and minimum disapproval. What Goldhammer (1969) said of teachers in supervision can be applied equally well to social workers: They have learned, in adapting to stress in the supervisory relationship, "how to second guess the supervisor, how to anticipate what will please him, how to stage appropriate performances for him to observe and how to jolly him up for their own protection" (64).

Supervisees in all helping professions have developed a series of well-established, identifiable games that are, in effect, defensive adjustments to the threats and anxieties that the supervisory situation poses for them. In the description that follows, these games are grouped in terms of similar tactics, but, to the extent that most



games are a form of unconscious behavior (Berne 1964), the first indication that a game is underway may be rooted in subjective experience. Thus, the “symptoms that a game is being played,” according to McIntosh, Dircks, Fitzpatrick, and Shuman (2006:228), citing Hagler and Casey (1990), “include ‘the presence of a cool, unsatisfying relationship, a general sense of discomfort, and a feeling of having been misinterpreted, belittled, imposed upon or somehow threatened.’” It may be important to note that some supervisees almost never play games. However, even the least anxious supervisees resort to such adjustive games occasionally. Supervisors also play games for similar reasons. These are discussed following the description of supervisees’ games.

## **Supervisees’ Games**

Much of the material in this section originally appeared in the article entitled “Games People Play in Supervision,” *Social Work* 13 (1968):23–32. It is quoted with permission from the National Association of Social Workers. Similar reports have been published subsequently in counseling (Bauman 1972), genetic counseling (McIntosh, Dircks, Fitzpatrick, and Shuman 2006), medicine (Armstrong 1973; Cady 1973; Cummings and Groves 1982; McGee and Martin 1978), social work (Hawthorne 1975; Cousins 2010), and the speech-hearing professions (Hagler and Casey 1990; Sleight 1984).

### ***Manipulating Demand Levels***

One series of games is designed to manipulate the level of demands made on the supervisee. One such game might be titled “Two Against the Agency” or “Seducing for Subversion.” The game is generally played by intelligent, intuitively gifted supervisees who are impatient with routine agency procedures. Forms, reports, punctuality, and recording excite their contempt. The more sophisticated supervisee introduces the game by noting the conflict between the bureaucratic and professional orientation to the work of the agency. The bureaucratic orientation is one that is centered on what is needed to ensure efficient operation of the agency; the professional orientation is focused on meeting the needs of the client. The supervisee points out that meeting client needs is more important; that time spent recording, filling out forms, and writing reports is robbed from direct work with the client; and, further, that when the worker comes to work and goes home is not important as long as no client suffers as a consequence. Would it not therefore be possible to permit him or her, a highly intuitive and gifted worker, to schedule and allocate his or her time to maximum client advantage; and should not the supervisor be less concerned about his or her filling out forms, doing recording, completing reports, and so on?

It takes two to play games (Hagler and Casey 1990). The supervisor is induced to play this game because he or she identifies with the supervisee’s concern for meeting client needs; he or she has frequently resented bureaucratic demands himself or herself and so is, initially, sympathetic to the supervisees complaints; and he or she is hesitant to assert his or her authority in demanding firmly that these requirements

be met. If the supervisor chooses to play the game, he or she has enlisted in an alliance with the supervisee to subvert agency administrative procedures.

Another game designed to control the level of demands made on the supervisee might be called "Be Nice to Me Because I Am Nice to You." The principal ploy is flattery: "You're the best supervisor I ever had," "You're so perceptive that after I've talked to you I almost know what the client will say next," "You're so consistently helpful," "I look forward in the future to being as good a social worker as you are," and so on. It is a game of emotional blackmail in which, having been paid in this kind of coin, the supervisor finds himself or herself unable to hold the worker firmly to legitimate demands.

The supervisor finds it difficult to resist engaging in the game because it is gratifying to be regarded as an omniscient source of wisdom: there is satisfaction in being perceived as helpful and in being selected as a pattern for identification and emulation. An invitation to play a game that tends to enhance a positive self-concept and feed one's narcissistic needs is likely to be accepted.

In general, the supervisor is vulnerable to an invitation to play this game. The supervisor needs the supervisee as much as the supervisee needs him or her. One of the principal sources of gratification for a worker is contact with the client. The supervisor is denied this source of gratification, at least directly. For the supervisor, the analogous satisfaction is helping the supervisee to grow and change. However, this means that he or she has to look to the supervisee to validate his or her effectiveness. Objective criteria of such effectiveness are, at best, obscure and equivocal. To have the supervisee say openly and directly, "I have learned a lot from you" or "You have been helpful" is the kind of reassurance needed and often subtly solicited by the supervisor. The perceptive supervisee understands and exploits the supervisor's needs in initiating this game.

### ***Redefining the Relationship***

A second series of games is designed to lessen the demands made on the supervisee by redefining the supervisory relationship. These games depend on ambiguity in the definition of the supervisory relationship; it is open to a variety of interpretations and resembles, in some crucial respects, analogous relationships.

One kind of redefinition suggests a shift from the relationship of teacher and learner in an administrative hierarchy to worker and client in the context of therapy. The game might be called "Protect the Sick and the Infirm" or "Treat Me, Don't Beat Me." The supervisee would rather expose himself or herself than his or her work, and so he or she asks the supervisor for help in solving his or her personal problems. The sophisticated player relates these problems to difficulties on the job. If the translation to worker and client is made, the nature of demands shifts as well. The kinds of demands one can legitimately impose on a client are clearly less onerous than those imposed on a worker. The supervisee has achieved a payoff in a softening of demands, and because so much time is spent discussing his or her personal problems, there is less time left for discussing his or her work.

The supervisor is induced to play because the game appeals to the social worker in him or her (because the supervisor was a social worker before and is still interested in helping those who have personal problems); it appeals to the voyeur in him or her (many supervisors are fascinated by the opportunity to share in the intimate lives of others); it is flattering to be selected as a therapist; and he or she is not clearly certain that such a redefinition of the situation is impermissible. All the discussions about the equivocal boundaries between supervision and therapy feed into this uncertainty.

Cousins described “Treat Me, Don’t Beat Me” as a particular danger in social work, owing to the history and stance of the profession in relation to power. In social work, “managers shy away from the evaluative and confrontational components in their role.” However,

[i]n many other industries, a low profit line, or lack of productivity soon brings into sharp focus the need for employees with personal issues to “get on with the job,” regardless of their social situation. In social work, the philosophy around the use of self in work can result in a culture that focuses too much on the emotional well-being of staff. While this is necessary to a point, the inherent risk is that this will shift the focus from client to social worker. (Cousins 2010:286)

Thus, another game of redefinition might be called “Evaluation Is Not for Friends.” Here the supervisory relationship is redefined as a social relationship. The supervisee makes an effort to take coffee breaks with the supervisor, invite him or her to lunch, walk to and from the bus or the parking lot with her, and discuss common interests during conferences. The social component tends to vitiate the professional component in the relationship. It requires increased determination and resolution on the part of any supervisor to hold the “friend” to the required level of performance.

A more contemporary redefinition of the supervisor-supervisee relationship is less obvious than the two kinds just discussed—games of long standing. The game of “Maximum Feasible Participation” involves a shift in roles from supervisor and supervisee to peer and peer. The supervisee suggests that the relationship will be most effective if it is established on the basis of democratic participation. Because the worker knows best what he or she needs and wants to learn, the worker should be granted equal responsibility for determining the agendas of conferences. So far, so good. However, in the hands of a determined supervisee, joint control of agenda can easily become total supervisee control. Expectations may be lowered and threatening content areas avoided.

The supervisor finds himself or herself in a predicament in trying to decline the game. There is truth in the contention that people learn best in a context that encourages democratic participation in the learning process. Furthermore, the current trend in working with social agency clients is to encourage maximum feasible participation, with as yet ambiguously defined limits. To decline the game is to suggest that one is old-fashioned, undemocratic, and against the rights of those on lower levels in the administrative hierarchy—not an enviable picture to project of oneself. The supervisor is forced to play but needs to be constantly alert in order to maintain some semblance of administrative authority and prevent all the shots being

called by the supervisee-peer.

### ***Reducing Power Disparity***

A third series of games is designed to reduce anxiety by reducing the power disparity between supervisor and worker. One source of the supervisor's power is, of course, his or her position in the administrative hierarchy vis-à-vis the supervisee. Another source of power lies in his or her expertise and superior skill. This second source of power is vulnerable in this series of games. If the supervisee can establish the fact that the supervisor is not so smart after all, some of the power differential is lessened and with it some of the need to feel anxious.

One such game, which is frequently played, might be called "If You Knew Dostoyevsky Like I Know Dostoyevsky." During the course of a conference, the supervisee alludes casually to the fact that the client's behavior reminds him of Raskolnikov's in *Crime and Punishment*, which is, after all, somewhat different in etiology from the pathology that plagued Prince Myshkin in *The Idiot*. An effective ploy, used to score additional points, involves asking the supervisor rhetorically, "You remember, don't you?" It is equally clear to both supervisee and supervisor that the latter does not remember—if, indeed, he or she ever knew. At this point, the supervisee proceeds to instruct the supervisor. The roles of teacher and learner are reversed; power disparity and supervisee anxiety are simultaneously reduced.

The supervisor acquiesces to the game because refusal requires a confession of ignorance on his or her part. The supervisee who is nimble, who plays the game well, cooperates in a conspiracy with the supervisor not to expose his or her ignorance openly. The discussion proceeds under the protection of the mutually accepted fiction that both know what they are talking about.

The content for the essential gambit in this game changes with each generation of supervisees. Our impression is that supervisors are currently exposed to equal danger from games played in the guise of postmodern (Askeland and Payne 2006) or evidence-based (Mullen, Bledsoe, and Bellamy 2008) practice ideologies, with a significant risk of being wounded in the crossfire. The effect on the supervisor, however, is the same: a feeling of depression and general malaise at having been found ignorant when his or her position requires that he or she know more than the supervisee. In addition, it has the same payoff in reducing supervisee anxiety.

Another game in this genre exploits situational advantages to reduce power disparity and permit the supervisee the feeling that he or she, rather than the supervisor, is in control. This game is "So What Do You Know About It?" The supervisee with a long record of experience in public welfare refers to "those of us on the front lines who have struggled with the multiproblem client," exciting humility in the supervisor who has to try hard to remember when he or she last saw a live client. A married supervisee with children will allude to her marital experience and what it "really is like to be a mother" in discussing family therapy with an unmarried female supervisor. The older supervisee will talk about "life" from the vantage point of a veteran to the supervisor fresh out of graduate school. The younger supervisee may

hint at his or her greater understanding of the adolescent client because he or she has, after all, smoked some marijuana and once seriously considered cocaine. The supervisor, trying to tune in, finds his or her older psyche is not in tune. The supervisor younger than the older supervisee, older than the younger supervisee, never having raised a child or met a payroll, finds himself or herself being instructed by those he or she is charged with instructing; roles are reversed, and the payoff to the supervisee lies in the fact that the supervisor becomes a less threatening figure.

Another more recently developed procedure for “putting the supervisor down” is through the judicious use in the conference of strong four-letter words. This is “Telling It Like It Is.” The supervisor who responds with discomfort and loss of composure has forfeited some amount of control to the supervisee, who has exposed a measure of the supervisor’s bourgeois nature and residual puritanism.

Putting the supervisor down may revolve around a question of social work rather than content. The social action oriented supervisee is concerned with fundamental changes in social relationships. He or she knows that obtaining a slight increase in the budget for one client, finding a job for another client, or helping a neglectful mother relate more positively to her child are of little use because they leave the basic pathology of society unchanged. He or she is impatient with the case-oriented supervisor who is interested in helping a specific family live a little less troubled and a little less unhappily in a fundamentally disordered society. The game is “All or Nothing at All.” It is designed to make the supervisor feel he or she has sold out, been co-opted by the Establishment, lost or abandoned his or her broader vision of the “good” society, or has become endlessly concerned with symptoms rather than with causes. It is effective because the supervisor recognizes that there is an element of truth in the accusation for all who occupy positions of responsibility in the Establishment.

### ***Controlling the Situation***

The games mentioned have, as part of their effect, a shift of control of the situation from supervisor to supervisee. Another series of games is designed to place control of the supervisory situation more explicitly and directly in the hands of the supervisee. Control of the situation by the supervisor is potentially threatening because he or she can then take the initiative of introducing for discussion those weaknesses and inadequacies in the supervisee’s work that need fullest review. If the supervisee can control the conference, much that is unflattering to discuss may be adroitly avoided.

One game designed to control the discussion’s content is called “I Have a Little List.” The supervisee comes in with a series of questions about his or her work that he or she would very much like to discuss. The better player formulates the questions so they relate to problems in which the supervisor has greatest professional interest and about which he or she has done considerable reading. The supervisee is under no obligation to listen to the answers to his or her questions. When the first question has been asked, the supervisor is off on a short lecture, during which time the supervisee is free to plan mentally the next weekend or review the last weekend, taking care merely to listen for signs that the supervisor is running down. When this

happens, the supervisee introduces the second question with an appropriate transitional comment, and the cycle is repeated. As the supervisee increases the supervisor's level of participation he or she is, by the same token, decreasing his or her own level of participation, because only one person can be talking at once. Thus, the supervisee controls both the content and the direction of conference interaction. The supervisor is induced to play this game because there is narcissistic gratification in displaying one's knowledge and in meeting the supervisee's dependency needs, and because, in accordance with good social work practice, the supervisee's questions should be accepted, respected, and, if possible, answered.

Control of the initiative is also seized by the supervisee in the game of "Heading Them Off at the Pass." Here, the supervisee knows that his or her poor work is likely to be analyzed critically. He or she therefore opens the conference by freely admitting his or her mistakes—he or she knows it was an inadequate interview or that he or she should have, by now, learned to do better. There is no failing on the supervisor's agenda for discussion to which he or she does not freely confess in advance, flagellating himself or herself to excess. The supervisor, faced with this overwhelming self-derogation, has little option but to reassure the supervisee sympathetically. The tactic not only makes it difficult for a supervisor to conduct an extended discussion of mistakes in the work but also elicits praise for whatever limited strengths the supervisee has manifested. The supervisor, once again, acts out of concern for troubled people, out of his predisposition to comfort the discomfited, out of pleasure in acting the good, forgiving parent.

Another variation is "Pleading Fragility." The supervisee communicates "that he is extremely brittle, is easily hurt, or may even go over the brink if pushed too hard. This communication effectively prevents the supervisor from exploring any painful or threatening issues with the supervisee" (Bauman 1972:253).

"Woe Is Me" trades on dependence and helplessness. This is a game most legitimately played by beginning workers. In playing the game, they take advantage of legitimate deficiencies by exaggerating them so that it becomes a form of supplication. The social norms associated with responding to a suppliant reinforce the already existing professional obligation of the supervisor to help the supervisee.

Control can also be exerted through fluttering dependency, a case of strength through weakness. It is the game of "Little Old Me" or "Casework à Trois." The supervisee, in his or her ignorance and incompetence, looks to the knowledgeable, competent supervisor for a detailed prescription of how to proceed: "What would *you* do next? ... Then what would *you* say?" The supervisee unloads responsibility for the case onto the supervisor, and the supervisor shares the caseload with the worker. The supervisor plays the game because, in fact, he or she does share responsibility for case management with the supervisee and has responsibility for seeing that the client is not harmed. Further, the supervisor often wants the gratification of carrying a caseload, however vicariously, so that he or she is somewhat predisposed to take the case out of the supervisee's hands. There are, in addition, the pleasures derived from acting the capable parent to the dependent child and from the domination of others.

A variant of this game in the hands of a more hostile supervisee is “I Did Like You Told Me.” Here, the supervisee maneuvers the supervisor into offering specific prescriptions on case management and then applies them in spiteful obedience and undisguised mimicry. The supervisee acts as though supervisor were responsible for the case, with the worker merely being the executor of supervisory directives. Invariably and inevitably, whatever has been suggested by the supervisor fails to accomplish what it was supposed to accomplish. “I Did Like You Told Me” is designed to make even a strong supervisor defensive.

“It’s All So Confusing” attempts to reduce the authority of the supervisor by appealing to other authorities—a former supervisor, another supervisor in the same agency, or a faculty member at a local school of social work with whom the supervisee just happened to discuss the case. The supervisee casually indicates that in similar situations his or her former supervisor tended to take a certain approach, which is at variance with the approach the current supervisor regards as desirable. It becomes “all so confusing” when different authorities suggest such different approaches to the same situation. The supervisor is faced with defending his or her approach against some unnamed, unknown competitor. This is especially difficult because few situations in social work permit an unequivocal answer in which the supervisor can have complete confidence. Because the supervisor was somewhat shaky in his or her approach in the first place, he or she feels vulnerable to alternative suggestions from other “authorities,” and his or her sense of authority in relation to the supervisee is eroded.

A supervisee can control the degree of threat in the supervisory situation by distancing techniques. The game is “What You Don’t Know Won’t Hurt Me.” The supervisor knows the work of the supervisee only indirectly, through what is available in the recording and shared verbally in the conference. The supervisee can elect to share in a manner that is thin, inconsequential, and without depth of affect. He or she can share selectively and can distort (consciously or unconsciously) in order to present a more favorable picture of his or her work. The supervisee can be passive and reticent or overwhelm the supervisor with endless trivia. In whatever manner it is done, the supervisee increases distance between the work he or she actually does and the supervisor who is responsible for critically analyzing it with him or her. This not only reduces the threat to him of possible criticism of his or her work but also, as Fleming and Benedek (1966) pointed out, prevents the supervisor from intruding into the privacy of his or her relationship with the client.

A supervisee can manipulate the level of the supervisor’s response to worker performance deficiencies by games such as “Who Me? Not Me” and “Mea Culpa, But Just This Once.”

By playing “Who Me?” the supervisee tries to shift the burden of responsibility for his or her own shortcomings in task performance onto other things. Pointing to failures by others—the client, clerical staff, workers in other agencies, “the system”—acts to shift responsibility from the supervisee himself or herself. Pleading extenuating circumstances—traffic problems, the weather, temporary indisposition—mitigates

responsibility.

“Mea Culpa, But Just This Once” is an apology coupled with a show of repentance that reduces the supervisor’s inclination to reprimand the supervisee for task failures. The apology is an acknowledgment of error, a confirmation of the supervisor’s right to point out the error. Repentance is both an act of self-punishment and a promise not to repeat the error. In the face of all of this, supervisors find themselves disarmed.

“Yes-butting” is a game of seeming to accept what the supervisor says but in effect rejecting the communication. The *yes* signifies initial acceptance; however, it is then followed by *but*, which introduces its rejection. *But* is often followed by some statement from the social work literature or from a social work guru who holds a position contrary to the one suggested by the supervisor: “Yes. But isn’t it also true, as noted by —, that —?”

Supervisors go along with these games because of their reluctance to reprimand workers. They, along with the workers, are looking for excuses that might make it possible to avoid confronting the worker’s performance deficiencies.

## Countering Games

Although such defensive games help the supervisee cope with anxiety-provoking stress, they may be dysfunctional and subvert the purposes of the supervisory encounter. Consequently, the supervisor may be required to break up the games.

The simplest and most direct way of dealing with games introduced by the supervisee is to refuse to play. Yet, a key difficulty in this approach has been implied by discussion of the gains for the supervisor in playing along. The supervisee can successfully enlist the supervisor in a game only if the supervisor wants to play for his or her own reasons. Collusion is not forced but is freely granted. Refusing to play requires that the supervisor be ready and able to forfeit self-advantages. For instance, in declining to go along with the supervisee’s request that he or she be permitted to ignore agency administrative requirements in playing “Two Against the Agency,” the supervisor has to be comfortable in exercising his or her administrative authority, willing to risk and deal with supervisee hostility and rejection, and willing to accept the accusation that he or she is bureaucratically, rather than professionally, oriented. In declining other games, the supervisor denies himself or herself the sweet fruits of flattery, the joys of omniscience, the pleasures of acting as therapist, and the gratification of being well liked. He or she incurs the penalties of an open admission of ignorance and uncertainty and the loss of infallibility. Declining to play the games demands a supervisor who is aware of and comfortable in what he or she is doing and who accepts himself or herself in all his or her “glorious strengths and human weaknesses.” The less vulnerable the supervisor, the more impervious he or she is to gamesmanship—not an easy prescription to fill.

A second response lies in open confrontation. Goffman (1959) pointed out that in the usual social encounter each person accepts the line put out by the other person. There is a process of mutual face-saving in which what is said is accepted at its face value and “each participant is allowed to carry the role he has chosen for himself”



unchallenged (11). This is done out of self-protection: in not challenging another person, one is also ensuring that the other will not, in turn, challenge one's own fiction. Confrontation implies a refusal to accept the game being proposed; instead, the supervisor seeks to expose and make explicit what the supervisee is doing. The supervisory situation, like the therapeutic situation, deliberately rejects the usual roles of social interaction in attempting to help the supervisee.

Confrontation needs to be used, of course, with due regard for the supervisee's ability to handle the embarrassment and self-threat it involves. The supervisor needs to be aware of the defensive significance of the game to the supervisee. Naming the interactions that have been described as "games" does not imply that they are frivolous and without consequence. Unmasking games risks much that is of serious personal significance for the supervisee. Interpretation and confrontation here, as always, require compassionate caution, timing, and an understanding of dosage.

Never openly confronting each other with what is happening protects the symbiotic nature of the relationship. A supervisee who was aware that he or she engaged in game playing and who was aware that the supervisor was aware that of playing games says, "In a sense, we collaborated to provide each other with what we wanted: I needed a good job reference; needed to feel that my she was a competent administrator and supervisor."

Another approach is to share honestly with the supervisee one's awareness of what he or she is attempting to do in adjusting to work-related stress but to focus the discussion neither on the dynamics of his or her behavior nor on one's reaction to it, but on the disadvantages for him or her in playing games. These games have decided drawbacks for the supervisee. They deny the worker the possibility of effectively fulfilling one of the essential purposes of supervision—helping him or her to grow professionally. The games frustrate the achievement of this outcome. In playing games, the supervisee loses by winning.

Kolevson (1979) attempted an investigation of the extent to which games are actually played in supervision by information solicited from social work student supervisees. The results indicated that "gamesmanship was relatively infrequent," but that "students who were more critical of their supervisory relationship" were more likely to engage in games (243). The research goes on to note that the gamesmanship "in the supervisory relationship may be ... difficult ... to measure since exposing one's games may be a threatening venture" (244).

Likewise, McIntosh et al. (2006) conducted an anonymous internet survey of genetic counselors and clinical supervisors with a series of open-ended questions, inviting participants to describe a supervision game, its motivations, the goals it displaced, and how best to stop it. Nearly 60 percent of the surveys were completed by individuals who had supervised at least one master's-level genetic counseling intern. The 204 participants nominated thirty-seven discrete games, of which only ten were initiated by supervisees, according to the descriptions provided; twenty-seven of the games were initiated by a supervisor. The researchers identified thirteen new games from the survey, but the majority of the games, whether initiated by a

supervisee or a supervisor, had been previously described in the literature. The game most commonly initiated by a supervisee was “Treat Me, Don’t Beat Me,” whereas the majority of the games initiated by supervisors were analyzed and interpreted as assertions of interpersonal power.

## **Humor in Supervision**

The supervisee was anxious and eager to get to work because it was on this day that he was to observe his esteemed supervisor’s marital therapy session. He would finally be able to see the expert at work. The couple enter the office and the supervisor and the student sit across from them.

The wife begins: “My husband is impossible! He is sloppy, lazy, and inconsiderate. He doesn’t take responsibility and he is not in touch with his feelings!”

The supervisor responds, “I know it’s true. I know you’re right.”

The husband then responds: “She is whiny, depressed, and impossible to satisfy. She constantly complains and never listens to me.”

The supervisor responds, “I’m sure that is the case. I know you’re right.”

And so on, and so on, and so on.

Immediately after the therapy session, the student and supervisor are leaving the office. The supervisee, clearly agitated, says: “You call that therapy? All you did was agree with everything each of them said!”

To which the supervisor responded: “I know that’s true. You are absolutely right.” (Dinkelblau, McRay, and McFadden 2001:221)

Humor, like games, helps to control and mitigate job stress (Kaye and Fortune 2001; Southwick, Vythilingham, and Charney 2005). Unlike gamesmanship, having a sense of humor has been described as essential to effective supervision (Campbell 2006). In a study by Cross and Brown (1983), supervisees reported frequent “use of humor in supervisory sessions” (336); see also Consalvo (1989), Vinton (1989), and Decker and Rotondo (1999). Humor may be used by the supervisee to communicate gripes and dissatisfactions he or she may be hesitant to raise directly. Humor helps reduce worker tension by making the impermissible permissible. The friendly sarcastic remark permits an excusable expression of hostility toward clients and supervisors. It suggests that the worker does not really mean what he or she is saying and expects to be excused. If the supervisor reacts punitively, it is an indication that he or she cannot take a joke:

The supervisor said she was stumped, she really did not know what to suggest. A smile slowly spread over the worker’s face as she said in a gentle voice, “My, that really surprises me—I thought you were all-knowing, all-loving, and all-forgiving.”

A worker assigned an extra case may say, “Gee, you’re really being generous today,” communicating negative feelings about additional work in a positive way. Because opposition to the supervisor is risky, manifesting opposition in a joking manner reduces the threat. Stated in this way the worker implies that he or she does not really mean it and it should not be taken seriously. While supervisees use humor to mask opposition and hostility to supervisors, supervisors use humor to mask the authoritarian nature of some of their communications. Messages are conveyed in a way that is less likely to create resentment or provoke repercussions.

Humor tends to reduce defensiveness and aids in tolerating conflicting points of view (Lothane 2008). It relieves tension and permits us to see problems in a different

perspective through playful seriousness. It helps deal more effectively with some of the inevitable frustrations of work. It provides distance and detachment from stressful situations. Humorous interactions between supervisor and supervisee tend to reduce distance between them and increase a feeling of equality.

The supervisor has greater entitlement to make humorous, joking remarks than does the supervisee. Frequent use of humor by the supervisor in supervisory interactions communicates a message that humor is an acceptable kind of communication. This frees the supervisee to engage in humor. Generally, the supervisor is more frequently the initiator and the supervisee is more frequently the butt of humorous remarks. However, a supervisor who accepts jokes directed at him reduces the social distance and increases the informality in the interaction (Duncan 1984). The supervisor is perceived as a “good guy” who can take it. Reciprocal humorous give-and-take increases a sense of bonding.

Decker (1987) found that supervisee job satisfaction was higher in contact with supervisors who had a good sense of humor and used it in the interaction. Humorous responses are most effective if communicated spontaneously, informally, and in interpersonally supportive ways. A lot depends, then, on the ability to “see” the humor in a situation and the freedom to respond without defensiveness and inhibition. In short, it requires a sense of humor.

Humor can open the door to the frank and open discussion of forbidden topics (Goel and Dolan 2007), such as anger, envy, and sexuality, topics that Shulman (2010) has described as taboo. On the other hand, concerns about heterosexist, sexist, and racist humor require that the humor expressed be sensitively and culturally appropriate. The neuroscientist Cozolino explained:

Positive feelings related to humor ... have arisen as a function of an expanded neocortex and the specializations of the hemispheres ... [but] an unfortunate artifact of the human laterality may be that the right hemisphere, biased toward negative emotions and pessimism, develops first and serves as the core of self-awareness and self-identity. ... [As a result] to be human may be to have vulnerability toward shame, guilt, and depression. (Cozolino 2006:75)

Thus, there is a hesitancy to employ humor—first, because it is regarded as unprofessional and, second, in response to a recognition that the inappropriate use of humor can be demeaning and hurtful (Fovet 2009). Appropriate, productive use of humor requires skill, sensitivity, timing, and a cast of mind that recognizes the humorous aspects of a situation. To achieve its purpose, humor needs to be a creative spontaneous response to a specific situation. Because humor depends on the reaction of the person with whom it is shared, supervisors might hold off employing humor until they get to know a supervisee better and a relationship established.

## **Summary**

Supportive supervision is concerned with helping the supervisee deal with job-related stress and developing attitudes and feelings conducive to the best job performance. Whereas administrative and educational supervision are concerned with instrumental

needs, supportive supervision is concerned with expressive needs.

The main sources of job-related stress for the supervisee are the performance and compliance demands of administrative supervision, the learning demands of educational supervision, the clients, the nature and organizational context of social work tasks, and the relationship with the supervisor.

In implementing the objectives of supportive supervision, the supervisor seeks to prevent the development of potentially stressful situations, removes the worker from stress, reduces stress impinging on the worker, and helps him or her adjust to stress. The supervisor is available and approachable, communicates confidence in the worker, provides perspective, excuses failure when appropriate, sanctions and shares responsibility for different decisions, and provides opportunity for independent functioning and for probable success in task achievement.

The client, the peer group, and the worker's own adjustive capacities are additional sources of support for the supervisee.

Supervisees engage in a variety of procedures and games that can help deal with job-related tensions.

Judicious use of humor in the supervisory interaction is helpful in reducing stress and contributes to a more positive supervisor-supervisee relationship.

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## CHAPTER 7

# Problems and Stresses in Becoming and Being a Supervisor

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**T**he previous chapter detailed some of the strains and stresses encountered by direct service workers that require a supportive response on the part of the supervisor. In this chapter, we are concerned with the stresses and strains encountered by the supervisors themselves. In [chapter 8](#), there is a fuller discussion of one of the more pervasive sources of stress and tension for supervisors, namely the function of worker evaluation.

Selection of workers for the position of supervisor is most frequently made from direct service staff (Kaiser and Kuechler 2008). The rationale for this source of candidates is that supervision requires knowledge of direct service practice (Milne 2009; Shulman 2010). In addition to direct service practice experience, advanced educational credentials such as an MSW are typically required (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004). Apparently, years of practice experience can still sometimes be substituted for educational credentials in some fields of practice (Potter and Brittain 2009).

On the whole, these generalizations are consistent with the education and experience and of the 1,409 supervisors who participated in the NASW Center for Workforce Studies (2004) survey of licensed social workers. Although 9.1 percent reported one year or less of practice experience, the majority reported from 6 to 23 years of experience, with a median of 13 years. Although 9.6 percent of the supervisors described their highest social work degree as a baccalaureate, the majority reported an earned master's degree in social work (81.2 percent) or a social work doctorate (2.3 percent).

Suspecting that the baccalaureate supervisors might have been promoted to their supervisory positions after many years of experience, we were surprised to find that—although very experienced—they typically had significantly *less* experience than their colleagues with master's or doctoral degrees. Supervisors with less than a master's degree in social work reported an average of 11 years of experience, whereas those with at least a master's degree averaged more than 15 years of practice experience (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004). The baccalaureate supervisors were more likely to be found in child welfare settings (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004), where rapid turnover has been described as a national crisis (Mor Barak et al. 2006), or gerontology (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004), where salaries remain low and recruitment and retention have been difficult

(Whitaker, Weismiller, and Clark 2006b).

At the upper echelon of administration, where it might be desirable to have social workers, it is not as compellingly necessary as it is at the supervisory level. Texts on human services management (Austin and Hopkins 2004; Dolgoff 2005; Patti 2009) are based on the rationale that there is a generic field of human services management, which does not require social work education or experience in human-services practice. These books, addressed to social service, nursing, hospital, educational, and mental health administrators, see many of the tasks of all such administrators as having a similar focus.

However, at the supervisory level of management, expertise in core professional functions is clearly of dominant importance (NASW 1994). Although social workers can, and have been, widely replaced by business and public administration graduates at the executive level, such displacements were once rare at the supervisory level (Patti 1984) because technical knowledge is the basic minimum requirement for any first-line supervisor, regardless of organizational affiliation (Trojanowicz 1980:11). This is why many licensing statutes require supervisors to have technical competence in functions performed by their supervisees (ASWB 2010b), and why the NASW (2008) Code of Ethics says “Social workers who provide supervision or consultation should have the necessary knowledge and skill to supervise appropriately and should do so only within their areas of knowledge and competence.”

Be that as it may, fewer than half of the licensed social workers in the Workforce survey report having a social work supervisor (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004), and 22 percent of those workers whose supervisors are social workers indicate that social work supervision has become less available (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004). We expressed alarm at this trend in 2002, because “supervisors of direct care staff are often untrained in clinical concepts” (Rich 1992:180), “supervision by a seasoned clinician has been replaced [in managed care environments] by telephone or written contacts with managed care case managers, many of whom have no clinical background” (Munson 1996:249–50), and social workers have “mixed feelings about receiving supervision from professionals in a field different from their own” (Bogo et al. 2011:133).

The Workforce study (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004) was not designed to identify the credentials of the nonsocial workers who supervise the majority of licensed social workers in the United States, but it appears that a sizeable number of social work supervisors come to the job with little or no experience. Two or less years of experience practicing as a BSW or MSW were reported by 11.5 percent of the licensed social workers, and 7.9 percent described themselves as having no practice experience at all (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004). Among the supervisors without practice experience, the majority were white females between 45 and 64 years of age, who were employed in the private sector or state government and provided 1–9 hours of supervision per week, primarily in the fields of mental health or child welfare (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004). These findings may inflate the problem of unseasoned social workers supervising direct

client care, however, because only 61.4 percent of the supervisors without practice experience described their supervision as “related to delivering services to clients” (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004).

## **Transition: Worker to Supervisor**

### ***Motives for Change***

Different motives lead workers to become supervisors (Majcher and Daniluk 2009). Some had a strong attraction to moving into a managerial position, and this move is in line with their true intentions. Others move into supervision by default because of a lack of more preferable alternatives. Advancement up the career ladder in the direct service position is limited. Few agencies have super-advanced senior clinician positions. For those who eschew private practice but desire career advancement in pay, status, prestige, and continuing professional growth and challenge, acceptance of the supervision option is virtually mandated.

A sizable percentage of social work administrators may have preferred to remain as clinicians if salaries and status at the clinical level were the equivalent of those available with promotion to administration (Scurfield 1981). The current promotional situation risks the possibility that the agency may “lose a competent worker to gain an incompetent supervisor.”

In their studies of workers’ reasons for transition to managerial positions, Schwartz (1990), Patti et al. (1979), and Scurfield (1981) found a variety of motives, with “interest in administration” being the principal motive of only a limited number of respondents. The decision to opt for an opening as a supervisor may result from a feeling of being burned out as a direct service worker. Movement into supervision comes almost automatically to “survivors,” as a reward for the faithful who have considerable seniority on the job. There is often neither a great incentive nor a great opposition to the change.

In addition to extrinsic satisfaction associated with the move, such as better pay, a better office, and more status and prestige, workers in transition mention intrinsic satisfaction. These most frequently include the opportunity to help supervisees develop professionally and the fact that as supervisors they will be in a stronger position to formulate and influence policy decisions (Pickvance 1997).

New supervisors have explained their motives for the change by saying, “Being able to feel that I am able to do something to develop a better work force by stimulating the professional development of some supervisees and to assist some others in understanding that selling life insurance might be a better field for them” and “Opportunity to be involved in administrative or system change that would benefit practitioners and clients.”

In general, licensed social work supervisors have significantly more social work education and earn a higher salary than their supervisees (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004). Surprisingly, although they also had somewhat more practice experience than their supervisees, they were also somewhat younger,

although neither difference was statistically significant (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004). Consistent with the observation that supervisors are frequently appointed on the basis of seniority (Mor Barak et al. 2006), Workforce supervisors had been employed by their agencies significantly longer than their supervisees (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004).

### ***Preparation for Change***

There is stress associated with the fact that many supervisors have limited preparation for assuming the position and little educational support available following assignment to the position (Kaiser and Kuechler 2008; Preston 2004). Asked whether the majority of the tasks they performed were appropriate to their level of training and skills obtained through social work education and postgraduate professional development, 37.5 percent of the social work supervisors in the NASW Center for Workforce Studies (2004) survey described the demands of their jobs as being above their level of training. A study by Weiss (2011) suggests that social work supervisors with less education and training are more prone to burnout.

Some training in supervision is of course absorbed as a consequence of being a supervisee. In two studies, supervisors indicated that the most important source of learning their job was the role model of supervisors with whom they had contact as supervisees (Olyan 1972; Rodenhauser 1995). For some, that may include a “vow never to do what their supervisors did” (Salus 2004:13). Although all supervisors have experienced some anticipatory socialization to the position as a result of their experience as supervisees, there is an uneasy recognition that this is inadequate preparation. Being a supervisee does not make one a supervisor, just as being a student does not make one a teacher.

In the past, many supervisors have not felt adequately prepared for the supervisor’s job (Rodenhauser 1995; Saffo 1996). When 109 supervisors were asked by Shulman (1982) if they received adequate preparation for the tasks and problems faced as a beginning supervisor, the average response was between *uncertain* and *disagree*. The largest group (42 percent) of 62 supervisors surveyed by Robiner, Saltzman, Hoberman, and Schirvar (1997:122–23) described the quality of their graduate training to become supervisors as poor. Yet, when new supervisors who participated in the Workforce survey were asked whether their previous training had prepared them adequately for the roles they performed as social workers, less than 2 percent responded *not at all*; nearly 50 percent described themselves as well or very well prepared (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004).

Some of the stress related to becoming a supervisor was detailed in a study of the reaction of forty supervisors to the experience of transition (Woodcock 1967). Although becoming a supervisor has been described as an important “rite of passage” by some (Saffo 1996:102), for others becoming a supervisor was regarded as a career crisis, “the first and most striking finding being the degree of alarm that the prospect of supervision proved to arouse” (Woodcock 1967:68). Because few supervisors had had formal training in supervision prior to the appointment, they felt



considerable anxiety about whether they could do the job. This fear related particularly to the demand of educational supervision. Did they know enough to teach others to do the work? New supervisors reported “increased reading, thinking, consulting, attending lectures, seminars, meetings, anything which would illuminate the road ahead. ... One supervisor said, ‘I bought a pile of social work books, only one of which I read.’ Another ‘made notes on the principles of casework and determined to exemplify all these in all cases’” (Woodcock 1967:69).

Becoming a supervisor forces one to explicitly examine one’s practice in order to conceptualize it for teaching. As one supervisor said, “Supervising forced me to put my ideas, knowledge and experience together. I was placed in the position of having to communicate or try to communicate what I knew.” As Ewalt (1980:5) said, “Moving from doing to teaching requires what may be thought of as a conscious disintegrating process in which the supervisor purposefully recalls and conceptualizes elements in the decision-making process.”

New supervisors, however, have found that their prior casework training and experience was of considerable help to them in effectively dealing with the very significant interpersonal relationship aspects of supervision. In addition, their previous clinical experience was considered “to be a major source of credibility with their subordinates” (Patti et al. 1979:148). “The transition to management involved adapting knowledge and skills previously acquired, rather than comprehensive and fundamental retraining” (Patti et al. 1979:151).

Although most managers feel that a clinical background is a necessary ingredient in preparation for human services administration, it is clear that there are some differences in the demands made of the direct service workers as contrasted with those made of the supervisor (Clark et al. 2008; Menefee and Thompson 1994). The transition requires the mobilization of skills that are not so directly required in direct service practice. Although direct services practice requires maximization of potentials for expressive behavior (e.g., caring, concern, empathy, compassion), the transition to supervisor requires maximization of potential for instrumental behavior (e.g., integrating, organizing, coordinating, manipulating). Bramford noted:

The very qualities which make a good social worker are often the antithesis of those required in management. Talking things through patiently and determinedly is an admirable quality applied to work with clients. Applied indiscriminately to management decisions great and small, it is a recipe for administrative paralysis. (Bramford 1978:11)

The skills of managing are different from the skills of doing.

Addressing national concerns about “the challenges facing America’s behavioral health system,” Tebes et al. (2011:190) noted that “a growing empirical and professional literature” has “identified the lack of training in supervision as a critical factor in increased supervisor stress and turnover, decreased supervisor work satisfaction, inadequate accountability of supervisees, and an inconsistent or diminished quality of care.” Nevertheless, the Workforce supervisors gave far more priority to clinical practice than to administration when asked to identify areas in which they would like to pursue additional education and training (NASW Center for

Workforce Studies 2004). The Workforce survey did not ask the supervisors an explicit question about their interest in supervision training, but other studies indicated that they would find it beneficial (Kaiser and Kuechler 2008; Milne et al. 2011; Tebes et al. 2011).

### *Changes in Self-Perception and Identity*

Promotion to supervisor involves a drastic change in self-perception for the worker (Blankman, Dobrof, and Wade 1993; Pelling 2008). The newly appointed supervisor “is essentially entering a new occupation, not simply a new position. This occupation will have its own set of job specifications ... precedents ... expectations. In the performance of his duties he finds himself in a new set of role relations with his former peers, with his new administrative colleagues and with his new superiors” (W. E. Moore 1970:213). A person disengages from an old role and takes on a new one.

The transition from worker to supervisor is in some measure analogous to developmental transitions “such as adolescence, marriage, or retirement. As with other transitions, it may involve a period of disruption, of depression or defensive hyperactivity, of personal and professional growth. ... Changes in external aspects of the career are likely to be accompanied by inner changes in personality” (Levinson and Klerman 1967:13–14). Conceptions of personal identity change so as to be congruent with changes in professional identity (Yerushalmi 1993).

The transition involves a temporary disequilibrium in identity that Watkins (1993) described as *role shock*. The new supervisor had previously developed a firm sense of who he or she was and what he or she could do in his identity as a direct service worker. This identity had been repeatedly confirmed by responses from peers, supervisor, and clients, who accorded him or her the recognition that comes with this role identity. Moving into the position of supervisor required dissolving the old identity as direct service worker and slowly building a new sense of identity as supervisor. This new, and at the beginning alien, identity needs confirmation from supervisees, fellow supervisors, and administrators, whose behavior toward the new supervisor attests to the fact that they recognize and accept him or her as a supervisor. Initially, the supervisor has to work to obtain this confirmation from others of the new position and title, which involves proving one’s competence to others (Perlmutter 1990). In adaptation to these external and internal pressures, the new supervisor may enter supervisory misalliances to avoid or manage conflict (Milne, Leck, and Chaoudhri 2009; Watkins 2010).

Becoming a supervisor often involves moving to a new agency (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004; Schwartz 1990) and all that this implies in the way of adjustment. But even if the worker stays in the same agency after becoming a supervisor, the shift requires some of the adjustments involved in accepting a new job. As one beginning supervisor said, “Rather than being at the top of the ladder as a caseworker, I was starting all over at the bottom again in my new trade—supervision” (H.C.D. 1949:161).

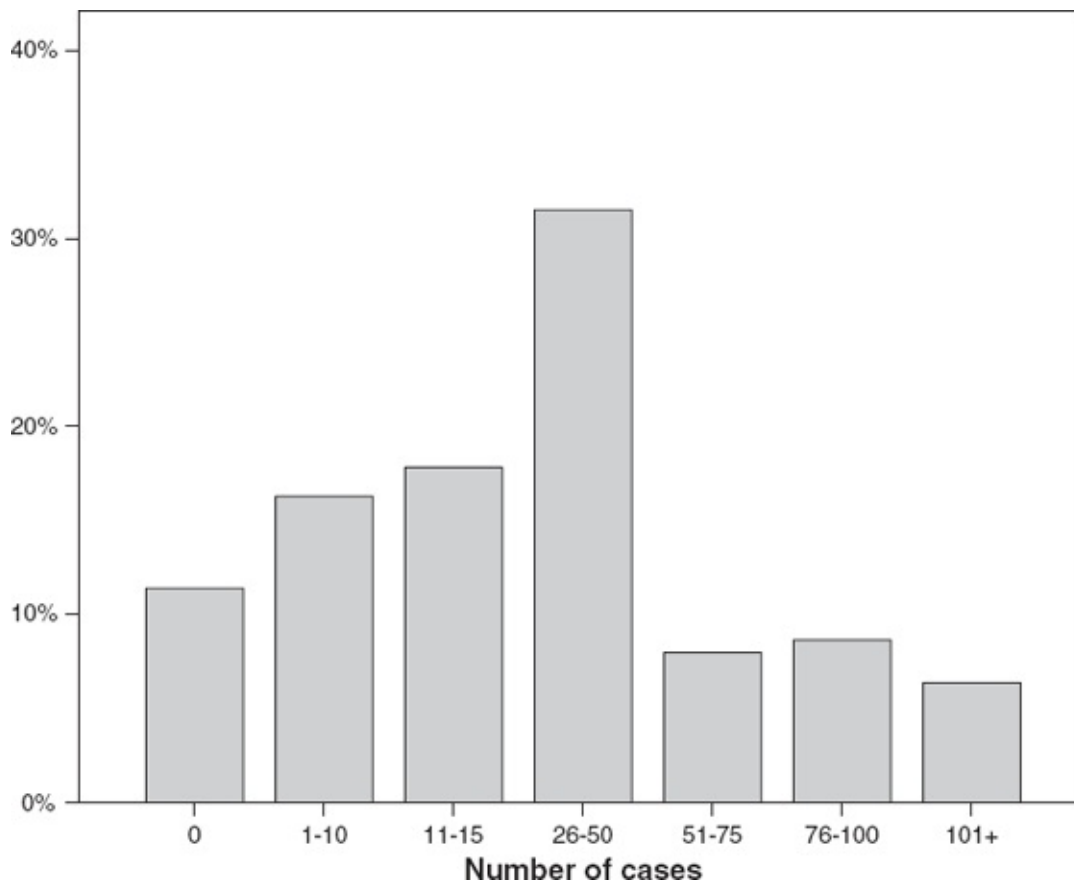
The shift from diagnosis of clients’ social problems to diagnosis of supervisees’

educational problems, from helping in the personal development of the client to helping in the professional development of the worker, involves a shift from therapeutic techniques previously acquired to pedagogic techniques that need to be learned (Clark et al. 2008; Saffo 1996). Accepting the title of supervisor involves a shift in self-perception from a treatment person to an administrator-teacher. The promotion involves learning to think like a supervisor (Borders 1992).

In moving into supervision, the worker assumes the stress of greater responsibilities and playing many roles. He or she has responsibility to the supervisees for administration, education, and support, and ultimate responsibility for service to the client. The promoted worker assumes greater responsibility for policy formulation in the agency and community-agency relationships. Whereas previously the worker was responsible only for his or her own work, he or she now has the larger responsibility for the work of a number of others and diverse new duties. Instead of being responsible for one caseload, for example, the supervisor is now responsible for a number of caseloads, yet typically retains a large caseload of his or her own, as shown in [figure 7.1](#). The shift has been compared with that of a person who has often ridden as a passenger in a car and who now has the responsibility for driving the car, watching traffic, and getting the group safely.

Because of a frequently distorted perception of the supervisor's position, new supervisors experience "reality shock" as they encounter the actualities of supervision. As one new supervisor said:

When I was a caseworker, I thought the supervisors had it all worked out and knew what they were doing. It all looked so easy. Now I see how great the responsibilities are and that everything isn't so neat at the supervisory level. There are power struggles, games, and turf battles among the supervisors. When I first became supervisor, I felt very confused and depressed, and there was no one to help. (Abramczyk 1980:83)



**FIGURE 7.1.** How social work supervisors answer the question, “What is the approximate size of your current caseload?” (From National Association of Social Workers Center for Workforce Studies. 2004. *A Study of the Role and Use of Licensed Social Workers in the United States*. Washington, DC: National Association of Social Workers.)

The beginning supervisor also has to make other adjustments in perspective. He or she moves from a process orientation as worker to a more focused concern with product as a supervisor. He or she has to become more organizationally oriented.

Lieberman (1956) tested the hypothesis that a person’s attitudes will be influenced by the role he or she occupies in a social system: for example, “Johnny is a changed boy since he was made a monitor in school,” “She is a different woman since she got married,” and “You would never recognize him since he became a foreman” (385). When studying the attitudes of men in industrial concerns before and after they became supervisors, he found that, because the supervisory role entails being a representative of management, workers who were made supervisors did tend to become more favorable to management. Likewise, in a study of perceptions of the essential roles, practices, and tasks of child-welfare supervision in a representative sample of 772 line workers, 186 supervisors, and 42 managers, Clark et al. (2008:24–25) found that “supervisors’ and managers’ answers concurred with each other more often than either did with line workers as to which specific tasks or practices” were essential, suggesting “that supervisors conceptualize themselves in roles that are more aligned with management.”

The movement from worker to supervisor is accompanied by a stronger identification with the agency, with increased support, loyalty, and commitment to the organization and its policies. Agency policy and actions now seem more justifiable, acceptable, morally correct, and fair. The new supervisor's attitudes become more like those supervisors whose ranks he or she is joining and different from the attitudes of direct service workers from whom he or she is disengaging.

The change from worker to supervisor involves a change in reference group affiliation, which leads to changes in attitudes and therefore behavior (Majcher and Naniluk 2009). The change in functions performed also requires changes in behavior. Attitudes are revised so that they are consistent with changed behavior required by changed functions. One supervisor expressed her change in orientation as follows:

My orientation definitely changed as I moved from the role of supervisee to the role of supervisor. In the first place, I took agency policy much more seriously. I also felt a marked increase in responsibilities and in the importance of realizing the full responsibilities of this position. I also saw problems in a wider scope and found it easier to analyze them when the details and the client were not as close to me.

The closer one gets to administration, the more clearly one begins to respond to the pressures that administrators feel, such as the pressure for meeting accountability demands of public, regulatory, and legislative agencies; the competition with other agencies for scarce resources; and agency survival needs. "One clear example is that supervisors and managers" tend to "stress *accountability* more than line workers" (Clark et al. 2008:25).

The change in position and the responsibilities that go along with becoming a supervisor in and of themselves force a change in the worker's perception of agency rules, policies, and procedures. However, this change is reinforced by information about agency operation from a broader perspective than had been available earlier. Such change is also reinforced as a consequence of experiencing as supervisor the political effects of agency policy that the worker only knows about.

As a person moves from worker to supervisor, he or she becomes more sensitive to the effects (on policy, agency survival, and agency image) of actions taken with, or in behalf of, individual clients. He or she adopts an administrative perspective with regard to service decisions (Saffo 1996; Salus 2004).

A change in perspective implies further a change in perception of the effects of agency policy. As a former worker, the supervisor measured the effects of agency policy on the client with whom he or she had direct contact. As supervisor, that person is in a better position to see the effects of agency policy in a wider perspective. A policy that may have impacted negatively on his or her own former clients may be seen as meeting more effectively the needs of a wider group of clients as a collectivity.

The transition involves a change of orientation from individual justice in which the unique needs of the individual client are given priority to the idea of proportional justice, which requires fairness and equity in prioritizing the competing claims of many clients. The new supervisor has to reassess the balance in a conflict between an orientation that gave priority to resources and an orientation that gave priority to

people. The conflict is often expressed by business managers, who complain that social workers do not care what they do with the money, and social workers, who complain that managers do not care what they do to people. In making the transition, the supervisor, as a member of the management team, has to give greater recognition to the fact that resources are scarce, that painful choices have to be made, and that priority of client needs is not absolute.

As a worker, the newly appointed supervisor may have thought of management as concerned primarily with survival, with little real commitment to the needs of the client. Now, as Matorin (1979) said, the practitioner as supervisor “has become a member of the ‘establishment’ and is propelled into what may have previously been the enemy camp. They are now responsible for all of the deficiencies of the system, yet expected to defend and identify with it” (15).

#### *From Clinician to Manager*

Less than 10 percent of the supervisors in the NASW Center for Workforce Studies (2004) survey study spend more than half of their time in staff supervision. Thus, although relatively few social workers in the Workforce view supervision as their primary function, becoming a supervisor still requires a worker to give up some of the satisfaction of direct practice and contact with clients (Saffo 1996). He or she has to learn to offer service through others. From being an active participant in the process of implementing client change, the supervisor also becomes a passive facilitator of client outcomes. One such supervisor said, “As a caseworker I was very ‘social work’ oriented. I enjoyed working with clients and helping them if possible. As a supervisor I no longer feel the stimulation I did as a worker” (Miller and Podell 1970:36).

Some stress derives from the defensiveness that a supervisor might feel in comparing administrative work (and an “administrative” caseload) with direct service work and a direct service caseload. According higher status to direct service activity as the most important work the agency provides, the supervisor may be somewhat apologetic about having a desk job, a modest administrative caseload, and less client contact (Berliner 1971). But, as the majority of Workforce supervisors maintain significant caseloads (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004), perhaps only a minority feel unduly burdened by this source of stress.

As discussed earlier, some of the administrative requirements of the supervisor’s job run counter to the ethos of social work. The need to exercise authority and the need to judge the worker require some adjustments in attitude. Patti et al., studying the problems of worker transition from the direct service position to the management position, found that “the use of authority, particularly as it implied directing, supervising, and changing subordinates, was the most difficult area of adjustment for respondents when they assumed their first administrative job” (1979:146–47). In a qualitative study by Saffo (1996:125), “the authoritative and evaluative components of being a supervisor” were “two of the more troublesome aspects of supervision” new supervisors experienced.

A study of 285 social work administrators, most of whom had been clinicians,

indicated once again that adaptation to authority was a problem in making the transition from direct service to administration. The move was from indirect leadership to more direct leadership, from permissiveness to assertive direction, from covert use of power to more overt use of power. In reporting the research, Scurfield (1981:497) said, "It is clear that the exercise of authority in relationships with subordinates in contrast with the exercise of authority in relationships with clients is a major area of change reported by some former clinicians in their transition to administration."

In direct service work, the workers may advise, suggest, and influence, but they rarely direct the client to engage in certain actions. The ultimate decision and responsibility for action rests with the client and the consequences of the client's decision are borne only by the client. The authority of supervision extends beyond advice, suggestion, and influence to the imperative of directing the worker to act in some particular way. The consequences of the worker's decision to accept, reject, or modify the supervisor's directive is borne not only by the worker but by the supervisor and the agency as well. Because the supervisor is given the power to actually require certain actions by the supervisee, it is appropriate that supervisors accept responsibility for the worker's failure to act. The limits of authority and responsibility are broader and more pervasive in supervision as contrasted with direct service.

Worker adherence to the clients' right to self-determination permits the client, with worker acquiescence, to reject worker suggestions. The principle of self-determination is not applicable, however, to the supervisor-supervisee relationship:

When a subordinate fails to accept the suggestion of the [supervisors] the latter must be prepared to press for compliance even in the face of appearing to be arbitrary. Certainly there are times when it is appropriate to defer to subordinates or engage in collaborative decision making, but inevitably there are occasions in which the manager must take courses of action that may not be agreed to or supported by staff. (Patti 1983:217)

The change in position may also require, at times, a change in language usage from expressions that connote egalitarian relationships to others that communicate a sense of hierarchy. Statements such as "I might suggest that you ..." or "I would encourage you to ..." suggest a relationship of mutuality. At some point, the objectively hierarchical nature of the supervisor-supervisee relationship might need to be expressed in more direct language, such as "I expect you to ..." or "I am telling you that. ..." To use the softer language when the supervisor has been directed to get certain procedures or objectives implemented leaves the supervisee with a sense of ambiguity as to what he or she is required to do (Furlong 1990). Regarding performance expectations, Paul and her colleagues (2009:333) said that "communication should be clear and consistent, using direct and unambiguous language."

The change from a clinical to a managerial cast of mind applies to changes in thinking about the supervisee as well as the client. Holloway and Brager (1989) pointed to the fact that beginning supervisors trained as clinicians and oriented toward psychological theories tend to focus on idiosyncratic behavior of supervisees as explanatory variables, although in clinical settings perhaps experienced supervisors continue to maintain such a focus (Frawley-O'Dea and Sarnat 2001). Although still

needing to be sensitive to these factors, the new supervisor also needs to give explicit recognition to the organizational context, roles, and status of supervisees as sources of explanation for supervisees' behaviors (Holloway and Brager 1989:29).

### ***Changes in Peer Relationships***

Becoming a supervisor requires change in the worker's relationship with others in the agency (Blankman, Dobrof, and Wade 1993; Salus 2004). The supervisor is no longer a member of the peer group of direct service workers. He or she has become one of "them." Not only is the new supervisor deprived of what may have been a satisfying source of pleasure and support, but he or she is further penalized by feelings of rivalry and jealousy from former colleagues. There may be "a certain feeling of distance that I had arrived and they hadn't" or "that I was doing better than them" (Woodcock 1967:69). One new supervisor said:

One's colleagues like to see a person get ahead all right—but not too far ahead, and not too fast. If fortune seems to be smiling too often and too broadly on one person, his friends begin to sharpen their knives to even up the score a bit. I was philosophical about this, as by this time I realized that an occasional knife in the ribs goes with supervision just as June bugs go with June and must be accepted as stoically; I marked my promotion by buying a bigger brief case, enrolling in an advanced seminar in supervision, and having a drink with a few sympathetic friends—also supervisors. (H.C.D. 1949:162)

Social distance is increased between the worker-turned-supervisor and his former peers. There is more formality, less spontaneity in their interaction, a greater guardedness, and hesitancy in communication. The talk slows down and alters as the supervisor sits down to drink coffee with them. What was formerly identified as interesting in-group gossip is now perceived as squealing when shared with a former peer who is now a supervisor. As Cousins (2004:175) observed, "Social work is a profession that significantly focuses on the use and misuse of power and, for many social workers, becoming a supervisor can leave questions (or sometimes accusations from others) that they have sold out and become part of the oppressive hierarchy."

Charles Lamb noted this change in his essay "The Superannuated Man":

To dissipate this awkward feeling, I have been fain to go among them once or twice since: to visit my old desk fellows—my co-brethren of the quill—that I had left below in the state militant. Not all the kindness with which they received me could quite restore to me that pleasant familiarity which I had heretofore enjoyed among them. We cracked some of our old jokes, but methought they went off but faintly.

Describing this change from the supervisee's standpoint, a worker said: "I used to be close friends with Ruth but when she became a supervisor continuing as friends seemed 'funny.' As a result, I gained a great supervisor but I lost a good friend."

Having been a member of the supervisee peer group, the new supervisor has been party to all of the frequent unflattering characterizations made about supervisors. The new supervisor might be haunted by the memory of these remarks. "Are they saying about me what they said about ——?" Former peers wonder about the new supervisor: Will he or she act with favoritism toward best friends? Will he or she pay off grudges against old enemies? Will he or she grow into the job or just swell?



Some problems arise from the fact that the supervisor, in a position immediately adjacent to the caseworker, has the same professional background and experience as the supervisee. Identified and empathetic with the problems and orientation of the direct service worker, the supervisor nevertheless represents management. "This creates both a role conflict and a personal dilemma for the supervisor. Professional norms stressing autonomous integrity for practitioners still make a claim on him which he considers legitimate but so does the organization's need for control" (Abrahamson 1967:83).

The ghosts of one's predecessors can be a source of tension. The new supervisor wonders if he or she can be as good as the former supervisor. If, in changing some of the patterns of work established by the former supervisor, will he or she challenge the established loyalties of the supervisees and incur their hostility?

Having lost his or her old peer group, the new supervisor has to obtain acceptance in a new peer group—that of the other supervisors. Maintenance of some marginality, some social distance, from both groups to which the supervisor is hierarchically related—the supervisees who are his subordinates and the administrators who are his superiors—is functionally useful. Blau and Scott found that "detachment from subordinates was associated with high productivity and independence from superiors with greater solidarity in the work group and [that] both kinds of social distance, although the two were hardly related to one another, were associated with commanding the loyalty of subordinates" (1962:238). Unfortunately, it appears unlikely that the majority of Workforce supervisors have other supervisors to turn to for support (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004). As Harmse (2000:n.p.) observed, social work supervisors frequently "have no formally assigned sources of feedback or support."

Weinbach offered a list of twenty-five statements that candidates for promotion to supervision that workers should generally agree with when considering the change, such as "I comfortable with being directive and authoritarian with others when the situation requires it; I can live with being the object of criticism or ridicule by subordinates; I enjoy overseeing the work of others" (Weinbach 2003:306).

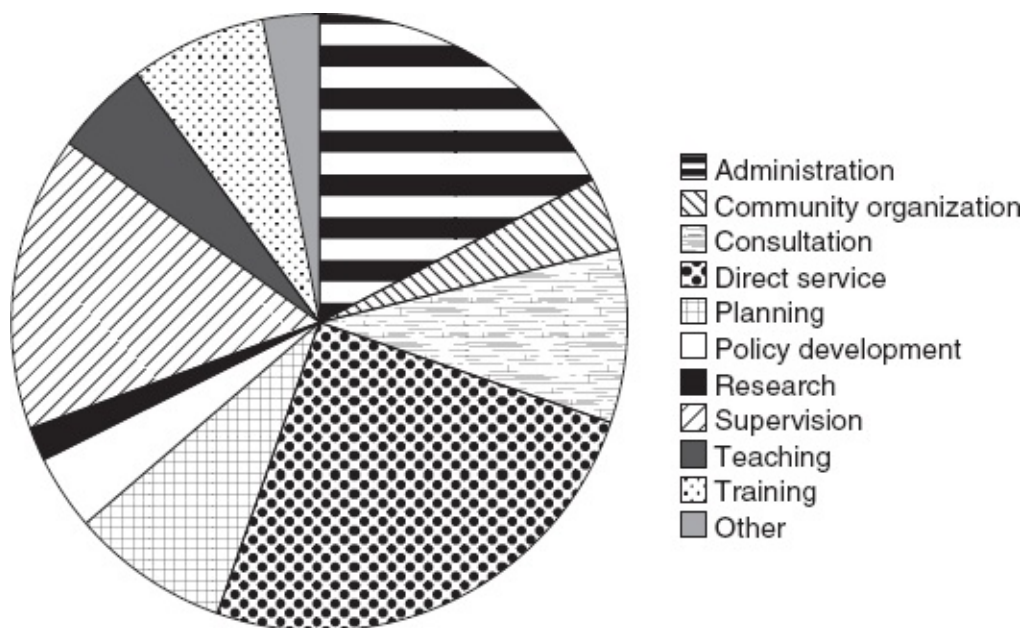
### **Summary: Stress Associated with Becoming a Supervisor**

In accepting the transition, new supervisors face the complex processes of developing a clear conception of what the new position entails behaviorally and attitudinally. While maintaining a significant caseload, they may have to divest themselves of old behaviors and attitudes appropriate to the direct service worker's position and learn and commit themselves to attitudes, behavior, and roles appropriate to the new position. They have to emotionally accept a changed image of themselves and a changed relationship with former peers and newly acquired colleagues.

Overall, however, clinicians moving to supervision see the transition as not being particularly problematic. Researching the actual experience of such a transition, Scurfield (1981) noted, in reporting responses from administrators who made this

transition, that he “expected that former clinicians would report that their transition to administration had been difficult. The findings show, however, that former clinicians tended to minimize differences between clinical and administrative practice. This suggests that little difficulty may be experienced in the transition period” (Scurfield 1981:498).

On the basis of their research of the actual transition experiences from clinician to administrator, Patti et al. seconded Scurfield’s findings. They noted that “despite the obvious difficulties in making the transition to management, the data also suggests that in many respects the respondent’s past clinical education and experience was perceived by them as an aid in the process. As a consequence the role discontinuity and identity problems encountered, although quite apparent, appear to have been much less intense than we had assumed” (Patti et al. 1979:151). This is consistent with the surveyed experiences of Workforce supervisors, who are generally positive about their ability to help agency clients (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004).



**FIGURE 7.2.** Proportional representation of time spent by social work supervisors performing “the following roles in all social work employment.” (From National Association of Social Workers Center for Workforce Studies. 2004. *A study of the Role and Use of Licensed Social Workers in the United States*. Washington, DC: National Association of Social Workers.)

### Ongoing Supervisor Stress: Problems in Being a Supervisor

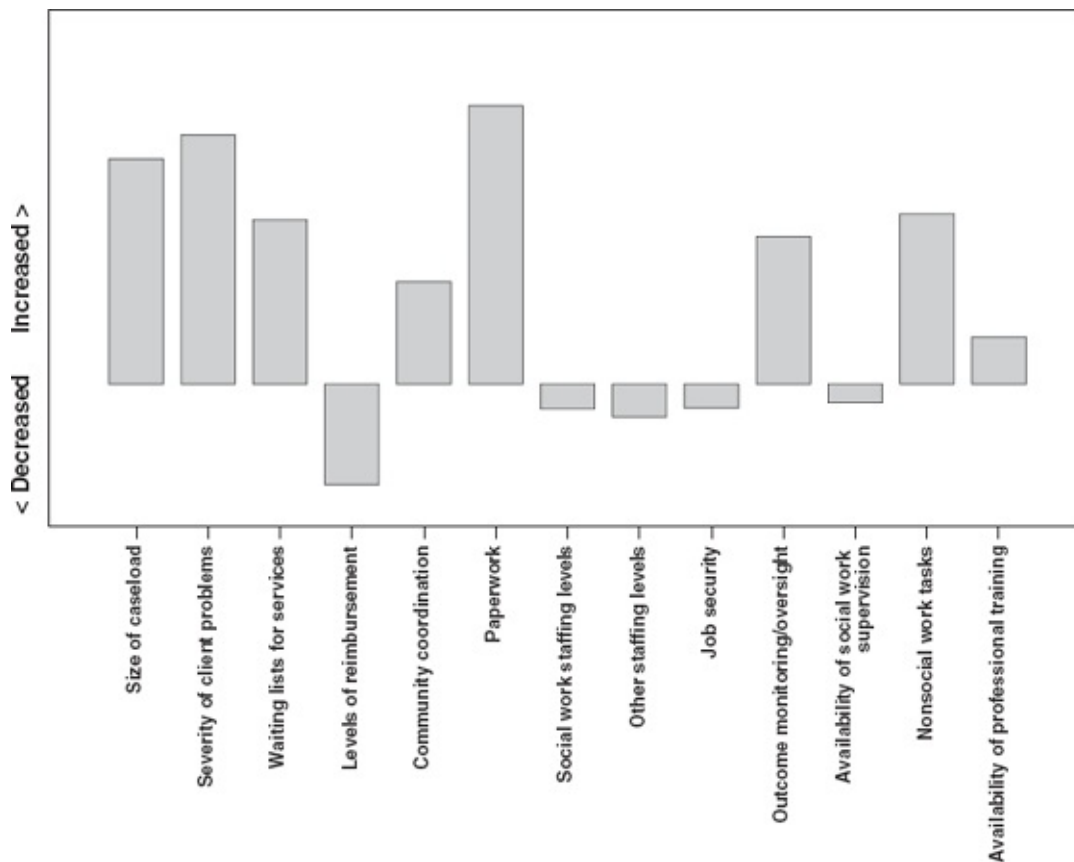
In addition to the stresses encountered in becoming supervisors, there are ongoing job-related stresses involved in being a supervisor (Zunz 1998). As discussed in previous chapters, these include the acute stress associated with the real or potential “death of children, intense media scrutiny, and the risk of million dollar lawsuits” (Dill 2007:177), and the chronic stress of doing more with less, as shown in [figures 7.2](#) and [7.3](#).

The limits of the supervisor's responsibility are less definite than the worker's responsibility. Consequently, some beginning supervisors find themselves working harder than ever before: "I soon found that I was doing about twice as much work as I had done formerly. When I brought this to my executive's attention she was very nice about it. She patiently explained that this was one of the privileges of my new position" (H.C.D. 1949:161).

A study of a supervisor's workload in a public welfare agency concluded that "casework supervisors did not have time to supervise" (Galm 1972:34). Apparently, this remains a problem throughout the social work profession (Kadushin 1992b; NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004). Faced with such pressures, supervisors feel anxious about the kind of job they can do. One supervisor wrote:

My greatest dissatisfaction came with the realization that supervision takes an incredibly large amount of time. I now understand why I have received so little of it in my former placements. To do the job correctly, one needs to devote great time and energy to supervising each [worker]. It resembles teaching anything. To maximize effectiveness, the teacher must prepare several hours for each hour spent actually instructing. I would have liked to have been able to analyze each recording of the worker, for instance, in depth, prior to our discussion of it, but instead I found myself listening to it for the first time in conference and responding spontaneously.

There is greater pressure to manifest exemplary behavior because the supervisor is perceived as a model. If the supervisor is frequently late, disorganized, or fails to keep work up to date, can he or she expect his or her supervisees to be punctual, organized, and efficient? A worker in a mental health agency said, "When the supervisor began to take days off at irregular intervals and without explanation, we began to follow his lead and took days off when we were feeling overwhelmed, calling them 'mental health' days."



**FIGURE 7.3.** How social work supervisors answer the question, “To what extent has the practice of social work changed in the past two years in your primary employment setting?” (From National Association of Social Workers Center for Workforce Studies. 2004. *A study of the Role and Use of Licensed Social Workers in the United States*. Washington, DC: National Association of Social Workers.)

Supervisors are aware of, and feel concerned about, the limits of the help they can give supervisees. A supervisor said: “A big part of my anxiousness is that I won’t know the answers for them and that I won’t satisfy them with the answers that I have to give. I think even our profession doesn’t know that much and that’s a hard thing. They walk out feeling they didn’t get what they wanted” (Amacher 1971:262).

If supervisees see knowledge and practice competence as one of the principal “strengths” of their supervisor, they confirm that lack of clinical expertise is a significant “shortcoming” for them in their supervision (Greenspan et al 1992; Hardcastle 1991). Of the supervisees responding to a questionnaire, 20 percent cited this as a problem for their supervisor. Supervisees said the following:

- He doesn’t know enough to provide much help in difficult cases.
- When I don’t know a particular form, process, procedure, policy, neither does my supervisor. I need to find this out for myself.
- She lacks knowledge about the particular clients and problems I work with.

Workers can stand the uncertainty and doubt better than the supervisor can because they feel that if they do not know the answers they need, the supervisor can

make them available. The worker has the sanctioned luxury of acceptable dependence on the supervisor. The supervisor is granted the dubious prerogative of independence. He or she becomes the question-answerer rather than the question-asker. Furthermore, the supervisor has little opportunity to turn to others in the hierarchy who might be able to answer her own questions. The worker's status gives absolution from some mistakes; the supervisor's status reduces the grant of immunity. In meeting the needs of the worker, the supervisor requires a confidence in his or her convictions and in decision-making that is hard to come by. The pressure to act with certainty, when inwardly one feels very uncertain, is stressful. Perhaps this is why Workforce supervisors have more interest in further education and training in clinical practice than in administration or related forms of practice (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004).

The supervisor has a more complex interpersonal configuration to monitor and understand than the direct service worker. He or she has to attempt an understanding of the client as described by the supervisee; he or she has to understand the nature of the relationship between the supervisee and client, and he or she has to understand the nature of the relationship between himself or herself and the supervisee (Doughty and Leddick 2007; Frawley-O'Dea and Sarnet 2001; Rubin 1997).

There is also stress that results from lack of clear definition of the supervisor's tasks, responsibilities, and authority (Tromski-Klingshirn and Davis 2007). In one interview study of twenty supervisors, half said they were unclear about their role in the agency (Weatherley et al. 1980), a phenomenon that Feldman (1999:281) described as the "middle management muddle."

There is stress as a consequence of periodic challenges to the legitimacy of supervisory authority (e.g., Brashears 1995; Veeder 1990). Episodic discussions in the literature (which suggest that supervision is an archaic, unnecessary drag on the profession) tend to erode the confidence of supervisors that they are engaged in an appropriate social work role.

Supervisors may worry that they may be growing away from the job they have to supervise, for which "knowledge is considered the most essential supervisory practice domain" (Clark et al. 2008:17). In some measure, the supervisor's image of practice is not as it is but as it once was; practice in the supervisees' experience is as it is today. As a minority of Workforce supervisors described their agency as participating in best practices training, clinical research, demonstration programs, or program evaluations (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004), such anxiety is exacerbated by the rapidity of change. "Given the rapid changes in knowledge and state of the arts, the administrative professional is in danger of losing 'professional authentication'" (S. Moore 1970:211). Changes involve new orientations and new techniques. Supervisors may often lack mastery of some of the new techniques and knowledge about some of the new programs. Hanlan cited an example of this:

The merger of a number of small, independent, sectarian agencies in Philadelphia under one administrative organization is one illustration of how the change in functions has broad ramifications throughout all levels of the

organization. In this particular case, the tension was particularly noticeable at the level of the first-line supervisor. The situation became critical when supervisors who formerly performed casework teaching functions were now required to train their staff and themselves in a wide range of community-organizing functions. (1972:43)

Formal supervisory conferences with supervisees are a source of stress for the supervisor (Cantillon and Sargeant 2008; Heckman-Stone 2003; Hoffman et al. 2005; Komiskey 2004). It is in this interaction that the supervisor has to prove his or her competence and value to the supervisee. The conference is the context in which the administrative, educational, and supportive abilities of the supervisor are subject to test. The worker, in providing materials for the conference agenda, has exposed his or her work for critical analysis. The supervisor, in responding to the supervisee's work, questions, and problems, is subject to critical analysis by the supervisee. A supervisee noted:

I had a cognitive-behavioral orientation to practice learned in my training. My supervisor had an experiential family-systems perspective. I had difficulty in relating what I was doing with my clients. Since we had adopted different perspectives, so too we had adopted different vocabularies to describe the dynamics of the problems and the proposed interventions. When I would describe my clients' thinking errors or irrational thoughts, my supervisor seemed to think that I was being concrete. I found myself in the uncomfortable position of trying to defend my evidence-based models of practice to an administrative superior with many years of experience. My supervisor did not have any answers consistent with my perspective. It became difficult to rely on her for guidance questions concerning my analysis of a problem, my methods of intervention, or my goals for a client.

The supervisor has to deal with the stress of competitiveness between supervisees while diplomatically maintaining a cooperative spirit in the group. "Several workers with the same supervisor are like a big family, each demanding the ... attention of a busy mother who has her own housework to do. The supervisor has to learn to give each what he needs without seeming to give anyone more than the others" (H.C.D. 1949:163). Here, too, the supervisor walks a tightrope.

We noted earlier that the supervisor is dependent on the worker to some extent. In terms of instrumental needs, the supervisor gets compliance, communication, and information from the worker; in response to expressive needs, the supervisor gets appreciation, respect, and loyalty from the worker. Failure or refusal of the worker to meet the instrumental and expressive needs of the supervisor creates stress for the supervisor. The worker can be uncooperative, resistive, make the work of the supervisor more difficult, and threaten the supervisor's good conception of himself or herself and his or her competence. The supervisor is identified with his or her supervisees in the agency and in the community, and any complaints about their work reflect negatively on the supervisor.

A study of problems encountered by beginning supervisors in a counseling program found that supervisee' resistance to learning, a feeling of not knowing how to intervene in the supervisee's case, and a feeling of not understanding what was happening in the case were most frequently cited by supervisors (McColley and Baker 1982).

Satisfaction in helping the supervisee develop professionally can be achieved only with the cooperation of the supervisee. Supervisees who are not motivated to learn, resistant to learning, or incapable of learning deny the supervisor this source of

satisfaction and create a problem for the supervisor.

Some groups of supervisees present problems for and tax the patience of supervisors more than others. Supervisors indicated that they tended to be impatient with and irritated by supervisees who were uncooperative, overly dependent, hostile, resistive, or failed to meet expectations. Supervisors said the following:

- I lack tolerance for people who work slowly, don't make an effort to learn on their own, the passive-dependent supervisee.
- I find it difficult to maintain an objective working relationship with complainers and narcissistic workers.
- I feel irritation at those unwilling to risk themselves and grow.

Supervisors also talked about aspects of their own personality that presented problems for effective supervision. Supervisors were concerned that they might be hyperv verbal, too rigid, perfectionistic, demanding, or communicating unrealistic expectations (Kadushin 1992b).

Supervisors also face the problem of implementing seemingly antithetical demands—permitting the greatest degree of worker autonomy while adequately protecting the rights of the client, helping preserve agency stability while promoting agency change, being supportive to the worker while communicating challenging expectations, acting as an agent of the bureaucracy while being loyal to the profession, and balancing the individual needs of the worker and the needs of the organization. Workers want an aggressive supervisor; administrators generally prefer a more passive supervisor.

The supervisor is in the position of having to reconcile job demands with human demands, of managing with a focus both on productivity and quality and on worker satisfaction and morale. The supervisor has to balance these antithetical expectations. Thus, the supervisor has to learn to live with the tensions generated by all sorts of conflicting demands and expectations. The more distasteful, but nevertheless necessary, aspects of the supervisor's managerial responsibilities include handling complaints, resolving grievances, and imposing discipline.

The supervisor is apt to be pulled between conflicting expectations from above and below. Placed at the boundary between the direct service worker and agency administration, the supervisor is simultaneously a member of both the working unit and the organizational unit. As is true for all who operate in boundary areas, the supervisor is in a difficult position. He or she has only marginal membership in each unit and is faced with pressure from both when attempting to act as a buffer and mediator between them. Sometimes the directives from administration and the demands from the workers are contradictory. In responding to one group, the supervisor risks incurring the hostility of the other group and compromising his or her power to influence.

The supervisor can effectively implement his or her responsibilities only if the agency provides enough resources to do the job. This means that the supervisor has to have enough workers assigned to the unit and enough workers with a particular

level and variety of skills. Many supervisors face problems resulting from having a short supply of workers available to cover the caseload or from assignment of workers with deficiencies in knowledge and skills that limit the productivity of the unit.

The supervisor, like the worker, faces the frustration of limits to autonomy and discretion. The sources of constraints may be different but the experience of constriction is the same. The supervisor is constrained by administrative policy, union regulations, client advocacy organizations, the reporting requirement of legislative sources of agency funding, accrediting standards, licensing standards, and affirmative action and civil rights regulations.

The supervisor is authorized to make some decisions autonomously, such as assigning work. Some decisions, however, may need to be reported to administration after they are made. Other decisions, such as hiring, dismissal, or the purchase of a computer, cannot be made without prior approval. Such internal and external constraints limit the supervisor's freedom to act vis-à-vis the supervisee in accordance with the supervisor's best judgment.

Perhaps this sheds light on the somber conclusion of a review of the literature: "There are differences in skillfulness in supervision across supervisors [but] the evidence to date shows little indication that supervisors improve with experience" (Worthington 2006:156–57).

### **Ongoing Supervisor Stress: The Challenge of Human Diversity**

The growing human diversity of social work practice is an ongoing source of stress for the supervisor (Mor Barak 2005). Supervisors, supervisees, and agency clients vary in ability (Olkin 2002; Pardeck 2001), gender (Chung, Marshall, and Gordon 2001; Dennis and Aitken 2004; Granello 2003), gender identity (Halpert, Reinhardt, and Toohey 2007; Singh and Burnes 2010), sexual orientation (Bidell 2005; Burkard, Knox, Hess, and Schultz 2009; Nilsson et al. 2008), and race and ethnicity (Bhat and Davis 2007; Jernigan et al. 2010), thus invalidating one-size-fits-all assumptions about the interactive process of helping. This has become the subject of a burgeoning theoretical (Bernard and Goodyear 2009; Yabusaki 2010) and empirical (Jernigan et al. 2010; Mor Barak 2005; Vasquez 2007) supervision literature.

Although there are numerous contexts for a discussion of cross-cultural supervision, for purposes of simplicity we have elected to focus on three such contexts: race, gender, and sexual orientation. We hope this will provide analysis of some concerns that are ubiquitous and applicable in cross-cultural supervision generally.

#### ***Race and Ethnicity as Factors in Supervision***

Race matters in social work supervision (Chang, Hays, and Shoffner 2003; Gatmon et al 2001; Inman 2006; Inman and Ladany 2008), because the patterned regularities of identity and behavior, based on shared customs, language, traditions, values, and beliefs, have been traditionally organized around racial ethnicity in the United States (Sangganjanavanich and Black 2011).



*White Supervisor-African American Supervisee* The most frequent cross-cultural pattern is of a white supervisor and African American supervisee (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004). White supervisors supervising an African American supervisee should consciously make explicit to themselves their attitudes, feelings, prejudices, and biases relative to racial differences. They should clarify for themselves the nature of their own white identities. They need to make an effort to learn some details about African American culture, lifestyles, communication patterns, discrimination experiences, attitudes toward authority, approaches to problem solving, and so on. In supplementation of such self-education, the supervisor should attempt to be openly nondefensive in learning about the culture of the African American supervisee (Gray and Smith 2009). Developing self-awareness, creating a safe and open environment, and communicating acceptance and respect for cultural differences were ranked as the three most “successful multicultural supervisory behaviors” in a recent Delphi study of supervisors with “significant multicultural experience” (Dressel et al. 2007:57).

The supervisor should be sensitive to the fact that the supervisee, a member of a victimized group, will generally be vigilant in cautiously checking the speech and nonverbal reactions for any hint of prejudice or bias while assessing the level of sophistication of the supervisor’s knowledge about African American culture (Sue et al. 2007). Older supervisors suffer a disadvantage in discussing multicultural issues with younger supervisees in that few supervisors, unlike many supervisees, have ever had any training in multicultural counseling (Yabusaki 2010).

Any discussion of interracial concerns is likely to be uncomfortable and awkward (Tummala-Narra 2004; Utsey, Gernat, and Hammar 2005). The supervisee, in a less powerful position, is likely to be more hesitant to initiate a discussion of such matters (Green and Dekkers 2010). Consequently, it is incumbent on the supervisor to be sensitively alert to the need for such dialogue and take the initiative in opening such discussions, assisting and encouraging the supervisee in the interaction (Burkard et al. 2006). Otherwise, “few discussions will occur” (Bernard and Goodyear 2009:129).

The factor of race should not be ignored nor should it be overemphasized. A sensible, relaxed sensitivity to race seems to be the most desirable approach. A white supervisor in contact with an African American supervisee who ignores the factor of race may be perceived negatively. Saying, in effect, “You are like me; I don’t think of you as black” may be seen by African Americans “as a negation of their black identity and a subliminal message that they would be acceptable if they were not black—that is if they would repudiate parts of themselves.” If, on the other hand, the African American supervisee “is asked to comment on every black patient or issue relevant to blacks he or she cannot help but wonder whether there is stereotypical thinking behind the question such as all blacks think alike” (Bradshaw 1982:205).

White supervisors of African American supervisees will have to work harder to elicit their trust and confidence and provide evidence of their ability to understand the African American experience (Jeanquart-Barone 1993; Terrell et al. 2009). Studying workers in county welfare departments, McNeely found African American workers

expressed dissatisfaction with their white supervisors because they were “unknowledgeable” (McNeely 1987:128).

A white supervisor said:

The black worker felt that I was not meeting her needs, probably because of our racial differences. The worker was angry and I felt threatened (maybe I am a racist). We spent a great deal of time discussing these feelings. We got a lot of talk going but no real change in attitude. Finally I said, “Look, we’ve talked about it long enough. Let’s get on to the business of the agency. If a specific example comes up that seems related to our differences in race we can then discuss it.”

“A minority worker claiming the expertise of life experience can challenge the [white] supervisor’s knowledge and ability to deal with racial/ethnic problems and issues” (Swanson and Brown 1982:65).

Providing a diverse caseload, the supervisor has the responsibility of reviewing and evaluating performance as objectively as possible, but some evidence suggests that white supervisors may have difficulty giving African American supervisees negative feedback (Dipboye 1985; Wilson 2010). A white supervisor feeling guilty about white discrimination might tend to be protective in compensating for victimization by lowering performance expectations. The supervisee, in turn, might exploit feelings of guilt by pressing for exceptions to standards.

Some supervisors (out of sympathy, guilt, fear, or negative prejudice) may evaluate minority group members differently and less confidently than white workers. Fear of being labeled racist or the desire to openly claim that they are not racist may lead to a hesitance to criticize African American supervisees for deficiencies in their work.

The limited empirical evidence suggests that African American supervisees may expect their supervisors to be less empathic and respectful than do white supervisees (VanderKolk 1974; Constantine and Sue 2007), but a study of African American workers by Jayaratne et al. (1992) found no significant differences in perceived levels of emotional support from white and African American supervisors. This is consistent with findings that psychological (Jernigan et al. 2010; Ladany, Brittan-Powell, and Pannu 1997) and ecological (Jayaratne et al 1992) variables may ultimately be more relevant to supervisory relationship dynamics than racial matching. The most powerful predictor of satisfaction with supervision for African American supervisees, reported in a study by Cooks and Helms (1988), was whether they perceived that their supervisor liked them.

#### ***Gender as a Factor in Transition to Supervision***

Social work has been characterized as a “female” profession, as 78 percent of licensed social workers and 82 percent of the supervisors in the workforce are women (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004). Although men are no longer more likely than women to become supervisors (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004), male supervisors still earn a higher annual wage than female supervisors, even when controlling for their social work education, years of experience, and the number of hours they work for pay in a week (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004). Thus, social work supervision is gendered too, with implications for leadership,

influence, pay, process, and power (Granello 1996; 2003).

Initiating structure, the instrumental component of supervision, has been associated with “masculine” characteristics (Crespi 1995). It is concerned with initiating activity, making decisions, organizing work, assigning work, reviewing work, and evaluating work. It is concerned with task outcomes, accountability, standards, rules, competence, and effectiveness. This component of supervision requires the active use of authority and power deriving from position in the organizational hierarchy.

On the other hand, the expressive-consideration component of supervision reflects characteristics more commonly defined as feminine (Crespi 1995). The focus here is on an empathic understanding of people and their satisfaction and dissatisfaction in their work, their self-esteem, and their need for appreciation and support, as well as awareness of workers’ feelings. Power, authority, and hierarchical differences are downplayed in a press toward equality between supervisor and supervisee (Munson 1997).

Some evidence suggests that the gendering of supervision affects organizational leadership behavior. In a study of subordinates rating the leadership behavior of 12,546 managers in 437 organizations in 32 countries, van Emmerik, Wendt, and Euwema (2010) found that a higher gender ratio (relatively more female managers) was positively associated with consideration and negatively related to initiating structure in organizations. Moreover, a higher gender ratio (relatively more female managers) was positively associated with consideration and negatively related to initiating structure among male managers. This implies that more “feminine” leadership behavior is realized when more women are in managerial positions, and that increasing the proportion of female manager has an impact on male leadership behavior (i.e., less initiating structure by male managers) but not on female leadership. That may be because female managers make greater use of both leadership orientations, according to van Emmerik, Wendt, and Euwema (2010), who viewed this as an indication that female supervisors put more effort into their leadership than do men.

At this point, we refer back to a review of studies that suggest that the most desirable approach to supervision involves integrating instrumental and expressive behaviors, initiating structure and consideration behaviors. Content describing the “good supervisor” is relevant here as well. This material suggests that in terms of gender stereotypes, the most desirable approach to supervision is likely to be androgynous (Dodson and Borders 2006; Munson 1997). Expressive, considerate behaviors in concern for people doing the job reflect the strengths of the female stereotype. Instrumental-initiating structure behaviors concerned with task accomplishment reflect the strength of the male stereotype. Because good supervision integrates concern for task accomplishment as well as concern for people, the good supervisor needs to possess characteristics that reflect maleness as well as femaleness. *Androgynous* here means the comfortable readiness to manifest flexibly and adaptively either masculine or feminine traits, as the situation

requires. Males attracted to social work (a profession categorized as a female profession because a clear majority of workers are female) are likely to be more androgynously oriented than males in general.

Studying men in female professions, Dodson and Borders (2006), Lemkau (1984), and O'Neil (2008) found that they held less sex-typed, more androgynous attitudes than men in more traditionally male occupations. They are consequently less likely to be uncomfortable about manifesting behaviors culturally defined as feminine. In addition to implementing instrumental behaviors in concordance with their maleness, they are likely to be capable of meeting the expressive needs of their supervisees. For male supervisors, an androgynous approach to supervision may not present a problem.

The opposite may be the case for female supervisors. Although the expressive requirements of supervision are consonant with their gender identification, the executive demands of instrumental supervision require the manifestation of cross-gender, masculine-identified behavior. An androgynous orientation to supervision may consequently create discomfort and unease among female supervisors.

A male supervisor, in becoming a social worker, has already added some elements of feminine orientation to his behavioral repertoire. The female supervisor generally has not previously had to make this transition to androgyny by adopting male-typed behaviors. The need to act in an uncharacteristic gender manner in administrative supervision may stimulate feelings of discomfort (Petty and Miles 1976; Watson 1988).

In achieving comfort and competence in implementing the instrumental-structural component of supervision, female supervisors do not reject their socialization as females; rather, they transcend it. The gender-neutral requirements of good supervision may result in a positive or negative self-selection for the position. Women who see themselves as reflecting the more traditional feminine stereotype may show little interest in the position, seeing a supervisor as "unlike themselves." More androgynously oriented women might actively seek the position. As a consequence of self-selection and position retention, female supervisors may demonstrate, as they empirically do when studied, behaviors that are not significantly different from those of male social work supervisors (Ellis and Ladany 1997).

This is in accordance with the findings of a study by York (1988). Studying social workers' orientation toward management, he found that "gender was not found to be a predictor of management orientation" (37). He goes on to say:

It is possible that females who achieve promotion into administrative positions are a select minority of females who happen to be more competitive or instrumental than other females. It is also possible that males in clinical positions are a select group of males who happen to be more inclined to embrace such clinically-oriented behaviors as expressiveness and mutuality than other males. This interpretation would suggest that a selection bias operates in the movement of males and females in various positions in social work organizations. (York 1988:38)

Male social work supervisors may be more "feminine" than men in general, and female supervisors may be more "masculine" than women in general. In a review of the research on the actual roles that male and female supervisors adopt within

supervision, Doughty and Leddick (2007:20) noted, "While the majority of studies reported traditional roles are still followed ... there are also studies indicating female and male supervisors act against stereotype."

#### ***Gender as a Factor in Ongoing Supervision***

Differences in gender between supervisor and supervisee can present some problems (Riordan 2000). Caplow (1954), in an earlier study of the sociology of work, pointed to the fact that men find it contrary to the norm to be directly subordinate to women in the work situation and that they are resistive to accepting women supervisors. Subsequent research in a number of different occupations tended to confirm this as a prevalent attitude among males.

Although there might be a continuing discomfort felt by traditionally oriented male workers generally in being supervised by women (Twohey and Volker 1993), this does not seem to be true of male social workers. Male social workers tend to be more androgynous than men in general in their orientation toward sex role behavior and consequently are apt to be less disturbed or threatened by women in supervisory positions (Dailey 1983:22). The more accepting attitude toward supervision by women manifested by male social workers (as contrasted with men in general) is confirmed by their positive responses to their actual experiences as supervisees of female supervisors. In an interview study of the experience of sixty-five supervisees with their supervision, Munson (1979b) found that male social workers supervised by females reported high levels of satisfaction with their experience. The level of satisfaction of these male supervisees was even higher than the level expressed by males supervised by fellow males. A 1983 study of eighty-six supervisors and supervisees in social agencies in Michigan found that trusting relationships were just as likely between supervisees and supervisors of the opposite sex as between the same sex pairs (Mathews 1983); in a study of 289 predoctoral psychology interns, Gatmon et al. (2001) found no difference in the level of the working alliance or satisfaction with supervision between those who were gender-matched with their supervisors and those who were not.

On the other hand, Behling, Curtis, and Foster (1982) obtained responses from 276 graduate social work students about their experiences in supervision with field instructor supervisors. Focusing on the effects of sex matching between instructors, supervisors, and student supervisees, they found the female student-male instructor combinations to be clearly the most stressful and problematic combination. "The stresses in the combination primarily were attributed to traditional sexist attitudes held by male instructors" (Behling, Curtis, and Foster 1982:96).

Though overall attitudes of male social work subordinates to female supervisors may be positive, this may be less true in relation to specific supervisory behaviors. Petty and Odewahn (1983:19) found that male social workers reacted negatively to assertive behavior from female supervisors.

Studying supervisee attitudes toward leadership in a social service organization, Petty and Miles (1976) found that both male and female supervisees held similar

stereotypical views of supervisors. Both were significantly more satisfied with male supervisors exhibiting and initiating structure behaviors and with female supervisors exhibiting consideration behaviors.

For some men, working with a female supervisor is “the first time in their adult life, except in their relationship with parents, that they are presented with a woman in a position of authority. This experience exposes the beginning therapist to his own system of unrecognized values, attitudes, and thus potential countertransference problems” (Nadelson and Notman 1977:281).

The female supervisor can provide the male supervisee with a consciousness-raising learning situation regarding women’s experience. This can provide an antidote to the “countertransference deafness” of some males toward their women clients’ needs and aspirations, increasing their capacity for empathic understanding (Alonson and Rutan 1978; see also Scher 1981 and Granello 1996).

Theoretical presuppositions suggest that it might be desirable to assign supervisees to a supervisor of another gender. In theory, such arrangements should permit working out transference residuals to the opposite gender, but some empirical evidence suggests otherwise. A number of studies suggest that both male and female supervisors treat male and female supervisees differently (Lyon and Potkar 2010), by asking male supervisees for their opinions twice as often as they ask female supervisees (Granello et al. 1997), for example, yet accepting and following suggestions more frequently from supervisees who are female (Granello 2003). Reviews of the literature by Bernard and Goodyear (2009), Doughty and Leddick (2007), and Nilsson et al. (2008) reported an equivocal pattern of findings, suggesting that the dynamics of gender in social work supervision are subtle and highly complex (Moorhouse and Caar 2002; Nelson and Holloway 1990). In general, empirical research currently available still suggests a neutral approach to gender matching in supervision (Vonk and Zucrow 1996:418).

Much as it would be unwise and inexpedient to ignore factors of racial difference between supervisor and supervisee, it would also be a mistake to regard gender differences between the two as a matter of no potential significance. For most supervisory dyads, gender differences may be of neutral significance, with the supervisor and supervisee relating to each other as one professional to another. However, some female supervisees may exploit gender differences in seductive ploys, making their relationship with the male supervisor more advantageous. Some male supervisors may employ their positional power covertly to solicit sexual favors. In less extreme interactional encounters, gender difference may result in flirtatious displays of femininity and male narcissism that interfere with good supervision (Hartman and Brieger 1992). In response to stereotypic male roles, male supervisors may have difficulty with a manipulatively dependent female supervisee, and female supervisors may enact a nurturing role to male supervisees who need firm expectations.

Male supervisors may act in a traditionally courtly, protective manner toward female supervisees (Shen-Miller, Olson, and Bolling 2011), being careful to avoid

“hurting” them by being critical, even when this is appropriate; by the same token, they may feel compelled to withhold expressions of affection or approval that the female supervisee might experience as caring or helpful (Jordan 2006) or crossing a boundary (Downs 2000; Manathunga 2007). A female supervisor with a male supervisee may be reluctant to display the same level of assertive leadership behavior that she might comfortably manifest in contact with a female supervisee (Alimo-Metcalfe 2010; Bligh and Kohles 2008). Participants in cross-gender supervisory relationships may be more hesitant to freely discuss the sexual problems of clients because of a fear of eroticizing the supervisory relationship (Begun 2011; Ladany, Friedlander, and Nelson 2005; Shen-Miller et al. 2011).

Male and female supervisors may be perceived differently by supervisees in response to persistent stereotyping (Shen-Miller et al. 2011). One worker noted:

In one work setting I had two supervisors—one male and one female. It almost felt like a family with two parents. If you needed support or validation, you went to the female. If you had a question about policy or procedure, you went to the male supervisor. And, just like parents, the staff knew how to play them off. If you needed something, it depended on what you needed in order to make the decision about who to ask. If you wanted time off, you went to her, even though he made the work schedule. If you wanted to order some supplies or equipment, you went to him.

Supervisors may assign cases in response to a perception of supposed gender differences in interest and aptitude (Lowe 2011; Shen-Miller et al. 2011). Child welfare cases might be more frequently assigned to female supervisees; cases involving delinquents more frequently to male supervisees. Gender might be a factor in assigning cases relating to incest and/or rape or cases with a risk of violence (Lowe 2003; 2011).

#### ***Sexual Orientation as a Factor in Supervision***

Sexual orientation is “a multifaceted construct that encompasses sexual attraction, sexual behavior, personal identity, romantic relationships, and community membership” (Herek et al. 2010:177; see also Moradi et al. 2009). Although the lived experiences of sexual orientation are invariably more fluid, nuanced, and textured than the construct (Burdge 2007), the economic, legal, and social consequences of sexual orientation are profound (Baumle and Poston 2011; Black et al. 2000; D’Augelli, Hershberger, and Pilkington 1998; Mays and Cochran 2011).

Gay men and lesbians are the victims of more hate crimes than any other ethnic or nonethnic minority group in the United States (Barrett and McWhirter 2002), for example, so it is unsurprising that they also bear a greater risk of health problems than heterosexuals (Cochran et al. 2003; House et al. 2001). In addition, the percentage of lesbians and gay men who seek counseling is estimated to be two to four times higher than the rate for heterosexual clients (Cochran et al. 2003; Barrett and McWhirter 2002).

Nor should it be surprising, given the risks, that sexual minorities may be hesitant to identify their orientation to their supervisors, workers, and clients. Human sexuality is an underdeveloped domain in social work education (Jeyasingham 2008). Some evidence suggests that many social workers practice with heterosexist or

homophobic bias (Berkman and Zinberg 1997; Crisp 2006a; Liddle 2000), and the preponderance of evidence argues that heterosexist and homophobic attitudes are harmful to sexual minority supervisees (Bartlett, King, and Phillips 2001) and sexual minority clients (Liddle 1997). Therefore, an orientation that “affirms a lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity as an equally positive human and experience and expression to heterosexual identity” (Davies 1996:25) has been described as a precondition for being helpful to sexual minorities seeking social work services (Crisp 2006b; King et al. 2007; Lyons et al. 2010), and sexual minority supervisors and supervisees find gay-affirming attitudes of vital importance in supervision as well (Burkard et al. 2009; Halpert and Pfaller 2001; Messinger 2007).

Given the intense emotional valence attached to sexual orientation (Herek 2000; Nilsson et al. 2008) and the power that supervisors hold over supervisees (Bogo and Dill 2008), Nilsson et al. (2008:569) argued that supervisors have a duty to “be aware of and willing to address their own overt and covert attitudes, beliefs, and biases regarding sexual orientation, as well as subtle heterosexist beliefs and privileges,” including ignorance, as “these may negatively impact the quality of supervision provided.” Zapata (2010) described this ongoing self-assessment and self-awareness as a basic multicultural competency in supervisory practice.

As a consequence of the power of their position (Sue and Sue 2003), Gatmon et al. (2001) also believe that supervisors should take the lead in addressing issues of sexual orientation, “the multicultural variable discussed least in supervision” (Harbin et al. 2008:62). This presupposes, of course, a competent supervisor (Lyons et al. 2010), with an affirmative attitude to sexual minorities (Burkard et al. 2009; Crisp 2006a, 2006b), an appropriate knowledge base (Charnley and Langley 2007; Satterly and Dyson 2008), an affirming and supportive supervisory environment (McGann 2010; Messinger 2007; Nilsson et al. 2008), and a clear linkage between the discussion of sexual orientation and its practice implications (Ladany, Friedlander, and Nelson 2005). The limited empirical evidence suggests that these are the most important supervisory variables in achieving successful outcomes with sexual minority supervisees (Burkard et al. 2009; McGann 2010; Messinger 2007).

An affirmative attitude necessarily begins with the supervisor’s systematic appraisal of his or her own heterosexism and homophobia and their expression in behavior and speech (Harbin, Leach, and Eells 2008). Indices of heterosexism and homophobia include viewing heterosexuality as normal and viewing homosexuality as a choice (Swank and Raiz 2010) or disordered identity or behavior (Halpert and Pfaller 2001), and a number of self-assessment measures have been developed that may be helpful for this purpose (Bidell 2005; Crisp 2006b). Even minor “snubs, dismissive looks, gestures, and tones” that communicate heterosexist or homophobic attitudes may be experienced as interpersonal “microaggressions” that deliver a hidden denigrating, hostile, or negative message, however subtle to others they may seem (Shelton and Delgado-Romero 2011:210). Long (2002:68), for example, suggested that “a supervisee ask a client, whose sexual orientation is unknown, ‘at what age they first engaged in sexual activity’ rather than at what age the client first



had sexual intercourse,” and “not to assume that clients are heterosexual if clients say they are married.”

Talking about human sexuality is “probably the most uncomfortable topic in supervision,” but some evidence suggests that this may be an area in which a calibrated measure of self-disclosure can help establish the “safe learning environment” required “for supervisees to explore their weaknesses and vulnerabilities, specifically around the normal range of sexual feelings bound to arise” in practice and supervision (Ladany, Friedlander, and Nelson 2005:127). The implications of “nondisclosure of personal sexual orientation may be profound” in supervision, “particularly in the context of remaining in the closet or coming out” (Farber 2006:173). However, self-disclosure “yielded largely positive effects on supervisors, supervisees, and the supervisory relationship” in a qualitative study of sixteen supervisors by Knox et al. (2008:543), who found that supervisors use self-disclosure to “enhance supervisee development and normalize their experience,” but not “when it was developmentally inappropriate” or threatened to derail supervision. Self-disclosure also “emerged as a central theme in the establishment of a positive learning environment for lesbian and gay students” in a qualitative study by Newman, Bogo, and Daley (2008:215). “Supervisors who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered (LGBT)” and “have gone through a coming-out process in their professional development,” may disclose their sexual orientation in supervision, as they are “less likely ... to be closeted [than their LGBT] supervisees, who are new to the profession and are vulnerable by virtue of their subordinate status” (Ladany et al. 2005:181).

On the other hand, “an important dynamic occurs when supervisor and supervisee have different sexual orientations. This circumstance can be particularly challenging because sexual orientation is typically not visible. ... Either member of the dyad may choose not to be ‘out’ in the supervisory relationship for any number of reasons” (Ladany et al. 2005:181). Here, Pfohl (2004:139) believes that “heterosexual supervisors” may still have a “[r]ole in [f]ostering the [d]evelopment of [s]exual [m]inority [s]upervisees.” That role might include coming out “first, as a professional who is openly supportive and affirming to gays and lesbians,” or by “promoting a safe and affirming environment [with] a ‘Safe Space’ or ‘Ally’ sign in the office that includes a positive symbol of sexual minority culture (rainbow flag, pink triangle)” (Pfohl 2004:148).

The knowledge base for supervisory discussions of practice with sexual minorities includes a general understanding of sexual minority identity development (Halpert et al. 2007; Lyons et al. 2010; Rosario 2010; Satterly and Dyson 2008) and “supervisor self-awareness” including his or her “own developmental struggles in working with LGB clients” (McGann 2010:34). In many cases, that awareness and knowledge may be stunted (Genther 2012), as the majority of clinicians in a random sample of 1,300 NASW members reported having no coursework in human sexuality during training (Strawgate-Kanefsky 2000), and as LGBT issues still have limited visibility in major social work journals (Voorhis and Wagner 2002). In the service of continuing

education, Long suggested:

The best way to increase one's knowledge about lesbians, gays, and bisexuals is to seek out personal and professional relationships with member of these groups. ... Asked what they would like [their supervisors and their workers] to know about being gay or lesbian ... [members of those groups have said] the invisibility of our relationship to the majority of persons with whom we come in contact every day; knowledge of the "coming out" process, including dealing with family and friends; "coming out" issues in the work environment; knowledge of the gay rights movement; awareness of the major social battles facing gays and lesbians; and an awareness of the effects of homophobic actions, including the fear of being harmed or killed because of one's sexual orientation. ... Supervisors' understanding of these issues greatly increases when they do not simply read about them but actually know persons who struggle with these issues on a daily basis. (Long 2002:63)

Something needs to be said in mitigation of some of the problems regarding race, gender, and sexual orientation noted in the last few pages. In each instance, different stereotypes may tend to shape *initial* behavioral responses in the supervisory relationship (Shen-Miller et al. 2011). Unfortunately, much of the research examining the supervisory variables of race, ethnicity, and gender has sampled supervised students in training, at the advent of professional practice, and at one point in time. Ideally, the actual experience of working with a supervisor or supervisee who is different in some way may vitiate the significance of some of these differences over time. Successfully working together results in people seeing one another as fellow professionals in a neutral race-ethnicity-gender context. Stereotypes tend to be modified or lose their potency to determine perception as people experience the actual person behind the label, as they get to know each other by working together. On the other hand, some gender-role expectations (e.g., that male social workers have the ability, courage, and strength to tolerate and manage dangerous situations) are both prevalent (Lowe 2011) and enduring (O'Neil 2008; Shen-Miller et al. 2011).

The relationship between supervisor and supervisee established over time may be more significant than the factors of ethnicity, gender, race, and sexual orientation (Jordan 2006). Prejudice, misunderstanding, and residuals of sexism, heterosexism, and racism may decline or be resolved for the particular supervisee dyad as a consequence of continuing contact and development of a positive relationship. The supervisor's competence in performing her administrative, educational, and supportive functions vis-à-vis the supervisee may take precedence over considerations of race or gender. Furthermore, a cultural differences between supervisor and supervisee does not necessarily, invariably, make a critical difference. Although it may encourage sensitivity and openness to a recognition of difference, that alone may not be a cogent variable in many supervisor-supervisee interactions (Fong and Lease 1997:403).

It needs to be noted that discussions of cultural differences require a very great simplification of reality. Talking about African Americans and whites; about women, men, and transgendered persons; or about bisexuals, lesbians, and gays tends to ignore the very considerable heterogeneity and diversity within groups. Consequently, although the supervisor may be approaching the supervisee with the recognition that he or she is in some way culturally different, the ultimate necessity of discovering and understanding the singular individuality of the particular supervisee needs to be

constantly considered. The African American experience is not the same for every African American supervisee. In addition, culture is dynamic and knowledge about culture is soon archaic. African American culture in the year 2012 is different from African American culture in 1950, and gender relationships in the year 2012 differ from those in the 1980s and 1990s.

### ***Safety in the Workplace: A Problem for Supervision***

The social work supervisor has a key role to play in the establishment, preservation, and management of safety in the workplace (Occupational Safety and Health Administration [OSHA] 2004; Paetzold, O'Leary-Kelly, and Griffin 2007; Peng-Sui Tan 2006). Threats and disruptions to safety are a significant problem for the supervisor, because "social workers are being asked to deal with increasingly difficult and potentially volatile client situations, ranging from child abuse and family conflict to substance abuse and domestic violence" (Jayaratne, Vinocur-Kaplan, Nagda, and Chess 1996; Newhill 2002; Shin 2011), and because people and practice are imperfect and messy (Maypole 1986; Ringstad 2005; van Heugten 2010). Perhaps the most benign thing to be said about working in an unsafe environment is that it elicits fear in the worker; it is a source of stress and burnout (Beaver 1999; Littlechild 2005) that alters their perceptions, cognitions, and judgments (Davis 2001), and impairs their performance (Littlechild 2002). In addition to the sources and sequelae of stress reviewed in [chapter 6](#), exposure to workplace violence can be frightening (Criss 2010), traumatic (Didham et al. 2011), disabling (Regehr and Glancy 2011), and lethal (Jayaratne et al. 2004; Littlechild 2002, 2005). We have selected two topics from the supervisor's portfolio of safety concerns to examine in some depth: violence in the workplace and sexual harassment.

*Violence in the Workplace* "Social services workers are nearly six times more likely than other workers to experience workplace violence" (Respass and Payne 2008:131). The scope and significance of this problem led OSHA to publish specialized *Guidelines for Preventing Workplace Violence for Health Care and Social Service Workers* to help employers comply with the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, under which "all employers have a general duty to provide their employees with a workplace free from recognized hazards likely to cause death or physical harm" (OSHA 2004:3). From a legal point of view, "to maintain a safe workplace and minimize liability, employers must take steps to prevent workplace violence and respond appropriately to it when it occurs" (Shumaker and Feldstein 2004:34; see also Beaver 1997, Lowe and Korr 2007, Newhill 2002, Regehr and Glancy 2011). From a practical point of view, supervisors have a duty to develop and administer an appropriate workplace violence policy, train workers in violence prevention and management, and provide for their physical and psychosocial security. See Lowe (2003) and Peng-Sui Tan (2006) for in-depth and evidence-based discussions and recommendations.

Workplace violence is a broad construct that includes the following:

(a) arson, (b) biting, (c) burning or scalding, (d) choking, (e) grabbing, (f) harassment (serious and persistent, e.g., racial, sexual, stalking), (g) scratching, (h) sexual assaults (e.g., fondling, inappropriate touching, rape), (i) shoving, (j) spitting, (k) striking (e.g., gouging, kicking, pinching, punching, slapping), (l) throwing objects, (m) tripping, (n) using a weapon (e.g., glass shard, explosive, firearm, knife, paperweight, poison), and (o) verbal or non-verbal threats to commit violence. (Peng-Sui Tan 2006:75–76)

A national random survey of 1,029 members of NASW reported that “an overwhelming majority” of respondents had experienced some type of violence from clients during their social work career, and 62 percent of respondents reported that they had been victims of physical or psychological assaults on the job (Ringstad 2005:308). Criss (2010) reported national prevalence rates indicating that 65 percent to 86 percent of social workers have encountered violence by a client at some point during their careers. In a review of the literature, Newhill (2002) found that one out of eleven clients seen in a variety of psychotherapy settings was threatening or presented a danger of assault to others. Similar findings have been reported by Jayaratne, Croxton, and Mattison (2004), Lowe (2011), Macdonald and Sirotich (2001), Ringstad (2009), and others.

The risk of violence from clients has been described as particularly high in the fields of child protection (Shin 2011; Littlechild 2002, 2005), mental health and corrections (Jayaratne et al. 2004; Newhill 2002), and residential care (Winstanley and Hales 2008), although the problem appears to be widespread (Criss 2010; Respass and Payne 2008). Moreover, the evidence suggests that workplace violence between client and worker in some fields of practice goes both ways (Ringstad 2005; 2009).

A prevalence rate of 41.7 percent for direct client violence in a national study of 595 social work students (Criss 2010) suggests that social workers are first exposed to violence as practicum students in the field (Didham et al. 2011). Despite their early exposure to violence and the fear that it breeds, Criss (2010:382) found the occupational commitment of the social work students in her study was unaffected or grew stronger, perhaps “because it is too costly for them to quit.” Some evidence suggests that violent incidents frequently go unreported by experienced social workers (Spencer and Munch 2003), perhaps because violence has become routine or perhaps because reporting is discouraged (Respass and Payne (2008). Other evidence suggests that approximately one-quarter of social workers do not report incidents of actual or threatened violence, for reasons that include: “Situation was not serious enough,” “It is considered part of my job,” “Nothing would be gained by reporting,” “Negative consequences for client,” “Might appear that I cannot cope,” “Agency might not be supportive,” and “Concern that I might be blamed for incident,” although “nonreporting of client violence is largely influenced by abused workers’ view of the seriousness of the violent incident and their view of their professional role” (Macdonald and Sirotich 2001:111–12).

According to the NASW (2011:1), 44 percent of the respondents to the NASW Workforce study (Whitaker et al. 2006a) reported that they faced personal safety issues on the job, and 30 percent of those with concerns did not feel that “their employers adequately addressed the safety issues.” In our own analysis of the

Workforce survey of licensed social workers in the United States (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004), 46.4 percent of supervisors and 48.7 percent of supervisees agreed that they faced personal safety issues at work. Although the difference between the two groups fell short of statistical significance across all fields of practice, the two groups did differ statistically in the high-risk field of mental health (Peng-Sui Tan 2006), suggesting that social work supervisors in the major field of practice may be somewhat less aware of, exposed to, or concerned with threats to personal safety than their supervisees. Of licensed social workers who did report safety issues on the job, significantly more supervisees (15 percent) than supervisors (12.6 percent) across fields of practice said that their employers had failed to take appropriate steps to protect them. This suggests that social work supervisors may be less concerned about job safety issues than their supervisees (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004).

Of some concern is a recent suggestion that social work supervisors, the majority of whom are female, may make gendered case assignments that expose male supervisees to a greater risk of client-related violence. In an experiment designed to test “the effect of gender-sensitive decision-making as it relates to risk management” (Lowe 2003:iv) in the case assignment of clients to male social workers, Lowe (2003, 2011) drew a national random sample ( $n = 181$ ) from the membership of NASW with mental health as their primary field of practice and supervision as their primary practice function. Using case vignettes to manipulate the experimental condition, Lowe found that male clients were more likely to be assigned to male social workers, and that the supervisor’s female gender, a client’s history of violence, and agency safety practices interacted to significantly increase the likelihood of assignment to male social workers. Thus, of male supervisees who accept without question dangerous assignments from female supervisors, it may be said that courtly behavior has its price.

Some modes and venues of practice, of course, are riskier than others (Rey 1996). This includes the practice of making home visits, the subject of a qualitative study of social workers by Vergara (2006), in which 93 percent had experienced one or more types of violence, with both positive and negative effects on their job performance and client relationships. More than 90 percent of the social workers did report their experiences with violence to their supervisors, but less than 30 percent submitted a formal report to their employer. Although nearly 86 percent were satisfied with their supervisor’s response and more than 90 percent were satisfied with the safety policies and procedures of the workplace, all of them had recommendations for improvements in workplace strategies for prevention and intervention, physical safety tools, and supervision. For safety recommendations, see Lowe (2003), OSHA (2004), Peng-Sui Tan (2006), and Respass and Payne (2008).

*Sexual Harassment* The NASW (2008) Code of Ethics explicitly prohibits the sexual harassment of clients, colleagues, students, supervisees, and trainees, or colleagues, as well as sexual activities or contact between social work supervisors

and those over whom they exercise professional authority (Reamer 1998). A form of discrimination that violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, sexual harassment is defined in Title 29, Section 1604.11 of the Federal Code:

(a) Harassment on the basis of sex is a violation of section 703 of title VII. Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when (1) submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment, (2) submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such individual, or (3) such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment. (U.S. Government Printing Office, 2011)

In fiscal year 2010, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) received 11,717 charges of sexual harassment. Of those charges, 83.6 percent were filed by women and 16.4 percent were filed by men, continuing a growing trend of male-initiated charges (EEOC 2011). In the same year, EEOC resolved 12,772 sexual harassment charges from fiscal year 2007 and recovered \$48.4 million in monetary benefits for charging parties and other aggrieved individuals, excluding monetary benefits obtained through litigation (EEOC 2011). Although not without controversy (Sapper 2011), the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (2004) has begun to define sexual harassment as a form of workplace violence as well (see also Paetzold et al. 2007).

In recent reviews of case law, Conte (2010) and Gould (2000:238) distinguished two forms of sexual harassment, *quid pro quo* cases, in which "harassment is said to occur when an employee's job is made dependent on performing sexual favors," and *hostile environment* cases, in which "unwelcome" and "offensive" sexual speech or conduct becomes "sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions of the victim's employment." Because a thorough review of the developing case law is beyond the scope of this discussion, interested readers should examine French (2009), O'Leary-Kelly et al. (2009), Pignotti (2007), *Vance v. Ball State University* (2013), and Zugelder, Champagne, and Maurer (2006). For even more depth, see the detailed two-volume discussion by Conte (2010), which provides an encyclopedic history of sexual harassment law in the United States as well as a state-by-state survey of case and statutory law. Although Title VII is a federal law that applies to employers with fifteen or more employees (including state and local governments, employment agencies, and labor organizations), for the supervisor the devil is in the details because the states also recognize sexual harassment as a cause of action, and it is not uncommon for state and federal laws to diverge (Pignotti 2007:216).

Social workers enjoy no immunity from sexual harassment (Maypole 1986; Risley-Curtiss and Hudson 1998), which may come from above, such as at the hands of an administrative supervisor (Zugelder, Champagne, and Maurer 2006), from below as a result of client behavior (deMayo 2000; Hartl 2007), or from the side, in the form of harassment by a coworker or colleagues within the work unit (Paetzold et al. 2007). Although most victims of sexual harassment have been women (Cloud 1998), Paludi et al. (2006) noted that men also can be the victims of sexual harassment, citing large Congressional studies in which 42–44 percent of women and 14–19 percent of men

reported having experienced at least one incident of sexual harassment during the prior 24 months of federal employment.

The supervisor has the responsibility of protecting the supervisee from any kind of sexual harassment within the work unit for which the supervisor is accountable (Dooley, Housley, and Guest 1993; Reamer 2003). This duty is rooted in solid ground yet, at the margins, in muddy waters. Interpersonal perceptions and legal constructions of sexual harassment may widely vary (Pignotti 2007; Wooster 2010) because there may be contextual, experiential, and subjective dimensions to “unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature” (Christie 2009; U.S. Department of Education 2008).

Supervisors are involved with questions of sexual harassment at two different levels. They might use their power position over the worker to make unwanted sexual comments and advances. They are also involved in protecting workers from sexual harassment from administrative superiors, peers, and clients.

Some of the general rulings that developed under the Civil Rights Act of 1964 have been applied to incidents of sexual harassment. In such cases, supervisors may be held liable for such acts perpetrated on supervisees for whom they have responsibility. Based on Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, courts have held agency administrators responsible for sexual harassment by subordinates, just as a taxi company would be held responsible for reckless driving on the part of its drivers. Although the federal courts have unanimously held that a supervisor may not be held liable “in his individual capacity” for his acts of sexual harassment under Title VII, “a few states recently have reached the opposite conclusion” (Pignotti 2007:216).

Sexual harassment is a possible danger in both cross-gender and same-gender supervision because the power differential is so clearly in the supervisor’s favor. As a consequence, the supervisee is vulnerable and the supervisor might use the position to obtain sexual advantages. Where there is a difference in power, there is no true voluntary informed consent. Because of differences in power, autonomy, and status, the supervisory relationship presents opportunities for unwanted, unsolicited, and unwelcome sexual behaviors.

The supervisor-supervisee relationship is one that provides the supervisor with the possibility of exerting undue influence. Undue influence situations are defined as those situations in which there is inequality in the relationship, one member of the pair is dependent for some reason on the other, or one member of the pair is induced to have confidence in the other. In the context of a relationship of undue influence, the potential impact of the supervisor’s power is intensified.

The supervisee is vulnerable to advances from the supervisor because of the fact that the supervisor does possess real power with regard to the worker’s career and that such power is exercised in response to evaluations that have considerable elements of subjectivity. Such vulnerability requires protection from sexual harassment. Differences in power might lead to *quid pro quo* forms of harassment in which a supervisor implies the offer of some work-related benefit in return for sexual favors.

Furthermore, it needs to be recognized that the supervisor-supervisee relationship has many of the elements of an intimate relationship. People meet with some regularity in private to discuss matters that often are of an emotional, personal nature. The affective intensity of the relationship is deliberately fostered because it provides the necessary context for effective supervision.

Because the advantage of power lies with the supervisor, in this close relationship he or she must take greater responsibility for managing boundary crossings and transgressions (Fulst 2002; Hardy 2011), aborting any action that risks the conversion of a professional relationship to an unethical dual relationship (NASW 2008). The supervisor has to be held to a higher standard of conduct than the supervisee. This does not absolve the supervisee from the responsibility of refraining from any action, suggestion, or innuendo that implies (directly or indirectly) interest in such a change in the relationship.

The possibility of sexual harassment seems most likely in the vertical, hierarchical relationship (worker-supervisor, worker-administrator), where there is considerable power differential. However, the supervisor needs to be aware that coworker relationships and worker-client relationships are also possible contexts for sexual harassment.

A questionnaire returned by 319 NASW members in a Midwest state in 1982 indicated that 36 percent of the female respondents and 14 percent of the male respondents had experienced sexual harassment on the job. The most frequent kind of harassment experienced was verbal, such as jokes, propositions, and demeaning flattery. Unwanted touching was less frequent. The person doing the harassing was equally often a client, coworker, or supervisor/administrator (Maypole 1986). Such forms of harassment are experienced as a hostile work environment. The victim of sexual harassment is most frequently a younger female in a subordinate position. Among the most frequent perpetrators is an older, male supervisor (Maypole 1986).

In addition to achieving a measure of self-education regarding the subtleties of sexual harassment, supervisors have the obligation of interpreting to their staff the kinds of behaviors that are not acceptable. In light of recent Supreme Court rulings, Conte (2010) cautioned that human service agencies should adopt and enforce antiharassment policies to achieve a nonsexist work climate.

The problem of sexual harassment in supervision requires educating workers as to what is involved. There is general awareness of harassing behaviors that are obvious, overt, and unambiguous. Education is necessitated by the need to bring to awareness the fact that looks, gestures, jokes, innuendoes, suggestive remarks, insulting comments, or ogling might also be perceived as sexual harassment. In fact, studies indicate that the most obvious forms of sexual harassment represent only a small percentage of the source of complaints. The more frequent source of complaints relate to the more subtle forms (Conte 2010; Maypole and Skaine 1982; Maypole 1986).

The subtleties of sexist communications were listed by a worker in a probation and parole office. She said she was constantly subjected to seemingly innocent but



nevertheless offensive “stone age” remarks such as “women are better note takers than men, so you take the minutes” and “problems in decision making are just in the ‘nature of the beast’ for women.”

Being alert to the manifestations of sexual harassment is important to the supervisor as the administrative officer to whom formal complaints initially need to be addressed. Having educated workers and having set guidelines, the supervisor has to communicate receptivity to complaints regarding such behaviors and a serious response to such complaints.

This can become messy when the offender is a client (Jayaratne et al. 1996), as illustrated by Savaya, Gardner, and Stange (2011:69), who described the dilemma of supervising younger female workers who were “deeply embarrassed or disconcerted by clients’ discussions of sexual problems or by their accounts of childhood incest or rape.” Thus, deMayo (2000:706) asked, “How do clinical supervisors respond to supervisees’ reports of sexualized or sexually harassing behaviors by patients? How do supervisors help supervisees distinguish erotic transference reactions from sexual harassment of a therapist?” These are hard questions to answer (Hartl et al. 2007) and muddy waters indeed (Bywater and Jones 2007; Fults 2002; Strawgate-Kanefsky 2000), so many supervisors and workers simply avoid them (Begun 2011; Pope, Sonne, and Greene 2006). Although sexual attraction to clients is not uncommon (Fisher 2004), research suggests that most workers “believe that their training programs did not adequately address” the issue of sexual attraction toward clients, and will “find it helpful when supervisors normalize the sexual attraction and provide the opportunity to explore feelings in supervision” (Ladany et al. 1997:413).

In the past, workers who experienced sexual harassment from coworkers and/or clients rarely sought the protection of their supervisor or reported it to them (Maypole and Skaine 1982:690). It was felt that the report might be treated lightly if not ridiculed, and there was little conviction that any effective action would be taken. The typical response of the victim was either ignoring or avoiding the behavior, much less frequently confronting and/or reporting the behavior. More recent evidence suggests that workers now have more varied responses to harassment (Newhill 2002; Regehr and Glancy 2011; Savaya, Gardner, and Stange 2011). This may be a function of progress (O’Leary-Kelly et al. 2009) or workplace policies, procedures, and training (Lowe and Korr 2007; Peng-Sui Tan 2006). Supervisors have a duty to encourage and respond receptively to supervisee reporting.

The current sensitivity to the possibilities of sexual harassment in supervision is justifiable and necessary. However, it may present a problem for both male and female supervisors. Maccoby (1976) noted that male supervisors, anxious about imputations of sexual harassment, often withhold needed encouragement from female supervisees; on the other hand, female supervisors may feel hesitant about assuming a warm, nurturing, supportive approach with male supervisees. Vigorous supportive supervision may be regarded as an invitation to intimacy.

A case that most graphically illustrates this complication involves, paradoxically, a charge by a male supervisee against a female supervisor. The worker alleged that his

female supervisor made sexual advances, and when he failed to respond he was denied recommendation for promotion. A jury awarded the male supervisee \$196,500 in compensatory and punitive damages. In commenting on the verdict, the Wisconsin assistant attorney general, who defended the supervisor, noted that “supervisors, especially those who are women, will have to step carefully through management techniques that call for being supportive to subordinate personnel. Otherwise it would be difficult to avoid the allegation of sexual harassment” (Madison, *Capital Times* July 17, 1982). The accused supervisor said that as a result of the verdict, she was changing her approach to supervision, giving fewer compliments and being more direct in criticism (Madison, *Capital Times*, July 24, 1982).

#### ***Problems Related to Hierarchical Position***

Special problems related to the unique position of the supervisor in the agency's hierarchical structure sometimes arise. The supervisor is a linkage pin in the organization—he or she links two groups (direct service workers and administrators) and is a common member of the two dyads (supervisee-supervisor, supervisor-administrator), being a supraordinate in one and a subordinate in the other. Joining the two groups in which he or she is a member, the supervisor facilitates communications between them, advocates for one group with the other group, and attempts to mitigate distrust and friction between the two groups. The supervisor is sometimes involved in cross-role translation by communicating workers' concerns in a language that is comprehensible to administrators and, similarly, translating administrators' concerns to workers so that they are understandable.

In addition to translating communications, the supervisor is also concerned with reconciling differences in the problems and viewpoints between workers and administrators. The supervisor takes a multipositional orientation. The supervisor has to understand and accept the legitimacy of the different needs of the different members of the role set, to broker and negotiate between conflicting needs of the worker for autonomy and administrators' need for accountability. Allied with both, the supervisor must maintain some freedom from firm allegiance to either group. As a member of two different role sets, the supervisor has multiple and sometimes conflicting loyalties.

In a study of sixty-two public welfare supervisors, Erera (1991a, 1991b) found that implementing these responsibilities created stress because organizational policies were often ambiguous and incompatible.

*Working with Administrators* It has been said that where you stand depends on where you sit. Administrators, supervisors, and direct service workers have different problems that need to be solved, different constituencies who are their primary concerns, different clusters of information to which they give attention, different sources of satisfaction, different prerogatives to be protected, and different personal anxieties. Administrators are concerned with policy reflecting the needs and preferences formulated in the politics of the general community. Service personnel

are concerned with the needs and preferences of a particular segment of the community—the clients of the agency. The need to accommodate simultaneous conflicting pressures from administrators and supervisees creates tension for the supervisor. Influence with supervisees in getting them to do a good job increases the supervisors' influence with administration because administration admires a supervisor who achieves trouble-free, efficient, and effective production.

The supervisor who controls more resources has a greater power. By making these resources available selectively, the supervisor has the possibility of dispersing a greater number of rewards. Control of resources results from the influence the supervisor has with administration. Influence with administration thus increases influence with supervisees.

Fluctuations in supervisory power are reflective of changes in reciprocal interaction with others in the supervisory role set. If the supervisor has effective influence with his or her work unit and is able to motivate them to more effective performance, this increases the supervisor's power vis-à-vis the administrator. If the supervisor has more influence with the administrator, this increases the likelihood that his or her unit would have increased access to agency resources, which increases the supervisor's power with his or her work unit.

*Understanding and Working with Administrators* Because the supervisor was more likely to have been a worker and less likely to have been an administrator, it is to be expected that supervisors would initially be more attuned, understanding, and empathic with needs of the workers rather than the administrator. Bonding, alliance, and allegiance are likely to be stronger in the supervisor-worker relationship than in the supervisor-administrator relationship. However, supervisors, facing both ways, have the responsibility of working effectively with administrators as well as with supervisees. There has to be some understanding of where the administrator is coming from, what his or her needs and preferences are to implement the job successfully, and how the supervisor can help the administrator achieve his or her objectives (Austin 1988).

The administrator is not the enemy, and acting to assist the administrator is not an act of disloyalty to the rank and file. However, just as the supervisor has to empathize with supervisees, seeing the world from the perspective of client contacts, so the supervisor needs to empathize with administrators, seeing the world from the perspective of the agency's relationship to the community. Administrators, like supervisees, need a trusting, supportive relationship with the people with whom they work. Administrators share with supervisors and supervisees a commitment to agency goals and objectives. They would like to see the agency operate as effectively as possible, not only because it makes them look good but because such an agency is best for the clients. Without feeling that it is demeaning and with some respect for the limited time most administrators have available, it might prevent problems if the supervisor were to discuss a difficult decision with the administrator beforehand. This signifies a generally positive attitude toward the administrator on the

part of the supervisor. It suggests a cooperative stance in the mission in which both are jointly engaged. Most administrators appreciate a supervisor's approach to a problem if the discussion includes a clear statement of the problem, the possible alternatives to dealing with the problem, and the solution that the supervisor feels is the most likely alternative.

Acting effectively in a subordinate position to the administrator requires balancing a number of antithetical pressures on the part of the supervisor. The need to be open in discussing problems with the administrator conflicts with the need to be self-protective. The need to display initiative contradicts the need to appear noncompetitive with the administrator. There is a need to explicitly suggest what the workers want from the administration and yet to avoid being so explicit as to deny the administrator some flexibility in response.

If supervisors have a problem with assertively employing power and authority in their relationship with supervisees, they have an analogous problem in being appropriately assertive in their relationship with administrators. Although their position requires that they advocate assertively for staff and in behalf of necessary changes in policy, many supervisors find this difficult to do.

In a questionnaire study of supervisors' shortcomings, both supervisors and supervisees reported this as a problem. Supervisors said the following:

- I tend to be hesitant to speak up for staff to higher administrators.
- I have difficulty in negotiating between administrative demands and vested interests of supervisees.
- I am reluctant to approach higher administrators with ideas for correcting inefficiency in service delivery.
- Being weak in facing administrators with agency policy that is not in the best interests of the client.

Supervisees said the following:

- She does not have the backbone to stand up to the director.
- Too eager to be a "good guy" to everybody and not willing to communicate workers' needs to administration.
- His primary focus on covering his own tail keeps him from adequately supporting or advocating for his workers with administration.
- She is ambivalent about her authority, which militates against her ability to advocate with administration in behalf of staff. (Kadushin 1992b:16)

### **Summary of Stresses Encountered by Supervisors**

We have noted the stresses supervisors face in making a transition to the position and the stresses they encounter in implementing their responsibilities as supervisors. These relate to the demands of the position; the conflicting needs of administration, workers, and clients; and problems relating to gender and race. [Table 7.1](#)

recapitulates some of the dissatisfactions with the supervisory role, as noted by supervisors, which reflect the different kinds of stress encountered on the job.

**TABLE 7.1** *Sources of supervisor dissatisfaction in supervision*

<i>Item</i>	<i>Percentage of supervisors checking item as a strong source of dissatisfaction (n = 469)</i>
Dissatisfaction with administrative "housekeeping" (red tape, details in caseload audits, time sheets, statistical reports, etc.).	71
Dissatisfaction because other heavy responsibilities of the job not related to work with supervisees prevent me from giving as much time as I would like to supervisees.	53
Loss of the direct worker-client contact and relationship.	46
Dissatisfaction related to need to get workers' adherence to agency policy and procedure with which I disagree.	41
Dissatisfaction with having to work with supervisees who are resistive or hostile or dependent or slow learners, etc.	39
Dissatisfaction from being tied to the desk and to the office.	27
Anxiety at the responsibility of making decisions for which there is no clear-cut agency policy or procedure.	27
Dissatisfaction associated with the conflict between administrative, evaluative aspects of the relationship with supervisees and the educational aspects.	26
Anxiety from not feeling certain that I know enough to be an adequate supervisor.	11
The need to exercise administrative authority in relation to supervisee performance and to evaluate the work of the supervisee	21
Dissatisfaction at the socially and professionally isolated position of the supervisor in my agency.	21
Dissatisfaction with the physical aspects of my job (office, equipment, parking, etc.).	18
Dissatisfaction at finding myself becoming part of the Establishment.	15
Anxiety from being responsible for somebody else's work and being looked to for leadership.	12
Anxiety at having to supervise workers who are older and/or more experienced than myself.	2
Other (miscellaneous).	2

*Source:* From Kadushin, A. (1973). *Supervisor-supervisee: A questionnaire study*. Unpublished manuscript. Madison: School of Social Work, University of Wisconsin.

## **Coping with Stress: Supervisors' Adaptations**

In general, supervisors have fewer supportive resources available to help them cope with work-related stresses than do supervisees (Dill 2007; Regehr et al. 2001; Silver, Poulin, and Manning 1997). Gripping as a form of cathartic release is not as readily available to the supervisor:

Caseworkers could freely complain about agency policies and even, on occasion, defy them, but such options were hardly open to supervisors. Supervisors did critically discuss some aspects of agency functioning in supervisory staff meetings, and such discussions sometimes resulted in policy changes, but many regulations were outside their control, having been set by legislative bodies and the lay board. Regardless of their own feelings, supervisors were expected to enforce all current agency policies. These circumstances created problems for all supervisors, although professionally oriented supervisors were placed in a particularly difficult position. It was their task to help workers to accommodate to the agency's program—to reconcile bureaucratic requirements with professional principles. (Scott 1969:133)

Fewer provisions are made for the formal induction of supervisors into their new role and fewer formal, regularized channels are provided to assure support for new supervisors during the transitional period (Erera and Lazar 1993; Schwartz 1990; Watkins 1999).

Whereas the supervisee has a formal channel of feedback in the supervisor that provides opportunities for commendation, the supervisor has no such formally assigned sources of feedback. Many supervisors live with the stress of not knowing how well they are doing and what (if anything) they should be doing differently. Perhaps the assumption is that if the person is experienced enough to be selected for the position, he or she should be able to operate independently without the need for such support. A supervisor wryly expressed some resentment about this:

My first supervisee was a rather dependent person, who, as we expressed it professionally in her evaluation, "worked best with considerable reassurance and support." In practical terms, this meant that I propped her up while she propped the clients up, and in the end the whole weight fell on me. This left me in need of "considerable reassurance and support" too, but no one thought of that. I was the supervisor and I was paid to have shoulders that were broad. I soon became accustomed to this, however, and eventually I was able to prop several workers up—something like the bottom man in a human acrobatic act—and hardly feel it at all. (H.C.D. 1949:162)

The supervisor rarely has interaction with some member of the hierarchy who has the responsibility of helping him become aware of countertransference toward supervisees. The supposition is that the supervisor is objective and self-aware.

The supervisory peer group is less often a resource for emotional support than is the direct-worker peer group. There are not as many supervisors, so there are fewer possibilities for choice of those with whom one might feel comfortable and congenial. Competition for promotion becomes keener as one moves up the administrative ladder because there are progressively fewer positions available. Consequently, there is less tendency for the supervisors to act as a group and a greater tendency to act as individuals in seeking administrative favor.

It is far more difficult for supervisors than for direct service workers to develop a colleague support group. There are few, if any, functions or activities that require that supervisors work together. There is no formal arrangement analogous to unit meetings that would enable supervisors to get to know each other and develop a relationship. The work of the supervisors, even more than that of the workers, tends to isolate them psychologically and geographically.

Studies of social interaction and peer consultation among direct service workers and supervisors showed a considerably greater amount of interchange among direct service workers as compared with supervisors (Blau and Scott 1962). Where opportunities for supportive collaboration exist, supervisors report more job

satisfaction (Silver et al. 1997; Tebes et al. 2011).

Supervisees are a source of support for supervisors. Their positive response to the supervisor's efforts in helping them develop professionally, their efforts to do a good job, and the occasional compliments they offer the supervisor tend to provide the positive satisfactions that counter strain.

Supervisors are also subject to burnout (Ausbrooks 2011; Regehr et al. 2001). High expectations that they can significantly influence supervisee professional growth while effecting consequential changes in the agency are often frustrated (Erera and Lazar 1994). Supervisors experience burnout by balancing the needs of the organization against the needs of supervisees and/or clients, facing the necessity of obtaining compliance with policies and procedures with which they disagree, trying to carry out their responsibilities with increasingly limited resources of personnel and funds, and becoming emotionally depleted by the need to support and nurture and sustain a unit of supervisees while lacking a support group.

In adjusting, supervisors make deliberate efforts to buffer themselves from supervisees. Too much social contact and too little distance exposes the supervisor to constant pressure from the demands and needs (explicit or implicit) of the supervisees. However, because the supervisor needs the cooperation of the supervisee and a positive relationship with them, too great a social distance is undesirable. In somewhat formalized, controlled contact, the supervisor seeks an optimum balance between too great a familiarity, which risks constant pressure, and too little, which encourages supervisee resistance and alienation.

Supervisors adjust to their situation by developing their own vocabularies of realism. They learn to accept the limitations of their power and authority by discovering that, despite their restricted knowledge and control, most often the terrible things they fear just do not happen. They learn to turn a blind eye and a deaf ear to relatively inconsequential examples of deviance and noncompliance. They learn to recognize the limits of their influence: they can teach the worker to be responsible for his or her learning and they can facilitate interest, motivation, and commitment in the work, but only the worker can *feel* that interest, motivation, and commitment.

A study of 101 human-services managers by Zunz (1998) identified a number of factors that predict supervisory resilience to burnout and stress. A supervisor may benefit from appropriate recognition and feedback because burnout is associated with low feelings of self-worth. Supervisors need social interaction because low levels of interpersonal integration and attachment predict burnout. Opportunities for renewing the supervisor's sense of mission and skills may also be helpful because the strongest predictors of resilience to burnout were commitment to mission and feeling able to get things done and done well.

In dealing with problems in supervision, supervisors can be helped by cognitive reframing. The supervisor who needs to do the very best with all supervisees, who attributes blame to self for every supervisee failure, who thinks he or she is indispensable, or who thinks that all supervisees are lovable (and that if you are nice to them they will be nice to you) can profit from cognitive reframing. The middle

management position subjects the supervisor to pressure from those above and below, but it also presents opportunities for exculpation. The supervisor can explain failures to administration by pointing to the workers and explain failure to the workers by pointing to administration.

Some supervisors may adjust to the stresses of the position by becoming indifferent and doing the minimum to satisfy the requirements. Such a supervisor rewards supervisees who handle their assignments without bothering him or her, who do not bring up any problems, who do not generate any complaints from clients or other agencies, and who do not allow emergencies to develop (or when they do develop, handle them without the supervisor's help). The supervisor's actions are motivated not by a concern with helping the supervisees develop autonomy but rather by a desire to be trouble free. He or she settles for the absence of negatives in the performance of his supervisees rather than encouraging the presence of positives. He or she is not concerned with noncompliance as long as the supervisees take the risk and are not too blatant about it.

There are numerous compensating gratifications that offset, and make acceptable, the increased stresses occasioned by the appointment to supervisor (DeConinck and Stillwell 2004; Poulin 1995; Schwartz 1990; Silver et al. 1997). [Table 7.2](#) ranks satisfaction in supervision as described by supervisors. The list points to the kinds of social and emotional returns from their jobs that sustain supervisors in dealing with job-related tensions.

**TABLE 7.2** *Sources of supervisor satisfaction in supervision*

<i>Item</i>	<i>Percentage of supervisors checking item as a strong source of satisfaction (n = 469)</i>
Satisfaction in helping the supervisee grow and develop in professional competence.	88
Satisfaction in ensuring more efficient and effective service to more clients through my supervisory activity.	75
Satisfaction in sharing my social work knowledge and skills with supervisees.	63
Satisfaction in the greater opportunity and leverage to affect changes in agency policy and procedures.	45
Satisfaction in the stimulation provided by curious, idealistic, and enthusiastic supervisees.	44
Satisfaction in helping the supervisee grow and develop as a person.	37
Satisfaction in a more diversified job.	31
Satisfaction in having others look to me for leadership, advice, direction.	24
Satisfaction in being able to provide emotional support to supervisees when needed.	23
Satisfaction in increased salary that goes with job.	23
Satisfaction in contacts with professionally qualified and interesting fellow supervisors.	18



Satisfaction in the status and authority the position gives me.	9
Satisfaction in being free from contact with difficult clients and a heavy caseload.	5
Satisfaction in helping supervisees with their personal problems.	1
Satisfaction with the physical aspects of the supervisor's job (better office, parking privileges, etc.).	1
Other (miscellaneous)	2

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Source: From Kadushin, A. (1973). *Supervisor-supervisee: A questionnaire study*. Unpublished manuscript. Madison: School of Social Work, University of Wisconsin.

## The “Good” Supervisor

At various points in the text, reference has been made in passing to factors that characterize “good” supervision. Our objective at this point is to pull together and highlight these factors in a systematic way. The recapitulation is based on reviews of the supervision research literature, empirical studies of effective and ineffective supervision, studies of supervision associated with supervisees’ positive and negative responses to supervisors, and studies that define the kind of supervision that has the highest possibility of achieving the objectives of supervision.

It needs to be noted that the picture of the “good” supervisor that emerges from the research is derived primarily from findings regarding supervisee satisfactions and preferences (Bogo et al. 2011). The “good” supervisor is one the supervisees most prefer, find satisfactory, respond to positively, like, and trust.

Little empirical research into outcomes related to the supervisee, and especially to the supervisee’s clients, has been done (Milne 2009; Watkins 2011a). Outcome research would provide results showing that the good supervisor’s supervisees are more efficient, effective, and learn more and better than supervisees of other supervisors, or that clients of the good supervisor’s supervisees made quicker and better progress in their treatment (Kadushin 1981; Lambert et al. 2001; Watkins 2011a).

The following listing presents a composite picture of the good supervisor, organized in terms of the supervisory functions discussed in the text—administrative supervision, educational-clinical supervision, and supportive supervision.

As an *administrator*, the good supervisor:

1. Accepts, is comfortable with, and appropriately implements the administrative authority and power inherent in the position in a nonauthoritarian manner; holds workers accountable for assigned work and sensitively but determinedly evaluates supervisees practice; balances support and clear expectations of work in conformity with clearly defined performance standards
2. Provides clearly structured procedures and constructive feedback for workers in their relation to the agency and their clinical practice: The “good” supervisor provides direction, confronts when appropriate, and provides constructive, honest,

critical feedback in a way that respects supervisees' strength and confident growth toward independence

3. Makes active efforts to integrate agency's need for production with the socioemotional needs of the workers, balances agency output objectives with workers morale, makes task demands with concern for employees, and balances instrumental tasks with expressive needs
4. Is unobtrusive in supervision, so that supervisees know that they are being supervised but are not consciously and explicitly aware of this; availability without continuous presence is manifested
5. Is generally physically available as well as psychologically accessible and approachable
6. Develops and maintains good interpersonal relationships among the group of workers he or she supervises
7. Communicates effectively up as well as down the hierarchical communication ladder, vigorously representing workers messages for administration's consideration, and representing administration's concerns fairly and understandingly to supervisees
8. Balances the agency's need for stability with need to change and is ready to advocate for validated change

As an *educator*, the good supervisor:

1. Has a positive, forward-looking attitude toward social work and its mandate; displays a solidarity with and commitment to the profession; embodies the values of the profession in his or her behavior
2. Displays a sincere interest in promoting supervisee learning and professional development, balancing control and direction with respect for supervisee's autonomy
3. Has expert, updated knowledge of evidence-based practice theory and methods and is ready to share such expertise in providing the supervisee with information and suggestions relevant to practice problems
4. Has a problem-solving orientation toward the work of the supervisee based on consensus and cooperation derived from democratic participation rather than power-centered techniques and superordinate-subordinate relationships
5. Provides a clear flexible structure for the supervisor-supervisee relationship
6. Actively prepares for conferences and group supervisory meetings; preparation involves review of knowledge of supervisees as well as knowledge of content
7. Is culturally sensitive in helping the supervisee to understand clients in their situation; is nonsexist, nonheterosexist, and nonracist in orientation
8. Establishes benign relationships with supervisees characterized by a sense of psychological safety—accepting, warm, empathic, respectful, interested, supportive, flexible, genuine

9. Is ready, willing, and able to share expertise, effectively teaching practice in a way that optimally facilitates learning; sharing involves readiness to engage in appropriate self-disclosure
10. Displays technical professional competence in helping supervisees with their work as well as competence in interpersonal human relations with supervisees
11. Is ready to tolerate and accept mistakes and failures recognizing these as a natural component of the learning experience

To provide workers with appropriate *support*, the good supervisor:

1. Projects an attitude of confidence and trust toward the supervisee, resulting in optimization of supervisee autonomy and discretion
2. Is ready, willing, and comfortable in offering praise and approval for good performance; is equally ready to challenge and confront inadequate work
3. Is sensitive to the manifestations of workers' stress and is flexible in adjusting work demands accordingly
4. Establishes full and free reciprocal communication with the supervisee in an atmosphere that not only permits but encourages the expression of authentic feeling
5. Is comfortable in nondefensively considering negative feedback and countertransference reaction and is tolerant of constructive criticism
6. Appropriately supportive but not emotionally intrusive on workers' private concerns

In the end, it may all add up to the maxim "Good supervisors are available, accessible, affable, and able." The general picture of the good supervisor shows him or her to be a person who is a technically competent professional, with good human relations skills and good organizational-managerial skills.

However, the contribution of the effective supervisor to the supervisor-supervisee interaction is only one factor in the equation. A detailed analysis of ninety-four supervisory experiences based on structured interviews found that supervisees also made a contribution to the kind of relationship that developed. Although supervisors were more or less inclined to be permissive or controlling, directive or nondirective, egalitarian or distant, accepting or disparaging, these tendencies were muted or intensified by the supervisees' own characteristic way of relating:

In order for a supervisor to be collaborative, the supervisee must be someone he can collaborate with; [supervisees] who have a collaborative approach to supervision themselves most probably elicit collaborative behavior from their supervisors. ... In many cases a supervisor's coercive style may be the result of the [supervisee's] continually challenging or resisting his authority. ... The exercise of coercive power is not necessarily attributable to the intrapsychic dynamics of the supervisor but may be the result of the supervisory interaction. (Nash 1975:26)

Some supervisors were described by some supervisees as their most preferred supervisor while the same supervisor was described by others as their least preferred supervisor.

The configuration of effective and ineffective supervision that emerges is then in the nature of a generalization. This implies that an approach to supervision that mirrors the good supervisor configuration is more apt to lead to effective supervision. However, like all generalizations, it suggests that this is not invariably the case. The complexity of bidirectional interaction between supervisee and supervisor precludes any such statement. A contingency model that takes into consideration the uniqueness of the relationship between these factors comes closer to the truth. It argues for a best-fit decision on the part of the individual supervisor in contact with a particular supervisee working in a particular agency offering service to a specific client in an idiosyncratic, problematic situation. Still, a generalization is useful. It suggests that among the myriad of possibilities, the relevant literature shows the approaches listed above should be given priority for consideration because the research indicates they have been shown to be effective for many supervisors in many instances. Analogous to the frequent finding that there are few substantial differences in the effectiveness of various therapy models, there is no firm substantiation that the “good supervisor” can be identified as an adherent of a particular model of supervision.

## **Summary**

Supervisors also are subjected to a variety of job-related stresses. The transition to supervisor is a difficult change involving a reorientation of relationships with colleagues and alterations in self-perception and in attitudes toward agency goals and procedures. The additional responsibility, along with the lack of preparation, ongoing support, and clarity in role differentiation, combined with conflicting demands, all contribute to supervisors’ feelings of tension. The problems of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation in supervisory interaction are other sources of stress. Satisfactions, however, balance some of the dissatisfaction for supervisors.

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# CHAPTER 8

## Evaluation

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### Definition

Evaluation in supervision is defined as the objective appraisal of the worker's total functioning on the job over a specified period of time (Schmidt and Perry 1940). It is a process of applying systematic procedures to determine with reliability and validity the extent to which the worker is achieving the requirements of his or her position in the agency (Arvey and Murphy 1998). An evaluation should be a judgment based on clearly specified, realistic, and achievable criteria reflecting agency standards. It is job related and time limited. It is concerned with both the quality of performance and the quantity of accomplishment.

Evaluation is an administrative procedure that should, and can, contribute to professional growth (Gruman and Saks 2011; Latham et al. 2005). It is therefore a component of both administrative and educational supervision. It is further a component of supportive supervision. Explicit feedback helps the worker get a sense of meaningful achievement, reduces the tension associated with role ambiguity, and provides the positive reinforcement for good work that is well done (Brutus 2010).

Written, signed evaluations have legal ramifications (Henderson 2009; Latham and Mann 2006), as well as supportive, educational, clinical, and administrative implications. Due process requires that a worker be periodically informed of the acceptability of his or her performance to the agency (Latham et al. 2005). If a decision is made to dismiss the employee, failure to have provided the worker with such periodic assessments can legally be regarded as a violation of due process as well as being in contravention to many union contracts. Moreover, evaluation procedures should provide employees with a means of appeal (Latham et al. 2005).

Equal opportunity regulations require that any administrative personnel action requires validation by specific objective evaluation procedures (Malos 2005). Much evidence suggests that the accuracy of performance appraisal varies with the gender and ethnicity of the supervisor and supervisee (Lizzio, Wilson, and MacKay 2008; Platt 2003; see also Chung, Marshall, and Gordon 2001), as well as the ethnic and gender composition of the organization (Latham and Mann 2006). Thus, without such substantiating documentation, decisions affecting women or minorities may be open to challenge, as "there has been a 100% increase in the number of employment discrimination cases filed since 1995, and these cases have usually involved complaints regarding a performance appraisal" (Latham et al. 2005:77).

Furthermore, evaluations are an ethical obligation of professional supervision. Standard 3.03 of the social work code of ethics (National Association of Social

Workers 2008:n.p.) states that supervisors “who have responsibility for evaluating the performance of others should fulfill such responsibility in a *fair and considerate manner and on the basis of clearly stated criteria*” [emphasis added]. By the same token, Principle 7.06 of the American Psychological Association’s *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct* (2010:n.p.) lists establishing “a timely and specific process for providing feedback to ... supervisees ... on the basis of their actual performance on relevant and established ... requirements” as ethical mandates.

Evaluations are as ubiquitous and necessary as they are inevitable. There is no way of not communicating an evaluative message. Refraining from evaluating is, in itself, an evaluation. An anxious worker to whom no evaluation is communicated may read the message as, “I am so bad he can’t even tell me about it”; the cocksure, conceited worker may read the same message as, “My work is so exemplary that there is nothing to discuss.”

Every time the supervisor nods in agreement or says “Yes,” “Okay,” or “You’re right about that” in response to something the supervisee has said, an evaluation is being made. Every time a pained expression crosses the supervisor’s face, every time he or she gestures impatiently, every time he or she says gently, “Come now, I am not so sure about that,” or more forthrightly, “I disagree with you about that,” an evaluation has been made.

Supervisors cannot abstain from informal assessment, and workers are aware of this. Each supervisor has some idea of how he or she ranks a particular worker as compared with others in terms of a level of performance personally regarded as adequate. Evaluations require supervisors to formalize such assessments, make them explicit, communicate them to the workers, and defend them if necessary.

The formal evaluation conference differs from the ongoing assessments that are, or should be, part of each supervisory conference. In the individual conferences, the focus of concern is the current case situation. The formal evaluation conference is concerned with an overview of the entire caseload. It is a period of stock-taking and review. Given the uncluttered opportunity to take a more general view of the worker’s activity, the worker and supervisor make a conscious effort to discuss general patterns of performance.

At this point, greater precision in terminology might be helpful. One might reserve the use of the terms *evaluation* or *performance appraisal* for the formal, periodic event concerned with reviewing the worker’s total performance. The term *assessment* might be an appropriate descriptor of the ongoing, informal review of the limited segment of the worker’s performance that is the concern of each particular supervisory conference. Therefore, the formative assessment provided in each conference ultimately leads to the summative evaluation. Although our primary concern in this chapter is with evaluation, a brief review of assessment sets the stage, because the two are inextricably linked in performance appraisal (Osborn and Kelley 2010; Shute 2008).

In [chapter 1](#), we introduced Milne’s (2008) best-evidence synthesis of how

effective supervision helps clients achieve favorable outcomes through an iterative process of goal setting, teaching, observing practice, and providing performance feedback. In [chapters 2 and 3](#), we introduced the administrative ground rules of supervision, stressing the importance of documenting each supervisory conference and prescribing the observation of worker performance and the provision of corrective feedback as supervisory duties. Setting performance goals, observing and teaching practice, and providing corrective feedback are central features of the educational function of supervision discussed in [chapters 4 and 5](#). In [chapter 6](#), we closed the circle with evidence that performance feedback, coupled with clear goals and instructions, mitigates stress and buffers workers against burnout. Even if setting goals, observing practice, and providing feedback are not always helpful (Cleveland, Lim, and Murphy 2007) and may at times make things worse (Brown, Hyatt, and Benson 2010; Kluger and DeNisi 1996), a review of the evidence suggests that accurate formative and evaluative supervisory feedback can help engaged workers improve their performance, “when provided systematically over multiple years by an authoritative, credible source” (Veloski et al. 2006:117).

## **Values of Evaluation**

Evaluation has value to the client, the agency, the supervisor, and, perhaps most importantly, to the supervisee. Thus, as codified in our ethics (NASW 2008) and standards (ASWB 2009; ASWB 2011; NASW 2003; NASW 2005a), evaluation is a *sine qua non* of social work supervision.

### ***Value to the Worker***

Although workers may regard it with “fear and loathing” (Brown et al. 2010:378), evaluation relieves supervisees’ anxiety because it helps them know where they stand (Freeman 1993). Perhaps the only thing more anxiety provoking than evaluation is no evaluation (Ellis 2010). Supervisees are then in doubt about how adequately they are meeting agency expectations and how they compare with other workers of similar education and experience.

A period set aside for formal evaluation gives supervisees a perspective on change and achievement. Assuming that a worker has improved during the period of time covered by the evaluation, the process tends to encourage him or her and to enhance a sense of accomplishment. For the worker, the evaluation is an opportunity to obtain explicit approval of his or her work from somebody who is thought to have the information, ability, and experience to make such a judgment. It provides the worker with a presumably objective, authoritative perspective on his or her abilities and deficiencies. By recapitulating the real progress in professional development made by the worker while acknowledging the existence of deficiencies, the supervisor helps the supervisee to view his or her work more realistically and optimistically. This mitigates the counterproductive tendency—particularly on the part of young, conscientious workers—to deprecate their achievements.

Evaluations help motivate learning (Kluger and DeNisi 1996; Shute 2008). The



supervisee is stimulated to learn and change in order to achieve a good evaluation. A systematic review of what one has learned helps to consolidate it. Having identified explicitly what he or she has learned to do, the supervisee can recognize the learned behavior and more easily repeat it. Evaluation messages not only are designed to change behavior but also are important in maintaining or encouraging continuation of desirable behavior.

Evaluations help direct learning (Anseel et al. 2011; DeNisi 2011). The standards by which he or she is evaluated help to clarify for the supervisee the specific kinds of activities on which he or she has to focus. Selection of a task for inclusion in an evaluation-assessment instrument increases the visibility and significance of that task. The workers are likely to expend more energy in learning such tasks and pay more attention to the performance of such tasks (Poertner and Rapp 2007).

Evaluation helps make learning conscious because it requires an explicit assessment of performance (Green 2011; Osborne and Kelley 2010). It points to how much the worker has learned and how far he or she has come. At the same time, it helps to clearly identify the nature of performance weakness and what needs to be learned more adequately. It makes possible further goal-directed teaching. An evaluation is concerned with an assessment, in the present, of work during the immediate past period, for the purpose of determining future teaching and learning activities.

Evaluations help set the pattern for self-evaluation by the supervisee. Before standards of service can be internalized for self-regulation, they need to be clearly identified for the worker. Having become acquainted with performance standards and criteria as a result of evaluation conferences, the supervisee is in a better position to critique his or her own work. Evaluation increases self-awareness to further self-improvement.

Every worker has the responsibility for self-evaluation and self-regulation. The worker's continuous, critical assessment of his or her own performance is the best guarantee of effective and efficient service. However, to do this analysis requires not only the will to engage in critical self-evaluation (Gruman and Saks 2011) but also knowledge of the standards and criteria that distinguish good practice from poor practice (Green 2011), which is learned as a consequence of evaluation conferences.

Evaluations assist the worker in career planning. Many workers need reasoned feedback in helping them determine whether or not they have the necessary aptitude for success in social work. Marginal employees may be helped by considering alternatives as an outcome of evaluation. Others may find they have aptitudes for supervision and/or administration and can be helped by the evaluation conference to consider preparing themselves for these responsibilities.

#### ***Value to the Agency***

Discharging the responsibility toward public accountability by evaluating the extent to which the agency is achieving its goals and objectives starts with an evaluation of the degree to which the individual worker's performance is meeting agency standards



(Gravina and Siers 2011). Just as the agency is accountable to the community, the individual worker is accountable to the agency. Evaluation by the supervisor of the work of the supervisee is one link in the chain of accountability to the community for which the entire agency is responsible. Evaluation conferences provide the opportunity for structuring accountability.

Periodic, systematic evaluation of worker performance may point to needed changes in agency administration. Careful review may show that the workers are not failing the agency but that, instead, the agency is failing them (Levy and Williams 2004; Tziner, Murphy, and Cleveland 2005). Evaluation leads to communication from supervisors to administrators regarding administrative procedures that are adversely affecting worker performance.

A review of a series of evaluations of a number of different workers can help in planning in-service training programs and staff development procedures. Such analysis may disclose consistent weak spots in staff performance to which agency administration needs to give attention. Evaluation helps define for the staff generally, and for the individual worker in particular, those aspects of professional performance that require further special attention and effort, and it points to the kinds of learning experiences that need to be provided. Evaluation further helps the agency to identify special skills manifested by individual staff members who might then be assigned special tasks.

Evaluations are procedures for controlling and standardizing the behavior of the worker. The evaluation criteria make explicit and visible the kind of behavior expected, the kind of behavior that is approved, and the kind of behavior that will be rewarded. As Dornbusch and Scott (1975:157) noted, evaluation is an exercise "in the authorized use of power to control task performance by the distribution of organizational sanctions." Evaluations thus serve the agency purpose of administrative supervision.

If promotions, dismissals, reassignments, and merit pay increases are necessary and acceptable responsibilities of administrative supervision, then we must accept as legitimate and necessary the procedures that permit such decisions to be made on a reasonable and defensible basis. Evaluation also helps validate agency policy regarding worker selection. Through evaluation, the agency can determine if its selection requirements do, in fact, tend to result in the recruitment of personnel capable of doing an effective job.

Evaluation of performance for administrative decisions becomes more important in the context of diminishing agency budgets and downsizing agency programs. If staff has to be cut, retaining the best workers depends on the accuracy and objectivity of performance evaluation.

Effective evaluation procedures can protect agencies against affirmative action challenges as well as assure compliance with affirmative action procedures. See Malos (2005) for a review of the case law in which the availability of valid evaluation instruments and procedures was involved in the decision.

### ***Value to the Client***

Social work, like other professions, claims the freedom to operate without control by outsiders. One justification frequently advanced to support the demand for autonomy is that professionals will regulate each other to prevent abuse and ensure efficient practice. State boards of social work examiners (ASWB 2010b) and the NASW Code of Ethics (NASW 2008) exemplify such self-regulation by members of a profession. However, the sanctions available to boards of examiners and the professional to regulate ethical behavior are rarely applied (Boland-Prom 2009), and then only for the most egregious violations. When granting a profession freedom from outside regulation, control, and interference, the community has a right to expect some more immediate, more routinely applied measures of control. The principal benefit of evaluation for the client is that he or she is more likely to be assured of effective service as a consequence (Reese, Norsworthy, and Rowlands 2009) and thus is protected from continuation of inadequate service.

### ***Value to the Supervisor***

As a consequence of a systematic evaluation of the worker's performance, the supervisor knows what has been learned and what still needs to be taught. Evaluation provides the agenda for future educational supervision.

By explicitly evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the individual workers in his or her unit, the supervisor is in a better position to efficiently deploy the human resources available. Assignments can be made more efficiently as a consequence of evaluation. The supervisor can make a better match between tasks that need to be completed and interests and aptitudes of individual workers.

Formal, explicit evaluation protects supervisors from their own biases in rewarding or sanctioning the worker. The evaluation criteria and the need to justify his or her judgments help to discipline the supervisor's thinking in assessing the worker's performance.

The evaluation report and associated documentation of the worker's performance provides protection for the supervisor in cases where personnel decisions are contested (Latham et al. 2005; Malos 2005). The requirements of the Equal Employment Commission, union contracts, and civil service regulations make supervisors vulnerable to such complaints.

The standards and criteria explicated in a good evaluation form are, in effect, a translation of the objectives of the agency at the administrator's level to specific tasks at the performance level. As such, the evaluation not only acts as an instrument of worker behavior control as noted previously but also helps to reduce role ambiguity and role conflict. Consequently, the evaluation form and process assist the supervisors in implementing the administrative functions of supervision.

Having noted the values of evaluation, we may now ask who might best be delegated the task of making evaluations. The logical response is that the person in the agency who is most directly and intimately acquainted with the details of worker's day-to-day activity would be in the best position to make a reasoned and defensible

assessment of performance—that is, the worker's immediate supervisor. Consequently, it is not surprising that when any organization requires a formal, periodic evaluation of worker performance, almost invariably the immediate supervisor is given this responsibility.

### **Objectives of Evaluation**

Having indicated the value of evaluations for the different constituencies that are directly or indirectly concerned with the process, the specific objectives of evaluation need to be noted. Evaluation has three principal objectives. One is an administratively focused objective. Evaluation provides a systematic product, a report, which management uses in making informed administrative decisions—retention, merit pay increases, promotion, suspension, reassignment, termination, etc. A second principal objective is focused on the worker's professional growth and development. Evaluation is a teaching-learning process that identifies strengths and weaknesses in the worker's job performance so as to enable the worker to improve his or her performance. As a product for administrative purposes, evaluation focuses primarily on past performance. As a teaching-learning process, evaluation focuses on past performance for the purpose of improving future performance. As a product, the evaluation report is used by others to make decisions about the worker; as a process, evaluation is used by the worker himself for changing his or her way of working. Hand-in-hand, evaluation for administrative decision-making and evaluation used by the worker to improve his or her performance support a third, overarching objective—improving the outcomes of agency service (Poertner 2009; Poertner and Rapp 2007).

In a national study, both supervisors and supervisees perceived evaluations as being used more frequently for administrative reasons (salary measures, retention or separation, promotion) rather than for staff development (for making case load assignments, differential work assignments) (Kadushin 1992a).

### **Dislike of Evaluations**

Many supervisors and supervisees “hate” evaluations (Bouskila-yam and Kluger 2011:137), and less than one-third find them helpful (Gruman and Saks 2011). Despite their necessity and value, they trouble most supervisors and tend to be avoided, if not actively resisted (Spence and Keeping 2011; Tziner et al. 2005). Performance appraisals have frequently been compared with motorcycle headgear and automobile seat belts: We agree that they are necessary, but we dislike using them.

The antipathy to performance evaluation is not peculiar to social work. The feeling is ubiquitous. An article in *Psychology Today* (September 1985) entitled “Performance Review: The Job Nobody Likes,” details the negative feeling about this task among supervisors in a wide variety of jobs.

In many cases, this negativity is justified, as Brown, Hyatt, and Benson (2010),

Spence and Keeping (2011), and Cleveland, Lim, and Murphy (2007) explained in their reviews of the literature. Evaluation is among the supervisory procedures that most explicitly call attention to the difference in status between supervisor and supervisee. As such, it tends to increase the social distance between them. It is difficult to maintain the fiction that supervisor and supervisee are colleagues in a peer relationship when the supervisor has the responsibility and authority to evaluate the work of the supervisee. The possible reward and punishment consequences of evaluation clearly express the power of the supervisor, which on other occasions may be muted and obscured. Some supervisors feel uncomfortable with the authority inherent in their position. In many other kinds of supervisor-supervisee interactions, their authority need not be explicitly employed and so can be conveniently ignored; in evaluation, it is openly exercised.

Any evaluation of the worker is in effect an indirect evaluation of the supervisor (Spence and Keeping 2011). If the worker is performing inadequately, the evaluation might reveal that the supervisor has not taught the worker what he or she needs to know or has not given the worker the help that was rightfully expected. A supervisor reported:

I felt a pressure to give her a good evaluation, and I wonder now if my desire to do this was because I felt it was therapeutic for her. It was also a kind of reward for myself for being a good therapist in helping Ms. G. become a better worker. Both of these reasons are inappropriate, but it was a kind of validation that I was a good supervisor.

Evaluation can evoke strong negative feelings (Brown, Hyatt, and Benson 2010; Cleveland et al. 2007). Supervisors may be anxious that evaluation will precipitate a hostile reaction from the supervisee; there is guilt at the possible consequences of a negative evaluation, which may have considerable significance for the job status and professional career of the worker. A supervisor said:

If I told Mr. R. what I really think—that he's a lousy worker—he'd blow his top and I'd have psychic debris all over the office. Besides, he would challenge me on every word, and I am not so sure I could cross that *t* and dot the *i* on my judgments. So who needs all that grief? I kind of tone the evaluation down.

Although supervisors may feel uncomfortable and apologetic about making evaluations, supervisees are apt to be anxious and defensive (Brown, et al. 2010). Comparative evaluation more often than not becomes a subject of agency gossip. Consequently, not only is self-esteem involved but reputational standing in the peer group is affected by such assessments.

In addition, there are clear career-related penalties associated with a poor evaluation. The supervisor is keenly aware of the possible career consequences of evaluations for the supervisee. Many of the benefits that are possibly available as a result of very good evaluation are nondivisible—there are only so many promotion slots. Not knowing the rigor with which other supervisors are evaluating their supervisees, the supervisor is made hesitant by the realization that he or she might be placing his or her supervisee at a competitive disadvantage.

There is a reluctance to be appropriately critical because the criticism might be discouraging to the worker (Bouskila-Yam and Kluger 2011). The supervisor may

hesitate to inflict pain and discomfort or may fear that the supervisee will like him or her less as a result. The supervisor's task is to be uniformly helpful, not invariably popular, and to be consistently useful and responsible rather than consistently loved. Aware of this ambivalence, a supervisor noted:

I was flattered by his evident liking and respect for me. It gave me pleasure. I was not so ready to risk this by arousing his hostility if I pressured him about some of the things he was doing poorly, which needed improvement. If I did what I thought I had to do I would be giving up, or at least risking, some of the satisfactions for me in the relationship.

To be comfortable with the threats posed by performance appraisal, the supervisor must accept the legitimacy of the evaluation process and feel entitled to make an evaluation (Tziner et al. 2005). The supervisor has to feel confident that he or she is capable of making a valid judgment, that he or she has enough accurate information on which to base a valid judgment, and that the standards on which the judgment is based are clearly defined and defensible. However, many supervisors question the legitimacy of evaluation and lack a sense of entitlement. They do not think they should or can judge the work of others (Spence and Keeping 2011). Further, they are oppressed by conflicting, ambiguous evidence of performance and by imprecise, vague standards available for judging performance. Consequently, they neither feel qualified to make such a judgment nor confident that they can make a valid evaluation. Such doubts may make supervisors hesitant about being critical; not being without sin, they are reluctant to cast the first stone. As one supervisor said:

I know the agency wants us to recommend dismissal for workers who don't meet minimum requirements. But I am not so sure what these requirements are or how to measure them and how much emphasis to place on achievement versus individual progress. It's hard for me to be confident recommending dismissal for even my poorest supervisees, so I give them a passing evaluation.

A positive evaluation is an endorsement—a certification of proficiency. Hence, it involves a considerable responsibility to the general community, to the specific community of clients, to the agency, and to professional peers. Being invested with, and having to carry out, such a responsibility is apt to be somewhat unnerving.

The requirement for evaluation seems to contradict the ethos of social work. In social work, professional value orientation puts great emphasis on being nonjudgmental. Evaluations, of necessity, involve a judgment of performance. The admonition to be responsible, critical, frank, and direct in rigorous evaluation clashes with the professionally inculcated disposition to be accepting, compassionate, supportive, and reassuring. The felt conflict causes discomfort.

Most supervisors are aware of the possible loss of staff as a result of a negative evaluation (Brown et al. 2010). This realization suggests an additional motive for resisting evaluations. Every time a supervisee with some experience is fired or quits in response to a negative evaluation, a new, inexperienced worker has to be hired in his or her place. During the period of transition, extra burdens are placed on the supervisor. The uncovered caseload has to be temporarily assigned. Prospective candidates for the position have to be interviewed and a selection made. Once a

person has been hired, the supervisor again faces the tasks of worker introduction and orientation. The supervisor can avoid all this additional work by placating the supervisee with a laudatory, if not entirely accurate, evaluation.

On a cost-benefit analysis balance, supervisors have much to risk and little to gain by extending themselves to conscientiously undertake detailed formal evaluations (Brown et al. 2010). There is little overt reward. It is part of the job so that there are no special compliments or fringe benefits that result. On the other hand, it is a difficult, time-consuming job requiring a lot of painful soul-searching. It involves a risk of evoking hostility, resentment, or rejection in the worker. It is thus understandable why so often evaluations are delayed and, when done, are done perfunctorily.

Therefore, evaluations generally tend to be avoided—and negative evaluations tend to be avoided most of all. Yet, such evasion only compounds the supervisor's problem. Refraining from critical evaluation does the worker an injustice and promises future difficulty. Performance failures that are ignored do not disappear. The worker continues to practice his or her mistakes and becomes more proficient in making them. With time, the errors become more serious and, having been ignored, are more difficult to deal with. The easy avoidance of critical evaluation today comes back to haunt the supervisor tomorrow.

Hesitancy to deal openly with deficiencies in performance becomes in itself an incentive to continued concealments. The supervisor is aware that if he or she raises the problem for discussion after some delay, the worker can justifiably accuse him or her of earlier dishonesty and deception.

Failure to be appropriately critical substitutes a problem of group morale for a problem of individual morale. The worker who is appraised too leniently may be happier, but his or her fellow workers will be less happy. Peers are perceptive in their evaluation of each other's competence. If a worker whom they know to be inefficient and ineffective is given a raise along with better workers because the supervisor has not been appropriately critical, they feel resentful and cynical. They become suspicious about the validity of the supervisor's evaluation of their own work. They are robbed of some of the motivation to improve their own performance because the system appears to reward good and bad work equally.

It might be reassuring for the supervisor to note that, when employing sanctions in response to poor work, he or she might have the support of other supervisees. Not only does the reputation of the unit suffer from the inadequate performance, but other workers may have to pick up the slack that results from the sanctioned worker's failure to do his or her job.

It may further reassure supervisors to note that most social work supervisees recognize and accept the fact that the agency, as their employer, has a right to evaluate the work they are doing. They face this challenge along with millions of other employed workers. In fact, several studies have found that supervisees expressed strong dissatisfaction with the fact that supervisors were not sufficiently and specifically critical of their work. Anxious to do a better job, supervisees looked to their supervisor for help in identifying deficiencies in their work that needed correcting.

They were disappointed when they failed to receive such critical analysis (Kadushin 1974, 1992a). When supervisees raise objections to evaluation, the reason is not the legitimacy of agency entitlement to evaluation their work but rather the fact that evaluations are often inequitable, arbitrary, and unhelpful.

Despite dislike of and resistance to evaluations, supervisors are likely to resist giving them up. They are the most definite expression of supervisory power and are a potent instrument for control.

## **Desirable Evaluation Procedures**

Despite the clearly identifiable reasons that feed supervisory antipathy toward evaluation, performance appraisals are both necessary and inevitable. What approaches are most likely to contribute to a productive evaluation?

1. *In order to evaluate the worker's performance, the supervisor must first understand and describe the job that the worker has been hired to do.* This requires some specification of the essential tasks of the job and the requisite attitudes, knowledge, and skills required to perform them (Milkovich and Newman 2002), as explained in [chapter 2](#). A valid "job analysis" that includes "current information from individuals familiar with the job" has been described as the "cornerstone" of performance appraisal, from the legal perspective advanced by Malos (2005:375), Kerl et al. (2002), and Latham et al. (2005). Indeed, "the identification of employee behaviors, particularly those that are task related, which impact an organization's effectiveness," has become the "current focus" of "advances in the science of performance appraisal," according to a review of the literature by Latham and Mann (2006:295).

Because measuring "the wrong thing" is a primary problem with performance evaluation (Latham and Mann 2006:302), involving staff in establishing the right things to measure helps ensure that the criteria selected for evaluation have relevance to the job, may strengthen staff commitment to the evaluation process, and help clarify mutual expectations with regard to the evaluation itself (DeNisi and Gonzalez 2004; Millar 1990). Workers who have helped to develop standards to which they will ultimately be held accountable will feel a greater obligation and responsibility to see that the evaluation process achieves its objectives. Research indicates that an ability to have significant input in determining evaluation criteria and procedures is clearly related to satisfaction with evaluation (DeNisi and Gonzalez 2004; Gruman and Saks 2011; Milkovich and Newman 2002).

In a California survey of 42 managers, 186 supervisors, and 772 child welfare workers, the most essential attribute of successful supervision was the supervisor's knowledge of the subordinate's job (Clark et al. 2008). Likewise, a study of performance appraisal feedback by Jawahar (2006:232) found that supervisors' "knowledge of the subordinate's job [coupled with a supportive approach to providing evaluative feedback] explained almost three times the variance in [worker] satisfaction with appraisal feedback as did [the] performance ratings" themselves, and that worker satisfaction with evaluative feedback predicted job satisfaction,

organizational commitment, and turnover intentions. A thorough discussion of job analysis and its methods is beyond the scope of this book, but Poertner and Rapp (1983, 2007) provided a rich introduction, and a job analysis of social work supervision published online by the Association of Social Work Boards (2009) provides a rich case example.

2. *In addition to understanding and describing the worker's job, the supervisor must observe the worker's performance* (Ellis 2010; Latham et al. 2005). However, "there are data that suggest that supervisors spend less than 1% of their time observing their subordinates" (Latham and Mann 2006:304). Without direct observation, the supervisor often has little data to draw on besides worker self-reports. What workers have to say is clearly an important source of contextual and substantive information about their performance (Frawley-O'Dea and Sarnat 2001), but they "are less accurate than appraisals from other sources" (Latham et al. 2005:81), and they frequently withhold important information from their supervisors (Farber 2006; Mehr et al. 2010; Pisani 2005). As Rose observed:

Supervisors who do not have comprehensive knowledge of the ... work are unable to provide specific intervention training, cannot legitimately critique a supervisee's work, fail to see the improvement or worse, the decline of the client, and ultimately make themselves vulnerable to ethical and legal violations in supervision. (Rose 2009:34)

3. *Effective performance appraisal takes time and commitment.* Perhaps because they detest the job of evaluating employee performance (Cleveland et al. 2007; Kline and Sulsky 2009), some evidence suggests that social work supervisors place a relatively low priority on evaluating supervisees (Menefee and Thompson 1994; Patti 1977), not unlike their managerial counterparts elsewhere (Latham and Mann 2006). As a result, supervisors may spend too little time on the process (Milkovich and Newman 2002), commonly between three and seven hours per employee each year, and often less than one hour per appraisal (Bretz, Milkovich, and Read 1992). Spending too little time on performance appraisal is a source of bias that discourages performance improvement (Bol 2011).

4. *Evaluation should reflect a continuous process of systematic observation and assessment, rather than an occasional event.* The accuracy of ratings tends to increase with the amount of time supervisors spend observing supervisees (Latham and Mann 2006; Milkovich and Newman 2002). Research suggests that "careful attention needs to be paid to ensuring the systematic sampling of information" because, otherwise, supervisors "use cues from knowledge about the [supervisees] themselves, the jobs, the uses to which ratings will be placed, and other factors to form impressions of [supervisees], and these impressions influence the information to which [supervisors] attend" (Ilgen, Barnes-Farrell, and McKellin 1992:358).

5. *In the service of accuracy, the supervisor might do well to maintain an ongoing supervision diary or record* (Falvey and Cohen 2003; Osborn and Kelly 2010). Because the most useful appraisals include both qualitative and quantitative data (Brutus 2010; Milkovich and Newman 2002; Miller and Thornton 2006), the procedure might take the form of recording a summary note following each scheduled



supervisory meeting. "Keeping a written record ... of the specific behaviors that were observed improves the appraiser's recall, and hence contributes to an objective appraisal and working process ... [and] to increase the accuracy of the appraisal, longer, objective, descriptive behavioral statements are more effective than short phrases" (Latham et al. 2005:79). Otherwise, the supervisor may base annual performance appraisals on general impressions instead of specific past performance, reducing the accuracy of ratings with the passage of time (Ilgen, Barnes-Farrell, and McKellin 1992; Milkovich 2002). The annual performance appraisal should be a summation of the small assessments that take place as part of each supervisory conference.

6. *Regularly devoting some part of each conference to assessment, however brief, helps desensitize the worker's anxiety regarding it.* This practice also helps prepare the worker for what is likely to be shared at the formal conference so that it does not come as an unexpected, disconcerting surprise. As one worker complained, "The supervisor never mentioned my overidentification with Jane [a girl on probation] until the evaluation conference. If I had been aware of it sooner I certainly could have made some effort to control overidentification in my contacts." The formal, periodic evaluation is a summary recapitulation of familiar, previously encountered assessments rather than an unexpected, unanticipated critique for which the worker is unprepared.

7. *The evaluation should be conducted and communicated in the context of a positive relationship.* The positive relationship acts as an anodyne to the pain of criticism (however warranted) and makes the worker more receptive to, and accepting of, the criticism as a basis for constructive change. If the supervisor and supervisee dislike each other, the supervisee is predisposed to reject the criticism as invalid and unfair. All criticism of performance should be offered out of a sincere desire to help, not out of pleasure and satisfaction in criticizing. The supervisor needs to be sensitive to the worker's reaction to manifestations of anxiety and resistance (Abbott and Lyter 1998). These feelings can then be discussed openly, and appropriate reassurance and support can be offered. The most important aspect of evaluation is the attitude with which the process is conducted. As one worker said about critical feedback from his or her supervisor, "Knowing that his feedback is not malicious but rather purposeful and beneficial helps me to accept feedback that I really would rather not hear."

Social workers have known for more than a century that positive supervisory relationships play a significant role in effective supervision (Burns 1958; Robinson 1949). Bordin (1983:35) described the ideal supervisory relationship as a "working alliance" or collaboration for change that depends upon "(1) mutual agreements and understandings regarding the goals sought in the change process; (2) the tasks of each of the partners; and (3) the bonds between the partners necessary to sustain the enterprise." Yet there is sometimes concern that positive supervisory relationships may bias ratings of worker performance, as there is often a correlation between ratings of the supervisory relationship and worker performance in organizational

research. When Lazar and Mosek (1993) found that supervisory relationships were better predictors of performance ratings than putative measures of supervisee ability, for example, this was construed as evidence that supervisory relationships *interfered* with supervisory evaluations. Vinton and Wilke (2011), noting that there is a “Lake Wobegon Effect” in social work education, “where everyone is above average” in the service of “goodwill” (293), expressed concern that “[l]eniency bias, or the tendency to evaluate individuals more favorably than is warranted, can prevent accurate evaluation and constructive supervision” (288).

The alternative explanation is that supervisors form more positive relationships with better performers. This conventional wisdom is consistent with findings from empirical research (Arvey and Murphy 1998) and reviews of the empirical literature (Bouskila-Yam and Kluger 2010; Bretz, Milkovich, and Read 1992; Ilgen, Barnes-Farrell, and McKellin 1992; Jawahar 2006; Latham and Mann 2006). Paradoxically, if supervisors do inflate their ratings of worker performance in the service of positive working relationships, some evidence suggests that workers will perceive that as an expression of fairness and subsequently improve their performance (Bol 2011).

What can the supervisor do to build, strengthen, and sustain good working relationships with their supervisees—a working alliance? A promising approach has been described by Tebes et al. (2011), based on Shulman’s (2010) interactional model of social work supervision, in which managing the relationship with the supervisee is one of the basic competencies that supervisors learn to master. Using the Shulman approach, large gains have been reported in the management of supervisory relationships with workers over the course of a seven-month supervisory competency training program (Tebes et al. 2011). On the other hand, it appears that those gains were calculated on the basis of supervisor self-reports, and there is compelling evidence that supervisors are often poor judges of the quality of the supervisory relationship from the vantage point of their supervisees (Efstation, Patton, and Kardash 1990; Mehr et al. 2010; Pisani 2005).

*8. A formal evaluation generates anxiety because it is a threat to narcissism and self-esteem.* There is a fear of failure and rejection. It raises such questions as, “Will I be able to measure up to expectations? Will I be able to maintain the good opinion of me held by people I like and respect? How do I compare with my peers? What effect will this have on my professional future?”

Evaluations become part of a worker’s official record. There is much at stake. A good supervisory relationship helps support the worker through this anxiety-inducing procedure. Therefore, to the extent possible, the evaluations should be nonthreatening, protective of the dignity and self-esteem of the supervisee, and suggest confidence in the supervisee’s ability to do acceptable work.

*9. Supervisees may be less anxious if they know in advance when evaluations are to be scheduled, what information and standards are to be used as a basis for evaluation, what they might be expected to contribute to the evaluation, with whom the evaluation will be shared, and what use will be made of the evaluation.* However, of even greater importance, supervisees will be in a better position to prepare for the

evaluation over a period of time and to participate more productively in the process. In sum, “the accuracy of an appraisal increases when the supervisor and supervisee know in advance what is going to be observed” (Latham et al. 2005:79).

One way to prepare the supervisee for performance appraisal is to provide both an oral role induction (Bahrack et al. 1991; Ellis 2010; Strassle et al. 2011) and a written supervision contract designed to clarify expectations and prevent misunderstanding (Milne 2009; Osborne and Kelly 2010; Shulman 2010) at the outset of supervision. Using both, the “supervisees should be told the *amount*, *type* (formal or informal, written or verbal), *timing*, and *frequency* of evaluation procedures to be used. An explanation of how such information will be recorded by the supervisor (e.g., specific evaluation form, narrative, etc.), how it will be *used*, and with whom it will be *shared*, addressing the limits of *confidentiality* in supervision” (Osborn and Davis 1996:129). This procedure has been compared by Thomas (2007) to obtaining informed consent and has been named one of the basic competencies of social work supervision by ASWB (2009).

Although we endorse the use of role inductions and contracts in supervision, it is probably impossible to eliminate all surprises in supervision (Osborn and Kelly 2010:19) with these methods. The evidence for the effectiveness of role inductions is mixed, and the evidence that written contracts prevent surprises is largely anecdotal. In our experience, the evaluation process is more often governed by the *psychological* contract between the supervisor and the worker (Conway and Coyle-Shapiro 2011; Suazo 2009; Suazo and Stone-Romero 2011), which is unwritten, unspoken, “largely unconscious” (Conway and Briner 2009:75) but routinely “affirmed, altered or denied in day to day work experience” (Levinson et al, 1962:21). This is notwithstanding the consistent and cumulative efforts that supervisors may make to prepare their supervisees for evaluation through role inductions, written contracts, and the routine provision of formative feedback (Komiskey 2004).

10. *The evaluation procedure should be a mutual, shared process.* The supervisor should attempt to maximize the worker’s participation in, and contribution to, the evaluation (Gruman and Saks 2011; Lizzio et al. 2008), and the worker’s reaction to the evaluation should be solicited. Although self-appraisals tend to suffer from “positive leniency bias” (Ilgen, Barnes-Farrell, and McKellin 1992:354; Janssen and van der Vegt 2011), the worker could also be asked to write a self-evaluation or to write a critique of the supervisor’s evaluation (DeNisi and Gonzalez 2004). Mutuality implies not only encouraging the worker’s participation but also active use of those contributions that are valid and applicable in the final evaluation write-up. Evaluation is done with the worker, not to the worker. Mutual participation in the evaluation process increases the probability of a more valid evaluation and of its acceptance and use by the supervisee.

The good evaluation interview encourages open communication. The supervisee is encouraged to suggest changes in his or her performance, asked to formulate attainable change goals, and be given the opportunity of explaining failings. The good evaluation acknowledges the possibility of different points of view regarding

performance.

Participation lessens anxiety. Having been invited to participate, the worker retrieves a measure of control of the proceedings. By sharing control and being able in some measure to determine content, direction, and emphasis in the evaluation conference, the supervisee tends to feel less anxiously helpless. Participation also tends to reduce the discomforting imbalance in power between supervisor and supervisee. Power is manifested in the ability to control. By encouraging the supervisee's active participation in the evaluation process, the supervisor is sharing his or her control.

11. *Evaluations should be made with some recognition and consideration of reality factors that might be determinants of the worker's performance* (Kline and Sulsky 2009). The supervisor needs to assess whether or not the worker's caseload was atypically heavy or included more than the usual number of especially difficult cases. The worker who has a routine caseload of minimum complexity, imposing few unusual decision-making responsibilities, is in a different position from the worker with a caseload of clients who frequently present unique and complex problems. Moreover, because the worker does his or her work in an organizational context that might impede as well as facilitate satisfactory performance, some effort should be made explicitly to identify organizational difficulties over the evaluation period (Levy and Williams 2004; Tziner et al. 2005). Allowances also need to be made for situational aspects of the job, such as lack of office space, unavailability of essential support services, or periods of low morale that adversely affect staff performance. One should ask if there has been a change in administration, a reorganization of the agency, a temporary shortage of social work staff due to high turnover rates, or new legislation directly affecting agency operations. In performance evaluation and feedback, context is important (Talen and Schindler 1993).

12. *The principal, if not the exclusive, focus of evaluation should be the work performance of the supervisee rather than any evaluation of the worker as a person* (Kluger and DeNisi 1996; Latham and Mann 2006; Lizzio et al. 2008). The only social role of concern to evaluation is that of the supervisee as an employee of a social agency and, specifically, as the person assigned to do a particular job in this agency. None of the other aspects of the worker's life are legitimate areas for review. This concept was stressed by the Family Service Association of America in defining evaluation as "an accurate appraisal of the performance of the incumbent [of the position] in relation to specific duties assigned" (1957:53).

13. *The evaluation should review both strengths and weaknesses, growth and stagnation, and should be balanced and fair* (Bouskila-Yam and Kluger 2011). Isolated, atypical examples of the worker's performance should not be used to make a general case for failure. Rather, recurrent patterns of behavior in job performance are the legitimate bases for evaluation statements. In addition, the supervisor's personal standards should not be substituted for agency standards as a basis for evaluation.

14. *Fair evaluation focuses on behavior.* "Behavior provides structure and

articulation for objectives and judgments that might otherwise be vague and excessively open to interpretation” (Goldhammer 1969; 326). In addition, the “effectiveness” of feedback “decreases as attention moves up the hierarchy closer to the self and away from the task (Kluger and DeNisi 1996:254). The total configuration of the worker’s performance needs to be considered. Recent incidents may overinfluence the evaluation because of their very recency and dramatic incidents because of their vividness. Furthermore, if behavior patterns are cited as factors in the evaluation, there should be some reason to believe that the worker’s behavior had some significant positive or adverse effect on the client.

15. *A good evaluation is specific and individualized* (Green 2011; Jawahar 2006). As one worker said in complaining of his or her evaluation conference, “The supervisor was satisfactory but what was satisfactory about it or why it was satisfactory she didn’t say, so I don’t know.” General statements that apply to most supervisees (e.g., “He is a conscientious worker who displays warmth in his interaction with people”) can be used interchangeably in evaluating most supervisees.

16. *The evaluation should suggest tentativeness rather than finality and should focus on modifiable aspects of the worker’s performance* (Anseel et al. 2011; Shute 2008). The evaluation may describe the way the worker performs at this particular time; the expectation is that he or she will develop and improve. The good worker can become a better worker, and the poor worker can become a good worker. The spirit of the evaluation should communicate the idea that success is not final and failure is not fatal. The evaluation is, after all, not an unchangeable verdict but an incentive for change.

In achieving comprehensiveness, an evaluation should look to the future as well as the past (Gravina and Siers 2011). The worker’s performance speaks to what he or she has already done. Focusing on capacities and potentialities says something about what might be able to do in the future.

17. *Evaluations should be formulated with some consistency* (Malos 2005; Milkovich and Newman 2002). Both intra- and intersupervisor consistency is desirable. The supervisor needs to apply the same standards in the same way to all of his or her supervisees who have approximately the same education and experience. Likewise, different supervisors responsible for different units of workers with similar backgrounds need to act similarly in evaluating their respective supervisees. It is difficult to think of any other factor so corrosive of morale as differences in evaluation procedures applied to a homogenous group of supervisees.

By the same token, evaluation should distinguish heterogeneous performance (DeNisi 2011). Although many appraisal systems use five levels to evaluate employees, in general only three levels are used, with the top levels relatively full and the bottom levels relatively empty. “Labeling someone as satisfactory rather than above average or outstanding reduces commitment and satisfaction with the appraisal system” (Bretz, Milkovich, and Read 1992:329), but morale also suffers when different levels of performance earn equal rewards.

18. *It is desirable for the supervisor to indicate a willingness to accept evaluation*

of his or her own performance from the supervisee (Lizzio et al. 2008). If the process of evaluation is helpful in the development of the supervisee, it can likewise contribute to the supervisor's professional development.

The supervisee will be more accepting of evaluation, and less likely to see it as a manifestation of capricious authority, if he or she has the opportunity, in turn, to evaluate the supervisor. Certainly, as a recipient of supervision, as the consumer of the product, the worker is in a position to assess the supervisor's performance. Teaching faculty currently are more frequently open to student evaluation; it is difficult to defend supervisor immunity from supervisee evaluation. Two-way evaluations exemplify agency orientation toward evaluation. Evaluation of the worker's performance should be only one manifestation of the overall evaluation of personnel at all levels as part of a periodic review of the agency's total program.

*19. An acceptable evaluation process requires sound consensus between supervisor and supervisee about the objectives of the organization and the priorities among objectives (DeNisi and Gonzalez 2004).* If the supervisor gives high priority to efficiency and the supervisee gives priority to client service, the two will evaluate the worker's behavior differently.

*20. An effective evaluation procedure is integrated with other aspects of the organization.* Administration should support performance appraisal, periodically review and revise the appraisal procedures, provide training for supervisors in the use of appraisal forms, and organize its reward and punishment system so that they support evaluation decisions. These are elements of due process (Malos 2005; Milkovich and Newman 2002) and good agency management (Brown et al. 2010; Gravina and Siers 2011).

## **Evaluation Conference: Process**

### ***Scheduling the Conference***

The worker should be reminded at least a week in advance about the specific date and time of the evaluation conference. In some agencies, evaluations are scheduled at regular intervals, such as every half-year or every year. In other agencies, evaluations are tied to transition points in the supervisee's professional career, such as at the end of the probationary period, the hiring anniversary, when the worker's assignment is changed, when there is a change of supervisors, when the worker is leaving the agency, or when a merit increase is due.

### ***Supervisor's Conference Preparation***

The supervisor prepares by reviewing a sampling of the worker's case files, recordings, reports, and special project write-ups; the statistical material, time sheets, and supervisor's diary, notes, or logs (Falvey and Cohen 2003) covering the period of performance to be evaluated; and previous evaluations.

In a more general fashion, the supervisor's preparation should be a continuous process. Using all sources of information, the supervisor should make notes of

ongoing activity that illustrates the worker's typical performance. The supervisor should be constantly alert for critical incidents that relate performance to agency standards. A thorough knowledge of the details of the worker's performance is one of the most effective antidotes to supervisory anxiety about making evaluations. Criticism can be shared with less anxiety if there is a feeling of certainty that it is warranted and if the criticism can be adequately documented.

Because the total caseload cannot be reviewed in equal detail, preparation involves selecting typical representative examples of the worker's performance for illustrative reference during the conference. This includes selection of good work showing specific skills; examples of poor performance illustrating the need for skills requiring additional work; and case examples indicating the worker's professional growth.

The supervisor further prepares by introspectively examining his or her attitudes toward, and feelings about, the supervisee that might contaminate an objective appraisal of performance. The supervisor needs to be aware of his or her mood, which might make him or her expansive or narrowly focused; such feelings as hostility toward the supervisee, which might make him or her punitive in evaluation; a desire to control, which might make him or her manipulative; or a tendency to identify with and defend the supervisee, which might make him or her overprotective. The supervisor has an investment in the professional progress of his or her supervisees; eager for their success, which is the supervisor's success once removed, the supervisor may be reluctant to perceive a worker's failings.

The supervisor should also prepare for the conference by reviewing some of the classic and persistent pitfalls in evaluation in order to recognize and avoid them (Miller and Thornton 2006; Tziner, Murphy and Cleveland 2005). It may also be helpful to review this brief summary of what is known about performance appraisal and feedback.

### ***Performance Appraisal and Feedback***

Although "most reviews of performance appraisal research suggest that the relationship between job performance and ratings of job performance is likely to be weak or at best uncertain" (Murphy 2008:151), research has shown that satisfaction with performance feedback is related to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions (Brown et al. 2010; Jawahar 2006). Where it is generally assumed that accurate feedback will help workers improve their performance, the evidence is actually mixed. One review of the literature reported that worker performance often improved in the wake of performance feedback, but that performance also deteriorated one-third of the time (Kluger and DeNisi 1996). Another review found that improvements in performance were negligible after feedback (Smither, London, and Reilly 2005), which may explain why so many workers and supervisors detest evaluations.

Supervisors often provide feedback that is too vague to be useful or avoid negative feedback altogether (Green 2011). Performance ratings are often biased (Latham

and Mann 2006), and differences in ethnicity, race, and culture may affect the ways in which feedback is sought, given, and interpreted (Cleveland et al. 2007). Keeping supervision diaries or records of worker performance improves the accuracy of periodic appraisals (Latham and Mann 2006), but inaccurate performance records are more often caused by deliberate distortions than by rating errors (Spence and Keeping 2011; Tziner et al. 2005). Positive performance ratings are associated with being in a good mood and liking the worker (Milkovich and Newman 2002); negative feedback that includes an invitation to reply has been evaluated as more effective (Lizzio et al. 2008). Much evidence suggests that the typical performance appraisal is ineffective unless paired with other interventions (Bouskila-Yam and Kluger 2010). Feedback that focuses on the task promotes learning relative to feedback that draws the worker's attention to his or her self (Shute 2008). Multiple sources of feedback increase the likelihood that workers will respond to feedback with action (Latham and Mann 2006), but feedback without goal setting has little or no effect on behavior (Latham and Mann 2006). Educational supervision that includes goal setting, collaborative practice, feedback, and evaluation can lead to permanent improvement (Latham and Mann 2006). When negative feedback is linked with a clear and achievable goal, workers are more likely to increase their efforts (Kluger and DeNisi 1996).

Most workers appreciate positive feedback (Heckman-Stone 2003), but workers frequently dismiss feedback that is negative (Cleveland et al. 2007; Jawahar 2006), owing to the disconnection between workers' own self-appraisals and the appraisals of others (Latham and Mann 2006). Negative feedback is more likely to be viewed as fair when accompanied by a detailed explanation (Latham and Mann 2006) from a supervisor whose judgment is trusted (Veloski et al. 2006), and written feedback may be perceived as less biased than oral feedback (Shute 2008). Workers who perceive feedback as accurate are more likely to perceive it as fair and have a more positive response (DeNisi 2011), whereas praise and threats to self-esteem tend to reduce feedback effectiveness (Kluger and DeNisi 1996). Positive supervisory experiences increase willingness to accept negative feedback that workers find useful (Bouskila-Yam and Kluger 2010). Perceptions of the fairness of the feedback that workers receive influence what changes they adopt (Lizzio et al. 2008), but a given worker's response to performance feedback may be governed more by the worker's personality or cognitive processing than by the characteristics of the feedback itself (Cleveland et al. 2007; Ilgen et al. 1979), and workers who perform poorly tend to avoid feedback altogether (Cleveland et al. 2007).

#### ***Worker's Conference Preparation***

The worker should also prepare for the conference by reviewing the agency evaluation outline or evaluation rating form that has been shared with him or her. The worker might follow the outline in thinking about and making notes for a self-evaluation. In addition, workers might be asked to consider the way their performance six months or a year ago compares with their performance now, what



they think has been accomplished during the period to be covered by the evaluation, where they think more help is needed, and the kinds of professional experiences they missed and would now like to have.

Despite the desirability of familiarizing the supervisee with the criteria of evaluation, a large percentage of supervisees responding to a national study reported that they were not given a formal statement that informed them of these criteria. Only about one in three supervisees was asked to formulate his or her own evaluation statement in preparation for the evaluation conference (Kadushin 1992a).

#### ***Evaluation Conference Interaction***

At the beginning of the evaluation interview, it may be useful to deal explicitly with worker anxiety, to review the procedure, and to briefly recapitulate what will be covered. If made at all, these comments should be very brief; the worker is primarily concerned about the evaluation itself. Another tactic in opening the evaluation conference was suggested by a supervisor: "I asked the supervisee to check her caseload with me for the period to be sure nothing had been omitted. I find this is a good comfortable way for both supervisor and supervisee to get into the evaluation conference, and it sets the tone for the supervisee as an active participant."

It is suggested that the interview start with positives, move to problems and deficiencies, and end with reviews of positive performance. This has been termed the sandwich approach—a slice of negatives between two positives (Hornsey et al. 2008; Lizzio et al. 2008).

Because the supervisee is probably anxious to hear what the supervisor has to say, this is one conference in which the supervisor should take the initiative. The supervisor should open the main body of the conference-interview by presenting a general evaluation of the worker's performance as he or she sees it, clearly, simply, and unambiguously. Evaluation provides explicit formal feedback. Its effectiveness is intensified if it is specific, if it can be communicated so that it is appropriate to the needs of the worker, and if it is clear and accurate.

The formal evaluation is the opportune time for plain, direct statements adequately supported by specific citations from job performance. Workers may feel puzzled by ambiguous evaluation statements: "I guess I am doing alright because she didn't say I wasn't" or "She talked a lot about my mature approach to people but I don't know exactly what she meant." Supervisees are interested in an honest evaluation of their performance. Expressing dissatisfaction with evaluations that failed to provide specific feedback in a supportive manner, a supervisee said:

My evaluations were short, not in depth, and limited to general, positive feedback. Little criticism of my work was included. Overall my evaluations were positive but dissatisfying to me because they felt empty, as I really wanted to spend some time on areas on which I needed improvement.

Because a principal responsibility of the supervisor in this conference is to provide explicit, honest feedback in a supportive manner, the principles of effective feedback are applicable here.

The main body of the conference is a discussion of the worker's performance,

using criteria such as those described in this chapter. If both supervisor and supervisee thoughtfully prepare for the evaluation, there may be much agreement to begin with. The following are an excerpt from a self-evaluation review by a supervisee and an excerpt, related to the same problem, from her supervisor's preliminary evaluation note:

#### **SUPERVISEE SELF-EVALUATION**

With both Jane [an unmarried mother] and the Allens [a foster family] I continued to demonstrate what appears to me to be excess zeal. Jane was more capable of handling her problems than I gave her credit for and did not need as much help as I was ready and anxious to offer her. She was capable of applying for TANF without my intervention. The Allens too had enough skill and practice as parents to do an adequate job of making Paul [the foster child] comfortable with the transition to their home without all my hovering over them. In these, and in several other instances, I tend to be the all-loving, overprotective, anxious mother figure.

#### **SUPERVISOR'S PRELIMINARY EVALUATION**

Miss M [the supervisee] frequently manifests a need to be helpful, to encourage the dependency of clients, to solicit client approbation and appreciation by doing for them what they can, perhaps, do as well for themselves. The general attitude of concerned helpfulness which Miss M manifests is a desirable attitude for which the worker should be commended. However, Miss M's current indiscriminate helpful behavior needs to be exercised with more self-control and self-discipline. Miss M needs to learn to offer her help more discriminatingly in situations where it is appropriately required. In such situations and under such circumstances, her help is likely to be more truly helpful. Perhaps we can, in future supervisory conferences, center on the criteria that will enable Miss M to distinguish when a client is truly objectively dependent on her for her intervention and when the client can do for himself.

The conference should conclude as does any good interview—with a summary of the principal points covered. The implications of the conclusions for immediate future conferences are explicated and outlined. There is a clear statement of “where we go from here.” Attention is paid to the supervisee's emotional responses to the evaluation at the end of the conference, and an effort is made to resolve, or at least mitigate, the most disturbing feelings.

Having explicitly identified some aspect of the worker's performance needing improvement, the supervisor and supervisee should give some consideration to a plan of action for change before terminating the conference. Both participants should agree on a specific period of time during which the objective for change will be accomplished. Some evaluation forms even have an entry labeled for a development plan, where one can list specific plans for improvements, objectives to be achieved, and schedules for development to be undertaken.

Even after the conference has ended, the evaluation process continues. Each evaluation is directed toward the ultimate achievement of a reduction of the frequency of evaluations, when the worker is truly self-directed and capable of valid self-evaluation. At that point in his or her professional development, an objective, critical, outside review of his or her work can still be helpful, but the agency has sufficient confidence in the worker so that less frequent evaluations are administratively required.

### **Communication and Use of Evaluations**

The supervisee is not in a position to accept or reject the evaluation, as would be true if the relationship were consultative. The agency cannot grant the supervisee this

option if it is to responsibly meet its obligation to the profession, the community, and the clients. Assuming the evaluation is valid, the supervisee is given the option of modifying his or her behavior so that it meets the standards of performance required by the agency.

The supervisor, in preparing an evaluation, needs to have confidence that recommendations for administrative action, which follow from the evaluation, will be supported by the administration. However, the ultimate responsibility for implementing the consequences of the evaluation rests with administration. This practice protects the supervisee from possible arbitrary evaluations and accompanying negative recommendations. Thus, if the supervisor needs the confidence that administration will generally accept his or her evaluative recommendations, he or she also needs to be aware that good administration will make a considered rather than an automatic decision to support such recommendations.

Once the evaluation has been formulated, it should be written out and the worker should have an opportunity to read it and to keep a copy. *NASW Standards for Social Work Personnel Practices*, as revised in 1990, require a written statement by the agency "of standards of performance" as the basis for evaluation. Furthermore, "the evaluation should be presented in writing ... [and] [t]he employee should have the opportunity to read and sign the evaluation and to file a statement covering any points of disagreement." The statement notes that "[t]he final authority, however, belongs to the supervisor" (National Association of Social Workers 1990:np).

In a written evaluation, the supervisor can be deliberate and precise. He or she can review it carefully and reconsider it at leisure for possible changes in content, emphasis, and balance. None of this is possible in the heat and stress of an oral evaluation, when a word uttered is beyond recall or change. Because they are a matter of record, written reports have the advantage of being available for use by those who might supervise the worker in the future.

Several arguments can be made in support of having the worker read the evaluation. Oral evaluation is open to misinterpretation and is the source of considerable fantasy about what the supervisor actually said. A written evaluation is definite and available for rereading and rechecking. Although still open to some misinterpretation, it is not as readily distorted as an oral evaluation. It is easy for the worker to fail to hear what he or she does not want to hear or to suppress what he or she has heard but is reluctant to remember. It is possible, but more difficult, to engage in such defensive maneuvers with a written document. The evaluation conference is often a stressful experience during which the supervisee finds it difficult to absorb what is being said. The opportunity to read the material improves the chances for distortion-free communication.

Being permitted to read the evaluation reduces any anxiety the worker may feel about whether the evaluation that is shared verbally is the same as the written evaluation actually filed with administration. The fact that the evaluation will be read acts as a constraint on the supervisor. It is likely to intensify the care with which the statement is prepared and increases the probability that the evaluation will be more

objective and accurate.

The context provided for reading the evaluation is important. The worker should have the opportunity to read the evaluation in the presence of the supervisor. If he or she has questions or objections regarding content or desires clarification of ambiguously phrased material, this can be handled immediately. If the evaluation is negative, the presence of the supervisor is an immediately available source of reassurance and support.

If objections are raised that the supervisor accepts as valid, the evaluation statement is amended accordingly. If objections are raised that are not agreed to by the supervisor, the supervisee should have the right to ask that a statement of these reservations be included in the supervisee's file in his or her own name. Evaluation forms often include provision for supervisor signature, supervisee signature, and signature of agency administrator. Alongside the supervisee's signature the forms might include a proviso such as the following: "The contents of this evaluation have been shared with me. My signature does not necessarily mean agreement."

Some supervisors claim, with a certain amount of justification, that a careful safeguarding of the supervisee's right to read the evaluation will result in less useful and perhaps less valid evaluations. Torn between doing justice to agency administration and agency clients and protecting themselves from enervating argumentation, supervisors may choose to write bland, noncommittal, generally favorable evaluations—saying little to give offense but, at the same time, saying little that is significant. Hunches, intuitions, and sharp guesses that supervisors feel are true but cannot actually substantiate by citing the specific supporting evidence will tend to be excluded.

The agency should make available due process procedures for appealing an evaluation that the supervisee thinks is unfair (Milkovich and Newman 2002; Malos 2005). The supervisor needs to support access to such procedures without any suggestion of retaliation. It is not the use of such procedures that is important to most workers but the knowledge that the option is freely available and accessible.

In summary, both supervisor and supervisee should prepare for the conference by reviewing their notes and tentatively formulating an evaluation. After they have discussed their respective perceptions of the worker's performance in the evaluation conference, the supervisor writes a formal evaluation statement. This is given to the worker for reaction and comment.

This section indicates desirable social work evaluation procedures. We know little of how such evaluation conferences are actually conducted, Nichols and Cheers (1980) analyzed the recordings of twenty-three evaluation conferences. Although these were between supervisors and social work students, they may be instructive for what they can tell us about the conduct of practice evaluation conferences. In 30 percent of the cases, no evaluative comments were made. With regard to about a third of the evaluative comments made, "little or no evidence was presented to support the evaluative comment. When evidence was produced, it was primarily a descriptive statement rather than a specific example" (63–64). In 87 percent of the

cases, the supervisor introduced the topics that were discussed.

A study of evaluation of workers in protective services concluded that where assessment skills of workers' performance has been rigorously examined, it appears that supervisors tend to make global assessments of workers' performance and fail to make discriminating ratings of different performance criteria. It was further noted that personal characteristics of the supervisors influenced their ratings. Supervisors, in general, were not prepared to carry out accurate and detailed performance assessment of supervisees' work. (Thomas and LaCavera 1979:4)

## **Sources of Information for Evaluation**

In addition to knowing what to look for, which is spelled out in the criteria of the evaluation outlines, we have to know where to look in sampling worker performance. The supervisor needs to be able to obtain sufficient, valid, and reliable information representing the typical performance of the worker if he or she is to apply the criteria in making an assessment. The possible sources of information available to the supervisor regarding the worker's performance might include the following:

1. Supervisee's verbal reports of activity
2. Supervisee's case files and written records
3. Supervisee's correspondence, reports, statistical forms, weekly schedule, daily action logs, monthly performance records, etc.
4. Observation of supervisee's activity in group supervisory meetings
5. Observation of supervisee's activity in staff meetings and/or joint professional conferences
6. Observation of supervisee in joint interviews
7. Observation of supervisee-client interaction (individual, group, or community) via one-way mirror and/or audio and video recordings or transmissions
8. 360-degree stakeholder feedback
9. Client and organizational outcomes
10. The supervisor's diary or record of supervisory meetings

Studies of the actual sources of information used by supervisors in formulating evaluations indicates high dependence on a very limited group of sources, principally the supervisee's verbal reports and written records of activity (McCarthy, Kulakowski, and Kenfield 1994).

Written records include the worker's case and personnel files and data regarding the worker's program efforts. In addition to "gold standard" measures of client and program outcomes reflecting worker performance, quantifiable indices of productivity such as the following are reviewed for evaluation: number of interviews conducted, children placed, applications processed, discharge plans completed, home visits made, contracts written, institutions licensed, foster homes evaluated, group meetings held, number of collaterals contacted, and so on.

Less frequently used, but of some importance, are correspondence, reports, statistical forms, and worker activity in staff meetings and group supervisory meetings. Although audio and video recordings and direct observations of the worker

have been used with some frequency in the training and supervision of marriage and family counselors (Champe and Kleist 2003), it appears that social workers (Beddoe et al. 2011), like psychologists (Amerikaner and Rose 2012) and physicians (Craig 2011), more rarely use them. The use of audio and video recordings and one-way mirror observation is discussed in detail in [chapter 10](#), which is concerned with innovations in supervision.

In all of the previously mentioned techniques, the worker, either alone or in interaction with the supervisor, generates the data used for evaluation. It must be conceded that supervisors see a worker's performance from just one vantage point. Even when both parties are present and observe the same thing, there may be a glaring disconnect between their evaluative perspectives (Zarbock et al. 2009). Therefore, Bernard and Goodyear (2009), Kaslow et al. (2009), and Rose (2009) believe that evaluations are optimized when the supervisor receives data about the worker's performance from a number of sources, if only because others may see the worker differently because different aspects of the person's performance are manifested in the different relationships in different hierarchical relationships with the worker.

Peers and clients may evoke different aspects of the worker's repertoire of behavioral responses. This argues for the fact that a more comprehensive appraisal of the worker's total performance would need to include the perceptions not only of the supervisors but of peers and clients as well (Latham and Mann 2006). With Kelly and Sundet (2007), Richardson (2010) has called for using 360-degree feedback from multiple stakeholders to evaluate performance in social work. Although this approach to performance appraisal has been popular in business and industry (Milkovich and Newman 2002; Valle and Bozeman 2002), the effect of multisource feedback on subsequent performance has often been modest (Smither et al. 2005; Maurer et al. 2002; Miller and Archer 2010).

The research tends to indicate that peers make very accurate assessments of each other's performance (Harris and Schaubroeck 1988; Valle and Bozeman 2002), and organizations are said to make wide use of peer feedback when conducting management performance appraisals in business and industry (Richardson 2010). However, efforts by the supervisor to solicit information from peers for purposes of evaluation present problems. Peers are in competition with each other, and this may determine the nature of information selected for sharing. Peers "telling" on one another is apt to create morale problems within the peer group, and there is a question of violation of each other's confidentiality. Peer evaluation runs counter to the supposition generally held by the group that the unit is a company of equals. This inhibits the critical evaluation by one peer of another's work. However, increased employee perceptions that appraisals are fair, positive changes in organizational behavior, increased productivity, and improved customer satisfaction are said to offset the untoward effects of appraisals by peers, albeit in business settings with organizational cultures and goals that may be quite different from those of social work services. See Bracken et al. (2001) for a review of the literature.

There is growing acceptance of clients as a source of information regarding worker's performance, but this remains controversial. Client subjectivity is one explanation for the findings reported in a study by Bishop (1971), for example, in which supervisor and supervisee evaluation ratings, significantly correlated with each other, were at considerable variance with much more favorable client ratings of the supervisee. On the other hand, good performance looks different from different perspectives (Valle and Bozeman 2002), and subjective client ratings of their relationship or satisfaction with workers have been interpreted as objective reflections of the service outcomes (Baldwin, Wampold, and Imel 2007; Harkness 1997), because the helping alliance between worker and client is often the best predictor of treatment outcomes (Horvath et al. 2011; Orlinsky, Ronnestad, and Willutzki 2004). Clients are not in a good position to evaluate worker job performance because the client is not knowledgeable about agency job requirements, lacks a perspective on social work performance in general, and may find it difficult to be objective because of an intense personal relationship with the worker. However, their service outcomes are an important source of data that supervisors can use to evaluate worker performance, which is another innovation discussed in [chapter 10](#).

## **Evaluation of Supervisors and Supervision**

The supervisee is accountable to the supervisor, but in many agencies the supervisor is not formally evaluated by anyone else. There is frequently no evaluation of the supervisor's performance by agency administrators, leaving supervisors to evaluate themselves.

A study of how sixty-two supervising psychologists evaluated their own competence found that most supervisors perceived their skills as adequate and were at least somewhat confident in their supervisory and evaluative skills, despite limited reading of the supervisory literature, poor supervisory training, and poor-to-fair preparation for the supervisory role (Robiner, Saltzman, Hoberman, and Schirvar 1997). This is consistent with the self-appraisals of the 1,409 licensed supervisors participating in the NASW Workforce survey, of whom fewer than 10 percent described themselves as prepared poorly (or not at all) for the social work roles they performed (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004), with more than 87 percent in agreement that they always (or almost always) helped improve the quality of life of their clients.

Although supervisors may be conscientious about self-evaluation and attempt to make efforts to modify their performance accordingly, this may not be a sufficient incentive to effect change. Culatta and Seltzer (1977) instructed clinical speech therapist supervisors in the use of charting systems for their audiotaped supervisory conferences. Faced with a self-generated critique of their performance as a result of a charted analysis of their interaction, the supervisors became explicitly aware of some undesirable aspects of their supervision. Despite this, analysis of continuing supervisory sessions indicated that self-knowledge "*per se* of how a supervisory session is being conducted may not exert enough force to motivate change in

supervisory behavior” (526).

In principle, organizational behavior at every level can improve when human service providers obtain performance feedback from their stakeholders (Boettcher 1998), but the evaluation of supervisors presents more of a problem than the evaluation of supervisees because supervisors produce fewer “products.” In the absence of measured program outcomes, there may be no case records and fewer reports of one kind or another to examine.

The supervisee has the most intimate, detailed knowledge of the supervisor’s performance. Consequently, some efforts have been made to obtain evaluations of supervisors from their supervisees, despite the fact that the supervisee has information regarding a limited aspect of the supervisor’s performance—namely the supervisor’s performance in supervising the supervisee. Despite the apparent value of supervisee evaluation of supervisors, only 18.5 percent of 377 supervisees answering a national survey said they participated in such a procedure (Kadushin 1992a). Yet, to the extent that supervisee appraisal results in positive changes in the supervisor’s performance, it makes a contribution to more effective supervision. It provides the feedback supervisors need to correct performance deficiencies. Supervisee appraisal of supervisors enhances supervisee morale, intensifies a conviction in the fairness of the organization, is in line with a more egalitarian ethos, and encourages the feeling that the supervisees have some power in the organization. The fact that such an appraisal is an accepted procedure in the organization may prompt supervisors to be more concerned about their performance and pay greater attention to supervisee needs.

Hegarty (1974) found that supervisors did change as a result of feedback from supervisees about their supervisory performance, but additional incentive through external feedback and evaluation may be necessary. In an important study by Kelly and Sundet (2007), for example, it took a combination of 360-degree evaluative feedback, didactic skill training, individual development plans, and a two-year intervention to achieve enough behavioral change among child protective service supervisors to have an impact on organizational culture and outcomes.

Questions have been raised about problems that might be associated with such an evaluation (Judge and Ferris 1993; Arvey and Murphy 1998). Will the supervisee assess the supervisor’s performance primarily in terms of his or her own personal needs and preferences? Will such an appraisal encourage “gaming” on the part of both supervisor and supervisee, with the supervisor acting to court a favorable evaluation and the supervisee evaluating to obtain the approval of the supervisor? Given the power of the supervisor, can the supervisee afford to be objective? Is the supervisee capable of making an objective evaluation of the supervisor’s performance?

Dendinger and Kohn (1989) used questionnaires with 50 supervisors and 238 supervisees and found that supervisors’ self-evaluations were very similar to supervisees’ evaluation of supervisors, but it appears that a high degree of agreement may be unusual (Heidemeier and Moser 2009). Reviewing the research regarding the



effects of subordinates' appraisal of supervisors, Bernardin (1986) found them to be largely positive, as did Kelly and Sundet (2008) and Richardson (2010). However, Edwards and Ewan (1996) and Murphy and Cleveland (1995) cautioned that the anonymity of subordinate appraisals (and freedom from reprisal) may be crucial.

In the service of modeling and performance improvement, we encourage courageous supervisors to use each performance appraisal of the supervisee as an opportunity to ask for reciprocal feedback. A formal request for written feedback from the supervisee increases the likelihood that the supervisee will provide a measured response, and perhaps with less censorship for "political correctness" and social desirability than might be received in an oral report (Podsakoff et al. 2003).

One form of feedback that we have found useful in practice is a narrative, written, description of supervisory behaviors that the supervisee has found helpful and unhelpful. Often, vignettes such as these open the door to frank and useful discussions that serve to recalibrate the focus of supervision and the working relationship between supervisor and supervisee. In addition, a number of scales and coding systems have been developed to monitor and assess the supervisory process and its outcomes, and many have been reviewed in detail by Bernard and Goodyear (2009) and Falender and Shafranske (2004). Like periodic glances at a supervisory dashboard, the supervisor who collects both qualitative and quantitative performance feedback (Brutus 2010) at regular intervals is more likely to reach the desired destination by anticipating, avoiding, and correcting problems down the road.

Two instruments that we recommend for the supervisory dashboard are the Evaluation Process within Supervision Inventory (EPWSI), developed by Lehrman-Waterman and Ladany (2001), and the Supervisory Working Alliance Inventory (SWAI), developed by Efstation et al. (1990). Both instruments are psychometrically sound and are being used with increasing frequency in supervision research. (For a third dashboard instrument, counseling satisfaction outcome measures are described in [chapter 10](#).)

The EPWSI has two factors, goal setting ("e.g., goals that are specific; feasible in regard to capacity, opportunity, and resources; and measurable") and feedback ("e.g., feedback that is systematic, timely, clear, and balanced between positive and negative statements"). Both factors have been associated with "(a) a stronger working alliance, (b) enhanced trainee perception of supervisor influence on self-efficacy, and (c) increased trainee satisfaction with supervision" (Lehrman-Waterman and Ladany 2001:168).

The SWAI has two factors as well: client focus (e.g., "In supervision, my supervisor places a high priority on our understanding the client's perspective," and "When correcting my errors with a client, my supervisor offers alternative ways of intervening with that client") and Rapport (e.g., "I feel comfortable working with my supervisor," and "My supervisor stays in tune with me during supervision"). These have been associated with counselor self-efficacy (Efstation et al. 1990:327), skill (Ellis and Ladany 1997), work stress (Deihl and Ellis 2009; Sterner 2009), satisfaction with supervision (Ladany, Ellis, and Friedlander 1999), and job

satisfaction (Mena and Bailey 2007; Sterner 2009).

To counterbalance feedback from his or her supervisees, the supervisor might invite additional feedback from the agency administrator. An evaluation of supervisors by agency administrators might ask such questions as changes in the level of productivity of unit, the unit's error rate, the number of complaints received from clients, the rate of staff turnover, absentee and tardiness record of the unit, relationships with other agencies, interpretation of agency functions to the community, ability to represent needs of his or her workers to administration, and capacity to communicate service effects of agency policies and procedures to administration.

## **Controversial Questions**

Perhaps the key controversy in the evaluation of worker performance is whether individual performance should be evaluated at all. Overall, there is little evidence to support the contention that feedback from the evaluation of individual performance leads to meaningful performance improvements in organizational settings (DeNisi 2011; Kluger and DeNisi 1996; Smither et al. 2005), which leads many to believe that system factors, not individual factors, are the major performance determinant (Levy and Williams 2004). Nevertheless, supervisors are unlikely to abandon the appraisal of individual performance in the foreseeable future.

There is some controversy about whether evaluation should be concerned with assessing the worker against objective, uniform standards or against the worker's own development. A profession accountable to the community and concerned with effective service to the client cannot, it seems to us, accept as legitimate an orientation toward evaluation that employs the worker's own development as the standard. Some minimal external requirements need to be met. Even if the worker is ten times more proficient today than yesterday, if he or she still does not meet minimum standards of acceptability, supervisors do the clients an injustice in retaining the worker on the job. Supervisors should be concerned about individual development, but as measured against some general, established standards.

Previously, we mentioned the controversy around separating administrative and educational-clinical supervision. Some proponents for separation suggest that the administrative responsibility of evaluation be given to the supervisee's peers. Studies have shown that when peers are provided with the necessary information about a worker's performance, their assessment of performance correlates very highly with evaluations of the same work made by the supervisor (Harris and Schaubroeck 1988; Valle and Bozeman 2002). Under usual conditions, however, workers do not know enough about the work activity of their peers to make a reasoned judgment. Social work generally involves face-to-face activity between worker and client in privacy rather than any public performance open to observation by others. Studies of doctors in a clinic performing under analogous conditions indicated that they did not have enough knowledge of their peers' activity to judge their performance validly and reliably (Friedson and Rhea 1965).

Evaluation by peers would require sharing with each other all of the recordings,

case reports, and statistical forms ordinarily used as a basis for evaluation. Even if such materials were shared with peers openly and willingly, the peers would still be denied the rich information that supervisors obtain from the conference-to-conference discussion of work activity. The limited availability of basic information needed for valid evaluation, and the time expenditure such a procedure would impose, make peer evaluation for educational purposes open to criticism. Peer evaluation as a basis for administrative decision would be open to even more serious question. Where peers are in competition for scarce resources (a merit raise, a promotion, or a more desirable caseload), the burden of trying to be fair, honest, and objective in evaluating one's competitors is very great. Some additional difficulties of the relationship of peers to the evaluation process have been discussed earlier.

The same problems regarding adequate knowledge of the worker's total performance would militate against assigning the responsibility for ongoing educational supervision to one person in the agency and responsibility for evaluation to another. Other aspects of this controversy are discussed in [chapter 10](#).

Another problem relates to the antithetical functions of education and evaluation (Erera and Lazar 1994b). We noted that the two principal objectives of a good evaluation are educational and administrative: evaluation is designed to further professional growth but also provides a basis for administrative decisions. Attempting to achieve both of these objectives in a single conference is likely to fail because the defensiveness generated by judgments operates against the openness required for learning. The suggestion is that these two objectives be separated. One evaluation conference would focus on professional development. Another evaluation conference, held at a different time, would focus on producing an evaluation report for administrative use. In essence, evaluation for administrative purposes is uncoupled from evaluation for developmental purposes.

Uncoupling administrative and developmental evaluation conferences permits the supervisor to discuss salary and promotion decisions with regard to considerations other than an exclusive concern with performance competence. Salary, promotions, and layoff decisions may be communicated as the consequence of externalities having nothing to do with competence, such as agency financial changes, reductions in client applications, and job seniority. In deciding to separate the administrative and developmental aspects of the evaluation into two separate conferences, there is the additional problem of determining which of these interviews will be scheduled first. If the developmental interview precedes the administrative review, the content of the first interview can be used to justify administrative decisions communicated in the second interview. However, supervisees may not be ready to fully engage with developmentally focused content until administrative issues have been discussed.

The priority supervisees give to administrative evaluation over developmental evaluation is exemplified by one supervisor who said, "Betty didn't want and wasn't ready to discuss anything about her work until she heard about her pay raise." Inevitably, there is some disjoint between performance standards formulated for an evaluation instrument and its relevance as perceived by any individual supervisee. Of

necessity, performance standards have to be more general and less particular than any one supervisee's job. Consequently, the individual supervisee is likely to see any evaluation instrument as failing to do justice to and reflect accurately the specifics of his or her performance and the uniqueness of his or her tasks. It is not surprising, then, that in a study of differences between workers and supervisors regarding their reactions to performance evaluation, supervisors were significantly more likely than supervisees to see evaluation criteria as consistent with workers' duties and responsibilities and capable of accurately evaluating performance (Harkness and Mulinski 1988:342, table 2).

It may be that different evaluation procedures may need to be employed to meet the different objectives of evaluation. A recent meta-analysis of studies of performance improvement following evaluative feedback found the following:

Improvement is most likely to occur when feedback indicates that change is necessary, recipients have a positive feedback orientation, perceive a need to change their behavior, react positively to the feedback, believe change is feasible, set appropriate goals to regulate their behavior, and take actions that lead to skill and performance improvement. (Smither et al. 2005:33)

This suggests, for example, that performance contracting, using management-by-objectives procedures, may be more clearly designed to serve the professional developmental purpose of evaluation (Daley 1992). In achieving this purpose, the criteria of evaluation are based on the individual performance and professional growth needs of the supervisee being evaluated. However, because they are individualized and tailored to the needs of the particular supervisee, they are not useful in discriminating between the performance level of one supervisee as compared with another. This lack of discrimination makes this procedure ineffective for administrative purposes of evaluation.

A question arises about the reliability and validity of supervisors' judgments in evaluation. The supervisor is faced with a very difficult, albeit inescapable, task in evaluating. Perhaps unable to observe worker performance directly, denied access to a clearly defined finished product, and employing imprecise criteria applied to activities that are difficult to measure, the supervisor is asked to formulate an evaluation that accurately reflects the reality of the worker's performance.

There is general agreement that standards for evaluation in social work have been vague, "pragmatic, observational and intuitive rather than precise, standardized and scientific" (Kagan 1963:18). However, they have not been totally unsophisticated, casual, or without merit.

Some confirmation of the validity of a supervisor's assessments can be derived from the fact that such assessment shows significant correlation with scores achieved by workers on written tests developed from job analysis (Kleinman and Lounsbury 1978; Cope 1982).

In an experiment conducted in 1955 under the sponsorship of the Council on Social Work Education (Lutz 1956), records of four casework interviews were sent to casework faculty of schools of social work throughout the country for independent assessments. Records of four group-work meetings were sent to group-work faculty.

Faculty members were asked to evaluate the performance of the caseworker or group worker as reflected in the record on a seven-point scale from *definitely inadequate* to *definitely superior*. A total of 143 responses were received. In three of the four casework records the consistency in judgments made was at a level of statistical significance ( $p = .01$ ). This indicates that there was a considerable consensus regarding judgments. However, there were some supervisors who rated the same record as *definitely inadequate*, whereas others rated it *definitely superior*. Consistency in rating all of the group-work records was statistically significant, and there was less variability in the ratings. There is therefore reason to believe that supervisors can achieve close agreement about the level of performance of a particular worker based on some generally accepted criteria.

Kagle (1979) asked 435 registered clinical social workers to evaluate the social worker's performance in two case analogues sent to them. One was a case of child neglect, the second of marital conflict. The respondents were asked to use a Case Evaluation Form that included criteria generally employed in evaluating social work practice. Findings indicated that "there was much disagreement among evaluators on case one. Overall, less than 75 percent of the respondents agreed on thirty-nine of the fifty-four evaluation criteria. ... Respondents failed to agree in twenty-nine of the fifty-four criteria" on case two (294). The researcher concluded that "a case record is clearly insufficient information on which to base a valid judgment" of the worker's performance (295).

Even if more adequate data were available to supervisors, some of the essential problems of evaluation would still persist. Liston, Yager, and Strauss (1981) obtained videotapes of six psychiatric residents interacting with patients at mid-phase of psychodynamically oriented therapy. Using a previously validated schedule, the Psychotherapy Assessment Schedule, they asked thirteen board-certified psychiatrists, all experienced supervisors and clinicians, to evaluate the resident's performance based on the videotape. Interrater agreement was statistically better than chance. For practical purposes, however, it is noted that "the strength of interrater agreement was low on every case" (1071). "Inter-rater agreement tends to be worse among ratings for those conditions or behaviors which are especially important to assess accurately.... The most difficult performance category for the raters to agree about was that of dealing with the specific skills of therapy" (1072).

Chevron and Rounsaville (1983) arranged to have the work of nine psychotherapists evaluated by five different procedures:

1. Didactic examination
2. A composite global rating by faculty in the training program attended by the subject therapists
3. Therapists' self-ratings
4. Independent evaluators' ratings of videotaped psychotherapy sessions
5. Supervisor's traditional method of evaluation on the basis of the therapists' retrospective reports of therapy sessions.

Results showed little agreement among assessments of the therapists' skills based on the different data sources. The most disconcerting finding was the lack of agreement between ratings based on review of videotaped sessions and those based on the supervisor's discussion of process material with the therapist. Optimistically, however, only the supervisor's ratings were correlated with client outcomes, indicating that the supervisor's ratings had validity in terms of positive client change.

In explaining these confounding findings, the researchers noted that supervisees typically reported on client behavior, client themes, and client progress in discussions with supervisors. Thus, the most salient information focus in supervisory sessions may be associated with client variables. In contrast, when evaluating videotaped therapy sessions, the focus of attention tends to be on the therapist's behavior and interventions. It is not altogether clear which focus will be more closely linked to client outcomes.

Evaluations require some consensual agreement on the part of the profession about what constitutes good practice. Although explicit criteria have been formulated and standards established for evidence-based practice, there is often a variety of evidence-based interventions to choose from for any given problem. Because there are as many schools of thought about what is good practice as there are about what is good practice evidence, the supervisor might hold one theoretical position regarding this and the supervisee an equally acceptable but quite different position. Because the supervisor is charged with making the evaluation, his or her theoretical bias may determine the judgments made.

Until data firmly establishes the superiority of a well-defined set of procedures or interpretation for a given clinical problem, the very same behavior of a clinician may be rated appropriate or inappropriate depending on the point of view of the observer ... the behavior assessable only through the individual "filters" of a clinical supervisor. (Shriberg et al.1975:159)

The fact that supervisors employ their own theoretical biases in evaluating the work of supervisees is neatly illustrated in the responses of three different supervisors to the same segment of work by a counselor:

This particular interview involved a beginning counselor and an exceedingly fluent and verbal high school senior who proceeded to monopolize the counseling hour so completely that the counselor actually said only two sentences, namely, "Would you tell me your reasons for coming to counseling," and "Our time is about up; would you like to make another appointment?" The three supervisors of varying theoretical positions proceeded to examine what should have been done in this particular interview, which perhaps in actuality was what they would have done under the circumstances. One of the supervisors, of a Freudian bent, asserted that he would have done exactly what the counselor in question had done; that is, permitted him to free associate as much as he pleased during this first interview without any direction or interruption. This supervisor felt the counselor had done a marvelous job. The second supervisor, of a more directive-clinical orientation, expressed the opinion that, as he saw it, the counselor had done an atrocious job and indeed posed the question, "Who was doing the counseling?" He felt that the counselor should definitely have curtailed the client's excessive flow of verbiage and probed, analyzed, hypothesized, and clarified to a greater degree. The third supervisor took a somewhat middle-of-the-road position and felt that there were several opportune times for the counselor to reflect, clarify, and recapitulate, but praised the counselor's permissiveness and patience. (Demos 1964:705)

The general difficulties in evaluation are compounded currently by rapid changes in social work responsibilities, procedures, and acceptable methodological approaches.

For example, a supervisor trained in the interpersonal psychotherapy of depression may have great difficulty in evaluating the work of the supervisee practicing cognitive-behavioral methods. Accepting that *different* does not necessarily imply better or worse, the supervisor is not in a position to evaluate work based on a much different basic orientation to the clients.

Recognizing and accepting the necessity for evaluation and the difficulties that reduce the likelihood of achieving a wholly satisfactory, reliable and valid evaluation, what can one say to supervisors faced with this responsibility? The task and concomitant authority are inherent in the position. To accept the position of supervisor involves acceptance of the task. In accepting the task one must also, unavoidably, accept the burden of guilt and anxiety associated with it. But this is a truth to which the supervisor is no stranger. The social worker offering service to the client accepts the burden of guilt and anxiety associated with implementing decisions that are frequently made on the basis of tenuous evidence and hazardous inference. Every decision of consequence to which one is a responsible party excites a keen and discomforting awareness of personal fallibility.

One might further say to supervisors that they should recognize and accept their humanity—that *all* evaluations have, inevitably, elements of subjectivity, and that all are, in a measure, in error. But the supervisor, in immediate contact with the day-to-day work of the supervisee, is best informed about the work and best able to evaluate it. The measure of probable error in the supervisor's evaluation is less than the supervisee would be subjected to if evaluated by anyone else. The systematic, conscientious effort at assessments by the supervisor, despite subjectivity and error, is "far kinder (and more accurate) than the commonly employed gossip by which professional judgments are circulated in the absence of a structure" (Ekstein and Wallerstein 1972:291). If true, completely accurate, evaluations are not attainable, adequate and useful approximations are achievable.

It must be recognized and accepted that—however fallible it may be—the best instrument currently available to make complex judgments, such as performance evaluations, is the trained, perceptive, informed mind of the supervisor. "Subjective judgments are imprecise and run to danger of being distorted by biases and preferences. But they are broader, richer, more complex and, in the end, perhaps truer to reality than highly specific, narrowly defined, objective criteria" (Haywood 1979). More precise instruments are desirable but not yet devised. Currently, "the making of such assessments is as much an art to be cultivated as it is a science to be applied" (Green 1972:54).

Neither the community, the agency, the clients, nor the supervisee can legitimately ask for infallibility in evaluation. What they can ask for and expect is a "reasonable approximation to an estimate" (Reynolds 1942:280). Most supervisors are capable of offering this, while striving for infallibility. Fortuitously, the empirical evidence supports measured optimism about the validity of subjective supervisory ratings. As Arvey and Murphy (1998:163) observed, "There is increased recognition that subjectivity does not automatically translate into rater error or bias and that ratings are most likely valid



reflections of true performance and represent a low-cost mechanism for evaluating employees.”

## **Summary**

An objective appraisal of the worker’s total functioning on the job over a given period of time, in terms of clearly defined criteria reflecting agency standards, has value for the supervisee, supervisor, agency, and client. It is a responsibility of administrative supervision.

Supervisors dislike evaluating because they are reluctant to accentuate status differences, feel dubious about their entitlement and ability to evaluate, perceive evaluation as an indirect assessment of supervision, regard it as contradictory to the ethos of social work, and fear the strong negative affect which might be evoked.

Evaluation should be a continuous process that encourages active supervisee participation and input. It is based on defensible related criteria that are openly shared with the supervisee. It takes situational factors into consideration, is tentative, and is concerned with both strengths and weaknesses. It is enacted in the context of a positive relationship, and the supervisor is ready to accept an evaluation of his or her own performance.

Both supervisor and supervisee prepare for the evaluation conference by reviewing the work done during the evaluation period. The conference is concerned with a mutual sharing of the outcomes of the review, using the evaluation outline as the basis for discussion. The final evaluation is written and given to the worker.

The worker’s written and verbal reports of his or her work are the principal data used in assessing performance. Evaluations are most frequently used in motivating professional growth and making personnel decisions.

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# CHAPTER 9

## Group Supervision

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### Definition

Although individual supervision is the most frequent context for supervision, it is not the only context. In some agencies, group supervision may be the preferred format for achieving the objectives of supervision. In many more agencies, however, group supervision is likely to be employed as a supplement to individual supervision (Newgent, Davis, and Farley 2004).

Group supervision is distinguishable from other procedures that employ a group setting to achieve agency administrative purposes. Staff meetings, in-service training sessions, agency institutes, seminars, and workshops all use the group setting as context for conducting agency business and for the purpose of educating staff. However, the term *group supervision* is here defined as the use of a group setting to implement the responsibilities of supervision. In group supervision, the supervisor is given educational, administrative, and supportive responsibility for the activities of a specific number of workers and meets with them as a group to discharge these responsibilities. In group supervision, the agency mandate to the supervisor is implemented in the group and through the group. Most simply, group supervision has been defined as supervision in a group format.

The supervisory conference group is a formed group. The group is structured with a task and an agenda. Membership in the group is defined as a consequence of being a supervisee of a particular group leader-supervisor. These groups are organized under agency administrative auspices. They are formed with the expectation that certain objectives will be achieved; they have a designated place in the formal structure of the agency and have a designated leader in the unit supervisor.

The primary ultimate objective of group supervision is the same as the ultimate objective of all supervision: more effective and efficient service to agency clients. Unlike group therapy or sensitivity training groups, group supervision is not directed toward the personal development of the supervisee, personal problem-solving, or satisfaction derived from group activities and interaction. Although these outcomes may be a product of group supervision, for supervisees the principle objective is enhancement of their professional practice.

An agency introducing group supervision as a substitute for, or a supplement to, individual supervision needs to prepare its workers for the change. This modification of supervision should be introduced only with the concurrence of staff, with whom the reasons for the change have been discussed. The specifics of how group supervision will operate should be clearly interpreted following the acceptance of the desirability

of the change. In interpreting what is involved in making such a change, it may be administratively desirable to review the advantages and disadvantages of group supervision

## **Advantages of Group Supervision**

One clear advantage of group supervision is economy of administrative time and effort (Bernard and Goodyear 2009; Hayes, Blackman, and Brennan 2001; Proctor 2008). Administrative communications regarding standardized policies and procedures can be communicated once to all the supervisees in a unit. Matters that are of common concern can be most economically communicated to individuals as members of a group. There are financial savings to an agency that moves from individual supervision to group supervision because the latter involves less expenditure of supervisory personnel's time. Given the critical importance of redesigning human services to contain and lower costs in response to budget cuts and managed care, interest in group supervision has grown as a more cost-effective alternative to individual supervision.

Group conferences make possible the efficient utilization of a wider variety of teaching-learning experiences (Tebb, Manning, and Klaumann 1996). A presentation by a specialist can be scheduled, a PowerPoint presentation can be delivered, a video recording can be shown, a role-playing session can be organized, or a panel presentation can be arranged. Such learning experiences are designed primarily for the group context.

Group supervision provides the opportunity for supervisees to share their experiences with similar problems encountered on the job and possible solutions that each has formulated in response (Bernard and Goodyear 2009; Kuechler 2006; Linton and Hedstrom 2006). All of us together are smarter than any one of us; however similar the assignments, the aggregate of all the caseloads (which is the total pool for discussion in the group) provides a greater variety of experiences than is available in any one worker's caseload. Consequently, the sources for learning are richer and more varied than in the individual conference. Different members of the group can further provide a greater variety of points of view for learning in vicarious access to a greater diversity of social problems.

The sharing of relevant experiences in the group supervisory conference is illustrated in the following excerpt. In this conference of clinical social workers in a psychiatric hospital setting, the workers are concerned with variations in the signs and symptoms of mental disorders in selected patients receiving treatment. One supervisee, Mr. N, reported the following:

[My client] had regressed since his admission to the hospital. The patient's wife had noticed this further withdrawal and had discussed with Mr. N her concern about this observation. Mr. N pointed out that he felt he had been able to help the patient's wife understand that regressions during psychotic episodes occurred frequently.

Addressing the group, the supervisor pointed out that Mr. N had helped the relative to anticipate what so commonly happens during the course of mental illness and its treatment: that there were frequent vacillations in reality anchorage and in observable responses to treatment. The supervisor wondered if the others hadn't observed examples of these swings in their case assignments.

Miss Delmar said she had a patient who had recently been taken off of [electroconvulsive therapy] and had regressed immediately afterward. Mr. Drake explained that he had a case like Miss D's and also one like Mr. N's. So far, most of Miss Gleeson's patients had been responding very well to treatment; however, when discharge plans had been mobilized with one of her cases, the patient had regressed, showing worse symptoms than had been shown on admission to hospital. The reversal had been sudden.

The group expressed its opinion that temporary regression at the time of discharge or termination is a common reaction among clients. (Abrahamson 1959:89-90)

Not only does group supervision provide vicarious access to a wider variety of social problems than is available in each supervisee's singular caseload, it also provides vicarious access to a more diverse client caseload. Although the individual supervisee may have had limited opportunities to work with Bosnian, Sudanese, or Somali Bantu families, for example, encountering such clients in the presentation of the other group members affords some degree of indirect exposure.

One group member with a number of immigrant families in her caseload, while freely admitting that she had "a problem" with parents who "spanked" their children, was also clearly worried about what would happen if she openly challenged their behavior. Would she alienate her clients if she insisted that they use "time outs" instead? Would this be an act of "cultural imperialism?" Would we view her intervention as a violation of social work values and ethics that champion client self-determination?

Group discussion of such problems provides an opportunity to explore the challenges of social work practice with diverse client groups. The group acknowledgment and discussion of biases and stereotypes enhances the supervisees' level of multicultural practice competence (Rowell 2010; Kaduvetoor et al. 2009; Lassiter et al. 2008).

The opportunity for the sharing of common problems encountered on the job is, in itself, a therapeutically reassuring contribution to individual morale. In the interchange made possible through group supervision, workers often become aware that their problems are not unique, that their failures and difficulties are not the unique result of their own particular ineptitude, that all the other workers seem to be equally disturbed by some clients and equally frustrated by some situations. The group context permits a living experience with the supportive techniques of universalization and normalization. The worker is given a keen appreciation of the fact that these are "our problems" rather than "my problems." It decreases the tendency to personalize problems and increases the likelihood of objectifying them (Bogo, Globerman, and Sussman 2004a).

Workers find it difficult to assess their comparative competence because they perform their tasks in private and discuss their performance in the privacy of the individual supervisory conference. Group supervision gives workers an opportunity to "see" the work of others and provides them with a basis for comparison (Hayes, Blackman, and Brennan 2001). A worker can develop a clear sense of how he or she is doing as compared with other workers of comparable education and experience. A worker in a court setting said:

One of my major concerns is that I function pretty much on my own. I enjoy my autonomy but I have little opportunity to compare my work to my co-workers'. I have no standard to compare my efforts against but my own. My supervisor uses unit meetings for passing on new agency policies as well as troubleshooting unit concerns, but not for case staffing. When there has been an opportunity to team with another worker on a case, I found it interesting

that much of what we did was similar, which reduced much of my anxiety. I was also surprised and excited about the different view they had of a situation and new methods of processing the same experience. Why couldn't we have done this in unit meetings of the group?

Members of the group also act as a source of emotional support (Bernard and Goodyear 2009). Group members console, sympathize with, and praise each other during the course of group meetings. The group not only provides the opportunity for lateral teaching (peer to peer) but also provides opportunities of mutual aid of various kinds. This opportunity for a supervisee to share his or her knowledge and to give emotional support to peers is a gratifying, moral-building experience that reinforces a feeling of belonging to the group:

I reported to the group that the client whose situation I discussed the previous week. I said I wished I had been able to do more for her and as I said this I began to tear up, people in the group shared their feelings that there are limits to as what we can do and I had probably done my best. I felt much comforted.

Not only can the group provide explanation of situations that are the source of anxiety, but they can provide support in confirmation of the correctness of practice interventions about which the supervisee might have had some doubt. One supervisee spoke of group supervision as a "forum for sharing common struggles." The group acts as a support system to group members.

Group supervision is employed to encourage interaction among members of a work unit and to help develop peer group cohesion (Munson 2002; Hayes, Blackman, and Brennan 2001). Group supervision has the advantage of providing an opportunity for staff to meet each other. A supervisee in a mental health clinic said:

A major plus of group supervision is the act of getting all these autonomous people together. Unless we pass each other in the hallway, meet at the bathroom, or use the appointment book at the same time, we are, for 90 percent of the day, behind our closed doors. After group supervision was started, there seemed to be a visible change in attitude and more people made an effort to stay in the hallway longer.

Through group conferences, the individual supervisee develops a sense of belonging to a unit in the agency, of group and professional identity, and of group cohesion. It is true that supervisees working in close proximity in a common enterprise develop some sense of solidarity through informal interaction. Group life is inevitable in any agency and is fostered by coffee breaks, lunching together, and working together on the job. The group supervisory conference supplements and reinforces what happens naturally and ensures that feelings of affiliation and commitment will, in fact, develop. Furthermore, formal group interaction in supervisory sessions feeds back to intensify and improve informal staff interaction outside these sessions.

The group conference provides the supervisor with the opportunity of observing the supervisee in a different kind of relationship (Bernard and Goodyear 2009). Individual conferences permit the supervisor to understand how a supervisee reacts in a dyadic relationship; the group conference shows the supervisee in action in a group. It provides the supervisor with an additional perspective of how the supervisee functions. As a consequence, the supervisor may be in a better position to supervise

the worker more effectively in the individual conference. This result is illustrated in the following vignette:

The supervisor had often noted that the supervisee tended to be insistent and domineering in support of her approach to any problem discussed. Observing frequent examples of the same behavior in the group, as the supervisee interacted with other members, helped her understand this particular supervisee's difficulty with client self-determination.

Group supervision permits an advantageous specialization of function. Any ongoing system, individual conference, or group supervisory conference requires the implementation of both expressive and instrumental roles. Some things need to be done to see that the system is kept operating harmoniously and successfully completes its assigned task. In the individual conference, the supervisor has to perform both roles to see that the work gets done while maintaining a harmonious relationship between supervisor and supervisee. The instrumental demands may at times be antithetical to expressive needs. To insist that expectations be met, to confront in order to get the work done, conflicts with the need to comfort and reassure. The supervisor has to be simultaneously both the good and the bad parent.

Group supervision permits the separation of these sometimes conflicting role responsibilities (Rosenthal 1999). While the supervisor is communicating support to some member of the group, the group may communicate expectations. While the supervisor is acting to confront, members of the group may act to reassure. Because the group situation allows delegation of different functions to different people, the task of the supervisor is in some ways simplified. The supervisor can let the group carry out the instrumental tasks—confronting, demanding, and raising uncomfortable questions—while the supervisor devotes his or her attention to supportive interventions. At other times, the supervisor can do the challenging, counting on the group to be supportive.

It may be easier for the supervisor to achieve modification of a supervisee's behavior through the medium of the group conference than in an individual conference. If members of the peer group indicate, in the group discussions, an acceptance of the supervisor's point of view, the individual supervisee may be less resistive to change. Taking advantage of these benefits of the group conference, the supervisor can use them consciously to influence workers toward desirable changes in their behavior.

The group context may be a more comfortable learning environment for some supervisees. For these workers, the relationship dynamics that emerge in a one-to-one supervisory conference are too intense. They need a more diffuse relationship with the supervisor, as is exemplified in a group supervisor. It is easier for some workers to accept criticism, suggestions, and advice from peers rather than from parental surrogates such as the supervisor. Learning from peers with whom one identifies can be easier than learning from a supervisor. Learning from peers is free of the feelings of dependency and authority that complicate learning from the supervisor. For some supervisees, the group context has the advantage of better meeting their idiosyncratic educational needs. As Moore noted:

Norms formulated in the group through peer interaction are more readily internalized by workers than are the standards handed down from the supervisor as an authority figure. Workers are more apt to incorporate peer-formulated standards into improved work performance. (Moore 1971:5)

Just as the group conference permits the supervisor to observe the supervisee in a somewhat different set of relationships, it permits the supervisee to observe the supervisor under different conditions. Group supervision gives supervisees an opportunity to learn more about their supervisor. To what extent can the supervisor yield power gracefully, and to what extent does he or she need to feel in control? How does the supervisor react to different people in the group? Does he or she play favorites, have negative attitudes toward others, or treat group members similarly? How does the supervisor react to pressure when strong conflict erupts around some consequential issue?

The group setting provides the supervisee with the opportunity for using the supervisor as a model in learning group-interaction skills. Through the individual conference, the worker learns something about dyadic interaction; through group supervision, the worker learns something about group interaction. Given the ubiquity of group work in social work practice and their economies of scale associated with the provision of services in group formats, there are clear advantages to learning about group interaction through group supervision.

Group supervision provides a gradual step toward independence from supervision. The movement is from dependence on the supervisor, to a lesser measure of dependence on peers, to autonomous self-dependence. Group supervision offers an effective medium for power sharing and power equalization between supervisors and supervisees. Consequently, it can serve as a halfway house in the movement toward independent functioning (Ray and Altekruze 2000; Sussman, Bogo, and Globberman 2007).

The group context provides safety in numbers that individual supervisees may need in order to challenge the supervisor. In the highly personalized, isolated context of the individual conference, the supervisee may be afraid to articulate his or her questions and objections to what the supervisor is saying. "In the individual conference ... there are only two opinions available and in case of disagreement the supervisor's opinion will usually prevail" (Pointer and Fishman 1968:19). Given the support of potential allies, the supervisee may find the courage to present his or her differing opinions in the protected setting of the group conference.

As previously noted, group supervision permits active participation of the worker in lateral teaching of peers, by peers (Barretta-Herman 1993; Getz and Agnew 1999). Such sharing among colleagues emphasizes a greater measure of practice independence than is true for individual supervision. Not only does the supervisor share responsibility for teaching with supervisees in the group conference, but the power of the supervisor is also shared. The supervisees have a greater measure of control and a greater responsibility for the initiative in the group conference. Even responsibility for evaluation is shared. Hence, if at the beginning there is much individual supervision and only a limited amount of group supervision, the movement

toward independent, responsible practice should see a change in this balance. Gradually, there should be less individual supervision and a greater measure of group supervision. In line with this idea, some agencies have used group supervision in explicit recognition of its potential as a vehicle for fostering independence and autonomy from supervision.

### **Disadvantages of Group Supervision**

The great advantage of the individual conference is that teaching and learning can be explicitly individualized to meet the needs of a particular supervisee. The group conference has to be directed toward the general, common needs of all the supervisees and the special, particular needs of none. As a consequence, the interest in group activity may be highly variable for the individual supervisee. At one moment, the group may be concerned with something of vital interest to a particular worker; a half-hour later, the matter under discussion may be boring or repetitious and of no concern. The principal disadvantage of the group conference is that it cannot easily provide specific application of learning to the worker's own caseload. Given individual needs, it is very likely that any one group supervisory session will be perceived as less focused, less structured, and less relevant than individual supervisory sessions.

If the supervisee can learn more easily in a group conference through identification with peers, unencumbered by feelings of dependency and hostility toward the authority of the supervisor, the group presents its own impediments to learning. The group situation stimulates sibling rivalry and peer competition (Bernard and Goodyear 2009). Each supervisee may be concerned that another will say the smart thing first or will get more of the attention, approval, and affection from the supervisor. Each supervisee may be anxious about how well he or she compares with others in the group. This problem was noted by Apaka, Hirsch, and Kleidman in describing the introduction of group supervision in a hospital social-work department:

There was hostility and competitiveness among workers that previously had been concealed effectively. It became clear that the group process was potent in underscoring and bringing out all the previously underscored or unacknowledged subtleties of staff interrelationships. (Apaka et al. 1967:58)

It is more difficult to incorporate a new appointee into a supervisory group than to provide the same appointee with individual supervision. A group with any continuity develops a group identity, a pattern of interpersonal relationships, an allocation of roles, development of cliques and subgroups, and a set of shared understandings. The newcomer, a stranger to all of this, threatens the established equilibrium and is apt to be resented. Group supervision thus imposes a particular problem for new appointees.

The individual conference forces the supervisee to come up with his or her own answers and make his or her own decisions regarding the problem he or she faces. The group context permits the supervisee to abdicate such responsibility and to accept group solutions and decisions. Although the supervisee is forced to participate and respond in the individual conference, he or she can hide in the safety of numbers

provided by the group.

Communication within a group risks a higher probability of failure than in the dyadic interaction. In the dyad, the communicator can select his or her ideas and choose his or her words with regard for what may be specially required to ensure accurate reception by his or her one partner. When facing a group of people, each of whom requires a somewhat different approach to an idea and a somewhat different vocabulary for best understanding, the supervisor must compromise. The supervisor must select his or her message and words so that they can be received with reasonable accuracy by all, but they may fail to meet the particular needs of any one.

An intervention that meets the needs of one person may at the same time create a problem for someone else. A complimentary comment to one member may seem like a rejecting comment to another member if the two are in an intense rivalry for the supervisor's acceptance.

The safety of numbers that allows the supervisee to raise critical questions and comments also presents a danger that the peer group may organize against the supervisor in the group conference. The supervisor may feel more comfortable in the individual conference, where there is a greater likelihood that he or she can control the interaction. There is a greater threat to such control in the group situation. Consequently, some supervisors might be uneasy about employing group supervision.

In group supervision, the supervisor risks loss of control of the meeting. Stimulating, encouraging, and supporting more active participation by the group, as well as granting a larger measure of responsibility for interaction to the group, are acts of control by the supervisor. He or she consciously decides to encourage such activity because it feels more desirable. However, the group may decide to do some things the supervisor does not feel are desirable. Having encouraged maximum participation and fuller responsibility for action on the part of the group, the supervisor may find the group has taken the play out of his or her hands. In the individual conference, when something comparable to this occurs, the supervisor can reassert control. In the group situation, the supervisor is outnumbered. Faced with the solidarity of a group in opposition to him or her, the supervisor may find it difficult to regain control of the situation. Because of the risk in sharing control of the supervisory conference with the group, the need for personal security on the part of the supervisor is greater.

In a cohesive group, an individual member identifies more with the group, which increases the pressure to conform to group thinking and group attitudes. This cohesion is both a strength and a weakness of group supervision. It operates as an advantage in influencing individual supervisees to accept agency procedures and professionally desirable approaches in interaction with clients. On the other hand, it tends to stifle individuality and creativity. Considerable strength and conviction are needed to express ideas and attitudes that run counter to those held by the group. Sometimes, these atypical ideas may be valid and helpful to the group in more effectively implementing its tasks. The supervisor, as group leader, needs to act so as to preserve group cohesion but mitigate group tyranny and "group think." In



achieving this aim, the supervisor supports the expression of atypical attitudes and ideas, is sensitive to a supervisee's ambivalence about expressing them, and establishes the accepting encouragement of such contributions to group discussion as a norm for a group interaction.

Accepting the responsibility for group supervision imposes heavy, perhaps unfamiliar, demands on supervisors and their knowledge and skills. As group leaders, supervisors have to learn about, or at least refresh their knowledge of, group interaction, group dynamics, and the psychology of individual behavior in the group context (Bernard and Goodyear 2009). As facilitators as well as supervisors, group leaders help develop and maintain group cohesion, monitoring group interaction so that it is productive rather than unduly conflictual. They have to move from an accustomed focus on the individual as the center of interest to perceiving the group entity as the center of concern. If a supervisor cannot successfully reorient his or her focus, he or she may become engaged in an individual supervisory conference in the group context. The tendency might be to respond to a collection of individuals rather than to the group.

The situation for the supervisor is inevitably more difficult as a consequence of a need for a dual focus. The supervisor has to develop and maintain a relationship and a productive pattern of communication with each supervisee. In addition, the supervisor has to develop and maintain relationships and communication patterns between each group member, and all the others as well.

In any group, there are simultaneous interactions among (1) individual group members, (2) individual group members and the supervisor, (3) the group as a whole and individual members, (4) the group as a whole and the supervisor, and (5) each subgroup, its members, and the supervisor. There is therefore a greater diversity of informational cues and pressures to which the supervisor has to adjust and accommodate as compared with the less complex, more manageable, individual supervisory conference.

The group context presents potential problems regarding confidentiality. Group discussion of client problems means revealing private information to a sizable group of people without explicit consent of the client. Consequently, efforts need to be made to safeguard client anonymity and information as confidential (Bernard and Goodyear 2009; Cutcliffe, Hyrkas, and Fowler 2011; Rowell 2010).

### **Individual and Group Supervision: Appropriate Use**

Both individual and group supervision provide special advantages and disadvantages, with both being more or less appropriate in response to different conditions and different needs. Therefore, it is desirable to employ them as planned, complementary procedures. Frequently, the agenda for group conferences derives from recurrent problems discussed in individual conferences; frequently, the group discussions are subsequently referred to in individual conferences on individual supervisee case situations. The flow is circular, from individual conferences to group conferences to individual conferences. Because the same supervisor is generally responsible for both

the individual and group conferences, the two different procedures can have unity and continuity. The supervisor has the responsibility of determining how each approach can best be used to further the learning needs of individual supervisees.

## **Group Supervision: Process and Roles**

The process of group supervision consists of a series of successive steps toward achieving the objectives of the program. At each point in the process, supervisors and supervisees perform activities associated with their role in the proceedings (Edwards and Heshmati 2003; Kuechler 2006).

### ***Forming***

The first step in the process consists of activities associated with forming the group. Activities related to group formation are associated primarily with the role of the supervisor. Having decided to develop a program of group supervision, the supervisor has to determine the size of the group to be organized. The group should be large enough to provide a variety of heterogeneous inputs, but not so large as to cause difficulties in management that risk denying some members the opportunity for participation. The size of the group selected for group supervision generally runs between four and six members.

The supervisor has to decide whether group participation is voluntary or administratively mandated, the frequency of group meetings and their duration, the best method for selecting and notifying selected participants, and how to solicit their response to the group invitation. Selection of the setting for group meetings is an additional supervisor responsibility.

Physical arrangement is a determinant of group interaction and needs to be given careful attention by the supervisor in preparing for a group supervisory conference. A circle of chairs in a room of moderate dimensions for the size of the group is perhaps the most desirable arrangement. Too large a room makes the group feel insignificant and lost; too small a room may produce a cramped, uncomfortable feeling in the members of a group who find themselves seated shoulder to shoulder or knee to knee. A circular arrangement permits everybody to look at and speak with everyone else. Being able to look at, as well as listen to, each person permits easier perception of nonverbal communication messages. A circle, furthermore, has no identifiable status position, with no front-of-group position. The supervisor can melt into the group by taking his or her place unobtrusively anywhere in the circle. Although the circle does not entirely neutralize the supervisor's dominant status in the group, it helps to mute it somewhat. Freedom from competing noises and from interruptions are other components of desirable physical arrangement.

A schedule specifying the hour and day for meetings should be clearly established and adhered to with some regularity. It helps give the group continuity and becomes a necessary part of group structure. It shows respect for the workers' time and permits them to schedule other appointments in advance with assurance that there will not be a conflict. In general, it might be good to avoid scheduling group supervisory meetings

early in the afternoon. The lethargy that follows lunch tends to dampen group interaction.

Having formed the group and made the necessary organizational and meeting arrangements, the group is ready to consider the objectives, form, and content of group meetings.

### ***Objectives***

The group meeting, like the individual conference, needs to have a clearly defined objective. Formed by the agency to achieve agency purposes, the group is not entirely free to determine its own objectives. Group and individual supervision have the same ultimate objectives, and group conferences are required to have purposive outcomes that further these objectives. A considerable amount of expensive agency-personnel time is invested in each group supervisory conference. A meeting of six people for an hour and a half costs more than a day's pay for one worker. The supervisor consequently has some responsibility to attempt to direct the group interaction so that purposes congruent with the general objectives of supervision are selected and so that such purposes are more or less achieved.

Group members are also personally investing their own limited time and energy. If the group meeting serves no productive, useful purpose, they have every right to feel disappointed and resentful. In a study of social work students' reactions to group supervision, a major dissatisfaction was time wasted in tedious, irrelevant discussions. However egalitarian his or her approach, the supervisor cannot entirely shed the mantle of group leadership. The supervisor's position and status in the agency hierarchy inevitably give him or her a special status in the social system of the group. This status is often reinforced by the supervisor's education and experience, which are sources of special knowledge and skill that he or she is responsible for using (and is expected to use) in behalf of the group.

An egalitarian stance on the part of the supervisor (e.g., "I am just another member of the group," "We are all the same here") is seen as false by some and as an abdication of responsibility by others. The very fact that the supervisor has the authority to define his or her position as not having authority is, in and of itself, proof of his or her authority.

Because the supervisor, as designated leader, has authority not from the group but from agency administration and is responsible to agency administration for what the group does, the group is not democratic. The supervisor, in some instances, may have to determine what decisions will be made and what procedures will need to be accepted by the group.

The group is not free to develop its own solutions but needs to recognize constraints imposed by agency budgets, legislative regulations, or agency policy. The supervisor has the responsibility of being knowledgeable about such constraints and sharing this knowledge with the group. Groups that formulate recommendations that cannot be implemented feel futile and discouraged.

Although leadership of the group is primarily the responsibility of the supervisor, it

is not his or her responsibility alone. The group itself has considerable responsibility for the many decisions that relate to group purpose and functioning. As a matter of fact, a supervisor might react positively and with some relief to diluted hierarchical responsibility for the group sessions (Parihar 1983).

The supervisor is here, as in the individual conference, only as the first among equals. Furthermore, it is clear that rigid, insistent adherence to an approach that emphasizes supervisory control is self-defeating and counterproductive. Supervisees can be required by the agency to attend group meetings, but there is no way to compel their participation. Although physically present, supervisees can defeat the purposes of group supervision. The purpose of the meeting and the nature of group interaction have to meet, in some measure, not only the needs of the agency but also the needs of the supervisees themselves.

The amount of leadership exercised by the supervisor should be the minimum necessary to assure that the group can do its job. As in the individual conference, the supervisor, as group leader, faces the dilemma of leading without imposing, directing without controlling, and suggesting without dictating. Over a period of time in the history of the group, the supervisor should be progressively less active, and an increasing proportion of the initiative, responsibility, control, direction, and activity should pass over to the group itself. The supervisor has to be flexible and comfortable enough to share this responsibility. Some roles are most effectively enacted by a member of the group rather than the supervisor. Leadership is then diffused rather than focused in the supervisor.

If the supervisor is invested with the responsibility for defining and implementing (however tentatively and however gently) the aim and objectives of the group, adequate preparation for group meetings is mandatory. The supervisor has to have a clear idea of what he or she will propose for group consideration, even experimentally. He or she must decide the points that need to be raised for discussion and the content that needs to be communicated and taught. The supervisor needs to think out the answers to some of the more difficult questions that can be anticipated. He or she needs to clarify which points will encounter greatest resistance and which may require repeated emphasis. In effect, the supervisor needs to imagine the general scenario of the meeting as it might, in actuality, unfold.

Some plan is desirable, even if it is flexible, subject to change, and even abandoned if necessary. Having an outline of how the group meeting is likely to go is, in itself, reassuring. However, a plan is advantageous only if used as a guide. If it becomes a crutch, the supervisor will resist deviating from it even when that appears necessary to follow the legitimate interests of the group, as he or she is psychologically dependent on it. The supervisor's preparation also involves bringing in the supporting books, pamphlets, articles, forms, and directives that are pertinent to the content of the meeting.

The general purpose of group supervision may be clear, but because it is often stated in a very global way, the supervisor has to help translate it into specific, clearly identifiable objectives for each particular meeting. "Learning to offer more effective

and efficient service” does not answer the question of what the group will actually do when it meets next Tuesday morning from 9:00 to 10:30. The supervisor, whose experience and perspective provide a clear idea of what supervisees need to know, to do, and to be, should be in a position to derive from the general purpose the topics for a series of meetings. However, although it would be helpful for the supervisor, as group leader, to propose specific topics for group meetings, it would be best if these were advanced tentatively as suggestions for consideration rather than as requirements for acceptance. The group itself may have suggestions for relevant and significant topics that have greater priority and interest for the members. However, achieving a shared purpose is not easy. Often, the purpose that interests one subgroup is of little or no interest to others in the group. The objectives on which the supervisor is administratively required to focus may be accepted with reluctance or covert resistance.

A clearly stated purpose that has group understanding and acceptance is one of the best guarantees against overcontrol and overdirection of group activities by the supervisor. The group rather than the supervisor gives direction and meaning to group interaction, determines the relevance of contributions, and structures group activity. Knowing what to do and being motivated to do it permit the group to exercise self-direction.

The preceding reflections are related to the step in the process regarding acceptable determination of group meeting objectives.

### ***Content***

Having decided on the objectives of group meeting, the next step in the process is to determine the nature of the meeting content (discussion of which is likely to help achieve the determined objectives).

The content of group supervisory meetings includes matters of general concern to social workers in any agency—documentation, interviewing, referral procedures, psychological testing, caseload management, worker-client interaction, use of consultation, the ethics of practice, and so on. Often, it is specific to the clientele served by a particular agency, such as understanding the juvenile delinquent criminal, the adoptive child, the patient with a chronic or terminal illness, or the unmarried mother. Sometimes it is concerned with procedures, forms, and reports that are particular to a given agency, with communications to workers from administration or with problems identified by workers that they are anxious to communicate to administration. It may also be concerned with the particular community in which the agency operates, such as community composition, community problems, agency resources in the community, and the nature of the relationship between this agency and other agencies.

On occasion, general agency situations determine agenda items: If the agency is concerned with formulating a budget, this might be the opportune time to discuss budgeting matters as they relate to the unit’s operations; if a state or other third-party case audit is scheduled, it makes reviews of some related content relevant; if

evaluations for unit members are scheduled for the immediate future, the evaluation form and associated questions might be discussed. Agenda items for group meetings are frequently, and most desirably, derived from interests and problems recurrently identified in individual supervisory conferences as common to a number of different workers.

Traditionally, clinical case material is the most frequently used stimulus for group supervisory discussions (Edwards and Heshmati 2003; Rowell 2010). Such material vicariously replicates actual situations with which group members are grappling, making those situations vivid and interesting, and motivating group involvement. For the most productive use, case material needs to be carefully selected and prepared. Otherwise, its very richness invites all sorts of digressions that have little real yield. Consequently, selection of case material should be in line with clearly defined objectives of the group meeting. In preparing the material for distribution, the supervisor may profitably condense and paraphrase so as to sharpen the focus for teaching. Often, a section of dramatic interaction may be excerpted from a longer case record for group discussion purposes.

Although case material by definition is concerned with some individual instance, the focus of the discussion cannot remain tied to the individual case situation if learning is to be generalized and transferred. At some point, the group (and if not the group, the supervisor) needs to determine what the particular case situation offers for learning about such situations in general.

When a group member presents his or her own material for discussion, there are additional problems. The supervisor may work with the supervisee toward selecting a case for presentation that is likely to have greatest value for both the supervisee and the group. The supervisee may need help in preparing the case for group presentation; he or she may also need the supervisor's support in coping with the anxiety that case presentation arouses and help in clarifying what group reactions he or she is likely to encounter. Because this is a case situation in which the agency has ongoing contact, the presentation may run the risk of group supervision of the worker that parallels the individual supervisory conference in deciding on specific planning for the case. The more appropriate use of the case situation in the group context would, again, be a general focus that permits group members to apply learning from this case to situations in their own caseloads.

### ***Role Playing***

As an alternative to case presentation, role playing is employed as a procedure for presenting content for group discussion. The outlines of the proposed role play have to be clearly presented to the group: What is the nature of the problem to be acted out, and who are the participants? Situations for role playing could include an application for temporary financial assistance at a department of public welfare, a rejection interview with an adoption applicant, an interview with an unmarried mother struggling to decide whether to surrender her child, a first interview with a parolee after his or her return to the community, or an interview with a daughter concerned

about institutionalization for her aged mother. Beyond the definition of the situation and identification of participants, the approach of the worker can also be defined. The worker can be asked to play the role in Rogerian, solution-focused, or behavioral terms—acceptingly, strategically, or directive.

Willingness to participate in role playing requires a considerable sense of security in the group. Particularly in early meetings, obtaining volunteers may be difficult. It is easier if initially the supervisor volunteers to play the worker, which is the more difficult role. Spontaneous critical comments may be inhibited in this situation, depending somewhat on the freedom to criticize that the supervisor communicates to the group. Using the role-playing names of the participants helps to depersonalize the discussion afterward. It is not “Mr. P” (the actual name of the supervisor whose work the group is discussing) but rather “Mr. Smith,” the name the supervisor adopted for the role play.

The group can move into role playing through the use of brief playlets. In the midst of some discussion, the supervisor can suggest that, for the moment, he or she play the client they have been talking about. “As the client, I have just said to the worker, ‘I got so mad and discouraged that I sometimes feel like I just wanted to get away and never see the kids again.’ How would you, as a worker, respond to that? Let’s play it for a minute.” Frequent use of such role playing provides a good group introduction to the activity.

Role-play participation enables the workers to understand more clearly, through vicarious identification, how an assistance applicant, an unmarried mother, an adoptive parent, or a parolee feels about his or her situation. However, like a projective test, role playing permits and encourages self-revelation. Without realizing it, we tend to act ourselves and expose to the group some parts of ourselves that were previously hidden. Consequently, role playing makes participants vulnerable. The supervisor has to be sensitive to the need to protect participants from destructive criticism. There is also a possibility that a role-playing session that generates strong feelings may become a group therapy session.

Audio and videotapes are appropriately used as the basis for group discussions. Adequate preparation is invariably necessary. Audio tapes are often difficult to understand, and the strain of listening to unclear, disembodied voices can leave the group without energy for discussion. If possible, written transcripts of the tapes should be made available to the group. They not only permit people to follow what is said but make subsequent discussion easier as people refer to the transcript in making a point. Playing a video recording without previewing it can often be disappointing and time wasting. The catalog description of a recording may be only remotely related to its content. Familiarity with the equipment and with the room used for showing it is also necessary. Countless groups have been frustrated because an extension cord was not long enough to reach an outlet, because there were no blinds to darken the room, because no one could connect and operate the equipment, because of Internet problems, or because the audio or video portion of the film was defective or garbled.

After determining the objectives that group supervision is designed to achieve, as well as selecting the content that is most relevant to the objectives and the format for presentation of the content, we have reached the point in the process for analyzing, discussing, interpreting, and reflecting on the material presented. It is at this point in the process that the role of the supervisor is considerably enhanced.

### **Process**

Just as the supervisor has inducted supervisees into the social system of the individual conference and has interpreted the respective, differentiated responsibilities of supervisor and supervisee in that system, he or she similarly inducts supervisees into their role as members of the group supervisory conference. The nature of reciprocal group-membership role expectations and obligations should be clearly outlined. Supervisees are given to understand that they have some responsibility for preparing for the meetings and for reading any relevant material that is distributed in advance. They have responsibility for contributing to group interaction and keeping such contributions pertinent to the discussion; they have responsibility for listening to others with respect and attention and should refrain from making interventions that will create unproductive conflict and tension, and should help in dealing with such conflicts and tensions as do arise. They need to indicate respect for other members of the group, to display a willingness to accept them as resources for learning, and demonstrate some commitment to help achieve group goals.

Early on in the group process, the supervisor needs to make an explicit attempt to establish some group norms. The norms, if accepted and repeatedly implemented, help to regulate the behavior of group members. Agreed-upon norms of productive group supervision might include the following:

- To allow everyone to have his or her say without undue interruption
- To listen carefully and attentively to what others are saying
- To respond to what others have said
- To keep one's contribution and response reasonably relevant to the focus of what is being discussed
- To keep in mind that group membership requires a measure of deindividuation—some setting aside of one's own preferences in order to maintain the integrity of the group.
- To share material and experiences that might contribute to more effective professional practice

Most of the principles of learning that are applicable to the individual conference are equally applicable to the group conference. As in the individual conference, the supervisor is responsible for establishing a context that facilitates learning.

The supervisor, as group leader, engages in many of the same kinds of behavior he or she manifests in individual conferences—asking questions; soliciting and supporting the expression of ideas, attitudes, and feelings; requesting amplification of



supervisees' points of view; restating and clarifying supervisees' ideas and feelings; summarizing, recapitulating, enabling, expediting, facilitating, focusing, and redirecting; resolving conflicts; making suggestions and offering information and advice; and supporting and reassuring—while also challenging and communicating agency expectations. The supervisor, as group leader, raises the provocative suggestion, acts as devil's advocate, calls attention to what has been missed, stimulates productive conflict to enhance instruction, and directs the interactions. He or she acts as catalyst, mentor, arbiter, and resource person. The supervisor orchestrates the activities of the individuals who make up the group. She maximizes individual contributions, coordinates and synthesizes them, and weaves them together into a pattern.

Groups, like individuals, resist the often difficult, unpleasant, and uncomfortable tasks that need to be worked on if productive purposes are to be achieved. Groups manifest ambivalence and resistance by irrelevant digressions, unproductive silences, fruitless argumentation, and side conversations among subgroups. The supervisor has the responsibility of holding the group to its purpose, as well as stimulating and rewarding the kind of group interaction that will optimally help the group achieve its purpose.

At the same time, the supervisor delays disclosure of his or her own views in order to prevent premature closure of discussion. Ultimately, of course, he or she is obligated to share them with the group, clearly and explicitly. But if, as in the individual conference, the supervisor indicated early in the discussion what he or she thought, this would act as a constraint on free exchange and would relieve supervisees of the stimulus and responsibility in finding their own answers. If challenged with "Well, what do *you* think?" the supervisor can legitimately say, "I'll be glad to share that with you later, but at this point I think you all have some thoughts about this that we can profitably share with one another."

Each supervisee brings to the group meeting his or her own needs and anxieties, which eventually find expression in the way he or she behaves in the group. The supervisor has the problem of responding to individual behavior in a way that furthers the purposes of the group and at the same time meets the individual's needs. Often, the best that can be achieved is some compromise between individual need and group need. Reconciliation of conflicting group and individual needs is sometimes impossible, and the supervisor, giving priority to group needs, may have to ignore or actually deny the satisfaction of individual need. The persistent disrupter who seeks to use the group for satisfaction of insatiable attention-getting needs may have to be suppressed; the time allotted to monopolizers of group discussion may have to be firmly limited; the cynical demolisher of group morale may have to be resolutely moderated; the consistently passive supervisee may need to be prodded out of his or her lethargy. To keep all the group interested and motivated, the supervisor must, without guilt, limit his or her concern for any one person in the group. The needs of the group, as a group, have priority.

The pattern of informal group interaction that takes place in the agency outside the

group meetings is brought into the group supervision meetings. Some people like each other, some dislike each other, and some are indifferent to each other. Workers play out these feelings in the way they relate to each other. The supervisor needs to be aware of these patterns of relationship and how they might influence subgroup formation and reactions to what a particular individual says in the group. A knowledge of individual needs and the pattern of informal interaction outside the group helps the supervisor identify the nature of “hidden agendas” that help explain otherwise inexplicable in-group behavior. The supervisor knows a great deal about the individuals who make up the group and actively uses this knowledge in evaluating and understanding group interaction.

The supervisor’s responsibility denies him or her the flexibility of accepting any and every contribution, however subjectively correct for the person advancing it. If our claim to being a profession has substance, it means that we have established some procedures, practice principles, and approaches that are objectively more correct, more desirable, and more efficacious than others. It is these responses that the supervisor is helping the group to learn and accept. Consequently, some contributions from the group need to be challenged and rejected by the supervisor. Because the hurt of rejection in the presence of a group is sharper than in the individual conference, the supervisor has to be even more sensitive and compassionate here.

The group supervision equivalent of “reject the sin but not the sinner” is to “reject the comment but not the commentator.” The supervisor does this subtly and understandingly: “I see you have given this considerable thought, but if we did it this way what negative consequences could result?” or “I recognize that many people feel, as you do, that gay adoption is harmful to children but research on the development of such children indicates they grow up as well-adjusted as children raised in heterosexual families.”

It would be best, of course, if the group itself takes the responsibility for correcting, rejecting, or amending erroneous information and approaches that might do a disservice to the client. However, the group is not always aware of what needs correcting, and the supervisor cannot abdicate his or her responsibility for this. Because members of the group are frequently on the same level in terms of education and experience, the nature of the error is not as readily evident to them. In addition, they identify as peers with other group members, and they are understandably reluctant to confront them. Reluctance to criticize also derives from hesitancy about creating friction in the group. Refraining from necessary criticism in order to maintain group harmony is one of the weaknesses of group supervision. Maintenance of a good group relationship may take precedence over the desirability of engaging in some difficult activities necessary for the optimum achievement of the group’s objective. Expressive needs prevent fulfillment of instrumental tasks. Furthermore, because the supervisor has administrative responsibility for the work of every individual member of the group, there is hesitancy about intruding on his or her responsibility. Group members may feel limited responsibility to critique the work of a peer because this responsibility is formally invested in the individual supervisor-

supervisee relationship.

When necessary expressive functions (group maintenance functions) are not performed by members of the group, the supervisor should perform them. He or she mediates between conflicting subgroups, prevents or tempers scapegoating, offers help and support to group members who are fearful or reticent about participating, and tries to influence the monopolizer to accept a more quiescent role. Good discussion leadership does not necessarily imply that everyone participates equally, only that everyone has the opportunity for equal participation.

The supervisor attempts to protect individual members from the hostile reaction of the group and protects the group from its own self-destructive, divisive tendencies. While protecting the weak from the assaults of the strong, the supervisor has to act in a noncondemning manner, redirecting or redefining the hostile intervention so that only the comment is rejected.

In implementing the expressive system maintenance responsibilities, the supervisor is friendly, warm, encouraging, and accepting in his or her interaction with the group; is sensitive to emerging feelings which may be disruptive to group interaction; moves to harmonize and resolve them; and exercises a gate-keeping function so that each member will have a safe opportunity to share her thoughts and feelings. The supervisor has to be ready to find compromises for serious disagreements and in doing so be able to distinguish disabling disagreements from helpful differences of opinion. The supervisor is responsible for keeping the tension at a level of optimum group productivity, heightening it by stimulation and/or confrontation when necessary, and reducing it by reassuring, encouraging, tension-releasing humor when it gets too high.

As in the individual conference, the supervisor must seek to establish and maintain an emotional atmosphere that will foster the achievement of goals. He or she seeks to establish a climate that will enable people to learn freely, to consider freely all alternatives to a decision, to risk change, and to communicate freely and openly. The kinds of relationships between supervisor and supervisee that are helpful in the conference are similarly helpful in the group meeting. The responses of the supervisor demonstrate to group members a model of tolerance, acceptance, and good patterns of communication. Research on the outcome of group experiences indicates that positive outcomes are associated with warm, caring group leaders who provide a cognitive framework for group interaction.

Task and group maintenance problems are interrelated. The group that is effective in accomplishing its tasks is likely to have better morale and a greater sense of cohesion. A group that seems to accomplish little—that never gets anywhere—is more likely to encounter expressions of dissatisfaction and divisiveness. The supervisor who effectively aids the group in accomplishing acceptable objectives is also, at the same time, helping to develop more positive patterns of interaction among group members.

Detailing the supervisor's responsibilities in implementing his or her roles in group supervision is mirrored by describing the important and significant activities

associated with the implementation by supervisees in their role as members of the group. Group membership involves obligations to participate actively in the discussion of the meeting agenda; to share relevant knowledge, ideas, and opinions; to contribute personal accounts of analogous practice experiences; to acknowledge the contributions to the interaction of fellow group members, as well as to accept and consider the response of fellow members to one's own contributions. Perhaps the most difficult element in this complex group interchange is the give and take of feedback regarding opinions, attitudes, feelings, practice experiences that one has contributed. This often involves openly sharing oneself through self-disclosure of personal information.

If a group offers a large pool of possible sources of insight and support, it also offers more sources of critical feedback. It is easier to expose your feelings to one supervisor in the privacy of an individual conference than to present somewhat inadequate work publicly to a group of four or five peers. If a worker is seeking and can accept critical feedback, the number of participants is an advantage of group supervision; if he or she is hesitant and anxious about critical feedback, it can be a disadvantage. There is a similar risk for the supervisor. The threat to self-esteem and narcissism from saying something stupid in front of a group is greater than the risk of similar failure in the individual conference. Supervisory ineptitude is exposed simultaneously to many rather than to one.

Although feedback can be positive and confirming, sometimes the most helpful feedback intentions might be experienced as critical and challenging, generating negative reactions. In that case, feedback needs to be made with care, sensitivity, and support. Willingness to openly critical develops slowly in most groups. In reporting on her own experience as a group supervisor, Smith noted that "for the first dozen sessions we were very supportive and encouraging towards the other participants, and few challenging or critical comments were made during the early reticent stage. Since then, workers have become more clear, direct and specific with their observations and thoughts" (Smith 1972:15).

In general, feedback and its anticipation create anxiety and an increased resistance to sharing. One supervisee said, "My anxiety was high much of the time and I felt scared and judged and interpreted feedback as threatening" (Christian and Kline 2000:384). As a consequence it is imperative that supervisors promote an atmosphere of safety and trust (Bogo, Globerman, and Sussman 2004a; Enyedy et al. 2003; Linton and Hedstrom 2006).

### ***Termination***

In ending the group supervisory meeting, the supervisor summarizes the main points covered in the meeting; relates them, if possible, to the conclusions of previous meetings; and ties them in with the agenda of the next meeting to give continuity to the group supervisory experience.

## **Humor in Group Supervision**

The group context of group supervision makes the use of humor particularly appropriate. Humor is infectious and the use of humor helps even the most reticent group participants interact with the group. When members are laughing together, an enhanced sense of group membership and solidarity is created.

Laughter provides a welcome break for the group. Serious consideration of clinical and administrative problems is stressful. The refreshing interposition of a moment of humor enables the group to return refreshed to its work. A group of medical social workers discussing terminally ill patients once got a respite when one member of the group described death as the ultimate discharge plan (Bennett and Blumenfield 1989). A supervisor chairing a group supervision meeting was asked to indicate where she stood in a heated debate about some clinical problem. Not ready to declare herself explicitly because this would cut off discussion, the supervisor said, "I feel like a politician who was asked where he stood on a certain bill. He said, 'Some of my constituents are for the bill, some of my constituents are against the bill, and I am for my constituents.'"

Humor acts as a safety valve for tension in the group. An acrimonious interchange between one member of the group and another or between one clique and another can be defused by an appropriately humorous remark. Group coherence is enhanced in the collective experience of laughter. Laughter together unites the group, performing an integrative function.

Kidding among peers is used to control deviance in the group and communicate group norms. People are kidded about behavior the unit regards as unacceptable. The judicious use of humor by the supervisor tends to help develop camaraderie and bonding, group cohesion, and an atmosphere of playful informality.

A sense of humor is a positive attribute of the effective supervisor (Vinton 1989; Consalvo 1989). Laughing together means that supervisor and supervised share the same meaning of the situation. It tends to reduce status barriers.

There is a problem that stems from the fact that humor can have a covert aggressive component. Through humor, the supervisee can risk derogating the person and skills of the supervisor. What a person would never risk saying seriously, he or she can say humorously because humor contains the metacommunication that the person doesn't really mean what he or she is saying. As La Rochefoucauld said, humor "permits us to act rudely with impunity" (Bund and Friswell 1871:n.p.).

The possibility of offending through the use of humor has increased with the growing concern about "politically correct" use of language, particularly in the group context. A supervisee in a mental hospital said:

In staff meetings people seem uptight and careful about humor. We have very difficult cases, and at times I would feel better if I could just say, "You know, these people are crazy," but that's a no-no I would not care to risk in the group. In my individual conferences I am able to relax with my supervisor and can joke about some of my frustrations in an "unprofessional" way.

The comment also suggests the cathartic effect of humor. In group supervision, as in the individual conference, the supervisor should indicate a receptive reciprocal attitude toward nondisruptive, nonhurtful humor (Dziegielewski et al. 2003; Tracy,

Myers, and Scott 2006).

## **Research on Group Supervision**

The question of the advantages and disadvantages of group supervision has been the subject of some empirical research. For reviews of the empirical literature, see Bernard and Goodyear (2009) and Bradley and Ladany (2010).

Looking at the experience in supervision of 671 supervisees and 109 supervisors, Shulman found that group sessions were held on an average of twice a month and that “holding regularly scheduled group sessions correlated positively with a good working relationship” (Shulman 1982:261) between supervisor and supervisee.

The University of Michigan School of Social Work conducted an experiment in which a sample of students assigned to group supervision in fieldwork was compared with a sample of students assigned to individual supervision (Sales and Navarre 1970). Comparisons were made in terms of student satisfaction with mode of supervision, content of supervisory conferences, time expended in supervision, the general level and quality of participation in conferences, and evaluation of practice skills as the outcome of training. In general, the experiment indicated that “students performed equally well under each mode of supervision when supervisors’ ratings of student practice skills were compared.” However, “field instructors using individual supervision spent substantially more time per student in supervisory activities than those who employed group supervision.” Because both “modes of supervision result in equivalent overall student performance” and the difference in time expended “unequivocally favors group supervision,” “the time factor may become pivotal to a choice” (Sales and Navarre 1970:39–41).

In addition to the greater efficiency in time expended in group supervision, the study further confirms some of the other hypothesized advantages of the approach: “students in group supervision felt greater freedom to communicate dissatisfaction with field instruction to their supervisors and greater freedom to differ with them about professional ideas” and “students in group supervision most liked the varying ideas, experiences, and cases made possible by this mode of supervision” (Sales and Navarre 1970:40). On the other hand, confirming the individualizing advantage of individual supervision, “students in individual supervision most liked the specific help, the help in specific problem areas provided by this method” (Sales and Navarre 1970:40).

An experiment that tested the two supervisory procedures in training counselors arrived at similar conclusions. The group of trainees was randomly assigned to individual supervision and group supervision. The data regarding training outcomes “suggest that the individual method is not significantly different from the group method in producing some desirable outcomes. It is reasonable, therefore, to use group supervision at least as an adjunct to individual supervision until further research suggests that a different method is obviously superior” (Lanning 1971:405).

Savickas, Marquart, and Supinski (1986) attempted to empirically determine the variables of effective group supervision. Eighty-four medical students receiving group

supervision in learning to interview were asked to provide critical incidents of effective and ineffective group supervision. Categorizing and factoring the responses, the researchers found that the effective group supervisor modeled good interviewing. The supervisor provided structured instruction; evaluated supervisee strengths and weaknesses through accurate, specific, and reinforcing feedback; and facilitated the development of independent functioning. In general, effective group supervisors provided structure and reassurance.

In studying the behaviors of peers in group supervision, Hoese (1987) found that peers tended to provide mutual support to one another in developing a comfortable group environment. Supervisors were seen as establishing goals and providing feedback to help group members evaluate their work and providing direct help or suggestions regarding client contacts. Kruger et al. (1988) observed and tape-recorded group supervision of four counseling teams in a children's treatment center in a forty-five-day period. Group meetings tended to be highly task-oriented, concerned with problems relating to resolving the emotional difficulties of residents. Participants rated the group experience as positive and satisfactory. Higher levels of satisfaction were related to higher levels of participation in group instruction.

Wilbur et al. (1991) described an explicitly structured format for group supervision in which supervisees provided the group with a written request-for-assistance statement and round-robin responses from the group were employed. A pilot research study of the format using a control group supported the desirability of a more structured approach to group supervision (Wilbur et al. 1994).

A qualitative study by Walter and Young (1999) compared student satisfaction with alternating weeks of individual and group supervision in a child welfare field practicum. In individual supervision, students appreciated the "individual attention, case-specific direction and support, being the initiator and director of their own learning process, developing their clinical skills, and acquiring the supervisor's increased understanding of the case material and the clinical process" (Walter and Young 1999:81). In group supervision, students were "able to validate one another, support one another, and to explore perhaps more deeply a particular point of intervention," as well as "see a larger view of the case" and its "long term goals" (Walter and Young 1999:83–84). Despite complaints about the time required for writing process recordings, students preferred individual over group supervision. In the former, they learned to apply theoretical perspectives to a particular case, how to use short-term helping goals to focus their practice, and what to say and do in the next client interview. In the latter, they learned to seek consultation from colleagues with different values, knowledge, and skills. Initially ambivalent about group supervision, the students came to value group encouragement and support for their work.

Sixty-four supervisees differentially assigned to group supervision combined with individual supervision or group supervision only were rated on a pretest/posttest form regarding growth in counselor effectiveness and development. Supervisees assigned to both formats indicated similar progress in counselor effectiveness and development. However, those assigned to group supervision only achieved an

increased sense of autonomy. There was a general preference expressed for individual supervision by all participants (Ray and Alterkruse 2000).

A four-year follow-up study of ten psychiatric nurses who participated in a two-year group supervision program found that the experience had a lasting influence on the supervisees' professional competence in the form of a pronounced professional identity (Arvidsson, Lofgren, and Fridlund 2001:161).

Forty-nine supervisees identified group supervision as a situation that hindered learning. Clusters of such situations related to negative behaviors related to group member interactions (competition among supervisees), problems with supervisors (lack of focus), supervisee anxiety (pressure to self-disclose), and poor group time management (one person dominated group time) (Enyedy et al. 2003).

One hundred and sixty-two supervisees receiving group supervision for eighteen months provided self-evaluation information regarding their experience. The supervisor provided ratings of the supervisees' skills before and after supervision. Findings indicated that "there was significant and general increases in psychotherapeutic skills following group supervision" (Ogren and Jonsson 2003:56).

Tape-recorded interviews with eighteen supervisees regarding their experiences in group supervision found that problematic interactions relating to group dynamics impeded learning in making supervisees feel more anxious and self-conscious (Bogo, Globerman, and Sussman 2004b). The reactions of the five supervisors participating in the research reflected this finding by reporting their experience that a group feeling of "trust and safety" needed to be established to enable effective learning (Sussman, Bogo, and Globerman 2007). Interview data regarding supervisee reports identified elements associated with their perception of supervisor competence. Competent supervisors were perceived as being available and supportive, educationally focused, structured in leadership, able to facilitate learning from others, and able to process and manage group dynamics (Bogo, Globerman, and Sussman 2004a).

An Israeli study reported on the experience of 59 students receiving group supervision as compared with 245 students receiving individual supervision over a two-year period. Student self-evaluation questionnaires elicited responses regarding interaction with clients, internalization of professional values, experiences with supervisors, learning experiences, and general satisfaction with the supervision experience. Results indicated that the two groups did not differ from each other in terms of factors evaluated. However, those students receiving individual supervision had a more positive perception of their relationship with their supervisors (Zeira and Schiff 2010).

From 1,087 references that were potentially relevant to the effects of group supervision of nurses, seventeen studies were identified as meeting adequate research standards. Overall, the acceptable studies "indicated that group supervision produced to a greater or lesser extent certain positive effects" (Francke and de Graaff 2012:1176). The authors went on to note that "although there are a rather lot of indications that group supervision of nurses is effective, evidence on the effects is still scarce" (Francke and de Graaff 2012:1165). Such a conclusion might justify a



general description of the state of the art of group supervision research.

Group supervision seems to be as effective as individual supervision in achieving the educational and professional developmental objectives of supervision. The group context of group supervision presents problems of group dynamics that impede learning and are of special concern to the group supervisor. Although group supervision is more effective in enhancing professional independence and autonomy, individual supervision is a preferred option when supervisees are offered a choice between group or individual supervision.

## **Illustration of Group Supervision**

The following extended extract is from a supervisor's report of a group supervisory meeting in a protective service unit of a county public welfare agency. It illustrates some aspects of the process of group supervision. The group consists of the seven workers who are assigned to the unit. Five of them have a master's degree in social work. All have at least one year of experience in the unit. The group meetings, scheduled for ninety minutes every two weeks, supplement individual conferences held once a week. The supervisor is responsible for scheduling and conducting the meetings. The meetings are held in the agency conference room around a large, boat-shaped table. The first thirty to forty minutes of this meeting were devoted to some general announcements followed by a discussion of techniques in helping abusive parents to make changes in their behavior.

George had been, as usual, a rather inactive participant. I observed that he had taken some notes, had nodded his head in apparent agreement with others at different times and head leaned forward at other times in apparent interest in what was being said. However, he himself had contributed little to the discussion. At this point, however, his nonverbal activity seemed to increase in intensity. He crossed and uncrossed his legs, leaned forward and back in his chair, and rubbed the back of his neck. I interpreted this to suggest that he might respond to a direct invitation to participate so I chanced it and, taking advantage of a slight pause in the discussion, I said, "George, I wonder if you would care to share your reactions to what has been said?" I tried to make the invitation tentative and general so that he would not feel an obligation to respond to any particular point made in the discussion but could feel free to respond to anything that had been said. I attempted to make the tone of my invitation light rather than peremptory so as to suggest that it would be all right if he declined my invitation to participate. I tried to catch his eye as I said this, pausing a little after calling his name. He, however, kept looking at his notebook.

There was a moment of silence which increased the pressure on George to respond. Having initiated the invitation out of a conviction that George, like any other member of the group, had an obligation to contribute his fair share to the discussion, I wasn't going to rescue George too early by breaking the silence without waiting a while. He shifted in his chair but continued to look down. He said, "Well," and then paused. Then, looking at the wall, avoiding eye contact with any member of the group, he started up again, saying, "I guess the whole discussion kind of pisses me off. Here we are trying to figure out how to be nice and understanding and accepting of these lousy parents who crack skulls and belt a defenseless infant around. I say to hell with them. They had their chance to care for the kid adequately and they didn't. Out of protection to the kids we ought to petition the courts for termination [of parental rights] and place them. And then take legal action against the parents for abuse. That's the only way to discourage this sort of behavior and this is the way to protect other children from this sort of thing."

The more he talked, the more vehement he became. When he finished there was a kind of dead silence. I recognized that he had articulated a strongly felt, but often suppressed, attitude that was generally characterized as "unprofessional," a component of the protective social worker's ambivalence that was rarely openly expressed—at least in official sponsored meetings (it is frequently said by one worker to another in informal contacts in the washroom, coffee breaks, etc.). Consequently, after a short pause, but not giving anybody else a real chance to respond. I said, "Well, there is something to what you say. It's understandable that social workers concerned with child abuse might get to feel this way. What do others in the group feel about this?"

I was deliberate in taking the initiative because I wanted to protect George from any direct criticism from others,

which would be easy to do, because he was expressing an “unfashionable” opinion. Secondly, some members of the group might be threatened by what George had said because it was a feeling that they themselves were struggling to control and [they might be] prompted to attack him in an effort to protect their own equilibrium. Thirdly, I wanted to give official sanction to George's comments—not as a correct point of view but one which was acceptable for open discussion. Fourthly, I suspected that many in the group had hostile feelings toward abusive parents (you would have to be either pretty callous or pretty saintly not to, after some of the things we had all seen) and might welcome a chance to discuss it now that it was brought out in the open. Consequently, I was more directive than usual in taking the initiative here but did it consciously and deliberately for the reasons cited.

In saying what I said, to focus the discussion on the point of view raised, I tried to depersonalize it and universalize the comment. Not “What do you think about what George has said?” but “Social workers might feel this way. What do you think?” Having said what I said I sat back, physically withdrawing, my intent being to give the initiative back to the group and suggest that they were once again in control and responsible for the proceedings.

It didn't work. George's comment was too threatening or too tempting. Perhaps some felt that once they started expressing hostility to the abusive parents, they might not be able to control themselves. I really don't know what was operating internally in members of the group. I do know that nobody responded to what I had said and the continuing silence was growing more oppressive. Something needed to be done and I, as the one officially in charge of the group (the leader?), had the responsibility for doing it.

After a silence which seemed eternal (but was really only about seven to ten seconds) I intervened again. I was also pressured by the fact that I was conscious that George, for all the vehemence with which he had said what he had said, was now growing more and more uncomfortable about being responsible for getting us into this impasse—so I felt an obligation to protect him again. My intervention this time was designed to deliberately sanction negative feelings toward abusive parents and consequently to make acceptable the open expression of such feelings in the group.

Very briefly I told the group about a call I had made in response to a report about a baby crying continuously, apparently uncared for. The apartment was in a rundown rooming house, and the baby, in a crib, had apparently not been fed for some time. It was covered with sores and the diaper had not been changed for days. Feces and urine had dribbled down the child's legs and covered the bottom of the crib. In addition, the child's face was bruised as a result of a beating. The mother was lying on a bed in a drugged or drunken stupor. As I stood there taking in the situation I kept saying to myself openly but in a low voice, “You shit. You lousy bastard”—because that's the way I felt at the moment.

Having finished, I sat back again. I shared this with the group in giving further sanction to expression of negative feelings. Assuming that some in the group identified with me, openly sharing my own reactions might prompt a response.

I had, during the seven-to-ten-second silence, briefly considered, and then rejected, an alternative intervention. I knew from our individual conference meetings that Sandra had strong negative feelings about abusive parents. I was tempted to use this knowledge and call on Sandra to share her feelings with the group. However, I felt that would be a breach of confidentiality which Sandra might resent. It might also make the others anxious about my use of any information they had confided in the individual conference.

An uneasy silence followed what I said and then Paul (bless him) said that as he thought about it this reminded him of his reaction with the “R” family. (Paul, twenty-seven, who did a two-year stint with the Peace Corps in Guatemala, is the indigenous leader of the group.) Paul's comment started a general discussion which lasted for about thirty-five minutes during which I said nothing. The initiative and control remained with the group throughout. All I did was nod and “mmm-mmm” on occasion and in general indicated I was an active, interested, accepting listener.

Paul's comment, focused on his hostile feelings toward some parents, was followed by similar expressions of feeling by Ann, Cathy, Bill, and George again. As each one took the ball in turn, there was less hesitancy and stronger feelings expressed. The sense of group contagion was almost palpable. There was, particularly at first, a good deal of embarrassment, tension-relieving laughter—the kind one hears in middle-aged, middle-class groups when sex is discussed. Neither Lillian nor Ruth said anything, but they listened avidly and reacted, nonverbally, with approval to what was said. They really enjoyed hearing the group tear into abusive parents. It was clear (at least to me) that the effect was cathartic (and needed) by the group—and was not as likely to have happened in the individual conference where each member of the group reacted in isolation.

After a time, however this expression of such previously suppressed feelings kind of ran its course. Once again, Paul initiated a change in direction of the group discussion. He said something to the effect that “That's all well and good but how does that help the kids?” Perhaps it was satisfying to feel punitive toward the parents, but we all knew that in most instances the courts would not terminate parental rights even if we petitioned for it and furthermore, in most instances, we would be abusing the child if we opted for removal and placement. He used the “R” case, once again, to discuss that fact that even though, sure, he felt hostile toward the parents, his job was to do what was best for the kid and even here he felt that preserving the home for the kid by helping the parents change was the best

thing he could do to protect the child.

This changed the direction of the discussion. It returned to the earlier focus—how does one help the abusive parent to change, but with a difference. There was a conviction that this was a necessary and correct approach in helping the child and that, while hostility toward the parents was an understandable and acceptable reaction, it got us nowhere. We needed to control our feelings because if we all responded punitively toward the parents, this would get in our way in trying to establish a therapeutic relationship with them. If we were going to keep the child in the home by changing the parents, we would kill our chances by communicating hostility toward them.

Once again the discussion with regard to this question was pretty general and for the most part I stayed out of it completely. Members of the group used their own caseload (as did Paul with the “R” case) and their own experience to illustrate the futility of hostility toward parents if your aim was to help the child.

The meeting went about ten minutes beyond scheduled time. At the official end-time the discussion was still pretty active so I let it run for a while. When it began to slow down and get somewhat repetitious I intervened to sum up and recapitulate. I rapidly reviewed the course the meeting had taken from general discussion on approaches in helping abusive parents to change, to a cathartic expression of hostility, to a discussion of the pragmatic need to control negative feelings if we were going to do our job effectively.

I was conscious of the need to do this rapidly (three to five minutes), because once the scheduled time is past some people stop listening and get restive (“overtime,” is an imposition), others get anxious because they may have interviews scheduled. But I was also conscious of the need for closure and for a transition to the next meeting.

Consequently I kept the group a moment longer and said that, while we had established a pragmatic reason for self-discipline of feelings, perhaps we could discuss what makes abusive parents act this way. Perhaps we could come to the desirability of self-discipline of hostile feelings through understanding. I threw in the old “to understand is to forgive,” first in French (pandering a bit to my narcissism—a venal sin). I proposed that we think about this as the focus for our next group meeting, and if the group thought that this would be helpful to discuss, to let me know before next Tuesday (meetings are on Thursday afternoon).

The supervisor acted consciously and deliberately to help the group move productively toward the achievement of some significant learning related to their work. Each intervention he made was the result of a disciplined assessment of the needs of the group at that moment. The exercise of direction was not restrictive but tended to enhance group participation. The supervisor tried to limit his interventions to those necessary to expedite the work of the group, giving direction and control back to the group as soon as possible. He showed sensitivity to the verbal and nonverbal reactions of individual members of the group, as well as perceptiveness to the general climate of the group as a whole.

At every point, the supervisor was faced with a series of possibilities. For instance, when the group was silent, the supervisor might have chosen to focus on group dynamics or steer the discussion in a direction which developed greater group awareness of group dynamics interaction: “I wonder what prompts the silence; perhaps it might be productive to discuss how each of us is feeling now.” This would have encouraged a transition away from the question of dealing with abusive parents and it would have led to teaching regarding group process. By focusing group attention, by interventions on one or another aspect of the situation, the supervisor can narrow, widen, or change the focus of discussion.

## **Summary**

Group supervision is the use of the group setting to implement the administrative, educational, and supportive functions of supervision. It is most frequently used as a supplement for, rather than a substitute for, individual supervision.

The advantages of the use of the group setting for supervision include the

following:

1. It ensures economical use of administrative time and effort.
2. It ensures efficient utilization of a wider variety of teaching-learning experiences.
3. It provides a forum for discussion of problems and experiences common to group members, which not only aids in the formulation of possible solutions but also provides a wider variety of experiences to each worker.
4. It provides emotional support.
5. It provides an opportunity for the supervisees to share their own knowledge and give support to others.
6. It aids in the maintenance of morale.
7. It provides a comfortable learning environment—one that is potentially less threatening than the individual supervisory conference.
8. It provides an opportunity for the supervisees to confront the supervisor with some degree of safety.
9. It provides each worker with an opportunity to compare his or her work with that of the other supervisees.
10. It gives the supervisees a chance to feel more involved with and a part of the agency as a whole.
11. It provides the supervisor with the chance to see the supervisees in a different light.
12. It allows the sharing of supervisory functions between the supervisor and the group.
13. It facilitates modification of the supervisees' behavior by giving them a chance to learn from peers.
14. It allows the supervisees to see the supervisor in a different light.
15. It permits the development of greater supervisee autonomy.
16. It offers the possibility of multicultural education.

The disadvantages of the use of the group setting for supervision include the following:

1. Group learning needs take precedence over individual learning needs.
2. It fosters peer competition.
3. The supervisee can abdicate responsibility for developing his or her own work-problem solutions.
4. It threatens the loss of the supervisor's group control.
5. Group pressures to conform may stifle individual creativity.
6. It demands considerable group-work skills from supervisors.

The basic principles of group process and dynamics and the general principles of learning are applicable to group supervision. The supervisor as group leader shares

with the group the responsibility for stimulating and focusing group interaction.

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# CHAPTER 10

## Problems and Innovations

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### Observation of Performance: The Nature of the Problem

At different points in the earlier chapters, we have alluded to persistent problems that confront supervisors in social work. Some problems are methodological, related to how supervisors observe and teach social work practice. Others, addressing supervisory goals and environments, are more basic. The first series of problems is primarily technical in nature. The second series deals with professional policy issues. The intent in this chapter is to pull together and make explicit the different sets of problems and to review the innovative methods and procedures that have been proposed to deal with them.

The supervisor faces a technical problem related to access to the supervisee's performance. If the supervisor is to be administratively accountable for the worker's performance in order to help the worker learn to perform his or her work more effectively, the supervisor needs to have clear knowledge of what the worker is doing (Beddoe et al. 2011). However, the supervisor most often cannot directly observe the worker's performance. This is particularly true in direct practice. The worker-client contact is a private performance, deliberately screened from public viewing. Concealment of what takes place in the physically isolated encounter is reinforced and justified by dictates of "good" practice and professional ethics. Protecting the privacy of the encounter guarantees the client his or her right to confidentiality and guards against the disturbances to the worker-client relationship which, it is thought, would result from intrusion of an observer. What Freud said of analysis is applied to the social work interview: "The dialogue which constitutes the analysis will permit of no audience; the process cannot be demonstrated."

The group worker's performance is more open to observation. Miller (1960) pointed out that "what goes on between the worker and the group is directly visible to many people" (72)—to group members, to other workers, and to supervisors. However, "observations of a worker's activity take place ... on an informal, not a deliberately planned, basis" (75).

While the community worker's activities also seem to be open to observation, this openness is more apparent than real. As Brager and Specht noted:

Community organization practice is at once more visible and more private than casework. Although it takes place in the open forums of the community, where higher authorities may be present, this is usually only on ceremonial occasions. Surveillance of the workers' informal activities is another matter. The real business of community workers is less likely to occur within the physical domain of higher ranking participants than the activities of other workers. Thus the community worker has ample opportunity, if he wishes, to withhold or distort information. (1973:240)

Many of the community organizer's activities are highly informal and unstructured:

Whereas casework interviews can be scheduled and group workers conduct meetings on some scheduled basis, the activities of community workers defy regulation and schedule. Much time is absorbed with informal telephone conversations, attending meetings in which they may have no formal role, talking to other professionals and other difficult-to-specify activities. (Brager and Specht 1973:242)

By far the most common source of information used by supervisors in learning about a worker's performance is the written case-record material supplemented by a verbal report prepared and presented by the supervisee (Amerikaner and Rose 2012; Everett et al. 2011; Hicks 2009). Thus, in most instances, the supervisor observes the work of the supervisee at second hand, mediated through the supervisee's perception and written description of it. A medical social worker supervisee wrote:

The only information my supervisor receives about my clients is through my filter, what I tell her at patient staffing and what she reads when I do all my charting. Her thoughts and recommendations are manipulated by what information I chart and choose to share.

A worker in an adolescent treatment facility added:

It's pretty scary. In reality my supervisor has no clear idea of what I am doing. She knows only what I choose to tell her. Sometimes I feel pleased that she trusts my judgments. But sometimes I feel we might be placing my supervisor, as well as my clients, at risk and she could end up on the hot seat on the "Oprah Show."

Discussing the supervision of psychiatric residents, Wolberg said:

A professional coach who sends his players out to complete a number of practice games with instructions on what to do and who asks them to provide him at intervals with a verbal description of how they had played and what they intend to do next would probably last no more than one season. Yet this is the way much of the teaching in psychotherapy is done. What is lacking is a systematic critique of actual performances as observed by peers or supervisors. (1977:37)

The problem of access to worker performance is compounded by the fact that not only is the performance itself "invisible," but the outcomes of the performance are vague and ambiguous. The fact that automobiles come off an automobile assembly line is assurance of the competence of the worker's performance without actually having to see the performance. Social work supervisors never see a clear visible product of performance.

The traditional, and current, heavy dependence on record material and verbal reports for information regarding workers' performance necessitates some evaluation of these sources. Studies by social workers (Everett et al. 2011; Maidment 2000) as well as other professionals (Del-Ben et al. 2005; Farber 2006; Farnan et al. 2012; Mehr, Ladany, and Caskie 2010) indicate that case records and self-reports present a selective and often distorted view of worker performance.

To examine the nature, extent, and importance of what supervisees withhold from their supervisors, Ladany et al. (1996) surveyed twenty counseling and clinical psychology training programs and received 108 usable responses from graduate students. Therapists-in-training acknowledged withholding negative aspects of their performance, such as clinical mistakes, evaluation concerns, impressions of their clients, negative reactions to clients, countertransference reactions, and client-

counselor attraction. The reasons provided for withholding information were that supervisees perceived the information as unimportant or too negative or personal to reveal to the supervisor; that information was withheld to manage the supervisor's impression of the supervisee; and that revealing information was a form of political suicide. In most cases, nondisclosures remained secret because neither the supervisee nor the supervisor brought them up. Some findings from the study suggested that withholding information from the supervisor was related to perceptions of supervisory styles and relationships; supervisees often revealed the same information withheld from their supervisors to their peers or friends in the field, particularly if the information was perceived as important. Studies by Farber (2006), Hess et al. (2008), and Mehr et al. 2010 have reported similar patterns of findings.

Distorted reports and withheld information are self-protective measures against the possibility of criticism and rejection by the supervisor (Doherty 2005; Hahn 2001; Yourman 2003)). They are also an effort to obtain approval and approbation for work seemingly well done, perhaps even an integral part of the social worker's professional development (Lazar and Itzhaky 2000; Noelle 2002). It needs to be remembered that approval and criticism are intensified by inevitable transference elements in the relationship with the supervisor, and that autonomous decision-making is a cornerstone of professional practice.

Pithouse (1987), studying the use of records by agency workers, noted that, among other things, they were sometimes constructed as a gloss—a protective device vindicating the worker's practice. He noted that supervisors, having themselves once been workers, recognized records as presenting the appearance of expected practice, not necessarily a record of actual practice. As Gillingham and Humphreys (2010:2602) observed, "There may be an *unofficial* version of practice, which is quite different from the *official* version, as represented in formal procedures and practice guides."

Case records are used not only to collect and store information for use, but they are used to justify a worker's decisions, reconcile conflicting impressions, document events for worker protection, and present an understandable picture of a confusing situation to communicate an impression of success (Bush 1984; Munro 1999).

Comparisons of process recordings with audio or video recordings of the same contacts indicate that workers fail to hear and remember significant, recurrent patterns of interaction—discrepancies that can lead to important lessons in supervision (Bransford 2009). Workers do not perceive and report important failings in their approach to the client. This omission is not necessarily intentional falsification of the record in order to make the worker look good, although that does happen. It is, rather, the result of selective perception in the service of the ego's attempt to maintain self-esteem (Yerushalmi 1992). In 1934, Elon Moore wrote an article entitled, "How Accurate Are Case Records?" The question, which he answered negatively, is still pertinent today (Gillingham and Humphreys 2010). Supervision based on written records supplemented by verbal reports is supervision based on "retrospective reconstructions which are subject to serious distortions" on the part of



the supervisee (Ward 1962:1128). A supervisee wrote candidly:

The tendency in writing process notes is to sort of gloss over things that you found embarrassing or that you found difficult. I think there are times when I've made super boo-boos that I've left out purposely. And my reason for leaving out super mistakes is that I don't feel like being embarrassed. And if I know it's a mistake, why I have to present it to the supervisor? (Nash 1975:67)

Seeking approval through selective reporting, another supervisee said:

If I'm concerned about my supervisor writing down in his evaluation that I tend to ignore transference phenomena, then, even if I don't believe it, I'll make sure to include material that shows transference phenomena, because he happens to be interested in that. (Nash 1975:68)

There is some inevitable distortion of the realities of the encounter in the intellectualized reconstruction for the purpose of verbal and/or written communication. Imposing order, sequence, and structure on the interview in reporting the typically discontinuous, redundant, haphazard interactions presents it differently from the way it actually happened.

Stein et al. (1975) compared the psychiatric evaluations of patients made under two conditions. In one condition, the psychiatric resident described the patient in a supervisory conference and the supervisor completed an evaluation statement. In the second condition, supervisors directly observed the interview between the psychiatric resident and the same patient and on the basis of this observation completed an evaluation. "The results of the study supported the hypothesis that a supervisor who does not see the patient is handicapped in his evaluation of the patient's psychopathology" (267), indicating that "indirect supervision results in decreased accuracy" (268).

Differences between diagnostic reports provided to supervisors and independent assessments by observers of the same interaction have been confirmed once again in studies of intake interviews (Del-Ben et al 2005; Spitzer et al. 1982). This is a significant concern in clinical settings (Ponniah et al. 2011), where misdiagnoses or underdiagnoses can have educational, legal and medical consequences for providers and clients (Farnan et al. 2012; Harkness 2010).

Even if worker reports formed a valid basis for educational supervision, using only those reports for evaluating worker performance would be a hazardous procedure. Valid evaluation requires that supervisors know what workers actually did, not what they think they did or what they say they did. By applying what is known about human behavior to the supervisee reporting on his or her own performance, one can recognize the inadequacies of such a procedure as a basis for either good teaching or valid evaluation. As a consequence of anxiety, self-defense, inattention, and ignorance of what should be looked for, workers may be unaware of much that takes place in the encounters in which they are an active participants. Some of what workers are aware of may not be recalled; if they are aware of it and do recall it, they may not report it. The comment by two supervisors of child psychotherapy trainees is applicable to social workers:

In supervision of child psychotherapists over the year the authors have become impressed with ... the unexpected

degree to which direct observation of the trainee's psychotherapeutic hours reveals important and often flagrant errors in the trainee's functioning—errors which are somehow missed during supervision which is not supplemented by direct observation. This seems to be the case despite the trainee's attempt to be as honest as possible in talking with his supervisors, his use of the most detailed and complete process notes or his attempt to associate freely about the case without looking at his notes. (Ables and Aug 1972:340)

This clinical observation is confirmed in an empirical study by Muslin, Thurnblad, and Meschel (1981). They systematically compared the actual interview material as recorded on videotape with an audiotape of the reports of these interviews to supervisors. The interviews were conducted by medical students during their psychiatric clerkship. They found that less than half of the material was actually reported to the supervisor, and some degree of distortion was present in 54 percent of the interview reports. The four clinicians who independently studied the actual videotaped interviews and the reports to supervisors also made a judgment on the significance of the interview material that was not reported to supervisors. Forty-four percent of the material that the judges felt would totally alter the evaluation of the patient was omitted and 9 percent of such material was distorted. "These results indicate that to proceed in supervision as *if* [emphasis in original] an adequate data base were present is misleading" (Muslin et al. 1981:824; see also Wolfson and Sampson 1976). Some additional studies on the problem of assessment of performance on the basis of supervisee self-reports were cited in the chapter on evaluation.

In response to these difficulties, various innovations have been proposed to give the supervisor more direct access to the worker's performance. A review of the literature by Goodyear and Nelson (1997) enumerated twenty-two strategies that supervisors have used to observe worker performance; Bernard and Goodyear (2009), Kaslow et al. (2009), and Walker (2010) identified even more. Of these, direct observation and the indirect observation of audio- and video-recorded interviews have been rated highly by clinical supervisors and their trainees (DeRoma et al. 2007; O'Dell 2008), although few social work supervisors appear to use either method (Everett et al. 2011; Knight 2001; Scott et al. 2011). For both supervisors and workers, the postsession observation of video-recorded practice has been the most highly rated supervisory method (Bernard and Goodyear 2009; Wetchler, Piercy, and Sprenkle 1989).

## **Direct Observation of Performance**

"Supervision is a dynamic process that requires the use of a diversity of supervisory styles and approaches" (Graf and Stebnicki 2002:41). The simplest procedure is direct observation of the interview, either by unobtrusively sitting in on the interview or by observing the interview through a one-way mirror. The client's informed consent is needed, of course, for this and any other procedure that opens the client-worker contact to outside observation (NASW 2008). (Whether social work's involuntary clients can give valid informed consent for direct observation is a controversial question.)

Although 51 percent of master's degree programs and 57 percent of doctoral programs in counselor education are said to use direct observation in training supervision (Champe and Kleist 2003), such methods are used more rarely in the training of physicians (Craig 2011; Fromme, Karani, and Downing 2009), and more rarely still in the training of psychologists (Amerikaner and Rose 2012; Reiser and Milne 2012), and social workers (Beddoe et al. 2011; Everett et al. 2011). Direct observation is scarcer still in professional work settings, where "work environments lack needed resources," "heavy productivity demands from agency administrators have the effect of severely limiting their ability to make use of the supervision strategies they would prefer," supervisors are often "only paid for the limited time needed for supervision sessions, and thus have little time or incentive for utilizing strategies such as live observation," and agencies governed by HIPAA regulations have adopted "policies which limit or eliminate" the direct observation of clinical work (Amerikaner and Rose 2012:78–79; see also Fromme et al. 2009).

Feedback rooted in direct observation has been described as one of the key elements in developing worker skills in evidence-based practice (Carlson, Rapp, and Eichler 2010), but the evidence base for this claim is not well developed (Champe and Kleist 2003; Farnan et al. 2012). There is some evidence that supervisees who receive live supervision form a stronger working alliance with their supervisors (O'Dell 2008), if not with their clients (Moore 2004), and that feedback based on direct observation may change supervisee behavior (Craig 2011; Scheeler, McKinnon, and Stout 2012)—although, here, the evidence is mixed (Craig 2011). There is also some evidence that "live supervision" makes "a difference in therapists' ratings of progress on the problem over the course of therapy" (Bartle-Haring et al. 2009:406), and that direct observation leads to better patient outcomes (Farnan et al. 2012) in medical settings, by offering medical students "the opportunity to see beyond what they know and into what they actually do" (Fromme et al. 2009:265). But, for the most part, the pertinent research has been concerned with the experiences and perceptions of students and workers (Champe and Kleist 2003; Haber et al. 2009), not clients (Champe and Kleist 2003).

### ***Sitting In***

Kadushin (1956a, 1956b; 1957) tested the feasibility of sitting in on an interview in both a family-service agency and a public-assistance agency. Very few clients objected to the introduction of an observer. Postinterview discussion with both the worker and the client, supplemented by some objective measures of interview contamination attributable to observation, indicated that an unobtrusive observer had little effect on the interview.

Schuster and his colleagues used this procedure in the supervision of psychiatric residents: "We decided on a simple direct approach to the matter. We decided to have the supervisor sit with each new patient and the resident, as a third party, relatively inactive and inconspicuous but present.... In very few instances did our presence seem to interfere significantly with either the resident or the patient"

(Schuster, Sandt, and Thaler 1972:155). For the most part, this has also been the conclusion of recent reviews of the research (Bernard and Goodyear 2009; Champe and Kleist 2003; Ellis 2010).

### One-Way Mirrors

The one-way mirror permits observation without the risk, or necessity, of participation and minimizes observer intrusion on the interview or group session (Fleischmann 1955). The supervisor can see and hear the interview without himself being seen or heard. Peer group observation of the interview or group session is also possible. One-way viewing requires a special room, and it has its own hazards. Gruenberg, Liston, and Wayne (1969) noted that “the physical setting of the one-way mirror arrangement has been less than conducive to continuous alertness in the supervisor. The darkened room is more often conducive to languor than attentiveness” (Gruenberg et al. 1961:96; see also Adler and Levy 1981).

**TABLE 10.1** *Observational methods used in intern, student, and trainee supervision*

<i>Profession</i>	<i>Client records and/or process recording</i>	<i>Self-report</i>	<i>Audio recording</i>	<i>Video recording</i>	<i>One-way mirror</i>	<i>Co-therapy</i>
Marriage and family therapists <sup>a</sup>	34%	76%	53%	65%	58%	Not reported
Marriage and family counselors <sup>b</sup>	72%	83%	39%	57%	28%	Not reported
Psychologists <sup>c</sup>	58%	73%	3%	11%	3%	13%
Social workers <sup>d</sup>	93%	81%	12%	7%	9%	68%

<sup>a</sup> National sample of 330 approved American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy supervisors from Lee et al. (2004:65).

<sup>b</sup> California sample of 389 supervisees from DeRoma et al. (2007:421).

<sup>c</sup> National sample of 173 supervisees from Amerikaner and Rose (2012:68–69).

<sup>d</sup> Regional sample of 81 field instructors from Everett et al. (2011:258).

In a study of ten social work graduate students on the other side of the one-way mirror, Wong (1997) found that social work students expected and experienced anxiety before and during supervision. In time, however, the trainees begin to relax, and by the end of their training they generally perceived this form of supervision as a valuable experience. As shown in [table 10.1](#), the limited evidence suggests that this mode of observation is rare in social work supervision.

### Co-Therapy Supervision

The supervisor-observer, by sitting in on an interview (or otherwise intervening in real time), can easily move to a new role—that of co-worker or co-therapist (Tuckman and Finkelstein 1999). Co-therapy has also been termed multiple therapy and, in group work, co-leadership. If supervision through co-therapy is offered, it is generally provided as a supplement to, rather than a substitute for, individual supervision. See Beddoe et al. (2011) and Evans (1987) for rich introductions.

Supervision conducted by sitting in with the worker and client has been championed for safeguarding client welfare, immersing the supervisor in the direct practice experience, and allowing clients to observe supervision in action (Bernard and Goodyear 2009). One of the principal advantages of co-therapy is that the supervisor, as an active participant in the supervisee's performance, is in a position to witness firsthand the behavior of the supervisee (Finkelstein and Tuckman 1997). Having initiated co-therapy, a supervisor notes that he became immediately aware of a supervisee's problematic approach to the client—a problem that “had not been clear to me during the few months of traditional supervision we had had” (Rosenberg, Rubin, and Finzi 1968:284). In analyzing the experience over a six-month period of co-therapy between a supervising psychotherapist and students, Rosenberg, Rubin, and Finzi noted that “the direct observation of the student did away with retrospective falsification in the student's traditional role in reporting his work to the supervisor” (1968:293).

The power and manifestations of countertransference are more apparent to the supervisor as he or she experiences the client firsthand. Co-therapy then makes more information and more valid information available to the supervisor. Consequently, it is an innovation that helps resolve the problem regarding the information needed by the supervisor for effective supervision.

Munson (2002) ranked the live co-therapy interview as the most effective method of social work supervision, but the use of co-therapy for educational supervision may present problems. If the supervisor becomes overactive in the worker-client meeting, then the dynamics may resemble those of co-therapy conducted by a novice paired with an experienced practitioner (Smith, Mead, and Kinsella 1998), in which “the junior therapist” tends to defer to the senior therapist, who tends “to take over” (Altfeld and Bernard 1997:381). Co-therapy supervision is also expensive.

During the co-therapy session, it is advisable for the supervisor to allow the supervisee to take primary responsibility for the interaction. The supervisor intervenes only when the supervisee is experiencing some difficulty, when the supervisee signals a request for intervention, or when the supervisor sees a clear opportunity of modeling behavior that he or she is anxious to teach.

Noting the developmental importance of observing supervisees directly early in their training, Hunt and Sharpe said:

[We] evaluated the perceptions of 37 interns and 49 patients regarding communication between supervisor and intern during the therapy session. Most supervisors used such communication infrequently. While some interns and patients viewed call-ins or walk-ins as intrusive and unhelpful, the majority did not. Indeed, some valued the feedback. No association was found between the use of call-ins or walk-ins and patient reports of therapist behaviours or intern reports of supervisory style. It is concluded that within-session communications is not deemed as necessary by most supervisors, who should remain cautious in their use of such communication, unless patient care is compromised. (Hunt and Sharpe 2008:121)

Productive use of co-therapy for purposes of supervision “requires a conscious effort by the supervisor to modify what tendency he might have to take over and be the expert and for the [supervisee] to resist a tendency to sit back and be an observer” (Sidall and Bosma 1976:210). Alternatively, the supervisor may elect to

consult with the worker in the presence of the client, in order to “heighten” the client’s “awareness of particular dynamics” (Bernard and Goodyear 2009:265).

The helping professions employ and evaluate co-therapy supervision differentially (Carlozzi, Romans, Boswell, Ferguson, and Whisenhunt 1997), and this has changed over time. In 1986, McKenzie, Atkinson, Quinn, and Heath reported that 64.9 percent of marriage and family-therapy supervisors engaged in co-therapy supervision; eleven years later, DeRoma et al. (2007:419) noted that “direct supervision in the presence of a supervisor was [still] more frequent than expected given manpower costs.” In contrast, only 13 percent of the current psychology supervisees surveyed by Amerikaner and Rose (2012) agreed that they conducted co-therapy with their supervisors, and it seems likely that social workers still use this form of direct observation infrequently (Kadushin 1992a), as [table 10.1](#) suggests.

Co-therapy provides the supervisee not only with an opportunity for direct observation of the work of a skilled practitioner but also with a stimulating basis for joint discussions. “The supervisory conference takes on new meaning as the [supervisor] evaluates for the [supervisee’s] benefit not only the [supervisee’s] performance, but also his own” (Ryan 1964:473). The co-therapy experience is most productive if prepared for carefully and if followed, as soon as possible, by a joint discussion of the experience which they have jointly shared. On the other hand, those reporting on the use of the co-therapy procedure in supervision cite the dangers of inhibiting the worker’s autonomous learning or promoting dependency on the supervisor (Champite and Kleist 2003; Smith, Mead, and Kinsella 1998).

Tanner (2011) examined the effectiveness of co-therapy supervision on treatment outcome, client retention, and therapy training by comparing the outcomes reported by groups of clients treated by supervisor-trainee co-therapists with those treated by supervisees varying exposure to co-therapy supervision. No between-group differences were found in client retention or in the magnitude or direction of change, suggesting that the co-therapy was no more effective than the therapy provided by solo supervisees. For that matter, co-therapy supervision was no more effective for the trainee than ex post facto supervision.

### **Observation via Recordings: Indirect Observation of Performance**

Dependence on retrospective verbal and written reports of the worker-client interaction means that the experience as it actually occurred is lost forever. Similarly, direct interview observation and observation through co-therapy or a one-way mirror leave no record for retrieval, study, and discussion. To correct this deficiency, some social workers make audio or video recordings of their interviews for use in supervision. The use of such procedures is said to be widespread in the supervision of marriage and family counselors (DeRoma et al. 2007), but less so in psychology and social work, as shown in [table 10.1](#). The importance of such technical aids for supervision is that their use enables one to observe performance indirectly and reenact the performance for examination.

Video may be recorded through an unobtrusive port from an adjoining control room

that houses the equipment. Alternatively, the camera can “see” through a one-way mirror or (using more recent, inexpensive digital technology) via one or more small webcams placed in the interview room (Chlebowski 2011). The simplest procedure is to turn the equipment on at the beginning of the interaction and off at the end, although ethical considerations may suggest the option of providing clients with some independent means to start, stop, or interrupt the recordings themselves. The use of multiple digital cameras allows the client and worker to record or be recorded independently or in concert, and software can be used to edit digital recordings for wide-angle shots, zoom close-ups, superimpositions, and split-screen images. Digital technology provides highly flexible options for recording group interaction and meetings.

The NASW Code of Ethics (2008) and the NASW and ASWB Standards for Technology and Social Work Practice (2005) require social workers to obtain informed consent from their clients before audio- or video-recording interviews. HIPAA regulations (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2010) and state boards of social work examiners (McAdams and Wyatt 2010) may impose additional duties, obligations, prohibitions, and restrictions governing protected information in settings linked to health care. Likewise, informed client consent is required before permitting supervisors and other third parties to observe the recordings. Informed consent requires clear and understandable language that informs clients of the purpose of the recording, who will be reviewing the recording, the risks and benefits involved, the clients’ right to refuse or withdraw consent (by interrupting or stopping the recording), and the timeframe covered by the consent. Social workers should give clients the option of specifying that the recording be erased after use in supervision and invite clarifying questions. Echoing Jencius, Baltimore, and Getz (2010), Haggerty and Hilsenroth (2011:200) added that “videos should be kept locked and de-identified in some way so as to further protect the identity of the patient,” and that digital recordings should “have the data password protected and encrypted.” Video recording through unobtrusive webcams or ports—whether in the wall, behind a one-way mirror, or in the interview or conference room—is designed primarily to reduce distraction, not to hide the fact of recording from the clients.

In addition to making available complete, reliable, and vivid information regarding the worker’s practice in supervision, video- and audio recording lend themselves to methods of teaching and evaluation with promise for improving worker performance (Hammoud et al. 2012; Huhra, Yamokoski-Maynhart and Prieto 2008; VanDerWege 2011) and perhaps client outcomes (Haggerty and Hilsenroth 2011; Hammoud et al. 2012). Based on a meta-analysis of 217 experimental comparisons from thirty-three experimental studies involving a total of 1,058 persons, for example, Fukkink, Trienekens, and Kramer (2011) have reported that video feedback has a significant effect on the interaction skills of workers in a range of professions. A second meta-analytic study, drawing on ten independent samples of short-term dynamic psychotherapy, found that the use of audio- or video recordings in supervision had a moderate effect on patient outcomes (Diener, Hilsenroth, and Weinberger



2007). Based on a psychotherapy research program affiliated with the Harvard Medical School and sister institutions, McCullough et al. (2011:129) published an internet-accessible and practical guide on how to rate video-recorded therapy sessions, using an automated training protocol for trainees and advanced clinicians, and a scale of common factors “empirically shown to play a role in therapeutic change” (published on [www.ATOStrainer.com](http://www.ATOStrainer.com)).

Practice recordings enrich the nuance and texture of supervision. The availability of recordings “retrieves” the client for the supervisory conference. The supervisor who knows the client only from the supervisee’s written record and verbal reports may have difficulty envisioning the client or holding the client as the focus of attention of the conference. The client is a disembodied, dehumanized abstraction. Audio or video recording makes the client’s presence immediate and vivid. This increases the certainty that the client is not “forgotten” during the supervisory conference, that clinical supervision remains truly triadic, including the supervisor, supervisee, and client.

Audio and video recordings allow the supervisor to discuss the client in a way that makes more vivid what he or she says to the supervisee. Telling is not as effective as showing. But to see for ourselves, which recordings make possible, is perhaps the most insightful method of learning. Supervisees, through replaying recordings, face themselves in their own performance rather than the supervisor’s definition of them. “One rather cocksure resident denied feeling much anxiety in the interview situation. On a replay of his videotape, however, he saw himself chewing gum rapidly during several tense moments during the hour. In the discussion of his behavior, he was able to recall his tension and consider the possibilities of its origin” (Hirsh and Freed 1970:45).

The disjunction between a supervisee’s mental image of his or her behavior and the actuality becomes undeniably clear on replay of a recording. One student said, “You get an idea of what you really look like and project to the [client] but often this is not what you intended” (Suess 1970:275). The experience of self-discovery that follows video playback has been aptly described as “self-awkwardness.” One worker said, “I discovered by watching the tape that I was too halting in my speech and that there was not enough continuity in what I was saying. Without videotape it might have taken months for a [supervisor] to convince me of this” (Benschoter, Eaton, and Smith 1965:1160).

Recording playback and review involves confrontation with self, by self—not, as so often is the case, confrontation by reflection from others (VanDerWege 2011). “A therapist was shocked when she saw and heard herself making cumbersome and convoluted interpretations of such semantic complexity that *she* could barely understand them while later viewing the tape. However, months of reporting had given her supervisor the impression that her interventions were precise and articulate.” Another “recognized while watching a tape that he gratuitously mumbled ‘uh huh’ throughout the session regardless of the patient’s words” (Rubenstein and Hammond 1982:149–50).



Audiovisual playback permits considerable self-learning. It thus encourages the development of self-supervision and independence from supervision. The supervisee has the “opportunity of distinguishing between the model he has of his own behavior and the reality of his behavior” (Gruenberg, Liston, and Wayne 1969:49). He or she has a chance for a second look at what was done, an opportunity to integrate multilevel messages that might have been missed in the heat of the interaction. Playback provides a less pressured, more neutral opportunity to detect missed interventions or formulate what might have been more appropriate ones. As a supervisor said in pointing to the advantages for self-instruction in videotape, “Sometimes there is no need to point out a mistake. The tape speaks for itself” (Benschoter, Eaton, and Smith 1965:1160).

As participant-observers in the interview, group meeting, or conference, supervisees can devote only part of their time and energy to self-observation and introspective self-analysis. They must devote most of their time and energy to focusing on client needs and reactions. Furthermore, much of their behavior is beyond self-observation. They cannot see themselves smile, grimace, arch their eyebrows, or frown. Retrieving the interaction on a recording, supervisees can give their undivided attention to the role of self-observer. Video recordings come close to implementing Robert Burns “wish “to see ourselves as others see us.”

Supervisees can play the recording when they are more relaxed and less emotionally involved, and they can therefore examine their behavior somewhat more objectively. At the same time, repeating their contact with the full imagery of the event as it took place tends to evoke some of the same feelings that were felt at the time. Thus, the recordings allow supervisees to observe themselves as they relive, to some degree, their affective experiences.

Viewing themselves on video recordings or listening to themselves on audio recordings may be ego-supportive for supervisees. For many, their self-image is reinforced positively by what they see and hear. Supervisees said, in response to the playback experience, “I look better, sound better than I thought” and “I did better than I realized.” Adjectives used to describe themselves, elicited after playback, were similar to, and as positive as, those elicited before playback (Walz and Johnston 1963:233). The direction of the limited change that had taken place was toward a more objective view of their performance. It was a humbling rather than a humiliating experience. Without supervisory intervention, but as a consequence of the playback alone, supervisees’ perceptions of their work tended to become more congruent with the supervisor’s perceptions (Walz and Johnston 1963:235). Seeing one-self engaged in behaving competently, intervening in ways that are helpful, tend to reinforce such behavior. Replay not only helps correct errors, but it helps to reinforce learning.

The nature of recording technology permits considerable flexibility in how it might be used in supervision. Through the use of audio and video recordings, the supervisor and supervisee can review the work repeatedly at their own time and at their own pace (Farmer 1987; VanDerWege 2011).

The opportunity for repeated replaying of the interactional events permits

supervisor and supervisee to focus exclusively on a single aspect each time. At one time, they can focus on the client; another time they can focus on the worker. The same one or two minutes of interaction can be played repeatedly to focus on worker-client interchange. Shutting off the sound on a video recording permits exclusive concentration on nonverbal behavior; shutting off the visual image permits exclusive attention to verbal content.

Recordings do not diminish the desirability of supervision even though they do provide the supervisee with a rich opportunity for critical, retrospective self-examination of his or her work. Seeing and hearing this material in the presence of a supervisor who asks the right provocative questions and calls attention to what otherwise might be missed provides the supervisee with greater opportunities for learning. The procedure has been used frequently in counselor training by Norman Kagan and his associates (Kagan, Krathwohl, and Miller 1963; Kagan and Kagan 1997) in what they term *interpersonal process recall*. Individual supervisees watch playbacks of their video-recorded interviews in the presence of trained supervisors. The supervisors encourage the their supervisees, through sensitive questioning, to describe the feelings they experienced during the interview, to translate their body movements, and to reconstruct the thinking that led them to do and say the particular things they did and said at specific points in the interview. For reviews of the literature, see Buser (2008) and Huhra, Yamokoski-Manhart, and Prieto (2008).

Self-defensive activity by the supervisee is just as probable in playback observation as during the interview itself. The use of recordings is optimally productive only when there is a supervisor available who can gently, but insistently, call attention to what the supervisee would rather not hear or see. Mark Twain once said that “you can’t depend on your eyes when your imagination is out of focus.” The supervisor, watching or listening to the recording alongside the supervisee, helps keep imagination in focus.

Video recordings are employed in group supervision as a stimulus for discussion (Bransford 2009; Brooks, Patterson, and McKiernan 2012). In the system used by Goldberg (2012:47), “During each session, supervisees are encouraged to first process urgent counseling concerns and then show videotapes of counseling sessions to promote discussion. The supervisees rotate weekly the chance to show the first tape.” Chodoff (1972) played tapes of interviews in group supervisory meetings, stopping the tape at various points in an interview to elicit comments from supervisees as to how they would have handled the situation at that point if they were the interviewer and to speculate on what would happen next in the interview.

Supervisor evaluation feedback is likely to have greater effect under conditions of high visibility of worker performance. Any assessment is likely to be easily dismissed by the worker who has little confidence in the supervisor’s evaluation because of limited opportunity to observe the worker’s performance. Recorded material can be used in evaluation to demonstrate or validate patterns of changing performance over a period of time. An interview or group session recorded at one point in time can be compared with a similar interview or group session recording several months or a

year later.

Recordings can also be used, as records are currently, to induct new staff. Under appropriate conditions, a library of audio and video recordings might be developed to give the new worker a clear and vivid idea of the work the agency does.

There are some disadvantages, however, in the use of audio and video recordings. Conscious of the fact that their entire performance is being recorded, with no possibility of change or revision, supervisees may be somewhat more guarded and less spontaneous in their behavior (Huhra et al. 2008; Mauzey, Harris, and Trusty 2000). They may tend to take more seriously La Rochefoucauld's maxim, "It is better to remain silent and be thought a fool, than to speak and remove all doubt."

The worker is more likely than the client to feel anxious, "since the therapist can feel himself being examined while the [client] sees himself as being helped" (Kornfeld and Kolb 1964:457). For most supervisees, the gains from recording their performance appear to offset the risks. Itzin (1960) found that supervisees who recorded their interviews for supervision were very much in favor of the procedure. They felt it introduced a desirable objectivity into supervision and helped them overcome evasions, distortions, and other defenses manifested in written reports of their work. One supervisee said, "I feel certain that the supervisor was able to pin down my problems quite early—and understood me much better than he could have had I been able to hide behind process recording" (198). Another commented, "It gave [the supervisor] a much more accurate account of what went on during the interview. When reporting happenings we tend to flavor them with our own thoughts, feelings and needs. I fail to see how it could be otherwise. He knew what we were doing rather than what we said we were doing" (198). One student said, "I can read a thousand books on theory but when I actually saw what was happening it was a great awakening" (Ryan 1969:128).

Thus, social work students who videotaped their interviews gained self-awareness and sensitivity. In a study by Hanley, Cooper, and Dick (1994), social work students who received feedback on their audiotaped or videotaped client interviews reported significantly more satisfaction with their field practicum than those who did not (Fortune and Abramson 1993). Both supervisors and supervisees awarded their highest rating to reviewing videotaped interviews when Wetchler et al. (1989) asked marriage and family therapists to evaluate supervisory formats in use. However, Hicks (2009) found no association between the use of audio or video recordings and perceptions of the effectiveness of supervision in a national study of postdoctoral supervisees.

One of the principal advantages of the use of recordings for supervision is, at the same time, one of its principal disadvantages: audio and video recordings are complete and indiscriminate. The supervisor faces an embarrassment of riches and may be overwhelmed by the detail available. It is possible to avoid the danger of being overwhelmed, however, by selecting limited sections for viewing, judiciously sampling the interaction, and taking an "audiovisual biopsy." On the other hand, a surgical approach to supervision may have contributed to the experience of the

supervisee who felt that her supervisor was “just watching [video recordings] to correct” and felt the need to be “on guard at all times” (Phelps 2013:125).

The time involved in using the video recording for supervision can be reduced by asking the supervisee to select the points on the recording that he or she wants to discuss and identify the counter numbers where this interaction appears on the recording, giving this information to the supervisor in advance. Rather than reviewing the entire hour-long recording, the supervisor can merely spot-check and then focus on those interactions that the supervisee would like to discuss. Unfortunately, VanDerWege (2011:138) found that supervisors rarely asked to view practice recordings “marked and tagged” by their supervisees during supervision, leading to disappointment with supervision.

Recording procedures present a possibly hazardous challenge to the supervisor. If the supervisor can observe the supervisee’s performance through use of these procedures, the supervisee can likewise have access to the supervisor’s performance. There is an implied invitation to have the supervisor conduct an interview or lead a group so that the supervisee can observe how it should be done. The supervisee who is dependent solely on hearing the supervisor talk about social work has to extrapolate from the supervisor’s behavior in the conference how he or she might actually behave with clients. The role model available to the supervisee is largely imaginary. Direct observation of the supervisor in action would make available a more vivid, authentic, and realistic role model for emulation.

Video recording of interviews by the supervisor with clients allows the worker to “see their teachers at work removed from the unrealistic vacuum of didactic pontification. In seeing their supervisor’s sessions firsthand, warts and all, the [supervisees] not only see their supervisor’s skills and learn from them but may also be given the chance to renounce the previous idealization of the supervisor” (Rubenstein and Hammond 1982:159).

Supervisors as well as supervisees can profit from recording and reviewing their work. There is no reported use of such procedures in social work, but supervisors in education and psychology (Robiner, Saltzman, Hoberman, and Schirvar 1997) have tape-recorded their conferences for self-study.

There is a persistent question of the distortion of the worker-client interaction resulting from the use of all observational procedures and the threat to confidentiality. Reports by psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers who have used audio and video recordings of individual or group interviews are almost unanimous in testifying that no serious distortions of interaction had taken place. With considerable consistency, professionals state that very few clients object to the use of these devices; that whatever inhibiting effects these devices have on client communication are transient; that clients are less disturbed than the workers, who are anxious about exposing their performance so openly to the evaluation of others; and that workers take longer to adapt comfortably to this situation than do clients.

The subjective reports of those who have used audio or video recordings for service, research, and supervision are consistently supported by systematic research

on the effects of such procedures. Some years ago, Kogan (1950) found that the use of an audiotape recorder had no significant intrusive effect on social casework interview. Subsequent studies (Ellis 2010; Ellis, Krengel, and Beck 2002; Gossman and Miller 2012) confirmed this conclusion.

That is not to say that such procedures have no effects. Any change makes for some change. The important question is whether the effects are significant, whether the intrusive consequences are sufficiently deleterious to offset the clear advantages in the use of recordings. The answer clearly seems to be that there are no serious deleterious effects, when used with good judgment.

The use of recordings cannot be careless or indiscriminate. Some clients are affected more than others (Gelso and Tanney 1972; Van Atta 1969), and particularly with paranoid clients these procedures would be contraindicated. Niland et al. (1971) observed some of the inhibitory consequences of the use of tape recordings; they emphasized the need for sensitivity to the supervisee's "index of readiness" to use audio and video recording.

Balancing the advantages and disadvantages and comparing audio and video recording with alternative supervisory procedures, these observational approaches might be seriously considered as desirable innovations. This was the conclusion of family therapist supervisors. In a questionnaire study of 318 approved family therapist supervisors and 299 of their supervisees, both groups agreed that "reviewing videotapes of therapy sessions with supervisors" was the most effective supervisory technique (Wetchler et al. 1989:39). "Review written verbatim transcripts with supervisor" was given the lowest effectiveness rating by both supervisor and supervisee among eighteen different procedures listed.

Use of these measures that provide direct and indirect access to the worker's performance helps mitigate the problem associated with the supervisor's secondhand, perhaps distorted, knowledge of what the worker is actually doing. Some additional innovations include not only direct observation but also supervisory through input live supervision during the time the interview is actually conducted.

### **Live Supervision During the Interview**

Even if the supervisor can observe the work of the supervisee more fully and directly, he or she is still denied the possibility of teaching at the moment when such intervention is likely to be most effective. Whether he or she sits in on the interview, observes through a one-way mirror, or listens to and sees the work of the supervisee on audio and video recordings, his or her discussion of the worker's performance is retrospective. For the worker, supervision comes after the interview, at a point in time removed from his or her most intense affective involvement in the problem situation, when he or she might be most amenable to learning. The advantages of immediacy and heightened receptivity to suggestion while under stress are diluted. Assuming that the record of practice shows room for improvement, any retrospective benefits of supervision may be lost on the client. Consequently, there have been a number of attempts to use modern technology to permit the supervisor to supervise while the

worker is actually engaged in an interview. However, if the supervisor's direct observation of the worker-client interaction is intrusive, live supervision intrudes more.

The main thrust of live supervision is to move supervisory interaction closer to where the action is taking place, to increase the immediacy and spontaneity of the supervisor's teaching. Live supervision also permits the supervisee to immediately test his or her ability to implement the supervisor's suggestions and to ascertain immediately the client's response to suggested interventions. This supposedly has a potent impact on learning (Munson 2002).

Having decided to supervise during the actual course of the interview, the supervisor has to decide on the method of live intervention. The choice involves use of the "bug-in-the-ear" and related methods of contact with the supervisee, calling the supervisee out of the session for a conference (Gold 1996), or walking into the session to engage in supervision.

#### ***Bug-in-the-Ear and Bug-in-the-Eye Supervision***

A smartphone or computer with a wireless link to a small, unobtrusive, lightweight, behind-the-ear receiving device allows the supervisor to communicate with the supervisee during the course of the interview or group meeting. As Wade (2010:27) noted, a bug-in-the-ear (BITE) currently "is comprised of two major components: a Bluetooth earpiece and a USB adaptor." Watching and listening behind a one-way mirror or through a video transmission, the supervisor can make suggestions that only the supervisee can hear. The communication is in the nature of a space-limited broadcast, and no wires impede the movements of the supervisee.

Korner and Brown first reported the use of such a procedure in 1952, calling it "the mechanical third ear." Ward (1960; 1962) and Boylsten and Tuma (1972) reported on the use of this device in psychiatric training in medical schools. Montalvo (1973) detailed use of a similar procedure in a child guidance clinic, and Levine and Tilker (1974) described the use of the device in supervision of behavior modification clinicians.

Barnett (2011), Chlebowski and Fremont (2011), Ford (2008), Goodman et al. (2008), Olson, Russell, and White (2001), and Scheeler et al. (2012) have reviewed the literature on the use of the BITE technology in a variety of disciplines, citing the advantages and disadvantages of the procedure. A review by Wade (2010:iii) noted that "bug-in-the-ear Bluetooth technology has allowed supervisors to increase desired teacher behaviors by providing immediate feedback, coaching, and prompting during instructional delivery." An empirical study of the effects of the use of BITE supervisory feedback with four marriage and family therapy trainees found that the procedure produced significant improvement in trainees' clinical skills (Gallant, Thayer, and Bailey 1991). A study by Jumper (1998) found that the immediate bug-in-the-ear feedback that counselor trainees received directly enhanced their self-efficacy. In addition, in a multiple-baseline study of three novice teachers of students with disabilities in K-8 classrooms, Goodman et al. (2008) found that "the rate and accuracy of effective teaching behaviors increased when in-class feedback was

delivered via the electronic ‘bugs.’” However, although Goodman et al. (2008) found some evidence that some teachers’ practice effectiveness was sustained when BITE supervision was withdrawn, the outcomes of BITE supervision were more equivocal in Thurber’s (2005) dissertation study of therapists receiving live supervision.

For a beginning worker, such a device may help lower “his initial encounter anxiety, thus allowing him more freedom to focus on the patient’s anxieties. The fact that a supervisor is immediately available provides significant support so that the therapist is able to be more relaxed, spontaneous, and communicative” (Boylsten and Tuma 1972:93).

In defense of directive intrusions by the supervisor during the therapy, Lowenstein and Reder (1982) stated that for the beginning therapist “there is a feeling of gratitude for a ‘powerful voice’ which offers generous help in moments of stagnation, perplexity, and chaos.” They noted further that the supervisor does or should know better than the supervisee, and directivity is not antithetical to development of creativity because “it is only reasonable to expect that creativity will be developed *after* [emphasis in original] fundamental techniques are mastered” (121).

The supervisor can call attention to nonverbal communication, which is often missed, to the latent meaning of communication, to which the worker fails to respond, or to significant areas for exploration that have been ignored. As Montalvo (1973) noted, “This arrangement assumes that you do not have to wait until the damage is done to attempt to repair events” (345). Becoming aware of these considerations on the spot promotes immediate learning and helps to offer the client more effective service, as illustrated in the following vignette. A nine-year-old was very late for his interview, and the therapist was annoyed and upset:

[When the boy came in,] he was obviously anxious. He looked at the therapist and stated that the therapist looked different—his hair was “all messed up.” Misunderstanding the communication, the therapist commented on his hair. When it was pointed out to the therapist (via the bug) that the boy recognized his more curt voice, the therapist was able to comment on the boy’s fear that perhaps the therapist was angry at him for being late. The interpretation of the boy’s fears of the therapist’s anger led to the patient’s being able to relax and promoted further psychotherapeutic intervention. (Boylsten and Tuma 1972:94)

Such a procedure enables the supervisor to directly evaluate the supervisee’s effectiveness in using supervision. It has an additional advantage for supervisors, in that they are in a better position to deter possible legal action against them by stopping the supervisees if there is any danger of harm to the client. The procedure combines client protection with enhancing the professional growth of the supervisees.

Direct supervisory interventions can differ in their degrees of concreteness and specificity. This intervention can be a general statement or a very specific prescription for action. The intervention can differ in the degree of direction. The supervisee can be directed to do something, or the intervention can be in the nature of a suggestion. The intervention can differ in terms of the degree of annotation. Supervisors can be very brief in explaining the reasons for what is being communicated, or they can elaborate on the justifications for the communication. The interventions can differ in the level of their intensity and can be communicated with considerable emphasis or in

a mild tone. Interventions can be more specific or more directive with beginning workers and more general with experienced ones.

Comments might be peremptory instructions, telling the supervisee to do something: “Explore the parent’s conflicts on discipline,” “Confront father with his failure to respond to son,” “Get the mother to negotiate with daughter on homework,” or “Include grandmother in the discussion.” More often, their supervisory comments tend to be suggestive: “Think about..., If you have a chance ... See if you can ... It might help to try ....” Their comments also may be supportive (e.g., “That was good. Keep it up. Fine intervention”) or suggestive (e.g., “Perhaps a short role play might help at this point”).

Although informed consent is required for the ethical use of BITE and related procedures (NASW 2008), client cooperation is sometimes solicited by being told that the services may be more effective if monitored by a more experienced supervisor (Kaplan 1987). Clients should always be informed in advance about methods of supervision in use; otherwise, clients who observe workers wearing ear buds or headsets may assume that a Bluetooth device is being used to receive incoming calls unrelated to the business at hand.

Although training with live supervision has long been proposed to prepare social workers for clinical practice (Evans 1987; Saltzburg, Greene, and Drew 2010), little is known about how often or widely it is used in social work supervision (Everett et al. 2011; Mishna et al. 2012). A questionnaire study of the use of the bug-in-the-ear in psychiatric residency training found that it had been used by 36 percent of the seventy-four programs responding. Patients were not adversely affected by its use. Problems for the supervisee, including possible loss of control of the interaction, creation of dependency, and disturbance and distraction in using bug-in-the-ear, depended to a considerable extent on the supervisee-supervisor relationship. Where the supervisor was sensitive to the needs of the supervisee and was not dominant or intrusive, the procedure presented little difficulty (Salvendy 1984). Training programs may overestimate how frequently they use live supervision, however. Medical residents and students report that direct observations of their practice during training are rare (Fromme et al. 2009), and a recent national survey of 150 professional psychology supervisees at all levels of training found that “methods permitting live observation of supervisee work were used very infrequently” (Amerikaner and Rose 2012:61).

Certain dangers associated with the use of the device are clearly recognized. In addition to anticipatory and initial performance anxiety (Champe and Kleist 2003; Saltzberg et al. 2010), these include the possibility of confusing and disconcerting the worker by too-frequent interventions, the possibility of addictive dependence on outside help, and the possibility of interference with the worker’s autonomy and his or her opportunity for developing his or her own individual style (Barker 1998). The danger lies in “robotizing” the worker or having him operate by remote control as a parrot:

A trainee pointed out that in my enthusiasm to be helpful via the ear—that “comments came so thick and fast it was



hard to do any thinking of my own!" I think it is important for the bug to be a word in the ear rather than a cartridge in the brain! (Hildebrand 1995:175)

The evidence suggests that supervisors who intervene too much during live supervision are as unhelpful (Hendrickson et al. 2002) as those who just watch (Beddoe et al. 2011).

To manage these risks, supervisors should receive training in live supervision (Mauzey and Edman 1997) and provide an orientation "in which supervisees are given an informed consent statement about the purpose of live supervision, how the particular format works, and the expectations supervisors have for trainees" (Champe and Kleist 2003:272). The approach suggested by those who have used the device is for the supervisor to broadcast only during silences or when the worker is making notes; to limit such interventions to clearly important points in the interaction, when the worker is seriously in error or in difficulty; and to make suggestions that are phrased in general terms, "leaving the actual dialogue and action pattern" to the students. "Most trainees point to the fact that the real value for them lies in interpretations of general themes in the psychotherapy process rather than in specific interpretive remarks" (Boylsten and Tuma 1972:95). Alternatively, Mauzey and Erdman (1997) argue that live supervisory interventions should be brief, clear, and concise.

Further, supervisor and supervisee might agree in advance that if the supervisor's interventions are at any point confusing or not helpful, the supervisee can take the bug out of the ear using some agreed-upon signal. In general, although the bug-in-the-ear is among the least intrusive of the live supervisory approaches, the recent innovation of "bug-in-the-eye" supervision (Chapman et al. 2011) is even less so. In this method, the supervisor employs a mobile phone or smartphone, computer, iPad, or similar device with a keyboard to send text or e-mail to the supervisee on a video screen. Visible to the worker, but not to the client, a bug-in-the-eye provides visual supervisory feedback. Available when the supervisee wants it, unlike bug-in-the-ear feedback that may come when the supervisor deems it prudent, this form of feedback is less demanding of the worker's immediate attention. Sometimes, for that very reason, messages from the supervisor can be ignored.

These procedures, involving supervisory guidance of supervisees as they work, have also been discussed, explained, and evaluated recently by Barnett (2011), Ford (2008), Ladany and Bradley (2010), Mishna et al. (2012), and Wade (2010).

In offering criteria for determining when personal contact with the supervisor is necessary and when a phone call via bug-in-the-ear will suffice, Berger and Dammann said:

We find it helpful to call the therapist out of the room to talk with the supervisor when changes in strategy are proposed. ... It is difficult for the therapist to comprehend a change in strategy while in the presence of the family. Once a joint strategy is developed, however, phone calls from the supervisor to the therapist suggesting changes in tactics (e.g., "Have the therapist persuade his wife to go along with" or "tell the family you must explain the tasks further") are very useful. (Berger and Dammann 1982:340–41)

With some empirical support, Bernard and Goodyear (2009) proposed that live supervision has a number of putative advantages over less intrusive forms of

supervised practice:

1. Live supervision protects client welfare, as there is increased probability that practice directed by a more experienced clinician will help clients.
2. The helping alliance with supervisees may be strengthened in live supervision, as supervisors become more invested in the unfolding process of helping.
3. Live supervision allows supervisees to work safely with more difficult cases and chance greater risks if the supervisor is available to provide help as needed.
4. The credibility of the supervisor increases when live supervision is helpful.
5. Learning may become more efficient in live supervision.

Other reviews of the empirical literature, however, suggest that live supervision has counterbalancing disadvantages (McCollum and Wetchler 1995):

1. Live supervision takes time, is expensive, and is difficult to schedule.
2. Skills learned in live supervision may not generalize to other practice situations.
3. Live supervision may produce passive practitioners who take little initiative.
4. Live supervision is unduly disruptive.

In a review relating psychotherapy supervision to patient outcomes, Watkins (2011a:248) noted a study by Kivlighan et al. (1991), in which undergraduate “clients,” exposed to live versus videotaped supervision, “rated their four counseling sessions as rougher and the working alliance as stronger during the live supervision condition.” Although live supervision did not affect client perceptions of their relationships with workers in a study by Ford (2008), O’Dell (2010) found that supervisees who participated in live supervision reported a significantly stronger working alliance than those receiving supervision via videotape and verbal case presentation in a study of fifty-three matched pairs of supervisors and supervisees drawn from across the United States. Locke and McCollum’s (2001) study of clients’ views of live supervision and satisfaction with therapy found that clients were generally satisfied with live-supervised therapy, as long as the perceived helpfulness of live supervision outweighed its perceived intrusiveness, although an experimental manipulation of direct client exposure to supervisors conducting live supervision of initial sessions of family therapy—arguably an intrusion—had no effect on client satisfaction in the randomized trial reported by Denton, Nakonezny, and Burwell (2011). As noted by Bernard and Goodyear (2009), Milne (2009), and Watkins (2011a), the impact and efficacy of live supervision have been the subject of more speculation than research.

With a few exceptions (e.g., Wong 1997; Saltzburg, Gilbert, and Drew 2010), it appears that live supervision is rarely used in social work education (Everett et al. 2011; Knight 2001), but even less is known about its use in social work practice. Social workers may feel some hesitancy about the use of such direct measures of observing and directing the supervisee’s performance. Where a social work

supervisor strives for a collaborative relationship with his or her supervisee, the relationship in live supervision is more overtly hierarchical and directive. Family therapy supervisors have been less hesitant and less apologetic about being openly directive and acknowledge that such procedures clearly reflect the hierarchical nature and structure of their supervisor-supervisee relationships, although Hair and Fine (2012) suggest that this attitude may have softened somewhat.

#### ***Using Client Feedback and Client Outcomes in Supervision***

Consistent with the social work emphasis on client strengths (Council on Social Work Education 2010), most social workers and supervisors believe that they are helping the clients they serve (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004), and some evidence suggests that supervisors believe that they are providing more help to clients than the workers they supervise believe that they do (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004). However, those with “an overly optimistic view of client outcome” may be “especially poor” at identifying clients whom they are not helping (Worthen and Lambert 2007:49). Consequently, practitioners have been “encouraged to routinely monitor patients’ responses to ... ongoing treatment [as] such monitoring leads to increased opportunities to reestablish collaboration, improve the relationship, modify technical strategies, and avoid premature termination” because this is a “demonstrably effective” procedure that “works” (Norcross and Wampold 2011:98), based on a meta-analysis of the research. Accordingly, the use of client feedback and outcomes in social work supervision is recommended (Collins-Comargo, Sullivan, and Murphy 2011; Rapp and Poertner 1987; Whipple and Lambert 2011).

Because workers “who assume or intuit their client’s perceptions of relationship satisfaction and treatment successes are frequently inaccurate,” whereas those “who specifically and respectfully inquire about their client’s perceptions frequently enhance the alliance and prevent premature termination” (Norcross and Wampold 2011:101), a supervision intervention designed to address the problem was introduced in [chapter 4](#). In this method, the supervisor asks the worker a series of questions that serve to challenge inaccurate perceptions of the helping process and prompt workers to discuss with clients the goals and methods of the helping process and make them more explicit.

What does the client want help with? How will you and the client know you are helping? How does the client describe a successful outcome? Does the client say there has been a successful outcome? What are you doing to help the client? Is it working? Does the client say you are helping?? What else can you do to help the client? How will that work? Does the client say that will help? (Harkness and Hensley 1991:507)

To evaluate this procedure, those questions were used to change the focus of social work supervision with four workers serving 161 clients over the course of sixteen weeks of agency practice, monitoring client satisfaction on a weekly caseload basis, using a brief multidimensional measure of counseling satisfaction developed, field tested, and validated by Poertner (1986). Reaching for client feedback in supervision increased client satisfaction with goal attainment by 10 percent, client satisfaction with worker helpfulness by 20 percent, and client satisfaction with

worker-client partnership by 30 percent (Harkness and Hensley 1991).

One indication of how this method may have worked was gleaned from a cross-lagged panel reanalysis of the data. In temporal order, using supervision to encourage workers to speak directly with their clients about the goals and tasks of helping led first to increased client satisfaction with goal attainment, then to increased client satisfaction with worker helpfulness, and subsequently to increased client satisfaction with their partnership with workers (Harkness 1997). This suggests that client perceptions of their bond or working alliance with workers (Baldwin et al. 2007; Horvath et al. 2011) were strengthened when the supervisor encouraged workers to reach for client feedback—an interpretation that emphasizes how reaching for client feedback in supervision affects clients. Owing to its brevity of administration and sensitivity to changes in supervisor behavior, we encourage supervisors wanting to monitor the client outcomes of their practice to include the Poertner instrument in their dashboards, augmenting the measures of alliance and process we recommended in [chapter 7](#).

Another analysis emphasizes how reaching for client feedback in supervision affects workers. A number of important studies have examined the effects of direct observations of client outcomes and their systematic use as practice feedback, the subject of a review by Green and Latchford (2012). These include the work of Bickman et al. (2011), De Jong et al. (2012), Harmon et al. (2007), Knaup et al. (2009), and the program of supervision research conducted by Michael Lambert and his colleagues. In brief, providing clinicians with client feedback in supervision has been found to improve client outcomes, especially when coupled with problem-solving assistance, principally by identifying and addressing likely treatment failures early on, and primarily in university counseling centers where clinicians are being trained.

Some of the most effective feedback has been presented in a graphical form (e.g., Robinson and Dow 2001; Lambert et al. 2002; Harmon et al. 2007), timed to arrive between client appointments (Green and Latchford 2012), especially feedback signals that the difference between outcomes achieved and the outcomes that workers expected (Lambert et al. 2001). This suggests that the amount, form, quality, and timing of client feedback that workers receive in supervision may play a role in advancing client gains.

As an illustration, there is much to be learned from the work of the Lambert research group, who analyzed treatment data from a national database of more than ten thousand patients to develop a set of algorithms for expected trajectories of change in response to treatment, primarily for axis I mental disorders, using weekly administrations of the OQ-45, a proprietary self-report measure of outcome, that takes about clients five minutes to complete. This weekly client feedback is provided to workers and their supervisors in the form of a progress graph with color-coded dots that signal the following (Whipple and Lambert 2011:95–96):

*White dots:* The client is functioning in the normal range. Consider termination.

*Green dots:* The rate of change the patient is making is in the adequate range. No

change in the treatment plan is recommended.

*Yellow dots:* The rate of change the client is making is less than adequate.

Recommendations include considering altering the treatment plan by intensifying treatment, shifting intervention strategies, and monitoring progress especially carefully. The patient may end up with no significant benefit from therapy.

*Red dots:* The client is not making the expected level of progress. The patient has a chance of dropping out of treatment prematurely or having a negative treatment outcome. Steps should be taken to carefully review this case and decide upon a new course of action, such as a referral for medication or intensification of treatment. The treatment plan should be reconsidered.

In order to deliver this information in a timely manner ... clients come to their session 10 minutes early, and complete the OQ-45 through the use of handheld computers. After pushing the “enter” button a graph and color coded messages (i.e., Red, Yellow, Green, White) as well as critical items, full item responses, distress level, and norm comparison group information for both the total OQ scores as well as the three subscale scores are instantaneously delivered to the therapist. (Worthen and Lambert 2007:50)

The principal purpose of providing clinicians with systematic feedback is to draw attention to cases with suboptimal trajectories and potential treatment failures. This may include critical item responses to the OQ-45 measure, such as marking the following items as occurring frequently: suicide—*I have thoughts of ending my life*, substance abuse—*I have trouble at work/school because of drinking or drug use*, or work violence—*I feel angry enough at work/school to do something I might regret* (Worthen and Lambert 2007:50). For cases such as these, the Lambert group provided additional assistance in a form that might be described as “manualized supervision,” using a decision tree designed to help the clinicians reassess the case and reorganize their interventions. The decision-tree hierarchy is structured to rule out issues and concerns in the following descending order: (1) the quality of therapeutic alliance, (2) the client’s motivation and readiness for change, (3) the adequacy of the client’s social support, (4) a reassessment of the diagnosis for effective treatment matching, and (5) referral for medication. (Whipple and Lambert 2011:101).

Initially, Worthen and Lambert (2007) found that workers and supervisors were lukewarm about the helpfulness of receiving client feedback, but subsequently “counselors simply considered the evidence of client benefit too persuasive to ignore” (Worthen and Lambert 2007:52), reporting that they “continued to use progress feedback in supervision but increased the likelihood of discussion of this information by notifying supervisors each time a NOT [not on track] client of a supervisee is identified, so that the case will be considered in supervision as a matter of routine practice” (52). For related findings and procedures, see Calahan et al. (2009), Reese et al. (2009), and an interesting study by Thurber (2005), who compared bug-in-the-ear, phone-in, and computer-assisted modalities of live supervision in the Lambert research setting, finding that superior “therapist adherence” to a treatment protocol, and “desired changes in client behavior and outcome assessments” were associated with the latter live intervention (Thurber 2005:v).

## **Observing Worker Performance: A Recapitulation and Caveat**

A principal problem for supervision concerns the supervisor's access to the supervisee's performance. Administrative supervision for evaluation and accountability, educational supervision for professional development, and, to a lesser extent, supportive supervision all require the supervisor's firsthand knowledge of what the supervisee is actually doing and doing well. The nature of the social work interview is said to require privacy and protection from any intrusion, but this must be counterbalanced with due concern for the development of the worker and the achievement of successful client outcomes. Although innovations have been proposed that may be helpful, the supervisor typically learns what the supervisee has done after some delay and from the supervisee's verbal and/or written self-report.

Case record material supplemented by the supervisee's verbal report has served a long and useful purpose in social work supervision, despite its deficiencies. There is nothing to suggest that it should be discarded. There is much to indicate that it does require selective supplementation through more frequent use of the other procedures discussed in this chapter. Despite the availability and clear utility of such procedures in meeting some of the problems of supervision, social workers, by and large, have made very limited use of them (Everett et al. 2011).

In the past, the use of video recording required a large initial expense for an agency, consultation in the selection of equipment from the bewildering array available, and some technical knowledge in the use of the equipment. These considerations may have acted as deterrents, but now audio and video recording equipment of high quality requires modest expense (Abbass et al. 2011), minimal knowledge for use, is unobtrusive, and its use is familiar and acceptable to most clients. Moreover, sophisticated software for digital recording, playback, and analysis, such as the Landro Play Analyzer (used by coaches to analyze and study athletic performance), is currently being adapted and priced for affordable use with an iPad in social work supervision (Melissa Wold, personal communication, June 8, 2012). (For illustrative applications in counseling supervision, see Herd, Epperly, and Cox 2011; Jencius, Baltimore, and Getz 2010; and VanDerWege 2011.) Observation through one-way mirrors or sitting in on an occasional interview requires even less imposition, and observing practice through its outcomes by collecting routine client feedback may be less intrusive as well. Little justification remains for the neglect of these various methods for direct supervisory access to worker performance.

Yet a word of caution is also in order. As cybertechnology has "crept in" to social work practice, "core elements of the work have been affected" (Mishna et al. 2012:n.p.), changing our modes and habits of communication, with implications for rapid future growth in "cyber," "digital," "distance," "online," and "telehealth" supervision (Fenichel 2003; Perron et al. 2010; Reese et al. 2009). Although such innovations have proven value, in rural Idaho (Cunningham and Van der Merwe 2009), for example, some evidence suggests that there are significant methodological and qualitative differences between face-to-face and distance supervision (DaPonte 2011), and that distance supervision is often practiced in ethical and legal grey zones

(Mishna et al. 2012; Panos et al. 2002), as foreshadowed by Parker (2011) in a thesis (aptly titled, *Into the Wild West*). For thoughtful discussions of key ethical and legal issues bearing on cyber supervision, see McAdams and Wyatt (2010) and Reamer (2012), who recently addressed these pressing concerns with the members of the Association of Social Work Boards that regulate social work practice and supervision in the United States. Finally, in settings and systems in which social workers have been overmeasured and overmanaged, unintended consequences have been noted (Adams 2006; Burton and van den Broek 2009).

## **The Problem of Interminable Supervision**

The innovative procedures we have been discussing are all intended to provide the supervisor with more open, more complete access to the worker's performance. Another series of innovations has been proposed in response to the historical controversy regarding the continued need for supervision of professionally competent workers. In 1950, the U.S. Census Bureau questioned the advisability of listing social work as a profession, "since its members apparently never arrived at a place where they were responsible and accountable for their own acts" (Stevens and Hutchinson 1956:51). Kennedy and Keitner (1970:51) noted that "there is no other profession where self-determination applies to the client and not the worker."

Arguments about autonomy derived more often from considerations regarding the professional status of social work than from the demands of direct service workers. The limitations on autonomy implied in a system of supervision were perceived as an insult to the professional status of social work. A worker once said, "Supervision creates a poor image of social work in relation to other professions. As a mature, experienced, professional social worker, I am embarrassed to refer to someone as 'my supervisor.'"

The literature reverberated with charges that supervision perpetuates dependency, inhibits self-development, violates the worker's right to autonomy, and detracts from professional status. Reynolds, in 1936, complained of supervision as cultivating "perpetual childhood" in workers: "Much of the time, one must admit, supervision is a necessary evil and it becomes more evil as it becomes less necessary" (103). During the 1970s, continued supervision became not only professionally inappropriate but also appeared to violate the tenets of egalitarian participatory democracy.

Subsequently, Veeder (1990) expressed a more general concern with continued supervision as related to the problem of the professional status of social work. Continued supervision, it was asserted, denied the worker of full autonomy in practice, which is one of the principal attributes of a profession.

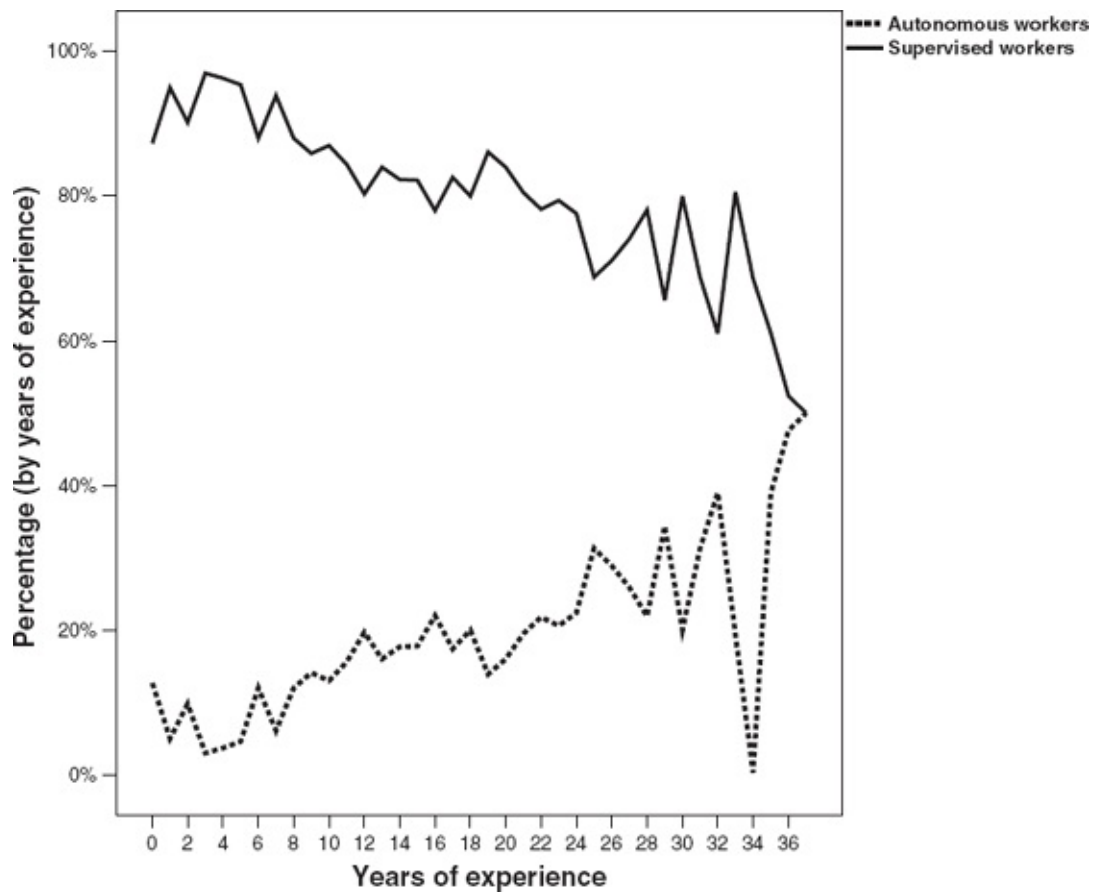
Most of the assertions with regard to interminable supervision have been perhaps merely that—assertions based on limited evidence. Until recently, there was little factual data that let us know how many social workers were supervised for how long, and whether supervision was, in fact, interminable for any sizable number of professionally trained workers. To shed light on the question, we returned to the NASW Center for Workforce Studies (2004) survey, in which 82.3 percent of 3,543



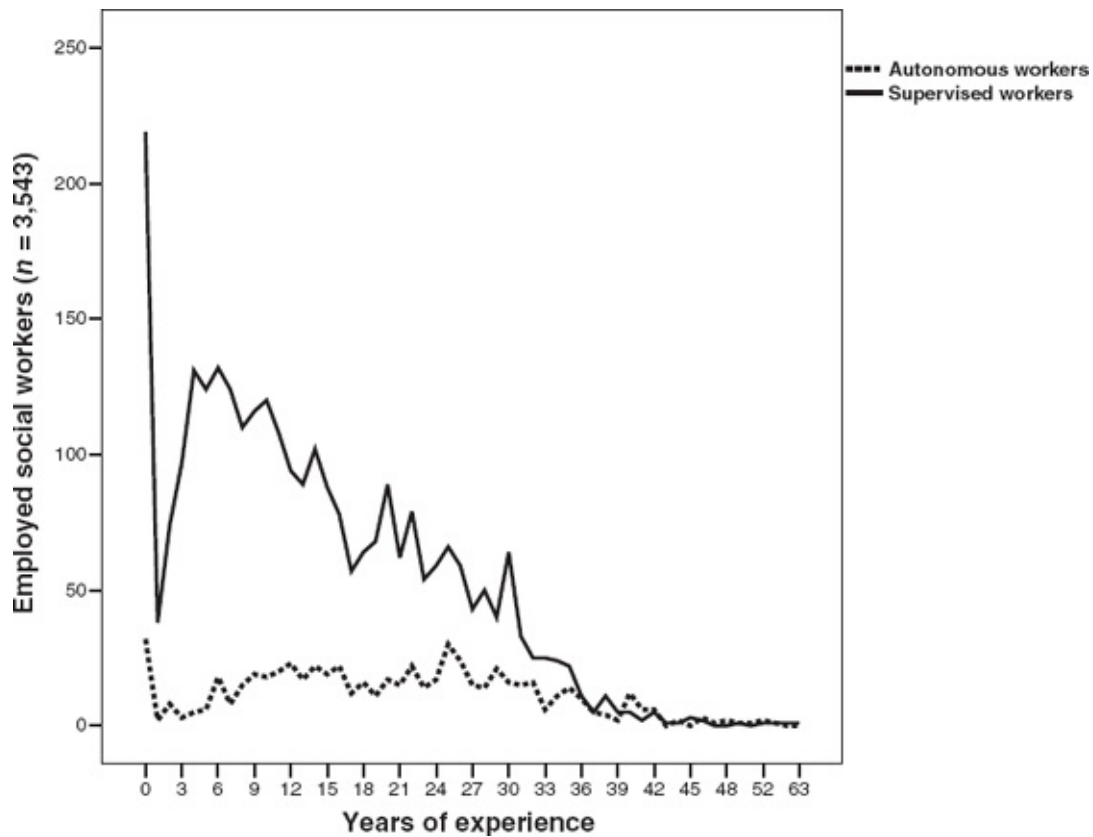
employed social workers in the sample reported having a supervisor. Although we have no information about the amount, frequency, or form of the supervision of Workforce supervision, our analysis indicates that the percentage of the Workforce with supervision grows smaller, and that the corresponding percentage of autonomous workers grows larger, with years of experience, as shown in [figure 10.1](#), until a point of parity is reached among those who have practiced for 36 years. Apparently, this is largely a function of attrition among supervised workers, rather than a light at the end of the tunnel of interminable supervision, as the number of supervised workers in the Workforce dwindles over time, whereas the ranks of the smaller autonomous cadre remain relatively constant, as shown in [figure 10.2](#).

There seems little doubt that the difference in attrition between the two groups is multidetermined. In some cases, for example, it seems reasonable to assume that a number of supervised social workers pursue opportunities to practice autonomously in any given year, just as some of the autonomous workforce find attractive opportunities in settings that provide supervision. But there was a significant difference in the Workforce study between autonomous and supervised workers in their intention to leave social work within the next two years to work in another field (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004). Where 2.8 percent of the autonomous workforce reported planned to leave the profession, nearly 5.1 percent of the much larger cadre of supervised social workers planned to leave. Emulating Mor Barak et al. (2006:548), we too asked “Why do they leave?” Two of the variables associated with intentions to leave the profession were the availability and quality of supervision in social work, variables that can only concern supervised workers. Reductions in the availability of social work supervision, and a relative lack of supervisory support and guidance, predicted their intentions to leave. Thus, although dissatisfaction with interminable supervision may prompt some workers to leave the supervised workforce for autonomous practice, it appears that too little supervision and a lack of supervisory guidance and support are much larger problems.





**FIGURE 10.1.** Estimated percentage of autonomous and supervised employed licensed social workers, by years of experience. (From National Association of Social Workers Center for Workforce Studies. 2004. *A study of the Role and Use of Licensed Social Workers in the United States*. Washington, DC: National Association of Social Workers.)



**FIGURE 10.2.** Autonomous and supervised employed social workers in the NASW workforce study, by years of experience. (From National Association of Social Workers Center for Workforce Studies. 2004. *A study of the Role and Use of Licensed Social Workers in the United States*. Washington, DC: National Association of Social Workers.)

Moreover, it is no longer true that graduate social workers with practice experience are the only professionals who are supervised. Professionally accredited teachers, engineers, and nurses continue to be responsible to supervisory personnel after years of practice. Furthermore, the once highly independent professions of medicine and law are facing increasing supervision as a majority of their members are now employed in organizational settings. It appears that this trend will continue for all helping professions governed by case law (Harkness 2010; Reamer 2003), the managed care practice environment (Jean-Francois 2008), and the privatization of health and social services (Jean-Francois 2008). To the constraints on autonomy that those forces have already imposed, rapid advances in information technology (Poertner 1986; Walter and Lopez 2008), growing advocacy for evidence-based practices (Institute of Medicine 2001), and the embrace of “new public management” (Evans 2013; Levay and Waks 2009) are likely sources of more constraints in the future (Burton and van den Broek 2009; Wastell et al. 2010). Owing to the growing cost of health and welfare (both real and perceived), a conservative political climate, and recessionary fiscal pressures, this trend appears to have become global (Hair 2012; Grant and Schofield 2007; Yoshie et al. 2008).

There is an additional point of controversy regarding the question of interminable supervision. At the same time that the contention was made that social workers were supervised too much and too long, there was the counterargument that social workers were *unsupervised* and had too much autonomy and discretion. While social workers, regarding themselves as professionals, pressed for more autonomy, more discretion, and fewer administrative controls over their actions, client advocates and civil libertarians, acting in defense of clients' rights, pressed for greater restrictions on worker discretion (Handler 1973, 1979; Gummer 1979).

It is clear that occupational dissatisfaction and an increased likelihood of burnout is associated with infringements on professional autonomy (Kim and Stoner 2008; Lloyd, King, and Chenoweth 2002). The question is the extent to which employment in the social agency bureaucracy actually restricts professional autonomy.

Past studies of worker autonomy and discretion in a variety of settings such as public welfare (Kettner 1973), child welfare (Gambrill and Wiltse 1974; Satyamurti 1981), and rural social work (Kim, Boo, and Wheeler 1979), and studies by McCulloch and O'Brien (1986), Protas (1979), and Butler (1990), supplemented by relevant studies in England (The Barclay Report 1985; Pithouse 1987; Davies 1990), and in Israel (Eiskovitz et al 1985) tended to confirm the fact that in reality workers had exercised a considerable amount of autonomy and discretion in the performance of their work.

The detailed studies by Protas (1979) and Lipsky (1980) of the actual decision-making procedures of "street-level bureaucrats"—their term for the direct service worker—confirmed a picture of very considerable discretionary behavior on the part of such workers. Lipsky (1980) concluded that two characteristic interrelated aspects of the direct service position in the human service profession were the "relatively high degree of discretion and relative autonomy from organizational authority" (13). Protas (1979:388) observed, "There is a surprisingly large degree of autonomy and self-direction displayed in the behavior" of the direct service worker; workers are successful in capturing the autonomy they need to "respond to a complex and unpredictable" situation (7). Although the amount of discretion formally allocated to the direct service public welfare worker is modest, the study indicated "that considerable discretion is in fact exercised" (18). This had been noted previously by Handler (1973; 1979), who pointed to the considerable autonomy exercised by social workers in making day-to-day decisions.

A questionnaire study of social work professionalization asked a nationwide sample of 1,020 NASW members about the level of autonomy they experienced in their practice (Reeser and Epstein 1990). Of the respondents, 68 percent indicated they had considerable autonomy in their work. Only 16 percent indicated that "any decision I make has to have the supervisor's approval" (Reeser and Epstein 1990:91, table 3.7). "The profile that emerges from their responses—suggests that social workers in the eighties experience[d] relatively high autonomy in their work—social workers have more discretionary power in dealing with clients than is generally assumed" (Reeser and Epstein 1990:92), reflecting the general conclusions of the

studies cited previously. In support of this observation, a majority of the licensed social workers in the NASW Workforce survey reported satisfaction with their ability to influence the design of client services, respond effectively to requests for assistance, spend time with their clients, help them navigate the system, address a range of problems, and meet their objectives (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004)—an indication, perhaps, of some residual degree of professional autonomy and discretion in social work practice.

More recent studies of worker autonomy and discretion in a variety of settings such as child (Wells 2006) and public welfare (Evans 2003), clinical (Probst 2012) and rural (Green 2003) social work, and managed care (Sossin 2005), including important studies by Mor Barak et al. (2006, 2009), Graham (2010), and Kim (2008), supplemented by relevant studies in Denmark (May and Søren 2009), England (Evans 2011; Evans and Harris 2004), and other nations (Weiss-Gal 2008), tend to confirm the fact that workers still exercise a considerable amount of autonomy and discretion in the performance of their work, notwithstanding extensive “attempts to control and direct [social work] practice (Evans 2011:381) with information systems (Parton 2009), managed cost (Munson 1998a) and care (Sossin 2010), and “prescriptive rules [and] procedures” (Lees, Meyer, and Rafferty 2013:542).

#### ***Attitudes Toward Interminable Supervision***

The research raises questions then about the reality of the negative aspects of continued supervision. The continuation of supervision gets support from advocates who point to the positive aspects of continued supervision.

There have been cogent defenses of support provided by extended supervision (Eisenberg 1956a and 1956b; Levy 1960). Eisenberg (1956a) pointed to the continuing supportive needs of the supervisee: “It would be an extraordinary worker who did not, at times, experience some burden and some guilt, some anger and some despair—even a mature and experienced practitioner [does]. ... In all of this the supervisor stands as helper of the caseworker for the agency; the worker is not alone” (49). The argument is also made that supervision of even the most experienced worker is necessary because help is always needed in objectifying the complex interpersonal relationships in which the worker is involved. The complex nature of the work may require continuation of the availability of supportive supervision (Barth et al. 2008; Kossek et al. 2011). A significant body of subsequent research, reviewed in [chapter 7](#), supports this conclusion.

Reflecting on her years of experience in supervision, Norman said:

During my early years of supervising I would have said that one’s emotional dependency on supervision lessens with experience. However, experience has taught me that this is not true. Although at some point a therapist may no longer need the educational aspects of supervision, he or she continues to need the emotional support of supervision or consultation because of the nature of clinical work. (1987:379)

The principal dissatisfaction with continued supervision seems to lie with prolonging educational supervision. Continuing obligatory educational supervision suggests that the worker does not know enough, is not fully competent, and is incapable of

autonomous practice. As Toren said:

Trained social workers are willing to concede administrative authority to their supervisors as part of the limitations imposed by the organizational framework; however, they resent and resist the teaching function of the supervisor which they perceive as encroaching upon their professional judgment, responsibility, and competence. (1972:79)

One might, however, see continuing supervision not as a reflection on the workers professional competence but as a procedure to help workers to continue to improve and upgrade their practice. This is a professional obligation with no end in an era of evidence-based practice (Mullen, Bledsoe, and Bellamy 2008; Thyer and Myers 2010). Even the skill of the most advanced practitioners can stand improvement. Such a perspective justifies continuation of clinical supervision. We are all in the process of becoming; none of us has ever fully arrived. The need for continuing professional education receives support in the requirement in most states that maintenance of a professional license requires annual continuing education. Trained experienced workers who do not have supervision available frequently express a need for this in furtherance of professional development (Garrett and Barretta-Herman 1995; Hair 2012)

In contrast to the opposition to prolonged educational supervision, there is a readier acceptance of the necessity for continued administrative supervision. One of the earliest advocates of freedom from supervision believed that because social workers “work in agencies that are accountable for the performance of each staff member,” autonomous practice would still require “that agencies continue to maintain structural channels for enabling staff to be most effectively accountable to administration” (Henry 1955:40). As Leyendecker (1959) noted, freedom from authority of others in autonomous practice does “not seem to be truly applicable to the operation of a social agency requiring, as it does, an organizational structure in which responsibility and accountability are clearly defined and allocated” (56). The recognition that someone in the hierarchical agency structure must continue to perform the functions of administrative supervision has been echoed and reechoed by those who have advocated greater independence from supervision, from Aptekar (1959) and Austin (1961) to Mastekaasa (2011).

Even if all the workers were well trained, were objectively self-critical, and had developed a level of self-awareness that eliminated the need for educational supervision—even if all workers were so highly motivated, so self-assured, and so rich in inner resources that they felt no need for supervisory support—administrative supervision would continue to be necessary as long as the workers were employees of an agency, as recent experiments in new public management and governance have shown (Benish 2010).

Administrative supervision functions to protect the client from possible abuse of worker autonomy. The possibility that the worker’s real power may be used in oppressive, arbitrary, or inequitable ways argues for the need for some continuing procedural controls (Wilding 1982). Handler (1979) noted that good supervision serves the same function as a fair hearings appeal on the part of the client. Both

serve to check discriminatory practices and failure to comply with rules and regulations—matters that can have an adverse effect on client rights and interests.

At the same time, few experienced social workers endorsed unsupervised practice. In a national survey of 885 members of NASW, Kadushin (1992a:25) noted:

A high percentage of both supervisors (48 percent) and supervisees (52 percent) agreed that as the worker developed professional competence, the relationship should be changed to consultation to be used when, and as, the supervisee decides ... [but] a sizeable percentage of both supervisors and supervisees (38 percent supervisors; 41 percent supervisees) indicated a preference for continued moderated supervision.

Greenspan et al. (1992:41) found that experienced social workers who have developed practice wisdom on a par with their supervisors yearned for more “highly skilled ... more senior level supervision” with a clinical focus—not practice *without* supervision. Bogo et al. (2011) and Hair (2012) reported similar findings. Although Laufer (2003) found that an Israeli sample of experienced social workers, even if willing to receive supervision with knowledgeable supervisors, may have preferred supervisors who were not *too* knowledgeable, she also found that their willingness to receive supervision diminished with age.

Despite the fact that the negative aspects of continued supervision seem to be less serious than had been presumed, and despite the fact that there are positive aspects of continuing supervision and an expressed desire for ongoing instruction, there has been controversy about the need for modification if not termination of interminable supervision. In response to this concern, the social work profession has considered a number of formal, institutionalized procedures for termination of educational supervision after a given period. Despite efforts to clarify the criteria of readiness for worker emancipation from supervision (Henry 1955; Lindenberg 1957), they are often ambiguous. Decades ago, The Jewish Children’s Bureau in Chicago had a classification of “workers independent of supervision,” achieved after workers had been under supervision for “three or four years” (Richman 1939:261). Other recommendations have varied from one year in practice following graduation from a school of social work (Stevens and Hutchinson 1956:52) to three years (Leader 1957:464) to “four to six years” (Hollis 1964:272). Respondents to a survey by Hair (2012) endorsed the need for supervision of up to three years for new employees and graduates in Canada, and Laufer’s (2003:153) respondents suggested that it may take seven years for a social worker to become “long-experienced” in Israel.

Wax (1963) described one agency’s use of “time limited” supervision for master’s-degree social workers, permitting them to move toward independent practice within a period of two years in the agency. Supervision is followed by formal and informal peer consultation, and “social pressure from the colleague group replaces the pressure of the parent surrogate supervisor” (41).

In one highly professionalized agency, the procedure in 1982 was to have “regularly scheduled supervision” with new staff members “until the worker and supervisor agree that it was no longer needed. Generally this is six months to one year after hiring. “Supervision in group continues beyond this” (Dublin 1982:234).

The National Association of Social Workers statement on *Standards for the*

*Classification of Social Work Practice* (NASW 1981) required “at least two years of post-master’s experience under appropriate professional supervision” (9) before achieving the level of independent professional practice. To a large extent, that benchmark standard has been widely adopted, but the formal, institutionalized procedures for termination of educational supervision after a given period are governed now by the licensure laws of the individual states and their boards of social work examiners—subject, as always, to additional standards that imposed by an agency employer, third-party payers, and other market forces.

## **Professional Autonomy and Social Work Licensure**

Striving for professional autonomy and status fueled a movement, gathering steam in the second half of the twentieth century, in which social workers launched a series of state-by-state campaigns to license social work practice (Bibus and Boutte-Queen 2011; Groshong 2009; Hardcastle 1977). As their efforts became successful, Baretta-Herman (1993) suggested “that life-long supervision contradicts the movement toward professional autonomy” (57), “based on the assumption that practitioners holding a license to practice independently, as offered by state boards of licensing, is an indication of competence” (56).

Now that social work practice is regulated by the states, a license to practice without supervision generally requires an earned MSW, a minimum of two years of full-time experience under the supervision of a social worker licensed for independent practice (usually in clinical social work), and a passing score on a national examination (ASWB 2010b). Moreover, to credential the supervisors who guide them through the licensure process for independent practice, the ASWB task force convened to analyze supervision for social work licensure recommended four requirements: (1) a license to practice in the area in which supervision is going to be provided, (2) specified coursework in supervision and/or a specified minimum number of continuing education hours, (3) a minimum of three years of post-licensure experience in a supervisory role, and (4) continuing education courses in supervision that are updated every five years, and approved by the licensing board (ASWB 2009).

Has licensure brought an end, once and for all, to interminable supervision? Our analysis of the NASW Center for Workforce Studies (2004) survey indicates that only 18.8 percent of licensed social workers practice without supervision. As a group, the unsupervised workers earned significantly higher estimated salaries than their supervised peers, and they also reported significantly more satisfaction with their ability to spend time with, access services for, and be helpful to their clients. On the other hand, the effect sizes of the differences in their satisfactions were generally modest, and the characteristics and resources of the clients they served may have also been different.

Although licensure may emancipate some social workers from interminable supervision, through professional regulation social workers thereby become the servants of more than one master. Not surprisingly, this development has led to some

expressions of buyer's remorse (Adams 2006; Hair 2012).

The license becomes the lifeblood of a clinical social worker, and without one, most of us could not engage in our chosen field of social work. The process of obtaining a clinical license can become costly, arduous, and stressful. Once obtained, however, the stress of having one does not end. There are yearly CEUs to attend and dues to pay, which are not concerns for most clinicians. More troubling is the sense that one's career somehow hangs in the balance between a regulatory and liability issues. ... In effect, clinical social workers become the sum total of their clinical license credentials, since this will generate income for an agency where one is employed. ... The fear of losing one's clinical license, either through some liable action or sanctioning by the licensing board fuels fear for the clinician. Additionally, since many state agencies and even non-profits seem to be moving towards hiring only licensed social workers due to reimbursement issues, there is a group of new MSWs in desperate need of clinical supervision in order to secure a livelihood. Yet seasoned clinicians, wary of vicarious liability, are voicing their hesitation about providing supervision. ... As clinical social workers, afraid of licensing boards, we have adopted a very narrow model of clinical work, one where we are focused on our protection. ... Perhaps one of the most disturbing trends in the movement from licensure boards as *agents* of the profession, to *monitors* of the profession, is the growing fear with which we begin to view our clients and each other. If we begin to see our clients as potential vehicles of our own professional destruction, then we cannot avoid the negativity with which the therapeutic relationship becomes tinged. Without the satisfaction of authentic therapeutic relationships, what then is left in this often challenging profession? (Floyd and Rhodes 2011:309–13)

As the large majority of licensed social workers in the United States have supervisors they report to, they may be assumed to receive some form of supervision. If this implies that social workers have not yet acquired the idealized autonomy of doctors and lawyers, then it may soften the blow to consider that “the impact of licensure, coupled with developments in litigation filed against mental health providers and complex managerial control systems, has had a profound effect on the exercise of autonomy by all professional groups” (Baretta-Herman 1993:57), and that doctors and lawyers are also well on the road to becoming semiautonomous. Against the backdrop of major reforms in the administration and funding of health and social services, there is little reason to predict that a majority of the profession is likely, any time soon, to achieve the degree of autonomy that social workers once imagined. Moreover, they may no longer wish to, as there are indications of nostalgia for social work supervision in addictions (Bogo et al. 2011; Barth et al. 2008), child welfare (Meezan and McBeath 2011); direct practice in non-profit settings (Stein 2005), home health care (Egan and Kadushin 2005, 2007), hospitals (Kadushin et al. 2009; Sterling 2009), and managed care (Acker 2010b, Acker and Lawrence 2009), where the reforms mentioned above have displaced social work supervisors and reduced the amount and scope of supervision.

After a prolonged period of education and supervision, licensed social workers may “welcome the opportunity to practice their profession without supervision for some period of time. However, once they have been practicing without supervision, they may find themselves wanting supervision, in some form, once again (Goldsmith, Honeywell, and Mettler 2011:204).

### **Innovations for Balancing Worker Accountability and Autonomy**

Although the need for a structured approach to granting increasing autonomy for experienced practitioners has been largely achieved through social work licensure, other innovations have been proposed to allow workers who continue to receive or



want supervision strike a new balance between their desire for autonomy and accountability to the agency that employs them.

### ***Peer Group Supervision***

We noted in [chapter 9](#) that group supervision can offer the worker a greater measure of autonomy than that permitted through individual supervision. Peer-group supervision is an extension of this procedure in the direction of still greater independence. Bernard and Goodyear (2009) describe peer group supervision as a popular forum for reflection on practice experiences—an environment conducive to adult learners, peer review, transmitting new knowledge, and obtaining feedback. To this list, Milne (2009) added the advantages of an assembly for the development of professional consensus, and an environment that lends itself to giving and receiving social support (see also Evans 2003). As distinguished from group supervision, peer-group supervision invests the peer group with control of group meetings; the supervisor, if he or she sits in at all, is just another member of the group. It has been defined as a process by which “a group of professionals in the same agency meet regularly to review cases and treatment approaches without a leader, share expertise and take responsibility for their own and each other’s professional development and for maintaining standards of [agency] service” (Hare and Frankena 1972:527). In such peer supervision, each member of the group feels a responsibility for the practice of the others and for helping them to improve their practice (Marks and Hixon 1986). What a worker does with the suggestions and advice offered by peers is his or her own responsibility. Peer supervision is suggested as a substitute for, or supplement to, educational supervision (Counselman and Weber 2004; Kadushin et al. 2009).

Peer-group supervision symbolizes the capacity for greater independence of the worker; it also allows greater spontaneity and freedom in the absence of an authority figure. Nonetheless, it presents its own difficulties. Rivalry for leadership and control is often present, and unless the group is composed of workers with somewhat equal education and experience, some staff members may be reluctant to participate, feeling that they cannot learn much from “peers” who know less than they do.

In describing a productive peer-group supervision experience, Schreiber and Frank (1983) attributed the success to the fact that the group was composed of social workers of “comparable experience, length of training and background” (31). Difficulties related to exposure of practice to peers with whom they felt competitive and to the fact that members felt hesitant about being vigorously critical (see also Counselman and Weber 2004 and Granello et al. 2008).

Although peer supervision “has received only modest coverage in the professional literature” (Bernard and Goodyear 2009:260), there is some empirical support for a conclusion that it offers enhanced learning opportunities in feedback from peers under conditions of greater independence and lower anxiety (Borders 2012; Goldsmith, Honeywell, and Mettler 2011), a source of interpersonal support that “combats loneliness and isolation” and buffers workers against burnout (Milne 2009:178).

### ***Peer Consultation and Collaboration***

A less authority-bound version of peer-group supervision is peer consultation. Peer consultation can be organized in the context of the individual conference. For example, Fizdale discussed a worker in her agency:

[The worker had] done considerable interviewing of both partners together in marital counseling cases. She had, therefore, developed a special skill in handling these "joint" interviews and had special knowledge about when they can be productive. It is quite usual for any staff member to consult with her about the value of a joint interview in a particular case or to get her help in preparing for such an interview or in reviewing the results. (1958:446)

Asking for consultation with peers is not without its consequences. The consultee admits to a limited measure of competence. He or she must accept some measure of dependence as well as lower status, however temporary, in the dyad. Frequent requests from the consultee accentuate these negatives.

Peer supervision works best between peers with approximately equal levels of competence, so that the consultee today may be a consultant tomorrow to his or her consultant of yesterday. This possibility of reciprocation equalizes status.

As reflected in the material presented previously, the term *peer-group supervision* as used in the literature is a very loosely defined term. In one sense, it is an extension of the informal kind of consultation that goes on in "bull sessions" between workers in any agency as they talk with each other about their clinical experiences. In another sense, it applies to a program of continuing education organized by peers employing their own case material as the basis for group discussion (Kuechler and Barretta-Herman 1998; Powell 1996; Richard and Rodway 1992).

In a related context, Suter et al. (2012:261) used the term *interprofessional collaboration* to describe "the process through which different professional groups work together to positively impact health care," noting, in their review of forty-one peer-reviewed articles, that "there is mounting evidence that interprofessional collaboration in healthcare positively impacts client outcomes" in such domains as "mortality, pain, admissions, post-operative complications and hospital stays when patients are cared for by collaborative teams." Although there are many barriers to collaborative care (Meyer, Peteet, and Joseph 2009), social workers who overvalue their autonomy and independence, to the extent that they eschew consultation and collaboration, may put clients at risk.

Although these procedures encourage greater autonomy and independence in the examination of clinical practice, peer group supervision and peer consultation as reported does not attempt to take responsibility for the necessary administrative functions of supervision. Peer collaboration, consultation, and supervision are best viewed as an adjunct to and supplement to traditional supervision, not a substitute.

## **Interminable Supervision and Debureaucratization**

Other proposals for dealing with the negative reactions to continuing supervision concern alterations in administrative structure or relationships. Suggestions for changes in the administrative structure involve a redistribution of power and responsibility so that a greater measure of both is given to worker peer groups

(Weber and Polm 1974). Instead of an agency whose administrative structure is sharply pyramidal (large numbers of workers at the base, supervised by a more limited number of middle managers, topped by an administrator), the suggested shape is somewhere between pyramidal and rectangular. Instead of an agency with a hierarchical orientation, the suggested orientation is more egalitarian.

Intensified implementation of participatory management procedure tends to enhance the autonomy of the worker. Deliberate efforts have been made in some agencies to actively involve direct service workers in the determination of significant policy decisions and in formulation of operating procedures (Weber and Polm 1974; Pine, Warsh, and Malluccio 1998).

Similar efforts have involved application of the principles of management by objectives (MBO) to supervision (Raider 1977; Kwok 1995). Management by objectives (or, more appropriately, supervision by objectives) is an effort to establish a procedure of control that is acceptable and measurable. With the participation and cooperation of the supervisee, definite objectives are formulated for achievement in each case. These objectives are stated in precise and explicit terms that lend themselves to observation and measurement. Once objectives have been formulated in conferences between worker and supervisor and measurable outcome criteria have been defined, a time limit is established for achievement of objectives and the different objectives are ranked in priority. The process is monitored by the supervisor with active worker participation (Fox 1983). Work efforts are evaluated by establishing the extent to which such objectives are achieved in each case.

Another innovation involves team service delivery (Brieland, Briggs, and Leuenberger 1973; Gillig and Barr 1999). A team of workers, working together as a unit, is given responsibility for supervision. The "supervisor" is merely one of the team members, although somewhat more equal than the others. He or she acts as a consultant, coordinator, and resource person to team members and, when necessary, as team leader. However, the responsibility for work assignments, monitoring quantity and quality of team members' work, and meeting educational needs of team members is invested in the group.

Supervisory functions still need to be performed in team service delivery. They can be differently allocated and distributed, but such functions cannot be eliminated or ignored. Team service delivery takes group supervision one step further as a procedure for augmenting worker autonomy. It gives administrative mandate to the peer group to perform the main functions previously performed by the supervisor. The team can, as a team, engage in much significant decision making, but the imperatives of organizational life still have to be implemented. Final decisions have to be validated by the supervisor, who has ultimate administrative responsibility for team performance.

The problems of organizational coordination and communication may even be intensified with team service delivery, making the functions of supervision especially important. Because different members of the team may be involved with the same family at different times, this approach requires having up-to-date record and

reporting material available. It also requires constant coordination to see that team members are not falling over each other in offering service to the family. However, see Shamai (1998) for a case study of the salutatory benefits of team supervision during periods of traumatic political upheaval.

Interdisciplinary teams, as contrasted with intradisciplinary teams, face the additional problems of differences in status between members and the understanding and acceptance of the claims of expertise of team members from different disciplines. A counterbalancing factor, however, is the benefit of transdisciplinary teaching and learning (Gillig and Barr 1999). Wood and Middleman (1989) viewed the team approach to supervision as a growing and desirable alternative to more traditional supervision.

Quality circles are voluntary problem-solving groups of employees from the same work group to identify, analyze, and solve work-related problems (McNeely, Schultz, and Naatz 1997). Springer and Newman (1983) reported on the use of a quality circle system in social work. The quality circle system, as used by the Texas Department of Human Resources, "consists of a small group of staff members who usually work in related areas, meeting regularly to identify, analyze and propose solutions to problems of productivity, quality of operations service and work life" (417). The quality circle program supposedly emphasizes a more humanistic, democratic, collaborative relationship between labor and management. It encourages greater managerial receptivity to worker grassroots input in organizational problem solving. Although this and related forms of worker participation in management (e.g., Gowdy and Freeman 1993) may improve worker morale (Baird 1981) and ameliorate or prevent worker burnout (Cherniss 1985), Smith and Doeing (1985) raised questions about the problems in applying the approach to social work administration, and any benefits may be short-lived (Lawler and Mohrman 1985).

Work groups manage service by monitoring customer satisfaction in total quality management (TQM) (Martin 1993), for example, but this alternative to supervision is rarely implemented in settings that offer human services (Boettcher 1998). Although Mersha, Sriram, and Herron (2009) found that introducing TQM in a public service agency helped improve teamwork and had a positive effect on employee willingness to accept change, a meta-analytic study of the empirical TQM research reached another conclusion:

TQM has been promoted by governments throughout the world and forms a central aspect of many public organizations' improvement strategies. We are now able to say that this has been done in the dark, because there is no systematic evidence on the validity of the TQM-performance hypothesis in public organizations. (Boyne and Walker 2002:127)

Although new forms of management periodically become fashionable in social work, following private-sector trends, Abrahamson and Fairchild (1999) viewed many of their putative benefits as management superstitions.

Workers may be given greater control over the supervisory process by instituting a contract system (Fox 1974). The supervisee negotiates a contract with the supervisor, specifying the kinds of things he or she feels the need to learn within a

specific period of time. Osborn and Davis (1996) recommended a structured contract to define: (1) the purpose, goals, and objectives of supervision; (2) the context of supervision; (3) the duties and responsibilities of supervisor and supervisee; (4) supervision procedures; (5) performance evaluation; and (6) the scope of supervisory competence. Others encourage contracts that define the supervisor's and worker's legal and ethical duties to agency clients (Reamer 1994; Knapp 1997; NASW 2003). Munson (2002) believes that supervision agreements should be negotiated for renewable six-month periods, specifying what procedures will be followed if either party fails to fulfill the contract conditions.

If the purpose of supervision contracts is to bring key practice issues into the conscious awareness of both parties, contracts will have modest value unless both parties participate psychologically in the process of their development (Shulman 1999). Nevertheless, Holloway (1995:255) contended that a supervision contract "increases the probability that both participants will behave congruently with established expectations," by inviting the supervisee "to participate in the construction of the [supervisory] relationship."

Not everyone is sanguine about the benefits of supervisory contracts, however. Designed to empower workers by articulating the reciprocal obligations and duties of supervisor and supervisee, supervision contracts may not be legally binding (Holloway 1995; Bernard and Goodyear 2009), and their advocates rarely take into account the power differences in the supervisory dyad (Munson 2002). Thus, although the American Association of State Social Work Boards (1997) encouraged social workers seeking licensure to file written supervision plans with state licensing boards, contracts with heavy-handed supervisors may be difficult to negotiate or enforce from the subordinate position.

### **Agency Debureaucratization Experiences**

No systematic information is available that would enable us to know how many agencies have "flattened" their organizations by adopting quality circles, team supervision, TQM, or related innovations in participatory management. By the same token, little is known about the adoption of MBO procedures, supervision contracts, or other related techniques used to sharpen the focus of supervised social work services.

Generally the reports of peer supervision and consultation describe workers who were professionally trained, had considerable practice experience, and, in addition, often had advanced training. Agency administration had confidence that the workers were sufficiently competent, committed, and self-disciplined to operate autonomously without harm to clients. Many experienced workers have been emancipated from supervision as a consequence of having social work licenses. Evidence from the NASW Workforce study indicates that many licensed social workers still yearn for supervision from colleagues with advanced practice wisdom and skill (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004). As Stein concluded in her study of social work supervision in not-for-profit agencies, "Career-long supervision is requested and relied

upon in practice. Supervisees regardless of experience level find supervision useful ... at all levels of experience in their work with clients” (2005:73).

Agencies reporting successful efforts to reduce or eliminate supervision recognize that these innovative efforts were made possible by virtue of special staff and structural qualities. Reporting on debureaucratization of a professional voluntary child welfare agency, Taylor (1980) noted the agency’s success in eliminating some supervisory positions and in assigning cases on a peer level. Success of the innovation was explained in part by the fact that peers “were comparable in experience and skill” at a high level. The agency, however, was still struggling with the problem of “how evaluations of caseworker performance will be done” (587).

The success of increasing autonomy through agency debureaucratization, increased participation in decision making on the part of the workers, and increased responsibility of supervisory task performance by workers is largely predicated on conditions that obtain in only a minority of agencies. A collegial model requires a highly trained and experienced staff, with a consensual commitment to clearly understood objectives and a mutual sense of trust and regard—conditions that are not easy to achieve.

The innovations outlined here are expressions of a series of fundamental and related problems. These concern the place of the professional in organizations and the larger society, the distribution of power in the organization, and the prerogatives of worker autonomy. Such questions are of particular relevance to the focus of this text because they get played out in the organization most explicitly at the supervisory level.

## **Supervision in the Managed Care Context**

Sweeping changes in health care financing and delivery have affected all human services (Dziegielewski 2004; Rodwin 2010). With national health care expenditures estimated to have reached \$2.7 trillion in 2011 (Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services 2012), the United States turned to managed care and privatization long ago in an attempt to regulate and slow the pace of this runaway growth (Coffey et al. 2000; Rehr and Rosenberg 2000). (For a brief history of U.S. health care economics with implications for managed care social work practice, see Cummings, O’Donohue, and Cummings 2009.)

Corcoran and Vandiver (1996:309) defined managed care as “any health care delivery system in which various strategies are employed to optimize the value of provided services by controlling their cost and utilization, promoting their quality, and measuring performance to ensure cost-effectiveness [by actively managing] both the medical and financial aspects of a patient’s care.” Long the dominant form of health care delivery in the United States (Almgren 1998; Mechanic 2011), most social workers work in the shadows of a managed care environment (Acker 2010a; Rodwin 2010; Vandiver 2008). The effects have been particularly striking in child welfare (McBeath, Collins-Comargo, and Chuang 2011; McBeath and Meezan 2009, 2011) and health care (Acker 2010b; Egan and Kadushin 2005; O’Brien and Calderwood

2010), but the effects of managed care have been felt all fields of practice, as 81.5 percent of the employed workforce serve clients whose health care is managed by Medicaid, Medicare, or private insurance (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004).

What have been the consequences of these changes for social work supervision? One general effect has been a decline in the number of social work supervisors and a reduction in the significance of supervisory functions, although isolated exceptions have been noted (Ginsberg 2009). Gibelman and Schervish (1997a) examined changes in the status of social work supervision between 1998 and 1991 based on NASW membership data. The overall conclusion was that “resources of staff time and allocation of personnel costs associated with supervision are shrinking” (4). There had been a decrease in the number of members listing supervision as their primary function. Most of the supervisors indicated that the time they allocated to purely supervisory functions had been reduced.

Schroffel (1999:92–93) quoted the American Board of Examiners in *The Clinical Supervisor* to the effect that “there is currently less agency support for consistent individual sessions between supervisee and supervisor.” A questionnaire study of more than three hundred hospitals affiliated with the American Hospital Association found that one-on-one supervision by social workers decreased between 1992 and 1996. “Traditional models of supervision are beginning to erode while non-social work supervision experienced a significant increase over all three years of the study” (Berger and Mizrahi 2001:15).

Based on an analysis of the membership of NASW, Gibelman and Schervish (1996) observed that not long ago new social workers began supervised practice in social service agencies, earned licenses to practice clinical social work independently, and then developed unsupervised private practices in solo or group or settings within several years (Cornelius 1997). But as managed care is loath to reimburse unlicensed social workers for their services (Mauch, Kautz, and Smith 2008), each hour of supervision provided represents an hour of net loss for agencies and practitioners that earn their livings by the “billable hour,” and thus supervision has become harder for beginning social workers (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004) or social work students (Dalton, Stevens, and Mass-Brady 2011; Ligon and Ward 2005) to acquire. Thus, in one care-managed profile, 69.9 percent of surveyed workers received group supervision, 50 percent received brief episodes of individual supervision, and 32.9 percent received no supervision at all (Schroffel 1999:98). In a more recent profile, social workers were often found to practice in host settings with supervision by other disciplines (Kadushin et al. 2009; NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004), purchase social work supervision in the private marketplace (Altoma-Matthews 2001; Todd 2002; Ungar and Costanzo 2007), or practice with little or no supervision (Hair 2012; Giddings, Cleveland, and Smith 2007). As noted by Hoge et al. (2011:184), “There is growing alarm in many sectors of the behavioral health field that staff members are receiving neither the support nor the direction needed to deliver safe and effective care to the individuals they serve, who are among the most

ill and vulnerable in society.”

Managed care may not be totally responsible for such changes, but the ideology and orientation of managed care practice has pushed and pulled the profession inexorably in this direction. Cost containment, maximization of productivity, increased efficiency, and rigorous fiscal management exert financial pressure to flatten organizational structures, implement horizontal integration of related functions, eliminate positions of lesser priority, and reduce time allotted to unprofitable functions.

Gibelman and Schervish (1996) noted that while retrenchment stimulated by managed care pressures affected all organizational levels, downsizing tended to target middle-management positions, and that supervisory “positions are classified within the middle management categories” (14).

It is instructive to note that a nationwide survey in 1998 by the Child Welfare League of America about “the management of child welfare services that is consistent with managed care models” (McCullough and Schmitt 2000:117) found nothing to say about supervision. This signal of the reduction in significance of social work supervision may herald a trend in response to the pervasive bottom-line ideology of managed care. The managed care insistence on packaged, systematic, time-limited procedures of “medical necessity” (Sabin and Daniels 1994) makes the supervisory cadre vulnerable unless it can demonstrate clearly that supervisory functions and activities make a significant contribution both to the “bottom line” and positive client improvement. As Munson observed:

Managed care companies do not require supervision because their model of accountability is not passed on supervisory oversight. Face-to-face individual and group supervision provided by a seasoned clinician has been replaced by telephone and written contracts with managed care case managers, many of whom have no clinical background. In this process, clinicians not only lose control of the treatment process, but also, in many instances, of reasonable access to case managers who make crucial decisions regarding the availability, outcome, and duration of care. (Munson 1996:249–250)

Managed care has had a different impact on each of the three principal supervisory functions.

#### ***Administrative Supervision and Managed Care***

There has been a reduction in the supervisory role in staff recruiting and hiring. Managed care organizations, not supervisors, determine which workers will become providers of reimbursable services.

Managed care organizations manage and evaluate worker performance by requiring documentation of client diagnoses, treatment plans, and the practice procedures of contracted social work employees. Although “the managed care company (and the agency, if any)” may “desire to measure and hence gain some control over what the clinician actually does with the client, how the client does or does not improve, and how quickly this can be accomplished with limited resources” (Adams 2006:176), the actual reviews performed by the managed care company, and any parallel reviews conducted by agency supervisors, often have little bearing on quality assurance in the managed care context. Adams found:



The supervisor of the clinical social worker working for a mental health agency has little control over what that worker does with clients and has little in the form of objective measures by which to evaluate the outcome, even if an agreed upon outcome could be found. The same is true for the managed care organization that is charged with assuring that their client's behavioral health dollars are spent in the most effective manner. The task of monitoring and controlling the activities and outcomes of the clinical social worker is made even more difficult for managed care companies because they are further removed from the clinician than those directly supervising the clinician. The resultant policies developed by those who manage coping agencies place restrictions and controls on areas that they can observe and create performance standards for those activities that they can document. This is the case with managed care's oversight of the clinician's work. They can observe such things as number of sessions utilized, recidivism rates, paperwork compliance and reported compliance with "best practices." The lack of good, objective, client-based outcome measures prohibits them from accurately evaluating the results of the clinician's efforts. (Adams 2006:47–48)

Supervisory decisions regarding choice of clients to be assigned, the nature of services to be provided, and the duration of treatment are typically preempted by managed care organizational decisions. To the extent that managed care systems are driven by the documentation of the signs and symptoms of medical disorders and their standardized treatments, supervisors have to make certain that details are clearly, accurately, and completely documented in the record of service. Monitoring of worker activity becomes detailed and precise.

#### ***Clinical-Educational Supervision and Managed Care***

It has been suggested that social work education has not done an adequate job of preparing students for evidence-based practice (Howard et al. 2009; Howard, McMillen, and Pollio 2003) or managed care environments (Cohen 2003; Kane 2002). Like many of the social workers and supervisors trained before them, new workers have to learn to speak the language of the corporate market culture of managed care in order to practice. The client is a consumer; the worker is a service provider; case management is benefits management; service planning is benefit design. Capitation, co-payment, and utilization reviews are not only terms to be mastered, but connote concepts that need to be accepted (Sabin 1999). The origin and development of managed care is another important supervisory lesson for teaching and learning (Rodwin 2010).

For educational purposes, many supervisors have had to reorient their traditional biopsychosocial perspective to include a significant new element. The reorientation is toward a biopsychosocial-fiscal perspective within a medical model of practice. Cost-consciousness concerns have had to become part of the supervisee's perspective as well (Cummings et al. 2009).

Managed care systems demand rapid assessments of presenting problems, the ability to conclude client contacts within a limited timeframe, and the ability to competently employ the diagnoses and interventions for which managed care agencies are most likely to provide reimbursement (Adams 2006; Ginsberg 2009). Corcoran and Vandiver (1996) argued that supervisors should be prepared to help their supervisees master the art of demonstrating the medical necessity of treatment, formulating behavioral treatment goals informed by the signs and symptoms of mental disorders codified in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition* of the American Psychiatric Association (2013).

These have had to become part of the supervisor's educational agenda in the managed care context, as the professional social work curriculum has generally not included a strong emphasis on the diagnosis of mental disorders (Harkness 2010) or the evidence-based practices used to treat them (Howard et al. 2009; Howard, McMillen, and Pollio 2003). The necessity for such training and retraining is confirmed by studies that examine what social workers need to know to operate effectively in the managed care context (Adams 2006; Meezan and McBeath 2011; Vandiver 2008).

### ***Supportive Supervision and Managed Care***

The managed care context presents the social worker with situations that are likely to generate considerable professional and ethical stress (Acker 2011; Ginsberg 2009).

Managed care practice is stressful because its policies and procedures erode the worker's professional autonomy and prerogatives (Strom-Gottfried 1998). As a competent professional, the worker might expect to determine, along with the client, the nature and content of the service that the presenting problem requires, the appropriate duration of service, and the desirable outcomes of social work practice. These decisions, however, are made by the managed care organization through prospective, concurrent, and retroactive utilization reviews. It is the managed care organization that authorizes the necessity, appropriateness, applicability, and duration of the reimbursable service, providing practice guidelines and protocols that detail how approved treatment modalities should be implemented. An altogether different approach might be selected by the worker with more professional freedom.

The result of such constraints lends itself to the standardization and routinization of performance, which was once the antithesis of autonomous professional practice. If autonomy and decisional prerogatives are a source of job satisfaction, as research suggests that they are (Gagné and Bhavé 2011), then curtailing professional autonomy leads to a loss or reduction of job satisfaction (Kim and Stoner 2008).

Operating in the managed care context exposes the social worker to a host of ethical problems (Metzl 2012). Restricting access to services for unprofitable consumers—the disabled, those with chronic illnesses, the aged, those requiring heroic treatment—is in conflict with the ethical mandate of providing unfettered access to social work treatment for vulnerable persons and groups.

Restricting the number of reimbursable service contacts that a client may have implies that the worker may have to terminate services unethically before the presenting problem is resolved. When client health care requirements exceed managed care limits, the social worker may feel torn between practicing *pro bono* and the malpractice specter of client abandonment.

Following the time-limited treatment protocols dictated by managed care utilization review managers may compromise the social worker's ethical duty to champion every client's right to self-determine the course and nature of treatment.

Having to share details about clients and practice interventions with managed care organizations for monitoring and review purposes results in some loss of control of

how and by whom the information will ultimately be used. As many social workers, if not all (e.g., Jean-Francois 2008), view this as tantamount to an unethical violation of the client's right to privacy (Coles 2011), "over half of the respondents" to a survey of eighty-nine social workers from a managed care panel "reported a conflict" in "maintaining confidentiality" (Ginsberg 2009:vi).

If Evans (2013:1) is correct that social workers retain significant freedom in their work, "even in rule-saturated organizations," it would not be altogether surprising to learn that a significant number of social workers have resisted managed care constraints on their professional autonomy by engaging in what might be described as bureaucratic insurrection, guerilla warfare from the trenches, inauthenticity (Floyd and Rhodes 2011), even fraud (Boland-Prom 2009); however, owing perhaps to the stakes, the "true facts" may be hidden from view. In a sophisticated mixed-methods survey of eighty-eight social workers from eleven agencies practicing in a Medicaid managed care environment, for example, Jean-Francois (2008) found workers' exposure to Medicaid managed care was unrelated to their reported ability to practice in accordance with traditional social work mission and values, define practice problems collaboratively with their clients, or serve as advocates for their professional group in policy and practice. However, even as her respondents reported a greater sense of practicing "in a manner coherent with their core professional identity" as they gained years of practice experience, Jean Francois (2008:87) noted, they "most often indicated disagreement" that "the role of the social worker in mental health today is defined by the social work profession itself, and not by others outside the discipline of social work." In like fashion, after arguing that "social workers may sometimes find it necessary to overstate the severity of symptoms or diagnosis to obtain treatment; or submit to insurance in one manner as a way to obtain more services, and then treat a client as the social worker initially intended" (Ginsberg 2009:4), the author seemed surprised to find that more than half of the private practitioners who responded to her survey of their reactions to managed care "felt that managed care supported the social worker in providing services that the client's condition warrants," hastening the caveat "it is essential to mention again that this researcher is an employee of a managed care organization, which could have affected the responses" (Ginsberg 2009:53–54). In what may be a more typical pattern, 181 clinical social workers "expressed a belief that the practice of altering diagnoses is widespread," in a study of managed care practices in Massachusetts and Maine (Adams 2006:vi), and a majority of respondents indicated that clinical social workers alter client diagnoses some, often, or a great deal of the time to protect client confidentiality or to help the client or clinician get reimbursed.

The consequences of practicing in a managed care environment call for increased time and effort devoted to supportive supervision to help workers manage their ethical conflicts and private feelings. Because supervisors may also find it difficult to balance the financial, humanitarian, ethical, and legal dilemmas endemic in managed care (Foglia et al. 2009), managed care has a negative impact on supervisors as well.

Despite the fact that managed care appears to increase the need for clinical and

supportive supervision, both aspects of supervision are likely to receive less attention in the managed care environment because time and energy devoted to clinical and supportive supervision do not directly generate revenue. Time devoted to these functions is not financially reimbursable. Professional education and development, sustaining worker morale, are not perceived to be responsibilities of the managed care system. The result is a relative increase in the administrative supervisory function and a reduction in the total time devoted to supervision.

Notwithstanding the pervasive spread of managed care throughout social work, a word of perspective may be in order. There are some signs that the initially heavy-handed grip of managed care may relax in the future. Given the political backlash against its initial excesses, Rodwin (2010) noted that forty-seven states passed legislation to regulate managed care between 1995 and 2001, leading Draper et al. (2002:11) to suggest that “managed care plans—pressured by a variety of marketplace forces that have been intensifying over the past two years—are making important shifts in their overall business strategy. Plans are moving to offer less restrictive managed care products and product features that respond to consumers’ and purchasers’ demands for more choice and flexibility.” Although, anecdotally, most social workers still describe managed care as intrusive, oppressive, unhelpful, and unwieldy, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 offers hope for further reforms, as well as new challenges:

The Affordable Care Act, along with Medicaid expansions, offers the opportunity to redesign the nation’s highly flawed mental health system. It promotes new programs and tools, such as health homes, interdisciplinary care teams, the broadening of the Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services option, co-location of physical health and behavioral services, and collaborative care. Provisions of the act offer extraordinary opportunities, for instance, to insure many more people, reimburse previously unreimbursed services, integrate care using new information technology tools and treatment teams, confront complex chronic comorbidities, and adopt underused evidence-based interventions. (Mechanic 2012:376)

### ***Supervision and Evidence-Based Practice***

How well prepared are social workers to conduct the evidence-based interventions that Mechanic (2012) envisioned in the managed care of the future? In the Workforce study, 30.7 percent of social workers reported working for agencies that provided best-practice training and 21.2 percent reported an interest in obtaining best-practices training, but 40 percent of those interested in more evidence-based training were already employed in agencies said to provide it, suggesting that 43 percent of the workforce has had recent best-practices exposure or interest (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004). Many of the 115 social workers sampled in Wharton’s (2010) mixed-methods survey reported positive feelings about evidence-based practice, and a significant number considered themselves to be evidence-based practitioners, but they also reported varying degrees of supervisory support for evidence-based practice (EBP) in the workplace and significant barriers to its adoption, making it difficult to determine how many social workers are really prepared to practice evidence-based interventions, as illustrated in the following comment from one of Wharton’s respondents:

Evidence based practice becomes a tool for reimbursement and people who want a cookbook to therapy. It creates a system of therapists similar to school teachers who can get by on good enough as long as they write the correct thing down on paper (insurance documentation) and agree with the system (insurance/poorly trained supervisor). It rewards the task doer. ... The goal becomes the completion of treatment plans and treatment within the required amount of time. The needs of the client are made to fit in the box issued by the insurer and protected by the clinician and his/her agency. The client's needs have been shrunk to be made to fit the evidence based criteria for their stated problem. (Wharton 2010:41)

If social workers are going to practice evidence-based interventions, the evidence suggests that the role of the supervisor is going to prove crucial (Accurso, Taylor, and Garland 2011). At present, social work students have limited opportunities for evidence-based training in graduate schools (Drisko and Grady 2012; Weissman 2009), and the two-day intensive workshops (Addis et al. 1999) that employed social workers might attend for training, if they had the time and the money to afford them (Carroll et al. 2010; Wharton 2010), are unlikely to provide adequate training (Beidas and Kendall 2010), as “didactic training alone ... has minimal influence on clinician’s behavior or ability to implement treatments effectively” (Carroll et al. 2010:36). Apparently, it takes a good deal more than readings and lectures for practitioners to acquire and master the skills required to implement EBP (Accurso et al. 2011; Frey et al. 2012). To paraphrase Weissman et al. (2006:926), the “gold standard” for training requires both didactic learning and supervised practice that attends to the process and client outcomes of helping.

To implement evidence-based treatments in their clinic, Donohue et al. (2009) et al. introduced standardized supervision, as illustrated in the following excerpt from the protocol they used:

Although live supervision is often impractical, it is a preferred supervisory technique. ... Therefore, [our] supervisors sometimes attend sessions, particularly when therapists are inexperienced or when sessions are expected to be difficult. Supervision is scheduled to occur weekly for 90 minutes with a licensed supervisor. All program therapists (usually up to 7 therapists), and volunteers who sometimes assist therapists with child management during sessions, attend supervision. ... Therapists bring audiotape recordings of the sessions they have conducted since last supervision, and the chart records of each of the clients. The supervisor brings a standardized form to monitor cases, and guide supervision.

Systematic assessing, reviewing, and brainstorming methods of preventing adverse events and factors that may lead to adverse events have been shown to substantially reduce harm to clients and significantly decrease clinical liability. ... Therefore, supervision is initiated with an inquiry of any adverse events occurring in treatment sessions during the previous week (e.g., suicide risk, suspected child treatment, domestic violence). Of course, when adverse events are identified they are discussed, including safety plans and appropriate consultation with others ....

Supervision meetings focus of various aspects of treatment implementation, including therapist style, utilizing role-playing to teach therapeutic skills, providing descriptive feedback on adherence rating forms, and descriptively praising successful efforts to implement treatment. ... When trainees are learning to implement evidence-based treatments, it is essential to measure adherence to treatment implementation. ... Therefore, therapists are provided feedback regarding the quality and extent to which the provided therapy with integrity during the past week according to reviews of their session audiotapes by other therapists [using] a protocol checklist to guide them in mentioning outstanding strengths relevant to therapeutic style, and methods of accomplishing treatment adherence. (Donohue et al. 2009:428)

## **Problem: The Professional and the Bureaucracy**

Against the backdrop of the EBP and managed care movements, the problem of professional worker autonomy in a bureaucratic context raises once again the central

question encountered earlier in the chapter on administrative supervision. It speaks to the strain between the requirements for worker discretion dictated by the nature of social work practice and the need to accommodate to the requirements that have to do with working in an organization (Glastonbury, Cooper, and Hawkins 1980). This tension is mediated by the supervisor, who represents both the worker and the organization.

Social workers have always conceded, however grudgingly, the need for some sort of control structure in order to accomplish the work of the agency. However, the clearly preferred control structure was that of the profession rather than that of the bureaucracy. The orientation of a profession and that of a bureaucracy are, supposedly, inherently in conflict. The needs of the bureaucracy for standardization, uniformity, role specificity, efficiency, impersonality, and rule adherence—like those of managed care and EBP—are antithetical to the needs of the professional for flexibility, maximum discretion and autonomy, sensitivity to the uniqueness of individual situations, and a primary concern with client needs. What is professionally correct is more important than what is organizationally desirable or found in a manual. There is recognition that a complex algorithm or organization requires the performance of certain tasks, but the basis for obtaining conformity to organizational and procedural needs, for ensuring coordination, and for limiting individual, idiosyncratic behavior lies not in hierarchically delegated authority but in professional self-discipline and voluntary adherence to practice standards of care, professional norms, and peer governance. The essential difference between these control structures was outlined by Toren:

The distinctive control structure of the professions ... is fundamentally different from bureaucratic control exercised in administrative organizations. Professional control is characterized as being exercised from “within” by an internalized code of ethics and special knowledge acquired during a long period of training and by a group of peers which is alone qualified to make professional judgments. This type of authority differs greatly from bureaucratic authority which emanates from a hierarchical position. (1972:51)

The difference lies in the basis of the legitimated authority that supports the differing control systems—one based on expertise which prompts voluntary compliance, the other based on power vested in a position which obligates compliance. For the supervisor, the professional control structure recognizes colleagues as having equal authority and power rather than supervisor and supervisee with differing amounts.

The strain between the professionals’ preference for self- and peer-government and the bureaucratic-hierarchical control structure encountered in working in complex organizations such as managed care and social agencies is the subject of very considerable discussion (Abrahamson 1967; Biedas and Kendall 2010; Brooks, Patterson, and McKiernan 2012; Frey et al. 2012). However, with the bureaucratization of the professions and the professionalization of bureaucracies, there has been increasing accommodation between the two systems of control. “Organizations are increasingly governed by professional standards and professionals are increasingly subject to bureaucratic controls” (Kornhauser 1962:7). The basis for accommodation efforts lies in the fact that the professional needs the organization

almost as much as the organization needs the professional.

There has been some rethinking generally about the inevitability of conflict between professionals and the bureaucracy (Gagné and Bhavé 2011; Levay and Waks 2009; Mastekaasa 2011). There is greater current acceptance of the idea, first proposed by Harris–Jenkins (1970), that “the contemporary professional who works in an organizational setting is quite likely to feel at home and at ease there because professions and organizations are fused into a new social form” (Blankenship 1977:38). A questionnaire study of 267 professional social workers in health and welfare agencies found that bureaucratic and professional value orientations were not necessarily in conflict. The two sets of values were perceived as separate, rather than polar opposites on one continuum:

The findings clearly indicate that while social workers may value autonomy, flexibility, and innovation in their work situations they may at the same time value bureaucratic organizational arrangements. Assertions that bureaucratic values, which guide the policies and procedures of organizations, are antithetical to the professional values of workers are highly questionable. (Wilson, Voth, and Hudson 1980:29; see also Eagerton 1994)

Heraud also noted:

The relationship between bureaucracy and the profession is not, as is frequently depicted, in all cases one of conflict and in social work in particular there is considerable congruence between bureaucratic and professional criteria. Concepts such as organizational professionalism or bureau-professionalism have been developed to express this relationship. Bureaucracy and professionalism have, for example, both been seen as subtypes of a wider category, that of rational administration. (1981:135)

Thus, it might be concluded that although there is a dynamic tension between the needs of the professional and the needs of the organization, these differences are reconcilable, that bureaucratization does not necessarily result in deprofessionalization, that identification with the organization does not necessarily occur at the expense of identification with the profession. Supervision and professionalism are not necessarily antithetical concepts.

The difference (however subtle) between professional autonomy and accountability needs clarification. Professional autonomy suggests that professionals are responsible to themselves for the service they offer. Accountability requires something beyond professional autonomy and personal responsibility for service offered. Accountability requires that, beyond responsibility to oneself as a professional, the worker is also responsible to agency administration and, beyond agency administration, to the community for the service offered. Accountability is based on the fact that the social worker’s licensed actions are sanctioned not only by professional expertise, which justifies professional autonomy, but also based on “delegated discretion”—the authority to provide service deriving from the agency’s administration and third-party payers. *Professional autonomy* suggests that social workers are free agents. *Accountability* points to the fact that, as agency employees social workers are not free agents, but they are acting as representatives of the agency and through the agency as representatives of the community. The worker in organizational settings is not carrying a personal caseload, but an agency caseload.

Related to this is the distinction that needs to be made between autonomy over

ends and autonomy over means (Raelin 1986). Determining the mission of the organization is the proper responsibility of agency administration. Generally, the professional cedes autonomy of such ends to administration. Professionals are more likely to advocate for autonomy over means. What they should do in treating the client and how they should do it is their prerogative—an autonomy earned by their specialized knowledge and skills—constrained by public and private demands for efficiency in the face of limited resources. The justification for managerial control in the face of agreeing to grant the professional autonomy regarding means is that there needs to be some certainty that the professional is employing appropriate means to achieve the goals of the agency and its external stakeholders (Lewis 1988).

There might be less conflict than supposed between the professional and the bureaucracy, but there are significant advantages for the professional in operating in an organizational context. Although worker and supervisor autonomy has been associated with job satisfaction in every context and culture (Gagné and Bhave 2011), the counterbalancing variables of adequate organizational resources, supervisory support, and co-worker trust have also been identified as correlates of job satisfaction (Mor Barak et al. 2009). Through the agency, the professional is provided with community and legal sanction and support for the work he or she is doing. The organization provides the professional with clients so that less energy needs to be spent in developing a clientele. The agency provides resources that assist the professional in task performance—clerical and financial help, technical materials, paraprofessional assistance, insurance coverage, specialized consultation, and so on. The organization provides the stimulation that derives from immediate, close contact with other professionals, the emotional support that comes from an immediately accessible peer group, and the technical advisement that comes from good supervision. Within the context of a complex organization, the professional has available a rich network of related specialists with whom he or she can coordinate his or her own activities.

If bureaucratic controls limit the worker's discretion and autonomy, they make for reliable, predictable, nondiscriminating decision making. The statement that may come closest to reality is that professionalism and bureaucracy, being multidimensional, may be in conflict with regard to some considerations, but congruent and mutually supportive with regard to others (Anderson and Martin 1982).

### **Ethical Dilemmas in Supervision**

Although concerns are often raised about ethical supervision (Ellis et al. 2008; Greer 2002; Ladany et al. 1999), there is no question regarding the duty of a supervisor to act in an ethical, humane manner toward supervisees. There is an ethical obligation to meet the legitimate needs of the supervisee, to evaluate objectively and fairly, to refrain from taking advantage of differences in power, and to implement the functions of supervision conscientiously and responsibly. It is unethical for supervisors to assign a case to a supervisee who is without the necessary skills and knowledge to offer effective service, yet assigning another difficult case to an excellent worker who



“already has a full workload” may “contribute to caseworker burnout and turnover, and then to both diminished unit performance over time and the need for supervisors to spend more time on training new caseworkers” (Maceachron et al. 2009:181). Reamer (1989) noted that supervisors are ethically liable if they fail to meet regularly with supervisees to review their work, fail to provide timely evaluations, fail to provide adequate coverage in a supervisee’s absence, or fail to detect or stop a negligent treatment plan. It is unethical for either supervisors or supervisees to present themselves as competent to deliver professional services beyond their training level of experience and competence.

The supervisor is obligated to respect the confidentiality of material shared in the process of supervision. If information obtained in supervision needs to be communicated to others, the supervisor should inform the supervisee about the person(s) to whom it will be communicated and for what purpose. The supervisor has a gatekeeper function in protection of clients. If it is clear that a supervisee is not competent and is not likely to become competent, the supervisor is responsible for advising a change of career or terminating employment. There is an ethical responsibility on the part of supervisors to avoid dual relationships with supervisees, particularly those related to sexual exploitation. Supervisors have an ethical responsibility to make explicit their expectations of the supervisee and the arrangements for working together. Supervisors have an ethical responsibility for continued self-development, to upgrade skills and monitor their own effectiveness.

Supervisors have to make themselves available in case of emergencies when crisis decisions need to be made. Throughout, the supervisor’s responsibility is initially and primarily to the needs of the client and only secondarily to the needs of the supervisee.

These statements comprise the consensually accepted, standard, noncontroversial ethical obligations that a supervisor must observe vis-à-vis the supervisee. Beyond this, however, the supervisor might be confronted with ethical questions that are more controversial and about which there may be little consensus. Such problems relate to the kinds of ethical dilemmas that might be posed for the supervisee, who then turns to the supervisor for help in resolving them. A dilemma for the supervisee becomes a dilemma for the supervisor. A dilemma poses a question to which any answer has some negative consequences and/or violates an alternative significant value.

Many questions faced by the worker do not yield to technical solutions because they are primarily ethical rather than technical questions. No amount of technical skill can help a worker answer a question regarding situations in which confidentiality might need to be set aside to protect threatened people, in which agency rules and regulations might need to be bent to accommodate highly individualized client needs, or in which a white lie might be considered to mitigate a client’s pain or suffering. To resolve a difficult decision between one good and another conflicting good, the worker is more likely to turn to the supervisor than to an ethical code (Hair 2012), as workers vary in their belief in and adherence to the NASW Code of Ethics (DiFranks 2008). The opportunity to talk things over with a supervisor might provide the worker

with relief and a sense of direction—provided that the supervisor has formulated a sense of direction.

## **Sexism and Social Work Administration**

Sexism is defined as discrimination based on gender. There is a problem in social work relating to equitable access of females to administrative positions. The term *social work administration* covers a variety of levels from the lowest supervisory position to agency executive director. For both men and women, supervisor is the entry-level position to the administrative hierarchy.

Although the majority of social workers are women, for many years the administrative enclave in many social work agencies was disproportionately male (Szakacs 1977; Chernesky 1980). In a global sense, this still appears to be true, as employed male respondents to the NASW Workforce study reported spending significantly more hours per week than females in administration and management (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004). On the other hand, the size of the gender effect was quite small, and further analysis indicated that the gender disparity in weekly hours spent in administration and management roles was limited to social workers who spent less than 19 hours per week performing those duties. The gender effect disappeared among social workers reporting 20 or more hours per week in administration and management. Because it appears that the licensed workforce has achieved some degree of gender parity in their occupation of full-time administrative and management positions, it may be that the very small difference in reports of their part-time performance of administration and management differences can be explained as a social desirability phenomenon, in which men were more likely than women to describe similar tasks as administration and management.

Women who occupy administrative social work positions continue to earn significantly less income than their male counterparts (Gibelman 2003; Koeske and Krowinski 2004). This was certainly true for the administrators in the Workforce study (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004), as the estimated mean full-time salary of \$76,014 for male social workers reporting 20 or more hours per week in administration and management was significantly greater than that for their colleagues who were women, with a mean estimated full-time salary of \$54,938. Although the whopping 38 percent salary difference in favor of men was mitigated somewhat after controlling for estimated age, highest social work degree, public or private sector employment, and years of experience—a model suggested by Koeske and Krowinski (2004)—the significant difference that remained is evidence that sexism still hold sway in the agency settings where most social workers practice.

Because becoming a supervisor is often the first rung on the administrative ladder, we extended our analysis to examine social work supervisors. Unlike the significant difference in hours the genders reported spending in administrative and managerial roles, we found no difference in the number of hours that male and female supervisors spent providing supervision (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004). However, as was true for the administrators in the Workforce study, the estimated

mean full-time salary of \$65,921 for male supervisors was significantly greater than that for supervisors who were women, with a mean estimated full-time salary of \$50,386. Once again, although the 30 percent difference of \$15,535 in estimated full-time salary favoring male supervisors over supervisors who were women was mitigated somewhat after controlling for estimated age, highest social work degree, public or private sector employment, and years of experience, the significant difference that remained indicates that sexism plays a major role in the incomes that social work supervisors earn.

In addition to salary and wage discrimination, there are a number of other gender and gender-role issues related to problems of sexism and heterosexism and social work administration. As discussed in [chapter 7](#), these include gender as a factor in the transition to supervision, gender and sexual orientation as factors in ongoing supervision, the problem of sexual harassment in the workplace, and the role that sexism plays in case assignments that disproportionately expose male social workers to risk.

## **The Problem of Education for Supervision**

We have noted above that lack of training is one of the problems encountered by direct service workers making the transition to supervision. Education for supervision is a problem for the profession as well.

Decades ago, Olmstead and Christensen (1973), in concluding a national study of social work personnel problems, called attention to the need for formal and explicit training for supervision: "There appears to be a pressing need for supervisory training. The function of supervision is too critical to leave to trial-and-error learning. Systematic instruction in the fundamentals of supervision warrants a high place on any list of training requirements" (6).

Educating supervisors to supervise remains a problem today. Relatively few supervisors have had any extended systematic education in supervision. Aikin and Weil (1981) once noted that role adoption (learning to do the job after being assigned the title) and emulation or modeling (imitating supervisors previously encountered) are the principal ways of learning to supervise. A more recent review of the supervision of behavioral health care in the public sector reported the following:

The policies, procedures, and practices within service organizations lack clear standards regarding the format and minimum frequency of supervision, and few monitor data to ensure that those standards are met. Individuals become supervisors based on seniority, academic degree, or proficiency as a direct care provider ... and generally do not receive training in supervision practice. (Hoge et al. 2011:186)

Whether described as role adoption or "role shock" (Borders 2010), on-the-job experience is still how most supervisors get their training.

Although the Council on Social Work Education (2010:3) recognized the importance of training students for competency to use supervision in its *Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards*, it has not identified the ability to supervise as a competency that social workers shall acquire. Although the sample of respondents to

our recent Internet survey of deans and directors of schools of social work was small, we can report with confidence that Munson's (1983) observation that schools of social work vary widely in how or whether they prepare students to provide supervision is still valid. Some schools require all social work students to complete a course in supervision; other schools offer elective courses in supervision, embed supervision content in courses on administrative or clinical practice, or provide no supervision content at all. Hoge et al. determined:

Postgraduate certificate programs in supervision are probably the most substantive training models available to individuals. ... They involve a more intensive educational experience that may include from 40 to 80 hours of classroom learning that is both didactic and experiential and is spread over a substantial period of time that may range up to 2 years. The formal training is typically augmented with additional learning opportunities and requirements, such as advanced course work on clinical techniques and online learning communities that connect students in the program. Educational content tends to cover topics such as supervisory roles, supervisory relationships, ethics, confidentiality, models of supervision, and the implications of cultural diversity. (Hoge et al. 2011:191)

With growing recognition of the significance of supervision—for quality assurance and client protection, for the implementation of competency- and evidence-based practices, for the amelioration of practitioner burnout and workforce retention—some schools of social work have joined with community partners and state authorities to develop and test promising models of supervision training in behavioral health care (Tebes et al. 2011) and child welfare (Landsman 2007; Lietz and Rounds 2009; Strand and Badger 2005). But, given the panoramic curricular scope of social work education and its diverse, embedded interests, the time and resources available for achieving its ambitious mission are often quite limited (Stoesz et al. 2010; Weissman et al. 2006). Noting that perhaps one-quarter of social work graduates are unable to pass the national examination required for a license to practice (Deangelis 2009), the American Board of Examiners in Clinical Social Work (2004) and the Association of Social Work Boards (2009) have assumed compensatory leadership in development of a supervisory workforce, notably by convening expert panels to evaluate and synthesize practice wisdom and published research and itemize, define, and publish basic competencies for social work supervision.

Incrementally, the individual states with legislative authority to regulate social work have begun to follow suit by requiring clinical supervisors to complete some form of initial training and, increasingly, continuing education, before authorizing them to provide licensure supervision (ASWB 2010b). Arizona, for example, recently began “stricter enforcement of clinical supervision training [that requires] completion of 12 clock hours of training before a supervisor begins providing supervision and six clock hours of clinical supervision training before renewal of a license to practice” (Hymans 2012:15). Although this is a promising development, the quality of such training is difficult to ascertain, as self-reports of trainee satisfaction have been the principal method, if any, used to measure those training outcomes. A recent randomized controlled trial of supervision training found little evidence to suggest that supervisor skills are enhanced by supervision workshops (Kavanagh et al. 2008), nor have reviews of the literature by Carroll and Rounsaville (2007), Decker et al (2011), Lyon

et al. (2010), and Beidas and her colleagues. However, a cross-comparison of the empirical evidence and expert panel findings points to a growing consensus about what social workers and their supervisors need to learn.

Watkins (2011b:193) predicted that the supervision of the “new millennium” will become “evidence-based,” as the pivotal role of “evidence-based supervision” in the implementation of evidence-based practice becomes the focus of growing attention (Carlson et al. 2010; McHugh and Barlow 2010; Milne 2009; O’Donoghue and Tsui 2013). By now, the basic elements of evidence-based supervision, including those used to “standardize” (Donohue et al. 2009) and “manualize” (Milne and Reiser 2012) supervision, will have already become familiar to our readers: (1) conduct initial and ongoing assessments of workers’ educational needs, (2) develop, monitor, and maintain collaborative working relationships with supervisees, (3) hold routine supervisory meetings that follow working agendas, (4) use multiple methods (e.g., demonstration, discussion, modeling, role-play, and verbal instruction) to teach workers specific knowledge and skills, (5) make frequent direct and indirect observations of worker performance, (6) provide timely performance feedback and coaching, and (7) monitor client progress and outcomes.

### **A Perspective: The Positive Values of Professional Supervision**

Focusing on the problems of supervision tends to obscure the very real contribution made by supervision to the effective operation of social work agencies, and the general satisfaction with current supervisory procedures.

Despite some dissatisfaction, agency supervision is, for the most part, doing the job it is charged with doing. A nationwide sample of 377 MSW supervisees anonymously answered the following question: “In general, how satisfied do you feel with the relationship you now have with your supervisor?” Of the respondents, 30 percent indicated that they were “extremely satisfied” and 36 percent were “fairly satisfied” with their relationship with their supervisor. Only 5 percent indicated they were “fairly” or “extremely” dissatisfied (Kadushin 1992a). Other studies available also tend to indicate considerable satisfaction with social work supervision (Greenleigh Associates 1960:132; Galambos and Wiggins 1970:18).

Munson’s (1980) study of sixty-five supervisees from a variety of agencies indicated that satisfaction scores with supervision are “fairly high, indicating that there is overall satisfaction with supervision” (7). A survey of the job satisfactions of some 370 workers in mental health settings found that “respondents tended to be most satisfied with their supervision, followed closely by satisfaction with co-workers and with their work” (Webb et al. 1980).

A study of job satisfaction of school social workers in Iowa found that satisfaction with supervision was significantly associated with job satisfaction. “If respondents were satisfied with supervision they were more likely to be satisfied with their job” (Staudt 1997:481). Studying job satisfaction in a department of human resources, Newsome and Pillari (1991) found that overall job satisfaction and the overall quality of supervision were positively correlated. Evans and Hohenshil (1997), in a study of

substance abuse counselors, found a relationship between job satisfaction and the quantity of supervision received.

At a state human services agency, 636 supervisees rated their supervisors on seven dimensions reflecting their attitudes toward supervisees. The dimensions included such aspects as communication, unit management, personnel policies, and personnel evaluations. Overall, the supervisors rated a mean of 3.27 on a five-point scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very well*), indicating a reasonable level of satisfaction with supervisors on the part of the 636 supervisees (Russell, Lankford, and Grinnell 1984:4, table 1).

Olmstead and Christensen's nationwide study concluded that good supervision is an important determinant of agency effectiveness:

The data are conclusive. High agency scores on the supervision variable were accompanied by greater employee satisfaction, better individual performance, less absenteeism, better agency performance, and higher agency competence. (1973:304)

In a study of 102 child-care workers, Shinn (1979) found that the quality of supervision was positively correlated with job satisfaction and negatively correlated with anticipated turnover at levels of high statistical significance. In a more contemporary study of eighty-four clinicians serving clients with mental illness in a managed care environment, Schroffel (1999:101) found that individual supervision was always or very helpful for 64 percent of the surveyed practitioners, and that satisfaction with group supervision was significantly correlated with job satisfaction.

The value of supervision for more effective agency administration is noted in several studies. Community mental health centers are among the agencies that depend heavily on third-party payments for support and consequently face legislative mandates for rigorous accountability. A questionnaire study of community mental health center supervisors' perceptions of effective accountability mechanisms found all 117 respondents saw "a well-coordinated and explicit system of supervision as the most preferred approach to facilitating a community mental health center based quality assurance program" (Smith 1986:9).

Sosin (1986) studied the effects of supervisor inputs in implementing administration of child welfare permanency planning programs in all seventy-two Wisconsin counties. There were wide variations in the extent to which supervisors in different counties reminded workers to conduct case reviews of children in placements, monitored reviews, conducted discussions of case reviews, and reviewed workers' records regarding permanency planning. In analyzing the effects of supervisor actions on permanent planning outcomes, Sosin concluded that supervisors' actions in reminding workers to conduct reviews was significantly related to reducing time in care. Other administrative actions of the supervisor ("discuss routine review results" and "perform review from records") were modestly related to time in care (372, table 4).

Program review teams surveying child welfare programs in Illinois repeatedly mentioned the relationship between supervision and performance. A 1988 program review of an area office noted:

Positive indicators such as case documentation and case closing were found within those teams whose supervisors were more structured and formal in their management. Within those teams where supervision was vacant, sporadic and inconsistent, we found a lower rate of case closing and documentation.

Another area reviewed by the Office of Program Review noted that “those teams where the supervisor had developed systems for periodic review of case records had noticeably better quality records than those who had not.”

In [chapter 6](#), we discussed in some detail the value of good supervision as a prophylactic for burnout.

The importance of supervision in preventing child maltreatment in institutions for children was cited by Rindfleisch (1984). In asking for suggestions as to what is likely to reduce the incidence of maltreatment, different respondents to a questionnaire returned by some one thousand institutional personnel suggested better supervision, experienced supervision, thorough supervision, strong supervision, effective supervision, regular supervision, accessible supervision, consistent supervision, and quality supervision.

It might be noted that the research cited indicates the positive effects of supervision on supervisee job satisfaction and administrative procedures (Mor Barak et al. 2009). A question might be raised about the consequences of effective supervision for client change.

Harkness and Poertner (1989) reviewed the social work supervision research literature between 1955 and 1985 and noted that this research had generally neglected the effects of supervision on clients and their outcomes. Although some evidence suggests that supervision can improve client outcomes (Bambling et al. 2006; Callahan et al. 2009; Harkness and Hensley 1991; Worthen and Lambert 2007), much of the evidence is confounded by methodological problems, as noted in five reviews of the literature (Ellis and Ladany 1997; Frietas 2002; Inman and Ladany 2008; Wheeler and Richards 2007; Watkins 2011a). Thus, as Watkins (2011a:252) concluded, “We still cannot empirically answer that question.”

Our review of the literature leads us to conclude that agency supervision, despite some dissatisfaction, is, for the most part, doing the job it was charged with doing. Although licensed social workers reported larger caseloads, clients with more severe problems, the more frequent assignment of non-social work tasks, and increased levels of oversight and paperwork in their jobs over the two years preceding the NASW Workforce study, 25.9 percent of the employed participants in the survey agreed and 41.4 percent *strongly* agreed that they received support and guidance from their supervisors, notwithstanding reduced levels of job security, staffing, supervision, and reimbursement for services (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004). At the same time, 19.1 percent of the employed workforce identified supervision as one of the five most important factors that would influence a decision to change their current position (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004). For clarification, nearly one-fifth of the employed workforce meant to say that they would consider leaving their positions *for better supervision*, as both the 9.1 percent of the workforce who identified the *quality of supervision* as a reason to consider leaving,

and the 13.9 percent of the workforce who identified *having a different supervisor* as a reason to consider leaving (and some workers listed both as reasons to consider leaving), also reported significantly lower levels of supervisory guidance and support than their colleagues (NASW Center for Workforce Studies 2004).

Thus, although some social workers may have viewed supervision as a problem of abundance for a time in the past—with longing for professional autonomy, and emancipation from interminable supervision—the more common perception now seems to be that social work supervision has become fleeting and scarce, suggesting the adage “Be careful what you wish for.”

With less than half of the workforce receiving supervision from a social worker (NASW Center for Workforce studies 2004), and given its importance, the profession might consider a more active program of explicit, formal training for social work supervision in order to increase the number of social work supervisors doing good supervision. In a companion initiative, we encourage our colleagues to advance social work’s portfolio of supervision research. It is comforting to know that supervision makes a significant contribution to worker’s job satisfaction and that agency administration operates more effectively as a consequence of the availability of supervision. A very important question that needs to be far more adequately addressed by research is the extent to which good supervision is significantly related to the certainty of client improvement—a problem alluded to a number of different times in different ways in various contexts throughout the text.

## Summary

The lack of direct access to supervisees’ performance is a problem for supervisors. Workers’ reports of their activities often suffer from significant omissions and distortions. Procedures such as direct observation, audio and video recordings, and co-therapy supervision are being used in response to this problem. Recordings provide the supervisor with a complete, reliable view of the worker’s performance and provide the worker with the opportunity for self-supervision; affordable and unobtrusive technology has been developed for this purpose. Practice skills are enhanced by observing client outcomes and collecting client feedback.

Peer supervision and time-limited supervision have been proposed to balance the professional autonomy of experienced workers with the need for accountability in agency settings. With the advent of social work licensure, there is agreement that the supervisory relationship should yield to consultation, although some administrative supervision will continue to be required.

A variety of procedures have been tried to debureaucratize the agency and redistribute managerial decision-making power. These include team service delivery, participatory management, and a supervisory contract system. Many such initiatives are difficult to sustain in a managed care environment and may be incompatible with evidence-based practice.

The problem of the professional in a bureaucracy was discussed, suggesting the possible sources of reconciliation between these two sources of control. Sexism,



managerial opportunities for women, and risks for men were reviewed.

Studies show that most supervisees express satisfaction with the supervision they are receiving and that supervisors do a more effective job as a result of formal training, although the training opportunities that exist are limited and often unproven.

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