What happens in supervision ? The Inside Story!

Dr Diana Bourne and Trish Hafford-Letchfield

Introduction

SW Task-Force (DCSF 2009):

- Poor communication and antagonistic relationships between staff and managers in front-line SW
- Managers reported unmanageable work-loads, expressed unmet needs for support and continuing CPD
- Recommendation 7 – Clear national requirements for the supervision of social workers

Research project

- Small-scale exploratory
- **Aims**: explore different roles managers perform within the supervision contexts.
- Analysis of management actions and behaviours at this level to help generate insights into how managers trade between the needs of the supervisee and the organisational context
- Identify strategies that might enhance frontline relationships.
- Ethical approval
- **Sample**: 17 scripts, 8 AV recordings (30 – 90 mins)
- **Methods**:
  - Literature review
  - Visual analysis of AV recordings of supervision sessions
  - Documentary analysis of students' written reflective analyses of their performance in the AV recordings
- **Data analysis** – Preliminary themes

Definition of supervision

‘Supervision is a process by which one worker is given responsibility by the organisation to work with another worker(s) in order to meet certain organisational, professional and personal objectives which together promote the best outcomes for service users.’

(Morrison 2005 p32, adapted from Harris 1987)

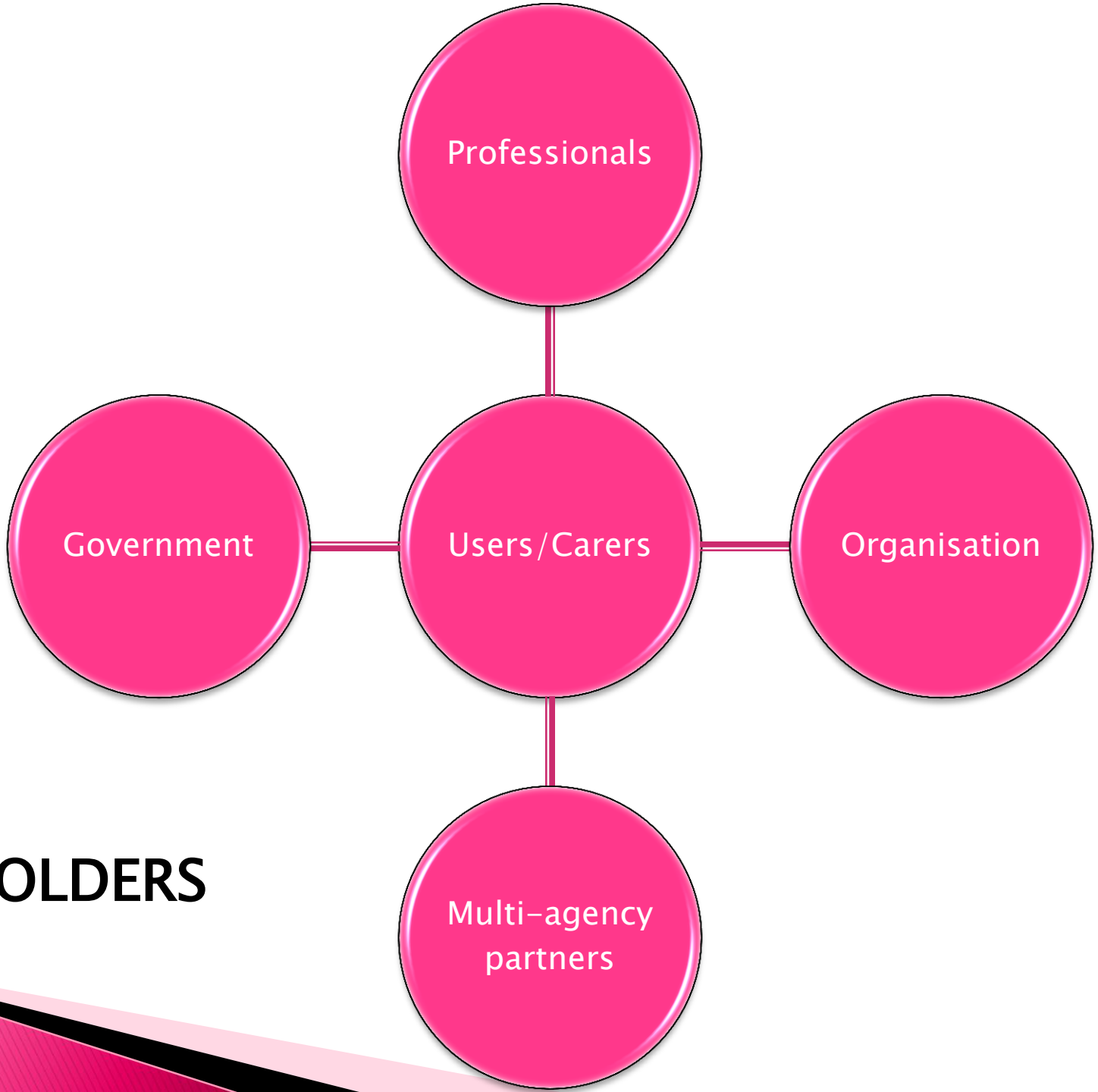
Supervision in its organisational context – Walking the tightrope

- Use of power and authority
- Balancing organisational and administrative functions with empowerment / professional development of frontline staff.
- Determined by organisational culture
- Collaborative models and skill

(Bogo and Dill, 2008)

Functions of supervision
Traditional model

STAKEHOLDERS



Limited empirical research

- Yoo (2005) – estimated only 34 research reports between 1950 and 2002

- Bogo and McKnight (2005) found only 22 studies (mostly small-scale) between 1994 and 2004 (half outside USA) suggesting that supervisory practice lacks a well developed empirical base

Supervision

- 3 types of supervision process:
  - active intrusive
  - passive avoidant
  - active reflective (Wonnacott 2003)
- Making a difference to practice:
  - Relationship
  - Accurate assessment of competence
  - Empathy and emotional attunement
  - Enhancing practice (observation, feedback, modelling, skills development, intervention ideas and knowledge) (Morrison 2009 UL)
  - Trust and appropriate use of authority (Bogo and Dil, 2008)

Supervision

- Knowledge of SLT important in enhancing knowledge and skills (Dodenhoff 1981 in Kavanagh 2003)
- Importance of clarity and agreement about supervision goals (Ronnestad and Skivholt 1993 in Quartro 2002)
- Inexperienced staff prefer directive supervision; structured supervision and direction less important to experienced staff (vs consultation, reflection, discussion) (Swanson and O'Saben 1993 in Kavanagh 2003)
- New supervisors likely to adopt an overly controlling and structured manner
- Successful supervisory relationships are an outcome of how power and control issues are continually negotiated (Quatro 2002)

What about the supervisors?

- Only 1 in 10 SWs felt they could rely on their supervisors for support
- Higher levels of stress amongst managers than practitioners (McClean 1999)
- Poorly trained and supported (Kavanagh 2003):
  - Only 50% had had supervision in the past 2 years
  - only 38% had had any training

Impact of organisational policies and programmes:

One qualitative study

- 20 case manager supervisors in long term services (USA):
- Workload pressures & increasing demands & pressures meant:
  - becoming "more of a business-minded person than a social worker" (p. 36)
  - focusing more on workers filing forms on time than on quality of outcomes
  - Described themselves as becoming less user centered over time.

(Bowers, Esmond, & Canales (1999):

Influential nature of the supervisory relationship

Hensley 2002 in Bogo and McKnight 2005:

- Qualitative study (20 supervisors in USA)
- Found that practitioners gained in many ways from supervision:
  - skills, often related to theory
  - professional growth and support
  - role modelling of professional and personal qualities
  - and mutuality through an interactive supervisory relationship.

Valued supervisors are:

- Available
- Knowledgeable these techniques to theory
- Hold practice perspectives and expectations about service delivery similar to the supervisee
- Provide support and encourage professional growth
- Delegate responsibility to supervisees who can do the task
- Role models
- Communicate in a mutual and interactive style

(Bogo and McKnight, 2005)

Wider issues:

- ‘Riding the juggernaut’ (Giddens, 1990, 53)
- Increasing surveillance and evaluation of professional practice
- Prioritising confidence (in services) over trust & ‘moral motivation’

(Harrison and Smith, 2004)

Preliminary findings – main themes from the written analyses:

- Importance of supervisor's own support
- Recording requirements detracts from full engagement
- Emotional impact of the work
- Emotional attunement: skills, time and ability to recognise emotional component
- Awareness of self
- Supervising experienced/inexperienced staff
- Usefulness of observation and reflection for learning
- Helping supervisees manage complexity, anxiety, pain, stress
- Impact of targets
- Lack of training, 'learning on the job', modelling practice on own supervisory experiences
- Gender, race and power relations in supervision

AV recording

- **Decision making**
- Trust and professional confidence
- Reliance on anecdotal information/ playing for time
- Use of language when discussing serious situations or risk (Menzies-Lythe, 1988)
- Specialist knowledge base in interprofessional decision making.
- Active listening – impact of recording

Preliminary findings from AV recordings

- **Use of authority** (dissonance or incongruence between verbal and body language)
- **Mediating function**

"Its a new rule that has been brought in – some people might see it as 'upping' the bar, when really we are just changing KPIs to reflect service changes"

"Will you do me a 'shared practice' (laughs) – well it ***is*** useful"

Learning lessons and creating a supportive container

- The central importance of relationships in supervision
- Rewarding contact with colleagues
- Quality of supervision
- Attitudes of managers and human relations
- Service user narratives?
- Flexibility
- Policy analysis rooted in real world analysis and enquiry (Cooper, 2004) including engagement of staff and their managers in the development of systems and structures.
- Participatory management

Issues 1

- Changing role of first line manager
- Flatter management structures – decision-making closer to the front-line
- Performance management – achieving targets and procedural compliance → dominance of management function
- 'Covering your back' – defensive supervisory practice

Issues – 2

- How to keep Users/Carers central –little research evidence
- Reflective practice and analysis
- Maintaining balance between professional and managerial elements
- Role of leadership behaviours in creating, facilitating and enabling positive work environments.

Issues – 3

- Complexity of interprofessional work
- Mediation function significant
- Lack of time/space
- Administrative and accountability vs consultancy/ professional guidance
- Addressing equality and diversity issues

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