The functions of supervision

The functions of supervision. Examining the different functions of supervision throws up various questions and issues. These questions include asking ‘in whose interest does supervision work?’ Confusion also arises concerning notions such as ‘mentoring’, ‘practice teaching’ and ‘clinical supervision’. Here we explore Alfred Kadushin’s model of supervision and the insights it brings to these questions.

Contents: introduction · overseeing · Kadushin’s model of supervision · putting the functions together · ‘non-managerial’, ‘consultative’ or ‘professional’ supervision · supervision and the emergence of psychoanalysis and counselling ·
responsibilities to clients, other professionals and the community · a question of power · the college or training programme supervisor · mentoring and clinical supervision · conclusion · further reading and references · links · how to cite this article

The immediate roots of what we have come to know as supervision in the human services lie in the development of social work and casework. We see this, for example, in the concern for the needs of clients; and the taking up of ideas and practices that owe much to the emergence of psychoanalysis. However, to make sense of supervision it is necessary to look to the various forms of apprenticeship that have existed in different societies. In ancient China, Africa and Europe (feudal and otherwise), for example, there are numerous examples of people new to a craft or activity having to reveal their work to, and explore it with, masters or mistresses i.e. those recognized as skilled and wise. This process of being attached to an expert, of ‘learning through doing’ allows the novice to gain knowledge, skill and commitment. It also enables them to enter into a particular ‘community of practice’ such as tailoring or midwifery (see Lave and Wenger 1991). By spending time with practitioners, by ‘looking over their shoulders’, taking part in the routines and practices associated with the trade or activity, and having them explore our work, we become full members of the community of practice.

Overseeing

Supervision can be found in the growth of charitable social agencies in Europe and North America during the nineteenth century. It involved the recruitment, organization and oversight of a large number of volunteers and, later, paid workers. The volunteers were commonly known as ‘visitors’. Their task was to call on a small number of families to offer advice and support. The main concern was to foster self help, and the adoption of ‘healthy’ habits and behaviours. In addition, visitors were also often in a position to access limited funds via their agencies, although such monies were only given after a careful investigation of the family’s circumstances. In other words, a decision had to be made as to whether they were ‘deserving’. (See, for example, the discussion of Maude Stanley, girls’ clubs and district visiting and ellen ranyard, ‘bible women’ and informal education).

The person assigning cases, organizing work and taking decisions on behalf of the agency was basically an ‘overseer’ — and hence the growing use of the term ‘supervisor’. (In Latin super means ‘over’, and videre, ‘to watch, or see’). As Petes (1967: 170) has pointed out, traditionally, part of the overseer’s job was to ensure that work was done well and to standard. This can be viewed as an administrative
task. However, overseers also had to be teachers and innovators. These were new forms of organization and intervention: ‘standards were being set, new methods developed’ (op cit.).

In these early forms – and especially in the work of the Charity Organization Society in the USA and UK – the present functions and approaches of supervision were signalled. As thinking and practice around casework became more sophisticated, especially through the work of pioneers such as Mary Richmond (1899; 1917; 1922), and demands for more paid workers grew, so supervision became more of an identified process. For example, books on the subject began to appear – e.g. Jeffrey R. Brackett’s *Supervision and Education in Charity* (1904).

Also, the hierarchical position of the supervisor (or paid agent) was revealed:

While the ‘paid agent’ acted as supervisor to the volunteer visitor, the paid agent ‘supervisor’ was himself supervised by the district committee, which had ultimate authority for case decisions... The paid agent supervisor was then in a middle-management position, as is true of supervisors today – supervising the direct service worker but themselves under the authority of the agency administrators. (Kadushin 1992: 6)

It is this hierarchical and managerial idea of supervision that tends to permeate much of the literature in social work.

**Kadushin’s model of supervision**

It is at this point that Alfred Kadushin’s discussion of supervision in social work becomes helpful. He goes back to earlier commentators such as John Dawson (1926) who stated the functions of supervision in the following terms:

*Administrative* – the promotion and maintenance of good standards of work, co-ordination of practice with policies of administration, the assurance of an efficient and smooth-running office;

*Educational* – the educational development of each individual worker on the staff in a manner calculated to evoke her fully to realize her possibilities of usefulness; and
Supportive – the maintenance of harmonious working relationships, the cultivation of esprit de corps. [This is Kadushin’s (1992) rendering of Dawson 1926: 293].

It is a short step to translate these concerns into the current language of the ‘learning organization’. As Salaman (1995: 63) argues, managers must have a concern for both performance and learning.

[T]he essentially managerial aspects of managers’ work is their responsibility for monitoring and improving the work of others; their managerial effectiveness is determined by their capacity to improve the work of others. If managers are not able to make this contribution, then what value are they adding? The only ultimate justification of managers’ existence is the improvement of the work of their subordinates. If managers fail in this way they fail as managers.

In this way managers are expected to develop relationships and environments that enable people to work together and respond to change. Such ‘joint performance’ involves having common goals, common values, the right structures, and continuing training and development (Drucker 1988: 75).

I want to concentrate on how managers approach supervision – later I will suggest that the threefold education/administration/support model also works for ‘non-managerial’ supervision. In our experience of management some of us will have found that all three elements were present – and were acknowledged by the parties involved. As managers we may well express a concern for the well being of those we are responsible for; we may also attend to gaining clarity around the tasks to be achieved (and how they are to be undertaken). In addition, we may have a care for staff development. We may well explore particular incidents and situations and see how they could be handled in different ways.

There may also be situations where these elements are not all present. For example, we may have slipped into a strong task orientation with a particular worker. Or, and this is quite common, we may focus rather too strongly on the support side. In voluntary and not-for-profit organizations it is not uncommon to find that staff require a good deal of ‘working with’!

I find it helpful to think of the three elements as inter linked (or as overlapping). They flow one into another. If we are to remove one element than the process becomes potentially less satisfying to both the immediate parties – and less
effective. It is easy to simply identify managerial supervision with administrative supervision.

**Administration**

Kadushin tightens up on Dawson’s formulation and presents his understanding of the three elements in terms of the primary problem and the primary goal. In **administrative supervision** the primary problem is concerned with the correct, effective and appropriate implementation of agency policies and procedures. The primary goal is to ensure adherence to policy and procedure (Kadushin 1992: 20). The supervisor has been given authority by the agency to oversee the work of the supervisee. This carries the responsibility:

... both to ensure that agency policy is implemented – which implies a controlling function – and a parallel responsibility to enable supervisees to work to the best of their ability. (Brown and Bourne 1995: 10)

It also entails a responsibility not to lose touch with the rationale for the agency – ‘to provide a first-class service for people who need it (or in some cases are required to have it, in order that they or others may be protected from harm)’ (op cit.).

**Education**

In **educational supervision** the primary problem for Kadushin (1990: 20) 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 skill. The classic process involved with this task is to encourage reflection on, and exploration of the work. Supervisees may be helped to:

Understand the client better;

Become more aware of their own reactions and responses to the client;

Understand the dynamics of how they and their client are interacting;

Look at how they intervened and the consequences of their interventions;
Explore other ways of working with this an other similar client situations (Hawkins and Shohet 1989: 42)

Support

In **supportive supervision** the primary problem is worker morale and job satisfaction. The primary goal is to improve morale and job satisfaction (Kadushin 1992: 20). Workers are seen as facing a variety of job-related stresses which, unless they have help to deal with them, could seriously affect their work and lead to a less than satisfactory service to clients. For the worker there is ultimately the problem of ‘burnout’.

Kadushin argues that the other two forms of supervision focus on instrumental needs, whereas supportive supervision is concerned with expressive needs (ibid.: 292).

The supervisor seeks to prevent the development of potentially stressful situations, removes the worker from stress, reduces stress impinging on the worker, and helps 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, provides opportunities for independent functioning and for probable success in task achievement. (Kadushin 1992: 292)

Some issues

This way of representing the functions of supervision does leave me with a number of questions.

First, the way these functions are depicted tends towards seeing supervisees in deficit. They are lacking in certain ways – and it is the job of the supervisor to help them put things right. **The problem is that supervisors can easily slip into acting on, or upon behalf of, supervisees.** Kadushin is primarily concerned with organizational or managerial supervision. Such supervisor-managers have responsibility to the organization or agency for the actions of their staff and so such a deficit orientation may not be surprising. However, there will be a number of us who would argue for a different approach to management – one that that stresses conversation and a concern for fostering an environment in which workers can take responsibility for their own actions. I do not think that this criticism undermines the shape of the model, i.e. the splitting into administrative,
educative and supportive functions, but it does remind us to take great care when approaching it.

Second, I am always a bit wary of fuzzy notions such as ‘support’. At one level I could argue that having a concern for the management and development of the worker (i.e. looking to administrative and educational supervision) is support in itself. I suppose this is where the various functions could be seen as overlapping or feeding into each other. On the other hand, separating out ‘support’ does have the virtue of making explicit the need to have a concern for the emotions of supervisees. I guess that it is in this area that the real danger of slippage into a counselling framework appears. We make the main focus the person of the supervisee rather than the work. By incorporating support into the model we are at least able to frame the concern for the person of the supervisee within the larger concern for the service to the client.

Third, there is always the question of what may have been left out from the model. Approaching it from a managerial perspective, especially where you are concerned with the operation of teams, there might be the temptation to add in mediation as a function (Richards et al 1990 in Brown and Bourne 1995: 9). Then there may be issues around the naming of the separate functions. For example, is it helpful to separate administration from management, would management be a better overall title and so on?

Fourth, there is the question of how tied this model is to managerial supervision. Proctor (1987) uses the same basic split but uses different terms – formative (education), normative (administration) and restorative (support). This has the virtue of lifting the administrative category out of line-management and thus, allowing the model to be approached from a ‘non-managerial’ standpoint. We will return to this later.

Even given these questions, the Kadushin framework remains helpful. It has found a consistent echo in the social work field, and in the English language literature of supervision. Perhaps the main reason for this is that by naming the categories in this way Kadushin and others are able to highlight a number of key issues and tensions around the performance of supervision.

**Putting the functions together**

Having mapped out Kadushin’s model it is now possible to look at some of the different foci that can be attributed to supervision. For example, Hawkins and
Shohet (1989) list 10 different foci and then categorize them in relation to Kadushin’s elements.

**The primary foci of supervision (after Hawkins and Shohet 1989; 2007)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>To provide a regular space for the supervisees to reflect upon the content and process of their work</td>
<td>Educational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>To develop understanding and skills within the work</td>
<td>Educational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>To receive information and another perspective concerning one’s work</td>
<td>Educational/Supportive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>To receive both content and process feedback</td>
<td>Educational/Supportive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>To be validated and supported both as a person and as a worker</td>
<td>Supportive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>To ensure that as a person and as a worker one is not left to carry unnecessarily difficulties, problems and projections alone</td>
<td>Supportive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>To have space to explore and express personal distress, restimulation, transference or counter-transference that may be brought up by the work</td>
<td>Administrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>To plan and utilize their personal and professional resources better</td>
<td>Administrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>To be pro-active rather than re-active</td>
<td>Administrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>To ensure quality of work</td>
<td>Administrative/Supportive</td>
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Hawkins and Shohet (1989: 43) suggest that foci one and two could be seen as educational; foci three and four as educational/supportive; foci five and six as supportive; foci seven to nine as administrative/supportive and ten as administrative. I know that when I attempted to put categories against the foci – I ended up with some differences. For example, I could argue that foci 8 can be approached as an educative element.

I know some people will have problems with the language and the basic conceptual position that these writers have taken up. For example, to what extent can a supervisor/manager ensure that things happen when they are working in conjunction with others? They can work for conditions that will foster good quality work – but they then have to leave matters to their team members.
‘Non-managerial’, ‘consultative’ or ‘professional’ supervision

At this point I want to return to the idea of ‘non-managerial supervision – sometimes described as consultant (e.g. Brown 1984) or professional supervision in the literature. The most common distinction I hear made is that the manager’s first point of reference has to be the interest of the organization or agency (it is on their authority that she or he is acting), while the non-managerial supervisor looks to the development of the worker. Sometimes this is reduced to the difference between administrative and educational supervision. That is to say, one version argues that managers should not be concerned with educational supervision; and consultant supervisors should only focus on education and support. There is some truth in portraying the primary responsibilities in this way – but it would be very misleading to leave it there. As we have seen, Kadushin argues that management supervision involves all three categories. I want to suggest that both ‘managerial’ and ‘non-managerial’ supervisors share larger responsibilities – to the client group and to other professionals; and that both look to the development of the worker.

Supervision and the emergence of psychoanalysis and counselling

Some of the confusion around supposed differences arises from the roots of consultant, non-managerial or professional supervision. Its development has, arguably, owed much to the emergence of psychoanalysis and counselling. In the case of the former, practice, supervision, teaching and personal analysis have formed the central elements of training since the 1920s. If we consider current approaches to training social workers, teachers or informal and community educators, then we can see similar elements. For example, with regard to this programme there are various ‘teaching’ moments (perhaps most obviously seen in the form of lectures, study materials, seminars and study groups); self-assessment (as against self-analysis), practice (whether in the form of our day-to-day work, any placements we undertake, and our engagement with other students) and supervision.

Student or trainee supervision can be contrasted with practitioner supervision. The latter is addressed to established workers. Some writers, such as Page and Wosket (1994: 2), claim that there are many differences between the focus in supervision of students or trainees, and that of established practitioners. The former are more likely to be concerned with issues of technique, boundary, understanding the material clients’ bring, and dealing with personal feelings of anxiety. The experienced practitioner is more likely to be concerned with teasing out relationship dynamics, choosing intervention options and perhaps dealing with feelings of frustration and boredom towards clients’ (op cit.). This is
something that you may like to think about. My own experience of supervision is that the degree of difference in these respects can easily be overstated. Experienced practitioners may have a greater repertoire of experiences and models to draw upon, and may have grown jaded. But the supervisor who fails to attend to the extent to which experienced practitioners face new situations and different clients, can overlook the chance of practitioners feeling like novices again. Similarly, those labelled as student workers may well be experiencing frustration and boredom toward their clients!

However, the demand for ‘practitioner supervision’ in counselling can be seen as a key factor in the spread of non-managerial or consultant supervision. By the early 1950s, with the ‘coming of age’ of the profession, there was a substantial growth in the proportion of practitioners with significant experience, many of whom valued, ‘having a fellow practitioner to act in a consultative capacity’ (Page and Wosket 1994: 2). This linking of consultant supervision with the development of counselling is significant. The form that supervision takes may well mirror or adopt ways of working from the host profession. Thus, a counsellor supervisor may draw heavily on the theory and practice of a counselling model and apply this to supervision.

A psycho-dynamic supervisor would interpret the material being presented and use an awareness of the relationship dynamics between himself and the counsellor in supervision as a means of supervising. A client-centred supervisor would be concerned to communicate the core conditions of acceptance, respect and genuiness to her supervisee. (Page and Wosket 1994: 4)

We now can begin to appreciate why many of the arguments and questions around supervision can become confusing. Contrasts between managerial and consultant supervision, for example, inevitably focus on the managerial element. Yet those involved may well be drawing on very different models and sets of understandings. The debate may be between a psycho-dynamic and a task orientation!

This drawing upon from psycho-dynamic and counselling can also add to the common slippage from supervision into therapy or ‘working with’. We have already noted problems around this area with regard to the management of staff – and it applies with great force in consultant supervision.

The first thing to say here is that it may well be appropriate for us as supervisors to change the focus of the session from ‘supervision’ to ‘counselling’. The
situation may demand it – and we have what may be described as a ‘counselling interlude’. However, there are two particular dangers: we may slip into a different framework without being aware of it; and, further, even where the shift is conscious, it may not be appropriate. That is to say we should have held our boundaries as supervisors.

There can also be confusion between shifting our frame of reference and drawing upon insights from a particular field. It may be that to properly approach a question that has arisen in workers’ practice we need to attend to their emotional and psychological lives. Here we may draw upon, for example, psycho-dynamic insights, to work with supervisees to enhance the quality of their interactions with clients. This does not entail moving beyond a supervisor’s frame of reference. Our focus remains on the enhancement of practice. However, where our primary concern is no longer the work, but the well-being of the supervisee, this is a different situation. When the worker becomes the primary focus (rather than the work), I think there is a significant shift – we move into the realm of counselling or ‘working with’ proper. We should not make the mistake of describing this as supervision.

Responsibilities to clients, other professionals and the community

This last discussion highlights something fundamental about supervision. While the manager may have in mind the needs of the agency; and the practice teacher or college supervisor the needs of the student-worker, their fundamental concern in supervision lies with the quality of service offered by the supervisee to their clients. In other words, supervision focuses on the work of the practitioner.

**Clients at the centre.** It is easy to fall into the trap of viewing changes in the individual supervisee as the central goal of the process. It is not difficult to understand how this happens. As we have seen, in supervision we draw on understandings and ways of working that we have developed in other settings. The most obvious of these are ‘counselling’ and other one-to-one relationships. Yet, as Kadushin (1992: 23) puts it in relation to managerial supervision, ‘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’. The same applies to consultant or non-managerial supervision:

The responsibility of the supervisor to protect the interests of the client emerges as a central component of trainee supervision. Attention to client welfare is equally important... in practitioner supervision. (Page and Wosket 1994: 9).
The British Association of Counselling makes the point unambiguously: ‘The primary purpose of supervision is to protect the best interests of the client’ (BAC 1987, quoted by Hawkins and Shohet 1987: 41). Change in supervisees is fostered for a purpose – the enhancement of the service they provide for their clients. However, in considering this we also have to take into account what may be in the interests of the community as a whole.

**Accountability to the wider community.** In the well known phrase of C. Wright Mills – there are considerable dangers in seeing private troubles merely as troubles – and not as public issues (and vice versa). There is always the danger that we ‘slip past structure to focus on isolated situations..., a tendency for problems to be considered as the problems of individuals’ (Mills 1943: 534). As practitioners and supervisors we have to balance the needs and wishes of the individual with considerations of those of others in the community. There will be times when what may be identified as being in the interest of the client seriously affects the rights and lives of others. The tensions can be quickly seen if we examine the four basic or first order principles identified by Sarah Banks (1995: 25 – 46) as central to social work (and, indeed, informal and community education):

1. Respect for and promotion of individuals’ rights to self determination.

2. Promotion of welfare or well-being

3. Equality

4. Distributive justice.

As supervisors we may have to remind supervisees of the requirement to consider the extent to which a course of action they are pursuing leads to human flourishing, promotes equality or whether they are ‘distributing public resources (whether they be counselling, care or money) according to certain criteria based variously on rights, dessert and need’ (Banks 1995: 44)? In a similar fashion we have to reflect on our actions as supervisors.

**Being part of a community of practice.** There are likely to be endless arguments about considerations such as these – especially when they are thought about in relation to specific cases and situations. We may have our individual ideas, but as members of a community of practice we need also to consider the views of others. That is to say we need to appeal to collective wisdom. Within
professional groupings a key port of call here is a code of ethics (see Banks 1995: 67 – 93).

I want to suggest here that while managerial supervisors, as members of the profession or community of practice, have a duty to consider the appropriate standards and codes, the main way that they do this is via the policies and practices of the agency. On the other hand, while non-managerial or consultant supervisors may be contracted by the supervisee (or the College in the case of student workers), their authority comes from their membership of the community of practice [2]. Their concern for the service offered to clients is fed through a set of shared understandings concerning what constitutes ‘good practice’. In other words, at certain points in the supervision process they may be required to represent that constitutes acceptable behaviour or good practice.

In Figure 3 I have tried to bring out the position with regard to professional and managerial supervision. Professional supervisors act on behalf of the community of practice of which they are members. They should have a concern with the quality of service offered and the needs of the wider community. This links back to the way that Proctor (1987) redefined Kadushin’s administrative category as ‘normative’. If we were to adjust Kadushin’s (1992: 20) definition it would read something like the following:

The primary problem in administrative supervision is concerned with the quality of the supervisee’s practice in respect of professional standard and ethics. The primary goal is to ensure adherence to these standards.

In other words, so called ‘non-managerial’ supervisors have an administrative responsibility. Where workers consistently fail to live up to these standards or present a danger to clients they have a responsibility to act. This could take the form of them discouraging the supervisee from practice, or of reporting matters to the appropriate professional body. Managerial supervisors also look to professional concerns and to the interests of clients and the wider community, but they do so through the framework of agency policies and procedures.

A question of power

We can see in all this that there are questions concerning power relationships within supervision. There are issues arising from position in agency hierarchies; and the extent to which dynamics around gender, ‘race’, age and class (for example) intersect with the roles of supervisor and supervisee (see, for example,

First, because one person may be seen as more powerful (perhaps in the sense that they occupy a particular position, or are experts in their field) this should not encourage us to fall into the trap of seeing the other party as powerless. For example, Erving Goffman has provided us with numerous examples of how the performance of one party in an encounter depends on getting the right sorts of cues and responses from other participants. When these are denied or subverted in some way then the performance becomes problematic. Thus managers, for example, require information from their subordinates in order to function. The subordinate, by managing the flow and character of information is in a position to affect how a manager sees an issue or situation.

Second, it is not possible to eliminate power differentials in supervision. Some writers have argued strongly for more dialogical approaches to supervision in order to ‘flatten’ unequal relations and to allow interaction across ‘difference’ (e.g. Waite 1995). Yet even in such forms there are power relationships – e.g. the supervisor is responsible to the community of practice. However, this need not be a one-way relationship. Here it is useful to think of supervisees also as members of the professional community (Waite 1995: 137 – 141). They may already be ‘full’ members (recognized and qualified) or apprentices. As such supervisors can be held accountable for the quality of the service they provide; and supervisees for their practice with clients. Both have a responsibility to participate appropriately in the professional community of which they are a part.

Third, and linked to the above, we need to bear in mind questions of authority. Power is often discussed alongside questions of authority. When we talk of the authority of the supervisor, for example, what we can mean is that the supervisor has some sort of right or entitlement to act in relation to the supervisee. Managers occupy a certain position in the agency and with this is associated the ability to direct the labours of their staff. There are various formal and informal ‘rules’ within which this may take place. Some activities may be seen as legitimate, others as not [3]. The same applies to supervisors undertaking their work to meet the requirements of professional training programmes. To operate, the actions of supervisors must be seen as legitimate – by the supervisee and by significant others. Thus, in certain situations supervisors may be in a position to effectively impose their requirements on supervisees (for example, around the way in which someone records). This they may do through the threat of sanctions such as a ‘bad’ assessment, or the allocation of unrewarding work. However, such actions may not be viewed as legitimate by the supervisee or other interested parties. In other words, their authority is questioned.
The college or training programme supervisor

At this point it may be useful to reflect more fully on the role of the supervisor within professional training programmes such as those involved with informal and community education.

For the professional or non-managerial supervisor within a training programme the lines of their authority are fairly clear. They act on behalf of the profession or community of practice. Students within programmes are having to develop, and provide evidence concerning, their work so that they may be recognized as qualified to join the professional community. Supervisors agree to provide a certain number of sessions and an assessment of supervisees’ abilities for the training provider. The training provider, in turn, is accredited act for the profession by a relevant professional body (in the case of the College’s informal and community education programmes this is CeVe Scotland and the English National Youth Agency).

A supervisor may also hold some form of line-managerial responsibility for the student-worker. In their supervision of the student-worker they will, thus, want to represent the interests of the agency and safeguard the quality of service offered to the agency’s clientele. At the same time their involvement within the training programme highlights their responsibility to the community of practice or profession. Perhaps the best way of representing this is as a dual line of authority – to the profession and to the agency.

Training programmes are one of the few areas within informal and community education in Britain and Ireland where there is something approaching a formal mechanism linking supervision and the community of practice. We do not have full professional associations, nor codes of ethics. However, with the development of the accreditation of fieldwork supervisors and of training programmes – especially in Scotland – we have the beginnings of a technical framework (CeVe 1995).

Mentoring and clinical supervision

Talk of training brings me round to some variations or additions to the supervisors’ role. In some settings, the supervisor is asked to become more of a practice teacher or mentor. Their task is not just to enable the supervisee to reflect on practice and to develop new understandings and ways of working, but also to teach in a more formal sense. Mentors and practice teachers may well need to instruct a student-worker on how to proceed in a particular situation; or
to provide theoretical insights. This comes closer to the apprentice-master/mistress relationship with which we began this discussion. Mentors are skilled performers – they can be observed, consulted and their actions copied.

For my own part I know that I am apt to slip into a ‘telling’ mode more often than I ought within a supervision framework – so I have to attend to this area. The line I try to apply in this area runs something like the following:

1. Supervision is a space for the supervisee to explore their practice, to build theory, attend to feelings and values, and to examine how they may act.

2. The supervisor should only switch into a more instructional mode where they are reasonably certain that the supervision process will be enhanced by their doing so.

3. Such ‘instructional interludes’ should remain interludes i.e. they should as far as is possible be brief and oriented to resuming exploration.

I suppose the key idea underlying this is that we should not act to undermine supervisees’ ability and commitment to take responsibility for exploring their practice. All this is not to say that the supervisor, outside the supervision session, should not also have an instructional role. However, where they do so there is always the danger that expectations in one setting (the instructional) may be carried across into another (supervision). Here supervisors will have to make clear the difference between the two forms – and mark the boundary in some way e.g. by sitting in a different way, or waiting for the supervisee to begin the session.

Clinical supervision

Instruction and supervision can get confused is in the arena of educational supervision. This form of supervision is sometimes described as ‘clinical’. This way of describing or approaching supervision derives from medical experience. It has been popularized in teacher training – especially in North America. As Cogan (1973: 8) one of the pioneers of the approach in education has commented, the use of the term ‘clinical’ has involved some resistance, but what he particularly wanted to highlight was use of direct observation in the approach. Apprentice surgeons learn their trade by first observing the skilled practitioner at work; then by undertaking surgery under close surveillance. In this way they begin to develop their ‘professional artistry’ (Schön 1983; 1987).
A working definition of clinical supervision has been given by Goldhammer et al (1993: 4) in what has become pretty much the set text on the field:

Clinical supervision is that aspect of instructional supervision which draws upon data from direct firsthand observation of actual teaching, or other professional events, and involves face-to-face and other associated interactions between the observer(s) and the person(s) observed in the course of analyzing the observed professional behaviours and activities and seeking to define and/or develop next steps toward improved performance.

I think it is helpful to think of clinical supervision as a subset of educational supervision rather than confusing the two. Some approaches to supervision benefit directly from the fact that the supervisor has not observed practice. This is because supervisees have to articulate what happened – and what they were thinking and feeling. It is much easier for us as supervisors to focus on what was happening for the practitioner if we are not encumbered by our own direct memories of the encounter or incident.

On the other hand, directly observed practice also has its benefits. As we have seen it allows for feedback and the facility for the supervisor to introduce other material from the situation. Managerial supervisors will often engage in this form of activity on a day-to-day basis

**Conclusion**

In this discussion particular questions have been highlighted. Some of the main points developed are as follows:

1. The central focus of supervision is the quality of practice offered by the supervisee to clients.

2. Supervision can be seen as having three aspects: administration (normative); education (formative) and support (restorative).

3. Supervisors’ authority is derived from their positions in agencies and/or the appropriate community of practice (profession).

4. There are particular issues arising from the hierarchical position of supervisors.
5. In some forms of supervision direct observation of practice is a major obstacle to the exploration of practice; in others an aid.

I am conscious that I have left a number of important questions unasked or unanswered. The various issues discussed here have particular implications for what areas legitimately may be discussed within supervision; what supervisors themselves may put on the agenda, and so on.

Notes

[1] Actually Hawkins and Shohet use the term ‘managerial’ to describe the administrative category in Kadushin’s scheme.

[2] This is why in this item I like to use the term professional supervision rather than consultant or non-managerial supervision.

[3] The classic statement of this position was made by Max Weber. he described such authority as ‘rational-legal’ (in contrast to traditional and charismatic forms of authority). See Gerth and Mills (1948) pp. 245-252.