

Reading Nine

Morrison, T. (2005). Contracts and structures for individual supervision. *Staff supervision in social care: Making a real difference for staff and service users* (pp. 113-147). Brighton, Pavilion Publishing.



Chapter 4 **Contracts and Structures for Individual Supervision**

This chapter:

- discusses the benefits of written supervision contracts
- describes a four-stage contracting process
- presents a specimen contract
- discusses how to engage reluctant staff in supervision
- identifies rights and responsibilities for supervisors and supervisees
- considers the supervision of specialists
- considers the supervision of volunteers
- presents structures for managing supervision in both formal and ad hoc settings.

Introduction

In previous chapters the impact of organisational context, agency culture and prior experiences was explored. A core theme that emerged was the need to provide a positive environment to enable staff to engage fully in the task and to keep the needs of service users to the forefront. It is the contention of this book that effective supervision is essential in achieving this aim. It follows, therefore, that the supervisory relationship itself must be established on a clear and secure footing. This chapter argues that a clear supervision contract is an essential prerequisite, and presents a four-stage contracting model. The latter parts of the chapter present different approaches to structuring supervision depending on context and agenda. Those who are interested in group supervision contracts should see **Chapter 7**. The chapter starts by outlining the nature of a good contract.

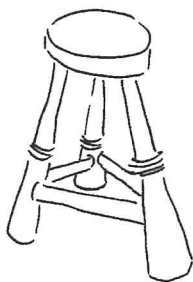
Note

The use of the word 'agreement' may be preferred by some readers to 'contract'. As long as there is equal clarity about the process and the outcome, the choice of word is a matter of individual or agency preference.

Negotiating an effective supervision contract

Effective contracts

Effective contracts have three elements:



- 1 **Administrative:** frequency, location, recording etc
- 2 **Professional:** purposes, focus, principles, accountabilities
- 3 **Psychological:** motivation, commitment, ownership, investment

Like a three-legged stool, all three elements need to be in place if the process is to work, although the nature and level of each element may change over time. Nonetheless, an administrative and professional agreement for supervision that lacks any real psychological investment will be superficial at best and conflictual at worst.

Importance of written agreements

Whilst some may argue that written supervision agreements represent an unnecessary formalisation of the supervisory process, there are powerful counter-arguments in support of such an approach.

- 1 The tasks and potential consequences of supervision require that there is a written contract to **reflect the seriousness of the activity**. The agency's supervision policy should specify this as a requirement.
- 2 Negotiating and recording a supervisory contract between two parties, each of whom have different levels of power and authority, represents a **positive modelling of partnership** behaviour.
- 3 A written contract helps to ensure that the supervisee is equally aware of his/her **responsibilities and roles in supervision**. Supervisees should not be passive receptacles waiting to be 'filled'.
- 4 The majority of difficulties in the supervision relationship have their roots in a lack of **clarity about authority and accountability**. Verbal understandings become distorted and misremembered when anxiety, disagreement, conflict or issues of poor performance arise. Such misunderstandings may then inhibit addressing such issues.
- 5 A written contract, followed by regular recording of supervision, provides the **basis for reviewing and developing the supervisory relationship**. It also validates the time and effort both spend on this key activity, and can be used as evidence (for instance, in portfolios) of the supervisee's professional development.
- 6 Written contracts act as an important **benchmark** against which supervision can be audited by the agency. This protects the interests and rights of supervisees so as to ensure that their entitlement to supervision is being delivered.

- 7 Written contracts have been the **basis for practice teaching and student placement arrangements**. There is no logical reason why, once supervisees bear the full weight of employee responsibility, they should be supervised within a looser and potentially less focused framework.
- 8 The primary duty of supervision is to **promote the interests of the service user**. The agency should be able to demonstrate to all service users, via the existence of written contracts, that staff are supervised.
- 9 The expansion of service providers, particularly in the private sector, suggests that where the agency is acting as a commissioner of services it needs to ensure that the standard of supervision afforded to staff by the provider is of appropriate **quality**. In order to set and monitor that standard in the service specification, written supervisory contracts should be required based on the commissioning agency's own policy framework.
- 10 Finally, the requirements of professional bodies, including the General Social Care Council (GSCC), may well place requirements on staff to **demonstrate continuing development** in order to update registration. Evidence of using supervision is an important contribution to *this*. Accredited probation service programmes require that those delivering the programme are regularly reassessed in order to maintain and widen their skills.

Negotiating a written supervisory contract

The value of a written supervision contract lies less in the paperwork than in the process by which it has been established. The following discussion will outline a four-stage framework for negotiating such an agreement:



1 Mandate

Both supervisor and supervisee need to know from the outset what the mandate for supervision is; on what authority is supervision based? In addition to the professional and personal authority of the supervisor, supervision must be firmly rooted in the agency's policy and standards for supervision. This was emphasised in **Chapter 1**. Without this organisational mandate the authority of the supervisor is overly dependent on the person rather than the role of supervisor. This will render the supervisor particularly vulnerable if the supervisee is resistant to engaging in supervision, or where there is concern about the performance of the worker. Without a clear supervision policy, the supervisor's authority may be challenged or issues may become personalised, for example:

'My previous supervisor never commented on the quality of my reports, what right have you got to make me re-write this report?'

or

'As an experienced worker, I am happy to consult you if I need to, but I don't see myself in need of supervision.'

As supervision is a primary authority relationship for the worker, a clear agency policy is the basis for clarifying which are the non-negotiable and negotiable issues, and how these are to be handled within supervision.

Key issues to discuss at the mandate stage are:

- What is non-negotiable?
- What is negotiable?
- Who has what rights to expect what from whom in supervision?
- What responsibilities does each have in supervision?
- What are the boundaries around, and limits to, confidentiality?

- What is the difference between supervision and consultation?
- What records are to be maintained in supervision, who keeps them and who can see them for what purposes?

2 Engagement



Whilst a clear mandate for supervision is critical, this does not guarantee purposeful engagement by either or both parties in supervision. The mandate deals with the administrative and professional elements of the contract. There is therefore a need to establish a psychological mandate, or engagement. Engagement exists where there is a shared perception of, and commitment to, supervision, based on clarity about agreed roles, responsibilities, needs and expectations. Without engagement, trust will be constrained or withheld, and without trust, supervision may at best be limited, and at worst, potentially destructive. Both parties may be physically present, but psychologically absent. Anxiety will be uncontained and will undermine the security of the setting.

Engagement does not occur overnight. It requires not just time, but also the development of mutual understanding. This cannot be left to chance to happen, as this can result in partial understanding or misunderstanding. The process of building mutual understanding can be powerfully enhanced by specific attention to engagement issues. This helps to clarify for both parties where each is coming from professionally, and what influences each person's approach, both to practice and supervision. This is a basis for an informed and collaborative supervision relationship.



Key areas to explore at the engagement stage include:

- previous supervisory experiences, and their effects on the way each perceives and approaches supervision
- their understanding about supervision
- how the supervisee is best motivated and managed in the light of his/her previous experiences of supervision or management
- expectations around the handling of authority and conflict within supervision, particularly, though not exclusively, in relation to differences of gender and race within the supervisory relationship
- the learning styles of the supervisee, and the degree to which this does, or does not match the learning style of the supervisor (see **Chapter 3**)
- the beliefs each brings about the nature, purpose and rationale of the work; also beliefs each brings about development and change
- values and attitudes around the significance of difference and inequalities resulting from race, gender, class, sexuality, disability etc
- the approach each brings to the work, especially in terms of the use of authority with users.

It will be noted that this list includes areas for both supervisor and supervisee to explore. This is because building the supervisory relationship is not simply about the supervisor understanding the supervisee, but also about the supervisee understanding the supervisor. **Supervision is a collaborative process.**

For instance, if the supervisee brings a strongly interventionist approach to their practice, whilst the supervisor is strongly anti-interventionist, this needs to be acknowledged early on and its implications openly discussed if they are to work together. If these areas are left unaddressed at the outset, they are likely to undermine mutual confidence at a later stage. As an example, a new worker complained that her manager simply refused to follow any of the department's procedures with regards to calling case conferences because of his strongly anti-interventionist and laissez-faire beliefs. The worker was left feeling confused and very vulnerable.



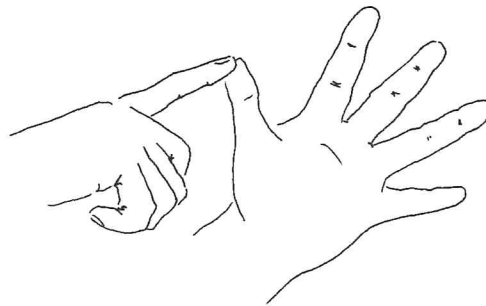
3 Acknowledging ambivalence

No matter how committed the supervisee is to supervision and to the exploration of practice, there will always be unforeseen blocks. Often these are triggered by strong emotional responses to situations such as:

- personal impact of cases causing sadness, despair, confusion or fear
- over-identification with certain users or situations
- moral disgust, repulsion or intolerance at the user's situation or behaviour
- frustration or demoralisation at the lack of time or resources
- mismatch between the positive expectations about the job and the realities of it
- resonance of current supervisory experiences with previous negative experiences – *'Here I go again'*.

In addition to these triggers, Claxton (1988) states that adults are ambivalent about learning and development because they carry **four irrational beliefs** about themselves. These beliefs are particularly strong amongst the helping professions, and amplified by 'macho' organisational cultures.

- I must be competent.
- I must be in control.
- I must be consistent.
- I must be comfortable.



In entering into a supervisory relationship, both parties have to take the risk, especially the supervisee, that s/he may encounter areas of incompetence, inconsistency, discomfort or loss of control. These may be hitherto unknown aspects of the worker's experience or located at a level below their conscious awareness. If these can be brought to supervision and explored, they offer some of the best developmental opportunities. The worker's own ambivalence – *'I should be able to*

cope with this' – may also be reflective of processes going on at other levels within the team or agency, or with other agencies.

Thus there are real benefits to exploring issues around ambivalence, as this can lead to a much wider and more systemic level of analysis and strategy in response to a particular situation. However, there can sometimes be considerable apprehension about exploring such issues, for fear that the supervisee will be perceived as not coping, or even incompetent. Again, such fears are often influenced by differences of gender or race between supervisor and supervisee.

In order to make this aspect of the worker's experience available for supervision, it first needs to be openly acknowledged and validated by the supervisor as normative, not pathological.

Secondly, the supervisor can acknowledge and validate the emotional demands of the work. In other words, addressing the issues of ambivalence is giving clear permission for the emotional domain, and the role that exploring feelings has in assisting the problem-solving process.

Thirdly, the supervisor can recognise how – due to the wider organisational culture where any sign of distress may be regarded as weakness – the worker may be hesitant about bringing such aspects to supervision. The following examples demonstrate ways in which the supervisor could address these themes.

Example 1 Legitimising and utilising feelings

Supervisor:

'Some of the work we do generates strong emotional and attitudinal responses in all of us. The triggers vary with each of us, as does the way that we deal with such situations, and especially how they surface in supervision. In order for me to know how to respond most helpfully, could you say something about what happens when you feel confused, distressed, scared, or angry with your users? What would I notice as a supervisor that would alert me to this? What would you like from me in such situations?'

Example 2 Anticipating ambivalence to supervision

Supervisor:

'From time to time everyone feels bored, distracted, or dissatisfied with supervision. What signals would indicate that for you? How do you think we should address that?'

Example 3 Addressing potentially conflictual areas in supervision

Supervisor:

'What might be the more difficult aspects of supervision? To what extent might these be influenced by the fact that I am female/black and you are male/white [etc]. To what extent might these be influenced by your previous experiences of supervision? How best could we address such areas?'

Engaging reluctant or resistant staff in supervision

For a variety of individual and organisational reasons, however carefully the supervisor works to establish supervision contracts, there remains a small minority of staff who are clearly resistant to engaging, or whose response is at the minimal level of compliance (*'If you say so.'*). It may be that the origins of this can be elicited using the supervision history approach described in **Chapter 3**.

Some staff may resist being involved in such an exercise, however. It may be that they have had negative experiences of supervision and so are very cautious about such an exercise. It is possible that they have become very autonomous, successfully eluding managerial oversight for some time and have used this position to create a powerful niche in which they can define their own role. **Chapter 6** examines these 'blocked scenarios' in more detail. This may, *in extremis*, be reflected in a compromised team culture as described on pages 76–79, where the team has become disengaged from the agency. In such situations, engaging staff in supervision becomes part of a wider need to re-engage the team as a whole in their proper roles and accountabilities.

For now, however, the following pointers are highlighted for consideration at the contracting stage where staff appear particularly reluctant.

- The supervisor needs to acknowledge the skills the worker has brought and the contribution the worker has made to the agency.
- The supervisor needs to consider how the power differential between supervisor and supervisee might be seen, especially where there are differences of, for example, gender or race.
- The supervisor needs to discuss and clarify with the worker their perception of roles and accountability. This may involve acknowledging the lack of managerial oversight in the past, but establishing that this will be in place from now on.
- The supervisor needs to make clear and share the requirements for all staff to engage purposefully in supervision, according to the agency policy (not just to 'be supervised'). This involves stating that some elements of supervision are non-negotiable, and sharing the policy with staff.
- The supervisor needs to explore the worker's perceptions of supervision and seek to clarify what is agreed, unclear or disputed. The task checklists on pages 41–46 may be a useful tool.
- The supervisor needs to be aware, of and deal with, their own feelings of frustration and anger, in order to remain professional in their dealings with the worker and to avoid personalising the issue.

4 Written supervision contract



A structured approach to establishing a supervisory contract will motivate both parties to be proactive and purposeful in making their expectations of supervision a reality. Thus far, the emphasis has been on the need for dialogue, negotiation and clarification of mutual responsibilities and expectations, all of which facilitate the necessary development of trust and clarity. However, these discussions need to be translated into specific written agreements,

for the reasons outlined above. In doing so, it may be useful to distinguish between a basic contract and a more advanced contract, the latter requiring greater knowledge of the worker and his/her work, gained over time.

If your agency has a good policy on supervision, there may be an agency pro forma for such contracts so that there is a consistent format for all staff. Alternatively, you may have developed one yourself. The following is an example of just one type of supervision contract, which you may wish to modify according to your context. Whatever format you use, it is essential that it:

- is arrived at through negotiation
- addresses issues and how they will be managed
- is co-signed and dated
- is copied for both supervisor and supervisee
- is reviewed at least annually.

A specimen contract for supervision

Between: Team manager: _____

and Team member: _____

Agency expectations:

The agency expects workers to be supervised at _____ intervals as a minimum, for periods of _____, and that the key areas to be addressed are:

- 1 to enable the worker to perform to the standards specified by the agency (see agency documents.....)
- 2 to ensure that the worker is clear about his/her roles and responsibilities
- 3 to ensure accountability for the work undertaken by the worker
- 4 to assist in the worker's professional development
- 5 to be a primary source of support for the worker
- 6 to provide regular and constructive feedback to the worker on their performance
- 7 to review the supervision contract annually.

Arrangements agreed for supervision

Frequency

.....

Length

.....

Location

.....

Recording of supervision

.....

Purpose for which supervisory record may be used

.....
.....

Storage of supervision record

.....
.....

How we will agree the agenda for sessions

.....
.....

Interruptions will only be permitted if...

.....
.....

Content and focus of supervision will be based on:

- agreeing the agenda
- reviewing your work via discussion, reports, observation
- agreeing and monitoring action plans
- development of your skills, knowledge and value base by reflecting on your performance
- identifying your developmental needs, interests, goals and action plans
- providing space for you to reflect more generally on your experience of, and feelings about the work
- reviewing this supervision agreement, including your feedback about the progress of supervision.

Making supervision work: what each agree to contribute

What I want from you as my supervisor:

.....
.....
.....

What I will contribute as the supervisee to make this work:

.....
.....
.....

What I want from you as a supervisee:

.....
.....
.....

What I will contribute as the supervisor to make this work:

.....
.....
.....

Permissions that we have agreed:

(eg: The supervisor does not always have an answer; OK for me as the worker to say I am stuck.)

.....
.....
.....

What we will do if there are difficulties working together:

.....
.....
.....

Signed:

.....

Date:

.....

This agreement to be reviewed at (frequency):

.....

Summary

In this chapter the importance of written contracts has been discussed and a four-step framework for negotiating an individual supervision contract has been presented. These steps cannot guarantee that an effective supervision process will follow, or that there won't be ups and downs in the course of supervision. However, **a well-negotiated contract provides the foundation for a robust, focused and safe process**, within which risks may be taken, innovations attempted, challenges raised and development enhanced. We cannot afford to take supervision for granted. If its benefits are to be achieved, it must be approached with the care and commitment to which all involved are entitled.

Exercise 6 (page 129) provides a format for reviewing with your team the current supervision arrangements and developing written contracts with them.

Preparing supervisees

Establishing effective contracts is much easier if the supervisee understands what supervision is for, and has given some thought as to how best to use the process.

Two resources

Making the Most of Supervision in Health and Social Care: Self Development Manual for Supervisees by Jackie Knapman and Tony Morrison (Pavilion, 1998)

Preparing and Developing Supervisees: Facilitator's Guide by Tony Morrison (Pavilion, 2005)

Don't forget!



Exercise 6 Reviewing supervision agreements

Aim:

- To review with each supervisee how clear you and they are about the purpose, roles, and expectations each of you has about supervision, and to develop a written supervision contract.

Task

- 1 Copy pages 114–128 from this chapter and pages 41–46 from **Chapter 1**, and ask each of your supervisees to read through it. This might be scheduled for a team discussion.
- 2 Make clear to your team your agency's – and your own – views about written contracts so that the mandate for this exercise is clear to them.
- 3 Explain that you plan to review the existing supervision contracts and arrangements you have with all your staff, with a view to arriving at written contracts in all cases. You may want to explain that the detail will vary according to individuals' needs and stages of development.
- 4 Allocate time to discuss with your team the benefits of written contracts and the kinds of items that a written contract should contain. Be clear what is and what is not negotiable. Make reference to agency requirements. Try to arrive at a team consensus on the nature of a specimen contract if the agency does not provide one.
- 5 Then allocate time through individual supervision sessions to review supervision expectations and agreements with each. Recognise that this will take longer with some than others.
- 6 If there is disagreement about either the purposes or the process, clarify:
 - what's agreed
 - what's unclear
 - what's disputed
 - how to take this forward.

Finally, draw up a written contract, preferably using an agency or agreed team format, co-sign and date it, with each party having a copy.



Rights and responsibilities checklist



Because the distinction between rights and responsibilities is, in practice, very fine, they have been combined here. Thus, while some items are more clearly one or the other, most are as much a responsibility as a right. As supervisors reading this list, please consider it in relation to your roles as both supervisor and supervisee. There may be other items you wish to add.

- To accept the mandate to be supervised/accountable
- To negotiate a supervisory contract
- To attend regularly and on time, and to have minimal interruptions
- To have an agenda and to participate actively
- To be open and share information
- To promote anti-oppressive practice and behaviour
- To have permission for one's feelings and to be listened to
- To be active in the pursuit of own development
- To give and accept constructive feedback
- To have an opinion, to disagree, to learn from mistakes and to be unsure or not know
- To have experience and contribution acknowledged
- To reflect, think through and explore options



- How many of those whom you supervise would be clear about these rights and responsibilities?
- Do some of these rights need to be made explicit if supervisory agreements are to be based on informed consent?
- How clear are you with your manager about these issues for you?

Supervising specialists

'Help! What can I offer the specialist in my team – I haven't got half her knowledge!'



Specialists are a valuable and often highly trained resource. Often the specialist will have expertise that the supervisor does not possess. This can make the supervisor anxious and diffident and can lead to the specialist being effectively abandoned in terms of supervision. Equally, some specialists can become resistant to engaging in 'ordinary' supervision. Whilst specialists may have a legitimate need for some specialist consultation, it is important they are properly integrated within the mainstream of supervisory arrangements. If not, their work can become unaccountable and their role increasingly marginalised within the team.

Sarah is a bright and ambitious qualified worker who has undertaken a family therapy course in her own time and now wants to do a post-graduate course. She is very proud of her specialist role but feels that supervisors now lack the expertise to supervise her. She sees herself as only being accountable for only administrative areas such as recording and annual leave rather than her 'clinical practice'. She is not much of a team player and is continually looking for the agency to fund expensive external courses for her to go on.

The following box illustrates a number of ways in which the contribution and role of the specialist might be explored in supervision.

Supervising specialists – 10 useful questions

- 1 Can you explain why/how you got into this area of specialism?
- 2 What are the benefits for users of your specialist knowledge in terms of this team's remit and goals?
- 3 How does your specialist post compare to previous work you have undertaken?
- 4 How does your specialist perspective enlarge/change the way you look at this area of work?
- 5 What do you think the role of the specialist is alongside the rest of the staff? How can it complement other skills in the team?
- 6 What implications does your specialism have for supervision? What can I provide? What might you need from other supervisors/consultants? How do we ensure the different inputs can be integrated?
- 7 What are the underpinning pieces of knowledge, values and research in your area of specialism? Can you give me one article to read that would help me, and the team, understand your work in more detail?
- 8 How can we all most benefit from your role? How could you share your knowledge with the team?
- 9 What do you find most enjoyable/stressful in your role?
- 10 How can we ensure your role does not become an isolated one?

Managerial v clinical supervision v external consultation

In **Chapter 1** we discussed the distinction made by health professionals between managerial and clinical/professional supervision. This can apply to all disciplines. Specialists may require a specific type of supervision from someone with a particular qualification in order to acquire or maintain a professional qualification, for instance, someone who is undertaking a counselling course. However, this cannot act as a

replacement for supervision from the agency. The questions described on the previous page illustrate the important role of the agency supervisor in integrating the specialist's role and knowledge within the wider team.

Secondly, where the need for additional 'supervision' is identified because of the nature of the work being undertaken, the accountability and feedback from that external supervision need to be clarified, perhaps via a simple contract. It may be more appropriate to refer to such arrangements as consultation, coaching or mentoring, rather than external supervision, as managerial responsibility still rests with the agency supervisor.

Supervision of volunteer staff

The following is based on work done by Lisa Markham, project manager of M.A.P Hull, and volunteer support/trainer for Survivors Sheffield.

The volunteer's lament

'I am a committed, honest and sincere person. I deeply believe in what we are doing. We work here, many of us for nothing, others for not much more, because the task is so important, so urgent. Why then, is it so frustrating? Why do I come out feeling angry, bruised, ineffectual?'

– cited in Handy, 1985

Motives for volunteering vary widely. An understanding of the individual motive of volunteers is essential to the exercise of good supervision.

Why do people volunteer?

Some volunteers have a passionate belief in the cause or organisation they join.

Others need relevant experience for professional development.

Some volunteers use volunteer activity to meet personal needs – to care for others, to 'be needed', etc.

Others are driven by ethical or moral imperatives to give something back to the community, either because of their own previous experiences of being helped, or because of their philosophical belief in the value of service.

Volunteers also play different roles in organisations. They may be:

- involved in face-to-face activity with individuals
- members of management or organising committees
- involved in day-to-day activities of a practical nature.



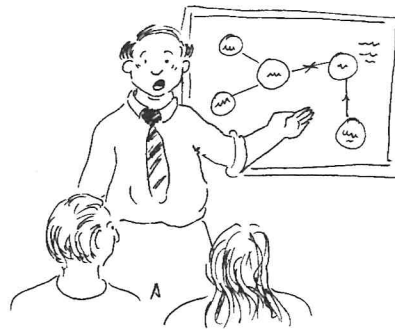
What's different about volunteers?

- Volunteers choose to be involved and can choose to disengage with minimal cost to themselves, other than the psychological 'cost' of giving up and letting go. The opening may need them more than they need the agency.
- Since there is no immediate financial reward for volunteering, volunteers will expect other rewards – status, belonging, affirmation, recognition and so on. Hence the importance of good supervision.
- Volunteers may have an extremely low status within an organisation although, depending on the nature of the task, they may have considerable power and a better knowledge of the user group.



- Particularly in direct work with service users, volunteers may bring an ideological preference for non-hierarchical, democratic ways of working. Whilst this may be a strength, it may also be a challenge to some organisational structures, including supervision.

- Routes to volunteering are varied, as are the different personal and professional experiences of volunteers. Supervision may be something which some volunteers have no experience of. It may have frightening connotations of control and oversight. Volunteers may resent being made to be accountable when they are freely giving of their time.



- Volunteers may have more power than paid employees precisely because of the reason given above. Sensitive negotiation of the power imbalance (which cuts both ways) is critical to effective supervision.

What do volunteers need?

Volunteers want to feel valued and to feel that their contribution makes a difference to the organisation. They want to feel involved at an appropriate level and to understand the organisation. The potential for exploitation of volunteers is considerable. Assuming that the core business of most organisations is delivered by paid professionals, there is a potential for 'them and us' thinking and practice developing. Powerful volunteers can also subvert the objectives and direction of an organisation. Supervision processes should allow the opportunity for such trends to be spotted and creative solutions developed.

Volunteers need:

- induction into the volunteer role and its limits
- induction into the organisation
- induction to the specific task
- clear information about relevant agency policies
- agency policies on the use of volunteers
- clear expectations about minimum levels of commitment
- initial training and ongoing training relevant to role
- help with prioritising
- clear information about relevant agency development
- the opportunity to give and receive feedback
- to know how to express concerns or complaints
- a process by which their work is reviewed
- support
- some form of supervision.

(The above text has been adapted from:

- 'Involve' Volunteer Development Scotland, 1985
- 'Survivors' Sheffield, Review of Training (Volunteers) Policy, 2000
- 'First Step' Leicester, Induction of Volunteers, 1999

for which they kindly gave permission for use.)

Supervising volunteers

Although the processes and frameworks that have been described elsewhere in the book are all relevant, it is very important that the supervision of volunteers gives something appropriate to the volunteer. This will be facilitated where the supervisor can attend to the following areas.

- Try to have, and to show, appreciation of why supervision may be difficult for some volunteers:
 - the 'too busy doing other things'
 - the 'flying solo'
 - the 'been there, done that'
 - the martyr
 - the needy
 - the absolutely indispensable
 - the volunteer who is more experienced than you!

Taking a 'supervision' or 'volunteer' history can be very helpful here and will help you to understand the motives of the volunteer.

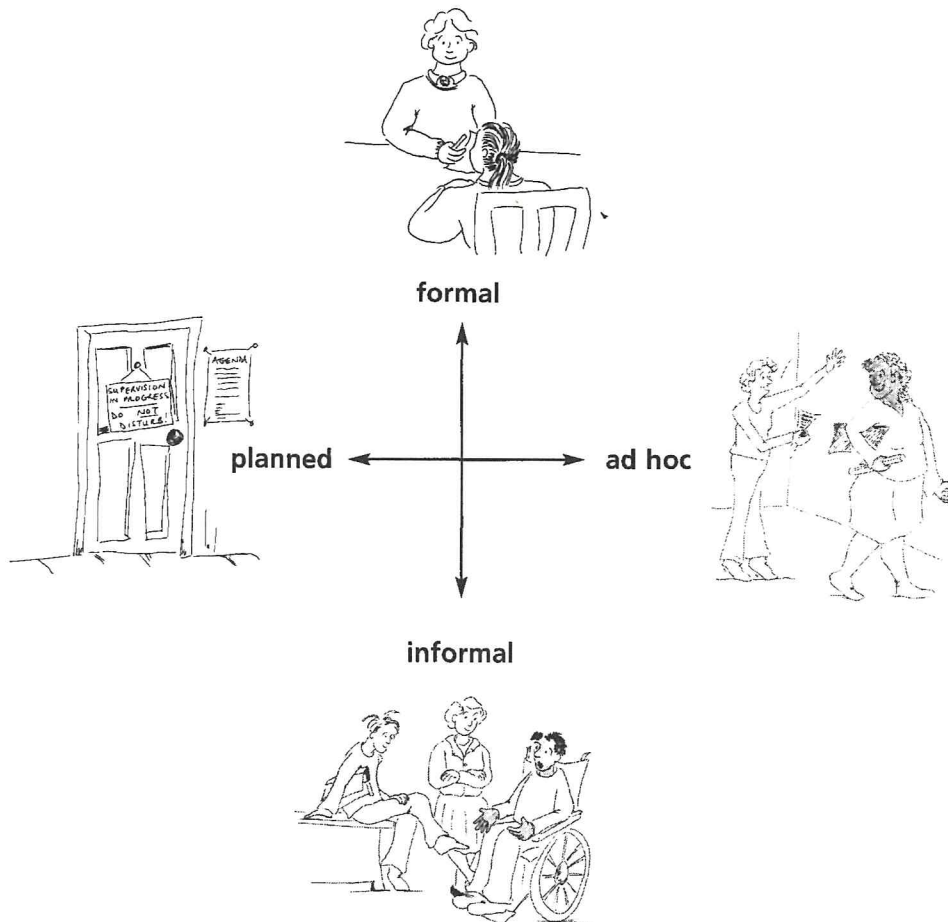
- Take time to develop a shared understanding about what supervision means.
- Pay particular attention to the power differentials between the paid supervisor and volunteers – and the possibility that paid workers are at a disadvantage.
- Identify the mesh between agency objectives and voluntary activity and clarifying whose needs are being met through the activity.
- Ensure shared agreement about the role(s) and tasks of volunteer(s) and agreeing individualised job or task outlines.
- Link the work of the volunteer to the wider agency objectives and priorities. This should help facilitate accountability and a sense of belonging.

- Validate the unique skills and perspectives of the volunteer and review the potential for the role to develop. Be responsive to the creative and new ideas that s/he brings.
- Take care to maintain the boundaries as supervisor – avoid becoming a counsellor!
- Pitch supervision frequency and style to the individual volunteer and the tasks s/he performs.
- Be realistic about time available and other demands on the volunteer.

Structures for supervision

Supervision is about much more than the supervision session. It is an ongoing process which takes place in many different settings ranging from the formal, planned, office-based session to urgent discussions in a corridor or a car park. Different arrangements will suit different settings. However, sometimes the arrangements are made by default rather than by design. Thus, **formal** or **planned** supervision becomes **informal** and **ad hoc**. You may catch yourself supervising in the corridor or continually rearranging supervision sessions.

The matrix shows the range of settings in which supervision can take place. The central point to note is that the different settings fulfil different purposes. Thus, informal, group, ad hoc supervision cannot be an effective substitute for planned one-to-one sessions.



Structure for individual supervision sessions

The following is one format for individual supervision sessions. It should be adjusted to suit different settings.

Preparation

- 1 Set supervision sessions in advance so that they are a regular feature in the diary.
- 2 Try and avoid sessions first thing on a Monday morning or last thing on a Friday afternoon.
- 3 Review the supervision record of the previous session, and note items and action plans that need following up. This should form the basis for an agreed agenda.

Session

- 4 Start the session on time. If you don't make supervision a priority, neither will the supervisee.
- 5 Clarify the agenda. Make sure the supervisee has had an opportunity to contribute to the agenda. Do not, however, start discussing the items yet.
- 6 Within the first 10 minutes, always 'take the temperature' by asking the supervisee how they are, in a general way. However important your agenda, it is very important to find out where the supervisee is starting from. Also check whether there are likely to be any unavoidable interruptions (these should really be exceptional).
- 7 Prioritise the agenda as far as possible around the worker's needs.
- 8 Discuss and review selected 'main work' items. Agree to record key decisions and action plans.
- 9 Review other work or projects.
- 10 Look at developmental, training or personal issues related to work. This may include feedback that the worker needs.
- 11 Share any information/briefing.
- 12 Agree the agenda for the next session.
- 13 Record the session. You may wish to share responsibility for the recording, and give a copy of the record to the supervisee.
- 14 Note any areas of disagreement, ensuring that both points of view are recorded.

Supervision records

It is important to distinguish between how to record:

- 1 case material discussed in supervision
- 2 the supervision session
- 3 information that belongs in a personnel file
- 4 individual workers' own reflections.

Policy framework

Each agency/discipline should set out a clear policy for recording, covering at least areas 1, 2 and 3 above.

1 Case material discussed in supervision

It is important that the supervisor's influence/decisions about case management should be discoverable in the case file for legal and quality assurance reasons. For instance, a court may require this, or it may be required in the investigation of complaints. Some agencies include a supervisory record sheet in the case file in which case decisions made by the supervisor are recorded. This also enables a new or temporary supervisor or worker to trace the decision-making process. It would also allow the service user to see the role played by a supervisor in their case.

2 Record of the supervision session

There are several purposes for the recording of supervision:

- to maintain a record of the frequency and focus of the activity
- to be available to benchmark and audit the quality of supervision
- to record key information shared
- to record decisions, advice and actions (other than clinical casework decisions)

- to record the supervisee's progress and achievement
- to record the supervisee's learning and development needs, goals and progress
- to record any performance concerns and action taken to improve performance
- to record the supervisee's feedback about the experience of supervision or his/her wider experience as an employee
- to record any staff safety or staff welfare issues that are relevant to the performance of the worker.

Format

There should be an agreed agency pro-forma for recording supervision, and this should be an agency document.

Access

The supervision record should be accessible to the supervisor and supervisee at any time. Although this is a confidential document, it is also an organisational document which does not belong solely to the supervisor and supervisee. As such, the supervision record is neither secret nor private. Hence, a supervision policy should in addition specify under what conditions others can access this record. Such situations might include:

- auditing
- grievance
- discipline
- internal/external inquiry
- complaint.

Method

Whilst, in the main, supervisors will make brief contemporaneous notes directly onto an agreed recording format, there may be circumstances where this is not the best method. For instance, different approaches will be required where staff have impaired vision or hearing, or where

there are first language differences. In these cases, an appropriate alternative will need to be identified, which might include audio or video records. As recording becomes increasingly electronic in nature, the supervision record may be typed directly into a computer.

It is important to share some responsibility for record keeping, for instance, by ensuring that the supervisee records an action plan or at least counter-signs the recording and adds additional comments if he/she wishes.

Storage

The supervision record should be stored under lock and key in a separate area from the case files. A copy may be held by the supervisee as well, as long as this, too, is securely stored.

Transfer of record

The policy should clarify what happens to the supervision record when a worker transfers to a new supervisor within the agency. There are strong arguments in favour of the record being transferred with the worker, as long as the record has been maintained in line with agency standards. When the worker leaves the agency, it is suggested that any information about the worker that needs to be retained from the supervision record should be placed in the personnel file for future reference. The supervisee must be informed about what, if anything, is being transferred from the supervision record to the personnel file.

3 Information that belongs in a personnel file

This file should contain the worker's CV, qualifications, appointment documents and any disciplinary record.

4 Reflective diary for individual workers

In addition to the above, some workers may be required to maintain a reflective or learning diary, for professional registration or study purposes. This should be held and maintained by the individual according to any formats required by the professional body/educational institution and accessible only by that body. The worker can choose whether to share the contents with the supervisor.

Ad hoc supervision

Responding to urgent requests for case consultation from an anxious worker



The supervisor will also be required to respond to urgent requests for ad hoc supervision which may be either face-to-face discussions or by telephone. It is important that the urgent and informal nature of these conversations does not undermine the fact that this is still taking place within a supervisory contract, and that the resulting advice and actions should be no less accountable than if the same issue had been discussed in a formal session. It is therefore

essential that the outcomes be recorded. Here are some suggestions for managing such ad hoc supervision requests.

- Ask the worker to clarify what exactly s/he wants from the supervisor, and why it is so urgent.
- Ask if the worker has read the file; if so, what is the current situation and recent key decisions?
- Don't say *'I've only got 10 minutes'*. Instead say *'I've got 10 minutes, let's see how far we can get – we may need to talk later.'*
- Reassure – *'Let's think it through'*. Normalise the feelings of being under pressure, using a calm tone and careful pace.
- Listen and establish key facts.
- Clarify that you have heard accurately – *'Is this what you are saying?'*
- React, decide and conclude clearly.
- Break the tasks up into manageable bits.
- Consider who else needs to be consulted.

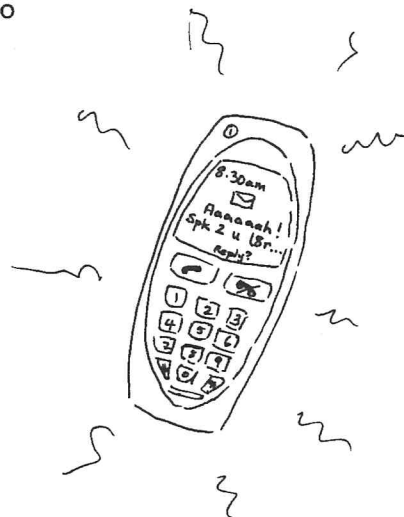
- Consider whether other staff are required to deal with an immediate crisis or to cover other parts of the worker's duties.
- Give clear instructions. Get the worker to repeat back to you what has been decided, and what his/her tasks are.
- Identify the next point of contact with the worker.
- Record the outcome.

Please remember, when the action is hot

The impact of the supervisor is magnified several times when the worker is anxious. This applies equally to the positive effects of a helpful response as the negative effects of a poor response. The brain is programmed to search for and remember what happens under conditions of threat, anxiety or danger. In a very short space of time, the supervisor's response can either mobilise or undermine the worker's personal and professional coping responses, which in turn can have dramatic effects on the fortunes of the situation or case being discussed.

Telephone supervision – additional points

- Consider the worker's location (eg ask if s/he is free to talk properly).
- Do you have privacy? If not, do you need to find a suitable room in which to take this call?
- Be aware of the significance of not having non-verbal clues.
- You will need to probe more carefully for feelings.
- Summarise back to the worker in terms of what is clear, what is unclear and what is actually urgent.
- Record the outcome.



Other considerations

- The worker's anxiety can be contagious. You may judge that the situation is not as urgent, or that you need to pause and think before making decisions. One option is to say that you will get back to the worker once you have thought through the issues. Agree a time to talk again.
- If the worker is very anxious, consider linking him/her with an experienced worker.
- If very urgent, consider whether you need to delay your next appointment to give more time.

Well done! It's time to sit back and draw breath before the next phone call!





KEY MESSAGES FROM CHAPTER 4

- A clear written contract is an essential basis for the supervisory relationship.
- Contracts need to be negotiated, not imposed.
- Effective contracts have administrative, professional and psychological elements.
- Supervisors do not need to possess the same body of professional knowledge or skills to be able to offer good supervision. However, there may be a need to supplement the supervision you provide with 'external supervision/coaching/consultation' to ensure that the professional needs of the worker are addressed.
- Supervisees need to be made aware of their responsibilities as well as their rights.
- Understanding the motives of volunteers is very important in offering them appropriate supervision.
- Supervision takes place on both a planned and ad hoc basis. It is important that ad hoc supervision does not result in confusion about accountability, action plans and recording.
- Supervision needs to be recorded within an agreed agency format.

