SUPERVISION IN SOCIAL WORK

THIRD EDITION

ALFRED KADUSHIN

Alfred Kadushin

Supervision in Social Work

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Preface

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

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

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

Changes in public social welfare policy during the past ten years have intensified concern about social work supervision, particularly its administrative responsibilities. Concerns for efficiency and productivity have been added to the continuing concern for accountability. Tax and spending limitations at all levels of government and growing budgetary stringency have resulted in reduction of financial support for social service agency programs. The current situation is characterized by reduction in staff, retrenchment in programming, and limitations in resources available to agencies.

Social agencies are labor-intensive operations. The current political context, which now provides less financial support for social services, calls for doing more with less. One possible if difficult solution is to increase the productivity of each worker. Increasing productivity requires greater managerial efficiency and more imaginative agency management. With the constriction of resources, practice has become more time limited and results oriented. This has intensified requirements for accountability and the need to justify the legitimacy of the agency through the demonstration of efficiency and effectiveness.

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

More limited resources and the demands associated with taxpayer revolts have made issues of accountability a matter of much greater concern than ever before. Since agency accountability starts with the supervisor's review and evaluation of the work of the direct service staff, such issues intensify the visibility and importance of supervision.

The increasing dependence of agencies on governmental funding, third-party payments, and legislative mandates all have resulted in the increasing external regulation of agencies. The need for documentation of agency activities through periodic reports further increases the need for administrative supervision to ensure that such information is available. Compliance with external regulatory requirements of funding sources such as Medicaid, Medicare, and Title XX puts a premium on the need for supervisory personnel. Community Mental Health Centers are among the agencies that depend heavily on third-party payments for support and consequently face legislative mandates for rigorous accountability. A questionnaire study of Community Mental Health Center supervisors' perceptions of effective accountability mechanisms found that all 117 respondents saw a "well-coordinated

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and explicit system of supervision as the most preferred approach to facilitating a Community Mental Health Center–based quality assurance program" (Smith 1986:9).

Some regulatory changes during the last ten years have once again increased the importance and significance of social work supervision. Insurance carriers often require that the worker receive formal supervision as a third-party condition for payment. Licensing and registration legislation adopted by 1988 in some forty-six states often requires that licensed or registered workers have formal access to supervision.

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

Supervision and in-service training and staff development share responsibility for helping the worker learn what he needs to know in order to effectively do his job. Cuts in agency budgets have frequently required cuts in in-service training and staff development programs. Agencies have increasing difficulty in funding worker attendance at workshops or institutes and national meetings. As a consequence, supervision becomes increasingly more important as a source of training and often is the only resource available to help workers enhance their skills.

Recognition of the need for supervision has been formalized, in that candidates for the title of certified social worker (ACSW) are required to have been supervised for a minimum of two years following the MSW. Similarly, other specialized professional organizations that enlist social workers require minimum hours of supervised practice for licensing or registration. This includes organizations such as The American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists and The National Commission for Credentialing of Alcoholism Counselors.

The ascendence of a political orientation that seeks to curtail the development of social programs and limit access to resources increases the importance of supervision for preserving the commitment of social work to a political orientation that is more humanistic. An orientation antagonistic to the objectives and values of social work has been made evident not only in legislative changes but in attempts at imposing business management technologies on social agencies. The increasing

tendency to appoint business managers to administer social agencies has been encouraged by the proliferation of business administration graduates who are actively seeking such positions.

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

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

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

In a chapter devoted to negligent supervision as a basis for malpractice suits, Austin, Moline, and Williams (1990) advise supervisors to keep records that are complete and up to date, to document meetings with supervisees, and to take care in seeing that insurance forms for clients are completed properly.

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

Though calls for more supervision predominate, some changes reduce the need for supervision. The tightened job market has reduced turnover and has increased the time social workers spend in a given position; experienced workers need less supervision than beginners; and there is a tendency to reduce agency managerial costs by eliminating layers of supervision as part of a general trend toward debureaucratizing agencies. On balance, however, recent changes tend to suggest a heightened concern with social agency supervision.

All these developments justify a third edition. Widespread use of the book in courses, workshops, and institutes has clearly identified some of the strengths and weaknesses of the previous editions. Based on the feedback from supervisors and supervisees, students, and instructors, a third edition can also give increased priority to the strengths and eliminate some of the shortcomings of the earlier editions.

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

From time to time throughout the text I offer a vignette or an anecdote. It always begins with "A supervisor (or supervisee) says——". These illustrations were gathered over the thirty years that I have been teaching and researching social work supervision. In graduate seminars, institutes, and workshops, I have urged, coaxed, cajoled, importuned participants to share with me critical incidents and memorable encounters that graphically exemplify some important aspect of supervision. The illustrations cited in the text without attribution come from this collection of material.

Since field instruction in graduate and undergraduate social work education have elements in common with agency supervision, we reviewed fieldwork manuals from fifty schools of social work and reviewed the rich literature on field instruction. In the end, the need to keep the length of the text within reasonable bounds dictated a decision not to include this material. Differences between agency super-

vision and field instruction in educational programs are sufficiently pervasive to justify this decision.

I have made a studied effort to be generic in my presentation. Alas, this book is heavily weighted in the direction of casework. In asking forgiveness I plead *ex nihilo, nihil fit*—out of nothing, nothing can be made. The experience of the profession and, consequently the available literature are heavily weighted in the direction of casework supervision. There is little recent material on supervision in group work and almost nothing on supervision in community organization.

Pronouns are a source of trouble throughout the text. At one time it would suffice to note that all supervisors would be designated "she" and all supervisees "he." We are beyond the point where such conventional designations are acceptable. Consequently, I have randomized the use of pronouns. *He, she, her,* and *his* are scattered throughout the text in no particular pattern except to equalize the frequency with which they are used.

Ethnic language has also been a problem for the third edition. At the time this was being written the term *African American* was being suggested as an alternative to *black*. The suggested change had not, however, achieved widespread acceptability. As a consequence we continue to use "black" in this edition as the racial term of choice.

The first edition was written during the year that I was a fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, Palo Alto, California. My very warm thanks and sincere appreciation to the Center for the opportunity the fellowship provided. It offered not only financial support but also a stimulating, supportive atmosphere. During the year at the center I was a member of a fellows seminar on organizational theory. The seminar discussions were relevant to the problems of social work supervision, and I am indebted to other members of the seminar—Michael Crozier, Herbert Jacobs, Martin Krieger, James March, Eugene Pusic, Daniel Shimshoni, Judith Tendler, Julian Wolpert—for helping me clarify my ideas.

My sincere appreciation and thanks to Carol Betts and LuAnn Stibes, indefatigable secretaries who patiently and accurately typed revisions to revisions of revisions, deciphered my hand-written hieroglyphics, and conscientiously typed many more pages than appear here.

My thanks to John D. Moore of Columbia University Press for his continuing encouragement during the thirty years of our professional association.

To Sylvia, severest critic and most compassionate friend, my deep-

est love for constant help, support, and comfort, as well as to Goldie and Raphael, formerly children, now my friends. In affectionate friendship to Dave and Tudella and Mickey, and in loving memory of my parents, Phillip and Celia.

A.K.

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