



CHAPTER I

Overview of Supervision

1.1 WHAT IS A SUPERVISEE?

A supervisee is one who brings his/her work to another (individual or group) in order to learn how to do that work better.

Supervisees come to supervision:

1. for a variety of reasons (they have to or they want to);
2. choosing amongst different types of supervision (peer, group, individual, team);
3. for various kinds of work (individual clients, groups, programmes, organizational);
4. with a raft of possible outcomes (accountability, reports, accreditation, training, consultation, better quality service for their client group).

Whatever the reason or the type of supervision, the actual work of the supervisee is at the heart of supervision. Supervision is about “*learning from doing*” or “*becoming students of our own experience . . . sitting at the feet of our work*” (Zachary, 2002: xv).

Just in case you think supervision is only for helping professionals, have a look at the latest application of supervision. The American Military devised an interesting form of supervision they called the AAR (After Action Review). First tried in Kuwait and more recently in Iraq, it consists of commanders gathering their troops into small groups of 7/8 soldiers around them soon after military action has been completed. The commander first of all sets the ground rules, viz that nothing any soldier says will be reported on his/her file and that no ‘b’ or ‘f’ words are acceptable (blame or fault).

The commander then outlines six questions for open discussion:

1. **What did we set out to do?**
2. **What happened?**
3. **What went well?**
4. **What went badly?**
5. **What have we learned?**
6. **What will we do differently next time?**

50% of the time is spent on the first four questions and 50% on the final two with the commander taking notes of what was learned and what will be done differently next time. These notes are sent back to the CALL Centre (Centre for Army Lessons Learned) where they are collated and the new learning (information) is sent back to all units. The American Military has discovered the use of supervision under another title, The After Action Review.

You are a supervisee. That means, in our view, that you have chosen to present your work to another (or others, as in a group) in order to learn from that presentation.

There are a number of assumptions in the statement we have just made:

1. **that you have 'chosen' supervision;**
2. **that you know how to present your work to another;**
3. **that you feel safe to present your work honestly and openly;**
4. **that you want to learn;**
5. **that you can trust your supervisor.**

Exercise

You might want to put down this booklet and think about some questions around those assumptions:

1. Is supervision something you 'have to do' rather than a process 'you have chosen to engage with' ?
2. What has been your experience of supervision to date as a supervisee, if you have already been in supervision?
3. If you have not been in supervision before, what immediately comes to your mind when you think of the term?
4. Do you have a clear understanding of what supervision means?
5. Have you considered how you learn and what learning style is best suited to you?
6. Has anyone ever talked to you, or have you thought about, how to present in supervision?

Let us look at some of your answers to these questions.

If your answer to the first question was that supervision is something you 'have to do', is mandatory because of your profession or the requirements of your work, and that is the only reason you involve yourself in it, Please think again. Our experience is that doing something because you are required to do so rarely reaps as many benefits as it can. Sometimes quite the opposite – it blocks real learning and you will go through the procedure without heart or choice. Without apology, we ask you to consider choosing to be in supervision, even if it is a requirement.

Choose Supervision – it will make all the difference regarding your motivation and cooperation and thus lead to more openness and learning. If you are or have been appointed a supervisor, and therefore have no choice as to whom he/she will be, you might like to look at helpful hints on how to handle this relationship on pages 20/21.

If your experience of supervision has been that it has been supervisor-centred rather than supervisee-based, then we are hoping that you might take a more

Proactive stance in regard to negotiating what you want and need from supervision. Our hope is that the supervisor will move towards you, not insist that you move to join them in their way of learning and teaching.

We are also keen to help you **Review Your Understanding** of supervision and what it has meant to you in the past. And we will keep coming back to the focus on **LEARNING** as the central aspect of supervision (not monitoring, or assessing, or evaluating, or giving feedback – all important dimensions of supervision but not its key purpose).

Some of you reading this manual will be trainees who are in the process of learning your profession and who need the forum provided by an experienced person from the same profession to allow you to think through, reflect on and mull over the issues, problems and joys, that emerge from the work you are doing. Others of you will be qualified and often experienced who, again, choose another person or group to be the recipient of your thoughts, ideas, and reflections on your work. In the conversation called 'supervision' you will look inwards to what is happening to you as you work and look outwards to how the work is being done. From these reflections will come learning that will be used to increase the effectiveness of the work. While supervision has its roots in the helping professions, we consider that supervisees can come from any profession – what makes a supervisee a supervisee is a desire and wish to learn from opening up their work to others (whether it is as a manager, a prison officer or member of the emergency services, a spiritual director, a policeman or policewoman, a technician, a medical doctor or even as a parent) so that in the ensuing conversation new thoughts, insight, awareness, ideas, feelings, approaches and theories will create better practice. Hence, we see the worlds of mentoring, coaching and consultation as closely allied to the world of supervision. We also see links here with line-management supervision. Even though roles and responsibilities can be different, the essence of all supervision is the same – how can I, as supervisor, facilitate the learning of supervisees from the actual work they do? From a supervisee's perspective the question is similar: How can I, as supervisee, present my work in the safe and facilitating environment of a healthy supervisory relationship so that I can learn from what I do?

1.2 WHAT IS SUPERVISION?

Our understanding is that you, as supervisees, come to supervision with a history of supervision: if not an actual experience of it then with some ideas or assumptions about it. You will have, already, an understanding or concept of what supervision should be or should not be – either from direct experience or from hearing others talk about it or from the assumptions you make from hearing and using the term ‘supervision’. It is important that you come to an agreed understanding with your supervisor about what supervision means.

Here are five definitions of supervision:

1. *“Supervision is a regular, protected time for facilitated, in-depth reflection on clinical practice”* (Bond and Holland, 1998).
2. *“Supervision is a working alliance between two professionals where supervisees offer an account of their work, reflect on it, receive feedback, and receive guidance if appropriate. The object of this alliance is to enable the worker to gain in ethical competency, confidence and creativity so as to give the best possible service to clients”* (Inskipp and Proctor, 2001).
3. *“Supervision is the construction of individualised learning plans for supervisees working with clients”* (McNulty, 2003).
4. *“Supervision is a place of trust where a healthy relationship gives me a safe place to acknowledge and work with my clinical concerns, stresses, fears and joys”* (Johnson, 2003).
5. *“When a person consults with a more ‘seasoned’ and experienced practitioner in the field in order to draw on their wisdom and expertise to enhance his/her practice, then we would call this process supervision”* (Gilbert and Evans, 2000).

When we take elements of these definitions together, supervision emerges with a number of features:

1. to ensure the welfare and best-quality-service for clients;
2. to enhance the personal and professional development of supervisees through ongoing reflexivity that results in advanced learning;

3. to gate-keep and monitor those who wish to enter and remain within their professions;
4. to benefit from the input of others as this applies to our work;
5. to draw on the wisdom and experience of another;
6. to build in accountability for the quality of the supervisee's work at all levels and to offer assurances to those who need to monitor that accountability.

I.3 ELEMENTS IN SUPERVISION

A number of elements go to make up supervision which include:

a) **A forum for reflection**

Supervision is the forum where workers reflect on their work and learn from that reflection through their interaction with another who takes on the role of supervisor. We will look in some detail later on what reflection is and how supervisors facilitate reflection.

b) **A forum for accountability**

Supervision is a process where clients' cases are presented and the supervisee's work with them is monitored, considered, reviewed, dissected with learning being brought forth. It also is a process of accountability where ethical and professional issues are considered and stakeholders in the supervision process (clients, organizations, professional associations and those who pay for the work) are assured that quality is being maintained.

c) **The focus is on experiential learning**

Experiential Learning is the type of learning most appropriate to supervision. Not the only type, but the one most often used. Supervision is built on the reflection/action model where the practice of counselling/psychotherapy becomes the vehicle for learning. The Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb, 1984) comprises four stages as shown in this diagram:

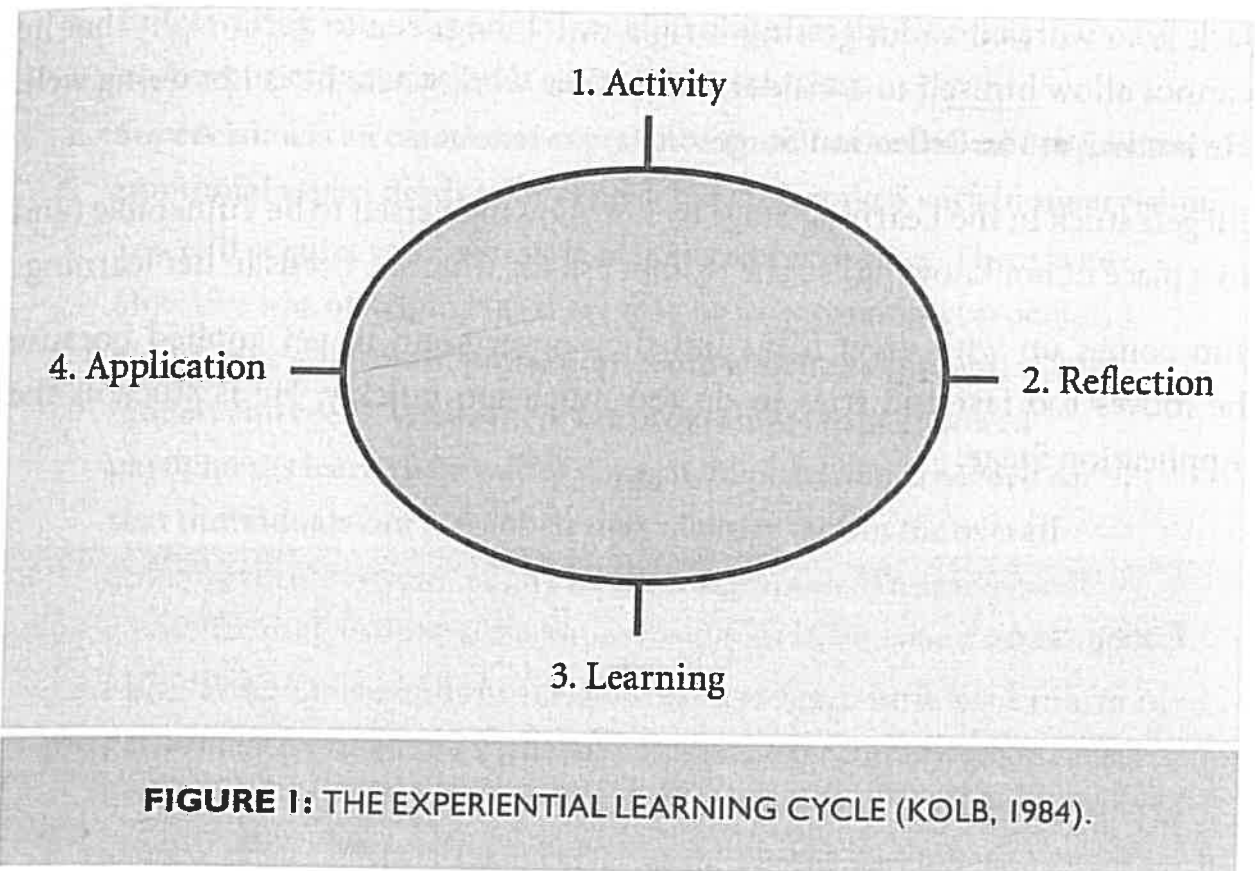


FIGURE 1: THE EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CYCLE (KOLB, 1984).

1. Supervisees **DO** their work – ‘How are you doing your work?’ is the question asked by supervisors.
2. Supervisees **STOP** doing their work and start **REFLECTING** on it. ‘Are you able to reflect openly and honestly on your work?’ is the relevant question here .
3. Supervisees draw out their **LEARNING** from their reflection. What are you learning?
4. Supervisees then **APPLY** their learning? Do you implement your learning? Do you integrate this learning into your work activities?

Supervisees can get stuck at any stage of this process i.e., they find themselves not able to engage in the activity, not able to reflect, not able to learn, not able to apply learning. The following are some examples of individuals stuck at the various points of the Experiential Cycle.

Jane is so stressed and overworked that she is unable to **DO** her work as she would like to. She is stuck at the Activity Stage.

Jack is so worried about getting it right and being seen to get it right that he cannot allow himself to consider areas of his work where he is not doing well. He is stuck at the Reflection Stage.

Jill gets stuck in the Learning Stage by not allowing herself to be vulnerable (and in a place of not knowing) so she cannot ask for what she needs in her learning.

Jim comes up with great ideas but they never seem to get applied because he moves too fast and tries to do too much too quickly. He is stuck at the Application Stage.

Exercise

Go around the four stages of the *Experiential Learning Cycle* and see, at each stage, where and how you sometimes get stuck. What are you experiencing when you get stuck? Is this a familiar place for you?

Supervisors facilitate the learning of supervisees by ensuring that these blocks are dealt with and that learning continues around the *Experiential Learning Cycle*. A number of supervision features now emerge:

1. **The focus of supervision is on the learning of supervisees, i.e., your learning. Hitherto the apprentice joined the master-practitioner, watched, learned, tried out the work, and was given feedback on how it should be done, practised and learnt more. Power, the right way to do the job and how this was taught, resided in the hands of the supervisor. The new emphasis is on the learning of supervisees with supervisors interested in questions such as: At what stage in their professional development are supervisees? How do they best learn? What learning objectives supply the focus of supervision time? How are supervisees integrating the various components of their training and experience?**
2. **Your main learning takes place through reflection on the actual work itself.**
3. **Your supervisor is primarily a 'manager of learning' and hopefully asks questions such as: How can I, as supervisor, assist your learning?**

4. **Empowering you to be an active collaborator in the learning endeavour of supervision is essential for learning.**
5. **Supervision is an emotional experience as well as a rational one and the emotional aspect needs to be considered and worked with in supervision.**
6. **You will acquire your own style of being a practitioner. There is no objective way of helping (as there may be in becoming a carpenter, plumber or goldsmith, professions from which the apprenticeship models emerged). While there is a programme to be followed participants learn their way of doing it. Supervision is needed so that individuals can forge their own identity within the overall boundaries of the profession and the programme. Training is not about learning to do it as the supervisor does it, but about learning an individual and unique way of interacting with work.**
7. **You will go through stages on your journey to becoming an expert practitioner. Supervisors perform various tasks as they work with you. If these tasks can be geared to the developmental stage through which you are travelling then learning can be better managed and can be seen as cumulative.**

d) **Your own philosophy of Supervision**

At this stage, we hope you are ready to write your own 'philosophy of supervision' i.e., what it means to you. Can you capture in a paragraph what it might look like? One group of supervisees used images and metaphors to capture what supervision meant to them and came up with the following:

For me supervision is:

1. **a torch – which illuminates my work;**
2. **a container – where I feel safe and held;**
3. **a mirror – where I see myself and my work (the mirror is usually held by my supervisor);**
4. **a playpen – where we play with ideas, feelings, intuitions, hunches, theories;**
5. **a dance – where we learn how to work together in harmony;**
6. **a classroom – which contains two learners one of which facilitates my learning.**

7. a courtroom – where assessments, evaluations and judgments take place;
8. a journey – where we both move through stages and need to decide where we are going, what we want to take with us, and what to leave behind;
9. a thermometer – to gauge temperatures (intellectual, emotional, psychological and social climates);
10. a sculpture – where I am being fashioned into something yet to be.

You might like to see if you could draw what supervision means to you. What images/symbols come to you when you think of what supervision might be? What is your image?

Exercise

In whatever way suits you, illustrate:

What supervision means to me is . . .

OR you may prefer to answer the following series of questions.

Thinking Through Supervision

1. What has been my experience of supervision to date?
2. What do I want from supervision?
3. What do I want from my supervisor?
4. What learning objectives would I like to bring to supervision?
5. What worries me about supervision? My supervisor?
6. What are the kinds of problems that could arise within supervision?
7. What interests me about supervision?

1.4 FORMS AND CONTEXTS OF SUPERVISION

So far, we have talked about supervision as if there was only one form of supervision. As you may know there is not. There are a number of formats all of which have their strengths and limitations. While you may not have a

choice about the kind of supervision in which you are involved, it is worthwhile reviewing the various forms. We want, briefly, to look at four:

a) **Individual Supervision**
(one Supervisor and one Supervisee)

In this process the supervisee consults with one other person who is usually a more experienced member of the profession. One of the main advantages of individual supervision is that it provides you with the undivided attention of the supervisor. Some supervisees prefer this at stages of their development when they have particular challenges to face or when they get shamed easily in front of peers if there is any critical feedback to be given (See Carroll, 1996; Gilbert and Evans, 2000; for further reading on this area of supervision).

b) **Group Supervision**

Group supervision (one supervisor and several supervisees). The advantage of this form of supervision is that the supervisee gets the benefit of feedback from peers as well as learning from the variety of work that is presented by others in the group. In our experience many supervisees enjoy this form of supervision because of the variety of input and because of the additional sense of support that comes from belonging to a small community of peers (Proctor's book, *'Group Supervision'* 2000, is the best for those wanting to know more about this form of supervision).

c) **Peer Supervision**

Peer supervision (two or more people in a group where there is no designated supervisor but each participant becomes co-supervisor and supervisee at different times). The advantage of this form of supervision is that it provides you with the opportunity to interact with people at your level of development and share one another's fears and triumphs. Many people combine this arrangement with individual or group supervision to gain extra support (see Hawkins and Shohet, 2000, for further insights into peer group supervision).

d) **Team Supervision**

Team supervision (where the group, in this instance, is also a team that works together). The advantage of this form of supervision is that it provides the team

with a safe place where issues can be brought and worked through in the presence of a facilitator, the supervisor. Team supervision often results in team solidarity and provides a place where greater openness and clearer feedback becomes possible (Lammers, 1999, has a very good article on team supervision).

Besides forms of supervision, there are also issues of context that affect supervision. Managerial supervision involves elements of power and authority and responsibility not usually present in developmental or reflective supervision. At times, supervisees do not feel as safe in sharing vulnerable areas. Contextual issues can also include the background in which supervisors do their work. Organizational cultural differences exist between Prison Service supervision, Probation and Social Work supervision as well as supervision in the Private Sector.

CASE EXAMPLE

How might you respond to George in the following example?

George is an experienced Tutor on the Sex Offenders' Treatment Programme within the Prison Service. A new Treatment Manager has been appointed to oversee the programme and to supervise the two Tutors (George and Amanda). She (the Treatment Manager) is about 20 years younger than George and has had nowhere near the same experience in running the actual programme as he has had. At the first supervision meeting George suggests that it might be better if he not attend future supervision meetings. He says that he has little to learn from supervision, being as experienced as he is in running the programme and wonders how the new supervisor can supervise his work when he is more experienced in running the course than she is. He is happy for the other two to meet for supervision (Amanda, he says, is new to the programme and supervision will be of help to her).