

❖ PREFACE

The first edition of this book was published in 1976. A second edition was published in 1985, a third edition was published in 1992, and a fourth edition was published in 2002. A fifth 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 2002. Some older concerns have become archaic, and some new concerns have become increasingly visible.

This 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. Although 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.

Developments in health and social welfare policy and practice during the past decade have intensified concerns about the preparation and size of the workforce and, given the key role that supervisors play in workforce training and retention, the diminishing availability of social work supervision. Against the backdrop of a fragile and stagnant economy, with political gridlock and widespread

unemployment, our nation is divided about the appropriate size, scope, and sector of health and human services. The current situation is characterized by reductions in staff and retrenchment in programming, as agencies and institutions strive to get more from their workers with an uncertain future and fewer dollars to spend.

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. Because 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 domination of managed care approaches to health care and "the new public management" in human services have intensified concerns with service efficiency and demands for accountability. The changing demographics of the client population and staff have increased the need for attention to the problems of diversity in supervision. The privatization of health and human services and government support for faith-based programs are often in conflict with traditional values of social work education and practice.

The increasing dependence of agencies on governmental funding, third-party payments, and legislative mandates 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.

Regulatory developments during the past decade have once again increased the importance and significance of social work supervision. Legislation enacted by 2012 in the District of Columbia, the U.S. Territories, and all 50 states often requires that certified, licensed, or registered workers have formal access to supervision. This has particular relevance for the provision of health care, as third-party reimbursements by managed care organizations and insurers are typically limited to those social workers practicing at the highest level of licensure—an achievement that typically requires an intensive and extended period of supervision. Where exceptions exist, social workers are often required to receive formal supervision as a third-party condition for payment.

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, in-service training, and staff development share responsibility for helping the worker learn what he or she needs to know in order to do the job effectively. The

supervisor's critical role in the agency adoption and implementation of evidence-based practices has been increasingly noted (McHugh and Barlow 2010), and supervisors must often teach new workers how to document clinical services, for example, as social work education rarely prepares students to meet legal and managed care practice standards (Kane 2002). 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.

The ascendance of a political orientation that seeks to reduce or eliminate public 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 (MBA) 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 in recent 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) advised 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. Risk management has become a priority concern of supervision (Lynch and Versen 2003).

Since the publication of the first edition, 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.

During the past decade, there has been an explosion in research and exposition of studies of supervision in social work and the helping professions, supporting, supplementing, correcting, and edifying the content of previous editions. Studies of supervision in counseling psychology, nursing, and psychiatry have provided additional updated material of relevance. The resulting accumulation of knowledge needs to be recognized in keeping the text appropriately current. As a result, we have excised some discussions found in prior editions, which has allowed us to add new ones and to expand upon those we opted to retain.

Some readers have complained that this 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 often 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 guilt or anxiety that his or her experience with supervision falls short, in some measure, of the image presented in the text, as inevitably everyone’s will. There is, however, 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.”

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—A.K.

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