

Tending the Soul: Developing a Supervision Policy within an Organisation

by *Mary Dwyer*



May the work fit the rhythms of your soul, enabling you to draw from the invisible, new ideas and a vision that will inspire.

John O'Donohue (1997)

Introduction

It is arguable that supervision within or for organisations, if indeed it is provided, can be seen as a private arrangement between supervisee and supervisor, or alternatively as a form of management. The benefits of supervision to an organisation are difficult to articulate, simply because they require openness to, and a valuing of, change within the organisation itself. Helping an organisation to appreciate the potential benefits of supervision requires engagement, and a modelling of supervision in action in developing a supervision policy.

Having worked for over thirty years in a healthcare organisation and having recently completed an M.A. in Cross-professional Supervision, I am increasingly convinced of the value of supervision within organisations. I am equally aware of the difficulties inherent in introducing it, due to various factors including a lack of understanding of its purpose, function and potential; resistance to change (Benefiel, 2010) and cultural norms.

I believe that organisations need the “Both/And” of Business and Soul. Supervision has the potential to

help organisations to reflect on their practices, to focus on process as well as content and to become dynamic, learning entities which can evolve and grow, enabling people within them to be creative, committed and valued which supports the achievement of organisational aims, mission and vision. In this article, I suggest ways that supervision can be introduced into organisations and outline its potential and relevance for today's world.

Supervision is becoming more recognised within health and social care sectors for its normative,

formative and restorative value (Inskipp and Proctor, 1993, 1995), as part of meeting clinical governance agenda (NHS, 2008) which includes quality of care, safeguarding patients/clients, accountability and performance standards, but also as a way to help an organisation to develop a learning culture (Hawkins and Shohet, 2006 p.202). However, I believe that the potential and value of supervision has yet to be realised in the wider organisational world.

Where business and outcomes override the soul of the organisation, the impact on employees can include: lack of meaning/job dissatisfaction; poor work relationships; stress/burnout/compassion fatigue; workplace bullying; defensive practice; reduced standards, poor work practices, poor outcomes and increased staff turnover.

In the recent HIQA Report on Patient Safety Failures (Oct 2013, p. 23), recommendations included the following:

“Every health system must ensure that, both nationally and at a local

Where business and outcomes override the soul of the organisation, the impact on employees can include: lack of meaning/job dissatisfaction; poor work relationships; stress/burnout/compassion fatigue; workplace bullying...

level, there exists the ability to learn when things go wrong and ensure that errors are not repeated wherever possible, and also to learn from the best available evidence nationally and internationally to ensure that clinical practice and models of care are safe, effective and up-to-date”.

“At the heart of the ability to learn is the culture and leadership within an organisation that actively seeks out ways to continually improve the quality and safety of services for its population in an open and transparent way with clear accountability and responsibility arrangements to do so. The achievement of this must be an aim for all healthcare providers.”

The central concerns of supervision mirror and extend these recommendations, in areas such as reflective and reflexive practice, learning organisation and culture, ethics and accountability, best practice, openness and transparency.

In the business world, there is increasing recognition of the need for “investing in physical, emotional, mental and spiritual energy of employees; eliciting people’s core values; identifying what people do best and enjoy most; allocating time and energy to work, family, health, service to others” (Schwartz and McCarthy, 2007).

The culture of an organisation is its atmosphere or ethos, reflective of its soul, as John O’Donohue (1997) states: “Presence is the soul texture of the person. When we speak of this presence in relation to a group of people, we refer to it as atmosphere or ethos. When the ethos is positive, wonderful things can happen”.

How to Begin

In developing a supervision policy within an organisation, Hawkins and Shoet (2006, p. 209) suggest that it is important in the first instance to create an appreciative enquiry into what supervision is already in place; awakening an interest in

developing supervision practice and policy; initiating some experiments. They posit that resistance to change issues can emerge and they recommend on-going development and learning processes for supervisors and supervisees and an on-going audit and review process.

Setting the Scene:

The rationale for a supervision policy should ideally reflect the vision and mission of the organisation. Supervision is not always applied organisation-wide and culture can vary across departments (Copeland, 2005 p. 125). Where possible it is important to contribute to the rationale through dialogue, education and review, with those who know, who care and who can (Garratt, 2000, p.60) within the organisation, suggesting that it include some or all of the following:

Benefit to Clients:

Supervision provides a forum for reflection, accountability and experiential learning (Carroll and Gilbert, 2011, p.20) and helps practitioners to deliver better services to clients.

Benefit to Practitioners

Supervision provides normative, formative and restorative functions (Copeland, 2005 p. 30;105) which develop practitioners’ skills and practice and address self-care issues.

Clinical Governance

Supervisors act as gatekeepers (Bernard and Goodyear, 2004 p. 14) for the professions and provide evaluative and ethical accountability which contributes to the maintenance of high standards of care. (Borders and Brown, 2005 p. 88).

Organisational Benefit

Supervision:

- manufactures uncertainty and facilitates reflection
- is time out from organisational movement

- helps in learning the language of the organisation
- works with the emotions within the organisation
- remains neutral, neither collusive nor bystander
- focuses on what is good for the organisation
- focuses on the individual within the organisation. (Carroll, 2001 p. 52-62)

Supervisors are in a unique position to observe, with an outsider’s perspective, what is and isn’t working in an organisation (Copeland, 2005).

Considerations in developing a Supervision Policy for an Organisation:

Checking out the motivational aspects underpinning an organisation’s request for development of a supervision policy is important. Davys and Beddoe (2010, p. 81) note that self-protection can be a particular motivator at a time when society is concerned with risk which could result in the role of supervision being misunderstood and undervalued. However, even if its potential is not fully realised initially, supervision can have organisational influence.

In order to address any obstacles that might arise, a number of questions can be posed at the outset and issues addressed through dialogue and collaboration, ideally with potential supervisees and leaders. Organisational leaders can be helped to see the potential impact that supervision can have through regular reviews. Resistance to change needs to be honoured and underlying needs met (Hawkins and Shoet, 2006 p. 213). Supervision of executive teams and other experimental groups could be introduced to provide experiential learning which may open up the potential of supervision within the organisation. (Ibid. p.210). Questions to be posed would include:

Who is requesting the policy and why?

This will elicit the background to the identified need and identify relevant clinical/supervisory rhombus aspects to be included in the policy (Eckstein and Wallerstein, 1972; Copeland, 2005 p. 69).

What are the expectations regarding the policy?

The policy may reflect the espoused organisational culture while the reality may be what determines the value, frequency and priority given to supervision (Hawkins and Shohet, 2006, p. 194). System dynamics such as defensiveness, fire-fighting, scapegoating and the addictive organisation can affect supervision (ibid.). If potential difficulties are explored without apportioning blame, systemic thinking may be facilitated (Egan, 2013). It is important to tease out contractual details as these should be a part of the policy and help to clarify expectations and reporting issues.

In any policy, the form or forms of supervision to be provided would need to be clarified. Carroll (2001, p.61) outlines four different types of supervision: Individual; Team/Group; Executive Team; Organisations themselves. In addition, DeHaan (2012, p. 67) suggests that there can be three different contracts or relationships: Organisation consulting, Shadow consulting or Peer consulting.

Supervision has the potential to be an agent of change within an organisational culture. Change can be anxiety provoking and supervisees can be helped to “hold anxiety long enough to learn its lessons”.

Who will have access to supervision and how frequently?

Even with a supervision policy, Davys and Beddoe (2010, p. 72) argue that the reality can be that supervision is not happening or is under pressure. It is important to have “buy-in”, even if initially it is motivated by risk management issues, so that the benefits of supervision can begin to be felt in an organisation.

Is supervision provided internally, externally or a mixture of both?

External supervisors may exert more expert authority and may focus more on professional rather than systemic issues, while internal supervisors may exert more formal authority, considering the system imperatives as well as the practitioner’s needs (Itzhaki, 2001). External supervisors could have a three-way contract with the supervisee and the organisation to ensure that learning gained benefits the supervisee’s practice and the organisation. However, as Itzhaki argues this may lead to role ambiguity and role conflict (2001, p. 83).

Organisational culture, the “social glue” (Baker, 1980), can impact internal supervision. Ethical dilemmas can arise where the supervisor acts as both the administrative and the clinical supervisor. (Copeland, 2005, p. 132). Therefore clarity is important with respect to expectations and responsibilities of internal supervisors (ACES, 1993: 2.09).

How is confidentiality being understood and managed?

Confidentiality is an important aspect of a supervision contract and should also be included in a supervision policy. Ideally supervisors can influence organisational culture without identifying supervisees (Copeland, 2005, p. 52); however this may be difficult unless the supervisor works with a number of supervisees within the organisation.

Limits to confidentiality must also be outlined.

Is there an organisational interest in themes that arise from supervision?

Supervision has the potential to be an agent of change within an organisational culture. Change can be anxiety provoking and supervisees can be helped to “hold anxiety long enough to learn its lessons”. (Carroll, 2001, p. 54). Immunity to change can be particularly difficult to overcome (Benefiel, 2010, p. 113). However, supervision has the potential to contribute to a learning culture within an organisation and can cause the organisation to critically reflect on its assumptions (Mezirow, 1990). Factors contributing to work stress (Brown and Bourne, 1996 p.13) can be communicated if the organisation is favourable to addressing such problems. Parallel processes within organisations can be surfaced within supervision and the supervisee can be helped to manage these (Carroll, 1999, p. 151), while organisational leaders can be alerted to this phenomenon.

Has the introduction of supervision been negotiated with employees or is this being imposed?

Where there is partial buy-in, but not an organisation-wide openness to supervision, it is arguably still a good idea to introduce it – this could be done on a pilot basis in a particular area, which can be evaluated as it develops and the evidence gathered in relation to the changes it is making. Such incremental steps may be more effective than an “all or nothing” approach.

Is the organisation looking for answers or is it willing to be brought into the uncertainty and anxiety of learning edges?

Van Ooijen (2003, p. 221) suggests that the culture of the organisation needs to be favourable for supervision to work well. Organisational change (Benefiel,

It is important to avoid collusion with supervisees and to provide a neutral standpoint, which helps supervisees to work in the organisation, keeps communication flowing and works at the interface between the individual and the organisation.

2010 p. 115) happens by pointing out the change that is needed, surfacing hidden assumptions and serving to help bring about the change. The restorative aspect of supervision can be highlighted and utilised when change is difficult.

What about unconscious dynamics and shadow aspects of the organisation?

Shadow aspects, “significant activities and arrangements that remain unidentified or, for whatever reason, un-discussed in some decision-making setting of the company or institution” (Egan, 1994, p. 5) can arise. It is important to avoid collusion with supervisees (Copeland, 2005, p. 172) and to provide a neutral standpoint, which helps supervisees to work in the organisation, keeps communication flowing and works at the interface between the individual and the organisation (Carroll, 1999, p. 144). Alerting organisational leaders to these aspects can be helpful, notwithstanding that Benefiel (2010 p. 113) argues that seventy percent of organisation change efforts fail, due to the collusion factor. The shadow side of the organisation may mean that emotions are denied. Benefiel, (2010 p. 112) in the Soul of Supervision: “Supervisors can help organisational leaders encounter their shadows so that the people who dwell in their organisations can experience more light.”

What about the Learning and Development Needs of Supervisors and Supervisees?

It is important that supervisors are suitably trained and have ongoing professional development and their own supervision. It is

equally important that supervisees’ learning needs be met. This helps with the supervision process and contributes to the credibility of supervision within organisations. Carroll outlines supervisor skills needed for good supervision, in and for organisations, in managing the following aspects: Process, healthy relating, connections, emotions, pain, agenda focus and facilitating change. (1999, p.62).

Program for Supervision Policy Development

Taking into account all of the consultations above, it is clear that the development of a supervision policy within an organisation is a dynamic, evolving process and the resultant policy should be reviewed regularly once it is in place. The program is summarised in graphic form in Appendix 2.

Potential of Supervision

As a Supervisor, I am inspired and challenged by Weld (2012) who suggests that Supervision’s potential is in: Supporting Resiliency; Being Agents of Change; Instilling hope; Using Strengths-based practice principles: Increasing responsibility for activities; Supervisors as Practice Leaders; Modelling Transformational behaviour and Critically Reflecting on Practice; Aiming beyond ourselves

As a Supervisor, I am inspired and challenged... Aiming beyond ourselves and always for the betterment of others – the release of human possibilities, helping others to break free of their limits.

and always for the betterment of others – the release of human possibilities, helping others to break free of their limits.

In her book, “The Soul of a Leader” (2008), Margaret Benefiel presents many instances of leading with soul and its challenges including the forces of entropy and Bottom-line thinking. She suggests ways to put people first in organisations by: articulating people’s personal values and ensuring company values are derived from them; practicing those values; having a commitment to ongoing development and having regular Supervision.

Summary

A supervision policy can clarify its function and its place in the organisation. Dialogue, education and collaboration at the initial stages of policy development are vital. It is also very important to build in reviews and feedback mechanisms which feed into HR policies, and professional practices which can effect change, based on the learning gained from supervision. Emphasising the nature of supervision, its objectivity and its contribution to organisational development, and highlighting the benefits of providing the optimum climate for supervision policy to exist can help to elicit maximum benefit for the organisation.

As supervisors, we begin by: using our sphere of influence; listening for soul (e.g. pride, joy or passion in work); not going it alone; having patience in peril and staying the course (Benefiel, 2005). ☺

May you cultivate the art of presence in order to engage with those who meet you.

John O’Donohue (1997)

Appendix 1:

Steps to developing Supervision Policy and Practice in Organisations:

- Step 1 – Create an appreciative enquiry into what supervision is already happening.
- Step 2 – Awaken the interest in developing supervision practice and policy.
- Step 3 – Initiate some experiments.
- Step 4 – Deal with resistances to change.
- Step 5 – Develop Supervision Policies.
- Step 6 – Develop on-going learning and development for supervisors and supervisees and the organisation.
- Step 7 – An on-going audit and review process. (Hawkins and Shohet, 2006 p. 209-216)

A Supervision Policy should include:

1. Purpose and function of supervision;
2. How supervision contributes to the agency’s overall aims;
3. Minimum standards for the content and conduct of supervision;
4. Minimum requirements for supervision contracts, to include frequency and agenda setting;
5. A statement on anti-discriminatory practice;
6. How supervision will be recorded and status of supervision notes;
7. Explicit statement of the relationship between supervision and appraisal;
8. Rights and responsibilities of both supervisee and supervisor;
9. Methods for resolving disagreements and/or breakdowns in the process;
10. The type of confidentiality expected and guaranteed;
11. A clear statement of how “poor performance” will be dealt with and “good performance” acknowledged.

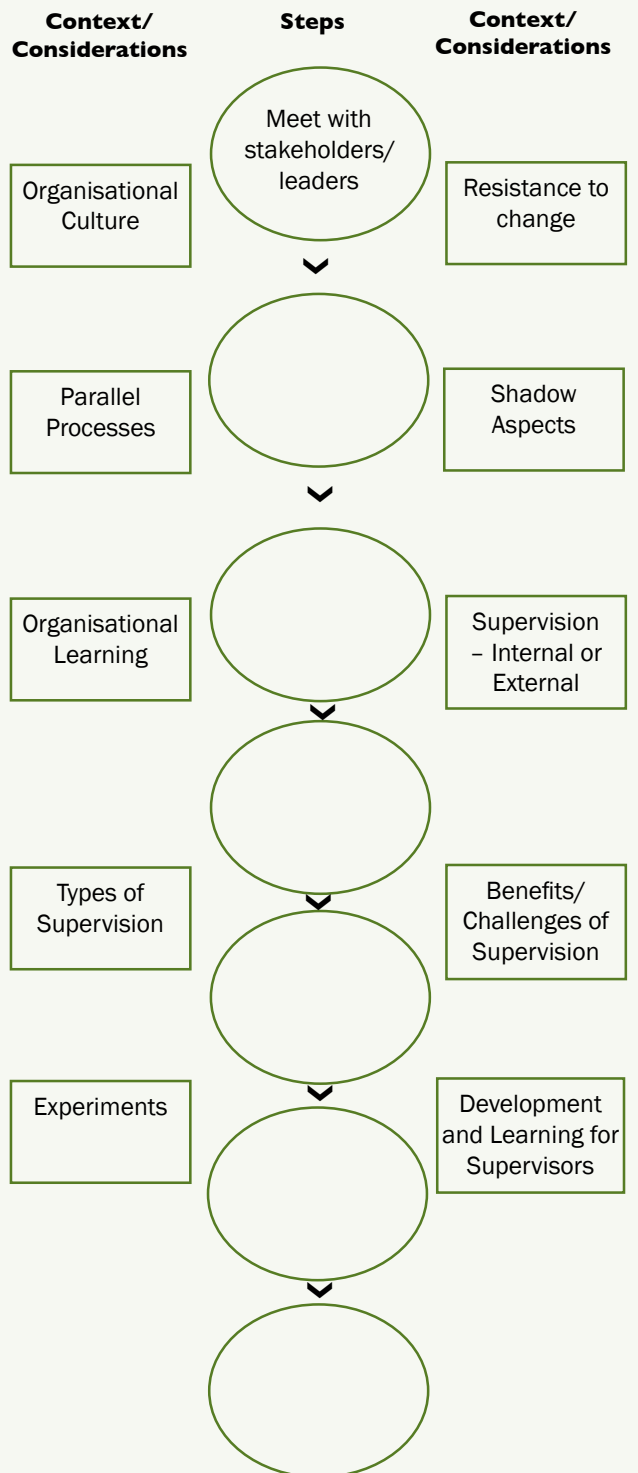
Kemshall (1995)

Hawkins and Shohet (2006, p. 214) add to this list:

- What supervision should focus on;
- What priority supervision should be given in relation to other tasks.

Appendix 2:

Program for Developing a Supervision Policy within an Organisation



References:

- Association for Counsellor Education and Supervision (ACES) (1993) Guidelines for Ethical Supervisory Behaviour in Gregoire, J. and Jungers, C.M. (2007) *The Counselor's Companion: What Every Beginning Counsellor Needs to Know*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc. p.p.94-95.
- Baker (1980) in Hawkins P. and McLean A. (1991) *Action Learning Guidebook*. U.K.: Bath Consultancy Group.
- Benefiel, M. (2005) *Soul at Work: Spiritual Leadership in Organisations*. Dublin, Veritas.
- Benefiel, M. (2008) *The Soul of a Leader: Finding Your Path to Success and Fulfillment*. U.S. The Crossroad Publishing Company
- Benefiel, M. (2010) *Immunity to Change: Supervision, Organisational Leadership, and Transformation*. In Holton, G. and Benefiel, M. (Eds.) *The Soul of Supervision: Integrating Practice and Theory*. New York: Morehouse Publishing.
- Bernard, J.M. and Goodyear, R.K. (2004) *Fundamentals of Clinical Supervision*. 3rd Edition. U.S. Pearson Education Ltd.
- Borders, L.D. and Brown, L.L. (2005) *The New Handbook of Counselling Supervision*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc. p.p.94-95.
- Brown, Allan and Ian Bourne (1996) *The Social Work Supervisor*. Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Carroll, M (1999) *Training in the Tasks of Supervision*. In Holloway E. and Carroll, M. (Eds.) *Training Counselling Supervisors: Strategies, Methods and Techniques*. London: Sage Publications.
- Carroll, M. (1999) in Carroll, M. and Holloway, E. (1999) *Counselling Supervision in Context*. London: Sage Publications.
- Carroll, M. (2001) *Supervision in and for Organisations*. In Carroll, M. and Tholstrup, M. *Integrative Approaches to Supervision*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Carroll, M. and Gilbert, M.C. (2011) *On Being a Supervisee: Creating Learning Partnerships*. (2nd. Ed). London: Vukani Publishing.
- Copeland, S. (2005). *Counselling Supervision in Organisations: Professional and Ethical Dilemmas Explored*. East Sussex.: Routledge.
- Davys A. and Beddoe L. (2010) *Best Practice in Professional Supervision*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- DeHaan, E. (2012) *Supervision in Action: A Relational Approach to Coaching and Consulting Supervision*. Maidenhead, Berks.: Open University Press.
- Egan, G. (1994) *Working the Shadow Side: A Guide to Behind-the-Scenes Management*. San Fransisco: Jossey Bass.
- Egan, K. (2013) *Supervision in an Organisational Context*. Unpublished paper. Dublin: All Hallows College
- Ekstein, R. and Wallerstein, R.S. (1972) *The Teaching and Learning of Psychotherapy*. New York. International Universities Press.
- Garratt, B (2000) *The Learning Organisation*. U.S.: Harper Collins Business
- HIQA Report (2013) *Investigation into the safety, quality and standards of services provided by the Health Service Executive to patients, including pregnant women, at risk of clinical deterioration, including those provided in University Hospital Galway, and as reflected in the care and treatment provided to Savita Halappanavar*. © Health Information and Quality Authority 2013
- Hawkins, Peter and Shohet, Robin (2006) *Supervision in the Helping Professions* 3rd Ed.; U.K.: Open University Press.
- Inskipp, F. and Proctor, B. (1993) *Making the Most of Supervision*. Twickenham: Cascade.
- Inskipp, F. and Proctor, B. (1993) *The Art, Craft and Tasks of Counselling Supervision*. Part 1. (1993, 1995) *Making the Most of Supervision*. Part 2 (1995) *Becoming a Supervisor*. U.K.: Cascade Publications.
- Itzhaky, H. (2001) *Factors Relating to "Interferences" in Communication between Supervisor and Supervisee: Differences between the External and Internal Supervisor*. *Clinical Supervisor*. Vol. 20, Issue 1. The Haworth Press, Inc.
- Kemshall, H. (1995) *Supervision and Appraisal in the Probation Service*. In Pritchard, J. (Ed.) *Good Practice in Supervision: Statutory and Voluntary Organisations*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers
- Mezirow, J. and associates. (1990) *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood: a Guide to Transformative and Emancipatory Learning*. California, U.S.: Jossey-Bass.
- New Economics Foundation (2011) *Five Ways to Wellbeing* (2011) <http://www.neweconomics.org/projects/entry/five-ways-to-well-being> Accessed 12.10.13
- NHS (2010) *Clinical Supervision Policy* <http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/About/FreedomOfInformation/FOIPublicationScheme/~/>
- O'Donohoe, J. (1997) *Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom*. U.S.: Harper Collins
- Proctor B (2001) *Training for the supervision alliance attitude, skills and intention*. Chapter 3 in Cutcliffe J.R., Butterworth T., Proctor B. *Fundamental themes in Clinical Supervision*. London. Routledge.
- Schwartz, T. and McCarthy, C. (2007) *Manage Your Energy, Not Your Time*. *Harvard Business Review*. www.hbrreprints.org. R0710B
- Van Ooijen, E. (2003) *Clinical Supervision made Easy: The 3-Step Method*. U.K. Elsevier Churchill Livingstone.
- Weld, N. (2012) *A Practical Guide to Transformative Supervision for the Helping Professions: Amplifying Insight*. London: Jessica Kingsley, 2012

Mary Dwyer

Mary Dwyer holds a Master of Science in Counselling Psychology (Trinity College) and a B.Sc. (Hons) Psychology (Open University). She has recently completed an M.A. in Supervisory Practice (DCU) focussing on transformational learning and cross-professional clinical supervision.

In her career with the HSE, Mary developed, managed and delivered an EAP service for over 6,500 healthcare staff, provided psychotherapy services with the HSE National Counselling Service and more recently, worked with the HSE Psychology Department within Child and Family Services, providing assessments and intervention, family therapy, courses and workshops.

Mary currently works in private practice.

email: marydwyerpsychologist@gmail.com, 086-8157274