

Supervision groups in private practice: an integrative approach

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Group supervision can provide a rich learning environment for post-training, practicing counsellors but requires active management, leadership and administration, and an understanding of group dynamics and process. A combination of generic models of group supervision for consultative use in private practice are considered. The Group Supervision Alliance Model (GSAM) of Proctor (2004) and the Cyclical Model of Supervision (CMS) of Page and Wosket (2001) are selected for further exploration with the aim of developing an integrative model for use in effective group supervision. The components required to prepare for and to conduct well-run group supervision for counsellors in private practice with a minimum of two years experience are described.

Group supervision can be an attractive option for some supervisees as it has the potential to provide a rich resource if carried out within a trusting and well-managed context. Effective leadership and evaluation of a supervision group in private practice requires attention to leadership style, intended group composition, theoretical approaches of members and the responsibilities that accompany the role of leader. A combination of generic models of led group supervision for consultative use in private practice are considered, with the aim of identifying the most effective group supervision models for post-training, practicing counsellors.

The group supervision literature reveals various models that map the process of supervision in its broadest sense. These are Bernard's *Discrimination Model* (cited in Bernard & Goodyear, 2009), Bernard and Goodyear's *Three Dimensional Conceptual Model* (2009), Carroll's (2001) *Integrative Generic Model*, Hawkins and Shohet's (2007) *CLEAR Model of Supervision*, Holloway's (1995) *Systems Approach to Supervision*, Inskipp and Proctor's (1995) *Group Supervision Alliance Model (GSAM)* and Page and Wosket's (2001) *Cyclical Model of*

Supervision (CMS). The word 'model' is used to describe a comprehensive map of group supervision or to denote a '*mental map for ordering complex data and experience*' (Proctor, 2004, p.12).

The GSAM of Proctor (2004) and the CMS of Page and Wosket

(2001) are explored with the aim of developing an integrative model for use in group supervision. The components required to conduct well-run group supervision for counsellors in private practice with a minimum of two years experience are described.



Illustration: Savina Hopkins

Just as one-to-one clinical supervision is an intervention in its own right (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009) and requires specific training (Hawkins & Shohet, 2007; Carroll, 2001), additional specific skills are demanded for effective conceptualisation and conduct of supervision in groups (Proctor, 2004; Page & Wosket, 2001; Cohen, 2004).

Before implementing group supervision, the supervisor needs to consider methods to ensure effective group process and management, capacities to balance group and individual needs within the group as a developing system, and awareness of how to address 'hot' issues and difficult dynamics in groups.

Bernard & Goodyear (2009) offer the following definition of group supervision as:

'...the regular meeting of a group of supervisees (a) with a designated supervisor or supervisors, (b) to monitor the quality of their work, and (c) to further their understanding of themselves as clinicians, of the clients with whom they work, and of service delivery in general. These supervisees are aided in achieving these goals by their supervisor(s) and by their feedback from and interactions with each other.' (p.244).

The GSAM and CMS models have been selected for their potential to enhance understanding of the clinical skills required, their attention to the development of counsellors in a group context, comprehensive application of monitoring and support, and a capacity to accommodate flexibility and creativity in group supervision. Suggestions offered by Cohen (2004) to the supervisor on preparing for group supervision are included to assist the supervisor to clarify the context of each group.

The GSAM arose from the collaborative efforts of Proctor and Inskip to identify and spell out the skills of supervisors and supervisees who worked well in groups. Both women are among the first generation

of supervision educators and trainers in Great Britain. This model encapsulates their experience of over 25 years within the historical context of group theory and supervision in counselling in Britain and the United States (Carroll, in Proctor, 2004).

The revised CMS model of Page and Wosket (2001) builds on feedback received from the field and

a developing system, and awareness of how to address 'hot' issues and difficult dynamics in groups (Proctor, 2004). The literature argues that supervisors of groups need to be aware of and work with stages of group development and group dynamics. Comparative models of group stages and research on group dynamics are discussed by Hawkins and Shohet (2007). Training in group leadership and dynamics and knowing when and how to effectively intervene are required here (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Campbell, 2000; Cohen, 2004; Feasey, 2002; Ögren, Jonsson & Sundin 2005; McMahon & Patton, 2002; Riva & Erickson Cornish, 2008; Rutter, 2007).

Proctor (2004) and Page and Wosket (2001) each identify four different types of group supervision, none of which are hierarchical or preferential. These are compared in Table 1.

Consideration of Table 1. reveals common agreement between the first and last definitions: one-to-one supervision that takes place in a group, where the supervisor manages the group and other supervisees are observers; and a peer group with shared responsibility for facilitation, supervising and being supervised. Proctor's '*Co-operative group*' is supervision by the group, whose members contract actively to co-supervise, and where supervisors take turns to be group facilitators and supervision monitors. In Page and Wosket's '*Supervisor-led group*' participants are involved in discussing the material presented, yet the supervisor leads the group and its process, and has both the implicit and explicit experiential seniority and responsibility for the group.

Both the GSAM and CMS models are similar in that they describe a typology of groups; emphasise the importance of group contracts with respect to ground

Table 1: Comparison of four different types of group supervision

PROCTOR – GSAM	PAGE AND WOSKET – CMS
Authoritative group supervision	Individual supervision in a group
Participative group supervision	Supervisor-led group
Co-operative group supervision	Facilitated group
Peer group supervision	Peer group

rules, boundaries, accountability of members, expectations of the group and of each other; and, explore group dynamics. They both outline procedures to enhance the conduct of group supervision to maximise the benefits for each member. Differences are identified where Proctor addresses the meta-tasks of supervision, takes system dynamics into account to give a greater amount of detail about methods for ensuring effective group process and management, and provides more comprehensive advice on how to address difficult dynamics in groups.

Based on the rationale that a post-training supervision group for experienced counsellors requires active management, leadership and administration, the facilitated group presents an ideal format. Proctor (2004) suggests that covert management can be detrimental to the establishment of clear foci in supervision, and person-centred, psychodynamic and action-oriented traditions can endorse this lack of clarity.

The '*Participative group*' of Proctor and the '*Facilitated group*' of Page and Wosket share common qualities. The supervisor takes primary responsibility for the supervision of each supervisee, while also facilitating members to co-supervise each other. This requires the supervisor to encourage, assist and challenge group members to respond actively to each other to enact the potential of co-supervision.

In preparing to conduct and evaluate a group supervision of counsellors, the group format requires that the supervisor embodies a presence similar to that of an educator. To provide a structured approach to this endeavour, Cohen (2004) suggests attention to five questions while preparing strategically for group supervision:

- what is the type of group and population?
- what are the reasons for the group?
- what are the supervisor's goals and criteria for success?
- what are the practical, practice and process questions to be borne in mind?
- how will the evaluation be conducted?

In considering the type of group

and population, Proctor (2004) and Page and Wosket (2001) suggest optimum numbers are three to six in each type of group so as to create sufficient safety for honest presentation and feedback. Safety is enhanced by making it a closed group, with a specific meeting time, for example two hours once monthly for six months. This is negotiated with the group and the supervisor advises that any agreements are to be reviewed at the end of the six months. One means to address the issue of group population is to seek through professional networks, a self-selected, mixed gender group of practicing counsellors with a minimum of two years post-training experience, with a stipulation that the theoretical approaches appropriate for this group are limited to, for example, the psychodynamic/humanistic/existential spectrum, in order to ensure reasonable homogeneity (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009).

The aim of a supervision group could be to provide a forum within which integrative and eclectic models of working can be explored, offering practitioners from different traditions the opportunity to open their work to each other, and for all to gain from each other's varied training, expertise and modes of practice (Proctor, 2004). In personal preparation for group supervision, the supervisor clarifies their personal goals, examples of which may be to provide a forum for shared learning to '*stretch, support and challenge ourselves...around our work*' (Clarkson, 1998, in Proctor, 2004, p.21), and to apply '*...careful forethought, initiation and building of a group working alliance {which} are essential foundations for a good working group*' (p.24). The supervisor must also make her/his intentions transparent to the group, and express the desire to meet the learning needs of the group members by addressing their individual learning styles, and to facilitate informed co-supervision within the group. Members are encouraged to give each other respectful, clear feedback, whilst enjoying the group development process. Group members are informed clearly that evaluation of these criteria will be made after each supervision session and will be complemented by a more formal six monthly review, using

methods outlined below.

A supervision session in Page and Wosket's five stage CMS has the following components; contract, focus, space, bridge and review. In contrast, Proctor's options for creating session agreements in the GSAM are; overall contract, group working agreement, session agenda, minute to minute response management and the reflective space. Both models begin with contracting, although the CMS refers more specifically to contracts made at the start of each session.

Good practice at the first meeting of the group entails a written contract given to each member that covers the broader context of limitations and accountability pertaining to the agencies, organizations and professional bodies to which all are beholden. A necessary component of a group contract is the group working agreement, which describes the roles and responsibilities of the group members and the supervisor. These are crafted by the group and include the non-negotiable responsibilities such as confidentiality, preparation, monitoring, assessing and reviewing as well as negotiable responsibilities such as accountability to the group, note-taking, record keeping, methods of presentation, group manners and individual needs. For Proctor (2004), establishing these norms is important in a group context because each supervisee's reaction to them has an effect on the dynamics of the group and will become a matter for group exploration in the event of non-compliance.

Contracting is followed by combining the CMS focus and the GSAM session agenda. Here specific session priorities are negotiated jointly—the number, order and content of presenters, as well as timings. This includes agreement with each supervisee about the management of their presentation and the amount of time available for reflective space which is dependent on the number of presenters per session. An agreed agenda at the start of the session allows time to 'check in', for each person to 'arrive' and be present, for left-over issues from the previous session to be revisited, as well as for a shared commitment to time management

(Page & Wosket, 2001; Proctor, 2004).

The supervisor now facilitates moving the group into the CMS space, known as 'reflective' space in GSAM. Each presentation of client work or professional issue provides the central task for the group at this point. During each presentation, feeling and behavioural responses occur within the group from which emerge the important benefits of group work. These felt responses may include countertransference, shadow material, parallel process and group energy level fluctuations (Page & Wosket, 2001), and it is here that Proctor's '*minute to minute response management task*' is most required. In this potentially creative segment, supervisees are encouraged to account for the reason they are prioritising their issue through open acknowledgment of their felt responses. The supervisor utilizes this segment to decide how to help the group respond in the most useful way in service of the supervision work, in the development of each group member and of the group as a whole (Proctor, 2004).

The next part of the group process comprises the CMS '*bridge*'—the presenter is given time to think through understandings that result from exploration of their issue, and the emotional experience in the group, in order to apply these outcomes to the counselling situation (Page & Wosket, 2001). Proctor (2004) refers to this as the '*debriefing portion*' for the presenter and the group after each presentation. This is followed by the next supervisee presenting in the order established in the session agenda.

The final segment is called '*review*' in CMS and GSAM. It is a '*check-out*' time in which the supervisor leads an exploration of the effectiveness of meeting each individual's learning needs, as well as attending to any group maintenance and group function issues. A review of the session as a whole and the supervisor's performance is undertaken in this last part of the group, both in verbal then written format. The written feedback form may be modelled on the one Carroll (2006) gives to individual supervisees and can be submitted after the session to allow time for further reflection on the group experience, as well as to allow time for appropriate construction

of feedback. Written evaluations are used in the contracted group review time, notionally after six months of meeting, and in the supervisor's own supervision as material to present to their supervisor when discussing the group work.

Each group develops a unique culture that needs to be accounted for in any conceptualising of how group supervision works or fails to work. Some skills used in individual supervision are transferable to a group

their knowledge and skills, their self-awareness and to their professional identities. An overall impression based on anecdotal evidence from the literature supports the view that when groups are well run, they are helpful for supervisees and clients (Proctor, 2004).

In summary, a judicious combination of the CSM and GSAM helps the supervisor to conduct group supervision with the aim of facilitating the normative, formative and restorative tasks of supervision

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supervision context and others can only develop through the process of leading supervision groups. Carroll's (2001) quip provides a unique point of focus: '*It sounds a terrible choice, but given the option between a good counsellor who was a poor educator, or a poor counsellor who was a good educator, I would choose the latter as a supervisor.*' (p.27) He further suggests that a competent group supervisor has the ability '*...to offer a range of educational methods and to be aware of which learning processes suit which individuals...*' (p.28), and increasingly polishes her/his capacities as a teacher and counsellor who focuses on the learning of supervisees and gives attention to the welfare of their clients.

Rutter's (2007) research on effective group supervision revealed that experienced counsellors placed great value on three main factors; a group's climate of trust and safety, the relationships among group members, and the many opportunities to learn from the supervisor and one another. Members perceived that the group made a significant contribution to

as outlined by Proctor (2004). The normative task comprises group negotiations that highlight the shared responsibility for ethical practice. The formative task involves pinpointing and addressing individual learning needs. Finally, Proctor (2004) states that the '*...respect, empathic engagement, honesty and purposefulness called for provide... [a] culture and environment [which] is an optimal atmosphere for learning and development*' (p.75). Well-managed group supervision can enable '*...a safe ... place for shedding old habits and trying new ways of being in... the world of counselling and supervision. It is restorative and often therapeutic*' (p.75).

An integrative method for understanding and conducting effective group supervision has been considered. There is agreement in the literature that well managed groups can provide a significant contribution to knowledge, skills, self-awareness and professional identities of supervisees. Although further writing and research on group supervision is recommended, the literature suggests that practicing,

post-training counsellors may reap significant personal and professional rewards from involvement in generic forms of group supervision.

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AUTHOR NOTES

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