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## An Introduction to Supervisory Practice in Human Services

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### CHAPTER 3: The Supervisory Process: Beginnings, Middles, and Endings

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# THE SUPERVISORY PROCESS: BEGINNINGS, MIDDLES, AND ENDINGS

### THE NEWLY APPOINTED SUPERVISOR: ENTERING THE ROLE

It is not unusual when changing roles to have questions and a degree of anxiety and stress. Before “changing hats,” human service professionals typically think that their direct work with clients, families, groups, and communities is the most important work they could be doing (Perlmutter, 1990). For many human service workers, direct work with clients is the reason they entered the field. While in direct service roles, they socialized and worked closely with their colleagues. Those colleagues might have reinforced the view that direct service is the best reason for working in the human services. Furthermore, they have developed a social network of people similarly situated. Frequently in these groupings there is a sense of camaraderie and collective involvement in important work.

When a direct service employee is asked or volunteers to become a supervisor, her view of herself changes and the nature of her professional network also has to change. Having to accept the consequences of becoming a supervisor is sometimes an awkward, even painful, part of the shift in roles. Emotional issues are common to almost all human service direct service professionals as they embark to become a supervisor of other staff members. Psychologically, leaving friends or becoming professionally responsible for them can lead to loneliness, a sense of isolation, and feelings of loss even as the new supervisor is happy about the promotion and about new responsibilities. When a supervisor is assigned to a difficult unit or a staff known to have problems, the change may be accompanied less by positive feelings than by additional fears and frustration.

Movement up from direct service means leaving tasks for which one is respected and from which one gained professional satisfaction, recognition, and self-esteem. (However, many supervisors continue as direct practitioners as part of their job assignments or to cover for unit members.) When moving into new roles with some confusion and personal stress, a new supervisor can encounter personal psychological issues (“old ghosts”) she met earlier in life. In what can be a stressful situation, a newly appointed supervisor may find she re-encounters previous personal developmental challenges. These personal confrontations

require that a supervisor deal with her personal difficulties so they do not flare up and interfere with doing the job. Being alert to this possibility provides the new supervisor with the opportunity to draw on her knowledge and skills to deal again with somewhat re-intensified old ghosts in constructive ways.

Leaving roles that are more or less professionally comfortable, a new supervisor has to learn new roles for which no one can be entirely well prepared. Newly appointed supervisors must struggle to some extent with identity confusion. Who am I now? What are my skills in this job? What do my subordinates, current and former peers, and superiors think of me?

Persons new in the supervisory role necessarily must consider the extent to which they are familiar with and comfortable with the authority that comes with the new role. As “beginning” human service workers, they had to work through their feelings, attitudes, and behaviors in relation to those in authority. Now the new job and its tasks demand that the new supervisor find some sense of comfort in the use of the authority that comes with a supervisory role.

### **Overcoming Trained Incapacity**

Part of the change is a struggle with *trained incapacity*, a behavior or thought that is constructive and helpful in one situation which is maladaptive and unhelpful in a different situation. Previously, the worker focused on a particular person, family, group, or community instead of on enabling employees to perform their work effectively. A supervisor moves from hands on, face-to-face personal involvement in the delivery of direct services to delegation, at least one step removed from actual direct service. The earlier worker could be a neutral enabler, empowering clients and being nonjudgmental; now because of the role change, the new supervisor moves into leadership tasks that require taking stands on issues facing the unit, supervisee, or agency. In addition, a new supervisor has to shift from a “current” orientation to planning for the unit, which requires a “future” orientation. Furthermore, many human service workers are uncomfortable with authority and power and their uses. Indeed, many have been trained to minimize power differentials between clients and themselves. The new role requires the use of authority and power; in fact, their use is inherent in the job itself (Perlmutter, 2001).

### **Accepting One’s Authority**

New supervisors—despite their anxiety and ambivalence—are forced by the immediacy of the context to take on their new roles and administrative duties. They must initiate action, make decisions, make assignments, and indicate the results they are seeking in individual situations. Even where a new supervisor might resist acting in these ways, the members of the work unit—through questions, requests, and their other actions—will call on the new supervisor to act in one way or another. Certainly, the new supervisor will not be perfect, will be tentative about some issues and more sure of others. Experienced supervisors did not become that way overnight. They too fumbled at times, made errors, and learned, sometimes easily and sometimes not, how to perform the requirements of their jobs as supervisors.

## What's My Motivation?

According to Schein (1987), five motives (or career anchors) account for the ways people select and prepare for a career: (1) *managerial competence*, that is to develop interpersonal, analytical, and emotional competence needed to manage people; (2) *technical/functional competence*, the continuous development of technical talent so that one opts out of management roles and chooses to refine one's direct practice skills and continue as a direct service practitioner of high skill; (3) *security*, stabilization of one's career situation, tying oneself to a particular organization or geographic location; (4) *creativity*, the desire to create or build something on one's own; and (5) *autonomy and independence*, a desire to be free from organizational constraints. Autonomy and working at one's own pace are chief values. While a person can have all of these motives at various times, several (1, 3, and 4) are congruent with the aspiration to become a manager.

Why become a supervisor? Some reasons that have encouraged people to become supervisors include: interest in administration; power and influence; monetary reward and stature; professional growth; self-affirmation; recognition by others; only job available; and having a prior commitment to the agency (Patti et al., 1978). But each individual has her own particular reasons for wanting to become a supervisor. You may consider your own motivation for wanting to become or remain a supervisor by examining the factors listed above that influenced others to become supervisors, as well as factors peculiar to you.

## Building on Prior Knowledge and Experiences

Whatever a supervisor's motivations, no one comes empty-handed to the job. Social workers who become supervisors have prior experiences and knowledge that can help them cope with their new responsibilities. In your personal life, it is probable that you have supervised someone or a group as part of family, church, camping, or other community organizations. As a social work practitioner you have integrated knowledge about clarifying the purposes of the job and the importance of making relationships for professional purposes. You have learned various methods for delivering services, possibly within the agency you now serve or will serve as a supervisor. Part of your experience undoubtedly focused on setting goals and selecting appropriate problem-solving means, either individually or as a member of a team, in order to attain the goals.

If you have been a successful practitioner, you understand how change takes place over time and that it is seldom rapid and conclusive. Furthermore, as a practitioner, you have integrated into your work respect for the dignity of those served and those with whom you work. In addition, as a practitioner, to a significant degree you have been able to master a conscious use of self. Supervision will require additional skills, but this prior learning and experience serve as supports in your beginning life as a supervisor. There is one additional element which can serve as a strength. You have been pre-socialized to the role through your experiences as a supervisee, where you have consciously and subliminally been "reading" your own supervisors as to their knowledge, skills, and supervisory styles. From some you have learned positive supervision skills; perhaps from others you have identified actions to avoid.

## Working in the Middle

Supervisors are middle-managers strategically located in the organization, “caught between the conflicting expectations and demands of superiors and subordinates” (Havassy, 1990). Havassy found that effective middle managers are able to deal with their multiple roles because of several abilities:

- They have a *tolerance for ambiguity*, grasping simultaneously different and seemingly contradictory aspects of multi-party systems.
- They serve as *boundary agents* between constituencies with different demands and expectations, including that of loyalty to each.
- They possess the ability to *mobilize* and *use resources* from horizontal (parallel) and vertical (superior/subordinate) systems and to *influence* others to take action leading to desired results.
- They can *identify with each point* of view and see it as containing a valid understanding of the situation, without necessarily agreeing with everything.
- In conflict situations, they can see and *understand the perspectives of the different groups* involved and try, when possible, to create win–win situations.
- *Thinking independently*, they have the ability to question what makes sense, what is right, and whether there is another way of thinking or acting.

These are difficult skills. Most persons anticipating becoming a supervisor possess some of them, but few at the start can claim them all. Time and experience will enrich your package of skills.

The remainder of this chapter presents three sequential phases of the supervisory role and the supervisor–supervisee relationship, a sequence that affects both the total relationship over time and individual discrete discussions/sessions, relationships that change as supervisor and supervisee work together for shorter and more extended periods. New supervisors must be alert to the time dynamics of supervisory work relationships, and need to be aware of the impact of the three major phases of the supervisory process on themselves, their supervisees, and relevant others in the organizational system. *Supervisory process* refers to the evolving and continuous series of more or less intentionally organized discrete events by which a supervisor and supervisee accomplish their work—in other words, the process is what they actually do in their work together over time. For both supervisors and supervisees, the context and their actions are both patterned and changing over time.

## BEGINNINGS

Many beginnings are difficult and none are without some concerns, anxieties, and ambivalence. Yet, simultaneously, a person poised on the brink of a new chapter in life has positive expectations and looks forward to fulfilling and satisfying experiences. When thinking back to earlier beginning experiences, you probably remember questions such as these: Who are these people I will be working with? Will I like and respect them and they like and respect me? Will I be able to do the work, maintain relationships, and juggle these

new responsibilities in light of my other responsibilities? At the same time, you probably were looking forward to the challenge, exciting new experiences, new learning and thoughts, and new friendships. For a prospective or new supervisor, early socialization to the role of supervisor took place as you became aware of the behaviors of your own and other supervisors on the job, as you observed and perhaps studied their activities, and as they communicated their styles through day-to-day behaviors. Soon the new supervisor moves beyond this preliminary phase of unplanned learning as she enters the new supervisory role and begins relationships as a supervisor with supervisees, other supervisors, and superiors in the administrative hierarchy.

### **The Emotional Climate**

Even while you are experiencing feelings of pride, excitement, and challenge and want to get on with the job, there are aspects of the job and the organization that must be studied so that you can best do your job. It is important to recognize that the *emotional climate* in your organization, including your own feelings, shape and lubricate social transactions. Soon after entering a new system, people ordinarily begin to perceive those emotional overtones operating in the environment. Some agency environments are warmer, friendlier, and more relaxed, while others have more tension in the air and conflicts among the different groupings.

Emotions are the lubricants and, conversely, the “sand in the oysters” of organizations. Worry, envy, brooding, boredom, playfulness, despair, plotting, and hating, all contribute to the emotional climate of an organization, the emotional climate within which supervisors and supervisees work. Tensions or conflicts can exist between different units, professional disciplines, professionals and volunteers, racial or ethnic groups, staff and clients or patients, direct service staff and administrators, among others (Fineman, 1993). Since a supervisor must do her job in the organization, accurate knowledge and assessment of the organization is needed to be effective.

### **Variations in Beginnings: Promoted from Within or from Outside**

A promoted supervisor may have served in an acting supervisor capacity in her “home” unit or in a different unit. Nevertheless, she has been promoted over those who last week were her peers. Just yesterday, she joined them in complaining about supervisors and higher administrators and enjoyed being accepted in the work group and being friendly with coworkers. She may even have long-standing social relationships with them outside the job situation. Now the newly appointed supervisor must assume authority and power and, necessarily, her relationship with former colleagues must be altered.

If selected from outside the agency, the supervisor is a newcomer and not a part of the group. She must learn about the agency culture, the people, who is responsible for what, and seek a sense of psychological safety and security, part and parcel of clarifying her self and place in the agency (Holloway & Brager, 1989). Typically, a new supervisor’s reputation precedes her. This situation also brings forth questions as to whether or not she will be respected and liked, whether it is thought she can do the job, and her necessity to learn rapidly who everyone is and where they fit into the scheme of things. Such a supervisor is faced with

learning much information quickly and, at the same time, must make decisions without the knowledge of history and prior behaviors and patterns of employees, as suggested by Amy Jeffers' experiences in Chapter 1.

Whether you came from within or outside the agency, among the people you now supervise may be some who wanted the job and feel they deserved the promotion. Whatever the reason, the agency administration chose you. Part of assuming the new position is accepting the necessity to deal with the fact you were appointed, and to be sensitive to the ways in which the feelings of those not chosen may be acted out.

Supervisors have to deal with their own feelings and their own behaviors in the situation as they prepare for their roles and their initial encounters, so they can deal constructively with new relationships. It is incumbent on the supervisor to gather relevant information about her new supervisees, information such as educational background, prior human service and organizational experience, and knowledge and skill levels. Where the supervisor has participated in employment interviews with the new supervisee, much is known prior to the first supervisor–supervisee meeting. However, where they are beginning a new relationship, the supervisor has to learn quickly and make judgments about the supervisee's knowledge and skills as they relate to the job to be performed. These early interactions set a tone for the work that is to follow. Understanding one's own experiences of beginnings can help a supervisor be sensitive to what new employees or supervisees may be experiencing.

When you become a supervisor, your professional perspectives and job orientation change. You begin to see developments in new ways and your perspectives change to account for new roles and goals. For both the new supervisor and the new supervisee different feelings have to be dealt with and additional skills will be required in order to get the work done.

There is generally an office culture that may or may not be obvious to newcomers. Sometimes new employees come to the job unaware of some of the "rules" of behavior in a work place. By and large, these missed "signals" appear early in their work experience, although they may crop up later as well. Vignette 3.1 describes one such situation in which a supervisor early in the relationship has to deal with a supervisee over such missed "signals."

In social work practice, clients and groups have their idiosyncratic relationship styles. Supervisors become aware during the beginning stages that supervisees also relate in their own ways. Because the early stages of the work relationship set the direction for the future, supervisors pay close attention to how a supervisee relates early in their relationship. Some supervisees handle their anxiety in new situations through inappropriate *dependence* (too many questions, too much need for reassurance or "stroking," too much personal private information offered too early in the relationship); others become overly friendly and *inappropriately egalitarian*; still others strike out by *testing the authority* of the supervisor; yet others *distance* themselves, relating cautiously to the supervisor and others. Only time and the experience of working together reveals whether these reactions are connected to the beginning of the work relationship or are the general relationship styles of the supervisees.

On the basis of the job description of the supervisee, early in the supervisor–supervisee relationship the supervisor and supervisee must clarify their respective responsibilities. By creating a *professional contract* (discussed in more detail in Chapter 7) during the initial stage of their work together, they can define and clarify expectations about goals, methods to be used, and mutual obligations and responsibilities.

### VIGNETTE 3.1

#### COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS, OR HOW TO USE AUTHORITY?

Jackie Cheatham, a relatively new employee, often dresses inappropriately for work in the Stillwater Community Psychiatric Rehabilitation Agency. She wears skirts that have led to complaints from both male and female clients, and her accessories are flashy. Several clients have asked why she dresses as she does. They recognize her choice of clothing as being inappropriate. She also uses her cell phone during work hours, keeping the earpiece in so she won't miss any personal calls.

The supervisor, Ms. Lindos, was new on the job when she first encountered Ms. Cheatham's behavior. Ms. Lindos was a bit nervous about approaching the topic the first time it came to her attention. Nevertheless, thinking that the agency dress code had not been discussed with Ms. Cheatham in her initial employment interview, Ms. Lindos reviewed the dress code with her and explained potential problems that can occur. Ms. Cheatham agreed to abide by the dress rules and to discontinue using her cell phone during work hours. She did modify her clothing somewhat, but Ms. Lindos thought the clothing changes were somewhat ambiguous. They seemed at the same time to comply and not comply with the

dress code. Also, by the end of the next week the cell phone had reappeared. There were new complaints from clients about the clothing, and several staff members also raised questions.

Ms. Lindos took notes about the incidents, including brief descriptions of what happened and when, but she was unsure how to proceed. Since Ms. Cheatham had changed her dress somewhat, would Ms. Lindos be on correct legal and professional grounds if she insisted Ms. Cheatham further modify her dress style? What about the use of the cell phone? Ms. Lindos wondered if she could be accused of harassment. She wondered if she herself clearly understood agency policy on these matters. She asked herself, What is the policy in other units? Should she use her authority and demand that the behavior stop "or else?" Or else *what*, she wondered.

Ms. Lindos wants to do what is correct, and ensure that the agency maintains a safe and professional environment. What should she do? Does she need additional information? If so, what information does she need? Would your assessment or advice be different if Ms. Lindos were a *Mr.* Lindos?

Unique problems can exist for "acting" supervisors. The supervisor is then in a temporary role that requires she relate to her peers in different ways. Yet, a person who takes on the role of acting supervisor may not be selected to serve permanently as the supervisor. When this happens, the supervisor returns to her prior direct service role and again becomes a peer of her former colleagues. The ambiguity of the interim role creates special problems, since an alert supervisor has to act to continue the work efforts of all employees but at the same time do it in such a way that a return to the unit in her former role is possible.

## MIDDLE PHASE

### The Core Skills

The primary core skill of supervision is the ability to solve problems: entering a new role and job, establishing relationships, assessing and analyzing unit and inter-unit problems,

and, in general, anticipating and dealing with problems of various kinds. A common difficulty in problem solving is correctly identifying the problem. This seems, on the surface, to be a relatively simple task. However, supervisors are often balancing many tasks at the same time and are torn among different responsibilities.

Through their relationship with supervisees, supervisors can teach by modeling communication skills, in the way they relate to and communicate with their supervisees. Supervisors also can model problem-solving skills, such as the identification of individual, group, family, and community problems; estimating the impact of those problems; assessing situations and the relevant factors; dealing with accompanying emotions; choosing among alternative responses, including strategy and professional roles; and planning for follow-through and evaluation. Thus, modeling is a primary teaching tool for communication and problem solving.

When a supervisor is confronted with several supervisees who feel their own responsibilities are overwhelming—too many cases, reporting requirements expected in too short a period of time, too few resources available for them to be sufficiently productive—only careful assessment can determine whether low productivity is a result of the workers being unprepared, not using time properly, personal emotional states, insufficient employee supports being available, the unit being inadequately structured, or the job requirements being unrealistic. Each of these specific problems requires different interventions.

Successful supervisors develop the ability to spot potential problems and deal with or minimize them. The ability to identify and deal with relatively minor problems can enable a supervisor to reserve her priority attention for the most important problems. When faced with several problems, the mission and goals of the unit within the organizational context help to determine which priorities supervisors choose to act on.

For example, absenteeism may appear as a symptom in the unit. Too many absences can result from many factors. Supervisors will want to take care not to treat the symptom on a short-term basis when identifying the underlying causes is more appropriate and may lead to more positive and long-lasting results. Absenteeism can be related to the particular individuals in the unit; the demands of the job; to unit morale; the supervisees' relationships with each other and the supervisor; or events in the agency itself.

Given an accurate assessment, the identification of potential strategies is a creative act that requires time, energy, and thought. Carefully thinking through alternative approaches to dealing with the problem takes effort and is often not easy. Developing too few strategy ideas, as well as too many, can undermine a supervisor's decision making and problem solving. Too few ideas may miss an innovative approach that could work well, and too many ideas can overwhelm people and make decision making difficult. To generate alternative strategies, brainstorm and check with trusted colleagues as to how they handled similar situations.

Problem-solving skills are fundamental to the work of supervision. Among their uses is helping supervisees to help their clients and groups with the problem-solving aspects of coping. Similarly, supervisors help their supervisees cope with their own problem-solving in their work. Gitterman (2000) provides some skills guidance for workers to help their clients with problem solving but the suggested skills apply equally to the supervisor-supervisee relationship. A supervisor can help by: (1) providing relevant information, (2) clarifying misinformation where it exists, (3) providing advice where needed and appropriate, (4) offering

hypotheses to explore and explain a supervisee's concerns, (5) providing feedback, (6) inviting supervisee reactions, (7) specifying action tasks to deal with the problem, and (8) preparing the worker to carry out the tasks.

### **Supervisory Sessions and Agendas**

Supervisors and supervisees meet or should meet on a regular schedule to discuss the supervisee's work and the services provided. Essentially, these sessions of varying length depend upon the job situation, how much time is really available, and the supervisee's abilities. Sessions focus on the agenda of the supervisee (questions, job issues, needed information and/or new skills, signals that one is doing well or needs to improve, etc.) and the agenda of the supervisor (teaching, constructive feedback, "stroking," giving direction, communicating new policies, etc.). There are no rules as to how agendas can be set. They often vary with events on the job. Initial agendas for particular sessions can be cooperatively established before or early in a supervisory session, or can be initiated by the employee so as to highlight his concerns. But, agendas can also be set openly by supervisors gently or persistently and more forcefully directing an employee's attention to one issue or another about problems being avoided by the supervisee or handled less well than expected.

Although the ideal for supervisory practice is to hold regular supervisory sessions with supervisees, in a national study Kadushin (1992) found supervisors admitted they did not make themselves readily available to supervisees, did not provide sufficient time for supervision, and gave supervision a low priority for their use of time. These difficulties arose from many other job stresses such as other administrative tasks, direct service demands, outside projects, lack of organization, dealing with emergencies, and dealing with everyday management tasks such as reports, statistics, and other tasks assigned by upper management levels.

Supervisory conferences can be formal and take place in an office with a request that phone calls and other interruptions be held until the end of the meeting (a luxury which seems less and less available to supervisors and supervisees, as agency emergencies occur without warning and supervisors have many tasks assigned to them). But conferences can also be held "on the fly" in hallway interactions in between meetings, brief discussions at the water cooler or in the parking lot, or phone calls or email messages. Many of the same supervisory skills applied in formal sessions can be applied in shorter and more informal meetings: presentation of a problem or issue, assessment by the supervisor and the supervisee, agreement on action by the supervisor, or guidance to the supervisee for his action.

Where possible, an agenda for the meeting is expected by the supervisor from the supervisee prior to the actual meeting. Of course, there are often later developments which have to be included spontaneously. However, when the supervisee's agenda is prepared prior to the session, this provides time for the supervisor to think about the situations to be discussed and their ramifications and to make appropriate preparations for the meeting. Supervisors ordinarily invite supervisees to express their concerns at the beginning of each supervisory session, unless some exceptional factor has arisen with importance for the worker and/or their relationship which must take priority over the worker's job concerns.

As supervisors and supervisees work together on the agenda identified by the worker, the aim is to come to conclusions about their work together during the session and what the

worker and the supervisor are to do as a result of their discussion: call a family member who is an agency client, speak to a lawyer or physician, attend an inter-agency or intra-agency committee meeting, discuss an issue with a higher level administrator, complete a report due by the end of next week.

Some part of the agenda that has been discussed may remain unresolved. In this case, a supervisor judges how important the unresolved matter is and the degree to which she and the supervisee can live with the ambiguous result. Where necessary, additional meetings or assignments can be scheduled and can be followed up as appropriate to the situation. Where a more intense disagreement or conflict is unresolved, the supervisor ordinarily will schedule a followup meeting to pursue the required resolution or establish action guidelines for the worker to follow prior to their meeting specifically to settle the conflict or issue. Both persons may need time to “cool off” and to consider different approaches to the problem.

Supervisees can be motivated to use the supervisory relationship to learn, to gain skills, and to seek confirmation of their abilities and growth, but supervisors should be aware that supervisees may have anxieties that can lead to negative consequences. Supervisees are asked by supervisors to work, examine and perhaps change ideas, to gain new knowledge and skills, to change behaviors, and to exchange comfortable patterns for the unknown, that is, to take risks. The ways in which supervisees react to their anxieties are myriad. They can become dependent, aggressive, challenging, or passive, or step over boundaries in an attempt to make the relationship more social than professional.

### **Tracking and Assessing Game Playing**

The possibilities of “game playing” require that supervisors be alert to the ways in which supervisees are working with and relating to them. As early as 1968 in “Games People Play in Supervision,” Kadushin drew attention to the ways in which some supervisees attempt to manipulate their relationships with supervisors. He alerted supervisors to a number of games that supervisees can employ to deal with their own anxieties. They can attempt to manipulate the levels of demand made on them; redefine the relationship into something different, for example, counseling; reduce the power disparities by establishing that the supervisor is limited in some way, perhaps less smart or expert than one might expect; or try to control the situation in conferences or the job itself by attempting to shift control to the supervisee. Of course there are many games that supervisees can play to attain their goals.

Kadushin suggests the simplest and most direct way of dealing with the problem of game-playing in supervision is to refuse to play. Recognition of the game playing can be followed by not joining in the game, in effect “not granting the supervisee permission” to continue with the game. The less vulnerable (or personally needy) a supervisor is to the game playing by a supervisee, the less need she will have to participate in the game. A second strategy Kadushin suggests is to gradually interpret what is being done or to openly confront the game playing supervisee. Both these strategies depend on an assessment of how well the supervisee can handle the potential threat, embarrassment, and discomfort that comes from being “found out” and honestly confronted. To do so requires a sure assessment, sensitive timing, and careful selection and control of the intensity of the discussion. Yet another strategy is for the supervisor to speak honestly with the supervisee about what she observes, but focus neither on the dynamics of the supervisee’s behavior nor on

her reaction to it, focusing instead on the disadvantages of the games being played. In any case, supervisors have to remain alert to the ways in which supervisees relate to them and what their behaviors mean for the job and their growth as employees.

Supervisors can also be inventive and play games. Hawthorne (1975) defined a two-part typology of games played by supervisors and suggested that such games result from supervisors' attempts to deal with the difficulties surrounding their authority. She described two general categories of supervisor game playing: games of abdication and games of power. Supervisors can take on employees and students and then fail to actively supervise them. They can tell employees that they trust them and that they don't need the level of supervision that other employees need, thus using their labor but not accepting oversight and enabling responsibilities. Other supervisors can give one set of instructions and later chastise employees for doing the task in the way they had suggested. They can set up employees for failure by selecting the wrong assignments, or failing to provide sufficient background for expected performances. A supervisor can redefine honest disagreement as psychological resistance, or toss questions back to supervisees in order "to further" their learning.

It is incumbent on supervisors to be alert to the temptations to act out their own personal needs in their roles as supervisors and to choose to do the right and ethical thing, seeking help if needed in order to do so.

## ENDING PHASE

Ambiguity and uncertainty accompany all phases of the supervisory relationship and they are present in the ending phase as well. While difficult feelings may be present at the end of individual or group sessions, they may be accentuated when the work relationship itself is coming to an end. Either the supervisor or supervisee or both may be leaving the agency, moving to other positions within the same agency, or even leaving the field. These transitions affect the supervisor, supervisee, other staff members, and may have consequences beyond their immediate contacts.

Just as supervisors and supervisees have emotions associated with beginnings of their work together, so too do they have emotions when their work and relationship are to end. The ambivalent and conflicted feelings that accompany many separations apply to both supervisor and supervisee. Promotion or other advancements may be viewed as positive changes, but even positive changes can be accompanied by mixed emotions, emotions that may be difficult to handle. Supervisors are responsible for self-management and are expected to handle their own feelings with self-discipline. Part of this task is to acknowledge the transitions involved and to plan carefully for their implementation. If the supervisee alone is leaving, several factors must be prepared for: (1) the supervisor assisting the supervisee in ending properly with clients/patients, groups; (2) preparing endings with other unit and agency persons, as well as relevant persons in other systems, including with the supervisor; and (3) attending to all necessary administrative responsibilities.

Promotions of either supervisor or supervisee may evoke feelings of guilt in either party. Either party may feel guilty about leaving and either party may feel deserted and upset because of the separation. After all, when people work together and develop professionally

because of the relationship, and together they experience successes and pride, they may feel grateful for what has been but also fear their personal progress may be dependent in some way on the relationship. If the supervisee is promoted within the same agency to a supervisory position, the former supervisor may feel pride but also may feel envy. "It took me ten years to reach this position and it only took her four. And, she did it because of my help." Such rivalries call for the supervisor to deal consciously with her emotions in the most professionally disciplined ways.

A supervisor may also be promoted within the same agency. In this instance, the supervisor moves on to another unit and the supervisee remains behind with a new supervisor. If the supervisory relationship was very positive or the supervisee had a strong sense of dependence upon the supervisor, the supervisee may continue to seek support from the former supervisor. If endings are not handled effectively, the original supervisor may have to deal with a supervisee who tries to continue the relationship and the new unit supervisor may be confronted by resistance from her newly assigned supervisee. Both supervisors have to be able to set limits on the respective supervisees and on their need to be helpful and supportive.

Sometimes relationships do not end on a positive note. Some endings result from termination, illness, changes in family situations, and undesired transfers to new places and job assignments. In most cases, the decision to terminate a worker has to develop out of a process. In these cases, performance expectations have not been met and because minimum standards have not been met, the agency ends the supervisee's employment. But, the termination began with judgments and actions taken by the supervisor. Termination is almost always a difficult, emotionally charged process. The supervisor may feel a sense of failure: "I wish I could have helped him to do the job better." "I wish I could have found some way to have saved his job." The supervisee may also feel sadness, a lack of self-esteem, anger, worry because of a loss of income and health benefits, and so on. All these feelings may be expressed toward the supervisor. Much will depend on the ways in which the terminated employee deals with the situation, but the supervisor has to work hard to remain "centered" and deal constructively with her own and the employee's sometimes strong and intense feelings.

When endings are unusual in some dramatic way, the entire life of the work unit and the overall agency can be impacted. In general, endings evoke difficult emotions and anxiety. Even when supervisor and supervisee do not like each other, a supervisor may still care and be concerned about helping the employee get through the separation. Helping the supervisee to have a realistic view of the ending, the options for the future, and providing as much help as possible to prepare the supervisee to take "next steps" is part of the supervisor's responsibilities. Special care has to be taken when only a negative evaluation is possible as the person leaves. In some situations (termination or being laid off for a period), an employee, may need additional support that a supervisor cannot provide. In these cases, it may be necessary to refer employees in large organizations to human resources, employee assistance, or other supportive services. In addition, care must be taken to deal with the feelings of other persons in the unit who also are affected by the person's leaving and sometimes by the way in which he or she leaves. Chapter 14 includes two scenarios involving two negative ending situations.

## The Individual Session

The relationship between a supervisor and supervisee takes place over the entire duration of the time they work together and evolves through various stages. In parallel fashion, there are beginning, middle, and ending phases during individual supervisory sessions. As suggested earlier, agendas for conferences can be established prior to meeting together. Where this is not possible, a supervisor needs to clarify a preliminary contract for the session by focusing sharply on the needs and questions of the supervisee and putting on the table those items she needs to discuss with her supervisee.

Just as unexpected items can arise in the ongoing supervisory relationship, a supervisor can be surprised and encounter completely unexpected issues expressed by the supervisee. Both in practice and supervisory situations, there can be “door knob” effects introduced, that is, the supervisee may not be open about some difficulty and only raise the issue spontaneously while exiting at the end of the session. This action can create problems for the supervisor who has to make a quick judgment about whether to extend the session and work on the problem or end the session and go on to other work, delaying more extended discussion of the issue presented.

The door knob phenomenon suggests a supervisor review carefully what has been happening in the relationship with this particular supervisee. Is the supervisee fearful and hesitating to reveal one topic or another? Is the supervisee unclear about expectations, or feeling unappreciated? Is the supervisee’s sense of personal empowerment and self-efficacy insufficient to enable him to make demands or face certain issues? Is the supervisor setting a tone and environment which increases the supervisee’s discomfort and reduces trust?

The middle phase of a session is the time to work on the agendas that were identified in the beginning of the session or developed out of the discussion during the session. It is during this phase that efforts are made to resolve the issues brought to the session and to identify the resources needed for dealing with the problems, including who will do what and when.

Not every matter can be resolved during a supervisory session. However, the ending should tie up as many matters as possible and make plans for what both supervisor and supervisee will do as followup, when the supervisee will report to the supervisor about assignments, and when they will meet again. A sense of certainty about some matters will accompany the ending of a session, but other matters may be left hanging. It is helpful for a supervisor to summarize what was accomplished during the session, to give feedback about their work together, and to be clear about her expectations of the supervisee.

Sometimes supervisory conferences end on a sour note. A supervisee may be disappointed and angry. Such an event can spur anxiety and concern on the part of both supervisor and supervisee. The ways in which the supervisor and supervisee communicate about these difficulties and the ways in which they go about working on their respective and shared problems reflect the kind of relationship they have developed and may be models for the supervisee’s work with clients and groups. In any case, the supervisor has a responsibility to attempt to deal as constructively as possible with the feelings engendered by the uncomfortable ending. The supervisor remains responsible for services to clients, groups, and communities and this means ensuring the supervisee is able to deal with the difficulties and continue to perform adequately. Of course, a supervisor has the major responsibility, but a supervisor has a right to demand the supervisee work on the problem also.

## CONFLICT IN THE SUPERVISORY RELATIONSHIP

From the initiation of a supervisory interpersonal relationship to its conclusion, the potential for conflict is always present. Conflict results from a supervisor and supervisee being inter-dependent. Both have a need to be viewed as competent and may be fearful of exposing personal inadequacies. Both need implicit or explicit messages of approval, perhaps to varying degrees. Conflict can result from a number of factors: incompatible goals, differences in learning styles, personality differences, or may result from role ambiguity and role conflict. A supervisee may lack clarity about the expectations for his role, the methods for fulfilling the role, and the consequences of acting while not being clear about the role and work. Psychological issues can also play a disturbing part when either participant finds that the other person resembles someone from the past and relates to that person in ways perhaps useful in the past but inappropriate now.

Korinek and Kimball (2003) believe prevention of conflict is crucial, where possible. They encourage supervisors to limit, if possible, challenges to new supervisees. Otherwise, the possibility exists of encouraging defensiveness and resistance to learning. They suggest these conflict preventive interventions: (1) Supervisors maintain positive and supportive attitudes. (2) Agreement by both on a good supervisory contract. The contract includes logistics, their relationship, goals, methods, specific evaluation standards and procedures, and their agreement that the contract can be renegotiated. Provision can also be made in advance for ways to resolve differences, for example, by agreement that a third party could be used to help settle conflicts. The grounds for terminating the employment contract should also be specified. (3) The supervisor can balance, to the degree possible, hierarchical attitudes and power to minimize conflict. Achieving this sense of balance is a shared responsibility. A supervisor may temper her hierarchical attitudes through self-management but cannot cede the final say that is her legal responsibility. A supervisor who is willing to hear negative comments from supervisees can also ask for feedback. In general, supervisors can attempt to prevent conflict in their relationship with supervisees by seeking win-win problem solving. Again, this is only possible where both parties are cooperative (Korinek & Kimball, 2003).

## SUMMARY

In this chapter, you were asked to consider your motivations for becoming a supervisor; what goals and rewards are you seeking by taking on new responsibilities? Most supervisors do not come to the new role completely without prior experiences, knowledge, and skills that can be applied to the supervisory role. Supervision is a middle management role in which loyalties and responsibilities are owed to superiors, to supervisees, and to peers. The three phases of the supervisory process provide a framework for understanding the supervisor-supervisee relationship and how they work together both in individual meetings and overall. Each of the phases has special qualities that suggest different issues and preparation. Finally, some cautions about the games that both supervisees and supervisors can play were introduced and briefly discussed.

**EXERCISES**

1. As a direct practitioner you developed certain knowledge, skills, and attitudes. In certain ways, those talents may be functional or dysfunctional for being a supervisor. Can you identify those “trained capacities” and “trained incapacities” you think can help you as a supervisor and those which can interfere with your becoming an effective supervisor?
2. Have you observed in any situation the introduction of a supervisor into a work unit? How did the person handle the situation? What actions did he or she take when moving into the new role and position? What were the effects in the class or work group that you observed?
3. In what ways can you prepare yourself personally for entering the new role of supervisor?
4. What actions can a supervisor take to ease the entry of a supervisee into a new job in your unit?