

HUMAN SERVICE SUPERVISION STANDARDS AND PRACTICES

By

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to identify commonalities and consistencies of supervisory standards, practice and training requirements as well as to address the differences in the literature as opposed to actual practice and lastly, to determine if any correlation exists that directly affect the delivery of service, and whether supervisory standards and practice impact the quality of supervision they provide to the supervisee. The survey identified the supervisor's, knowledge, training and experience in the area they are supervising. The literature addressed the functions of supervisory staff and how support and the manner in which it is provided can directly impact the effectiveness of services provided to clients.

A total of 64 supervisors from 29 Wisconsin County Departments of Human Service Agencies participated in the study. A survey was used to identify the supervisors current practice standards, experience, knowledge and training as well as the functional

roles he/she functions in weekly and his/her preference to functional role/roles in his/her daily supervisory duties.

The results of the study indicated that the majority of the supervisor's time each week was spent in an administrative role whereas most supervisors felt most comfortable and preferred the supportive role. The research identified the supportive role for front-line supervisors as the primary functional role recommended in providing effective and quality supervision.

Statistically significant results were identified in the study in the area pertaining to providing the supervisee an opportunity to evaluate supervisor performance. A significant majority of supervisors responded in support of providing the supervisee with this opportunity.

Although the literature recommends and encourages the front-line supervisor's functional role to be primarily supportive the results indicated a majority of supervisors time spent in the administrative role. The results may be beneficial to directors, supervisors and administrators to assess how this impacts staff in his/her agency. An opportunity to evaluate the performance of supervisors on a regular basis may be one way to gain additional insight for administrators, supervisors, and the supervisees regarding changes, if any, that may benefit the agency and the clients serviced.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

“Organizations that stifle leadership from employees are no longer winning”. John Kotter (Reinhold, 1997, p. 144). Leadership is not only a term that should be reserved for supervisors or administrators. It is surprising the number of organizations that believe a title qualifies one to be a leader when in fact it is the traits possessed by a person that identifies them as a leader. Some agencies will not rate the leadership category on the performance evaluation unless you hold a supervisory position. According to a former supervisor in a West Central Wisconsin County Department of Human Services agency, direct service social worker yearly performance evaluation does not allow a supervisor to rate a worker on leadership qualities even if the supervisor believes that worker possesses leadership skills. This is a category that can be rated only if you are a supervisor.

The quality of supervision can be vital to the success or failure of an organization. According to Kadushin and Harkness (2002), quality supervision should include within the supervisory role 3 social work functions, administrative, educational and supportive. Achieving a proper balance is driven by the needs of the individual worker, within the guidelines of agency policy, and within ethical and legal mandates. Concentrating on the skills required for the supervisor in an organization can positively affect the overall productivity of the agency. Front-line supervisory roles are defined differently in different settings. In a positive work environment a partnership or a collaborative relationship between front-line supervisor and direct service social worker seems to be successful for both. Both front-line supervisor and direct service social worker must depend on one another to service the clients effectively and efficiently.

“Collaborative work brings out the best in all members of the work team –and how “the best” is lost and employees become unproductive when overcontrol returns.” “...what people call “human nature” is actually learned misery sustained by ignorance and lack of imagination” (Wyatt, Hare, 1997, p. 115).

This paper addresses the standards of practice for supervision in child welfare agencies specifically, front-line supervision of direct service social workers in the Family Service Units of 29 County Departments of Human Service agencies in Wisconsin.

The definition of a supervisor used for the purpose of this research is:

“A social work supervisor is an agency administrative-staff member to whom authority is delegated to direct, coordinate, enhance, and evaluate the on-the-job performance of the supervisees for whose work he or she is held accountable. The supervisor performs administrative, educational, and supportive functions in interaction with the supervisee in the context of a positive relationship”(Kadushin & Harkness, 2002, p. 23).

The role of the social work supervisor will be evaluated from three functional areas: administrative, educational and supportive. Many authors, researchers, and educators have applied Alfred Kadushin’s model to portray the role of the social work supervisor, in some instances referring to them by different terms but the concepts are prevalent and regarded in the literature.

Many public service agencies have moved towards privatizing services in an effort to decrease overall operational costs. It has become necessary to do more work with less available resources and manpower that has resulted in requirements to increase productivity imposed on the direct service social workers. For the purpose of this study

productivity is defined, as creating and delivering a valued service, in a cost effective manner that will lead to a desired result. “Increasing productivity requires greater managerial efficiency and more imaginative agency management. Supervisory personnel are the crucial element in dealing with worker efficiency and productivity as they were in meeting the earlier demands for increased agency accountability” (Kadushin, 1992, p. xvi). The need for a more effective management staff has become crucial to provide knowledge and support for the line worker with the increased demands on their caseload duties. This has challenged administration and management teams in areas outside of their areas of expertise (Kadushin, A, 1992). The focus of the child welfare agencies seems to have shifted from one of helping those in need to one of helping those who can afford it. Have the decision-makers changed their standards of practice to adequately manage these changes while upholding the ethical standards? Many contract agencies have been enlisted by county departments as cost saving measures and do not require staff to be social workers and are not mandated by the same ethical standards, as the agency may need to uphold which results in ethical and sometimes legal conflicts. County agencies have hired staff with primarily business backgrounds with little to no clinical experience who is responsible for managing the services provided by the contract agency. Evaluating performance is based on a cost containment gauge rather than the effective and efficient delivery of services while maintaining the dignity and confidentiality of the client. How an agency supervisor does or does not compensate for this may have a direct impact on the line staff and the people serviced by the agency and the community. This has broadened the administrative role of the front-line supervisor and increased the need for the supervisor to be more cognizant of the feedback from the

direct service social worker and client. Another role necessary is to assess the effectiveness and success of the contracted service to insure quality service delivery and maintain the mission of the agency. Directors need to be mindful of the affect contract agency services have on the general operation of the agency as well as the community. The supervisor responsibility is to ensure the direct service social work staff can carry out their role and responsibility to the client. This will involve a system change in a extremely established operational structure.

Individualizing supervision based on the workers needs, experience and knowledge is significant and calls for good assessment skills as well as the supervisor's experience in the area being supervised. When the supervisor moves within the organization to supervise an unfamiliar area, the organization should be responsible to identify the skills required and provide the supervisor with training to enhance his/her skills in that specific area.

Supervisors must handle multiple roles and responsibilities to the employees, for the day-to-day function of the work group, and to the organization (Drug-Free Workplace Advisor- Internet, Drug-Free Workplace Advisor, 2003, October). Supervisor's Role and Responsibilities:

(Office of the Assistant Secretary for Policy/elaws. Retrieved October 11, 2003 from the World Wide Web:

<http://www.dol.gov/elaws/asp/drugfree/drugs/supervisor/screen50.asp>). Therefore, the supervisor must exercise flexibility and the ability to assess a situation and be prepared to make immediate decisions in life threatening situations. To provide quality supervision, it seems essential that the family service front-line supervisor's possess good interpersonal

and communication skills, be knowledgeable of and maintain ethical practice standards. Also important is for the supervisor to have a working knowledge and have experience in the unit they are supervising and retain proper credentials. In addition to this the supervisor must be mindful of legal mandates that affect their work and the work of the line staff.

“In child welfare agencies ‘role overload’, or the over extension of the amount of work one worker can handle is common and a prevalent stressor experienced by the social worker “ (White, 1997, p.281). The manner in which the supervisor is able to assess the individual worker needs and draw from their knowledge and experience and utilize high-quality interpersonal skills to maintain a positive relationship will be crucial to success as an effective supervisor to sustain worker health and productivity.

How the supervisor responds to staff is crucial for job success and worker productivity. A supervisor must assess the supervisee’s individual strengths and weaknesses as well as to value and respect the diverse perspectives of the workers by “understanding that the stylistic weaknesses workers bring to the job are usually excessive strengths” (Reinhold, 1997, p.151). The diverse perspectives and methods used by individual workers can be a challenge for the supervisor. But, if cultivated according to the strengths each worker has to offer, it can become an asset for team development. Motivating, coaching workers, and emulating behaviors and practices that you would like the workers to model in their work with clients and families is an extremely important role of a high-quality supervisor. Effective supervisory skills are important and an asset to the agency because the supervisor is the direct contact with the worker employing and fulfilling the mission of the agency.

This paper will explore front-line social work supervision in family service units and the supervisory skills in the functional areas of administrative, educational and supportive roles associated with the social work profession, within the constraints of ethical and legal requirements. Front-line supervision is a difficult role in balancing both management and direct service demands.

With the increasing Federal, State and County budget deficits and cuts, the delivery of services to the children and families serviced by the Eau Claire County Departments of Human Service are directly impacted by the proposed 2004 budget year cuts (Emerson, 2003). Staff cuts and increased workloads are of concern as well as elimination or modifications in current programming. Relying on workers to take on more tasks may affect worker stress and morale that will directly affect productivity. The supervisor will need to be attentive to needs of the individual worker and find means to support the workers while at the same time offering leadership in the day to day operation and struggles in providing effective services to the community (Kadushin, 1992). Training budgets are often cut during fiscal hard times resulting in increased reliance on supervisors by line staff to guide and teach them (Kadushin, A., 1992).

Currently in most county Departments of Human Services the authority for decisions regarding development, monitoring and delivery of services, as well as programming are the supervisor and administrative staff responsibility. In order to make useful and cost effective decisions the supervisor must know how the programming is impacting the delivery of services to the clients serviced by the agency. The supervisor must depend on the direct service social worker to receive accurate information to relay

to administrators to make effective decisions to provide services to the community. The supervisor and social worker relationship will impact the information received.

Statement of the Problem

A study of the supervisory staff training, experience and qualifications will be the focus of this study. The measures of standards utilized for supervisors and the factors that may affect the supervisor's role and function will be the focus looking for consistencies among the front-line supervisors in 29 Counties in western, eastern, central, northern, and southern Wisconsin Department of Human Service Agencies. The objectives of the study will be to, *identify social work supervisory standards, practice, training criteria, education and experience including performance and to determine whether factors can impact overall quality work, job satisfaction and productivity of direct service staff, * to determine what factors are currently operating within the 29 county departments, and lastly *to determine and recommend how to strengthen or supplement skills already in place that may positively impact the productivity and success of the worker, the supervisor and the agency.

Purpose of Study

The purpose is to identify commonalities and consistencies of supervisory standards, practice and training requirements. To determine if any correlation exists that directly affect the delivery of service, and whether supervisory standards, training and practice may impact the quality of supervision they provide to the supervisee.

The study will also attempt to identify the frontline supervisors support, knowledge, training and experience in the area they are supervising. The literature will show how the functions of the management staff and the support given to the front line staff can directly

impact the effectiveness of services provided to clients. Kaduschin and Harkness (2002) believe that if the front line worker is not receiving support, adequate education to do their job, and there is an absence of the interpreting and monitoring of compliance of policies (administrative functions) from qualified and experienced supervisors; services and worker productivity will be negatively impacted.

Assumptions of the Study

An assumption is that the role of the supervisor will change with given circumstances within the organization and with the level of knowledge and experience of the individual worker as well as with the standards and policies of the agency. How effective the supervision is will be relative to the experience, training, and knowledge of the family service supervisor. If the supervisor lacks adequate skills and knowledge it can directly impact the worker's efficient and effective delivery of service to the client.

The assumption is that quality staffing and programming need to exist for efficient but valuable and quality delivery of services for the impoverished, mentally ill, abused or neglected, criminal, and the developmentally disabled children and families currently being serviced by county agencies. If quality staffing and programming are given little attention or importance it will affect worker functioning, agency operation and stability, costs, as well as community safety. According to Kadusin and Harkness, (2002) and Holloway and Brager, (1989), the front-line supervisor is the most significant person in the agency because they have a direct impact and affect on the direct service social worker who delivers services and carries out the mission of the agency and is in day-to-day contact with clients and families serviced.

Agency supervisors and administrators will be looked to for guidance and leadership by the line staff. Knowledge, education, experience, respect, and support will be important qualities for the supervisory staff to possess. It may be necessary to work in a different way to maintain the mission of the department to service the people who are incapable or unable to help themselves. The supervisors may need to step in to perform line staff duties, develop motivation, morale and retention of the line staff may be affected, and the leadership of the supervisor will be tested. An understanding, respect for and trust in the line staff that are experiencing the extra workloads will be essential as well as a trust in and respect for the supervisor.

It will be important for the supervisor to have a working knowledge and familiarization with program operation and development when relaying vital information to administration concerning programs that may need to be eliminated. Administrators need to be cognizant of the potential for increased costs in other areas and must rely on accurate information from the supervisors. Therefore, the supervisors will need to have a sound relationship with the direct service worker to accurately relay that vital information to administration. Legal mandates and ethical standards will also affect these decisions.

It is assumed that the respondents answered the questions truthfully and that only front-line supervisors filled out the surveys. Front-line supervisors in smaller agencies may have multiple roles within the agency including supervisory duties for other staff within the agency but part of his/her role will include front-line supervision to the direct service social worker.

Definition of Terms

Job satisfaction – “a feeling of fulfillment or pleasure associated with one’s work”

(Krueger, 1996, p. v).

Power - the ability to control others; authority; sway; or influence others (Agnes & Guralnik, (2001) Webster’s New World College Dictionary, 4th Ed., 2001,2000,1999, p. 1128).

Supervisor –

“A social work supervisor is an agency administrative-staff member to whom authority is delegated to direct, coordinate, enhance, and evaluate the on-the-job performance of the supervisees for whose work he or she is held accountable.

The supervisor performs administrative, educational, and supportive functions in interaction with the supervisee in the context of a positive relationship”(Kadushin & Harkness, 2002, p. 23).

Support – “the effective dimension of supervision, for those behaviors that indicate trust, respect, and concern for the worker’s welfare (Holloway & Brager, 1989, p. 89).

Limitations

The sample size was relatively small in comparison to the 72 county agencies within the state of Wisconsin and may not be representative of all counties. The participants are Family Service front-line supervisors with varying degree of knowledge, training and experience in county agencies. All counties function somewhat differently in regard to variations in caseload assignments and size, population diversity and size of county, rural or urban, and whether they contract services out or maintain services in-house. Therefore, the answers may not accurately reflect the level of administrative,

educational, and supportive functions desired by the workers or allowed by the supervisors due to management or budget constraints. The respondents may not have answered openly due to the environment in which the surveys were given and time factors.

Methodology

The remainder of the paper will be a review of the literature to support the overall assumptions of the study. Also, the instrumentation and data collection techniques will be presented, as well as the results. Lastly, a discussion and recommendation will be presented along with the references supporting the literature review.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter will review the literature that examines the history of social work supervision, supervisor's roles, skills and tasks, and how the work environment and climate within a public child welfare agency can be affected by the presence or absence of quality supervision of the direct service social workers. The supervisor's role will be illustrated according to Kadushin and Harkness (2002) model of administrative, educational and supportive functions and how the literature supports this model from the inception of social work supervision to current recommended practice standards of today. The purpose and objective of the study will also be presented.

History

Social work supervision can be traced back to the 1890's when charity organizations enlisted unpaid volunteers/visitors to visit the poor, needy, and helpless people in the community. Agents who were hired by the organizations were considered the "experts" in the work of servicing the needs of the underprivileged families. They advised the visitors/volunteers, identified families who needed their help and assisted the visitors in learning skills that were necessary to assist the families. They would also help the visitors to process their feelings, assess the visitors strengths and weakness, and assign the cases in accordance with the matching of the volunteers abilities or skills with the family situation and circumstance as best they could. The role of the agent is what we know today as that of the "supervisors" role (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002). Nineteenth

century standards practiced by the agents are consistent with front-line supervisory principles recognized as acceptable today (Kadushin &Harkness, 2002).

The agent/supervisor role was to direct and train the volunteer/ visitor, as well as to maintain communication with the director or organization regarding the work the visitors were doing with the families they serviced. They also monitored the volunteer's performance and kept records on services provided to the clients serviced. The supervisor's administrative role was beginning to be defined.

The agent would advise the volunteer and encourage he/she to share his/her feelings pertaining to the work, the plan of action for the family, and discuss ideas regarding the plan to effectively assist the family being serviced. The agent recognized that the individual worker would draw from his/her own life experiences when making decisions, reacting to the circumstances of the needy family, and the degree to which his/her responses characterized an individual belief based on personal knowledge and experiences. The agent needed to be cognizant of the worker's frame of reference and tailor advice accordingly. The concept of individualizing workers was realized 100 years ago, when Gardiner (as cited in Kadushin & Harkness, (2002), " The Training of Volunteers." Charity Organizations Review 11:2-4) stated, "our workers have quite as varied natures as our applicants and require to be dealt with in quite as varied a manner" (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002, p. 5). The agent/supervisor role was to support the visitor/volunteer emotionally, when he/she became discouraged with the work being done, therefore, giving rise to a supportive role of the agent/supervisor.

The educational role of the agent/ supervisor was characterized by working with the volunteer/visitor training and modeling behaviors. Experienced agents taught through example and learned experiences from their dealings and work with families in need.

During the Charity Organizations annual meetings articles would be presented to the agents and visitors on subjects such as “How to Help Out-Of-Work Cases,” “The Treatment of Drunkards’ Families,” “Deserted Wives,” and “Sanitation in the Homes of the Poor” (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002, p. 7). This gave rise to a more formal educational system for training the volunteers, by addressing areas that they frequently encountered.

In 1903,” the twenty-second annual report of the Charity Organization of Baltimore comments that the day is long passed when the only necessary qualifications for social service are good inclinations. To minister successfully to a family. . . requires intelligence and skill of a high order” (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002, p. 9). ”In 1898 the New York Charity Organization Society offered the first training program for what is now known as the social work profession, while the first course on supervision was offered in 1911” (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002. p.10).

From the 1920’s through the 1950’s many articles and books were written on the subject of social work supervision, as it became more of a recognized position. Most of the articles and books written were committed to the educational role of the supervisor.

The emphasis of the social worker supervisor’s role began to change from its early days of a more directive approach to one of a reciprocal approach, just as the importance of the worker role with the client changed from one of telling the client what was best or needed for them to one of involving the client in the decisions that ultimately

affected her/his lives. The presumed idea being that if the clients were more involved in the decisions the better chance the clients would invest in a change to improve their overall function in a positive direction. This concept certainly applies to the worker's investment in the agency and mission and demonstrates a feeling of being valued and respected within the system.

Supervisory roles vacillated between a supportive or curative role and that of an administrative role during the 1920's and the 1930's. With the development of many new welfare programs in the 1950's and 1960's the administrative role of the supervisor was more pronounced (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002).

In the "anti-establishment" era of the 1960's and 1970's supervisee's perceived supervision as one of being under enemy control and dictatorial. The sensitivity and feelings were heightened by the gender and racial inequalities facing the country at this time. The feeling gave rise to a need to establish and maintain a reciprocal and collaborative relationship with the supervisor rather than one of a dictatorial or authoritative premise. "Sensitivity to the rights of all oppressed subordinate groups carried over to the supervisee as an oppressed group" (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002, p. 13).

Since the mid 1970's, concerns over budget constraints, new ideology governing the delivery of services, and the development of diversification of social work practice and profession emphasized educational and administrative responsibilities for the social work supervisor. More emphasis was placed on the function of supportive role of the supervisor with a heightened awareness and interest in burnout (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002). Support for mothers working while acknowledging the needs of the children at

home and the growing influence of employment as an option for welfare reform contributed to the need for further education for both worker and supervisor.

The Work Incentive Program (WIN/WIP), an economic program designed to find jobs for families on the Aid to Families of Dependent Children (AFDC) program was initiated in the mid 1970's. The program supported employment, provided daycare and educational training for single parents and families as an alternative to welfare. The supported philosophy and rationale was that with a thorough assessment of job skills, coupled with the services needed to enhance job skills through education or training, providing day care for mothers enabling them to work would create a job force that will grow to be independent and free of government assistance.

The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) came into play in 1978, creating a general sensitivity to the needs of diverse groups and cultures. The ICWA is a federal law instituted to provide the tribal government with the authority over Indian children.

Prior to the ICWA a high percentage of Indian families were broken up because non-tribal agencies removed Indian children from their homes. One reason for the high removal rate was because state officials did not understand or accept the Indian culture (Wabanaki Legal News (2002, January) Indian Child Welfare Act Update, A Newsletter of Pine Tree Legal Assistance. Retrieved February 2, 2004, from: <http://www.ptla.org/wabanaki/icwa.htm>).

According to Christine Yellowthunder, a Native American social worker presently employed in Eau Claire County, prior to the ICWA there were few Native American foster homes licensed and the government placed little importance on the need to be mindful of consistent visitation with the Native American family to maintain

cultural bonds and beliefs. Little training specific to the needs of Native America children and the family as well as culture were available to child welfare workers at that time.

In the 1980's – 2000's there has been a greater emphasis on the needs of the people serviced with a heightened sensitivity to the sick, elderly, and poor. Cultural sensitivity and awareness was heightened and more thought and concern was placed on the needs of the people serviced with a heightened respect for their circumstances. Involving the family in the plan was a concept that was emphasized at this time. “ The supervision literature has shown signs of interdisciplinary development and growing specialization” (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002, p. 14).

Functional roles of the supervisor

The professional structure of social work supervision will be addressed from three areas of supervision, administrative, educational and supportive, as defined by Kadushin & Harkness in their book, *Social worker supervision* (2002, 4th ed.). Research of the literature supports the need for supervisor's to possess knowledge and understanding of all three roles and necessitates a need for the supervisor to be familiar with how to balance the roles to the benefit of their workers, that ultimately benefits the clients serviced in accordance with the mission of the agency.

Admittedly, according to Kadushin and Harkness, social work supervision does involve both education and administrative, however, a third role of “expressive-supportive leadership” (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002 p.19), is equally important and must be practiced to fulfill the true needs of the social work supervisee. Kadushin and Harkness (2002), also state that the function of supervision is a responsibility of the supervisor to nourish supervisee's morale, support the work through the discouraging and

depressing aspects of the job by encouragement, promoting a sense of belonging to the agency, and endorsing value in the worker and the work they do.

Educational, administrative and supportive roles of the social work supervisor were evident and practiced in the early developmental years of the profession. The prominence of one role over another has shifted throughout the years since the beginning of social work practice. Knowledge and experience of creating an effective balance of these roles, dependent on the needs of the individual worker, the nature of the times and needs of the people in need of services is imperative to successful delivery of services, according to Shulman, (1993), Holloway and Brager (1989), and Kadushin and Harkness, (2002) who are responsible for a great deal of the literature on the subject.

Administrative role of the supervisor

Agency structure will factor in and affect the position of a supervisor and his/her role therefore impacting the productivity of workers and ultimately clients serviced by the agency. There are varying levels of authority or hierarchy in an organization. Holloway and Brager, (1989) in a book titled *Supervising in Human Services* describe the human service hierarchal structure in terms of three levels. The upper level usually has the primary responsibility for dealing with the external issues of the agency and holds the most authority. The middle level oversees and manages the daily functions of the agency and maintains contact with and responsibility to the upper level. The lower level or line staff is involved in the main contact and operation of the agency and carry out the services provided by the agency. Many agencies vary in regard to the levels of management staff they have but for the purpose of this study agency structure will be represented using the three levels.

According to Kadushin and Harkness, (2002) the administrative role of the front-line supervisor is to manage the direct service worker and is a link in the chain of administration of the organization and the administrator of the direct line worker. The administrative role of the front-line supervisor is to implement agency goals and objectives while balancing the needs of the workers with demands of administration.

The front-line supervisor's task is to organize the work place including: recruitment, placement of workers, job assignments, work delegation, reviewing and evaluating the work of the direct service worker acting as an advocate, or as an intermediary between administration and the direct worker in regard to policies and to manage change and securing stability and maintaining effective communication (Standards for Supervision in Child Welfare (1994): *National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement*.(p. 5) Retrieved 9/27/2003), <http://muskie.usm.main.edu/helpkids/pubstext/supstand.html>). Communication upward is less frequent and more difficult than downward communication but is equally important. The front-line supervisor should collaborate with the direct service workers through encouragement while attempting to maximize acceptance and minimize opposition while maintaining an honest, open, and supportive relationship with staff (Standards for Supervision in Child Welfare (1994): *National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement* (p. 5) Retrieved 9/27/2003. <http://muskie.usm.main.edu/helpkids/pubstext/supstand.html>).

Gaining staff support to follow through with tasks assigned to the front-line supervisor by the administration often conflicts with the direct service social workers view for needs of the client. It is here where the front-line supervisor role is to mediate,

insure compliance, and educate the worker on the task being assigned, while supporting and understanding the workers position and the consequences to the client. “The burdens of the task fall on direct service workers who are, after all, the only members of the organization with firsthand knowledge of the specifics of service character and impact” (Holloway, S. & Brager, G., 1989, p.7). However, the supervisor and supervisee share the responsibility, liability and the outcome, but the direct service social worker is the person perceived by the community as those who are accountable and will benefit from a supportive role by front-line supervisor. The supervisor and supervisee face difficult decisions daily when they are not directly responsible for the rules or policies that are made. This further supports the need for the supervisor and supervisee to recognize one another as co-partners, team members, and to understand the need to rely on one another. Additionally, having the realization of the importance of maintaining a high-quality awareness of each other’s roles and how they can impact the outcome negatively or positively. However, the supervisee must maintain and respect the authority of the supervisor.

The supervisor is awarded a certain amount of authority due to the position they hold. However, the way in which the supervisor views that power, utilizes it, and responds to the supervisee from a position of authority impacts the response from the worker and ultimately impacts the success, failure and effectiveness of the supervisor. The motivation for becoming a supervisor is significant when we discuss power and authority. Differences of power and how it is perceived between the supervisor and supervisee impacts acceptance, teamwork, job satisfaction and success or failure in the working relationship of both the supervisee and the supervisor and will be discussed

further later in this writing. “The unnecessary exercise of personal authority is a kind of sabotage ceaselessly practiced by incompetent supervisors” (Caplow, 1976, p. 94). “Few staff members appreciate closer controls than is appropriate to the work, and this is particularly the case with a staff composed of professionals” (Holloway & Brager, 1989, p.100).

Kadushin and Harkness put it best when they said “Power and authority should be used only when necessary to help achieve the objectives of the organization in a flexible, impartial manner and with a sensitive regard for worker response” (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002, p.127).

Educational supervisory role

Supervisors need to be experienced in identifying client needs, being aware of the supervisee’s style, his/her personal or professional motivation and how these factors can impact decisions regarding the client. Additionally, how the supervisor and supervisee work styles compliment or contrast one another may also affect judgment regarding performance decisions (Borders, L.D., The Good Supervisor, *ERIC Digest: 1994-04-00: ED372350*. Retrieved September 27, 2003 from: http://www/ericfacility.net/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed372350.html). A supervisor should be modeling the skills that they want the worker to develop. This can become a challenge when supervising an experienced worker (Shulman, 1993). An individual assessment of each worker will be imperative to understand the supervisee’s learning style, their already developed skills and knowledge base and to be open to the possibility of learning new techniques or skills from the supervisee without becoming threatened. “The supervisor should encourage staff creativity, be sensitive to personal and

professional diversity /coping mechanisms/work styles, and model/mentor continued growth of staff” (Standards for Supervision in Child Welfare (1994). *National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement.*, p.7. Retrieved 9/27/2003. From: <http://muskie.usm.main.edu/helpkids/pubstext/supstand.html>).

Few researchers have focused on supervisor qualities and skills. Some say, being a good supervisor is instinctive and others believe it is a trait that can be learned. Others believe that it is a combination of the two but is dependent on personal traits, communication style, personal and professional security in oneself, and motivation in becoming a supervisor. (Standards for Supervision in Child Welfare, (1994) p. 2: *National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement.* Retrieved 9/27/2003 <http://muskie.usm.main.edu/helpkids/pubstext/supstand.html>).

Good supervisor exhibits: empathy, compassion, is flexible, requests input from others regarding supervisory skills, is sensitive to individual differences, is committed to helping workers develop skills and knowledge, is clear about own strengths and weaknesses, is aware of how his/her own style affects supervision. Good supervisors are able to function in several different roles depending on the situational need of the supervisee (Standards for Supervision in Child Welfare(1994), p. 2: *National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement.* Retrieved 9/27/2003 <http://muskie.usm.main.edu/helpkids/pubstext/supstand.html>).

“Learning is not merely the transmission of ideas from one to another. It requires a working knowledge of the material and the ability to transmit that knowledge in an organized manner through fluent communication that is understood by the one intended to receive the information” (Shulman, p. 157). Teaching is a collaborative effort by both

teacher and student that involves an interaction between them. The student cannot connect with the message unless there is a process of internalizing to some degree with the information that is being presented and an interaction with the teacher. There must be a connection on some level to understand the message or subject being taught. John Dewey, an acclaimed educator, addressed this in an article he delivered in 1896 when he said, "...one should first discover the child's own "urgent impulses and habits" and then, by supplying the proper environment, direct them "in a fruitful and orderly way". (Kleibard,1995. p.48. *The struggle for the American curriculum: 1893 –1958*. Routledge: New York, New York). The assumption here is not to compare children to supervisee's but to understand the importance for a supervisor to be experienced and knowledgeable in order to assess the needs, level of knowledge, personal and professional mindset of the supervisee and meet them on "her/his own ground" to create a successful learning environment to teach the skills desired and to prevent underestimating the learning potential.

Lawence Shulman in his book titled, *Interactional Supervision* states, "...three essential requirements for effective learning are perceiving an investment in the knowledge, being actively involved in creating the ideas, and having an opportunity to practice the use of the information" (Shulman, L. 1993. p. 158). He goes on to say that even with these requirements present, barriers may arise that hinders the learning process. The supervisor's role should be to acknowledge the obstacles and work to reconcile the problem together with the supervisee in a nonjudgmental way.

Other means of teaching skills by the supervisor is to model behaviors to the supervisee when the opportunity presents itself. Also, discussing an anticipated difficult

situation or problem coming up and working through the anticipated obstacles or talking about a situation following the event and problem solving together with your supervisor on what might have been done differently.

In-service training can provide supervisee's and supervisors with facts that can be applied to the work they do, however, it cannot provide them with the knowledge that is acquired through directly experiencing situations. Mutual respect and collaboration are important ingredients in building a learning environment and relationship between the front-line supervisor and the direct service social worker. Educational skill training for supervisors can augment and increase worker job satisfaction, agency productivity, and positive response to clients and families serviced, as well as decrease agency and worker liability, burnout, and turnover rates. (Shulman, 1993)

Supportive supervisory role

Kadushin and Harkness (2002) refer to supportive supervision as a leadership role of the supervisor. The purpose is to boost the overall performance of the worker by decreasing stress and increasing motivation. Improving worker commitment to the job and duties performed can enhance worker functioning and increase the drive or passion of the work the supervisee does.

Others define supportive supervision in terms of the psychological and physical environment and the organizational climate in which they work. Organizational climate will be discussed in the next section more in depth and is related to the supportive role of the supervisor.

A great deal has been written on the need for emotional support of the worker in many organizational settings. Discrimination, gender bias, power positions, level of

education attained and financial status come into play with the emotional climate of the work place. However, in a human service agency the stress associated with the high-risk nature of the work, short time frames, documentation requirements and budget issues factor into the environmental stressors of the job. In a survey conducted in 2001 by the American Public Human Services Association (Report from the Child Welfare Workforce Survey: State and County Data and Findings, 2001, May. *American Public Human Services Association (APHSA)*, Retrieved November 8, 2003 from: <http://www.aphsa.org/cwwsurvey.pdf>) including county agencies in several states, staff identified strategies that could prevent burnout and turnover. This survey confirmed the importance of a need by staff to be valued in their workplace and the most frequent recommendations from workers were to improve supervision, management, staff communications and fairness on the job. Other issues related to caseload size, flex time, safety on the job, improving training and to improve supervisory training (Report from the Child Welfare Workforce Survey: State and County Data and Findings, 2001, May. *American public human services association*, Retrieved November 8, 2003 from: <http://www.aphsa.org/cwwsurvey.pdf>). The aforementioned issues were considered the most effective and desired by staff and the easiest to implement when little to no resources were required to make the changes. The importance of listening to workers needs and realizing the importance of skilled and knowledgeable supervisors were evident in the study. According to the study, the “softer strategies and actions often deal with the nature of work itself rather than monetary issues and rarely require significant new resources” (Report from the Child Welfare Workforce Survey: State and County Data and Findings, 2001, May, *American public human services association*, p. 5.

Retrieved November 8, 2003 from: <http://www.aphsa.org/cwwsurvey.pdf>). The study further noted that many of the changes required help reduce turnover are preventable and the means to implement changes are already available to county directors. A consideration of the differences from county to county was acknowledged and a recommendation from the study identified the direct service social worker as an important resource to survey through one of a variety of means to provide administrators with information that could reduce staff turnout and preventable vacancies. How the direct service social worker is valued and treated by the agency directly impacts issues relating to the retention of qualified direct service social workers as well as supervisors. Losing valuable experienced staff over time influences the effectiveness and efficiency of the agency. Some agencies have compensated for this by hiring less than qualified supervisory staff and direct service staff with little to no experience in county social work or who lack degrees in the profession.

“...it is not unusual to find new supervisors with limited experience in the field, no related professional education and no long-term career expectations. The absence of agency historians and experts resulted in an exhausting task of establishing practice standards with almost an entire workforce that was equally new to its respective roles.” – (Therese Roe Lund, MSSW, former Director of the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare CPS supervision: *What does the present suggest for the future? Potpourri_0309*. p. 2 Retrieved (September 27, 2003) From: http://www.actionchildprotection.eorg/potpourri/potpourri_current.html).

The supportive role of the supervisor is imperative to maintain worker performance and productivity. Workers feel supported in these high-risk environments

when they are respected feel valued, and when the administration is sensitive to their personal needs. The environment for the direct service social worker is determined primarily by the way front-line supervision performs and responds to their personal and professional needs.

To maintain a positive focus and satisfaction in his/her work it is important for the front-line supervisor to establish a positive work atmosphere. This would consist of acknowledging effective performance efforts and accomplishment, treating staff with respect and dignity, model high expectations, sensitivity to staff feelings and needs, and support staff. (Standards for supervision in child welfare. 1994, June: *Colorado Department of Human Services: National Child Welfare Resourced Center for Organizational Improvement*. Retrieved (September 27, 2003), From: <http://muskie.usm.main.edu/helpkids/pubstext/supstand.html> http://www.gov.state.mo.us/REPORT_OF_INVESTIGATION.pdf).

The method, in which workers are valued, involved in decisions and responded to is very important in creating and maintaining a strong supportive team oriented work environment. Team members have an investment in maintaining the environment when they feel a sense of belonging and responsibility to supporting a climate of trust and openness. By creating a sense of safety, acknowledging and accepting cultural differences, turning a mistake into an opportunity to teach and learn from and creating team norms by utilizing team strengths and needs, will develop positive outcomes and decrease worker and agency liability. (Standards for supervision in child welfare, 1994, June):*Colorado Department of Human Services: National Child Welfare Resourced Center for Organizational Improvement*. Retrieved (September 27, 2003), From:

<http://muskie.usm.main.edu/helpkids/pubstext/supstand.html>,

http://www.gov.state.mo.us/REPORT_OF_INVESTIGATION.pdf).

Burnout and Job Satisfaction

Burnout rates of the direct line workers and the lack of job satisfaction has increased tremendously. The quality of supervision seems to be connected to burnout rates as well as with job satisfaction. Cotter Mena (as cited by Kadushin and Harkness (2002), “ A study of eighty social work supervisor-supervisee dyads found that a close, quality supervisory relationship as perceived by the worker was related to high job satisfaction and low burnout (Cotter Mena 2000). A meeting of the California Assembly Human Service Committee reported in NASW News (October 2001, 49, no.9, p.4) indicated testimony to the effect “that good supervision is key to retaining social workers” (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002). Training supervisors on how to supervise continues to be a problem. “The 1994 curriculum policy stated by the Council on Social Work Education did not require schools to offer a course in supervision...” (Kadushin and Harkness, 2002, p. 475). However, a survey conducted by Kadushin and Harkness in 2002 of 154 graduate programs with 71 percent responding showed significant evidence of the programs offering more training in supervision (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002, p. 475).

Stressors exist for both supervisor and direct service social workers. Supervisors may desire to carry a caseload and express an interest in being involved in direct service work but managerial demands may prevent him/her from doing so. A collaborative relationship with front-line supervisor and direct service social worker may meet the

needs of both as is suggested by Kadushin and Harkness (2002), as the ideal role and functions of the front-line supervisor.

Job satisfaction is “a feeling of fulfillment or pleasure associated with one’s work” (Krueger, 1996, p. v). “Satisfaction comes ...from an inner calling or sense of purpose. People who are happy in child and youth care work are driven by a fire in their belly, a gut feeling, a mission to be with and help empower children” (Krueger, M., 1996, p.1). Workers who are satisfied in their work in child welfare agencies seem to derive pleasure from overcoming obstacles and facing challenges. The work is difficult and demanding with little acknowledgement or understanding by either the agency or the community of the intensity, complex, emotional stress toll taken on the worker, and the dangerous nature of the work. Child welfare agencies and their workers have historically been viewed in a negative light who take kids from their homes, are mean, nose, controlling, overpaid, lazy, etc. The misconception stems mainly from the lack of understanding of the work required and the guidelines, statutes, and limitations imposed by the courts, agency, community, or forces imposed outside the workers capability to change. Some members of the community complain that the county worker doesn’t remove children from a situation while another community member may complain that the worker did remove that same child unjustly. Many workers are frustrated with the same issues and must look within themselves as individuals to what challenges them or satisfies them on a personal level to continue to do direct line work in a child welfare agency. Some workers gain a great deal of personal satisfaction from seeing what they have done has had a positive effect on a child or family, others may love the variety and lack of monotony. The direct line worker is compelled to look for an intrinsic value/

reward or a sense of personal satisfaction that will motivate them to continue to work in the social work profession. The reward isn't material but a feeling of satisfaction and accomplishment in facing and meeting the challenges of the job and appreciating the purpose whether personal or otherwise. The front-line supervisor nourishes this through supportive supervision. "Two characteristics of workers' jobs most closely related to overall job satisfaction are (1) having a nurturing boss (i.e., the affective dimension of supervising) and (2) receiving adequate guidance and direction (i.e., the work-related dimension). Although job satisfaction and quality performance are not necessarily correlated, the dimensions are both clearly important supervisory ingredients (Holloway & Brager, 1989, p. 85).

Supervisor Training

According to Dr. Nick Smiar, University of Wisconsin Eau Claire Social Work Professor,

"Content on supervision and supervisory skills is delivered in most MSW programs, probably because that knowledge and those skills are considered to be necessary knowledge and skills for a social work practitioner at that level of specialization; however, content on administration and administrative skills is delivered only within certain specialties at the MSW level, probably because administration is not considered to be part of the core of knowledge at that level of specialization."

Social work supervisors have little to no training on supervision prior to or after acquiring the position. "Supervisors seldom seem to receive supervision themselves. Often moving straight from line work, with little training for their new role (CPS

supervision: What does the present suggest for the future? *Potpourri_3090*, 2003, September, p. 1. Retrieved (September 27, 2003) from:

http://www.actionchildprotection.org/potpourri/potpourri_current.html).

According to Kadushin and Harkness (2002), supervisory training or education continues to be a concern. Few supervisors receive neither any organized or regular training prior to taking on the duties of a supervisor nor any prerequisite training prior to accepting a supervisory role. Aiken and Weil (1981), (as cited by Kadushin and Harkness (2002), state “role adoption (learning to do the job after being assigned the title) and emulation or modeling (imitating supervisors previously encountered) are principal ways of learning to supervise” (Kadushin & Harkness, 2001, p. 475).

Supervisor’s Role and Qualifications

House and Bratz (as cited in Holloway and Brager, 1989, p. 85) stated that “influence is not only central to supervision, but to leadership as well. ... two components are inherent in all definitions: influencing others and their acceptance of the influence “

Kieran O’Donoghue, a social work supervisor, trainer, and researcher from New Zealand identifies social worker supervision as the following:

- Supervision is the social worker’s most important professional relationship.
- Supervision is a professional process for the protection and empowerment of vulnerable groups, whether they are client or social worker.
- Supervision as a process needs to be anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory in its use of power and authority.

- Supervision as a process needs to be sensitive and responsive to difference, particularly cultural and gender.
- What appears implicit in social worker session is often as significant as what is made explicit.
- Supervision is a complex and skillful process, which can be learned.
- Supervision is one of the most important activities in the Social Services.
(O'Donoghue, Kieran, (2003, P. 2), Kieran's beliefs about social work supervision. *Kieran's corner for supervisors*. Retrieved October 4, 2003, from: <http://www.geocities.com/kieranodsw/supcorner1.htm>).

O' Donoghue states that a supervisor is one who oversees manages, or directs the work of another and is responsible for the quality of work that is completed. A supervisor is held accountable to the upper level of administration for the work that is done or not done by the people he/she manages and is turned to by clients when unresolved issues need to be mediated or resolved between the direct service worker and the client or family. The supervisor is the intermediary between administration of the agency and the direct service workers.

Research identifies social worker supervision as an educational process. As in the first edition of the *Encyclopedia of Social Work*, (1965:785), (as cited in Kadushin and Harkness, (2002), the role is identified as, "traditional method of transmitting knowledge of social work skills in practice from the trained to the untrained, from the experienced to the inexperienced student and worker" (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002, p.19).

Kadushin and Harkness define social work supervision in a broader and in more comprehensive terms. "These include supervisors function, objectives, hierarchical

position, the supervision as an indirect service, and the interactional process” (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002, p. 19).

The supportive role is becoming increasingly important and essential in the current climate of federal, state, county, and city budget cuts, the shrinking of quality resources, the rising incidence of staff burnout and turnover, decrease in job satisfaction and the impact of an increased intensity of problematic needs of clients serviced today.

It seems that that there is little emphasis on supervisory training. Presuming that a quality direct service worker will automatically become an excellent front-line supervisor is not necessarily the case. Merely, knowing the job and doing it well does not prepare one for a supervisory role. Although it is important to have experience and a working knowledge of the area you are to supervise the role changes dramatically.

According to Kadushin and Harkness, (2002), the direct service social worker shifting into a supervisory role often is moving from a senior employee position to a lowest level manager position in the agency. They are both leaders and subordinates. The front-line supervisors are internally focused on the work environment; supporting the direct line workers to insure that the policies and ethical standards are being adhered to and the delivery of service are being properly executed. The administrator is externally focused on community, legislative boards, and funding and policy issues. The role of the front-line supervisor is an extremely important one. They are the people closest to the workers carrying out the services to the clients and will impact the quality of service delivered.

...potentially good supervisors are born, but all benefit from training experiences in which they focus on supervision knowledge and skill, reflect on their role and

responsibilities, and received input from others about their work as supervisors. These experiences also have led me to ask questions about what distinguishes “good” supervisors from “bad” supervisors and how counselors become effective supervisors. The supervisor by far has received the least attention of any variable in the supervision enterprise. To date, only a few researchers have focused on supervisor qualities and skills... Good supervisors are empathic, genuine, open and flexible. They respect their supervisees as persons and as developing professionals, and are sensitive to individual differences of supervisees. They have extensive training and wide experience in counseling which have helped them achieve a broad perspective of the field

(Borders, D. (1994, April). The good supervisor. *ERIC Digest*, ED372350, p.1-4.

Retrieved September 27, 2003,

http://www.ericfacility.net/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed372350.html).

Experienced child welfare supervisors usually are secure both personally and professionally. They have a strong knowledge base and work experience to draw upon. They not only understand the work but also have participated in and have a current working knowledge of the skills required to perform the tasks of the supervisee.

They are respectful of the individual differences of the supervisee, whether it is in relation to culture, gender, practice styles, ethnicity, or personal characteristics, especially if they are different than their own.

A good supervisor will possess good communication skills but will also be a good listener, he/she will teach as well as learn, will be one who can decipher

information and not be judgmental. Trust and honesty are important attributes practiced between supervisor and supervisee.

“Disseminating information in a timely manner, consistently utilizing the expertise of their staff, and soliciting opinions in decision-making and planning for the future are signs of a good quality supervisor. They are accessible and seek to promote high morale and maximum productivity”. (*Supervisory leadership development* (1996, January), A pilot project of administrative and finance and SEIU Local 509, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 2-3. Retrieved 9/27/2003, from: <http://www.umass.edu/humres/Super.htm>).

“In the event of a problem in the office, they identify, and deal with the cause, rather than impose inappropriate, blanket policies. Competent supervisors also *maintain human values* in the workplace, even when under pressure”. (*Supervisory leadership development* (1996, January), A pilot project of administrative and finance and SEIU Local 509, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 2-3. Retrieved 9/27/2003, from: <http://www.umass.edu/humres/Super.htm>).

An inexperienced supervisor often demonstrates an insecurity concerning their skills and knowledge. They tend to operate from a role position power model and are authoritative in their approach and relationship with the supervisee. They tend to rely heavily on structure and exhibit little flexibility in dealing with the day-to-day issues of the agency. It is difficult for them to work “out of the box” when they doubt their own competence and do not want to have a supervisee expose their incompetence. It is important for them to maintain the structure due to the lack of confidence in themselves or the workers they are supervising. Often times they will not individualize the

supervision, but instead will treat everyone the same regardless of the supervisee's strengths or weaknesses. Supervisors who are inexperienced or lack adequate training will personalize issues between themselves and the supervisee. At times they resort to using their position power to threaten the supervisee if they disagree or challenge their power. In an agency that supports and maintains a supervisor with these practice standards, the workers will avoid supervisory contact and utilize peers to discuss questions, concerns and go to their peers for supportive assistance and needs.

Novice supervisors tend to doubt their skills, exhibit a consistent style with everyone, are fearful of confrontation, task-oriented, rigid, concrete, focus more on the client than the social workers development, have a tendency to ignore the diverse needs of the supervisee's styles, multiplicity, and training into account, because of their own insecurity and lack of broad based knowledge and/or experience in the area they are supervising. They consistently lack knowledge of the role and purpose of the agency as well as their own role as a supervisor (Borders, D.L., *The Good Supervisor, ERIC Digest: 1994-04-00.ED372350*).

The supervisor will gain supervisees respect far more readily if the supervisee believes the knowledge and experience base is present and can rely on and trust the supervisor's decision. The supervisees will be more apt to return for support and consultation rather than going to colleagues or others (Borders, D.L., *The Good Supervisor, ERIC Digest: 1994-04-00.ED372350*).

According to Kadushin and Harkness, the front line supervisor's role needs to be primarily supportive rather than educational or administrative. They believe that the front line supervisor is the person who sustains the mission of the agency by functioning

as the driving force behind the front line social worker who delivers services to the clients in the community. They believe that the supervisor is the most important person in a human service agency that can either make or break the performance and productivity of the direct service social worker. The front line supervisor is to model, through their behaviors, to the supervisee that which is expected of the supervisee towards the client.

Kadushin and Harkness' model of administrative, educational and supportive functions of the direct service supervisor, his/her role, how it relates to the frontline social worker and the impact it can have on the clients and mission of the agency is widely accepted in theory. However, in practice it may not necessarily be adhered to, taught or consistently practiced.

Power Distribution and Organizational Climate

A great deal of research and attention has been given to business and industry reorganizations, work environment, and methods of enhancing productivity. However, little attention has been given to human service agencies or government institutions in the area of supervision and worker motivation.

Workers many times are suffering from mental and physical health problems due to job related treatment and issues impacting them on their jobs. "Misuse of power by the people who feel powerless but entitled to power against those who feel powerless and undeserving of power is behind most work abuse" (Wyatt & Hare, 1997, p. 85). Many books on work abuse, burnout, turnover and job satisfaction have been written in an attempt to identify the structure of the environments in which these phenomena occur. Additionally, many topics have been noted on issues of how to resolve the feelings

manifested in the abusive environments and how to survive within these environments as well as knowing when to leave.

W. Edwards Deming, a notable management consultant who has brought Total Quality Control to Japanese business over the past 40 years believes that “Western managers universally blame workers, over control them, and deny them their pride of workmanship. He believes that “there is ample evidence that managers need to dominate employees rather than assist them puts a lid on people’s productivity and increases their stress at the same time” (Wyatt & Hare, 1997, p. 86). Deming says, “ How managers’ need to dominate comes from weakness, not strength” (Wyatt & Hare, 1997, p. 87).

According to Webster’s New World College Dictionary, 4th Edition and for the purpose of this study, power will be defined as “the ability to control others; authority; sway; or influence others” (2001, p. 1128). There are many different sources and types of power, how they are utilized in the work setting impact the effectiveness and productivity of the workers.

“Most government agencies exercise prerogative directive power. This type of power is coercive and manipulative of many by a few” (Wyatt & Hare, 1997, p. 89). When this type of power is used people do what they are told to do by management for fear of retribution by their supervisor. Fear, distrust, anger, isolation and an inability to act without direction, are prevalent in organizations that are directive in nature. Workers become stagnant, machine like and their creativity is suppressed. Many workers accept this environment despite feeling unhappy.

Direct power or prerogative organizations (Wyatt & Hare, 1997, p. 89) are abusive environments to work in. Shame, fear and intimidation are used to motivate

workers. According to Wyatt & Hare, *Work abuse: How to recognize and survive it*, people within a prerogative power organization seek promotions to avoid shame themselves while enabling them to pass it along to their subordinates. The process becomes acceptable and supported by upper management and workers expect and surrender to it.

Two sources of power, as described are “role” power and “personal” power (Wyatt & Hare, 1997, p. 90). “Role power is attained through a promotion or appointment to a position within the organization. Supervisors who misuse their “role power “position often lack self-esteem, self-confidence, and may have been exposed to abusive treatment in the past herself” (Wyatt & Hare, 1997, p. 91). They may lack knowledge, experience, or be deficient in qualities and competencies required for the position. Their motivation is to control others. When workers disappoint a supervisor who “rules” from this premise retaliation will most likely occur as the worker is perceived as an object of ownership by the supervisor. The impact on the worker can be feelings of not being heard, not respected, and appreciated and ultimately affecting job satisfaction resulting in lower productivity.

“Personal power is a subjective result of the sum of sources of power or authority you bring to your job independent of the position you hold within the agency or organization “(Wyatt & Hare, 1997, p. 90). Supervisors who operate from this framework are secure in individual abilities and do not have a desire or need to control others. They are more receptive to a collaborative team process and the engagement of individual workers creates satisfaction in their work. Workers supervised by a person operating under these principles are often times happier, feel supported, motivated and are more

productive. A worker who may be more experienced or knowledgeable than his/her supervisor is not perceived as a threat to the supervisor operating from a personal power position. The supervisor is more apt to utilize the strengths of the worker and draw on ideas and use his/her as a model to other workers, while at the same time giving credit to the worker for the idea.

“Collaborative power is a process of people working as a team towards a desired goal that could not occur on their own. This creates an atmosphere that taps into workers creativity and generates motivation among the workers” (Wyatt & Hare, 1997, p.89). “W. Edwards Deming calls the experience of synergic power ‘profound knowledge’ because in truly collaborative work groups productivity is enhanced beyond people’s expectation” (Wyatt & Hare, 1997, p. 89). With a staff that are not committed to the agency or not trained or experienced in the work they do can only result in unrest, dissatisfaction and disloyalty. “Success comes from successfully implementing strategy, not just from having one. This implementation capability derives, in large measure, from the organization’s people, how they are treated, their skills and competencies, and their efforts on behalf of the organization” (Pfeffer, J., 1998, p.17).

According to Glisson (1989), in his article, *The effect of leadership on workers in human service organizations*, “the purpose of leadership is to influence the environment and atmosphere of the agency in a way that the workers become motivated, empowered, passionate about the mission of the agency” (Glisson, 1989, p.100). Glisson defines leadership as ... “the power to create an enthusiastic and optimistic organizational climate and that this power lies in the leaders’ abilities to influence the attitudes and perspectives of the followers” (Glisson, 1989, p. 100).

Supervisee's learn very quickly how a supervisor feels by watching him/her in her daily interpersonal relationship with the supervisee or other colleagues. As Shulman says, "More is "caught" by staff than "taught" by the supervisor"

(Shulman, *Interactional Supervision*, p.4. Retrieved: 9/27/2003

http://www.naswpress.org/publications/books/management/interactionl_supervision/2200
ch.

Conclusion

The front-line supervisor is one of the most important roles in the human service agency, according to Kadushin and Harkness (2002). Their knowledge, experience, training, and commitment to those they supervise and to the clients serviced by the agency are important and should be supported by management. It is important to place special emphasis towards on-going in-service training to assist supervisors in maintaining their skills as well as keeping up with the current changes in laws, procedures, and the needs of the direct service social worker regarding the changes experienced in the working environment. It is important for the front-line supervisor to advocate for the direct service worker and to support them openly in front of clients and to be able to redirect or teach the worker ways to perform her/his job more effectively through modeling behaviors that will ultimately create a positive environment for the direct service worker.

The front-line supervisor needs to listen to the supervisee regarding the clients needs, issues pertaining to program effectiveness or ineffectiveness and to involve the direct service social worker in program planning and redesign. Having a good grasp of the needs of the client, through the direct service social workers input will enable the

front-line supervisor to relay agency needs to the administrative staff in order to meet the needs of the clients and families serviced by the agency.

The front-line supervisor, to meet the direct needs of the supervisee, utilizes administrative, educational, and supportive roles. To what degree they balance the roles are dependent on the individual needs of the supervisee, her/his knowledge base, experience, training, and emotional needs. The relationship between the supervisor and supervisee should be one of collaboration and partnership with the goal of meeting the needs of the clients while maintaining high ethical standards and at the same time maintaining compliance with the statutory requirements and agency policies.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

A description of the subjects participating in this research and how they were selected for the study will be addressed in this chapter. The instruments utilized and the collection of the data will also be addressed. The process and procedures of data collection and analysis will be provided.

Description of Subjects

Front-line supervisors in 29 County Departments of Human Service Agencies in western, eastern, central, northern and southern of Wisconsin will be surveyed. Varying size of counties within the 29 regions may result in front-line supervisors having additional supervisory duties and responsibilities other than primarily supervision of direct service social work staff.

Sample Selection

The participants were front-line supervisors from a 29 county region of Department of Human Service agencies in Wisconsin including urban and rural counties in northern, southern, central, eastern and western areas of the state. The sample included both male and females supervisors with varying degrees of experience, training and education.

Instrumentation

A survey consisting of 17 open and closed ended questions on a single two-sided legal sized document, along with a cover letter including identification of the purpose of the study, confidentiality issues and protections defined, time frames for study, and an addressed, stamped envelope was provided along with the surveys. The surveys were

mailed to supervisory staff of the 29 Wisconsin County Departments of Human Service Agencies. Surveys were mailed directly to front-line supervisors with the exception of two counties who requested they be sent to a contact person. A period of two weeks was provided for the return of the surveys commencing from the time the surveys are mailed. Approximately one week following the mailing of surveys a reminder postcard was sent to participants.

Confidentiality was protected. No individual names were requested, gender was requested, no specific county agency was identified within the study results, and only the researcher and advisory staff from University of Wisconsin-Stout viewed the surveys. The participants maintained the right to refuse to participate without any adverse consequences. This was stated in the footnote of the cover letter mailed to each participant with the surveys. Also included in the footnote of the cover letter was the statement informing the participants “by returning the survey I am giving my informed consent as a participating volunteer in this study, minimal identifiers are necessary and my confidentiality is guaranteed.”

The researcher constructed a survey instrument to information regarding the areas of practice functions, training, educational and work experience and performance feedback. The questions asked the level of years of experience in social work both in direct service and supervision, the level of education, training and certification that is required in his/her county, years of experience in both supervision, the area they are currently supervising and questions regarding performance evaluations.

Data Collection

The survey was a self-administered questionnaire, comprised of a combination of 17 open and closed ended questions that could be completed in approximately 10 minutes. All participants were given identical instruments. A total of 88 surveys were mailed to supervisors in the participating county agencies in 29 of the 72 County Departments of Human Service Agencies in Wisconsin. County samplings were chosen from northern, eastern, western, central and southern areas of the state to best represent the entire state. Mailings went to individual supervisors in 27 county agencies. Two county departments requested to have the surveys sent directly to the lead supervisor to present to the front-line supervisors individually for two reasons: 1) to provide the lead supervisor an opportunity to approve the tool/instrument and 2) it is the policy in the county to screen surveys and protect staff from the demands placed on them that take them away from their main duties and responsibilities. A follow-up postcard was mailed to supervisors approximately one week following the initial mailing to 1) remind supervisors of the deadline date for the surveys to be returned, 2) to thank them for their participation if they had already returned the survey, and 3) to offer to mail another survey if they did not receive the first one. The surveys were returned to the researcher by mail in a postage paid envelope provided to them along with the survey and cover letter.

Data Analysis

Frequency counts were used to calculate the data. Chi-Square analysis was used to determine statistical significance of the results and $p < .05$ was the significance level utilized in this study. Cross tabulations (frequency counts and percentages) were run with a Chi-Square analysis between gender and county types and all other items on the survey.

A content analysis was conducted to identify the themes of the responses from the open-ended questions.

Limitations

A relatively small sample was collected in comparison with the 72 counties within the State of Wisconsin. Various counties were rural and others were in urban areas where there may be variations in financial resources and/or the availability of services, qualified staff or educational opportunities. Some larger counties contained both urban and rural areas. Some of the supervisor's duties may include duties other than direct supervision that may have altered their answers to some degree. Dependent on the size of the county the Director may be the only supervisor in the agency. Supervisors may not have responded openly due to the nature of the questions regarding their personal experience, education or duties in regard to supervisory qualifications, limitations, direct training in supervision or academic status. Also, the survey questions were not specific and left a wide area of interpretation. The researcher maintained the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants to address this. Lastly, the researcher did not define "supervisory training"; therefore he/she did not clearly convey a constant in his/her responses.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

This report of survey results was based on responses from 63 respondents from 29 County Departments of Human Service Agencies in Wisconsin. A total of 88 surveys were mailed. The survey instrument can be found in Appendix B if further reader clarification is required.

In each of the following descriptive statistics tables, percent (%) refers to valid percent, which is the percent based on only those who actually responded to the item and (N) refers to the actual number of respondents who responded to the specific survey question. Some tables show the total number of responses being fewer than 63. This is due to respondent choosing to not answer all items.

Of the 88 surveys, 64 were returned with useable information, for a total response rate at 72%. One survey was returned too late for inclusion in results.

Item Analysis

Demographics

A cross tabulation with a Pearson Chi-Square analysis was performed between urban/ rural and all other items and male/ female and all other items on the survey. The majority of calculations had no significant relationship, define as $p < .05$.

Table 1.

Population of County

	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Urban	30	47.6
Rural	31	49.2
Total	63	100

Table 2.

Gender

	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Male	24	38.1
Female	37	58.7
Total	61	96.8

Note. 2 did not respond to this question

The functional roles supervisors spend most time in and preference

Tables 3 and 4 indicate that supervisors spend the majority of their time functioning in the administrative role (54%) whereas they prefer to spend their time in the supportive role (44%).

Table 3.

Area supervisors spend the majority of time each week

	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Administrative	34	54
Educational	9	14.3
Supportive	17	27
Total	60	95.3

Note. Not all responded to the question.

Table 4.

Area supervisors prefer to spend his/her time each week

	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Administrative	8	12.7
Educational	20	31.7
Supportive	28	44.4
Total	56	87.8

Note. Not all responded to the question or indicated a combination of areas.

Pearson Chi-Square analysis was performed between 1) what function supervisors spent the majority of his/her time in each week and 2) which function he/she preferred to spend his/her time in each week was utilized. The result of the Pearson Chi-Square was statistical significance ($p < .05$). The research indicates front-line supervision is most effective when the supervisor operates primarily in the supportive role/function. The

results of the survey/study indicated that most front-line supervisors are working in a role that does not lend to optimal quality. The survey indicated that the majority of his/her time is spent in the administrative role but would prefer to work in another role.

Neither county type nor gender had any statistical significance in this analysis (Table 5).

Controlling for 1) county type and 2) gender did not affect the results of the χ^2 analysis.

Table 5

	Prefer to spend supervisory time in functional role:			Total
	Admin.	Educ.	Supportive	
<u>Spend majority of time each week in functional role</u>				
Administrative	6	12	12	30
Educational	0	8	1	9
Supportive	2	0	13	15
Total	8	20	28	54

Note. $p < .05$. Other responses were either missing or a combination.

In a content analysis the consistent theme in the supervisor's comments indicating his/her perceptions of what prevented functioning in the preferred role was due to lack of understanding by administrators, implementation of a new computer program (eWISACWIS), high caseloads, turnover.

Females did respond slightly higher (45.9%) than males (41.7%) in preferring the supportive role although the difference was not statistically significant (Table 6). Male supervisors preferred the administrative role (25%), whereas female supervisors were at a much lower percentage (5.4%). When the same variable was compared with urban and rural the percentages were consistent in all categories and indicated little variance between county types.

Table 6.

	Function supervisor prefers to spend time with							
	Administrative		Educational		Supportive		Total	
	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)	%
Male	6	25 %	6	25%	10	41.7%	22	91.7%
Female	2	5.4%	13	35%	17	45.9%	22	90.3%
Total	8	13.1%	19	31%	27	44.3%	54	88.4%

A content analysis of the responses for both the supportive and educational functional roles the theme was either that the supervisor's background was in either education or counseling or that they were a "previous line worker" and were aware of the obstacles faced by the direct service social workers.

When supervisors were asked why he/she preferred a specific function role when supervising the direct service staff responded in the following manner:

For those who felt most comfortable in the administrative role some responses were: "was the most objective part of the job", they felt comfortable in that role, was the role/function that provided the greatest ability to impact the quality of services or to be creative in the problem solving issues of the agency. One participant responded that he/she was "comfortable but I enjoy it the least."

The supervisors most comfortable in the supportive functional role relayed the following responses:

"I feel if people are happy and feel valued in job they will do well. I am very flexible."

"I feel like I'm serving more as a team when I have direct contact in support of staff. Staff should have adequate support and training and this does not happen to a sufficient degree."

“I love working with my workers. I miss the “hands on” work of child welfare.”

“I am “a social worker at heart.”

“The supportive role “fits best with talent and experience” or “it relates most to the field of social work.”

“My role as a social worker involves “empowerment” of employees and I enjoy fostering and developing workers skills and problem solving with regard to service plan and resource coordination.”

“Connecting with staff to make a difference in our clients’ lives is the driving force in my job, if staff believe they are truly supported they can hopefully give better service to our clients.”

Supervisory training

Approximately 50% had received training prior to becoming a supervisor, 80% received training after becoming a supervisor and 50% of the 29 agencies surveyed required regular on-going supervisory training (Table 7).

Table 7.
Received any supervisory training prior to becoming a supervisor?

	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Yes	30	47.6
No	33	52.4
Total	63	100

Table 8.
Received training specific to your job duties after you accepted a supervisory position?

	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Yes	53	84.1
No	10	15.9
Total	63	100

When asked whether supervisors would like to have training specific to improving supervisory skills over 68.3% responded positively. A content analysis of the area that supervisors would prefer specialized training in identified the primary areas as program evaluation/development, financial management, technical assistance, and empowerment of direct service social worker to enable them to better service the clients.

Table 9 illustrates the responses from supervisors that would like training specific to improving supervisory skills. This indicates a need for training.

Table 9.
Would you like training specific to improving supervisory skills?

	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Yes	43	68.3
No	18	28.6
Total	61	96.8

Note. 2 did not respond to this question

Education and experience

Of the 61 (N) respondents, 60% reported having completed a master's degree, although 47.6% of the master degrees were awarded in a field other than social work. Other areas of study included were counseling, psychology, rehabilitation, management and community service. A majority (76.2%) of the agencies surveyed required social workers and supervisors to be certified by the state.

Experience and training

Supervisors within the 29 counties reported having direct service social work experience in the specific area they currently supervise (81%). (Table 10) Although overall the supervisors reported that he/she are not currently maintaining a caseload of his/her own (81%). A content analysis indicated the main reasons for his/her responses were due to time constraints and/or administrative policy. Some supervisors indicated

that they would be in favor of maintaining a caseload of their own and missed direct service contact with clients and duties.

Table 10

Do you have direct social work experience in the specific area you currently supervise?

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	51	81
No	11	17.5
Total	62	98.4

Note. 1 did not respond to the question.

The supervisors overwhelmingly reported many years of experience in the area he/she supervised as either a supervisor or direct line social worker. The majority reported more than 5 years of experience either as a social worker or a supervisor. (Table 11 and 12).

Table 11.

How many years of county human service experience do you have as a social worker?

	Frequency	Percent
None	9	14.3
Less than 1 year	1	1.6
1-2 years	1	1.6
2-5 years	3	4.8
5-10 years	18	28.6
11 or more years	28	95.2
Total	60	100

Note. 3 did not respond to this question

Table 12.

How many years of county human service experience do you have as a supervisor?

	Frequency	Percent
None	3	4.8
Less than 1 year	3	4.8
1-2 years	1	1.6
2-5 years	15	23.8
5-10 years	15	23.8
6-11 years	26	41.3
Total	63	100

The supervisors with work experience over 11 years or more were predominately male (58.3%) compared to females (29.7%). Supervisors maintaining over 11 years of experience in human service agencies working in rural counties (41.9%) was slightly higher than in the urban (36.7%) areas. However, more supervisors with human service work experience from 5 -10 years were female (29.7%) compared to males (16.7%) and are located in urban areas (36.7%) compared to rural areas (12.9%).

Performance Feedback

Supervisor's responses when asked whether the supervisee's were able to evaluate the performance of their direct supervisor were evenly distributed between yes (46%) and no (52.4%). However, when asked if they would support the opportunity to have supervisee's evaluate their individual performance the response was 89.9% yes, and 10.2% no (Table 13).

Table 13.

Would you support the opportunity to have your staff evaluate your performance?

	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Yes	53	89.8
No	6	10.2
Total	59	100

Note. 4 did not respond to this question.

Female supervisors (94.3%) were more receptive than male supervisors (82.6%) to provide the supervisee the opportunity to evaluate his/her performance, although the difference was not statistically significant (Table 14).

Table 14.

Support opportunity to have supervisee evaluate supervisors performance.

	Frequency (N)		Percentage (%)		
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Total
Male	19	4	82.6	17.4	23
Female	33	2	94.3	5.7	35
Total	52	6	89.7	10.3	58

Note. % within item 15/gender of respondent.

Table 15.

Support opportunity for staff to evaluate performance					
	Yes	%	No	%	Total
Urban	28	100	0	0	28
Rural	23	79.3	6	20.7	29
Total	51	89.5	6	10.5	57

Note. $P < .05$. Total less than 63 due to missing data.

Statistical significance was noted in the Chi-Square analysis of $p < .05$ when comparing supervisor's performance evaluated by the supervisee's to urban and rural county agencies (Table 15). Urban county supervisor's responded at 100% in favor of affording his/her staff the opportunity to evaluate performance of his/her supervisor as compared to 79.3% of supervisors in rural counties. Content analysis indicated that some counties already had a workable tool for the supervisee's to evaluate his/her supervisor's performance and continue to improve the tool.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

“A social work supervisor is an agency administrative-staff member to whom authority is delegated to direct, coordinate, enhance, and evaluate on-the-job performance of the supervisees for whose work he or she is held accountable. The supervisor performs administrative, educational, and supportive functions in interaction with the supervisee in the context of a positive relationship” (Kadushin, 2002, p. 23).

This study explored front-line social work supervision in 29 County Departments of Human Service Agencies of Wisconsin. The study explored supervisory skills in the functional areas of administrative, educational and supportive roles associated with the social work profession.

The participants completed a survey consisting of 17 open and closed ended questions, constructed by the researcher. A period of approximately two weeks was provided for the participants to return the survey in the self-addressed stamped envelope provided by the researcher in the initial mailing.

The purpose of the study was to identify commonalities and consistencies of supervisory standards, practice and training requirements. The study accomplished this purpose. Another purpose of the study was to determine if any correlation exists directly affecting the delivery of service, and whether supervisory standards, training and practice impacted the quality of supervision. The study did accomplish this to some degree. The study attempted to identify the supervisor’s support, knowledge, training, and experience in the area they are supervising. The literature review identified the importance of functions of management staff and how the support provided to the direct service staff

can directly impact the effectiveness of services provided to clients, staff job satisfaction and productivity.

Limitations

Knowledge, training and experience were identified from the results of the survey but the level of support provided by the supervisors when dealing with the direct service social worker was not clearly defined through the survey and individual practice styles were not addressed through the survey. The individual supervisors ability to provide quality supportive or educational direction to the supervisee was not a result of the survey. The majority of the supervisors surveyed responded as spending the majority of his/her time each week in the administrative role (54%), whereas 44% would prefer to spend his/or time in the supportive functional role. The literature identified the supportive role as the most important role of the front-line supervisor. Therefore, if the majority of supervisors are functioning predominantly in the administrative role the productivity may be affected negatively. The survey was not specific enough to conclude this.

A relatively small sample was collected in comparison with the 72 counties within the State of Wisconsin. Various counties were rural areas, urban and other counties had both urban and rural areas within his/her county. Therefore calculating data accurately in relation to comparisons between urban and rural may not be entirely valid. Variations in financial resources and/or the availability of services, qualified staff or educational opportunities may have affected the results. Some of the supervisor's duties may include duties other than direct supervision that may have altered his/her responses specifically to the amount of time spent weekly in the specific functional roles. Dependent on the size

and the financial situation of the county the Director may also be the agency's supervisor. Supervisors may not have responded openly due to the nature of the questions regarding their personal experience, training or duties in regard to supervisory qualifications, limitations, or direct training in supervision. Also, the survey questions were not specific and left a wider area for interpretation especially regarding supervisory training and whether the training was specific to human service agencies or to a broader form of supervision. Despite the fact that the respondents indicated they had received training specific to his/her job duties (84.1%) after becoming a supervisor, 68.3% responded the need for improving his/her supervisory skills.

Conclusion

Kadushin and Harkness (2002) believe that if the direct service social worker is not receiving support, adequate education to do their job, and there is an absence of the interpreting and monitoring of compliance of policies (administrative functions) from qualified and experienced supervisors: services and worker productivity will be negatively impacted. The survey results did determine that the majority of supervisors had 5 or more year's experience (95.2%) in both direct service work and a supervisory capacity. The greatest percentage of supervisors had 11 or more years' experience (41.3%). The majority of supervisors possessed a master degree level of education; however, the survey did not conclude that the level of education necessarily results in quality of supervision. The majority of the supervisors surveyed indicated most of his/her time each week is spent in the administrative role (54%), whereas 44% would prefer to spend his/her time in the supportive functional role. This was found to have statistical significance in the study. The literature identified the supportive role as the

most important role of the front-line supervisor. According to Kadushin and Harkness (2002), the front-line supervisor's role needs to be primarily supportive rather than education or administrative. They believe that the supervisor is the most important person in a human service agency that can either make or break the performance and productivity of the direct service social worker. Productivity and job satisfaction are highest when supervisor's primary role is in a supportive function. Therefore, if the majority of supervisors are functioning predominately in the administrative role the productivity may be negatively affected. One might conclude from the results that despite the fact that the supervisors were functioning primarily in the administrative role the majority of supervisors surveyed preferred the supportive role. This lends itself to cautiously conclude that he/she may be providing supportive practices in his/her daily interactions with the direct service staff, although no statistical significance was found to support that hypothesis. What was statistically significant in the study was that supervisors supported the opportunity for staff to evaluate the supervisor's performance. Again one may possibly conclude that the supervisors were either open to feedback from the supervisees and/or secure within his/her self. It may also indicate that the supervisors responding his/her preference to the supportive role respect the opinions of direct service staff and value his/her input regarding the supervisor's performance. If this assertion is valid the literature supports it in regard to sources of power and how they impact performance and productivity in an agency in the following way. Two sources of power are "role" power and "personal power" (Wyatt & Hare, 1997, p. 90). "Role power is attained through a promotion or appointment to a position within the organization. Supervisors who misuse their "role power" position often lack self-esteem, self-

confidence, and may have been exposed to abusive treatment in the past herself” (Wyatt & Hare, 1997, p. 91). According to Wyatt and Hare he/she may lack knowledge, experience, or be deficient in qualities and competencies required for the position. His/her motivation is to control others. When workers disappoint a supervisor who “rules” from this premise retaliation will most likely occur as the worker is perceived as an object of ownership by the supervisor. The impact on the worker can be feelings of not being heard, not respected, and appreciated and ultimately affecting job satisfaction resulting in lower productivity.

“Personal power is a subjective result of the sum of sources of power or authority you bring to your job independent of the position you hold within the agency or organization” (Wyatt & Hare, 1997, p. 90). Supervisors who operate from this framework are secure in individual abilities and do not have a desire or need to control others. They are more receptive to a collaborative team process and the engagement of individual workers creates satisfaction in their work.

According to Kadushin and Harkness (2002) and Holloway and Brager, (1989), the front-line supervisor is the most significant person in the agency. The reason is because they have a direct impact and effect on the direct service social worker that delivers services and carries out the mission of the agency and is in day-to-day contact with clients and families serviced.

Recommendations

1) Training specific to front-line supervision may be beneficial for supervisory staff. Placing an emphasis on the supportive role and how it impacts overall productivity and cost may be helpful during a time of budget shortfalls in reducing staff turnover and

lower productivity. It may also provide a means of support for the supervisor and gain insight into strategies to utilize in working within a system that requires he/she to work with fewer resources and staff due to budgetary issues.

2) Conduct a follow-up survey for direct service staff with similar questions to identify how the social workers respond and perceive his/her supervisor in regard to the three functional roles and if it affects his/her job satisfaction and productivity.

3) Survey all 72 County Departments of Human Services and Departments of Social Services to obtain comprehensive data pertaining to practice standards, educational level, experience, and training needs throughout the state or resurvey the same participants in this study and request more specific and follow-up questions to the initial survey.

4) Supervisors and Administrators to be cognizant of the need to improve communication with the direct service staff and look to he/she for input regarding the effectiveness of current programs and development of future programs realizing that the direct service staff are in direct contact with the clients serviced by the agency.

5) Develop a tool to evaluate supervisor performance with input from all direct line social workers and supervisory staff. Also implement the process with regular refinement of the tool through entire staff input.

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Appendix A – Cover Letter

Front-line Supervisor

Front-line Supervisor

March 29, 2004

Dear Supervisor,

Service to the elderly, developmentally disabled, juveniles and children has been the function of agencies since the early years of volunteers and the Charity Organizations. County Departments of Human Service agency's throughout the state all operate a little differently although the missions are similar.

As a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin-Stout I have chosen to do my Masters thesis on front-line supervision in Wisconsin County Departments of Human Service agencies. My interest is two fold: (1) is to research what supervision looks like according to the experts in the field, and (2) to determine the functional roles currently operating in 29 of the 72 Wisconsin county human service agencies.

I have worked as a social worker in various capacities including two county department human service agencies in my 30-year career. It has always been interesting to experience different styles and practices of my supervisors throughout the years of my employment. Front-line supervisors must balance their duties between direct line staff and management. This seems to be both a challenging and a rewarding experience.

I am asking for approximately 10 minutes of your time to complete the attached survey on issues that are important to you. This survey is being sent to front-line supervisors in the western region county human service agencies as well as to Brown, Milwaukee, and Dane county agencies. This is your expertise and I look forward to all of your views.

Please be assured that the responses are completely anonymous. Only the researcher and graduate advisor will have access to your individual response. The results will be evaluated as a whole and not by county. The only identifiers are gender and whether the county represented is from an urban or rural area. Please return the survey by April 9, 2004 in the postage-paid return envelope. Please do not include any personally identifiable information.

Thank you for your participation in this important project. The results of the investigation will be made available to you or your agency upon request in May 2004.

Sincerely,

Alyce L. Knueppel, MS Ed. Graduate student
University of Wisconsin-Stout

I understand that by returning this questionnaire, I am giving my informed consent as a participating volunteer in this study. I understand the basic nature of the study and agree that any potential risks are exceedingly small. I also understand the potential benefits that might be realized from the successful completion of this study. I am aware that the information is being sought in a specific manner so that only minimal identifiers are necessary and so that confidentiality is guaranteed. I realize that I have the right to refuse to participate and that my right to withdraw from participation at any time during the study will be respected with no coercion or prejudice.

NOTE: Questions or concerns about the research study should be addressed to Alyce Knueppel, (715) 833-2398, the researcher, or Dr. Bob Peters, (715) 232-1983, the research advisor. Questions about the rights of research subjects can be addressed to Sue Foxwell, Human Protections Administrator, UW – Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research, 152 Voc Rehab, Menomonie, WI, 54751, phone (715) 232-1126

Appendix B – Instrument/Survey

HUMAN SERVICE SUPERVISOR SURVEY

Urban
 Rural

PRACTICE FUNCTIONS:

Administrative (example: policy making, meetings, program evaluation and assessment, management duties)

Educational (example: training or teaching staff, providing staff with tools to do the work)

Supportive (example: Identifying staff needs, listening to concerns, talking things over, sharing worries)

1. What function do you spend the majority of your supervisory time with each week?

Administrative

Educational

Supportive

2. What functional role would you prefer to spend your supervisory time with?

Administrative

Educational

Supportive

3. What prevents you from doing so? Or what are the obstacles you face?

4. What area or functional role do you feel most comfortable with?

Administrative

Educational

Supportive

Why?

TRAINING:

5. Did you receive any supervisory training prior to becoming a supervisor?
 yes
 no
6. Did you receive any supervisor training specific to your job duties after you accepted a supervisory position?
 yes
 no
7. Is on-going supervisory training required by your agency?
 yes
If yes, how frequently?
 monthly
 yearly
 less frequently than yearly
 no
If no, would you like on-going supervisory training to be offered?
 yes
 no
8. Would you like training specific to improving supervisory skills?
 yes
 no
If no, what training would you prefer?
-
-

EDUCATION AND WORK EXPERIENCE:

9. What is your highest degree attained/completed?

- Bachelor's
 Master's
 Doctoral
 Other (please specify)
-

10. Were any of your degrees completed in social work? (BSW, MSSW, DSW)

- yes
 no

If no, please specify the academic focus of your degree:

11. Does your agency require you to be a state certified social worker?

- yes
 no

12. Do you have direct social work experience in the specific area you currently are supervising?

- yes
 no

13. Are you able to carry a caseload along with your supervisory duties?

- yes
 no

14. How many years of county human service experience do you have as either a social worker

or social work supervisor?

A. Social worker:

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> none | <input type="checkbox"/> 2-5 years |
| <input type="checkbox"/> less than 1 year | <input type="checkbox"/> 5-10 years |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1-2 years | <input type="checkbox"/> more than 10 |

years

B. Supervisor:

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1-2 years | <input type="checkbox"/> 2-5 years |
| <input type="checkbox"/> less than 1 year | <input type="checkbox"/> 5-10 years |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1-2 years | <input type="checkbox"/> more than 10 |

15. Gender:
 male
 female

PERFORMANCE FEEDBACK:

16. Are the supervisee's able to evaluate the performance of their direct supervisor?
 yes
 no
17. Would you support the opportunity to have your staff evaluate your performance?
 yes
 no

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

Thank you for taking the time to respond to this survey!

Appendix C – Postcard Script

Participants:

You should have already received and completed a survey that was mailed to you last week. If you have not please assist me by doing so at this time because it is vital to the validity of my research. If you have already responded I take this opportunity to thank you. If you have lost the survey or did not receive one please contact me at:

Alyce Knueppel

715-833-2398 or rak604@Charter.net

Thank you for your participation and assistance.