The *ménage à trois* complexity of external supervision

Paul Flanagan – University of Waikato

Vivianne Flintoff – Waikato Institute of Technology
Locating ourselves

• Excusé moi! Please excuse our French…

• Practice background
  • Paul
  • Vivianne

• Ideas
  • Social constructionism
    • Analysis of power relations
  • Narrative supervision practices
Pathways to today’s presentation

• NZAC Conference

• NZJC Article
    • Troubling taken for granted ideas of external supervision dyad
    • That closer collaborative 3-way relationships can better serve the purposes of external supervision
Background

• Concern about accountability and responsibility of external supervision – our experience

• Critique and interrogation of taken-for-granted ideas about the ‘sacrosanct’ nature of the supervision dyad

• Social work literature encouraged our further exploration of our critique of the dyad relationship

• Surprise response from others e.g. social workers

• Mixed responses from counsellors and counselling supervisors:
  • Don’t touch it!
  • Good on you.
Foreground – Practitioners, supervisors, agency (managers)

• Relationships – who are the partners in a ménage à trois?
  • What are the ethical challenges to be considered?
  • Responding to some calls to the professions
  • Current managerial and economic contexts

• Making explicit the implicit
  • This relationship of three already exists: how are we going to attend to this reality in ways that better serve the purposes of external supervision?
Partner Relationship Development

• Threading
  • Values
    • Ethics
      • Pragmatics
  • Through the three-way relationships
A (professional) Household of Three

- Professional spaces
  - Not sleeping partners or ‘in your pocket’
  - Independent and interdependent

- Patterns of relationship
  - Two’s company; three’s a crowd?
  - Collaborative and collegial
  - Individual roles, responsibilities, accountabilities, that are enacted in overtly acknowledged relationships with each other
Questions: Accountabilities & Responsibilities

• Questions for the individual professional about their relating with the professional other/s

• Questions that speak to the concerns and hopes of the professional – practitioner; supervisor; manager
Supervisor

• What is my responsibility to the:
  • Practitioner?
  • Clients and their whanau?
  • Agency?
  • Profession?
• How do I understand the relationship with the agency?
• How does the agency understand the relationship with me?
• How are power/agency politics addressed?
• Who do I talk with if I have concerns about the practitioner/a client/someone in the agency?
Benefits to supervisors

• Closer collaborative relationships better facilitate:
  • An understanding of the context of the practitioner and their work,
  • Interactions with the agency

• Leading to:
  • Increased support for the practitioner,
  • Shared responsibility for the practice work with the client
  • Clearer understanding of the supervision provision
Practitioner

• What forms of external supervision are going to provide the best service for me?

• What relationship would I prefer between the external supervisor and the agency? And why?

• Who decides who my external supervisor is?

• As the ‘payers for supervision’ what could/should my agency expect to know?

• Who is responsible for negotiating the supervision agreement?
Benefits to practitioner

• Reassurance and knowledge that agency / manager and supervisor are better positioned to support practitioner

• ‘Evidence’ of increased understanding, support, monitoring of practice, and professional development opportunities
Agency (Manager)

- How do I know that the supervision is effective and useful?
- Is this supervision value for money?
- Is this supervisor doing what I expect the supervisor to be doing?
- How do I know the practitioner is making ‘good’ use of supervision?
- How will I know if there is something I should know? And what could these things be?
- What are the contractual requirements for external supervision?
- How does the supervisor understand the relationship with the agency?
Agency (Manager) continued…

• How are power relations (e.g. agency politics, within supervision) addressed?

• Who decides who the supervisors are and why?

• What does the agency want in the supervisor? Skills, knowledge, training - compatibility with the agency values, theoretical approaches, professional codes

• What relationship do I as service manager have with the external supervisor? And what relationship should/could there be?

• How might the external supervisor understand that we share responsibility in supporting the practitioner and their practice?
Benefits to agency / manager

• Knowledge that the supervision service provides what is contracted for

• Safety of practice

• Safety for the practitioner

• Knowing of effective client work

• Assurance
Our Noticings:

• Appreciation by each professional for the closer collaborative relationship

• Reassurance and knowledge that the supervision service is providing what is hoped for and paid for

• Hopes are not assumed but made explicit within the ménage à trois relationship

• Retains the strengths of the dyadic relationship and addresses the worries that confidentiality and privacy might be undermined

• Better serves the purposes of external supervision
Conclusion: Common threads, different patterns

• Different pattern is the ménage à trois

• External supervision is usefully shaped as an explicit three way relationship

• Ménage à trois is shaped by values, ethics, and pragmatics threading through contracting conversations and subsequent interactions

• The common threads are woven through the relationships and interactions by each partner, together weaving the pattern we call external supervision – welcome to the ménage à trois.