

The Routledge international handbook of social work supervision

Kieran O'Donoghue and Lambert Engelbrecht (Eds.)
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Supervision is one of the core pillars of sound and humane social work practice and leadership. I'm sure we can all recall rewarding, stimulating and challenging sessions, contrasted with task-driven "KPI-drenched" meetings with our supervisor. Given its centrality to just and ethical practice, this volume is a welcome reference toolkit. This book is part of a wider handbook series of note—The Routledge International Handbook social work series is a splendid collection and something every library needs.

Opening chapters focus on a range of jurisdictions, with the USA a notable exception. I am always drawn to Scandinavian practice debates, and the German chapter is equally interesting given the pedagogical emphasis in Western Europe social work. Following sections cover supervisor settings, roles and responsibilities, models and approaches, interpersonal issues, leading and managing supervision and close with a focus on emerging areas. I started at the emerging areas section—excited to see what new debates are on offer. Chapter 50 stands out for me—the role of service user voice in supervision. Like the fourth-wall method of Brechtian theatre, the people we work with and for can be rendered present in the supervision process (an empty chair is sufficient to represent whānau and families). I was left pondering the possibility of families supervising my practice. What might this offer? Peer-based models are also a big area of interest for me (Chapter 22).

The book is large and comprehensive, and I found myself heading to chapters of interest rather than moving through the text. This

is a real strength of the book. Each chapter stands alone yet is located within a wider context of debate nationally, culturally, institutionally, and discursively.

Several contributions from Aotearoa are included—I've always enjoyed Liz Beddoe and Kieran O'Donoghue's work. *Indigenous Eyes Over Supervision in Aotearoa* was beautifully written by Moana Eruera and Leland Ruwhiu in Chapter 17. A follow-up chapter might consider tauwiwi practitioner needs in Kaupapa Māori supervision models. How might we build this into everyday practice and resist it becoming codified through managerial or KPI-drenched demands?

David Wilkins (Chapter 13) is a splendid practitioner-scholar, a rare mix of lived child protection practice experience with accessible scholarship and his chapter on child and family settings stood out for me. I work in this field, so was drawn to the chapters where child welfare was in sharp focus. David's argument that we need more supervision focus on the *how* and *why* of practice influenced my own work on the new practice framework for Oranga Tamariki. Further editions of the book would benefit from a local debate about supervision inside Aotearoa statutory child protection and forensic mental health because the stakes are so very high in these practice settings. The workplace significantly shapes how supervision takes place and this is explained well in Chapter 45: Organisational Culture.

I was pleased to see isomorphism covered, albeit briefly (Chapter 20), and organisational leadership in focus. Isomorphism is a theory

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of *acting up and acting down*—thus, how the supervisor is supervised will influence the supervision they facilitate and then flow on to the work and social work practice with families. The way supervisors are supervised has been a fascination for me and an area I think underdelivered in many practice settings. Anxiety and emotion management was another useful focus—helping practitioners to raise feelings and be able to *be present* with uncertainty and ambiguity is a practice reality and offers us reflective illustration to grow and stretch. This is particularly the case for child protection social workers.

There are several supervision models introduced in the book in Section 4. This is helpful for busy or anxious workplaces that will need to grasp effective models of supervision that the supervisee and supervisor can employ and participate in. The models covered required quite a bit of experience, and I pondered how we get the levels of experience needed. I think models need to be flexible and agile, perhaps less prescriptive.

Being part of rigorous and challenging supervision is a clear goal in the book and the case is well made. Less convincing were the arguments made for trauma-informed supervision. *Trauma* is one of the most overused terms in practice today, perhaps a modern-day catch-all, and I was looking for a more critical treatment of this term (Chapter 33).

Several chapters made the case for external supervision—with the risk of decision-making analysis and our emotions being outsourced, in my view. This is an alive debate now and warrants more exploration. I'm not convinced that external supervision offers the gains for all practice areas argued for (Beddoe, Chapter 21)—does it let internal supervisors off the hook? Does it let the organisation off the hook to develop the very best supervisors? How might we excite them to become the best reflexive leaders and supervisors they can be? Where is accountability for decision making located

in external supervision? This is a particularly important debate for statutory child protection and forensic mental health services.

Practice frameworks are surprisingly absent. Practice theories, models and skills are covered, yet not located or housed within a comprehensive framework. Doing so would help to drive supervision to focus on the theoretical and methodological aspects of practice—helping to explore the “how and why” of practice that David Wilkins (Chapter 13) reminds us to focus on (see Stanley et al., 2021).

The editors left it up to me to think though what works, what's best, and what I might like to draw on. This may be intentional. I would have liked a bit more of a steer—do the editors think group supervision is a better investment than the dominant dyad model? Is peer-to-peer learning and feedback offering benefits in some contexts more than others? What might teaching hospitals show us about peer-based learning and, while the role of coaching is explained from the German context, what might it offer us here in Aotearoa? Coaching and supervision seem a sound complement.

Wow—what a book! Chapters are brief and clearly written, so easy to read. It's a large, and expensive hardback volume. Probably too expensive for most practitioners. This is a comprehensive book explaining what supervision is, the core aims and purpose, how to participate, to lead, to evaluate, and so on. Perhaps a few less chapters with more analysis of the core debates would enhance the book. I do hope a paperback edition is released, and a suggestion is a brief summary note that offers core ideas and leadership access to these important debates. Borrow this from your library and read on. Practice can only gain when supervision is sound.

Reference

Stanley, T., Baron, S., & Robertson, P. (2021). Examining practice frameworks – Mapping out the gains. *Practice*, 33(1), 21–35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09503153.2020.1713312>

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