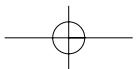
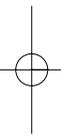
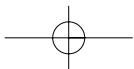
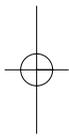
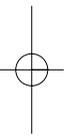




PART I

THE GROUP SUPERVISION ALLIANCE MODEL





1

Setting the Scene

Dramatis personae

Group supervision is an enactment. For the most part, supervisor and group supervisees are on stage. However, off stage, there are at least two powerfully silent participants, and possibly one or two other influential players who may appear in the opening or closing acts, or at times of crisis.¹ In setting the scene, it is worth taking time to consider each character in turn. Figure 1.1 represents these as stakeholders in the supervision.

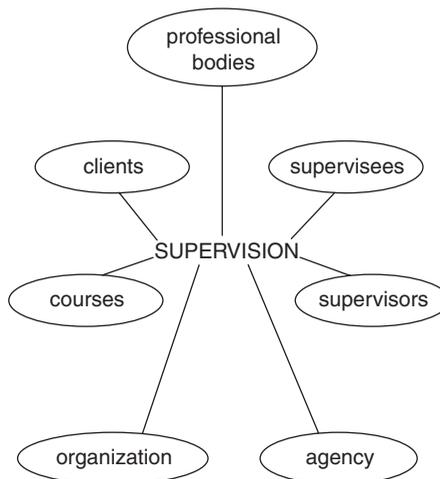


Figure 1.1 Stakeholders in group supervision

The supervisee

Group supervision is the opportunity for each counsellor, in the role of supervisee, to make use of the reflective space reserved for her. She will not be able to use it for the benefit of her clients, or her own professional development, unless she can come to look forward to supervision as sufficiently safe and challenging. Additionally, it will be a major forum for the development of the 4 Cs – Competence, Confidence, Compassion and Creativity. Traditionally, supervision writing has been concerned with the supervisor – how to do, or improve, supervisor practice. This preoccupation mirrors societal and professional assumptions that ‘the expert’ is hierarchically more important than the ‘learner’, and needs help in becoming yet more expert. Too often, in my opinion, such books can begin to treat supervisees as ‘them’ (rather as some counselling textbooks tend to talk about clients). This can disguise the reality that supervisees are adult learners, most of whom are capable of developing their own ‘internal supervisor’. In order to do so consciously, there may be information that can be spelled out before they ever enter supervision, and skills that they can learn or transfer to this new context.

Presenting clients or professional issues for supervision in an economic and accessible way is a skill in itself. To present in a group requires added courage and self-discipline. Using a group setting for reflecting and learning is also a specific ability. When starting in group supervision, supervisees may need to be reminded about some facts of group life, and encouraged to become aware, ahead of time, of some of the hopes, expectations, apprehensiveness and fears which they may habitually bring to group experiences. Most particularly, they need to be clear that in a group they will be (to greater or lesser extent, depending on the group agreement) not only supervisees but also co-supervisors. As such, they need a good deal of the skill and sensitivity that should be expected from supervisors. So, do supervisees, then, have the *information, skill, support and challenge* (Egan 1994) needed to enter actively and creatively into this group supervision alliance?

Much of this book is aimed at supervisors, but I hope it will be accessible and useful to group supervisees as well. While reading the case studies, which focus on supervisor practice and perspective, readers should also think about what would be happening for each supervisee in the groups.

The client

The client is one of the two powerful off-stage characters. Working well with the client is the heart of the matter – the counsellor is committed to practising to the best of her ability and the supervisor is employed to

1 Setting the scene

promote best work. In group supervision in particular, where the secondary satisfactions or hardships of group work can become centre stage, attention for the clients can be squeezed out. Would this client recognize himself, or the counselling issues being engaged with? Would that client experience group members as working to respect, understand, and help her? Will this supervision really result in helping them become more who they want to be and to act in ways which are resourceful and in their best interests? It will be salutary to think, in this book and during group supervision in practice, of the client's thoughts and feelings if he were a fly on the wall.

The supervisor

The supervisor is the person responsible for facilitating the counsellor, in role of supervisee, to use supervision well, in the interests of the client. His particular need is to have clarity about the task, so that he can be group manager as well as supervisor in a group. The role of group manager requires skills and abilities distinct from those of supervisor. Many will be transferable from other contexts. Some developed skills need to be left behind. The role entails sub-roles which may be in tension with each other. In addition to a clear map or understanding of the general tasks of supervision and their complexity, a group manager also needs:

- 1 An awareness of his own style, strengths and limitations in leading and facilitating groups. What abilities might he need to develop to do it better? Are his strengths as a supervisor well integrated with his abilities to engage supervisees in each other's supervision? Is he able to balance the needs of the supervision task with the needs of individuals and the demands of group building, maintenance and repair? The following chapter suggests three types of group supervision leadership, style and contract. The supervisor needs to have made suitable choices with regard to the style of group he intends to lead/offer and to communicate his choice clearly.
- 2 Access to maps of group task and process. The supervisor needs to have some understanding of how groups contribute or detract from the task of supervision and his ability as a supervisor. He will need to have ideas about how individual members and the group as a whole can be helped and hindered by the presence of group forces.² Cognitive frameworks add to an understanding of group dynamics and processes but, importantly, they also need to help him manage confusing or difficult incidents in the group with increased awareness and trust in physical, sensory based processing. Counselling itself is a more physical activity than we realize. All thinking and feeling is rooted in and mediated by our sensory perception – seeing, hearing, touch, movement, smell and taste. In a one-to-one relationship, we can often process sufficient units of verbal and non-verbal communication in time to

Group supervision alliance model

identify thinking and feeling – something which ‘makes enough sense’ to us to help us decide what, if anything, to say. A group, however, is almost always too complex in its units and levels of communication for processing minute to minute. A group supervisor, I suggest, has to learn to trust his senses – to think in physical imagery – ‘Who has the reins here?’ ‘Who is out in the cold?’ ‘Where have we got lost?’ ‘This is euphoric – we need to come down to earth.’ ‘I’ve lost the tune and the rhythm.’ ‘I was imagining a full-bodied bowl and suddenly it shattered.’

As we will see later, the amount of group skill required depends on the chosen mode of group. The supervisor needs to ensure that the particular supervision set-up he has chosen is well enough suited to his style and abilities as group facilitator.

The profession, the agency and the training course

Group supervision always takes place within a professional context – and often in the context of an agency, organization or training course. Most counsellors subscribe to a professional alliance which is codified in working agreements about ethics and good practice. The professional associations which represent and monitor this alliance for us are, collectively, another powerful offstage character in the group supervision enactment. Organizational, agency and course managers who are responsible for managing the context of the group are influential characters at the outset. They determine the supervision contract and they may engage with supervisor and/or supervisees at times of crisis or transition.

When one is training supervisors (and perhaps supervisees), it is informative to ask them to do an exercise in which they take different ‘stakeholder’ roles and speak from those perspectives about the supervision process. Any conversation between a supervisor and a person speaking in role for some professional association (for instance BACP or UKCP) instantly reveals what heavy expectations those bodies have of their supervisors and how little supervisors feel supported or even informed by them. When, in addition, someone speaks on behalf of an organizational manager, expectations of the supervisor become greater, and perhaps conflicting. BACP may expect confidentiality of client material. Managers may be expecting to have feedback on how clients are progressing with their counsellors. If training courses are added into the exercise, tutors may be requiring, for example, that their trainees have a certain number of on-going clients. A placement agency may be concerned about waiting lists and create a policy of time-limited work. Although, back in real life, such an issue is not the supervisor’s responsibility, he may be the person who becomes aware of such clashes, and who is at the centre – concerned for clients, trainees, the agency and proper ‘professional’ work.

1 Setting the scene

If group members are in contract with different agencies or courses, these differences are crucial to the focus of the supervision work.

So the profession, the client and any concerned organization, agency or training course are all stakeholders. Supervisor and supervisees need to be aware of these interconnections and know how and where they are accountable for the counselling work and the supervision undertaken.

Clearing the ground – models, orientations and frameworks

Terminology can be confusing in writing this complex supervision drama. In this book the word ‘model’ will be used in one way only – that is, to describe a comprehensive concept, or map, of supervision or of group supervision. The Supervision Alliance Model (Inskipp and Proctor 1995, 2001), which is referred to in the Introduction, and underlies the group model used in this book, is an example of this use of the word. Others are the SAS (Systems Approach Supervision) Model (Holloway 1995) or the Cyclical Model (Page and Wosket 1994). These focus on some concept which is central to the core beliefs on which the model is based and seek to map the process of supervision in its widest sense.

A model offers a mental map for ordering complex data and experience. Within each model are specific ‘mini-models’. In this book, the noun used from time to time to describe such a concept – a ‘map within a model’ – is ‘framework’. So, the *framework of tasks of supervision* within the SAS Model (Holloway 1995) is the development of:

- counselling skills
- case conceptualization
- professional role
- emotional awareness
- self-evaluation

The *framework for tasks* within the Supervision Alliance Model sees the responsibility for supervisor and supervisee as:

- formative – the tasks of learning and facilitating learning
- normative – the tasks of monitoring, and self-monitoring, standards and ethics
- restorative – the tasks of refreshment

In Houston’s (1995) model, the *tasks framework* is:

- policing
- plumbing
- (making) poetry

Group supervision alliance model

In Carroll's (1996) Integrative Generic Model the *task framework* is:

- creating relationship
- teaching
- counselling
- monitoring
- evaluating
- consulting
- administration

In this terminology, the well known Process Model of Supervision (Hawkins and Shohet 1989) (referred to later) would be a *framework for focusing* in supervision.

To distinguish these from the broad theoretical concepts, or 'schools' of counselling and psychotherapy practice which are often called 'theoretical models', I will refer to the latter as 'theoretical orientation'. It may well be that some supervisors describe their 'model of supervision' by the theoretical orientation in which they work, for example 'the psychodynamic model of supervision'. Carroll has pointed out (1996) that writers about supervision are increasingly moving away from 'counselling bound' models to models based on social roles, developmental stages and so on.

One framework or map, within the Group Supervision Alliance Model, that will frequently be referred to, denotes specific ways of conceiving the roles and responsibilities in group supervision. For ease, these will be described under types. You will read about Type 1 (or 2 or 3 or 4) groups. (The fuller name and description of each type will be given later in Chapter 3.)

As the founders of Neurolinguistic Programming quoted: 'The map is not the territory', and as Psychosynthesis has it, 'This is not the truth.' Models, maps, frameworks, orientations, types are the labels and descriptions devised to order and communicate our experience. In this book they are used as a preliminary. I would like the book to be useful in introducing, or re-introducing, you to the territory of group supervision. It can then be used not only to map (and encourage map-making), but also to guide and serve as a practical and psychological handbook.

The Group Supervision Alliance Model

Figure 1.2 maps the headings of the various frameworks within the Group Supervision Alliance Model. Each one is briefly described below and will be explored and illustrated in practice in subsequent chapters.

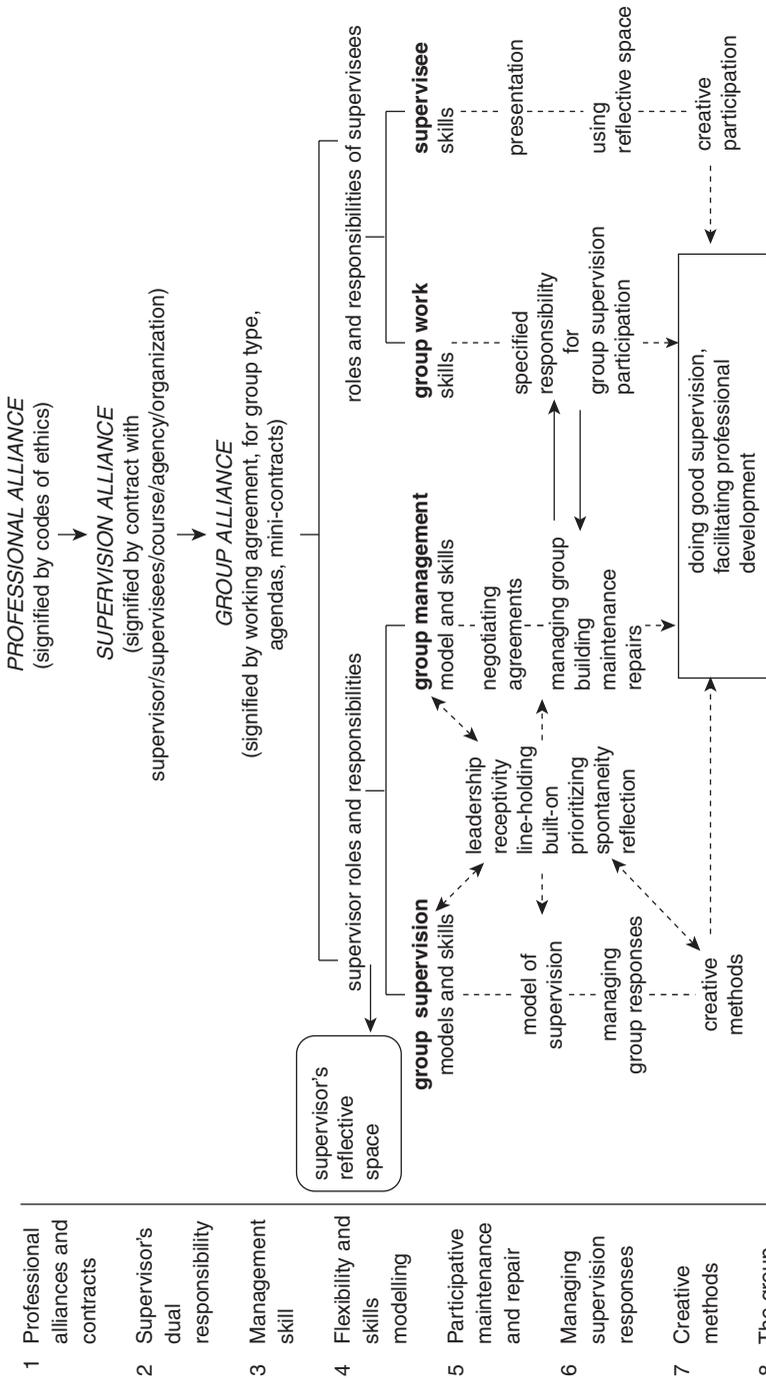


Figure 1.2 Group Supervision Alliance Model

Group supervision alliance model

1 Professional alliances and contracts

Outer frame – the supervision contract

The supervision alliance is the outer frame within which group supervision is contained. Its binding agent is the stated contract, which specifies tasks, rights and responsibilities within a particular organizational, training or freelance context. It spells out, for all active participants, responsibilities to the client and professional colleagues.

Group working agreement for an alliance

Within that, the group working agreement lays the foundation for supervisor and supervisees to ally themselves in the group supervision task. Through negotiating and clarifying supervisor and supervisee roles and responsibilities; ground rules; procedures for working and reviewing; time management; and individual learning aims, members of the group are actively engaged in the ownership of the supervision enterprise. At the same time, they are meeting and getting to know each other. Individually they will be finding their feet in this new group. Collectively they will be finding their shape and voice as a group.

This agreement acts as blueprint and container for supervisor and group. Negotiated agendas for session work, and mini-contracts for individual 'pieces' of supervision, continue the establishment of shared ownership. Individual learning aims gear the work to personal and professional development. Planned reviews and *ad hoc* processing ensure a continuing relationship with these holding agreements.

2 Supervisor's dual responsibility

The supervisor has a dual responsibility. She is responsible for enabling and ensuring that good enough supervision is being done in the group. This responsibility carries with it the care for each individual's learning and developmental needs. It may also carry managerial and training agendas, depending on the contract with any course or agency involved. At the same time, she is the leader in the group, at least at the outset. In her own style she needs to set the tone for the development of a culture of intention, empathic respect and straightforwardness – for a practical and effective group alliance.

Supervisees have reciprocal dual responsibility. They need to have, or develop, the ability to use supervision well. They also need to develop skill and understanding in participating in group supervision according to their specific group working agreement.

1 Setting the scene

3 Management skill

Both supervisor tasks call for skilled management. Choices between appropriate but conflicting goals occur frequently. The supervisor needs to have clear and simple ideas for prioritizing what she wants the group to achieve in terms of the supervision task and in terms of the life of the group. This offers ground to stand on. Since so much happens every minute in a group, she will have to develop trust in her own spontaneity and the ability to reflect on the group in retrospect in the light of the models she is using. For this she will need her own support and consultation opportunities, appropriate to her own developmental stage as a supervisor.

4 Flexibility and skills modelling

The group agreement can range in style from members as active audience watching one-to-one supervision by the supervisor, to members as co-supervisors, with the supervisor as boundary monitor, ultimate buck-carrier and collegial participant. Depending on the agreement and the developmental stage of the supervisees, the supervisor will carry responsibility for inducting and encouraging them in their agreed roles. If she is to harness the group's resourcefulness, she will move between leading, following and line-holding. She will also be modelling and informing group members about those abilities for themselves.

5 Participative maintenance and repair

As the group develops there may be growing pains within the group or difficulties in relation to the wider context. These should not be mistaken for dysfunction unless other explanations fail. The supervisor carries responsibility for dealing creatively with 'family life' while maintaining supervision work. She has to support and challenge the group to engage actively in its own development, maintenance and possibly repair work.

6 Managing supervision responses

If the group is set up as one in which the supervisees actively co-supervise, there will be a further management task of helping them gear their responses appropriately. This may consist of holding attentive space, managing freeflow discussions or offering structures and exercises. In all work there will be varying elements of freeflow and structure, and the supervisor

Group supervision alliance model

will be developing a sense of proper balance and timing. Later, I offer guidelines for good practice in managing group responses.

7 Creative methods

In order to access the group's collective good sense, the supervisor may want to employ creative methods that 'reach parts other methods can't reach'. In doing this, she will sometimes meet the unexpected and she needs rules of thumb to help her out until she can reflect more fully.

8 The group as supervisor

Developing good supervision work in a group, and providing a climate in which members grow in competence and confidence is, at least, challenging. The supervisor and, increasingly, the participants need to recognize that, at its best, a group is a great deal more than the sum of its parts. Potentially, the group *is* the supervisor. As a supervisor it contains not only the resources of supervisor and each group member, but, in embryo, the rich creativity of a complex living group system.

This model of group supervision is rooted in basic presuppositions that have proved more than an ideology – they seem to work in practice. They are borrowed and adapted from known and unknown gurus and mentors. Each time I write the list it is different – new presuppositions have been identified and added.

Relevant presuppositions

- It is possible and useful to clarify, progressively, what you are doing, why you are doing it and what you intend to happen as a result.
- You and your colleagues in supervision will be doing the best you can for yourselves at any one time and you are, in Carl Rogers' words, your own friend/s.
- Adult learners have the motivation and ability to co-operate with each other in shared learning and endeavour.
- They deserve information and the chance to know about and develop the requisite skills.
- This includes knowing their rights and responsibilities and believing that both will be taken seriously.
- Under these circumstances, they will usually take intelligent management of their own professional development.
- They can be helped in this by encouragement to identify the ways in which they learn best

1 Setting the scene

- They deserve to be told the purpose of activities they are asked to engage in so that they can give or withhold informed consent.
- If they can trust that this is the case, they will increasingly be interested in taking some things on trust.
- Development takes place best in an atmosphere of inquiry, experiment and reflection.
- Anxious attention to rules can destroy such an atmosphere.
- Holding to agreed focus of the task, while respecting boundaries, creates space for inquiry, play and discourse.
- Functional and dysfunctional Child states and behaviour will surface in Adult group work.
- Individuals can have a playful and easy relationship with the 'unconscious'.
- The unconscious demands profound respect.
- A group is more than the sum of its parts.
- To the extent that a culture of empathic understanding, unconditional respect for each person and increasing honesty and authenticity is fostered, mutual trust can develop.
- To that extent each individual and the group as a system will experience freedom to be 'their best selves'.

The territory of group supervision

That is the overall map. Group supervision is a complex subject. Writing *about* it is not a medium that easily conveys the flavour of the experience. To convey this more directly, four case studies will be used in illustration throughout the text. For obvious reasons these cannot be 'real'. However, they are all true to actual incidents heard about or experienced by the author. They are chosen to illustrate:

- the differing backgrounds and starting points of group supervisors
- differing contexts
- differing group types and working agreements
- groups of counsellors in varying developmental stages
- a variety of ways of 'doing supervision'
- group transitions and turning points

In brief, the four case studies comprise:

- Case study 1: Ruth, a supervisor of psychodynamic orientation who undertakes to supervise trainees in year two of their integrative course as they start their practice in a variety of agencies.
- Case study 2: Carmel, an integrative practitioner who is employed by a voluntary agency. Her task is to set up a new group for volunteers who are mainly, but not entirely, students on differing counselling courses.

Group supervision alliance model

- Case study 3: follows Christine as she decides whether to supervise a team of counsellors who work for a large organization, including their manager who is also a counsellor within the team. It charts her subsequent experiences.
- Case study 4: opens with Martin being invited to set up a freelance group. It follows the process of setting up the group and his difficulties in enabling it to become established.

Each case study, and episodes within it, will be introduced when pertinent to the body of the text. The next chapter will consider the advantages and pitfalls of group supervision relative to one-to-one supervision, and will illustrate the reasons why group supervision may be chosen.