Transforming social work practice through supervision: Two's a company: Is Three a Crowd? 👥

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Research Outline

This research study explores the dialectic between organisational culture and social work values for supervisors and practitioners within Adult Social Service departments in Wales. Located within the new legislative framework of the Social Services and Well Being Act, the research has three critical questions:

› how far social work is supervision affected by organisational values and priorities:

› can Social Service departments adopt a citizen model of social work supervision, involving service users, practitioners and supervisors, characterised by reciprocal, collaborative relationships?

› what implications would a triadic relationship have on social work practice and social work services within local authorities.

Why is this research relevant now?

The Social Service and Wellbeing Act 2014 is about citizen empowerment through the achievement of wellbeing and personal outcomes. It requires practitioners to, work with citizens as active participants. Co-production between citizens and professionals is key to transforming the citizen and practitioner experience of social care services. However, existing research identifies the experience of both social workers and service users as that of a passive recipient – **supervision is done to supervisees; service users are assessed by professionals.**

This research study explores the parallels between practitioner experience of the supervisory relationship and service user's experience. Investigating practice within supervision and citizen experience of practice through the lens of relationship based practice, may identify opportunities not only for a new model of supervision to emerge, but ways in which new collaborations between citizens and practitioners can be established.

Methodology

Adopting an interpretative approach, the research focusses on individual experiences of both social work supervision and social work intervention. Both the theoretical basis and methods used are intentionally collaborative, using appreciative enquiry) and action research approaches, the outcome of the research is to;

› Develop the theoretical knowledge base of supervision,

› Envisage a new model of social work supervision based on co-productive and person centred epistemology

› Develop creative practical methods to support collaborative, person centred supervision.

Literature review of social work supervision within Adult Services has confirmed that there is;

Limited research about the effectiveness of supervision, nationally and internationally.

Little evidence linking the quality of supervision on social work outcomes for service users.

Lack of a theoretical basis underpinning social work supervision.

Only one study to date has been identified the contribution service users may make to social work supervision. (Marrable and Lambley (2013)

Research methods and timeline

Phase 1: Oct 2015- January 2016: Documentary analysis of supervisions polices and processes and professional codes of practice.

Phase 2: January 2016 July 2016: Separate Focus group discussions with social workers; Senior practitioners; Team Managers; Operational service managers

Phase 3: April 2016: Citizen Service User Reference Groups; Citizen Panels

Ethics Approval from Swansea University Social Work Research Ethics Approval Committee; Participating research sites were agreed by respective Directors of Social Services and Adult services management teams via ADSS Cymru. Consent of service users and individual practitioners, agreed to contribute to respective Focus group discussions.

Findings- what is emerging

Analysis from initial sites is ongoing:

Documentary analysis: Findings
› All sites have official policies emphasising individual staff development and support
› Reality "One size fits all" that emphasises organisational control (priorities and values) i.e. Organisational *vs* Professional approach

Practitioner/Supervisor Focus Groups: Findings
› Individual 1to1 supervision, BUT not individualised- "one size fits all"
› Practitioners value alternative supervision - peer/ team support
› **What** am I doing ?(wrong) discussion emphasises tasks, processes and capacity
› Supervision= "Snoopervision"
› How well am I doing? Limited critical reflection;observation of actual practice and analysis of theory to inform practice
› Developmental needs = attendance on training courses

Citizen Focus Groups: Findings
› Not asked for their feedback
› Concern about giving feedback - fear of losing services
› Concern about capacity and workload of social workers
› Social Services should initiate feedback from service users
› Creative ways to give feedback; collaborative, reflective journals postcards; 1to1 conversation with line managers; mobile phone – texts; emails
› Trust needs to be developed in asking and giving feedback, dialogue not questionnaire "tick box" approach

Research is ongoing; Future stages will involve:
› Development of action research approach:
› Co- production of strength based supervision tools and learning materials with practitioners, supervisors and citizens "what matters" in supervision
› Further citizen, service user focus groups
› From April 2017 repeat of Focus group discussion with practitioners and -supervisors- are new ways of working evidenced through supervision?

References

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