

**GLOBAL-VISION, LOCAL-VISION, PERSONAL-VISION AND  
SOCIAL WORK SUPERVISION**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Traditionally, the vision of social work supervision has been limited to one that focuses on the dyad of the supervisor and supervisee within an organisational context. This traditional vision has been shaped by a dominant psychobureaucratic discourse, which does not consider the influence of global, local and personal voices. This paper critically considers the terrain of social work supervision and the voices that influence it. Furthermore, it argues for a critically responsive supervision practice that envisions the complexities of the social work world in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

## ***About the Author***

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### ***The Traditional Vision***

Throughout its history the dual forces of social service organisations and the social work profession have shaped social work supervision with its development and emphasis accentuating either managerial or professional interests (O'Donoghue, 1999; Payne, 1994; Kadushin, 1992; Tsui, 1997). This dual emphasis has been apparent in the traditional construction of social work supervision, which originates from the 19<sup>th</sup> century charity organisations in the United Kingdom and the United States. Traditional supervision involves a supervisor implementing the administrative, educative and supportive functions of supervision with their supervisee(s) within the context of a hierarchical agency relationship (Kadushin, 1992; Munson, 1993; Tsui, 1997; Grauel, 2002).

Internationally, this traditional perspective has been shaped by the development of social welfare systems, social work education, the profession, and a supervision literature in which books from the United States and the United Kingdom dominate (Kadushin, 1992; Munson, 1993; Shulman, 1993; Morrison, 1993). Predominately focused on the role and activity of the supervisor this supervision literature is silent concerning the role and activity of the supervisee (O'Donoghue, 2002).

As part of social work, supervision has also been used as a tool to reinforce the colonisation process of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries through the establishment and maintenance of social cohesion and order via a state sponsored welfare programme. Supervision's contribution was due in part to its reliance on western psychological casework methods and its emphasis of the bureaucratic model through the administrative function (O'Donoghue, 2002). This reliance and emphasis remains present in the normative psychobureaucratic discourse of supervision, whereby an individual supervisor and supervisee meet regularly within an agency setting with the supervisor having line management and professional practice responsibility for the supervisee. This discourse also constructs supervision as a private activity (much like casework) conducted through the medium of one hour face to face sessions with its focus predominately on the worker's functioning rather than their practice (Gowdy et al., 1993; Kane, 2001). It is also interesting to note that the emphasis and use of psychodynamic concepts such as parallel process, transference, and

countertransference in some models of supervision further cement the hold of the psychobureaucratic discourse (O'Donoghue, 1998).

The values implicit in this traditional view of supervision reflect dominant notions of western individualism, privacy, and paternalism. They also promote a form of homogeneity based on a western heterosexual imperialist male worldview, which does not recognise the needs and values of people from other gender, or cultural backgrounds or worldviews. In essence, this private world of supervision consists of the private business of the organisation and those directly involved in it (i.e. supervisors and supervisees) and is conducted through the secretive forum of individual sessions. Unseen in this private world are clients and other characters whose influence both within and beyond the organisation saturate the practice discourse.

One of the unseen characters was the social work profession. Increasingly, as the profession has become established internationally it has become party to the private world of supervision through the regulation of social work by state legislation. The registration of social workers through certification, licensing and self regulation has meant that traditional supervision as well as performing a control and monitoring function in organisations also performs a gatekeeping function for the profession (Bernard et al., 1998). Arguably, the professions entry into the private world has opened the doors slightly through the use of observational methods and live supervision (Munson, 1993). Secondly, it has raised awareness of the ethical argument that clients should be informed and aware that practitioners are supervised, the name of their supervisor and that material from their work with the practitioner may be discussed or viewed in supervision (Cohen, 1987: 194-196). However despite the above, social work supervision practice primarily occurs through the private dyad of supervisor and supervisee conferences or sessions and it remains questionable whether clients are either informed or aware of its existence and purpose (Kadushin, 1992; O'Donoghue, 1999).

Locally, in Aotearoa New Zealand, the traditional view of supervision was also influenced by the development of social services and social work education by the state. This development gave very little consideration to Tangata Whenua and feminist views of supervision until the mid 1980s, with little real change occurring until relatively recently (Mataira, 1985; NZSWTC, 1985; Bradley et al., 1999; Webber-Dreadon, 1999, Nash, 2001; O'Donoghue, 2002). Currently, supervision in Aotearoa New Zealand reflects the traditional psychobureaucratic view with individual private relationships and sessions within an agency's context dominating.

The professional gate-keeping function of social work supervision in the Aotearoa New Zealand context has generally been carried out through the supervision of social work students on fieldwork placements. However, it is likely that the Social Workers Registration Bill (2001), which intends to establish a regulatory system for social work through the individual certification of social workers, may result in this gatekeeping function being enlarged. In discussing the Aotearoa New Zealand history of supervision, O'Donoghue, (2002) argues that a colonising supervision has dominated and that post-colonial supervision is still something yet to be realised.

Whilst the traditional view of supervision has remained prevalent both locally and internationally, it has been significantly challenged by both "New Right Ideology" and "New Managerialism" in the last decade (O'Donoghue, 1999). These challenges have contributed to changes in both organisation bureaucracy and the professionalisation of social workers. The effect of these changes has included the separation of the following: policy advice from delivery; purchasing from provision; business from clinical; and management from professionals and clients (O'Donoghue, 1999). In the field of supervision these changes have contributed to the division between managerial and professional (clinical) supervision with the former equating to the administrative function and the latter the educative and supportive functions (Payne, 1994). It has also contributed to the differentiation between internal and external supervision. The former equates to supervision provided by an employee of the organisation whereas the latter involves supervision provided by a consultant contracted to the organisation. A further challenge to the traditional view has been the increased use of the peer form of supervision as agencies flatten their hierarchical structures and emphasise self-management through quality teams (Hawken et al., 2002).

### ***The Post-modern influence***

The traditional psychobureaucratic view of social work supervision promotes an essentially modernist uniform approach to supervision that is expert driven with the expertise residing with the supervisor. The recent challenges to this traditional view as well as emerging from the changes in management, organisations and professions have also come from the influence of post modernism upon both society and social work. According to Parton et al. (2000) modernism is characterised by its belief in unalterable truth, the pursuit of objective unbiased knowing, the certainty or ability to generalise from its knowledge, and the provision of expert status to the holder of the knowledge. Whereas, postmodernism is characterised by many perspectives and

truths, contextually based knowledge (shaped by the social, cultural, ideological, political and historical setting), subjectivity, and uncertainty. Furthermore, it views people as co-creators of knowledge and interpreters of meaning who exercise self-agency (Amnon, 2000; Parton et al., 2000).

The emergence of postmodernism in the current terrain of social work supervision is particularly obvious in the development of a plurality of forms, modes, kinds and types of supervision. Table 1, below lists and briefly describes this plurality.

**Table 1. Plurality in Supervision**

<b>Aspects</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Forms	Forms of supervision are essentially different domains of supervision with particular characteristics or areas of emphasis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Student or fieldwork supervision</li> <li>▪ Managerial supervision</li> <li>▪ Clinical/professional supervision</li> <li>▪ Peer supervision</li> <li>▪ Cultural supervision</li> </ul>
Modes	A mode of supervision refers to the size of the client group receiving supervision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Individual</li> <li>▪ Tandem</li> <li>▪ Group</li> <li>▪ Team</li> </ul>
Kinds	The construction of kinds of supervision relates to whether the supervision is provided within an organisation by a fellow employee or whether it is delivered by a consultant external to the organisation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Internal</li> <li>▪ External</li> </ul>
Types	The notion of different types of supervision is based upon the range of methods used in the delivery of supervision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Open door (informal ad hoc as and when required).</li> <li>▪ Consultative (i.e. based on regular consultations).</li> <li>▪ Contracted (i.e. based on an agreement, which specifies contact, roles, relationship and method).</li> <li>▪ Recall and review (i.e. sessions in which practitioners, describe, explain, scrutinise, justify and evaluate/revise their work and their knowing, decisions and actions in the social work role through using a process of interpersonal process recall).</li> <li>▪ Observational (i.e. involves the use of methods of observation such as live observation, audio/video-taping, process-recordings,</li> </ul>

		etc.)
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The emergence of postmodernism in supervision is also occurring through the social constructionist practice approaches, namely, solution focused practice, strengths based practice and narrative therapy which promote collaboration, partnership, service user agency and active participation in the process of social work practice and are based on the following beliefs:

- *that clients are the expert on the problem and themselves;*
- *that client strengths and exceptions to the problem are the starting point to solving the problem;*
- *that clients and their community contain within them the resources to solve the problem.*

The collaboration, partnership, service user agency and participatory nature of these approaches have also contributed to an increasing recognition of the supervisee's role as an active participant and co-creator in supervision (Barretta-Herman, 2000). This has also coincided with a renewed interest in the influence of power in terms of supervisee empowerment and depowerment and more explicit recognition of the political context and discourses in which social work supervision is immersed (Kaiser, 1996; Brown et al., 1996). In short, the influence of the social constructionist approaches has resulted social work supervision being viewed as a socially and personally constructed activity, that is socially constructed by the social and cultural context in which it is embedded and personally constructed by those directly and indirectly involved in it (O'Donoghue, 1999; 2002).

### ***Supervision voices and their influence***

Viewing social work supervision from a social constructionist perspective recognises that the supervision story in any particular context is shaped and influenced by global, local and personal voices. The global voices and local voices influence the macro context of supervision whereas the personal voices influence the micro context. Table 2, below describes the characteristics of each voice.

The global voices, namely, the economic, technological, political, socio-cultural and ecological exist within a capitalist, western, culturally imperialist hegemony in which the economic, technological and political voices sub-ordinate and dominate the socio-cultural and ecological voices. The effects of this on supervision

are that it tends to be storied as a production cost to be managed and as a residual and privatised means of reinforcing control, surveillance and social policing. The challenge that then arises for supervision from this situation is for it to be aware of and critically responsive to the authorship, telling, editing and censoring amongst and within the global voices. It also needs to be cautious of and critically responsive to the replication of oppression and subjugation of voices within its own story.

**Table 2. Description of Supervision Voices**

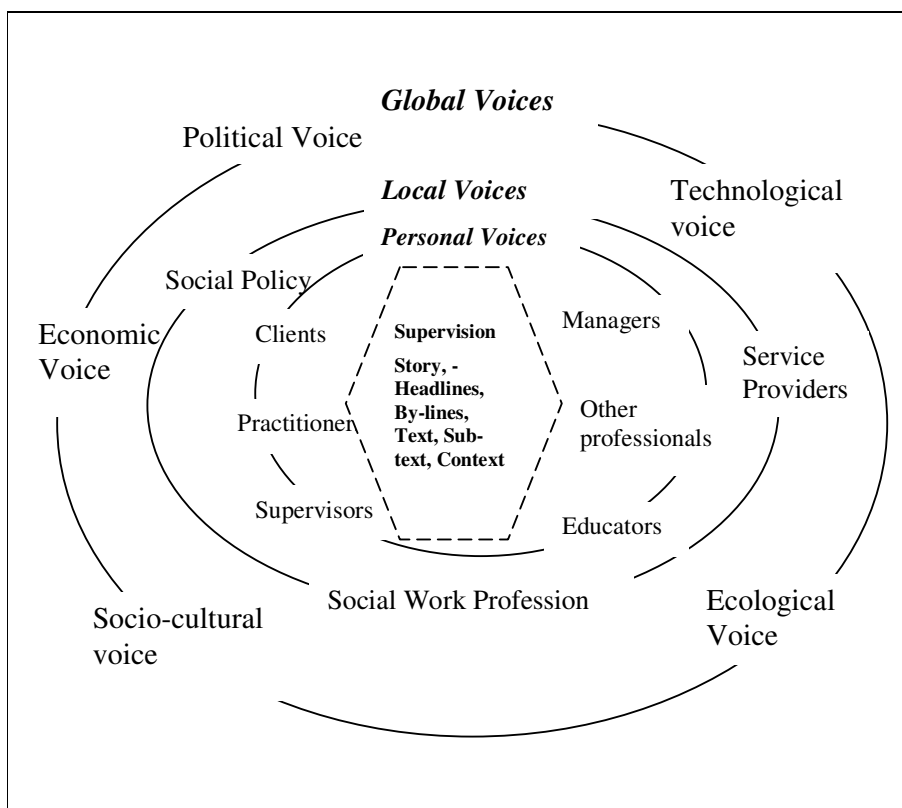
Voice Type	List of Voices	Voice Characteristics
<b>Global</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="500 562 699 594">▪ Economic</li> <li data-bbox="500 653 699 684">▪ Political</li> <li data-bbox="500 768 699 800">▪ Technological</li> <li data-bbox="500 863 699 894">▪ Socio-cultural</li> <li data-bbox="500 957 699 989">▪ Ecological</li> </ul>	<p>Speaks of a global marketplace in which there is free and unfettered trade, deregulation, low taxation and less government.</p> <p>Speaks the rhetoric of “The New World order” and “Global policing and security” and western liberal democracy.</p> <p>Speaks of immediacy, accessibility, surveillance, control and a digital divide.</p> <p>Speaks of culture, community, well-being and way of life. It reflects the effects of cultural imperialism on indigenous and minority peoples way of life and well-being.</p> <p>Speaks of conservation and sustainability of the Earth’s natural resources.</p>
<b>Local</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="500 1024 699 1056">▪ Social Policy</li> <li data-bbox="500 1140 699 1203">▪ Social Service Provider</li> <li data-bbox="500 1234 699 1266">▪ Profession</li> </ul>	<p>Speaks of kawanatanga and market-led social democracy in which the interests of business and economics dominate social concerns.</p> <p>Speaks of production with its vocabulary directed towards things like key performance indicators, risk management, human resources, budgets and contracts.</p> <p>Speaks of professionalism, qualifications, competence and registration.</p>
<b>Personal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="500 1314 699 1346">▪ Client</li> <li data-bbox="500 1545 699 1577">▪ Practitioner</li> <li data-bbox="500 1860 699 1892">▪ Supervisor</li> </ul>	<p>The client voice in supervision is a diverse voice, which generally consists of many strands and brings with it the echoes of the client’s history, family, cultural and social systems. It is central to the story and dialogue that occurs in the performance of supervision, however, it is rarely heard or seen directly from its source. Essentially, the client voice is a narrated and edited voice that is re-interpreted and restoried from the practitioner’s perspective.</p> <p>This voice has been formed by the practitioner’s personality and within the stories of their personal experiences, family, culture, gender, sexual orientation, religion, spirituality, socio-economic status, age, and disability as well as their professional experiences gained from education and training, employment and practice, and supervision. It resonates with their values and ethics, beliefs, expectations, cultural perspectives, ideology and theory of social work and practice skills. It speaks the language of narration, disclosure, discussion, debate and dialogue.</p> <p>Like the practitioner’s voice the social work supervisors’ voice is diverse and has been formed by the same factors. It also resonates with the supervisor’s values and ethics,</p>



interests of purchasers and managers rather than professionals and clients. The social work profession's influence in this situation has been limited because it has yet to claim its voice and has relied on the patronage of politicians and bureaucrats. The effect of this has been that the profession has yet to fully assert its responsibility as the guardians of social work and supervision's knowledge, skill and practice base within Aotearoa New Zealand.

The cast of personal voices includes the onstage voices of clients, practitioners, supervisors, and the offstage or backstage voices of managers, educators and other social service and health professionals. In the onstage setting the voices of the practitioners and supervisors provide the dialogue with the client's voice being relegated to being the subject of that dialogue. The client's indigenous voice is rarely heard in supervision and is generally presented in the form of an edited narration by practitioners. The offstage and backstage voices provide the theatre, scripting and backdrop to the supervision story. Figure 1; below illustrates in diagrammatic form the web of voices and their relationship to the headlines, by-lines, text, sub-text and context of a supervision story.

**Figure 1. Web of Voices involved in Social Supervision Story**



The range of voices present in the headlines, by-lines, text, sub-text and context of a particular social work supervision story highlight the need for social workers and their

supervisors to develop a kaleidoscope of lenses which captures the global, local and personal picture. These lenses as well as being able to identify the deconstruct the picture before them also need to be sensitised and coloured by the social work principles of human rights, social justice, empowerment, anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practice, and the articles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. These social work principles together-with the articles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi are both analytic and active principles, which means they inform and guide both our assessment and intervention in practice. The revisioning of social work supervision in terms of a global, local and personal vision in essences promotes critical reflective supervision practice because it recognises the impact of both characters and context have upon clients, workers, organisations, societies and the world (O'Donoghue, 1999). This type of critical reflection is more likely to result in intervention that attends to clients', practitioners' and agencies' social realities, and their perception of this reality. It is also likely that the interventions made are more effective because they are constructed on the basis of thorough multi-level assessment (Turner, 1996).

### ***Conclusion***

This paper has argued that the traditional view of social work supervision has been dominated by a psychobureaucratic discourse, which has resulted in social work supervision being focused on the dyad of supervisor and supervisee within an agency context. This discourse has also resulted in a private, homogenous western, heterosexual imperialist male dominated supervision in which expertise resided with the supervisor and a modernist uniform approach to supervision.

Challenges to this traditional view have come from new managerialism and new right ideology and the development of post-modern approaches to social work. The challenges from new managerialism and new right ideology have resulted in changes in organisation bureaucracy and hierarchical relationships and have contributed to the differentiation between managerial and professional (clinical) supervision and internal and external supervision as well as an increased use in the peer form of supervision. The development of post-modern practice approaches has challenged the traditional uniform view of supervision through:

- 1) the recognition of plurality in terms of forms, modes, kinds and types; 2) the emphasis on collaboration, service user agency, and participation as co-constructor of supervision; 3) the increased sensitivity to power and the politics of empowerment and depowerment in supervision; and 4) more

explicit recognition of the influence of the political context and discourse in which supervision is immersed.

These challenges to the traditional view of social work supervision emphasise that:

- a) the traditional psychobureaucratic discourse of supervision does not address the complexity of practice in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century globalised environment;
- b) the terrain of social work supervision has changed in response to the post-modern, postcolonial world.
- c) Social work supervision needs to be revisioned to see beyond the psychobureaucratic discourse and critically engage with the global, local and personal picture in order to develop and sustain a critically responsive practice to local people and the local and global context in which they are immersed.

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