

CHAPTER 6

EXPERIENCES OF SUPERVISION AND ITS CONTEXT

The objective of this chapter is to discuss the respondents' experiences of professional supervision and the environment in which professional supervision is practised. The areas covered for both the probation officers and service managers include their recent participation in professional supervision, and their experiences in relation to the development of agency policy and its implementation. Also discussed are the participants' experiences of the supervision environment, which includes management practices, organisational culture and the effects of social policy experienced in supervision. The chapter concludes with a summary, which considers also the implications of both the probation officers' and service managers' experience of professional supervision and the supervision context.

Recent participation in professional supervision

Both the service managers' and the probation officers' recent participation in professional supervision was variable. From the fifteen interviewed only four were currently receiving professional supervision and seven stated that they did not have professional supervision. The latter group of seven participants included two service managers who were currently providing supervision to members of their own teams. The four remaining participants' had recently finished supervision and their supervision needs were either partially met through informal supervision arrangements or not met at all.

Probation Officers

Amongst the probation officers interviewed, only three probation officers (Grace, Tania and Angela) stated that they were receiving formal professional supervision.

Grace and Tania received their supervision from their respective service managers. In Grace's case the supervision was administrative and this led her to feel annoyed, particularly when she thought about issues related to her safety. During her interview, Grace recounted an incident when she turned up at a house to find everyone on the premises drunk and she was verbally abused. When she informed her supervisor of the

incident his response was unsatisfactory and for her there was no “acknowledgement” of how scary and difficult that incident would have been for her. Summing up, Grace stated that, “He quite honestly didn’t give a toss.”

Tania was meeting monthly with her supervisor. She reported that she was having more supervision now than she had had “for quite a few years.” Tania knew the service manager well and rated her supervision as being all right.

The third probation officer, Angela, was receiving external supervision. Angela came into the probation officer role with no background in social or community work practice. Angela recognised her need for external supervision and stated that she approached a clinical psychologist and then put her case to management who granted her six paid sessions. At the time of the interview, Angela expressed feelings of disappointment and frustration. Angela had recently attended her fifth supervision session and management had advised her that she was not going to receive any further external supervision after her next session. Angela stated that her external supervision was helpful in improving her practice with clients, (thereby helping clients to achieve better outcomes) and in the management of her work-related stress.

I did find at one stage, that I was going home, and things were going over in my mind and I’d wake up in the night...so the psychologist was able to give me specific ways of dealing with those things, which were really helpful. Not necessarily the day to day things that arise, but more like the overall patterns.

Angela’s only form of professional supervision after her next session would be fortnightly meetings in a peer supervision group with two other colleagues. Participation in this group, according to Angela, involved casework discussion with a focus on working better with the clients through examining the issues and options. Angela stated that this group was very much about “getting ideas from each other.” The external supervision, however, was more personal and was where Angela felt she was able to discuss things that had affected her and might affect her clients. She was reticent about taking certain things to peer group due to ‘safety aspects’ and because she was not qualified. She said she felt that, “If I bring this

[matter to the group] they will think, ...fancy not knowing that or, haven't you got over that."

A fourth probation officer, Joseph, stated that until recently he had received external professional supervision paid for by the agency. In his case, the supervision was agreed to after he had been "reborn" as a probation officer following twenty years as a manager. Joseph saw a clinical psychologist, on a fortnightly basis for about a year, until the agency decided they could not afford to pay for his supervision. According to Joseph the external supervision received was:

The best supervision that I've had in my total of around about seven years as a probation officer...I don't know what it is in terms of theories, but she [the external supervisor] certainly switched me on to looking at the narrative therapy area, amongst others.

Joseph believed that this supervision had improved the quality of his practice, particularly in the areas of his "roles, boundaries" and "acknowledging client decision."

Another area in which he gained was in terms of his role adjustment from "being a manager to being a probation officer." In this area, his supervision encouraged him "to keep out of certain things" which in his former role he would have felt responsible for.

When discussing the end of his external supervision, Joseph expressed feelings of being "absolutely devastated" and "bloody annoyed." He stated that the only participation in supervision he now had is a peer group, which he described as "a bit of peer support on ...a formalised basis". At the same time as having his external professional supervision terminated, he was invited by his managers to become a professional supervisor! Joseph decided to become a professional supervisor so that he can access external supervision for himself for his own survival.

A further two probation officers, Ellen and Ernest, said that until recently they had received professional supervision from their respective service managers. In Ernest's case he reports that his last session was four months prior to the interview, in February 1998, whereas Ellen's last session was only a month ago in May 1998. According to Ernest, he had been having a professional supervision session once every six or seven weeks until February 98, and that the next planned session did not occur due to his supervisor's

unavailability. Shortly afterwards the supervisor then resigned. Ernest expressed mixed feelings about his supervisor's resignation; on the one hand he was "saddened by what has happened" and on the other hand, he was "a bit angry" with the organisation, believing that her departure was "a direct result of poor supervision".

Ellen's professional supervision changed when she changed teams and had a different service manager. Before changing teams, Ellen had supervision monthly and spoke highly of her supervisor:

She certainly offered support. There was good support for safe practice and the professional side of things...we did work on a few cases...and I think I learnt some things.

In contrast to the above, she expressed dissatisfaction with her current service manager, stating that he:

Doesn't have the skills for professional supervision so I tend to take charge and play games....Nice person, bad supervisor...I think because he's been in management for so long, he's terribly behind. In fact, I don't think I've ever had any meaningful input about where he is on the whole scale of skills and knowledge. And in the future it won't matter anyway because his job won't be that.

David stated in his interview that his last supervision session was in August 1997, ten months prior to the interview. That session was predominately administrative in focus and he had had less than twelve supervision sessions in his ten years with the agency. David also expressed feelings of ambivalence about his situation. On one level, he felt "cheated" because it was important, and on another level he was anxious about the prospect of supervision:

I go into supervision sessions, I suspect, with a certain amount of fear and trepidation about what might be expected of me afterwards ... the idea that I might be required to step outside of my comfort zone to try things differently, to look at new perspectives, is one that I am not looking forward to eagerly.

Finally, three probation officers (Kiri, Jack and Mary-Jane) reported that they were not receiving any professional supervision and expressed a variety of feelings about this. For example, Jack stated that he has not had any professional supervision in his nineteen years as a probation officer because it had “never been set up”, and was disappointed that the department had never given him the support that he “should have had”. Similarly, Mary-Jane expressed considerable frustration at not receiving professional supervision despite asking for it. In her opinion the situation “suck[ed]” as there was “only one supervisor for the whole area”, which had almost thirty probation officers. Mary-Jane’s reported experience as a newer staff member was that the Community Probation Service was more interested in its finances than its staff and clients.

Service Managers

The service managers’ participation in professional supervision was also varied. Only Joan was in receipt of supervision when interviewed, but did not provide professional supervision, and none of her team received professional supervision. Two others (Nicholas and Susan) stated that they provided supervision to their team members but did not receive any themselves. The other service managers (Sofia and Neil) also did not receive supervision, but their teams did from external providers.

Joan was offered external supervision as an outcome of an harassment claim finding in her favour. The claim was against Joan’s manager. Joan started her supervision in September 1997, had on average one session per month, and summed up her experience as follows:

I think it’s wonderful. It’s been a life-saver for me...it’s made me feel more positive about my job, about my relationship with my manager, about the organisation.

She also acknowledged its value in terms of the tools it provided to manage work-related stress, work relationships and different ways of working with her team. Joan claimed that she would continue her supervision at her own expense if the Department decided it would

not pay for it. Her reason was perfectly simple, “It’s very important for me as a woman manager, because I don’t have those supports otherwise.”

According to Joan none of her team of probation officers had professional supervision despite offers of external supervision paid for by the Department. Two of her staff had had “set up contracts with two providers, but neither of them went ahead and had it.” She expressed concern that her staff found their roles as probation officers to be stressful but would not, even when the opportunity was offered and the providers were of their choosing, grasp the nettle of professional supervision.

As noted above Nicholas and Susan did not receive any professional supervision, but did provide it to their respective team members. In Nicholas’ case this involved formal casework supervision for five probation officers with varying levels of experience. The frequency of this ranged from weekly sessions for the newer, less capable staff members, through to monthly meetings for the very experienced and highly capable officers. He believed that on most occasions he performed the role of a casework supervisor “pretty well.” As for his own need, Nicholas appeared to be somewhat ambivalent. On the one hand he acknowledged that he would probably have to have outside supervision and “would find it useful”, but on the other hand, perceived that due to the changing nature of his role there is less opportunity for him “to practice pure casework supervision.” Moreover he was candid in admitting that due to his extensive experience in supervising staff, he was “probably fairly well set” in his way of working and “it would take quite a bit to actually change it.”

Susan reported that she provided or tried to provide “at least monthly supervision” for a team of ten probation officers, all of whom, were on supervision contracts. She also spoke of her open door policy whereby staff members could consult with her when and if they needed. In an illustration of the open door policy, Susan cited a particular probation officer that avoided formal supervision, but appeared at her door every Monday and gave an account of his recent work and his plans for the forthcoming week. According to Susan, “He didn’t realise it was supervision, and as long as I didn’t tell him it was supervision, we were fine.”

Susan’s perspective on her own supervision needs and situation was interesting. At one point she said that if she really needed to discuss any matters she would see the

industrial chaplain that visited her work-site, a person who had previously been her supervisor at the Department of Social Welfare in the 1980s. At another point, however, she admitted that due to her change eighteen months ago from being a practising probation officer to being a manager, her needs were not being met. As a probation officer, she and her colleagues found their “own level of supervision among our peers...and although it wasn’t formal, we had a lot of informal discussion and ideas floated.” On the other hand, as a service manager, she claimed she had “been floundering...very close to resignation...[and] felt completely debilitated,” because of an acute lack of both support and mentoring.

The remaining two service managers, Sofia and Neil, neither provided nor received professional supervision, though Sofia, did say that she provided administrative supervision. Both have had ongoing arrangements with external sources to provide professional supervision to their respective teams. In Sofia’s team, the probation officers’ received team supervision one month from an external supervisor that they had chosen and agreed to, and the next month each team member received individual supervision with a supervisor that they have chosen. Sofia approves the chosen supervisors (“People that have a good reputation at supervising”) and provided them with the Department’s code of conduct, “so they see how a probation officer has to act.” The supervisors verbally contracted by Sofia were members of a professional body with the exception of one who provided cultural supervision for a Maori staff member. Sofia made the point that there was sometimes a crossover between the administrative supervision that she provided and the externally provided professional supervision. Sofia highlights an example of this “overlap” in relation to her role of reviewing case plans and case notes:

If case plans are way off target, or if silly things are showing up in the case notes, I just can’t leave it and think ‘that is not my business, I’m just purely administrative.’ I mean, that would be unsafe practice.

This point relates clearly to the dialectic found in the literature between the professional and managerial aspects of social service supervision. The essence of Sofia’s point is that neither professional nor managerial supervision exists in a pure form or in isolation from the other (Kadushin, 1992a; Morrison, 1993; Rich, 1993; Shulman, 1993; 1995).

In relation to her own experience of not receiving any professional supervision, Sofia expressed the opinion “it’s terrible”, and stated that she believes that service managers should receive professional supervision. Her reasoning was that service managers train the probation officers, supervise them on a day-to-day basis and are generally around when crises occur, whereas professional supervisors are generally not as available on the spot.

Neil’s experiences differed from those outlined by Sofia. His team participated in monthly group supervision with a clinical psychologist, an arrangement that was in place before he became the manager. Neil had been asked to attend the sessions, but declined to do so. “Personally I don’t see a need for myself, so I don’t bother”, though he “sat in” on a couple of sessions when “the office was going through periods of very high stress.” He reported that the sessions were “alright”, “feel good” sessions that were effective in managing an individual probation officer’s stress and the stress of the team by helping people “to put things into perspective.”

In terms of his own professional supervision needs, Neil said he “only started thinking about it” after being invited to participate in the research and after he had read the information sheet. His thoughts were that he would like to have it “if it was available” and if its focus was to assist him to deal with the stresses of the service manager’s role. Neil also expressed his concern that support for managers, such as professional supervision and the employee assistance programme, may be viewed by superiors “as a weakness” which could have a “detrimental effect” on future career prospects.

Commentary

Only three out of the ten probation officers received formal professional supervision at the time of the interview, and one of the three also participated in an informal peer group. One probation officer had just finished participating in external supervision, and only participated in an informal peer group. Two others had recently ceased having what they called professional supervision, one because she was transferred to another team where the manager provided only administrative supervision. The other had received no professional supervision since his service manager resigned. Finally, of the four remaining probation officers, one had not received supervision since August 1997 and had had less than twelve

supervision sessions in ten years as a probation officer, and the three others stated they did not receive professional supervision.

In relation to the five service managers, only one service manager received supervision. Two service managers provide supervision to members of their teams but were not supervised themselves, and another two, also not supervised, had the professional supervision of their team members carried out by an external provider.

Overall, for both groups of respondents, the most common recent experience was either no or inadequate professional supervision. A finding of this kind appears to be unmatched in the research literature available (Tsui, 1997a; Kadushin, 1992a; Munson, 1993). However, Morrison (1993:9) stated that the consequences of inadequate supervision have been “reflected in a number of major reports” in Great Britain. Morrison (1993: 9) argues that the consequences of inadequate supervision seriously affect an agency in three areas: the management of client casework; the well being and professional development of staff; the health and culture of the agency.

Of the fifteen participants only four reported positive recent experiences of professional supervision, (Angela, Joseph, Joan and Ellen), and three out of these four, (Angela, Joseph and Joan) received their professional supervision from external providers. This finding would appear to support Erera et al. (1994) who suggest that managerial supervision be separated from provision of professional supervision. However, Ellen’s experience of a service manager that provided her with good supervision seems to contradict Erera et al. (1994). Her experience, perhaps, raises the question whether supervisory competence rather than the supervisory functions are related to positive supervision experiences (Munson, 1993).

In terms of the provision of supervision, the findings indicate that there was no consistency or standard method of providing professional supervision. In fact, as Angela and Joseph highlighted earlier, the provision of supervision seemed to rely on the managers’ commitment to either provide or purchase it. To an alarming extent the findings also mirror Payne (1994) who found that recent reported experiences of supervision in social services are a considerable distance from the ideals portrayed in the professional supervision literature. Indeed the lack of professional supervision experience outlined by

the respondents poses a significant challenge for the agency in terms of the development and implementation of its professional supervision policy.

Experiences of Agency Policy Development

Ten of the fifteen respondents reported they participated in the development of the professional supervision policy. The extent of their participation ranged from those who put in submissions, to those that participated in regional presentations and became the identified liaison person between their office and the project implementation team. One probation officer (Grace) participated in the initial project group, which produced the initial report and recommendations to management.

Probation Officers

Generally the probation officers interviewed reported a greater level of participation in the policy development process than the service managers did. Seven of the ten probation officers interviewed appeared to have participated in the policy's development. The three remaining Jack, Kiri, and Tania stated they did not participate, they did not know about it, they were not concerned, or had too much client work.

Four probation officers, Angela, David, Joseph and Ernest, indicated that their participation in the policy's development involved providing written feedback on draft documents. Angela stated that the project group sought comments only about staff preferences in regard to the different types of supervision. Angela also commented that there was no opportunity to comment on who should provide the supervision. David recalled that there was "either a questionnaire or ... a call for input" into the policy. He reported that he expressed his concerns in writing about line management and the situation of smaller rural offices where he believed that the staff did not have the "skills" or "level of personal development to supervise others". As a result of his written feedback, David was asked by a member of the working party to attend a presentation on the policy and to then present it to the other staff in his office. Joseph advised that he also provided written feedback on the "draft reports" and he said that at the stage of the draft reports he felt "quite enthusiastic about where our agency was going," only to find that the agency "shifted the goal posts halfway" through the project. Ernest commented on the timeframes

for consultation. He recalled putting “some kind of submission in” which he prepared in a hurry. He felt that the consultation was “pretty minimal”.

Ellen and Mary-Jane both advised that they attended presentations on the policy in late 1997 and indicated that the presentations involved an outline of what professional supervision was and what the Community Probation Service General Manager thought it was.

Another probation officer recalled time spent as member of the initial working party in May and June of 1997 and advised that the working party reviewed documents from the Children, Young Persons, and their Families Service, health agencies, and from the Department of Social Work at Canterbury University, as background to the project. This probation officer outlined that the group attempted to define what they thought professional supervision was, the contracting arrangements between supervisor and supervisee, and the frequency of supervision sessions. The probation officer also felt concerned whilst participating in the working party, that the professional supervision project would be driven by money. The probation officer remembered thinking at the time that:

I'd be disappointed if...it was driven by money, because I ...think...the department could find fifty bucks a month...they spent twenty million dollars on computers, quite honestly they could actually find the money.

The probation officer's recollection of the working party's recommendations was that the Department provides professional supervision within a certain timeframe, that newer staff members receive more supervision than other staff and that staff members have some choice in their professional supervisor.

Service Managers

Three of the five service managers indicated that they participated in the process that resulted in the development of the professional supervision policy. The two managers who did not participate, namely Neil and Sofia, gave different reasons for this. Neil stated he did not participate because he believed “the decision was already made” and “They were going ahead with it. It was a done deal.” Sofia on the other hand, indicated that she was

excluded from the policy-making process and she felt “very pissed off” about this. Sofia also made the point based on discussions she had had with someone on the working party, that it was “never recommended” that professional supervision be provided internally.

Nicholas also spoke of the difference between the policy and the initial working party report. He believed that the initial working party report included resourcing that would have supported the purchase of supervision from external providers. Joan also revealed this difference when she said that:

I think the project team at the time were quite clear that it should be provided externally ...All we know as staff is that a year ago we were all going to get an hour a month supervision provided externally, and now we're not.

The three service managers (Nicholas, Joan and Susan) who participated in the policy development process did so in a rather limited fashion. Nicholas' participation was to forward a letter that his area's management team prepared, and to send other correspondence as the policy developed. Joan stated she had “no more input than anybody else” and was not specific about her participation. Susan stated she participated through completing a feedback sheet on professional supervision from the New Zealand Association of Probation Officers (NZAPO). Susan believed that NZAPO produced a report about the professional supervision policy. According to Susan, this report and its recommendation had been “watered down” by the Department's policy.

Commentary

The respondents' participation in the policy development process revealed that there was the opportunity for the majority of participants to contribute to the policy's development. Some of the participants indicated dissatisfaction with the extent of the consultation and the “very tight time-frame for responses” particularly in regard to the questionnaire and the draft documents (Community Corrections, 1997a:3).

The issues raised by Sofia, Nicholas and to a lesser extent Joan and Joseph, concerning the difference between the project team's report and the policy, particularly, the change in direction were interesting. The first two respondents (Sofia and Nicholas) posit

that what appeared to be the path of external supervision in the project team's report ended in a "U-turn" which embraced a predominately internal provision. However, the actual report recommends that, the bulk of professional supervision be provided internally (Community Corrections, 1997a:5). The difference between the project report and the views held by Sofia, Nicholas, Joseph and Joan that the goalposts shifted and the project teams brief changed, raises questions about the policy-making process, particularly in regard to:

How transparent or open was it?

What were the givens (e.g. in terms of outcome, cost and quality)?

What attempts were made to ensure that the key stakeholders (probation officers and service managers) would have ownership of the policy?

The question of the transparency or openness of the policy development process seems to be the major one raised by the participants whose views that were divergent from the report. In regard to supervision policy development, O'Donoghue (1998a: 9) asserted that supervision policy-making involved a partnership between the management, supervisors and supervisees, and the support of each was needed in the development of a supervision policy. The primary way of gaining such support is identified in both the social/community work literature and the management literature as through the involvement of key parties in an open and transparent process (Craig, 1983; Barndt, 1991; Covey, 1991; Bartol et al., 1991; Peters, 1993; Creech, 1994; Payne, 1997).

The Community Probation Service policy development process findings and the documentation available to the researcher, indicated that the policy development process was not particularly transparent or open. Firstly, it appears that the rationale for the recommendations of the project team and the subsequent management decisions, particularly in regard to the internal peer mode of supervision, were not clear to the participants. Secondly, the givens or the limits of the professional supervision project appeared not to have been made explicit to the participants. Thirdly attempts made by the participants during the policy development process to gain ownership were unsuccessful. It is argued that these three matters were likely to have had a considerable impact on the implementation of the policy.

Experiences of the Policy and its Implementation

Fourteen of the 15 participants displayed some knowledge and experience of the Community Probation Services' policy of professional supervision. However, the level of knowledge and experience of the policy was varied and ranged from those who knew it existed, through to those who knew details, such as, who would provide professional supervision, the standards required, the specialist provisions and details of the training and implementation programme.

Probation Officers

Nine of the ten probation officers had knowledge of the policy. Only Jack stated that he was not familiar with it, but indicated that he was aware that "they're talking about providing it".

The other nine probation officers all knew that the policy stated that most of the professional supervision would be provided internally by probation officers and they expressed various opinions about the agency's decision to choose an internal peer mode of professional supervision rather than an external one. Seven of these nine probation officers disagreed with the mode of delivery of professional supervision outlined in the agency policy. From those seven, five (Angela, Kiri, Grace, Mary-Jane, and Joseph) disagreed with the internal provision of supervision and thought that the agency should have purchased external supervision. Another two (Ernest and Ellen) disagreed with the peer arrangement outlined in the policy, and thought that service managers should be the professional supervisors. The two remaining probation officers, Tania and David were not adverse to the internal peer mode outlined in the policy. Tania, thought a supervisor for her should come from within the service and didn't mind if it was either a peer or a service manager. David indicated that he was comfortable with the peer arrangement and thought that not having his service manager as his supervisor was positive.

Not surprisingly, David was the most positive of the probation officers about the policy. He thought that, "it's a damn good idea", which, "in practice I can see lots of practical difficulties with it." The practical difficulties he outlined were travel, recruitment, increased workload, and self-nomination. Travel was a difficulty for those officers who were required to travel over an hour to either provide or receive supervision.

The recruitment of supervisors was a considerable obstacle, particularly, since only one person in David's area had volunteered to be a supervisor. The workload issue came from David's belief that the supervisors chosen from the probation officer ranks were likely to have their direct client work reduced so that they could supervise. The outcome of this reduction was an increased workload for the other probation officers. David also expressed reservations about probation officers self-nominating to be supervisors, and thought a better process would be to have each team nominate people. David's final thoughts on the policy were that it was "high time and under resourced as usual".

Ellen also outlined logistical difficulties. She referred to the prospect of travelling to another office and stated that it was one of the reasons why she did not volunteer to be a supervisor, particularly since she was unwilling "to supervise anyone" in her own office. Ellen was unimpressed with the selection process for supervisors. She thought that those that had volunteered did not have the background, knowledge or skills that she and other experienced probation officers had. In summing up this point, Ellen stated that the knowledgeable and highly skilled staff were not volunteering to be supervisors because they had "to fit it in" with the rest of their work.

This issue of the staff volunteering or being selected as supervisors, and a perceived shortage of supervisors, were clear themes in the probation officers responses. Mary-Jane, particularly, highlighted the issue of supervisor selection by reference to the "stringent interview" process that prospective supervisors in her area had to go through. According to Mary-Jane, this process passed only one supervisor for the "twenty probation officers" in her area. Contrary to Mary-Jane's experience was that experienced by participants in other areas, whose experience of the volunteering process was that very few staff volunteered to be supervisors. Tania captures the essence of this problem when she described the call for volunteers to be "very unsuccessful... because, not enough people are putting themselves forward" and those that do are "not necessarily the best people". In a similar vein, Ernest thought that the process of volunteering was "terrible", and stated that he would "never go near" the person who volunteered in his area. He also reflected on his previous experience as a Senior Probation Officer, a role which Ernest felt involved "mainly supervision of staff". He compared his past experience with the recent policy, which had staff volunteering to be supervisors and said that it "horrifies me really". Ernest

felt that the professional supervision policy and its implementation reflected the new ethos of the Community Probation Service, which he said had developed because:

The people running the organisation come in from outside...we're not like a social work agency now, we're more like a factory...factory processing of people.

Joseph who was to be trained as a professional supervisor in the week following the research interview stated that his problem with the policy was that it had “muddied the waters” of professional supervision. He believed that this was because the policy supported internal supervision and that “most of the people who will be supervisors haven't experienced professional supervision”. Joseph also expressed concern about the potential for collusion between peers against and with management. He reported that his experience of external supervision had led him to think that the Community Probation Service policy was a “buddy” and “mentoring” system, which is likely to buy into “mentoring rather than supervising”. Joseph also expressed concerns about the training he was due to receive as a professional supervisor. He stated that the training outline indicated a “four day programme was being delivered in three days”. This condensing of what he hoped was initial training seemed to confirm for him “an unhappy message...about the commitment to supervision or...the understanding of those that designed it.” He thought that a more effective long term method of policy implementation would have been for the service to have had waited twelve months before commencing internal supervision and have:

“All persons who are going to be trained as supervisors receive outside external professional supervision in that twelve months, probably that they undertake the Massey diploma or something of that nature.”

Joseph made the point that the only supervision that staff in Community Probation had experienced was “dual-role” supervision from their managers and they had no experience of professional supervision in any other form.

The point made by Joseph about having experience of professional supervision before becoming a professional supervisor was important, particularly, in view of the reported findings thus far, and the supervision literature. The supervision literature gives

strong support to the role of adult learning theory and the view that supervisors developed their conceptualisation of supervision from their experiences of receiving supervision (Kadushin, 1992a; Munson; 1993; Morrison, 1993; Brown et al., 1996; Van Kessel et al., 1993). The literature also indicates that supervisors' practice tends to be modelled on their experiences of receiving supervision (Hawkins et al., 1989; Kadushin, 1992a; Morrison, 1993; Brown et al., 1996)

Service Managers

All of the five service managers were knowledgeable about the Community Probation Service policy on professional supervision and also espoused various views on the provision of professional supervision through an internal peer arrangement. These views ranged from Susan's statement that internal peer provision was "lacking in integrity", through to Joan's statement that professional supervision should "be provided externally because it needs to be objective". None of the five service managers were satisfied with the policy's statement that the bulk of professional supervision is provided internally by probation officers. Two service managers (Nicholas and Susan) thought that service managers should provide professional supervision, but also stated that they would settle for external provision rather than the internal peer form, which Nicholas described as "doing it on the cheap."

The other three service managers believed that professional supervision was best provided externally and expressed concerns particularly about the policy's implementation. These service managers' concerns like those of the probation officers were about the practical implications of the policy. Their main concerns were the selection or volunteering process, the potential safety risks of providing professional supervision internally, and the training provided to supervisors.

Four of the five managers (Nicholas, Sofia, Joan and Susan) raised the matter of the volunteering or selection of professional supervisors. Nicholas expressed frustration about the process by which staff were becoming professional supervisors. He said that the process did not have "any validity" and it was "transparently the wrong way to go about it". Nicholas went on to state that in his area only one person has accepted the role of professional supervisor, and that person was not a popular choice amongst the staff, and

was only able to supervise two people. Summing up, Nicholas said that this situation “makes the whole thing a nonsense”. Sofia’s concerns were closer to home. She was considerably uncomfortable with the prospect of a particular person who had volunteered to be a supervisor in her area supervising probation officers. Sofia candidly said, “I wouldn’t touch her with a fifty foot barge pole. God she’s a bloody useless PO, now she’s a professional supervisor”. Joan raised a further issue in relation to the “self promotion or peer promotion” selection process, which was that she did not consider probation officers to be in an “informed position to select” professional supervisors. Joan believed that probation officers do not have a “consistent” or “clear understanding” of professional supervision. Susan, on the other hand, spoke of her experience on the selection panel which interviewed prospective professional supervisors, and required them to give a demonstration of their work as a supervisor. Susan reported that from four applicants only “one person just passed the benchmark”. She expressed concern about the lack of standardisation in the selection process and the amount of “shoulder tapping” that had gone on in other areas. Susan seemed worried about the prospect that service managers would allocate supervisors to probation officers. Her concern was that she might have to tell a probation officer to have supervision with someone who they may or may not be comfortable with. Susan felt that this situation was “unsafe.”

Sofia, who considered the peer arrangement an unsafe practice, which left people feeling extremely uncomfortable, also took up the safety theme. She also felt that the peer arrangement watered down the challenging aspect of professional supervision. Neil’s concerns were that there were potential safety risks from peer supervision, particularly, in areas of safe practice and confidentiality.

The training of the professional supervisors was a concern of three of the five service managers (Nicholas, Sofia and Joan). All three expressed the opinion that three days with a follow up day was insufficient. Joan’s statement that “I don’t think that you can pick up the qualities of a supervisor ... in two or three days” generally reflected the perspective of these service managers.

Commentary

Twelve of the 15 respondents disagreed with the mode of the delivery of professional supervision espoused by the Community Probation Service policy on professional supervision. This level of disagreement and dissatisfaction was concerning and raised questions about the level of commitment from staff to the policy and the extent to which the staff have ownership of the professional supervision policy.

The commitment of key stakeholders to organisational goals is strongly emphasised in management literature as central to goal attainment (Nelson et al., 1996; Covey, 1991; Bartol et al., 1991; Peters, 1993; Creech, 1994). This literature suggests that if probation officers and service managers were not committed to the policy, then its goals are unlikely to be achieved.

In regard to the policy implementation the participants described an unclear implementation programme which had significant “practical difficulties”. The most alarming of these was the selection or volunteering process for supervisors, which was contingent upon which area you happen to work in. This process correlated with the concern expressed by Brown et al. (1996:182) that plans to improve the delivery of professional supervision in the social services were not supported by an appropriate infrastructure. Another related issue was that there was no formal route and very few formal qualifications available for professional supervisors. The literature in this regard identifies a need for formal accreditation processes for professional supervisors (Brown et al., 1996; Beddoe, 1997a). Interestingly, the Community Probation Service draft manual amendment (1998a) appeared to provide an accreditation framework for supervisors through the use of the professional supervisors’ competency standard. However, the participants’ experiences indicated that this process was not in place.

Of further concern was the limited investment by the Community Probation Service in the workforce development of its supervisors and supervisees, particularly, when the participants indicated that there was no “consistent” and “clear understanding of professional supervision” and given the extent of the change that this policy appears to herald. The respondents considered the training investment in supervisors of a three-day

training event for supervisors followed by a further day, to be insufficient. In the literature Brown et al. (1996: 164-179) raised concern about the lack of comprehensive training and development for supervisors and they described supervisor training as mainly occurring on an ad-hoc basis. In relation to the supervisees, the participants' responses and the Community Probation Service policy and training documentation indicated that there had been no training provided to them in how to use professional supervision to gain the optimum benefit for them and their clients. It seemed that probation officers and service managers were informed of the policy and the definition without any recent formative experiences of professional supervision (Community Corrections Service, 1997a; 1998a). The issues raised in this section also evoke the question: How supportive was the organisational environment for professional supervision?

Experiences of the Supervision Environment

A recent trend in the supervision literature has been to consider the influence the environment has upon professional supervision (Tsui et al., 1997; Holloway, 1995; Beddoe, 1997a; 1997b; O'Donoghue, 1998b). In this section the respondents' experiences of management practices, organisational culture and social policy in relation to professional supervision are discussed.

Management Practices

All fifteen respondents stated that management practices influenced both the professional supervision delivered and the implementation of the professional supervision programme. Both groups identified management practices of concern to them. The probation officers were focused on their experience of their immediate managers, whereas the service managers appeared to be focused more upon the practices of senior management.

Probation Officers

Five probation officers, (Angela, Kiri, Jack, Mary-Jane, and Tania) focused on the changes ushered in by the development of the service manager role and their experience of that role. Three others (David, Grace and Ernest) spoke about divisions that had developed between management and workers, and between teams. Ellen, on the other hand, spoke of her experiences of a managerial preoccupation with technology and recording, whereas

Joseph spoke of his experience of the management practices of cost cutting and short-term planning.

Angela found the changes that followed the restructuring resulted in little supervision except for that provided by “outside supervisors” for a “few people” or that provided by local management. Angela believed that the managerial trend was “very much hands off cases, hands off clients”. This trend, according, to Angela had reduced the service managers’ availability for case consultation, because, they were “very busy doing their budgets and forms for head office and stuff”. Kiri made the point that the new structure was designed so that the service managers did not provide supervision like they used to and that this had resulted in, “minimal supervision”. Kiri emphasised that service managers seemed “a lot more administrative than practising”. Jack’s statements seemed to echo Kiri’s particularly in regard to the administration focus of managers and their “being too busy fiddling with paper ...to know what’s going on around the place.” Jack commented also about the “shovelling” down of work which had developed as a result of the combination of the district manager, senior probation officer/unit manager roles into the role of the service manager. He emphasised that the work once done by those roles had now been “shovelled right down to the probation officer level” and that professional supervision was one example of this. Mary-Jane was highly critical of management practices and stated that there was a push to “produce outputs, and produce really good statistics”. Mary-Jane characterised management as highly directive, non participatory and unsupportive. In one of her strongest statements Mary-Jane emphasised the inequities of the Community Probation Service practice of rewarding managers through bonus payments, as a key change which had implications for professional supervision.

People are feeling like management really sucks,...they’re wanting us to do all these things for them, so they can get their bonuses, and we get nothing. We’re not being rewarded for our good work, and we’re not being punished for bad work either. People can get away with blue murder round here really!

Mary-Jane seemed also to suggest that these management practices had resulted not in better quality work but rather coercion, collusion and corruption (Gregory, 1995).

The divisions created by management practices in the Community Probation Service are a theme that was raised by David, Grace and Ernest. David expressed “real qualms” about the management practices within the Department of Corrections. He was particularly concerned about the emphasis found in bonus payments and individual employment contracts, which recognised “the individual rather than the team”. This emphasis he linked to the “notion of divide and conquer”, which he considered was both “divisive” and “destructive” and created a culture of: “Stuff you, Jack, I’m looking out for me.” Grace spoke of divisions that were a direct result of the management structure and the development of teams. She suggested that the way the area she worked in had structured its teams had resulted in the management practice of “that’s not my job, that’s not my responsibility... you’ll have to see your service manager”. The point Grace made was that the structure had resulted in a patch-mentality amongst service managers, whose clear interests and performance are measured in relation to their teams’ output production and budget variance. The divisions Ernest identified were in two areas. The first area was related to measurement and performance, which Ernest stated had been divided by management into “practice” and performance “measures”. He seemed to be drawing attention to the new managerial practice of separating professional process from the product. This practice placed accountability on the product produced rather than the process involved in production (Boston et al., 1996). The second area Ernest identified was related to the management practice of reducing work into defined quantifiable units. Ernest’s point was that management had separated, “the management of a case” from “the supervision of the case”. Ernest stressed that his experience had been that the social work aspects of probation practice were subordinated to the managerial agenda. Summing up Ernest said that:

“The department isn’t interested in the social work part to be honest. It’s kind of like, you know, covering the management stuff, and getting the numbers through in the least time that you can, and I still try and do the other [social work] stuff, but its not valued.

Ellen’s experience of management practices emphasised that they had, “really gone technology mad”. She reported that more significance was given to what was recorded on

the computer than the client practice itself. Upon reflection, the point Ellen was making in regard to professional supervision was that the interest from managers will be on what is recorded rather than what actually transpires in the professional supervision.

Joseph believed that the current programme of internal supervision did not assist the Community Probation Service achieve its mission. He thought that the professional supervision programme was “supervision on the cheap” and he believed by saving money in the short-term the service would not develop in the manner that it aspired to in its “written documents”. He said that this was because they had not utilised, “the talents of our staff to the best of their ability”, and did not, “provide the best service we could provide.”

Service Managers

The five service managers presented an unflattering perspective of their experiences of management practices. Nicholas discussed three areas namely, the basis of changes initiated by management, the short-term political agenda of the general manager, and difficulties in communicating with senior managers. Nicholas said that the changes initiated in the Community Probation Service, “have often been for reasons other than... quality outcomes for probation officers and clients.” He believed that, “The agency’s priorities are in some other area than dealing with re-offending of our client group” and that they were “politically driven”. Nicholas also made a connection between the “political agendas” and the senior management of the department and said that:

Those in power in the agency, are there for the short term often. They have no mandate for enhancing the probation officers role. They are there for a defined period of time to perform according to the political agenda and then move on.

Nicholas contrasted the above with his experience of previous senior managers, who all served, “their apprenticeship in the organisation”. Nicholas conceded that whilst, “they may not have been particularly good managers at times”, they at least spoke the same language and understood the nature of probation work, which was something he had not experienced from the new breed of generic senior managers. Nicholas surmised that one of the consequences of generic managers not understanding probation work and not speaking

the same language, was, from his perspective, the development of “an element of distrust right throughout the organisation” about where the organisation was going.

Sofia felt that management practices had a considerable impact on professional supervision, particularly, in terms of how they were implemented. She stated that her managers were generally unwilling to discuss issues once they had made a decision and that they would “just dictate” and if you tried to critique the decision you were “reprimanded.” Sofia reported that the managers above her had never been employed as probation officers and that some of the decisions they had made were “off the planet, bloody bananas”. She also noted that there was only one person in Head Office who had been a field probation officer and that this person was a “lonely voice” amongst a chief executive officer who was “Ex-Treasury” and the general manager who was “Ex-Community Funding Agency”. Sofia’s experience of her senior managers who had never been probation officers and never experienced professional supervision was that they weren’t willing to listen to her or other staff’s opinions in relation to the potential problems with the professional supervision programme.

Joan similarly raised issues about senior management’s responsiveness to staff concerns. She stated that the one thing that was clear to her from listening to probation officers, “in team meetings, staff meetings, surveys, climate surveys... even the business plan process,” was that they wanted external professional supervision paid for by the agency. Joan believed that the people holding the purse strings weren’t “listening to what the staff want.” She reiterated that senior management’s role throughout the project had been to hold “the purse strings” and according to Joan this resulted in the project changing “from external supervision at a cost of \$90 an hour to internal or peer supervision at very little cost”. Joan, however, was quick to point out that this very little cost was in terms of what was readily accounted for in monthly budget accruals, and that the cost of internal supervision would be in terms of reduced output production, increased production pressure and decreased quality of the work. Joan also believed that there was a strong link here with the priorities of the organisation, which she stated were that, the organisation was “developing into more of ...a competitive business in the work place and less of a social agency.”

Neil spoke about the level of management support for the professional supervision project and difficulties he had experienced with generic senior managers.

He thought that there was little management support for the project and that “unless somebody in senior management drives it and continues to drive it, it will fall by the wayside, particularly if we use the current policy.” Neil also expressed frustration with generic senior managers who knew little about what probation officers do, yet readily made statements on how they should practice. He outlined an example of a discussion that he had with a manager in which he advised that his staff had found the computer system cumbersome and had difficulties keeping their case-notes up to date on the system. The response given by the more senior manager was that the probation officers type on the keyboard, whilst interviewing and counselling the clients. The clear message that this senior manager gave was that the computer was more important to attend to than clients are. Neil summed up this experience in the following statement:

They don't actually know anything about what the person does...It's like me trying to tell a mechanic how to strip an engine and put it back together.

The fifth service manager Susan, spoke of management practices impacting in terms of change, cutbacks, and in regard to the long term strategy of the Department, which she sees as the Integrated Offender Management project. Susan stated that change “happens very quickly” with short timeframes for consultation, which was rushed and not good. Susan thought that what occurred with professional supervision was that documents were sent out for comment with a short timeframe and people “don't often have time... to comment on the ramifications.” She believed that this management practice and the cutback policy had also impacted on the professional supervision programme through the small numbers of applications from staff to be professional supervisors. Susan makes the point that the people that should have applied to be professional supervisors weren't because, “they're just too busy” due to the “reduced staff ceiling and the add-on tasks that are happening”. Susan asserted that the changes were additional to the core business of the Community Probation Service and that they were managed within the current budget and staffing allocations. She firmly believed that the professional supervision programme was only an interim measure and that the longer-term strategy was the Integrated Offender

Management project. Susan said that this project had “really given the argument for ongoing supervision to maintain your practice level, a lot of weight” and that the Department was, “very aware that ...professional supervision” was a must for the success of this project.

Commentary

All fifteen respondents’ experience of management practices revealed aspects of what Boston et al.(1996:9) called the New Zealand model of new public management or new managerialism (Easton, 1997; Boston et al., 1996; O’Donoghue, 1998a; Gregory, 1995; Kelsey, 1993). This is particularly evident when the key aspects of new public management are linked to the findings from the respondents as outlined in Table 6.1 below.

The respondents’ experience portrayed new public management as having a detrimental impact on professional supervision and the implementation of the professional supervision programme. The most interesting finding outlined in Table 6.1 was the most common theme namely, the separation of the professional workers from management. The separation of management from workers and clients was discussed in the literature by Gowdy et al. (1993: 8) who asserted that the consequences of this separation in social service agencies results were “chronic and acute goal displacement where the organisation’s means becomes its end”. Gowdy et al. (1993) elaborated on this point through emphasising that agencies prefer to use outputs based on production tasks rather than clients outcomes as the measures of successful performance. Further points made by Gowdy et al. (1993) related to the results of this separation were that managers, practice reactive management, indulge in management fads which uses significant resources and use problem solving methods which resolve issues but don’t improve performance. Finally Gowdy et al. (1993:8) make the point that the separation of managers from workers and clients was the main reason why management was viewed as extraneous and non contributory to better client outcomes as well as the primary contributor to poor morale, burnout and low levels of job satisfaction.

Table 6.1. New Public Management Linked to Findings

Aspect of New Public Management	Number of respondents	Probation Officers	Service Managers
Service restructuring	Six	Angela, Kiri, Jack, Mary-Jane, Tania, Grace	-
Separation of professional workers from the management	Eight	Angela, Kiri, Jack, Mary-Jane, David, Ernest	Nicholas, Sofia
The use of private sector management practices	Three	David, Mary-Jane	Joan
Devolving and delegation of previous management functions to frontline practitioners	Two	Jack	Susan
Generic managers to run services like businesses	Four	Ernest	Nicholas, Joan, Neil
Production culture	Four	Mary-Jane, Grace, Ernest	Joan
Greater use of information technology	Two	Ellen	Neil
A focus on product accountability rather than process accountability	Six	Mary-Jane, Grace, Ernest, Ellen	Joan, Neil
Cost cutting and fiscal restraint	Three	Joseph	Joan, Susan
A focus on the short-term political agenda	Two	Joseph	Nicholas

Gowdy et al. (1993) assertions appear to relate to the issue raised by four service managers (Nicholas, Sofia, Joan and Neil) about senior managers' limited ability to receive feedback, listen, understand and empathise with staff. This finding along with those outlined earlier by the respondents seem to signal that the organisation's culture may not be a supportive environment for professional supervision.

Organisational Culture

The fifteen respondents were not positive about the organisational culture of the Community Probation Service and its impact on professional supervision. The clear theme that emerged was that at the time the interviews were conducted, the organisational culture was not supportive of professional supervision.

Probation Officers

The probation officers made a number of comments about the impact of the organisation's culture. The major theme was that identified by four probation officers, (David, Joseph, Tania and Ernest) who commented on the impact of change and highlighted that the service had a culture of continuous change in which the rate of change was described as "horrendous". The other views expressed tended to be those of individual probation officers and seemed to reflect an organisational culture in a state of crisis.

Ernest was unsure whether there was one organisational culture within the agency, and he wondered whether two cultures had developed, namely the "Old hands" and the "New". Joseph on the other hand, believed that the next cycle of restructuring was on the horizon and that this was likely to mean that the personal support aspects of professional supervision would be emphasised instead of the client work. He made a further point that few people had "responded with passion" to professional supervision and that there was not a professional supervision culture in the agency. Kiri commented that the organisation's leadership had promised much but delivered little and had not met her needs as a Maori. Kiri highlighted that the culture of the organisation forces her to "fall into the trap of being pakeha" and "dealing with things in a pakeha way." Kiri's final comments in this section were about experiences she had had of the agency not valuing her and not recognising her cultural needs particularly in regard to supervision. Ellen spoke of a clash of cultures between periodic detention staff and probation staff and felt that this was

“divisive”, whereas Grace commented on how professional supervision was threatening to some probation officers who tended to view themselves as “elitist” and “precious.” Jack expressed the view that the culture has been “fairly negative for a long time”, and that the organisation needs to shed some of its staff who had been there “so damn long ...and who are dragging all this baggage along with them.” Mary-Jane felt that the culture had little enthusiasm and that the implication of this was that professional supervision would probably be superficially put in place. Conversely, Angela believed that the current culture accentuated the need for good professional supervision and made the need for supervision more pressing than it had been previously.

Service Managers

The five service managers were more critical than the probation officers about the impact of organisational culture on professional supervision. Three of the five Service Managers (Joan, Neil and Sofia) made comment about the results of a recent climate survey which portrayed the culture as “being quite cold, unsympathetic, unsupportive of staff.” Joan felt that the climate survey portrait of the organisational culture indicated that it would not support the professional supervision project. Joan believed that there was a “level of dishonesty in the organisation” that was experienced by both probation officers and service managers and was contributing to the culture developing in a “sinister dishonest fashion”.

Nicholas believed that the organisational culture was “breeding a lot more cynicism” and that this influenced morale. He also thought that there is a tick the box mentality present in the organisation, which resulted in outcomes that were far from the best possible, and that professional supervision had:

Obviously been put on someone’s performance ...contract, and it’s a box to be ticked and it’s time-bound and it’s been done without due care and attention, thought, for the results.

Susan thought that in the current culture “professional supervision as it’s envisaged will die...and die very suddenly.” Susan said that this was because “staff are really not treating it seriously” due to the lack of credibility of the peer arrangement.

Commentary

The experiences reported of the organisational culture in the Service, indicated that it was not supportive of professional supervision and seemed to correspond with descriptions given by Hawkins et al. (1989) of bureaucratic and crisis cultures. Hawkins et al. (1989:135) described a bureaucratic culture as one which was problem focussed with an ethos of a “mechanics checklist”, with little time or space for understanding in its frenetic search for simple neatly packaged solutions. A crisis or reactive culture was described as one that is in a continual state of reaction to a sea of troubles in which supervision is seldom a high priority and will not occur regularly due to very important reasons (Hawkins et al., 1989). The correspondence between these two cultures and the experiences of the respondents was clearly apparent in the comments made about the climate survey made by the service managers and the discussion on the horrendous rate of change highlighted by the probation officers. The outcome of professional supervision in such an environment was that it becomes a rush for quick fix solutions amidst a host of competing demands (Beddoe, 1997a; Beddoe et al., 1994; Hawkins et al., 1989). Those competing demands include matters generated by the politics within the Community Probation Service and the politics that act on the agency from the outside.

Experiences of the Effects of Social Policy

Thirteen of the 15 respondents (8 probation officers and 5 service managers) reported that they had experiences of current social policy, which they considered impacted on professional supervision in their agency. Very little difference was reported amongst both probation officers and service managers with the exception of two service managers who raised issues related to the mental health system.

The most common theme outlined by seven of the 15 participants was the reduction of money for public provided support and services and the influence that this had on the workers in the Community Probation Service. Mary-Jane emphasises this through stating that “the more they cut the budgets...the more our clients get into trouble...the more we have to deal with, the less we get support.” Mary-Jane mused further that it is not a “very good cycle” and “it breaks down in the middle”, which she identified was “the supervision part.”

The impact of increased accountability was a theme raised by three respondents, Angela, Joseph and Ernest. Joseph and Ernest seem to raise two sides of the accountability issue. Joseph believed that accountability was clearer and it offered workers greater protection and made supervision in both its managerial and professional forms important, whereas, Ernest thought that the risk management approach of agencies left the individual worker more exposed to public censure and litigation. The matter of individuals being more exposed seemed to link David's concern about the thrust in social policy towards individual responsibility. David believed that the implications of this thrust may result in the contracting out of professional supervision with a reduced role for agencies focused on purchasing and contract management.

The final theme, which was raised by Neil and Nicholas, was about the impact of clients from the mental health system and upon professional supervision in the Community Probation Service. Neil believed that probation officers were dealing with greater numbers of people who were "coming out of the mental health system." He thought that probation officers "were not qualified to deal with people who have psychiatric and other disorders." Neil believed that where this had a bearing on professional supervision was when the probation officer did not know what to do with these clients and was getting "stressed out" about it.

Nicholas made a similar point and emphasised the effects of the social policy of de-institutionalisation, which promoted community care of mentally unwell people. Nicholas stated that his staff had been "traumatised" over recent months by clients who were mentally unwell. He felt that the influence of this on professional supervision was related to:

An increasingly anxious community, and by definition the people we see are the most stressed for whatever reason, then if the stress level rises in the community, then it's gonna rise inside these four walls too.

Commentary

The themes identified by the respondents of reduced public and social support services, greater accountability, increased public scrutiny, the emphasis on individual responsibility and the impact of the de-institutionalisation of mental health services were also key themes

found in the social policy literature of Aotearoa/New Zealand (Shannon, 1991; Cheyne et al., 1997). These findings highlight that fieldworkers and their managers in the Community Probation Service were faced with the stresses of this “turbulent environment” on a daily basis (Hughes et al., 1997). In essence the findings of this section revealed clearly the paradox outlined by Mary-Jane, in which the results of the social policies identified increased the need for supervision whilst at the same time diminishing the resources available to provide it. The supervision literature recognises the influence this environment had on both workers and the culture of an organisation and emphasises the role professional supervision has in management of work-related stress, and it promotes a mediation and advocacy approach through the raft of conflicts experienced in the work environment. It also promotes the establishment and maintenance of safe professional boundaries (Hughes et al., 1997; Morrison, 1993; Munson, 1993; Shulman, 1993; Brown et al., 1996; O’Donoghue, 1998a; 1998b).

The findings also give weight to Kadushin’s (1992a) construct of an ecology of supervision particularly in regard to the social setting’s influence on the supervisory system. In this regard the participants’ responses seem to indicate that professional supervision is constructed and shaped by forces both internal and external to social systems of those who are engaged in supervision sessions. Another way of framing this is the saying that, “There are more people in the room during supervision than those physically sitting in the chairs” (O’Donoghue, 1998b).

Summary and implications

The objective of this chapter was to explore the respondents’ experiences of professional supervision and the environment in which professional supervision is practised. The presentation of the findings involved discussing firstly, the participants’ experience of professional supervision in terms of their recent participation, their experiences in regard to the development of the agency’s policy, its content and implementation. Secondly the participants experiences of the supervision environment and its influence upon professional supervision were discussed. The environment explored included management practices, organisational culture and social policy, and considered the influence of these on professional supervision.

The findings in relation to the experience of professional supervision in the Community Probation Service revealed a very limited experience of professional supervision amongst both the probation officers and service managers.

The respondents' recent participation in professional supervision showed only three out of ten probation officers (Angela, Grace and Tania) participated in formal professional supervision with a fourth probation officer who had recently finished participating in external supervision, and was participating in an informal peer group arrangement. The service managers' recent participation revealed only Joan as participating in supervision as a supervisee. Two other service managers Susan and Nicholas participated as providers of professional supervision but did not receive any.

The last two service managers Sofia and Neil purchased external supervision for their team.

The findings also revealed that there was neither a consistent form of delivery of professional supervision nor a standard method of provision experienced by the respondents. The provision of professional supervision appeared to rely on the manager's commitment to purchase or provide. It was apparent that the respondents' recent participation revealed inadequate professional supervision which had implications in terms of the agency's work with clients, in the professional development of staff and health and culture of the agency (Morrison, 1993).

The recent experiences of the participants emphasised the need for a change in the Community Probation Service's professional supervision policy and delivery. However, the findings in relation to policy development, the current policy and its implementation revealed that the policy development process was not transparent and reflected the cognitive interests of management rather than clients and field staff of the organisation (Drew, 1987). This was particularly emphasised by twelve out of fifteen participants disagreeing with the mode of delivery outlined in the professional supervision policy.

The policy implementation process was found to be unclear and fraught with practical difficulties. The most concerning of these for participants was an inconsistent selection or volunteering process for professional supervisors and limited investment made by the agency in the workforce development of its supervisors and supervisees. These difficulties were particularly significant, given that the findings showed that the

participants had not experienced a culture of professional supervision. There was also a clear indication that the participants had been informed of the policy without any formative experiences of professional supervision (Community Corrections Service, 1997a; 1998a).

The experiences of professional supervision, the policy, its development and implementation indicated that there was little experience of professional supervision and little evidence of a professional supervision culture. Significant issues were identified with the way the agency had sought to change this situation and the changes proposed in the policy together with the inconsistent manner in which the policy was implemented. The most significant implication that can be inferred was that the professional supervision programme as described by the respondents was unlikely to achieve its objectives.

The participants' experiences of the supervision environment and its impact upon professional supervision revealed that the management practices experienced were reflective of, "new public management" (Boston et al., 1996). The most significant of the management practices, identified by eight out of the fifteen respondents was the separation of professional workers from management. The likely implications of this for social service agencies had been identified in the literature by Gowdy et al. (1993) as: serious goal displacement with the organisation focusing on its activities or outputs as the measures of success; reactive management practices; a flirtation with management fads; the use of problem solving methods; and the view that management is irrelevant and the main source of stress and burnout for direct service workers.

The implications of the separation described above were also apparent in the findings related to organisational culture in which the participants seemed to describe a bureaucratic and crisis culture unsupportive of professional supervision. This type of culture results in professional supervision becoming a rush for quick fix solutions amidst a host of competing demands (Beddoe, 1997b; Beddoe et al., 1994; Hawkins et al., 1989).

In regard to the impact of social policy, the findings reflected themes found in the literature on social policy in Aotearoa/New Zealand, namely, reduced state services, greater accountability, increased individual responsibility and the results of de-institutionalisation. The findings highlighted that in this "turbulent environment" there was a greater need for supervision, however, this need was met by a paradoxical reduction in

resources available. The findings also highlight that the policy context had an influence upon supervision practice (Hughes et al., 1997; Kadushin, 1992a).

The implications of the respondents experience of the supervision environment were somewhat paradoxical in that each element reinforced the need for professional supervision, yet at the same time demonstrated that it was unsupportive of that need. In regard to the professional supervision programme the implications from the respondents' experience of the environment in which supervision was practised were that the environment was unsupportive of the programme.

This paradox of a recognised need for professional supervision shared between the agency and the participants which was not met raises the questions of what type of professional supervision do the respondents want? And what environment will be supportive of professional supervision? These questions will be taken up in detail in the next chapter.