

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The aim of this thesis has been to investigate professional supervision as practised under new public management in the Community Probation Service. The first three sections of this conclusion review the objectives of the research, the methodology and the key research findings from the three empirical chapters. The final sections discuss the implications of the research findings, and make suggestions concerning the future practice of professional supervision in the Community Probation Service and wider social service environment. Also discussed, are areas for future research that have been identified during the course of this study.

#### **Research Objectives**

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the phenomenon of professional supervision practice in terms of the philosophy, experience, aspirations and expectations of both practitioners and managers, in the environment of new public management in the Community Probation Service. The development of the primary objective was derived from the literature review (Chapter 2), but was also influenced by two factors. The first factor was the author's experience of significant changes in the way public social services were managed and the effect these changes had on both the professional practice and management of statutory social service agencies. In the Community Probation Service the managerial changes resulted in an increase in private sector business management practices which impacted on the practice of professional social service supervision (Garwood, 1994; O'Donoghue, 1995; Dale, 1997). The second factor was an assertion made by Payne (1994), namely that the future of professional social service supervision in this new managerial environment would result in one of three scenarios: (a) that there would be separation of the professional and managerial aspects as part of a professional revival; (b) that there would be a reconciliation between these two aspects through the quality movement; or (c) that there would be a complete rejection of the professional aspects of social service supervision.

The Community Probation Service policy appeared to be taking a path that paralleled the first scenario outlined by Payne (1994). It also appeared that the Community Probation Service was a trailblazer with this development in statutory social work supervision in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The social service supervision literature reviewed indicated that limited attention had been given to the separation of the professional aspects of supervision from the managerial or administrative aspects. It was argued that in the literature there is a dialectical tension between the managerial and professional aspects, with authors tending to emphasise one or the other (Tsui, 1997b; Payne, 1994; Munson, 1993; Kadushin, 1992a).

Underpinning the primary research objective, as specified above, were the three major research questions. These questions were:

- What are the participants' understandings of professional supervision?
- What are the participants' recent experiences of professional supervision?
- What do the participants want from supervision?

These three questions provided the foundation and basic points of reference for Chapters 5, 6 and 7 respectively.

## **Methodology**

The research questions were examined using a qualitative research design and approach. In particular, the approach employed focussed on the participants' construction, experience and desires in regard to professional supervision, with each participant encouraged to voice their perspective on the subject. The methodology employed makes no claims to positivist scientific truth, and is interpretivist (Patton, 1990; Babbie, 1995).

The research design involved a sample of ten probation officers and five service managers, who were purposefully selected from staff lists provided by a regional manager of the Community Probation Service. Purposeful selection was chosen to obtain information rich cases as well as a cross-section in terms of experience and professional background. The sample chosen could be said to be biased. It is asserted, however, that the bias that arises from the sample selection makes the findings more, rather than less significant, because all those interviewed had a keen interest in professional supervision.

A semi-structured interview guide, developed by the researcher on the basis of the literature reviewed, was used for the purpose of data collection. This interview guide was pre-tested on a probation officer and a service manager. The interviews explored the participants' background details, philosophy of professional supervision, recent experiences and their professional supervision aspirations and expectations. The interviews were audiotaped, and on average took between an hour and an hour and a half.

Two hundred and seventy-seven pages of single-spaced transcript were produced for analysis. The data was organised for analysis by cutting and pasting the fifteen individual transcripts into files that corresponded to the four sections of the interview guide. Each section was then analysed and the themes present were identified. These themes were further analysed and a structured reporting framework was developed (Patton, 1990).

The limitations of the research methodology were threefold, in relation to: the sample; the research process; and in terms of epistemology. With regard to the sample, the main limitation was that the majority of people interviewed were or were to be *recipients* of professional supervision, with only two service managers claiming to be *providers* of professional supervision. Only one probation officer interviewed stated that he would be undertaking the supervisor role, and advised that he would be trained the week after his interview. This limitation was primarily due to the timing of the research interviews, which corresponded with the supervisors' training, and appears to have been an unavoidable coincidence. Also, when the sample was purposefully selected in April 1998, a regional list of prospective professional supervisors was not available to the researcher. The significance of this limitation was that the perspectives of the new professional supervisors post-training, and as beginning supervisors, were not considered in this research.

In terms of the research process, the main limitation was that the researcher chose the sample, collected the data and conducted the data analysis. The question that arises concerns the extent to which the findings reflect the researcher's perspective and interpretation. The epistemological limitations are threefold: first, the findings cannot be generalised beyond the research participants; second, the findings were reported perspectives; and third, the practice of professional supervision was not directly observed. In essence, the main limitation of the research methodology is that the procedures and

findings presented rely on the integrity of both the researcher and the participants for their credibility.

## **Key Findings**

### **Philosophy of Professional Supervision**

Three key findings emerged with respect to the philosophy of professional supervision amongst the participants. The first finding was that a clear philosophy of professional supervision was lacking amongst the participants. Second, their knowledge and understanding of professional supervision was at an elementary level. Finally, the philosophy of the participants did not align with the philosophy of the organisation.

### **Lack of Clear Philosophy**

This was particularly apparent in the lack of commonality found in the participants' definitions and descriptions of the functions of professional supervision. There was not a shared definition of professional supervision amongst either the probation officers or the service managers. Their definitions varied considerably and tended to reflect three perspectives - the organisational, situational and personality perspectives found in the literature. Professional supervision, when discussed from these perspectives, includes: the roles and goals of the organisation; the discussion of problems and challenging work situations; and the management or resolution of personal material that affects the worker-client relationship (Munson, 1993). Absent also amongst the participants was a shared understanding of the functions of professional supervision. The most commonly identified functions were professional development and personal support.

### **Elementary Knowledge and Understanding**

This finding was signalled by an emphasis on content and functions (rather than process and context), and by the limited knowledge of participants expressed in relation to processes, theory and models, and the skills of professional supervision. The emphasis on content and function was reinforced by the dominance of the organisational, situational and personality perspectives found in their definitions (Munson, 1993). In the literature, an emphasis upon content and function in supervision is viewed as indicative of a beginner's

understanding of professional supervision (Hawkins et al., 1989; Kadushin, 1992a; Brown et al., 1996).

The findings in regard to process, support an elementary knowledge and understanding of professional supervision in two ways. The first is through the processes involved being identified by the participants as similar to those used in direct practice. The aspect of an elementary understanding that this reveals is that of the participants' understanding being based in direct practice approaches rather than supervision approaches. Kadushin (1992: 157) describes this situation well when he asserts that:

Lacking in training in teaching but possessing clinical skills, the temptation for the clinician-turned-supervisor is to utilize her preferred clinical approach in teaching.

The second was the finding in relation to the perceived influence of gender and culture on the processes involved in professional supervision. Little attention was given to the context of supervision and how structures such as gender and culture can influence the processes, and both construct and reconstruct the context. The literature in regard to this finding indicates that a concrete and context-free understanding is also indicative of a beginner's understanding of supervision (Hawkins et al., 1989; Kadushin, 1992a; Brown et al., 1996).

This elementary knowledge and understanding was further exemplified by the findings in regard to knowledge of professional supervision theories and models, which revealed that the participants either had little knowledge, or could not articulate their knowledge. The clear implication of this finding was that the participants' philosophy of professional supervision was uninformed.

Finally, the findings in relation to the skills identified as important in professional supervision, were those generally ascribed to social workers and related to the expressive aspects of the supervisory relationship, particularly empathy and reflective or active listening skills. These findings support an elementary understanding of professional supervision through their predominate focus on the expressive and supportive aspects of supervision. This trait is particularly identified in the literature with beginning practitioners who tend to have higher levels of supervisory anxiety and a need for reassurance (Hawkins et al., 1989; Kadushin, 1992a; Munson, 1993; Brown et al., 1996).

### Lack of Alignment

There was a clear lack of alignment between the participants' philosophy and that expressed in the organisation's supervision policy. This lack of alignment was revealed in the participants' definitions and descriptions of the functions of professional supervision. None of the participants' definitions equated with the agency's definition of professional supervision, and only one participant's description of the functions equated with that of the agency. The lack of alignment was further shown in the findings on the role and place of professional supervision, which revealed differing opinions amongst the participants in regard to the specific role and place of professional supervision within the organisation. These differing views tended to reflect thoughts about the culture of continuous change, the separation of managerial from professional supervision, and the organisational culture and environment in which the Community Probation Service now operates.

### Experiences of Professional Supervision

The three key findings of this section were: first, that the participants had minimal recent experience of professional supervision; second, that the participants' experience of the agency's professional supervision policy development and implementation raised for them issues related to the credibility of the policy and its effectiveness; and finally, that the participants' experience of the context was paradoxical in that, on the one hand, the context revealed an increased demand for professional supervision, whilst on the other hand, it revealed a reduced ability to supply professional supervision. Each of these three key findings is briefly elaborated upon and discussed below.

#### Minimal Recent Experience

The participants' minimal recent experience of professional supervision was evident in the finding that there was not a consistent form of delivery of professional supervision, and no standard method of provision. This finding was further supported by the varied reports of the participants who stated that they had had no supervision, had only administrative supervision with their managers, had both administrative and professional supervision with their managers, had experienced participation in only informal peer group arrangements,

and/or had had external professional supervision. Only three out of ten probation officers reported they had recently participated in formal professional supervision, whilst a fourth officer reported he had recently finished external supervision and was participating only in an informal peer group arrangement. Among the five service managers, only one was a recipient of supervision. Two service managers provided professional supervision but did not receive any supervision themselves. The other two managers purchased external supervision for their respective teams. In terms of whether professional supervision was actually provided, the findings indicated that this was dependant upon the commitment of individual managers to purchase or provide it, or the individual respondent's initiative coupled with managerial support. Overall, the respondents' recent experience revealed inadequate professional supervision.

#### Supervision Policy Development and Implementation

The policy development process was not transparent and reflected the cognitive interests of management, rather than those of clients and field staff of the organisation. In general, it was found that: the reasons or rationale for the recommendations of the professional supervision policy project team and subsequent management decisions in relation to the policy, were not clear to the participants; that the participants were not aware of the terms of reference of the professional supervision project; and finally, that attempts made in the policy development process by participants to gain ownership were unsuccessful. This finding essentially highlights that management's interests more significantly influenced the construction of professional supervision in this organisation, than did those of the professional staff.

The policy implementation process was reported to be unclear and fraught with practical difficulties. The most alarming of these difficulties was the inconsistent selection or volunteering process for professional supervisors, and the limited investment made by the agency in the professional development of its managers, supervisors and supervisees. In particular, the selection or volunteering process for supervisors undermined the credibility of the supervision policy. Very few people reportedly put themselves forward, and some of those that did, were of questionable ability according to colleagues. The essential issue was that there was not a clear process used to designate and accredit

professional supervisors despite the agency's reliance on its supervisors' competency standard. Clearly, these findings raise questions in regard to the criteria and process by which professional supervisors are designated or accredited in social service agencies where new public management dominates.

Supervisor development was found to be limited to a three-day training course followed by a review day a few months later. The view of the majority of the participants was that this amount of training was inadequate. This finding also raises questions in relation to the provision of professional supervision training, particularly in regard to the accreditation of training providers and course standards.

A further finding was that supervisees and managers received only written communications and no training about how to optimise professional supervision. This was particularly significant, given that the participants emphasised that they had not experienced a culture of professional supervision. They clearly indicated that they had been informed of the policy without any formative experiences (Community Corrections Service, 1997b; 1998b). In the social service supervision literature, Proctor et al. (1988) specifically address what skills supervisees require to ensure that they maximise the benefits of professional supervision. In particular, Proctor et al. (1988) identify the supervisee's requirement to have a clear understanding of their needs, and to negotiate with supervisors in regard to both the type and boundaries of supervision. Also identified was the need for supervisees to be responsible for their level of personal disclosure in supervision, and the need to prepare for sessions. Finally, Proctor et al. (1988) explored the area of receiving feedback, and strategies for understanding what is said, and deciding whether it is applicable or not. It appears that none of these requirements were being met among the participants in this study.

#### Experience and Impact of Context

The participants' experiences revealed that the management practices they experienced reflected "new public management" (Boston et al., 1996). The most significant of these management practices was the separation of professional workers from management.

Another issue raised was the limited ability of senior managers to receive feedback, listen, understand and empathise with their staff. This finding also appeared to relate to the

participants' experiences of the organisational culture, which they outlined as a bureaucratic, crisis culture unsupportive of professional supervision (Hawkins et al., 1989; Beddoe et al., 1994; Beddoe, 1997a;1997b). All fifteen respondents presented an unflattering picture of the organisational culture with some participants referring to a recent climate survey which portrayed the culture as "being quite cold, unsympathetic, unsupportive of staff." The culture described was also one where professional supervision becomes a source of quick fix solutions amidst a host of competing demands (Hawkins et al., 1989; Beddoe et al., 1994; Beddoe, 1997a; 1997b).

In regard to the impact of social policy, the findings identified themes found elsewhere in the social policy literature of Aotearoa/New Zealand - namely, the reduced welfare state; greater accountability; increased individual responsibility; and the impact of de-institutionalisation (Cheyne et al., 1997; Shannon, 1991). In such a "turbulent environment", the need for supervision was intensified. However, this need is met with a paradoxical reduction in the resources available, which in turn has an affect upon supervision practice (Hughes et al., 1997; Kadushin, 1992a; Munson, 1993). The key finding from the participants' experience of the context, was that management practices, organisational culture and social policy, reinforced the need for professional supervision, yet, at the same time, each factor was also a restraining force upon that need.

### Aspirations and Expectations of Supervision

There were three key findings in regard to the participants' aspirations and expectations. Firstly, they expected professional supervision to assist them to work more effectively with clients/staff. Secondly, they expected good committed supervisors that would develop and support them. Thirdly, they also expected the agency to support professional supervision through the provision of sufficient resources, guidance and quality assurance in terms of a clear accreditation process for supervisors, and through the establishment of a learning/developmental organisational culture that supported professional supervision.

### Professional Supervision Expectations

The major finding in this section was that the participants expected that professional supervision would assist them to work more effectively with clients and, in the case of service managers, with staff. They wanted supervision that met the needs of supervisees, rather than the contract-focussed supervision found in the Community Probation Policy, which arguably meets the needs of management (Community Probation Service, 1998a; 1998b). This desire was most apparent in the findings in relation to expected content, process and structures of professional supervision.

The expected content was one where the participants could discuss: (a) clients and their work with clients; (b) themselves in relation to their work; (c) their training and professional development; and (d) feedback on observed work. The supervision process expected was very similar to the structure of a social work interview, with a preparatory phase, an introductory phase, a phase where the purpose or the agenda is clarified and ordered, a working phase and a review or ending phase.

In terms of structures, the participants named three domains where they wanted supervision structures, namely: frequency; length of supervision sessions; and mode of delivery. The participants expected structures that would be flexible and responsive to their individual personal supervision needs. This flexibility and responsiveness was also apparent in the mode of delivery findings, with individual supervision desired by most participants. However, mixed views were expressed on whether it should be delivered by supervisors (either peers or managers) from within the agency, or by supervisors external to the agency. Nine respondents expected external supervision, with the remaining six opting for internally provided supervision. The main point that was evident was that respondents expected good supervision, which was individually suited to their needs.

### Good Committed Supervisors

The participants expected supervisors to have a sound professional background, to undertake a range of roles that would support and develop the supervisee, and to be committed to the supervision. The sound background expected by the participants included suitable qualifications, relevant experience in the field, and highly developed personal attributes and interpersonal skills. The roles the participants expected their supervisors to

perform appeared to be in two categories those that were developmental and those that were supportive of the supervisee. This finding further reinforces that the participants expected that their supervisors would provide support and professional development, and as a natural consequence, assist them to provide better service to clients. Finally, a high level of commitment to professional supervision was expected. This commitment would be manifested in the keeping of appointments and preparation for supervision sessions. Overall, the portrait of the desired supervisor outlined by the participants echoed Kadushin's (1992:339) maxim that, "good supervisors are available, accessible, affable, and able".

### Agency Support

The participants' expectations of agency support for professional supervision raised three main areas - resourcing, guidelines and quality assurance processes, and an organisational culture supportive of professional supervision. Expectations in terms of resourcing were that the supervision programme would be adequately resourced through funds being made available to pay for external supervisors, supervision training, and to reduce work pressure so that staff could make the most of the supervision provided. A theme that emerged from these expectations was that there was a clear gap between what the participants wanted and what they perceived the agency was delivering and able to deliver.

The participants' expectations concerning agency guidelines and quality assurance process, focused upon staff having choices in terms of their professional supervisors, guidelines for the practice of supervision, and a transparent appointment or accreditation process. In general, the participants wanted the agency to ensure that their supervisory needs were met in the most effective manner.

The participants' aspirations and expectations of organisational culture were for an environment in which professional supervision would be supported and would thrive. The characteristics of their desired organisational culture were that it had a high degree of trust, was positive, open, best practice focused and promoted investing in staff. The type of organisational culture desired, appeared to be similar to the learning/developmental culture outlined in the literature by Hawkins et al. (1989) and Beddoe (1997a).

## **Implications of Key Findings**

Upon reflection, it appears that the underlying message from all of the findings reported was that good professional supervision was expected and that the participants' wanted the agency to do all that it could to facilitate this, because they believed it would benefit the clients and staff of the Community Probation Service. In these terms the key findings signal significant challenges for the development of professional supervision within the "new public management" of the Community Probation Service.

The implications derived from the key findings are that: field staff and management need to be socialised into professional supervision; the professional supervision programme as currently implemented is unlikely to be successful; and professional supervision needs to be focused upon persons and their environments, rather than agency focused practice.

### **Socialisation of Staff**

The need for socialisation of field staff and management appears to be in two arenas the organisational and professional.

In the organisational arena, the need for socialisation into professional supervision appears present in the lack of alignment of participants' perspectives with that of the agency. This lack of alignment in regard to professional supervision, appeared to be related to the way in which the organisation's professional supervision programme was introduced without any formative experiences of professional supervision to draw upon. In other words, the organisation's past experience was not reframed in the light of a new situation (Rich, 1993). Essentially, it appears that the professional supervision programme was developed and implemented without an adequate assessment of staff's experiences, knowledge, skills and expectations of professional supervision being completed. Furthermore, it seems that the purpose, objectives, and desired outcomes of the supervision programme were not well understood. The most likely result of this situation is that professional supervision practice will lack consistency, and that individuals or groups of individuals are likely to participate in professional supervision in a variety of ways which do not align with the agency's policy or purpose.

The challenge for the Community Probation Service is to develop consistency of purpose across the organisation in regard to its professional supervision (Covey, 1991; Nelson et al., 1996). To achieve this, the organisation needs to review its professional supervision programme and dialogue with the key stakeholders - the probation officers and service managers about their supervision experiences, knowledge, skills and expectations. Based on the responses from the participants in this study, I would suggest that such a review should be conducted by professional social service consultants or academics external from the agency.

In the professional arena, the need for socialisation arises from the low level of professionalisation apparent within the Community Probation Service. Bracey (1981) particularly highlighted this point, and argued that probation officers were not highly professionalised, with only limited commitment to the social work profession through membership or active involvement in the New Zealand Association of Probation Officers (NZAPO), or the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW). Knipe-Ackermann (1997) further reinforced this point by questioning the extent to which probation officers are aligned with the social work profession, and the extent to which the social work profession embraces probation. In the research findings, this low level of professionalisation is most acutely apparent in the findings related to construction of professional supervision within the organisation, which indicated that management's interests were more significant in shaping professional supervision than those of the profession. It is argued that professional supervision, as constructed in the Community Probation Service, is not professional supervision but agency focused practice supervision, because it is constructed upon the basis of the agency's interests rather than those of the profession.

The implications of this low level of professionalisation are that the professional supervision practice is likely to be conducted upon the basis of bureaucratic requirements rather than best-practice, and that it is likely to be reductionist, with a technical rationalist focus, rather than one based in critical reflective practice (Dale, 1997; Ellis, 1998).

The socialisation of staff who are not highly professionalised into "professional supervision" as constructed by the social work profession rather than the agency, presents a considerable challenge which involves a three way commitment involving field staff,

management and the professional bodies. The challenge for probation officers and service managers is to develop their professional identity through membership and active participation in a professional body (either ANZASW or NZAPO). This will require education and training programmes on the theory and practice of supervision, as well as accessing the local and international literature on professional supervision in the social services (O'Donoghue, 1998a).

Management's challenge in regard to the socialisation of staff in the professional arena is twofold. The first challenge is to support the probation officers and service managers' development of their professional identity through its employment policies, and through a monetary contribution towards the staff's professional membership fees. From the author's experience these practices are commonplace in the health and community sector. The second challenge is to develop effective working relationships with the professional bodies, which facilitate the involvement of professional expertise in practice policy and standards development.

For the professional bodies, the challenges are to clarify their relationships, the development of policy statements and standards, and the establishment of a professional credentialling and accreditation process for professional supervisors and supervisor training programmes. ANZASW and NZAPO need to establish a clear supportive relationship. This might be achieved through a formal agreement or through NZAPO being affiliated to ANZASW. The key point in the research was that NZAPO was unable to significantly influence the policy development, whilst ANZASW appears not to have been involved at all, which again reflects the low level of professionalisation in the service. A further factor, which may also be contributing to the situation, is that social work is not a registered profession in Aotearoa/New Zealand, despite the recent efforts of ANZASW towards this. Registration may have an effect on the practice of professional supervision through formal legitimisation of the professional knowledge and skill base, thereby challenging reductionist practice approaches, which have links with the knowledge and skill base of other professions, particularly management and accounting (Randal, 1997). A further implication would be that, in terms of practice matters, the professional bodies are in a stronger position to advocate on behalf of the profession. It may also provide an increased entrée into agency policy-making processes (Randal, 1997). Whether registration

is achieved or not, the challenge remains to both professional bodies to strengthen their positions as guardians of professional supervision practice.

The development and publication of policy and standards is another means by which the professional bodies can socialise the staff of the Community Probation Service to professional supervision as understood by the profession. In this area, the ANZASW published a policy statement on supervision, and has published standards in relation to social work supervision courses (NZASW, 1998b; 1998c). Public promotion of these documents to both members of the profession and the agencies, would aid the socialisation of staff into professional supervision.

A longer-term challenge for the professional groups is to reclaim professional supervision through the development of credentialing of professional supervisors, and the accreditation of training providers. At present in Aotearoa/New Zealand, there are no processes for credentialing supervisors or accrediting training providers. Overseas, particularly in the United States, the professional body provides credentialing for social workers, but it does not specifically provide any credentialing for social work supervisors (Munson, 1993). In terms of accreditation of training providers in the United States, there is a specific body - the Council on Social Education whose role includes the accreditation of Bachelors and Masters of Social Work education programmes (Munson, 1993). In the literature reviewed, there was no mention made of accreditation of supervisor education and training providers, except as part of BSW and MSW programmes. This literature indicates that social work supervision tends to be given only scant attention in such programmes (Kadushin, 1992a; Munson, 1993).

The local situation in regard to the accreditation of training providers is a complex one. The Industry Training Organisation (ITO), Te Kaiawhina Ahumahi, for social services, accredits providers of the National Diploma and National Certificate courses according to a mandate given by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) (Ellis, 1998). The attention given to provision of social work supervision within this framework is also scant and somewhat limited, with only two unit standards within qualifications set at undergraduate level (Ellis, 1998). According to Ellis (1998), the university based social work programmes remained outside the NZQA framework, and continued to explore alternative accreditation arrangements such as through the professional association or by

the establishment of a model like that of the United States, where there is a specific accrediting body. Currently in Aotearoa/New Zealand, training and education in professional supervision is delivered through a proliferation of short courses provided by independent providers and the Central Institute of Technology. In terms of in-depth formal education and training, the Auckland College of Education and Massey University provide the only substantial programmes aimed at social work graduates (O'Donoghue, 1998a). The heart of the credentialing and accreditation issue, in terms of the practice of professional supervision, is that supervisors and training providers are professionally reputable. The research findings imply that short three or four day courses are not creditable professionally, and in the current managerial environment are likely to represent the interests of the purchaser rather than best professional practice. The research findings emphasise that there is no clear mechanism to ensure that, in the new managerial climate, supervisors and the supervision training providers are reputable. It is argued that, for the profession to maintain the creditability of professional supervision, it needs to establish a process of credentialing supervisors, and an accreditation process for education and training providers. One means of establishing the credentialing of supervisors is through the ANZASW competency programme (Beddoe, 1997a). The matter of accreditation of training providers appears to be an issue that is more complex. My preferred approach would be for the professional body to facilitate the establishment of an independent body to accredit education and training programmes on social work supervision. The professional association has moved slightly towards that path with the production of its suggested standards for supervision training courses (NZASW, 1998c).

### Professional Supervision Programme

The implication that professional supervision practice within the Community Probation Service is unlikely to achieve the aspirations of the General Manager, namely that it is "Crucial to effective interaction with offenders to achieve the reduction in reoffending" (Community Corrections, 1997b), is based upon the findings pertaining to the experiences of the probation officers and service managers. It is argued that the supervision practice will be ineffective because of the lack of a best practice culture in the organisation, and that it is not a managerial and/or political priority.

### Lack of Best Practice

The research findings indicate that the professional supervision programme appears to be driven on the basis of expediency and efficiency, rather than on best national and international practice. The expediency and efficiency roots of the programme are most evident in the findings related to policy development and implementation. The policy was developed in a tight timeframe, implemented using a volunteering process for supervisors, with limited investment in workforce development. Little attempt was made by the organisation to establish what was best practice in the field of social service supervision (Community Corrections, 1997a). The lack of a best practice supervision culture was also apparent in the research respondents' elementary understanding of professional supervision, and their lack of professional supervision experience.

The likely practice outcomes are that supervision will tend to focus on supporting the worker, rather than facilitating best client practice. It is also likely to be influenced by the parties' personalities and issues, rather than practice content. The role of direct observation of client practice is unlikely to occur, because supervisors will tend to base supervision upon reports of work and review of file notes, particularly as the process of professional supervision was poorly understood. Finally, there will be reliance by supervisors on agency norms, policies and procedures, rather than best professional practice (Kadushin, 1992a; Rich, 1993; Brown et al., 1996; O'Donoghue, 1998a).

The challenge for the agency is to establish a role structure that supports best professional practice, perhaps similar to that present in the Children, Young Persons and their Families Agency, where there is a chief social worker and practice consultants. A best practice culture for professional supervision within the Community Probation Service, would be more likely to develop if practice consultants were established in each of the sixteen areas, with these practice consultants being supported by a Chief Probation Officer whose focus is the professional practice of the Service.

### Managerial and Political Priorities

The research findings imply that the professional supervision programme will be unsuccessful because it was not a priority either managerially or politically. Essentially, the

findings imply that new public management and libertarian social policy set both the managerial and political agenda within the Community Probation Service. This agenda is one of fiscal restraint, output accountability and risk management (Kelsey, 1993; Garwood, 1994; Boston et al., 1996). The findings also implied that there was a clear separation between the management and professional lines of the agency, and it was argued that this separation is detrimental to the professional practice of the agency (Gowdy et al., 1993).

The impact of supervision being a low priority, was that the project was under-resourced, and its success was based on quantified outputs. Examples of these outputs were the number of staff receiving professional supervision, and the supervisor competency standard which measured the elements of establishing, implementing and ending a supervision contract (Community Probation Service, 1998a; Community Corrections Service, 1997a).

Another implication is that it is unlikely that the supervision will be of a high quality, because it is not adequately resourced and supported. It is also likely that the reported experiences of the participants of inadequate and infrequent supervision will be repeated.

The challenge for both management and politicians, is to reprioritise services so that they are service-user centred rather than purchaser focused. It is argued that until this type of paradigm shift occurs best professional practice will struggle to develop under the large cloud of managerialism.

### Persons in Their Environments Supervision Practice

The key findings in regard to the participants' aspirations and expectations imply a need for professional supervision practice that is focused upon persons in their environments, rather than supervision that is dominated by the organisational context.

This requires that supervision be reconceptualised in terms of professional practice, rather than in organisational or management terms (Brashears, 1995). It also recognises the influence that the various contexts (e.g., personal, practice, team, managerial, organisational, professional and political) have upon the principal actors (clients, supervisee, supervisor, and agency) (Tsui et al., 1997). In other words, persons in their environments supervision practice works in the same manner that social work practice

does; it assesses and intervenes in the intrapersonal, personal, interpersonal, and social systems arenas. In doing so, it also addresses, mediates and reconstructs the effects that the ecological environment has on the person and their situation (Turner, 1996). Professional supervision practice, constructed in this manner, also draws from a wide knowledge base of theoretical concepts and models of practice. In terms of actual supervision practice, the persons in their environments approach stimulates critical reflective supervision because it recognises the impact of the social and political context upon clients, workers and the organisation (Ellis, 1998; Fook, 1996; Drew, 1987; Freire, 1974). This type of critical reflection is more likely to result in intervention that attends to clients', supervisees' 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). The literature emphasises that professional supervision of this kind requires a high degree of integration in terms of practice experience, theoretical knowledge and practice skills (Brown et al., 1996).

The challenges that persons in their environments supervision practice presents to the Community Probation Service and other social service agencies, is that firstly it requires a professionally trained workforce (Munson, 1993). This challenge relates directly to the Community Probation Services recruitment policy, and calls for the reintroduction of social work qualifications as a prerequisite. It also argues for those currently employed without such qualifications to be professionally educated.

Secondly, it requires the development of a best practice supervision culture that is lead by professional supervisors who are experts in professional practice (Munson, 1993). The clear challenge here, is to develop the practice expertise of those who are to become professional supervisors. The most effective way in which this could be easily achieved, is to ensure that the internal supervisors are supervised externally from the organisation by professional supervisors who are recognised for their level of practice expertise.

Thirdly, it challenges social service organisations' construction of professional supervision in terms of contractual arrangements, and as an agency function (Drew, 1987). Arguably, the professional supervision in the Community Probation Service, is not professional supervision. It is agency focused practice supervision. This challenge to resist the reductionism of professional supervision not only relates to social service

organisations, but falls squarely on the shoulders of the profession and its members. The challenge to the Community Probation Service, if it wishes to have professional practice supervision, is to support the professionals and the professional bodies in establishing structures that facilitate professional practice supervision. Again, on a practical level, the agency could support and foster membership of professional organisations such as ANZASW or NZAPO through its employment policies. For the professionals and the professional bodies, the challenge is one of reclaiming professional supervision as their own. One strategy that professionals could use is to put the payment of professional organisation fees and the payment of external professional supervision as claims in employment contract negotiations. For the professional bodies, the challenge as guardians of professional supervision involves raising the consciousness of workers to the difference between professional practice supervision and agency practice supervision (Beddoe et al., 1994; Beddoe, 1997a; 1997b).

### **Future Research Areas**

Five key questions that warrant further research arise from this thesis. Firstly, what occurs in the actual practice of supervision in the Community Probation Service and other agencies? Second, what is the relationship between supervision and client outcomes? Thirdly, what professional supervision frameworks and approaches facilitate best supervision practice in Aotearoa/New Zealand? The fourth question is what makes a creditable supervisor, and what is creditable supervisor training? The final question is what is the impact of new managerialism upon professional social service practice?

### **The Actual Practice**

The findings of this thesis, which are based on reported perspectives, reveal a need for future research into the actual practice of supervision in the Community Probation Service and other social services in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Both nationally and internationally, very little research has been undertaken into what actually transpires in professional supervision. Tsui (1997a) emphasises that the actual practice of supervision has been difficult to obtain empirical data on, because it is embedded in an organisational context that is not conducive to direct participant observation. Future research into the actual

practice of supervision is also necessary in terms of the development of theory and practice models within the various fields of practice within the social services.

### The Relationship between Supervision and Client Outcomes

According to the literature reviewed, only one study has been undertaken in relation to supervision and clients' outcomes (Harkness et al., 1991). This dearth of research, together with the findings and implications of this study, which infer that supervision is not a managerial and political priority within the social service environment in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and that agency focused supervision is constructed as professional supervision, reinforces the need for future empirical research on the clients' outcomes in relation to both professional and agency-focused supervision.

### Professional Supervision Frameworks

The need for future research into the development of professional frameworks from within our own cultural context, has been highlighted via the findings in relation to the participants' philosophy of professional supervision, that revealed an elementary understanding which focused on content to the detriment of process and context. This need is further exacerbated by the implication that supervision, as constructed by the profession, is being reconstructed by agencies in a reductionist form. Another reason for further research in this area, is that it is dominated by authors from the northern hemisphere. This domination means that their frameworks, which do not take into account the Treaty of Waitangi and the uniqueness of our bicultural setting, have shaped supervision practice in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Future research into professional supervision frameworks is needed to ensure that professional supervision in our context is relevant towards those it serves, namely clients, staff, agency, profession, and the community.

### Creditability of Supervisors and Supervisor Training

The research findings and their implications signal that the creditability of professional supervisors and supervision training is a question of significance in relation to the Community Probation Service professional supervision programme, and for the wider social service environment in Aotearoa/New Zealand. In regard to future research related

to the creditability of supervisors, such a topic could be approached using a qualitative methodology which looked at the perspectives of clients, supervisees, supervisors, agency management and the professional body. Future research in relation to supervisor training needs to be evaluative in approach, and ought to examine how effective the trained supervisors are at assisting supervisees to help clients obtain better outcomes.

### **New Managerialism's Effect Upon Professional Practice**

This thesis has inferred that new managerialism has effected professional supervision practice in the Community Probation Service in a negative way. An inference of this kind demands further research, particularly in the area of the business or generic management and professional practice interface. Key areas that future research ought to be aimed at are the influence of business or generic management in the social services upon client outcome, worker satisfaction and productivity versus the influence that managers who have retained their social service professional identity have on the same variables.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, the research objectives, the methodology and the key research findings were reviewed as the entrée to the discussion of the implications of this study and identification of areas where future research is required. The major implications of this study were identified as:

- a need for staff to be socialised both organisationally and professionally into professional supervision;
- that the professional supervision programme within the Community Probation Service, as currently implemented, is unlikely to be successful; and
- that professional supervision needs to be focused upon persons and their environments, rather than agency focused practice.

These implications signal strongly that the road ahead for professional supervision under new public management within the Community Probation Service and the wider social service environment, is one which has significant challenges. The areas for future research

that were identified provide opportunities for future researchers to delve deeper into these challenges.

In concluding this thesis I am reminded of a remark I made in a previous study; namely that “social work supervision in this country is under threat from managerialism” (O’Donoghue, 1998a: 92). The process of completing this study has enabled me to reflect on that remark, and I have revised my opinion. If I was to write that statement today I would say that “managerialism has challenged the social work profession to become the guardian and advocate of professional supervision practice”. What I take with me from this study is an enlightened understanding of a statement made by one of my past professional supervisors (Cockburn, 1994:37):

Professional supervision as it is traditionally defined by the social work profession itself is a necessity and cannot be replaced by managerial-oriented solutions.