

Mentor Development & Supervision: “A Passionate Joint Enquiry”

By Lis Merrick & Paul Stokes

Abstract – In this article, the authors examine the relationship between the developing experience of the mentor against the formality and functions of supervision required in mentoring. They develop a conceptual schema for mentor development and supervision, which is offered to practitioners and mentoring researchers as a starting point for further discussion and research.

Introduction

What is mentor supervision? How might we think about this in relation to mentor development? These are the questions we seek to address in this article as we explore what mentoring supervision might mean and what functions it can perform in mentoring. John Rowan in Inskipp and Proctor (1995) describes supervision as “a passionate joint enquiry” (p. 4), which is an interesting label for what is developing into a new and perhaps slightly controversial trend in the field of mentoring. However, Hess (1980) comes closest in our view to offering us a clue as to why supervision in mentoring is worthy of discussion. He defines supervision as “a quintessential interpersonal interaction with the general goal that one person, the supervisor, meets with another, the supervisee, in an effort to make the latter more effective in helping people” (Hawkins and Shohet, 2002 p. 50).

In other words, he recognises that all professional helpers - including mentors - need to address their own skills development so as to continue to be effective. This seems persuasive enough to merit further investigation of what mentoring supervision might mean and how it might be useful.

Whilst Feasey (2002, p. 2) points out that: “the concept of supervision has existed in the world of work and learning, especially the learning of skills and tasks, for as long as the recorded history of work has existed”, supervision is a relatively new field of practice within mentoring. This is somewhat surprising given that - as is often pointed out - the origins of mentoring go back to Greek mythology. This may be because - as Feltham (2000) and Stokes (2003) discuss - like counselling, mentoring is becoming increasingly governed by national standards and frameworks, as part of a desire to ‘professionalise’ mentoring. Whatever, the drivers for this trend, supervision is developing into a prominent topic in mentoring.

Although mentor supervision is a new practice, it is nevertheless a well-defined feature within the world of counselling, social work and psychotherapy. It is predominantly from these areas of work that the ensuing discussion on supervision will be drawn from.

What is Supervision?

A mentor supervisor appears to mean many things, but the common themes taken from two recent focus sessions with a cross section of mentoring practitioners, led by one of the authors in May and June 2003 include:

- Being a mentor to the mentors,
- Being able to explore techniques and help with problems,
- An opportunity to reflect on own practice,
- To support a mentor who feels out of their depth,
- As a mark of good practice for the profession,
- To support with ethical issues,
- To be available for the mentor as an emotional safety valve.

This echoes Barrett's (2002) work, which puts forward the following benefits of being supervised:

- Preventing personal burn-out,
- A celebration of what I do,
- Demonstrating skill/knowledge,
- Helping me to focus on my blind-spot(s),
- Discovering my own pattern of behaviours,
- Developing skills as a mentor,
- A quality control process; and
- Providing a different angle on an issue.

Barrett's (2002) work aside, there has been relatively little attention focused on mentoring supervision in the mentoring literature. However, the importance of the supervision role is apparent in other helping professions, with critical discussions emerging in psychoanalysis (Kutter 2002); medicine (Marrow et al, 2002); education (Blasé & Blasé, 2002) & social work (Maidment & Cooper, 2002). This critical reflexivity may be due to changes in the way other helpers understand the supervision process. For example, Law (2000), when exploring counselling, argues that "the original concept of supervision as primarily an element of training has altered and its role as a means of providing monitoring, support and education for counsellors throughout their careers has taken on greater significance" (p. 27). This suggests a more holistic view of helping through supervision than simply training or advising hence drawing it closer to mentoring in terms of its breadth of scope. In this vein, Feasey (2002) argues:

"The supervisor is very much a mentor and model for the counsellor in training. She models emphatic attention and the ability to offer insightful reflection as well as to inculcate the values of the counselling code." (p. xi).

This widening of the notion of supervision in other professions has coincided with increasing concerns with how mentors might be developed within the mentoring community (see Garvey & Alred, 2000 for a useful discussion of educating mentors). Hence, there seems to be a general readiness to explore what supervision means for a range of such professions/disciplines and what roles/functions it might fulfil.

Kadushin (1976) in his work on social work supervision describes the three roles of supervision as “educative, supportive and managerial”. Similarly, Proctor (1988) in considering counselling supervision, uses the terms “formative, restorative and normative”. Hawkins and Shohet (2002) have linked these processes to create three main functions for supervision in the helping professions:

- Educative/Formative, which develops the skills, understanding and abilities of the supervisees by encouraging reflection on their work.
- Supportive/Restorative, which concentrates on allowing the supervisee time to become aware of how the impact of the work they are involved in is affecting them and to deal with these reactions and emotions.
- Managerial/Normative, which in reality is the quality assurance aspect of supervision, the supervisor helps the supervisee to consider their work, identify their blind spots and work within ethical standards.

Whilst we might explore the issue of supervision in much more detail, our aim here is to explore the issue of mentoring supervision as distinct from supervision in other helping relationships. In this sense, Hawkins & Shohet’s (2002) categories seem sufficiently generic to use as a starting point for this discussion.

Exploring the relationship between different supervision functions in mentoring and level of mentor development

Considering the paucity of roles and functions viewed as part of *mentor* supervision, it seems important to create a conceptual framework around these ideas to assist in making sense of this subject. It makes sense to start with the literature on counselling development as Kram (1985) identifies counselling skills as an integral part of mentoring as part of its psycho-social function (see Stokes, 2003 for a more critical discussion of the relationship between counselling and mentoring).

Hawkins and Shohet (2002) offer four categories of counsellor development listed below:

- The Novice
- The Apprentice
- The Journey Person
- The Master Craftsperson

Whilst it can sometimes be unhelpful to artificially compartmentalise human development, this sort of framework is helpful as it offers a typology which the helper can compare themselves against and begin to identify for themselves what their development needs might be.

We have generated some similar stages for mentor development and offer them to be used as a device for mentoring practitioners to aid reflection on their own practice. We will use these categories to structure the following discussion on mentor development and supervision. These mentor development categories are as follows:

- Novice Mentor
- Developing Mentor
- Reflective Mentor
- Reflexive Mentor.

Each of these stages will now be explored in relation to mentor development and the implications for supervision.

The Novice Mentor

A Novice Mentor is someone who may be new to mentoring, with little or no experience of mentoring in practice. This does not mean that they are untrained or unskilled, but that they have relatively little experience as a mentor of participating in a live, dynamic human mentoring process. They may well have been mentored themselves or used mentoring skills in their work/profession but may not have thought of themselves as a mentor before. As a result, such a mentor may well have development needs that are different and distinct from more experienced mentors. For instance, they will need to become familiar with the protocols of mentoring within their particular scheme and what its aims and objectives are. They will therefore need help and support in defining/refining their approach, so that it is consistent with their scheme. Clearly, they will also need help in gaining access to the various theory and models of mentoring that exist.

Implications For Supervision

Whilst there will be a number of development agendas for the Novice Mentor, one of the important functions of the supervisor at this stage is to ensure that mentoring is operating in a way that is congruent with the aims of the scheme. This closely resembles what Hawkins & Shoher (2002) call the management/normative function of supervision.

This 'quality assurance'/audit function has two main purposes:

- To check the mentor's ability as a mentor i.e. are they using the key skills of acceptance, empathy and congruence with their mentee?
- To bestow what Feltham (2000) calls the "aura of professionalism" to ensure scheme credibility in the eyes of its sponsors

Within organisational schemes, where supervisors may be organisational members, this affords the supervisor the opportunity to intervene to avoid any damage to the mentee as well as to the reputation of the programme. This intervention is likely to be indirect i.e. helping the mentor to rectify or repair any damage done but may also be direct where the supervisor may need to intervene personally - this is where the role of supervisor and scheme organiser may be conflated, which can create difficulties and a conflict of interests. (see Megginson & Stokes, 2003)

The Developing Mentor

In one sense, all mentors might be considered to be developing and continuing to learn but in this context, the Developing Mentor is someone who can no longer be considered to be a novice, as they have some experience of mentoring 'under their belt' and understand the 'rules' within their particular scheme/context. They can use a well-known mentoring model/ process (eg Kram 1983) they can follow within a mentoring conversation and they will have an awareness of some of the skills and behaviours required by an effective mentor (see Clutterbuck & Megginson, 1999 for examples of skills/roles involved). However, this knowledge and repertoire of behaviours is basic and their comfort zone as a mentor is still fairly limited and confined to small repertoire of behaviours.

Implications For Supervision

At this stage, the Developing Mentor needs to start to identify other ways of mentoring so as to expand their effectiveness as a mentor. The supervisor may therefore need to pay more attention to supporting the mentor in their process development and in recognising the dynamics within a mentoring relationship. This closely resembles what Hawkins & Shohet (2002) refer to as the educative/formative supervision role. The supervisor will need to model some of the behaviours involved in order to help the mentor acquire these skills and may indeed coach them specifically in these areas where appropriate.

The supervisor needs to support the mentor in identifying a mentoring process that is effective for them to utilise and working with them to aid their understanding of the different phases and stages of the process, skills required etc.

Pilgrim and Treacher (1992) identify this as more effective than a formal training programme, arguing that "much more emphasis should be placed on the training function of the supervisor and far less on formal teaching" (p. 105). In this sense, we are comfortable with calling this the Training Supervision function.

Interestingly, one of the authors (Merrick) is working closely with Deutsche Telekom on their "Mentoring for Women" programme in Germany, where no

formal training takes place, but mentor supervision is utilised on a monthly basis to “train” the mentors in the process and skills required.

Gaining an awareness of the boundaries of the relationship and what skills they are required to use is particularly important for the Developing Mentor. Mentors who are able to participate in a comprehensive programme of mentor training may have gained much of this knowledge on the programme, but not necessarily had the time for experiential role and real play to practise the process and skills sufficiently. They may be in the situation of practising their skills in their real life mentoring relationship, similar to the Deutsche Telekom example. Or perhaps, they may have received minimal training to become a mentor initially. The supervisor needs to explore these development needs with their supervisee and help them to identify ways of fulfilling them.

The supervisor is still holding a definite position of power in this relationship with the mentor. The meetings may be part of a course of meetings, which have been pre-arranged and the supervisor is clearly looking for a level of development, which might need to be formally recorded within certain mentoring schemes.

The Reflective Mentor

The Reflective Mentor is someone who has a fair amount of experience as a mentor and has successfully extended their repertoire of skills beyond that of the Developing Mentor.

They are probably aware of most of the different approaches to mentoring theory and practice and have developed an awareness of context and their own identity as a mentor within the mentoring community. They are now in the position, on the basis of both their experience of mentoring and of being supervised, to begin to critically reflect upon their own practice and to further develop their skills and understanding of different mentoring approaches, drawing from other mentors, their supervisor and from other helping professions.

This process should have begun to some extent within the Developing Mentor stage but becomes central at this stage. It is distinct from the Developing Mentor stage in that the Reflective Mentor would have had the chance to reflect on some of their experience as a mentor through the lens of their supervisory discussions. Hence, the Reflective Mentor is someone who has begun to take some responsibility for thinking about and directing their own development as a mentor and who has started to incorporate ideas developed within supervision and elsewhere into their mentoring practice.

Implications for Supervision

One of the important aspects of effective supervision for the Reflective Mentor is that the supervisor is able to demonstrate emphatic attention and insightful reflection to the mentor. Mary Cox writes in Feasey (2002): “What I want from my supervisor is intelligent listening, experienced reflection, realistic

mirroring, perceptive confrontation and a sense of personal warmth and humour” (p. 141).

This development function is a combination of Hawkins & Shohet’s (2002) role of Educative/Formative support and of a supportive function, where through reflecting on and exploring the supervisee’s work, the supervisor focuses on developing the skills, understanding and ability of the mentor they are supporting. Therefore, there are two changes in focus here. Firstly, the supervisor is focusing more on the mentee and the ‘work’ of the mentor whilst at the same time encouraging the mentor to begin to recognise how the mentor’s own experiences (including those as a mentor/supervisee) are beginning to impact upon their mentoring work. Secondly, the supervisor is supporting the mentor to develop their own internal critically reflexive capacity.

The Reflexive Mentor

The Reflexive Mentor is someone with considerable experience as a mentor and may even be a mentor supervisor themselves. They have developed sufficient self-awareness, , with the help of their supervisor, to critically reflect upon their own practice and to identify areas for their own development, as well as being more competent in detecting and using their own feelings within mentoring conversations to inform their practice. They are however, astute enough to recognise that there is nevertheless a need to continue with their development and to understand the dangers that lie in complacency in terms of rigidity of approach. In this sense, the Reflexive Mentor who needs supervision to assure the quality of their helping skills and to prevent blind spots or damage being done through arrogant or careless interventions.

Implications For Supervision

For the effective supervision of a Reflexive Mentor, the supervisor would need to be a highly competent, flexible and experienced mentor themselves as the range of supervision required might range from very gentle support when a problem occurs, as a ‘spot mentoring’ transaction or conversely adopting a strong critical position in order to challenge the potentially complacent supervisee. As a result, the frequency of supervision may differ, depending on the needs of the supervisee. For instance, Feltham (2000) refers to a highly experienced psychotherapist Arnold Lazarus who does not use regular supervision: “I probably ask for help or input from others mainly when I run into barriers or obstacles or when I feel out of my depth. If things are running along smoothly, why bother, but if there are some problems that make you feel lost or bewildered, or when you feel that you are doing OK, but could do better, why not bring it to the attention of somebody else, and discuss the issues?” (Dryden 1991, p. 81)

Conclusions

From the preceding discussion, we have generated (see Figure 1) a schema for mentor development and supervision, which attempts to summarise and map the key dimensions of that analysis. This schema contains a number of assumptions, which need to be articulated. Firstly, we are assuming that the mentor's development increases as they become more experienced as a mentor and as a supervisee. This is because they have more development experiences to reflect on and more opportunities as time goes to take action on the basis of these reflections. We are also assuming a decreasing level of formality and authority on the part of the supervisor as the mentor develops. This is because the mentor/supervisee becomes more adept at recognising the 'lessons' for themselves and the supervisor is used more as a sounding board/critical friend than as a careers advisor or coach (Clutterbuck & Megginson, 1999); in that sense becomes akin to the skilled mentee.

In offering the functions of mentoring supervision, we have attempted to make distinctions between the different emphasises that mentor supervision might have at different stages of a mentor's development. Hence, whilst both the Reflective and Developing Mentor need what Hawkins & Shohet (2002) refer to as educative/formative supervision, the Reflective Mentor is likely to benefit from less direct input from the supervisor than the Developing Mentor.

It is important to be clear about our claims and intentions in offering the framework. Whilst the categories generated are based on our experiences of scheme design and mentor development, they are not research based in the sense that they have been inducted from a qualitative research study of mentoring supervision. Also, many of the examples and references are drawn predominantly from the business mentoring literature and do not specifically address any differences that might occur in volunteering mentoring or mentoring in education, both of which have considerable bodies of work to accompany them. However, our hope is that our categories for supervision might generate some debate and research into how supervision might be conducted.

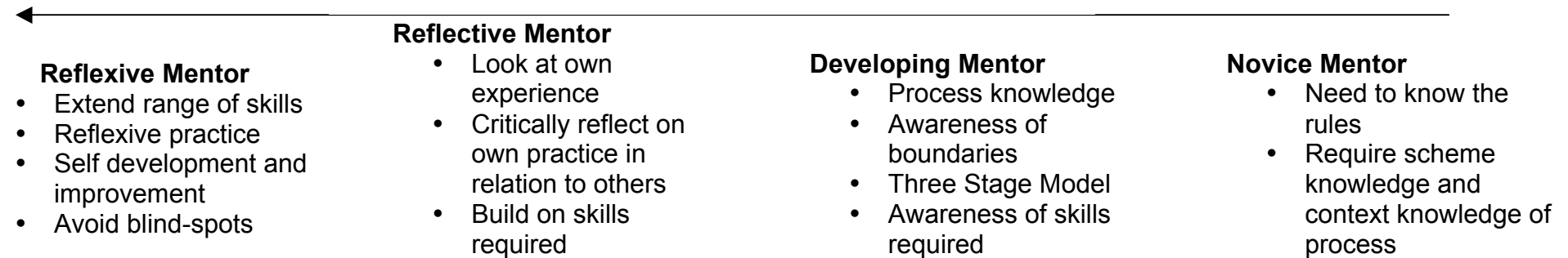
Furthermore, we have described the functions and categories of mentor as though they were clear and distinct which is likely not to be the case in practice. Our reason for doing this is to pay attention to the different needs that a mentor might have and how different aspects of supervision might be needed. However, in practice, it is likely that all four supervisory functions will be at play within the same supervisory conversation. This raises some challenges for the supervisor in practice; in particular, it raises the tensions that might arise from being responsible for quality control of mentors on the one hand and having an empowering/developmental conversation with them on the other. This is a similar tension in the mentoring relationship, particularly when line managers mentor those lower down the management hierarchy.

Indeed, there is a clear need for such research to take place and this article is not intended to take the place of that. Rather this is intended to be a conceptual framework to be used as a starting point for mentoring researchers and practitioners alike to develop their own approach to mentor development and supervision.

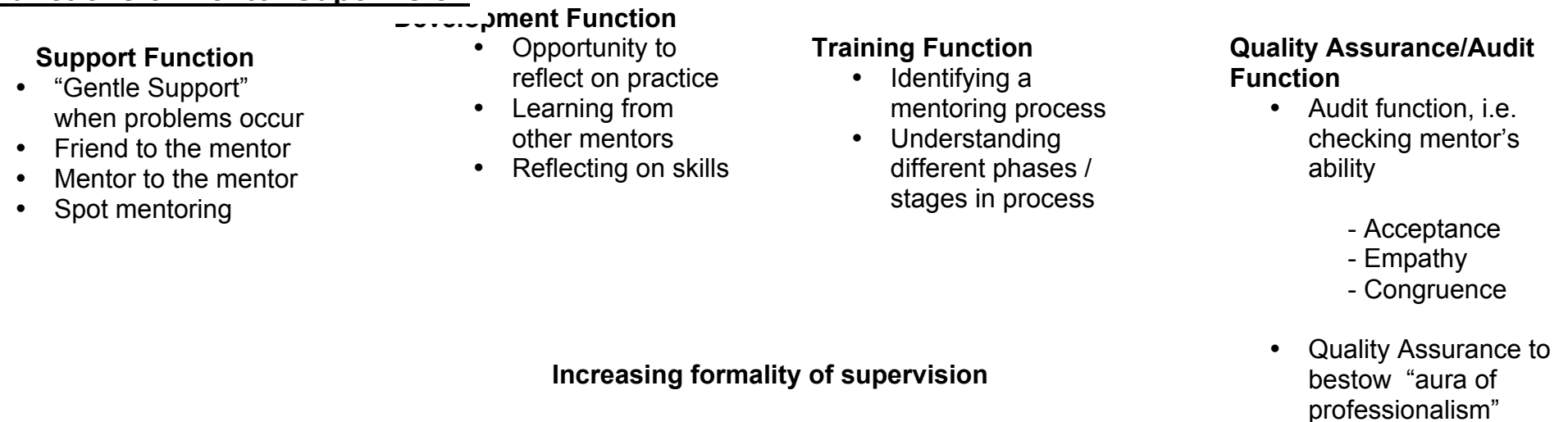
A Schema for Mentor Development and Supervision

Stages of mentor development

← Increasing mentor development



Functions of Mentor Supervision



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