

THE VALENCES OF THE SUPERVISION PROCESS WITHIN THE SOCIAL ASSISTANCE SERVICES

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Abstract: *Control or supervision, in management terms, involves setting standards and expectations, performance monitoring and performance evaluation, develop corrective actions. Control can be personal, based on direct, personal and impersonal supervision, meaning control of system results. In the field of social services, control is known as supervision, this being one of the specific characteristics of social assistance. The efficient functioning of the integrated social services system provides the implementation of the culture of professional supervision and performance evaluation for the employees of the social assistance system, organized on areas of responsibility and competence levels. Professional supervision is an important component of the social assistance system and is intended for staff who are directly involved in the provision of social services to beneficiaries. Supervision is one of the methods of periodic evaluation and allows us to observe how an activity is carried out and also shows us how to reorient it, if necessary. It is a method of observing (not a checklist or a study) the quality of the process at a given time. Supervision takes place formally at regular intervals.*

Keywords: supervision; social assistance; performance; skills; quality

1. Introduction

Professional supervision in social assistance is an intervention initiated by an experienced social worker on one with less experience in order to develop the latter and to monitor the quality of professional services provided to clients by him. Supervision is an intervention in which the less experienced social worker is supported by the supervisor to develop their skills and competencies on specific social programs.

The concept of supervision has its origins in psychotherapy and began to be used in social assistance in the 1960s / 1970s in the United States and the United Kingdom to monitor and standardize the volunteers' work. In most countries where there are modern social assistance systems, supervision is a system component, closely linked to the evaluation of the efficiency of social services provided to beneficiaries. Improving the professional performance of social workers due to supervision has a direct influence on the situation of beneficiaries and contributes to raising the quality of services provided.

One of the most effective ways of professional development of social workers is represented by the implementation of a complex supervision process in which the entire social assistance activity is followed. Through the supervision activity, a professional support relationship is built between the supervisor and the supervisee. Thus, in the professional supervision relationship, the head of the service, the supervisor and the supervisee are involved. The development and consolidation of the professional skills of social workers and social workers due to supervision contributes to raising the quality of social services provided and has a direct impact on the situation of beneficiaries and their families. In this sense, professional supervision is an essential managerial and professional activity for every structure and organization operating in the field of social assistance.

Barker defines supervision as “an administrative and educational process used in welfare agencies to support social workers to develop their skills and provide quality services to clients.” (Barker, 1995: 371-372). Supervision can be viewed from two perspectives: from the point of view of the manager and from the point of view of the social worker. Supervision, from a managerial point of view, answers questions such as: How do you know if employees are doing what they need to do? How do you know if employees are doing their job as well as possible? How do you know if employees are dealing with complex work situations? How do you know if the beneficiaries of the services you provide are satisfied?

Also, supervising, from the employee’s point of view, the social worker, means: reviewing his work to see if his expectations are met; removing the emotional load and experiences created by the work demands and getting support; concern for personal and professional needs and the development of his career (Neamțu, 2001: 54).

Supervision, as a method of professional and personal development determines the achievement of a correct case management, the accumulation of new knowledge about the theory and practice of social assistance, provides emotional support, preventing stress and exhaustion, makes teamwork, and not only, effective, and last but not least, it achieves an understanding of the beneficiary and through this, a better practical activity. Effective supervision involves: support; routing; development. Supervision is an activity with multiple objectives, which include organizational, professional and personal needs; form of professional support and peer counseling that can be offered in different forms (in individual and group meetings, formal and informal) and involve components with different responsibilities; a way to help, monitor and evaluate the employee’s activity; way to ensure compliance with professional standards for carrying out the activity in accordance with the job description, with maximum possible efficiency (both for novice employees and for those with experience).

2. Aims and objectives

The basic purpose of supervision is to facilitate the work of supervisors so that they provide, at high quality standards, the required social services. The purposes of supervision are: to ensure that the social worker knows his/her roles and responsibilities; ensure that the supervisor meets the objectives of the organization; to ensure the quality of services for beneficiaries; to develop a climate suitable for practice; to help professional development; to reduce stress; to ensure that the social worker has been provided with the necessary resources to carry out his / her activity (Morrison, 1993: 101).

In summary, the purpose of supervision in social assistance is to improve and maintain the quality of professional support provided to people in difficulty, through continuous professional development and avoiding the professional exhaustion of social workers. (Muntean, 2007: 89).

The basic objective of the supervision is to help the staff to ensure a good quality of the services offered to the beneficiaries, in the sphere of concern of the organization.

The objectives of supervision are: to maintain professional standards; tasks to be performed efficiently and effectively; to ensure a quality service; teams work well, harmoniously and achieve the proposed goals; social workers to feel fulfilled, not to encounter difficulties that affect their work, to feel supported.

3. The role and functions of supervision

Supervision is useful for: motivating staff to achieve good results; quality control from a technical point of view and from the perspective of the perception of the quality of the service by the beneficiary; staff training; getting immediate feedback and getting suggestions for process improvement.

In some organizations, the feedback provided is negative and destructive, which is useless. Constructive and appreciative feedback can provide information on the performance achieved by the individual and on how to improve it.

The supervisor has the administrative role of assigning each case of intervention to the most appropriate social worker in terms of skills and motivation. From a technical point of view, it helps the social worker to prepare the first contact with the beneficiary, to define the objectives of the intervention and to outline its project. The supervisor also helps the social worker understand the "philosophy" of the care practice and the organization in which he or she works. Last but not least, he watches over the observance of the deontological norms and carries out the final evaluation of the results of the intervention (Barker, 1995). Supervision helps the supervisee to reflect on his own situation or attitude in a given situation, acting as a mirror.

4. Supervision has three fundamental functions:

- managerial - ensuring the quality of employee performance, implementing the organization's policies according to pre-established standards, allocating an adequate workload to each social worker, adequate management of the supervisor's time;
- educational (learning) - developing professional competence, assessing the theoretical basis, skills and contribution of the social worker within the organization, assessing the training and development needs of employees and how they can be met;
- support (support) - helps people cope with stress, supports creative professional development. In social work, supervision also has the function of self-knowledge and improvement.

5. Principles of supervision in social assistance

Cojocaru (2005: 116) proposes a classification of the principles of supervision, a classification necessary to understand the importance of the supervision process: all social workers need supervision, a need accentuated by the context in which they carry out their activity; supervision is an activity encouraged and recognized by the organization, in the form of internal supervision or external supervision; it is recommended that supervision be provided by a specialist; supervision means the division of responsibility, and the results obtained are dependent on the quality of the supervision process; supervision overturns the pyramid of organizational hierarchy by changing the style of communication, control, support and evaluation of employees; thus, supervision brings a new balance within the organization and attenuates hierarchical relationships; relies on negotiation and provides solutions to conflicts; it is permanent, in its absence there is a decrease in the quality of services provided; promotes reflective criticism, competence, empowerment and responsibility; supervision helps the social worker to make decisions about the next intervention and ensures that his / her actions are in line with the organization's mission; it is one of the most important and strong professional relationships, due to its orientation towards teamwork, decision making regarding the work of the social worker, the need for training and professional development; the supervisor supports the social workers to provide the beneficiaries with quality services, oriented towards the beneficiary, towards his needs and their satisfaction; the supervisor supports the social workers to maintain high professional standards because the permanent reporting to the standards offers the social worker the guarantee of a correct and efficient social practice; it is one of the most important activities in social services, both for the organization and for the beneficiaries of the services; it aims to ensure that social workers are aware of their roles and responsibilities included in the job description; it aims to support social workers to achieve performance goals by setting goals that can be achieved

according to available resources, constantly monitoring the achievement of goals, help with tasks, evaluation and motivation of the supervised social worker, setting activities to achieve goals and setting deadlines; supervision assists in identifying and managing the stress of the social worker, generated by the roles he has to fulfill by establishing the workload, establishes, together with the supervisee, priorities and emergencies, etc.; the supervisor ensures that the social worker has the necessary resources to carry out his / her activity and manages these resources efficiently; supervision is based on adult education methods by identifying the training needs of supervisors, planning and organizing specific training programs.

6. Supervision styles and methods

The style of supervision depends on the leadership style in the organization, bringing with it, in the supervisor-supervisee relationship, an emotional charge, which can have both positive and negative consequences.

The methods used in supervision can be: case presentation and debate; co-therapy - the supervisor and the supervisee are co-therapists in working with the beneficiary; participatory observation; online supervisor assistance techniques; role play and reverse role play; modeling and demonstration; training; written information; methods taken from psychotherapeutic inspiration models; request by the supervisor of topics and subjects to be executed by the supervisee between the supervision meetings (Muntean, 2007: 103).

7. Supervision techniques

The techniques depend on the available time, the information system and the staff. These techniques include: direct, non-participatory observation of staff - employees are aware that the supervisor is there to help and guide them, not to criticize them; dialogue with staff - the causes of problems identified by staff can be found, which will help find solutions; the dialogue with the beneficiaries allows the evaluation of the satisfaction with the quality of the service, its utilization rate, its accessibility, etc. (e post-case social inquiries); gathering information - through opinion polls; logistic control - allows the evaluation of the availability of the necessary resources and of the results obtained as a result of the management activities; continuous training.

8. Stages of the supervision process

The stages of the supervision process are similar to the therapeutic one, having their origins in psychotherapy, but they differ from it by the issues addressed and the objectives of the process itself. Only those aspects and personal problems related to the professional framework, aiming at personal improvement and optimization from the perspective of the necessary

professional competencies, are touched in supervision. But, being oriented towards the individual (supervisee) and less on task and objectives and resorting to methods based on psychological theories, there is a risk of transforming the supervisor-supervisor relationship into a therapeutic relationship.

The stages of the supervision process are:

1. knowledge by: presenting the content in the field of social work (situations, conflicts, behaviors, attitudes, relationships); reflection on the content of social work, through descriptive and rational processing; self-reflection - actively and authentically on one's own attitudes; creating relationships between the effects of one's own actions, consequences and others; analysis and self-analysis.

2. awareness - the moment when the supervisor realizes certain relevant aspects about his own attitude in the context of his work. The process of awareness is almost always accompanied by the unblocking of the emotional tensions determined by the revelation of some aspects previously hidden from the conscious plan.

3. self-acceptance - bringing into the plane of consciousness aspects related to one's own person, aspects that, until that moment, were placed in the shadows, positive resources can be mobilized, and personal limits can be more easily accepted (Irimescu, 2003: 93).

A manager who is caring and supports his employees stimulates them to expand their performance, improve their quality, while exploiting the full potential available, which will help the whole team to progress and have better results.

In supervision, one of the stimuli that people respond to is feedback. Feedback is of vital importance to people who want to be successful in their work.

9. Types of supervision

Research (Cojocaru, 2005: 123) shows that the typology of supervision is based on the following criteria: the relationship of the supervisor with the organization; form of organization; the perspective of approaching reality.

Thus, we can have the following forms of supervision:

- from the point of view of the supervisor's relationship with the organization, we are talking about: internal supervision, when the supervisor is from inside the organization; external supervision, when the supervisor is a person from outside the organization.

- according to the form of organization we identify: individual supervision; group supervision.

- from the perspective of approaching reality we identify: classical supervision, focused on the problem; appreciative, appreciation-focused supervision.

Social organizations, the most common types of supervision are *individual supervision and group supervision*.

During the individual supervision sessions, two people meet - the supervisor and the supervisee - and the aim is to achieve the following objectives: developing the ability to perceive and control their own feelings and attitudes; discovering strengths and weaknesses; developing the ability to work based on critical planning and reflection; behavioral trends analysis; processing self-image in relevant aspects of professional work, so that it becomes more compatible with reality.

During group supervision sessions, a supervisor and a group of approximately six supervisees meet. Group supervision aims to achieve the following objectives: awareness of their own feelings, behaviors and their effects on others; discovering strengths and weaknesses; development of social competence; developing the ability to communicate in groups; developing the ability to work in a group; developing the ability to constructively use the proposals and perception of others; developing the ability to constructively confront other opinions; developing the ability to analyze and solve problems.

If managers cannot provide supervision, an alternative would be to form a network of support groups.

When a network needs to be formed, its members need to know how to provide support, feedback and training.

The eight key points for proper training are:

- positive attitude: the goal is to help employees provide better services to beneficiaries; avoid giving feedback if feel upset or irritated because of someone; wait until feel relaxed; give feedback only if it is believed that this will improve the services provided by colleagues to the beneficiaries;

- "I" statements: using expressions such as "I believe", "I want", emphasize that the feedback comes from you, that it corresponds to your point of view; it is not an accumulation of points of view belonging to other persons, it is not an absolute truth, but represents a simple opinion; if the interlocutor respects your opinions and there is good communication between you, the feedback provided by you will be accepted with great openness;

- discuss behaviors, not people: preparation is a very delicate process, which involves a high level of respect for the dignity of other people;

- offer alternatives and suggestions: feedback must address change, how better performance can be achieved in the future, regardless of the past; the solutions obtained following brainstorming sessions can propel the person who was given feedback, in the process of finding effective solutions;

- materialization: people must know clearly and concretely, what was good in their performance, but also in terms of possible changes;

- permanent training: the faster the feedback is provided in response to a certain behavior, the faster there will be an improvement in the situation as such; people constantly need to receive constructive feedback, but also permanent training, so that the benefits obtained from the change are as high as possible;

- the use of simple, direct expressions: it is of no use to hide when it comes to clarifying the thorny problems, because we will not know what needs improvement or what needs to be done;

- concern for the individual: to make the effort to provide constructive feedback to the interlocutor, telling him what to do, encouraging him to achieve performance.

10. Collaboration mechanisms of the social worker with the supervisor

In order for the professional supervision process to be functional and efficient, it is recommended to conclude a supervision agreement between the supervisor and the supervisee. The supervision agreement must include indications as to the purpose, functions of the supervision process, the needs of the supervisee person, the frequency, place and form of promotion of the supervision meetings. It is achieved through a series of professional roles.

Through the support role, the supervisor is responsible for maintaining the morality of social workers, providing emotional support to discouraged or dissatisfied employees with professional problems, creating in the supervised a sense of self-worth, a sense of belonging to the community of professionals, and of the feeling of security in the activity he carries out.

The support role has the following responsibilities: supervising the social worker and the group, facilitating efficient teamwork, advising on difficult cases at work.

The objective of the supervisor in the role of trainer is to create a work climate in which to appreciate and ensure access to professional development. Effective supervision requires the skills of training the social worker in the learning process. The main responsibility of the supervisor, in this context, is oriented towards the development of professional skills in the supervisees.

This requires the supervisor to know the content of the activity performed and the effective teaching methods, creating, maintaining and managing a social and emotional environment that stimulates the process of continuous professional training.

The internal management role involves coordinating activities, developing resources and facilitating communication to achieve professional goals and objectives.

The evaluator role involves the collection, analysis and interpretation of information on the performance of the social worker, as well as the provision of efficient social services. The evaluation process must be continuous and the supervisor must ensure that there is an adequate way of collecting and interpreting data on the results of the activity, to design a system for monitoring the efficiency of social services provided.

The transversal system manager role imposes the responsibility to develop a collaboration program with the representatives of different services and with the community, to establish and maintain inter-professional and

inter-organizational collaboration relations. This list demonstrates a connection between the core processes and skills involved in the professional supervision of employees, as well as those involved in working with beneficiaries. The supervisory relationship must establish a model for solving problems focused on results, change and empowerment.

The efficient performance of supervisory functions and roles imposes high requirements on the supervisor's personality. The professional supervisor's qualities required to be effective are: the ability to build a team, to make group decisions, training and communication skills, the ability to give and receive feedback, interviewing skills, presentation and coordination skills and so on

The efficiency of professional supervision is conditioned by learning and applying the appropriate methods of using working time.

Time management is a set of strategies that help the social worker to efficiently organize and manage working time, namely: analyzing how to use working time, organizing work space, compiling the to-do list and prioritizing them, the combination of tasks, the formation of the capacity to refuse in order to avoid overload, etc. The supervisor must identify and use appropriate means of supervision, ways of self-analysis to discover and react to the symptoms of stress and burnout, both to himself and to the supervised persons, as well as to the application of individual self-analysis strategies, protection. A supervisor must be able to express his or her own vision of the team, be able to interact with other specialists and services in the social assistance system and collaborate with them. All of the above skills are essential in supervision and, in combination, can support the conduct of supervision effectively.

From the point of view of the content of supervision, the above categories include case and quality supervision of social assistance activity. These activities are recorded by the supervisor through specific tools, such as: the social assistance activity supervision records; social case supervision records.

11. Guide for filling out the Supervision form of the social assistance activity

Date and place - The day and place where the supervision will take place will be specified. The supervisor will write down the date of the meeting and not the date of filling out the form. Supervision is performed for the purpose of professional development and continuous evaluation of the activity of the social worker and this can be done within the institution of the supervisor (governmental or non-governmental institution) or at the institution where the social worker is employed.

People present - Presentation of the participants, name and position held in the institution where they work. Filling out this section is relevant because we know the people who are involved in the correct assessment of the social problems faced by the social worker (eg. attending a meeting of the

secretary and mayor with the social worker where the specifics of the community, social problems and dysfunctions are analyzed from the commune level).

Topics - The topics addressed during the meeting will be presented and systematically analyzed. During the supervision, both social cases and social activities carried out in the community will be discussed.

For the professional development of the social worker, it is recommended that the supervisor monitor all the social assistance activity carried out and provide informational and emotional support for solving the community social problems. During these supervisions, the areas in which the intervention of the social worker is necessary will be identified and for these problems intervention strategies will be built.

For example, analysis of the application of Law 272/2004 at community level and identification of intervention modalities to minimize the negative effects, by involving all community leaders, correct information of citizens about the law, involvement of leaders for efficient management of family financial resources, etc.

Observations - recording the information that characterizes the quality and quantity of social assistance activity carried out at the community level or establishing recommendations for improving the results of social services.

Aspects that the supervisor can follow in filling out the section, the degree of involvement / non-involvement of the social worker in the social assistance activities, recording the proposals for actions for the benefit of the community; community specific analysis and identification of local social dysfunctions; involvement of local leaders in solving social problems.

12. Guide for filling the Case Supervision Form

Social worker -Specification of the name and surname of the supervised social worker at the institution/ service - specification of the service and institution within which the supervisee is employed.

Supervisor - The name and surname of the professional performing the supervision will be specified.

Date - Recording the day on which the supervision is performed.

Number of active cases - The total number of cases in which the social worker works in the respective month (eg: summary of cases investigated in all areas of activity: social assistance, prevention of child abandonment, maternal assistance, domestic violence, etc.). It is relevant to centralize the activity of the social worker, from the last supervision until now, because not all active cases can be addressed during a supervision session. Completing the item provides a complete picture of the complex activity carried out in the community.

Types of cases- Centralizing the activity on specific types of cases is important because the supervisor together with the social worker can have a representation of the cases. Thus, it is possible to make (taking into account the other relevant information about the community) the identification of the

specifics of the community, what case types they face most often, what are the causes that lead to social cases and implicitly having a complete picture can be developed solving.

Table of evidence of supervised cases, which includes the following items:

- *Supervised case* - In this field, the name and surname of the beneficiary are noted, but the number of copies can also be specified in order to concretize the case.

- *Case type* - Case specific/ type of service in which the beneficiary falls (Ex. Child protection - Prevention of abandonment)

- *Current situation* - Presentation of the current situation of the beneficiary, of the intervention stage in which the case is and with the results obtained after the intervention. The supervisor must listen to the presentation of the case by the social worker and then structure the information, as concretely and clearly as possible, but without omitting information about the beneficiary.

- *Activities carried out in the last month*- Presentation and analysis of actions taken to resolve the case, which may be: assessment and documentation of the case, intervention on the family through counseling, information, education, contacting the network of institutions / NGOs, etc. The supervisor must conceptualize the activities of the social worker and establish the general directions of the intervention approach.

- *Activities for the next month*- Planning future activities that have the role of achieving the objectives of the intervention / permanence plan. It is important that during the supervision session, the supervisor establishes the approach that the social worker will take to resolve the cases. This action ensures coherence in the intervention of the social worker, and for the supervisor it represents an item of evaluation of the activity for the next month.

- *Permanence plan*- Specification of the beneficiary protection measure.

- *Solutions and resources* - Means and strategies by which we can achieve the goal of the intervention. The resources can be of the type: financial, material, human, educational/ informative and it is necessary to specify concretely how to intervene. Completing the item is important because the social worker is put in a position to identify solutions to solve the case and, thus, he becomes aware that he has the necessary resources and power to solve the case. It is also advisable to focus on community resources, because each community has its specific resources: local leaders, social specialists (doctor, psychologist, and teacher) representatives of the private sector, which can sometimes be a solid basis for social intervention.

Observations- The analysis of the social assistance activity of the supervisee and the synthesis through some ideas of his professional quality or the recording of this relevant information for the characterization of the performed activity. Being a social case supervision activity, the supervisor will evaluate to the social worker the way of intervention, the way he uses the

theoretical information, the abilities and work skills on the case, how he identifies the solutions and how he manages to apply them, etc. Following this analysis, he/she will make a characterization of the level of professionalism of the social worker.

Following supervision there may be:

New cases opened- During the supervision session, the analysis and the new cases they face in the respective month will be recorded.

Closed cases- During the supervision are analyzed all the cases in which the social worker encounters difficulties and when it is found that the expected results have been registered, according to the intervention plan it will be decided together to close the case.

Total number of active cases for next month- The number is by subtracting from the total number of closed cases.

Conclusions

Supervision in the social framework is correlated with the work of the social worker. He is supervised, accompanied in his work on a case-by-case basis, in the process of analyzing and identifying the most beneficial ways of action for the social services client. Cojocaru St. (2005), considers that there are some confusions regarding the supervision of the social service or the supervision of the social program. This confusion arises due to the placement of supervision between management and counseling, although this does not represent either, but a combination of elements borrowed from both.

Professional supervision is a qualified type of supervision that is based on both theoretical and deep practical knowledge. The person who is the supervisor is necessary to transform the theory at a practical level and to take concrete actions.

Supervision and the way it is performed substantially influence both the supervisee and his/ her entire work. A well-done supervision, and implicitly a professional supervisor can guide the supervisor in his work and can support him in achieving performance; on the contrary, a superficial supervision, a supervisor without interest in the work of the supervisee, can generate conflicts and dissatisfaction and even resignation, or transfer to another department. Therefore, it is important both the supervision itself, which we have already insisted on, and the choice of the supervisor.

The efficiency of the functioning of the integrated social services system depends on the level of professional performance of social service providers. It provides for the implementation of the culture of professional supervision and performance evaluation for the employees of the social assistance system, organized by types of services, areas of responsibility and levels of competence.

In the management of social assistance institutions, the planning and budgeting of specific activities does not include supervision as an indispensable activity to make cases more efficient, all gestures designed to

support beneficiaries, specific training of professionals in problem solving, prevention of overload, assertive communication, conflict management, performance evaluation, guidance, motivation of professionals, etc.

A positive element that we found is the fact that practitioners, at least from a certain hierarchical level, feel the need for a supervisor and, moreover, are waiting for the appearance of some professionals who have been qualified in this field. On the other hand, a difference between the expectations of social workers in our country and the practice of other countries is the attitude towards the choice of the supervisor and the place that subjectivity has in the supervisor-supervisee relationship.

Even if there are institutions, legislation, practices, procedures in this field, there is a danger that their meaning will be lost somewhere along the way, and the beneficiary will no longer be the center of this system. At the risk of the supervisor disturbing institutions or people, sooner or later it will be concluded that without him it is not possible, and his work will bring quality in the work of social assistance.

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