Good Practice in Action 121
Fact Sheet

Peer supervision within the counselling professions

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Contents

Context

This resource is one of a suite prepared by BACP to enable members to engage with BACP's current *Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions* in respect of building appropriate relationships.

Using Fact Sheet resources

BACP members have a contractual commitment to work in accordance with the current *Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions*. The Fact Sheet resources are not contractually binding on members but are intended to support practitioners by providing general information on principles and policy applicable at the time of publication, in the context of the core ethical principles, values and personal moral qualities of BACP.

Specific issues in practice will vary depending on clients, particular models of working, the context of the work and the kind of therapeutic intervention provided. As specific issues arising from work with clients are often complex, BACP always recommends discussion of practice dilemmas with a supervisor and/or consulting a suitably qualified and experienced legal or other relevant practitioner.

In this resource, the word 'therapist' is used to mean specifically counsellors and psychotherapists and 'therapy' to mean specifically counselling and psychotherapy.

The terms 'practitioner' and 'counselling related services' are used generically in a wider sense, to include the practice of counselling, psychotherapy, coaching and pastoral care.

Introduction

Supervision is valued as an essential form of professional mentoring and accountability (BACP,2020b). In a formal, collaborative process, two or more people form a supervisory relationship with shared objectives about how to work together constructively to provide a safe, ethical and competent service to clients. A supervisor is considered to be within the 'circle of confidentiality' (see BACP, 2018: point 55).

Along with goals and tasks of supervision, the relationship is one of the components of the 'supervisory working alliance' (Bordin, 1983). Whilst the relationship is not the purpose of supervision, it is a means to the end of working together for the benefit of the client.

1. What is peer supervision?

Supervision in the counselling professions has been described as:

> *a formal but collaborative process that involves regular 'consultative support', and in which two or more people form a 'supervisory alliance' with shared objectives about how to work together constructively to provide a safe, ethical and competent service to clients. (*BACP, 2020b).

It follows that peer supervision represents a formal arrangement (not a casual gathering) of two or more practitioners who:

- have a specific agreement/contract to meet regularly
- have shared objectives
- work collaboratively for the benefit of their clients
- understand and observe their ethical and professional responsibilities.

An effective supervisory framework is considered to be one in which the supervisor is able to promote honest and open discussion and to provide the opportunity for practitioners to reflect in depth about all aspects of their practice (BACP, 2020d; BACP, 2018). In a collegial arrangement, it is the peers themselves who must take responsibility to facilitate such discussions and reflections.

Practitioners meeting in peer arrangements occupy, by turns, the role of supervisee and supervisor. In this way, each member of the group has the opportunity to develop skills of enabling exploration and insight, conceptualising, and giving feedback to peers.

Proctor (2000) says the group should be 'supervisor-full', 'since each member has agreed to be one of the people to whom the others are accountable for competent, confident, creative and ethical practice'. As such, peer supervision is not advised for newly qualified or minimally experienced counsellors.

2. Benefits and challenges

Peer supervision offers a number of potential benefits, which can make it a useful extension to the supervisory experience in addition to the contract with an individual supervisor. Collegial arrangements may emerge on the basis of a strong relational framework already built up, say, in a working context, a study environment or on a project. Practitioners can draw on others' perspectives, feedback and understandings, and the person presenting can judge whether their own experience resonates with those of peers (Hawkins and Shohet, 2012).

Exploring and discussing with fellow practitioners can bring echoes of the benefits of being in a community of learners and professionals as in the years of initial training (Caffrey, Scott and Touhey, 2014).

An effective peer arrangement can deal neatly with the requirement that 'a substantial part or preferably all of supervision needs to be independent of line management' (BACP, 2018). Peer supervision, like one-to-one clinical supervision, can focus on the therapeutic work and on the practitioners themselves, away from the immediate pressures of targets and organisational concerns. A peer group offers a range of perspectives on a situation, offering understanding, sharing relatable experiences, and adding to the possibilities for response.

Decisions about structure, membership and process of the group also lie with the peer participants and can offer a high level of autonomy and agency. Meeting with colleagues 'on a level' addresses potentially unhelpful aspects of individual supervision such as structural power imbalances, paternalism, and the exercise of unquestioned authority (Carroll and Tholstrup, 2001; Feltham and Dryden, 1998).

There are practical reasons too, which can inspire interest in peer working. Specialist practitioners might well seek out as supervision partners others in their field of expertise from different agencies. Busy practitioners may decide to divide their weekly or monthly supervision between their contracted individual arrangement and a conveniently located local group of experienced peers.

Also, the need to obtain at least a proportion of supervision away from the line management setting may make it essential to look beyond what the organisation provides.

Example: A small group of colleagues work in an agency which provides weekly line management supervision (non-clinical) but can't fund the additional independent provision the Ethical Framework requires. They already have good working relationships with each other and decide to explore the possibility of setting up a regular peer supervision group. This may be in addition to their one-to-one clinical supervision.

Peer supervision has the potential to contribute to cohesiveness in a team – not least by virtue of experiencing colleagues' approaches and perspectives. Tolerance and inclusivity in the group can promote the expression of a range of different responses and respect for different therapeutic styles.

The experience of peer supervisees suggests that it can be a place of support and understanding. Wilkinson says of the group setting *'that you can almost guarantee that anything raised will resonate with at least one other person. In this way the issue will be attended to and respected.'* (2015: 34)

Peer structures (as with any clinical supervision arrangement) are well placed to promote emotional wellbeing, alleviate work-related stress, and prevent burnout and professional stagnation (Vallance, 2004). Goldberg goes further: peer dialogue provides a social-professional connectedness essential to our sense of personal meaning:

> *Without the exchange of deeply experienced and meaningful sentiments with others, practitioners, no less than their clients, come to realise that their values are vacuous, their pursuits are bereft of happiness, and their endeavours lack direction and purpose.* (1981: 28)

These considerable benefits do not come without potential challenges and limitations. On the practical side, any peer arrangement needs one person to prompt setting up the structure. In Proctor's (2000) words, someone has to 'take their initiator power'. Then comes a stage of agreeing membership, contracting and ground rules – and a level of collective commitment if the group is to work effectively.

Members will need to feel that the potential benefits make it worth not just having to divide presentation time with peers – but also taking on a new set of professional responsibilities, including maintenance of the group dynamic and finding a way through difficult situations.

Working with peers offers up-to-date, often vivid connection to practice – but does not necessarily provide the theoretical and conceptual input we might expect of an individual supervisor. Peers may be less experienced as practitioners and may have little background in facilitating supervisory dialogue or in managing group dynamics. On the other hand, we might expect an experienced supervisor to have come across the kind of issue we are dealing with and be able to share the fruits of their experience – which is not necessarily the case with colleagues. Peers may well not have the breadth of knowledge to respond with sufficient understanding to a wide range of professional concerns, including issues relating to equality, diversity and inclusion.

Potential divergence between peer responses could, moreover, potentially cause confusion in the supervisee. The supportive capacity of many peer structures is well documented – though the skill and experience of members is sometimes less able to challenge and make developmental interventions (Creaner, 2014). It is also useful to be aware of the risks of 'cosiness' and collusion, which sometimes occur amongst supportive peers.

3. The professional association and peer supervision

The decision of whether or not to explore the option of peer supervision will be informed by the published position of your professional body. BACP does not allow practitioners in training to include peer supervision hours as part of the monthly requirement. Beyond qualification, practitioners have a choice of including peer activity in the time spent in regular, contracted supervision, so long as the one-to-one contract is also in place. There is currently no published maximum proportion of the total supervision time which can be obtained in the peer setting.

A further complication lies in the mathematics. The published calculations for accredited counsellors, or those preparing for accreditation, are as follows: any peer meeting of four persons or fewer counts for half of the time together. With five members or more, time spent in supervision is divided by the number of those in the group (BACP, 2020b). The calculation will need to be done where, say, an hour per month is spent with the individual supervisor and the rest is contributed by peer meetings.

When it comes to applying for individual accreditation, the BACP member will need to demonstrate understanding and experience of working with an individual supervisor. Reflecting the assessment process at initial qualification, the supervisor plays a role in confirming the applicant's regular and productive use of the one-to-one supervision arrangement.

Current BACP requirements are published in GPiA 054: *Introduction to supervision in the counselling professions* (BACP, 2020b) and at: www.bacp.co.uk/membership/supervision.

4. Options

Peer supervision groups generally have the option to meet in person or via a range of remote online platforms.

'In person' supervision groups need to be able to meet regularly in a confidential space. The location itself is an influencer: your house or mine, your workspace or theirs, always in one place or in rotation? The time of day (or evening) may matter factoring in working hours, traffic, family commitments, travel costs, and even weather conditions.

Supervision meetings online can involve an almost unlimited geographical spread of members, time zones allowing. Costs are lower, travel time non-existent – although securing a confidential space without interruption and with good internet connection can be more of a challenge. Online options found favour during the worst of the pandemic, offering a convenient environment without anxiety about restrictions or risks to health.

There are different options for dividing up the supervision time. The practice of rotating peer supervisors (and possibly observers) in the group offers a reliable time-slot for each supervisee and develops members' facilitation and observational skills.

Hawkins and McMahon (2020) give the example of a peer triad in which each member occupies a 40-minute slot in turn as supervisee, supervisor and observer.'

Goldberg (1981) suggests that anyone with a pressing or distressing issue takes precedence in presenting. Proctor (2000) offers 'the Durham model' with its further possibilities, including an even-numbered group dividing into consistent peer pairs or changing supervision partners in what she calls a 'musical chairs' option.

5. Aspects of peer supervision

5.1 Setting up the peer supervision arrangement

Every participant in a peer supervision arrangement brings their own hopes, needs and expectations. Preliminary conversations in which these are shared can indicate whether the structure being proposed is likely to work – and, in some cases, means the idea isn't followed up. In particular, the relative experience and status of potential members merit due consideration: some commentators argue for groups of comparable experience and seniority; others commend the benefits of a mix.

Founding members will need to discuss membership criteria (such as work context or theoretical approach) when considering who else to approach or who might be eligible to join. Variety of perspective may need to be weighed against the merits of a shared background or environment.

As a next step, it is helpful to make a checklist of areas for discussion and agreement. Again, one or two members of the forming group will need to take the lead, involving others as appropriate. The checklist is likely to form the basis of a written contract, with headings such as these:

1. Membership (size; limited to founder members or open to others)

2. Frequency, timing and length of meetings (for example, one evening a month for two hours) with commitment to attend

3. Time allocation in meetings (such as: 15 minutes to settle; remaining time equally divided for supervision; or divided on the basis of supervisees' needs)

4. Facilitation of the supervision (by all members not presenting, by one person in rotation, or in peer pairs)

5. Style of facilitation and feedback (as in: reflecting members' therapeutic principles)

6. Session management/timekeeping role (fixed, or in a pre-arranged rotation or decided 'on the day')

7. For 'in person' meetings: Location (a permanent base or alternating between members' homes)
   For online meetings: Choice of platform (availability, cost, hosting, reliability)

8. Mechanisms to ensure confidentiality and safety of records
   Additionally, for online meetings: confidentiality of the platform

9. Communications (including notification of absence and refraining from discussions about the group outside the group)

10. Strategies for management of difficulties (including ethical issues, group dynamics or loss of focus). Additionally, for online meetings: strategies for management of technical difficulties, interruptions or failures.

Although groups will vary in their preference for a more or less detailed document, a contract drawn up on this basis and signed by all the parties is likely to be helpful. Reviewing the contract after an agreed number of meetings allows for adjustments to be made where gaps need addressing. Any matters of detail not provided for will benefit from review time formally set aside. Whereas an informal rota of who makes the drinks and brings the biscuits might seem simple to organise, the reality might need clarifying. There are more obviously weighty matters that will need thinking about and deciding on, such as what happens if contractual elements aren't observed, or if members wish to leave.

A number of authors itemise steps and stages in setting up a supervision group (Dunnett, Jesper, O'Donnell and Vallance, 2013; Hawkins and McMahon, 2020; Proctor, 2000). Wilkinson (2015) writes tellingly about the consequences and challenges of groups set up across different hierarchical levels of status, background and experience. The decision to include, say, a team leader among the members is likely to influence the dynamic, though the mix of potential benefits and challenges will be different for every group.

No-one would claim that good initial discussions and contracting will solve all the issues in advance: but the early stages can set the scene for a robust framework and work of complexity and depth.

The process of forming the group represents in itself a creative enterprise between peers in which discussions take place, diverse opinions are shared, and a collaborative ethic begins to emerge.

5.2 Collegiality, collaboration and responsibility

> *It is not enough to just turn up and expect that someone else will 'take control' and lead the session. Every one of us needs to be ready to hold responsibility or, at the very least, be willing to try.* (Wilkinson, 2015: 35)

Opting into a peer supervision arrangement can bring significant rewards so long as those participating are able to engage with the challenges which also come with it. Some members may feel daunted by taking on the role of session manager or supervisor, wondering whether they can learn the necessary skills. Anxiety about competence may lead to absence, always deferring to others or being silent.

The responsibilities to be shared in peer supervision can be summarised as:

- **session and group management:** holding the group to agreed working arrangements; organising meetings; time-keeping; keeping the group to its focus; facilitating maintenance and development of 'the group alliance' (Proctor, 2000); identifying and exploring difficulties with the group dynamic, including non-participation, potential bullying or scapegoating; and ensuring equitable responses to differences in the group (see section 5.5).

- **facilitation of the supervision of others' work:** enabling the colleague presenting to benefit from the reflective space. The person occupying the peer facilitator role will draw on many of the relational skills detailed for supervisors in BACP's *Supervision Competence Framework* (BACP, 2021a). (See section 5.3.)

- **ethical and professional gatekeeping:** Dunnett et al (2013) say that supervisees 'will naturally look to the supervisor for ongoing support when it comes to monitoring and ensuring the professional integrity of their practice'. This statement can apply to the peer setting as much as to individual supervision. Section 5.6 offers further detail on the range of issues which can emerge.

There is no universal template for the sharing of tasks and responsibilities, though there is learning to be had from taking turns in both the organisational and facilitation roles. As Proctor says 'The limits and realities of responsibility will be refined over time, as will the ground rules for the management of the work' (2000: 56).

5.3 Facilitation skills

> '*Supervision requires additional skills and knowledge to those used for providing services directly to clients. Therefore supervisors require adequate levels of expertise acquired through training and/or experience.*' (BACP, 2018: point 62).

Since the peer is qualified in providing therapy but not in supervising others, what can reasonably be asked of them? BACP's *Supervision Competence Framework* (BACP, 2021a) offers useful pointers, including in the areas of supervisory relationships, responsiveness to supervisees' individual needs and collaborative exploration.

Whatever approach to practice we use, many of the relational competencies detailed will be familiar from the client work context: the ability to employ appropriate listening skills; to communicate effectively; to show respect, empathy, acceptance and encouragement towards the supervisee and their thoughts and feelings. Equally relevant to both contexts is the ability to balance support and challenge; to be fully present in the interaction; and to acknowledge and normalise anxiety. Using self-disclosure wisely in the supervision space could help normalise what the peer views as 'mistakes' and mitigate against their feelings of shame or inadequacy.

Similarly, peers are often well placed to recognise and respond appropriately to a colleague's individual needs, as they may have a shared training, work context or specialism.

They are able, when appropriate, to bring in 'the personal and the person of the supervisee', perhaps mindful of an aspect of their colleague's experience, culture or history relevant and potentially influential in the client work being discussed. From their own perspective, peers can sometimes reinforce the input from the individual supervisor, including in situations of stress or burnout where they can offer support and challenge on self-care strategies.

The *Supervision Competence Framework* (BACP, 2021a) recognises that the power imbalance in the conventional supervisor-supervisee relationship can present challenges which need open discussion. Its section 'Fostering an egalitarian relationship' anticipates the supervisor's ability 'to offer a supportive and collegial relationship characterised by the mutual sharing of ideas'. Peer supervision tends not to be hierarchical in structure, though hierarchies can assert themselves and need addressing (see section 5.5).

5.4 Being a peer supervisor/ supervisee

However long the practitioner has been qualified, there are likely to be aspects of peer supervision which are new. Learning to manage the new situation can take time, self-awareness, and tolerance with oneself and with peers. It is a bonus that group members can draw on their experiences as supervisees in individual supervision, reflecting and drawing on what has been helpful – and less helpful – in those relationships.

Which qualities and behaviours make it more likely that peer members will create an effective and lasting bond?

To begin with, group members need the **ability to express themselves honestly:**

> *Supervisees have a responsibility to be open and honest in supervision and to draw attention to any significant difficulties or challenges that they may be facing in their work with clients.* (BACP, 2018: point 72)

Wilkinson (2015) links congruence in the peer group to learning to be more open with clients. This might mean giving vent in the group to annoyance and frustration – an expression of feelings which sometimes has to precede exploration and arriving at an understanding.

Honesty implies **having the courage to speak and to challenge**.

It can be hard to know whether, when and how to express the unease we feel with a peer's interpretation of boundary-keeping with a particular client or frequent late arrivals at supervision. Yet remaining uninvolved can have wider consequences, as Goldberg says:

> *Those who express no concern, support or warmth for others in the group and withhold participation (...) will have detrimental impact on the intimacy, the disclosure and the sharing of the other participants.* (1981: 34)

Openness and the courage to speak out requires from peers **a respectful style of response**. Goldberg suggests that feedback is most likely to be heard if phrased as inclusive 'personal-I statements' couched in terms of feeling responses, as in:

> *'When you were speaking, I was getting a sense of just how hard you are both trying to make this work...but it seems to be falling apart...I imagine it will be hard to share that with him.'*

The *Ethical Framework* reminds us that supervisors are responsible for providing space for discussion of practice-related difficulties 'without blame or unjustified criticism' (BACP, 2018: point 72).

5.5 Relational dynamics

Peer supervision groups rely for effective working on the development of what Proctor (2000) calls 'the dynamics of cooperation'. There is a kind of circular process by which the above qualities and behaviours themselves promote a climate of trust. This in turn enables members to be honest about their work, doubts and uncertainties included.

Cooperative dynamics are characterised by every member of a peer group being mindful of colleagues' welfare and developmental needs. In an ideal situation, the abilities for leading, following and asserting are in balance; members are able to contribute their varied perspectives, to challenge and to be creative; accountability and responsibility are held both by the individual and collectively (Proctor, 2000; BACP, 2020c).

In many peer arrangements which work well, members grow in confidence with one another. This in turn promotes stronger relationships in the group and, potentially, in the working environment.

Effective peer groups don't form and run themselves. What aspects of the peer setting will need to be managed if a supportive and developmental climate is to be maintained?

- Dual role and pre-existing relationships need to be addressed, including organisational hierarchies where these exist. Differences of status can influence the power dynamic and the capacity of other members to exercise the full range of their roles (BACP, 2021b).

- Competitive elements can emerge – for time, attention, status, or support – and develop into imbalances which no longer serve the practitioners or their clients (Dunnett et al., 2013:142ff).

- It is important to ensure understanding and awareness of the complex nature of any group, specifically in relation to aspects of equality and diversity.

- Unhelpful power dynamics can develop and need to be addressed, such as a pattern of deference to age, rank or experience; one or two members dominating the discussion, the agenda and always having the knowledge or the answers (Dunnett et al., 2013).

- The formation of factions or sub-groups can provide the ground for a pattern of inclusion and exclusion.

- Individuals or the group as a whole can slip into various forms of non-engagement: meetings missed or postponed; gossiping chit-chat; clique formation; avoidance of meaningful discussion; over-intellectualising; collusion; bullying; scapegoating.

Any or a combination of the above lead to peer group dynamics becoming a preoccupation, undermining the group's activity and potentially taking away the focus from the client work being supervised (Hawkins and McMahon,2020). Two components can act together as an antidote:

- Peer members have a responsibility to develop their capacity for and willingness to undertake self-examination and reflection. Self-awareness in this context takes in the understanding that interpersonal dynamics from other contexts, including the therapeutic relationship, may be re-enacted in the supervisory space. (BACP, 2018; BACP, 2022)

- Adequate time needs to be set aside for periodic review, with additional time agreed when there are particular risks to the effective workings of the group. (See section 5.9.)

5.6 Ethical issues

Peer supervisors, having insights into colleagues' work with clients, have a role to play in the good governance of that work.

> *As a general rule, the supervisor's ethical responsibility relates directly to the supervisee, the supervision process and relationship and indirectly to the client, by facilitating the counsellor to take ethical responsibility for their clients through self-monitoring and managing their own practice* (Dunnett et al, 2013:66, citing Jenkins, 2007).

It follows that an awareness of legal frameworks might be called upon. Peers would not normally have in-depth knowledge of specific acts of law, though it is helpful to be familiar with reference and explanatory texts such as Jenkins (2007) and the BACP legal resource on supervision (BACP, 2022). Dunnett et al (2013) provide a list of the legislation most widely applicable to the kinds of issues brought to supervision, including the Children Act and data protection legislation.

Above all, peer supervisors have the *Ethical Framework* as their primary point of reference.

As a participant in the gate-keeping process, peers have a responsibility to bring their ethical concerns to the attention of the supervisee where the latter has not shown sufficient (if any) awareness of these. Section 5.4 cites Goldberg's (1981) suggestion to use 'personal-I statements' in formulating what might otherwise be a hard-to-hear response. The most effective challenges show respect for the peer and for their autonomy; they acknowledge the peer's decision to act as they did and enable them to set out the reasons for doing so – moving on, then, to facilitate discussion of the possible downsides of the response as well as exploring alternative lines of intervention.

Even so, peers can find themselves privy to information about a colleague's activity which feels hard to hold. It can be difficult to challenge on a fundamental issue of ethics or competence, and the tendency might be to 'protect' the colleague – and perhaps oneself – by saying nothing (Feltham, 1998).

5.7 Attending to the tasks of supervision (and sticking to them)

The peer supervision meeting, just as with individual supervision, is responsible for keeping in mind the three areas identified by Inskipp and Proctor (2001) as *normative, formative and restorative. Normative* issues include concerns relating to professional and ethical guidelines, norms and laws. The *formative* component refers to the development of skills, competences and theoretical knowledge. The *restorative* aspect involves both support for practitioner activity and the maintenance of members' personal wellbeing (BACP, 2020c).

Peer structures are well placed to offer all three components (Proctor, 2000; Owen-Pugh and Symonds, 2011). A normative intervention could be phrased: 'I don't envy you this situation...What comes to mind for me is that paragraph in the *Ethical Framework* about clients who feel under pressure from other people to attend'. Formative responses might draw on the peer's own experience: 'What I thought was really useful working with clients withdrawing from medication was that article last month in *Therapy Today*.' The supportive potential of the interaction is, ideally, present throughout, including in the style in which challenges are offered.

There are potential pitfalls, as with any supervisory interaction. A peer might fear that a comment intended as formative could be perceived as being know-all or condescending. Supportiveness could take over the group at the expense of due attention being given to developmental and formative tasks: supervision might begin to feel like it only works for mutual back-up or as a substitute for personal therapy (Dunnett et al, 2013).

5.8 Boundaries

Boundary-keeping is as much a concern in the peer setting as in the supervisor-supervisee relationship. On a practical note, supervision requires a confidential, quiet space: see Goldberg's (1981) account of groups using inappropriate settings. Online meetings offer convenience – but it's important to ensure confidentiality where the call is conducted.

Group members also need to take care that the supportive response they offer to peers does not shade into providing ongoing personal therapy to peers. (See section 5.7.) Participants are jointly responsible for maintaining focus on the tasks of supervision and for ensuring a boundary between 'restorative' interventions in the group and members' exploration in personal therapy.

Pre-existing and dual relationships can also be a potential source of ongoing problems (BACP, 2021b). The peer whom you meet at the coffee machine at the agency next morning might be holding unfinished business from the supervision meeting: it is tempting to continue the discussion there. The peer contract should cover such a situation and be clear on the need to keep the two contexts and conversations separate. The peer framework ''requires adequate levels of privacy, safety and containment for the supervisee to undertake this work' (BACP, 2018: point 61).

In the same way, information brought to peer supervision needs to meet agency policy on confidentiality as well as observing the *Ethical Framework* (BACP, 2018: point 64).

5.9 The challenges of change

While there are features that remain constant, individuals and groups continue to develop in their patterns of need and response in the supervision setting (Creaner, 2014).

Regular meetings can strengthen bonds, deepen trust between colleagues and contribute significantly to working relationships in a team. It is also possible that after a time the arrangement may seem to have outlived its usefulness, and ties of loyalty might be all that bind the group together.

If peers regularly review their group processes, these kinds of issues can be aired, including talking about changes and endings. It can be helpful to refer to the original contract as a reminder of their starting point and to see whether current group practices have departed from what was originally intended.

There are different opinions on whether it is ever appropriate to involve an external consultant to facilitate difficult conversations. For some groups, the idea of looking outside for this kind of intervention could seem more problematic than helpful, diverting authority and responsibility away from the membership. All the same, situations can arise where group members agree to bring in an outside facilitator to explore and resolve difficulties which are beyond the group's capabilities.

5.10 Dovetailing with individual supervision

The contract between peer partners inevitably covers the question of confidentiality of material brought to the group. Yet there are elements which may well pass from the peer meeting to a practitioner's individual supervision, or vice versa. Either context could, if the peer agreement allows, be used to debrief the other. Also, there is nothing which prohibits a supervisee from bringing the same or similar material to the two contexts so as to tap into both supervisory resources. The shadow side of what might be termed 'doubling up' is that practitioners present the issue a second time in the hope of obtaining a preferred response in the other situation.

Ideally, individual and group contexts complement each other. Whether consciously or unconsciously, the practitioner will decide what to take where (Mehr, Ladany and Caskie, 2010; West, 2003) – and what to make of the response. Where the nature (and usefulness) of the responses consistently differs between the peer setting and individual supervision, supervisees can be faced with a dilemma. This can in itself be informative, if it leads to deeper awareness of the nature of the issues presented – and sometimes also to consideration of the 'fit' between their professional needs and the supervision they access.

About the author

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