Supervising groups: A focus on the practical

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(with thanks to Steve Kellet, Chris Powell and Sue Walsh)
Aims of the session

- To focus on the practice of supervising groups
- To reflect on group theory and process
- To begin to explore the development of your group supervision skills through the use of vignettes
What is a group??

- Two or more human beings interacting with each other, who share the same interests or have the same goals.
Group dynamics operate EVERYWHERE

- Initial bonding: how alike we are
- Then how different we are; splits & attacks
- Idealisation/denigration of leaders
- Individual targeting (good or bad)
- Group defences: pairing, flight/fight, up-down aggregation
- Anti-group phenomena: the group as a gang
Exercise 1; small group work

- Think about the roles that you take up in groups related to your life experience and reflect on the pros and cons of this tendency in relation to being a group supervisor (or supervisee)

- Feedback
What skills group supervision hopes to provide supervisees with; the key tasks (Holloway, 1995)

1. More effective interpersonal skills
2. Better case conceptualisation, change and treatment skills
3. Better awareness of professional role
4. Better emotional awareness
5. Increased reflexivity
## Types of group supervision (Inskip & Proctor, 2002)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authoritative group</td>
<td>The supervisor supervises each supervisee in turn and manages the group.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participative group</td>
<td>Supervisor responsible for supervising and managing the group and for inducting supervisees as co-supervisors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-operative group</td>
<td>Supervisor is the group facilitator and supervision monitor; supervisees actively supervise each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer group</td>
<td>Shared responsibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Exercise 2; small group work

- Reflect on your experiences of group supervision (either facilitating or being part of)
Supervisor roles and responsibilities (Procter, 2008)

Group supervision

Model of supervision

Managing group response

Creative methods

Leadership
Receptivity
Boundaries
Prioritizing
Spontaneity
Reflexivity

Group management

Negotiating agreements

Building the group

Maintenance repairs
Framework for group management

TASKS
Group process
Group supervision

MAINTENANCE
Forming
Storming
Norming
Performing
Mourning

CPD

INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT/IDENTITY ISSUES
Inclusion/exclusion
Power/influence
Difference
Competence hierarchy
# Flexibility in group leadership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTIVE LEADERSHIP</th>
<th>ASSERTION</th>
<th>RECEPTIVITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose and preference stating</td>
<td>Managing time and boundaries</td>
<td>Openness to mood and flow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telling what and showing how</td>
<td>Saying no</td>
<td>Self side-lining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervene to progress</td>
<td>Negotiating</td>
<td>Listening</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Setting up groups
Supervising groups; the practical

- Two broad areas that you will need to reflect on when setting up group supervision
  - Creating the practical building blocks that help to support group learning
  - Your theoretical emphasis

- Clarity and preparation underpins successful group working
The hidden beginning...

- What is the real contract of work?
  - Are people sent to you?
  - Do they like psychology?
  - What is the anxiety? (Managing regression)

- What is the organisational milieu of the group?
Good practice in groups

① Clarity of purpose
② Shared agreement as to roles, responsibilities and purpose
③ Clear boundaries
④ Clear leadership
⑤ Scrupulous regard to context and stakeholder expectations
⑥ Engagement with and knowledge of supervisee’s style, learning needs, agenda and frame of reference
⑦ Security in own beliefs and assumptions about what is good practice
⑧ Feasible task
⑨ Curiosity
Why groups may not work

1. Ineffective leadership
2. Disorganisation
3. Inappropriate membership
4. Inappropriate task
5. Psychological resistances and defences (see later)
# Functional arrangements of the group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FUNCTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS</th>
<th>INTERPERSONAL GROUND RULES</th>
<th>INDIVIDUAL LEARNING AGENDA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time and place</td>
<td>Good manners</td>
<td>Course requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time management</td>
<td>Confidentiality</td>
<td>Learning gaps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slots</td>
<td></td>
<td>Group skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviews, governance and methods of presenting</td>
<td></td>
<td>CPD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Group supervision; beginning, middle and end

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMING TOGETHER</th>
<th>AGENDA BUILDING</th>
<th>PRESENTING</th>
<th>REVIEW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brief personal check in</td>
<td>Bids for time</td>
<td>Individual goals and case specific input from members</td>
<td>Individual learning needs and goals met?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Update from last sessions clients</td>
<td>Emergency requests</td>
<td>Use of variety of supervision methods</td>
<td>Any group maintenance needs identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues leftover?</td>
<td>Managerial issues</td>
<td>Formally agreeing the next steps</td>
<td>Themes from session and process review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time decisions</td>
<td>Debriefing</td>
<td>Requests for next time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Top-down containment of the group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall contract</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group working agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minute to minute response management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heart of the matter; ‘reflective space’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tasks of managing group supervision work

1. Negotiate working agreements in the group
2. Hold the time structure
3. Ensure equality
4. Hold the boundaries and focus
5. Model skills of responding, focus and feedback
6. Manage creativity to deepen understanding
7. Review and re-negotiate group working agreement
8. Self awareness in the role as facilitator
Tasks of building, maintaining and repairing group alliance

① Set up structures to help members to get to know each other
② Demonstrate clear intention – clinical supervision not a personal therapy group
③ Build climate of cooperation
④ Have simple models of group process in mind to manage events
⑤ Help members safely explore tension and conflicts in values, theories, approaches and styles
⑥ Recognize when the group needs to struggle, when it needs to ‘play’ and when it needs to celebrate success
⑦ Enable the repair of breakdowns in communication
⑧ Help the group reflect on factors that inhibit good supervision
⑨ Facilitate new members entering and old members exiting
Tasks of supporting supervisees to increasingly ...

① Manage their own learning and development
② Identify how to prepare for supervision
③ Present in ways that are effective for their own learning
④ Give clear feedback
⑤ To be open to feedback
⑥ Appreciate their own strength and style
⑦ Aware of role in the group and develop accordingly
⑧ Develop ability to manage issues of power, competition and comparison
Tasks which overlap with helping the supervision group learn

① Hold boundary between supervision and therapy

② Acknowledge variability in competence

③ Develop shared ability for creativity

④ To become aware of deeper levels of resistance
Exercise 3; small group work

- Thinking again about your experiences of group supervision (either facilitating or being part of)...
- What were some of the barriers and facilitators to this working effectively?
The visible and the invisible

What can be heard (the words used)

What can be seen (gestures, postures)

What can be sensed (feelings, attitudes)

Content (above the surface)

Process (below the surface)
“Wait! Wait! Listen to me! ... We don’t have to be just sheep!”
Defence mechanisms

- Repression
- Projection, Splitting & Projective Identification (Klein, 1946)
- Displacement
- Sublimation, Reaction Formation
- Denial
- Regression
- Rationalization, Intellectualization
- Identification with the Aggressor (Anna Freud, 1937)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BKDGFXzưrfk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BKDGFXzưrfk)
Bion’s Theory of Groups

- Groups are difficult, provoking feelings of conscious and unconscious anxiety in group members.
- Defensive Behaviour may be generated to deal with anxiety.
- Groups frequently exhibit a ‘group unconscious’, manifesting itself in three different ‘basic assumptions’ (‘as if’), which may be out of touch with reality.
- Groups may move from one basic assumption to another. But groups do not always become basic assumptions groups.
- If the group is in touch with reality, groups will get on with the task.
Two groups:

- In every group two groups are present:
  1) Primary Group or Work Group (conscious)
  2) Basic Assumption Group (BA / unconscious)
Basic Assumption Group:

When a group adopts any one of the basic assumptions, it interferes with the task the group is attempting to accomplish.

- Dependency
- Pairing
- Fight & Flight
- Oneness (Turquet (1974))
- Me-ness (Lawrence Bain & Gould, 2000)
- Massification/Aggregation (Hopper, 1997)
Dependency

- Members act as if they have no ideas/resources of their own;
- Ask for guidance about how to do the task, denying own capabilities;
- No initiative for action;
- All power & authority invested in group leader;
- Expectation leader will provide nourishment & protection.
Fight / Flight

- Assumption is created that group is meeting to fight something or run away from it;
- Members blame external factors (lack of resources, other teams, management) for all that feels uncomfortable;
- Fight or flight seem only techniques of self-preservation
- A leader is needed to direct the conflict.
Pairing

- Two members dominate & appear nurtured by group to increase cohesiveness;
- Unrealistic hope something new will emerge & someone/ something will help them getting on with tasks;
- Many new ideas but nothing happens;
- Hope something better comes up; if it did, would be rejected.
Basic Assumptions vs. Work Group

- Groups may move from one basic assumption to another.
- But groups do not always become basic assumptions groups!
- If the group is in touch with reality, groups will get on with the task.
Exercise 4; Vignettes
You are supervising a group of trainee clinical psychologists in an NHS setting.

You have noticed that when the supervisees present case material, they present it to you rather than to each other, and then look expectantly to you for a response.

Interaction between participants is focussed very much on deciding whose turn it will be to present next.
Vignette 1

- What do you think is happening?
- What would you be thinking and/or feeling?
- What intervention(s) might you make?
Possible discussion points

- Bion’s basic assumptions:
- Group in dependency mode.
- There might be a level of distrust/envy/rivalry amongst supervisees that holds them back from engaging with each other’s material?
- The supervisor could intervene by noting this is going on, and asking why people are working in this way, or could challenge the culture directly by inviting group members to comment on each other’s work.
- There could also be parallel processes at work; the team might be working with highly dependent clients who look to their therapists for answers.
You supervise a trainee who is running a group using CBT techniques to help people with anxiety related problems. Five out of the six members seem engaged, are always there on time, complete the exercises, and do their homework.

The sixth person is often late, sometimes misses sessions altogether, and never does his homework. Other group members seem critical of them, but don't say anything.
Vignette 2

- What do you think is happening?
- What would you be thinking and/or feeling?
- What intervention(s) might you make?
Possible discussion points

- Bion: this man seems to be in flight mode, and this should be explored with him.
- But in a group, it is possible for one person to be on the receiving end of other's projections and behave accordingly - this man might be expressing the resistance to treatment that others feel but don't express.
- A way forward might be wondering if other group members feel like not taking part, and then suggesting ways this man could deal with his resistance.
Vignette 3

- In the same supervision group as in vignette 2:
- A supervisee begins a session by saying that her sister had taken an overdose.
- Her sister has survived, but the supervisee says that although she has carried on working her heart and mind have not been in the job.
- What do you do as supervisor?
Vignette 3

- What do you think is happening?
- What would you be thinking and/or feeling?
- What intervention(s) might you make?
Possible discussion points

- Boundaries
- Need to hold them but not be too rigid.
- Supervision is not therapy, but can and should be supportive.
- Depends on you as a supervisor how far you encourage exploration of this.
- But bear in mind that supervision is ultimately for client. The supervisor does have a "quality control" function and a responsibility to act if the service to client is not good enough.
- But then again wounded healers may make good healers...?
Thank you for listening!

- Any questions or reflections?