



# Management Support Unit (MSU)



## Information Sheet 10: Professional supervision

Over the last few years, professional supervision has become an option of choice for many executive officers/senior managers in the community sector.

### So what is professional supervision?

In many respects the words professional supervision is misleading. It is more a relationship of equals. Some would say it is more like professional mentoring, although this also does not fully explain the relationship. The truth is somewhere between common understanding of supervision and mentoring.

*"We propose that at the most general level supervision is concerned with a set of core purposes. These include, most fundamentally, the development of the professional competence of the supervisee, and a responsive stance towards the clients they serve. In parallel and complimentary to this is the supervisee's development of a coherent sense of professional identity and purpose, and a considered crystallisation of their notion of personal integrity. These higher order purposes are achieved by explicit learning activities in six specific goal areas:*

- *The context of professional practice (systemic competence and role efficacy)*
- *The conceptualisation of strategy (conceptual competence and ethical judgement)*
- *The competent response to expressed client need (technical skills) and*
- *Critical self awareness (personal development)<sup>1</sup>*

### Guidelines for the establishment of an effective professional relationship

- The relationship should have a flexible but formal structure for a limited time, along with written guidelines on what the role of the supervisor should be
- The relationship should be financially and professionally supported by the organisation
- The supervision should be voluntary with neither party being forced into the relationship
- All information should be shared in confidence
- The supervisor should not be legally responsible for the action of the supervisee
- The supervisor and the supervisee should not take advantage of the situation in regards to professional ethics
- To ensure that important and relevant issues are discussed, there needs to be professional limits in place, noting that personal and emotional issues may come up from time to time
- There needs to be clear guidelines and expectations focussing on openness and support for the supervisee and the relationship as a whole
- There needs to be appropriate mechanisms for reporting back to the Board
- There needs to be clear procedures in place in case of a relationship breakdown

<sup>1</sup> McMahon M & Patton, W (Eds). (2002) *Supervision in the Helping Professions – a Practical Approach* Pearson Education Australia Pty Ltd, pp.27-28

## What makes a Good Supervisor and Supervisee?

### A good supervisor:

- Is committed to developing the skills of the supervisee and is interested in their work
- Has a desire to share their experiences and expertise
- Shows integrity and honesty
- Has good communication and listening skills and is not intimidating
- Will be able to assist the supervisee with developing options and developing a process for decision making
- Can provide appropriate advice when necessary
- Is open to other perspectives
- Encourages the examination of ideas
- Is interested in the supervisee's work
- Has a disposition that is positive and accessible

### A good supervisee:

- Has faith in the ability of the supervisor
- Is committed to developing their own skills
- Has a desire to achieve professional goals
- Has a desire for personal growth
- Has a good sense of self and personal capabilities
- Willingly accepts constructive and honest feedback
- Is open to different perspectives and options

### Things that can go wrong

- Professional supervision is adopted because it is in vogue rather than a genuine strategy for professional development
- Unsuccessful match of supervisor and supervisee
- The structural agreement is either too rigid or not rigid enough
- Lack of commitment by either party
- Unrealistic expectations or unspoken expectations by either party or the organisation
- Failure to respect confidentiality
- Failure of the supervisor to provide appropriate feedback

NB: There are other options for supervision. Some of these are:

1. Reciprocal mentoring supervision where you are partners in learning
2. Group supervision

Both types are explained in *Supervision in the Helping Professions*<sup>2</sup>.

### Suggested Reading

Hunter, Mary Ann (2002) *Getting Connected Making Your Mentorship Work*, Australian Council for the Arts, Surry Hills  
McMahon, M & Patton, W (Eds) (2002) *Supervision in the Helping Professions – a Practical Approach*, Pearson Education Australia Pty Ltd, (pp.27-28)

<sup>2</sup> McMahon M & Patton, W (Eds). (2002) *Supervision in the Helping Professions – a Practical Approach* (pp.27-28) Pearson Education Australia Pty Ltd

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