

Practice Guide 1: Managing Practice

1. Supervision and Team Leadership

Effective supervision and team management involves:

- organisation of time and team participation
- effective facilitation of team meetings
- team leadership

Individual and group supervision are important parts of the first-line manager's job as a manager of practice. However, managing practice involves more than formal supervision, as it looks at the best use of the whole team's resources. This means that the first line manager should know what staff are doing and how they are doing it and be able to give consistent, judicious leadership to the team.

Supervision is often thought of as a one-to-one activity. However, many of the principles and aims of **individual supervision** can be applied to **group supervision**. If you supervise a group of colleagues you are likely to find some of the skills and techniques of **team development** useful.

The difference between the two is probably one of emphasis: group supervision is likely to focus more on direct work with service users and carers, looking at the inter-personal skills, judgements and approaches used by group members.

In supporting and leading the professional work of your team, you are likely to use all three approaches: the table below sets out some of their characteristics to help you decide which approach to use when. A mixture of all three will probably be most effective. For example a statutory team used to thinking in terms of individual allocated cases may find group supervision very helpful.

A day care team, used to collective direct work may find the change of emphasis provided by a team development session just as stimulating.

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Individual supervision

- **ensures** line-manager attention to the quality of work, including issues of accountability and formal decision making
- **offers** a semi-private setting
- **provides** time and focus for the individual worker
- **reflects** the individual case-load approach of statutory services
- **focuses** on direct work with users and carers

Useful reading:

Mattison Jane. The Reflection Process in Casework Supervision

Institute of Marital Studies. Tavistock Institute of Social Relations, London: 1975.

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Group supervision

- **encourages** open and professional attitudes to learning
- **uses** the various abilities within the group
- **offers** a range of perspectives and skills to individuals
- **supports** the concept of collective practice and service delivery
- **reflects** the group approach of residential and day care services
- **focuses** on direct work with users and carers

Useful reading:

Barbara Kahan. Growing Up in Groups

London HMSO/NISW 1994 Caredata

Tony Morrison. Staff Supervision in Social Care: an action learning approach

Harlow Longman 1993 Caredata

Mattison Jane. The Reflection Process in Casework Supervision

Institute of Marital Studies. Tavistock Institute of Social Relations, London: 1975.

Team development

- **focuses** on the collective responsibility of the group as representatives of their organisation
- **looks** at infra-structure, continuous improvement and how the team can work together most effectively
- **looks** at the wider picture not only at individual client contact

Useful reading:

McCoughan Nano, Palmer Barry.

Systems thinking for harassed managers.

Karnac, London: 1994

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a) Team meetings

You are likely to be in charge of regular team meetings that deal with 'business' of all kinds. You are likely to influence the professional approach, values and skills development of your team in these meetings: you can not avoid setting a professional and management example. How you manage the team meeting will influence the group's effectiveness, collective effort and sense of purpose. The way you lead the team meeting will have an impact whatever the purpose of the meeting. You can:

Create effective and dynamic environments: by expecting all staff to:

- attend on time
- attend unless they give appropriate reasons
- to come prepared with necessary documents for the meeting and
- by preparing all staff for the agenda

Facilitate team meetings by ensuring:

- clear communication throughout the meeting
- differences are openly discussed; staff are confident that their views are being listened to; the manager is able to clarify and enlarge workers' contributions
- boundaries are adhered to: professional discussion and a focus on direct work of the team members is protected from being overtaken by organisational business or by conversations about wide generalities
- an environment where there is trust between team members and agreement to carry out their different tasks

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1. Supervision and Team Leadership

a) Team meetings

Lead the group by demonstrating:

- the confidence to make decisions in a meeting and demonstrate clearly why these decisions have been made
- an expectation of agreeing and undertaking action
- clarity about what are team tasks and the limits and purpose of the team
- respect for other people's skills, experience and specialist knowledge within the team

Validate the team's work by:

- providing a meeting place that is as comfortable as possible
- ensuring minimum interruption and disruption

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b) Effective Supervision

Managers are meant to supervise: but what does this involve for the first-line manager and what skills do you need to undertake supervision of staff?
'Supervision' has fallen into disrepute in recent years, for a number of reasons:

It has acquired a bad reputation as a semi-private activity, focused on the individual supervisee's needs and not on the outcomes for the service user.

Conversely, supervision has become procedurally driven, checking compliance rather than positively challenging accepted custom and practice. The relationship between practitioner and supervisor is therefore likely to be a prescriptive one, as managers oversee compliance with procedural and fiscal requirements.

Not least, first line managers have a lot to do and complex and disputed activities like supervision are likely to be left out of the manager's job.

The first line manager is responsible for the standard of practice within the team: some of the best characteristics of supervision are vital to this management of practice. These include an understanding that effective practice requires a sense both of disengagement and reflection. This creates the opportunity to question practice and custom which is vital to the development and support of effective social work and social care services. Workers need a finely tuned sense of professional anxiety to be able to reflect on their feelings and use them in understanding their work in the relationships they form with service users and significant others.

Discussion of this with an informed third party is more than a check on effective performance. It is an essential dimension of effective practice itself.

The Harkness Review: Changing the focus of social work supervision: effects on client satisfaction and generalised contentment. This looks at the relationship between supervision and client well-being. Download a resume of this article. (www.elsc-bestpracticeguides.org.uk/first_line/supervision_team/harkness.pdf)
If you want to read more about the research and development work NISW has undertaken on this topic, download Managing Practice: supervision and the organisation.

(http://www.elsc-bestpracticeguides.org.uk/first_line/supervision_team/supervision.doc)

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b) Effective Supervision

What support can the organisation provide?

Is there a supervision policy ?

If your organisation has a supervision policy, it means you are expected and sanctioned to undertake this aspect of staff development. You are guided as to how to do so, and you have a basis for negotiating the means to do so.

The Froggett review: Sustaining tensions in practice supervision. This study looks at the implementation of a supervision policy. Download a resume of this book.

(http://www.elsc-bestpracticeguides.org.uk/first_line/supervision_team/froggett.pdf)

NISW's survey of supervision policies identified a number of common elements:

- **Statement of intent**
- **Contracts, Recording and Confidentiality**
- **Supervision Contract**
- **Accountability**
- **Concerns and Complaints**
- **Endorsement**

Each of these elements are explained below.

- **Statement of intent**
This can set out the actions to be undertaken and the values underlying such action; that is, from the 'what' of supervision to the 'why'. It states that supervision is a "reflective" process about professional thinking, actions and decisions.
- **Contracts, Recording and Confidentiality**
Contracts set out what either party can expect from supervision and gives the agency an opportunity to audit and monitor supervision performance. They can also encourage innovation and thoughtful work.

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b) Effective Supervision

Supervision Contract

Date

Review date.....

Practice Arrangements : Individual

We will meet for supervision

How often

Where

For how long

We expect that case-files, diaries and other written notes will contribute to the session

We agree that the circumstances in which supervision may be interrupted are:

The methods we will experiment with will be:

Helpful feedback will be in the form of:

What we hope to gain is:

If things go wrong, we will:

The way we're most likely to break this contract is by:

The ways we will avoid doing this will be:

We will review this contract on.....

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Supervision Contract (continued)

We will both prepare thoroughly for the session

We will both consider these arrangements to take priority over other work except in extreme circumstances

We will book supervision sessions six months in advance

It is the supervisor's responsibility to produce supervision notes. A copy will be retained by both of us. These notes are the property of the agency and may be used to provide management information.

We will note any areas of work/development where additional /alternative professional supervision would be appropriate and aim to organise this between us.

Practice arrangements: Team

The supervisor will organise a team rota for these sessions at least six months in advance which takes into consideration the needs of individual team members.

Team members undertake to respect their colleagues supervision sessions and will not interrupt them other than in cases of emergency as defined by for each team member's contract.

Where supervision sessions are cancelled by team members then it is their responsibility to make an alternative arrangement with the supervisor.

Where supervision sessions are cancelled by the supervisor then it is her /his responsibility to make alternative arrangements with individual team members.

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Supervision Contract (continued)

Content of sessions

We will review the work undertaken since the last session.

We will agree an agenda for each session and ensure that we include:

Analysis, decision making and actions on current work

Relevant research and practice knowledge and where to get this

Maintaining agency expectations and standards.

Supervisee's continuing professional development

Key Aspects

The key aspects of work we wish to focus on in between now and the review are:

Signed: Supervisee Supervisor

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- **Accountability**
This sets out who is responsible for ensuring that supervision is offered and undertaken. It includes the individual supervisory pair but also other line managers, staff development officers representing the wider organisation.
- **Concerns and Complaints**
This touches on a number of distinct areas; differences of professional opinion and judgement and how they can be arbitrated, perceived poor performance and 'whistle-blowing'. This sets supervision within the agency's wider policy frameworks and clarifies which route to take in particular circumstances.
- **Endorsement**
This comes from a variety of sources; the Director or Chief Executive of the agency; the trade union and perhaps user and carer representatives. These statements acknowledge the importance of sound supervision to the whole agency as well as to the individual and places it firmly in the context of better services for users and carers.

Is there supervision guidance?

Policy tells you why to do it, but guidance can help you how to do it.

Are you offered skills training and mentoring as a supervisor?

This may be available from a variety of sources and you may get the most effective skills development from a combination of them. It would not be useful to see them as substitutes for each other.

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Skills development for professional supervision.

These are likely to be programmes specially commissioned within or by your social care agency. If these are not available, the CCETSW practice teacher award will cover much of the ground, although not within the context of your dual role as line-manager as well as supervisor. The Hughes, Lynette & Pengelly resume: Staff supervision in a turbulent environment: managing process and task in front-line services: Considers the current environments in which practice must be managed. Download a resume of this book.

(http://www.elsc-bestpracticeguides.org.uk/first_line/supervision_team/hughes.doc)

- **'Managing people' skills development.** In local Government or NHS these may be provided corporately, or have a specially adapted component to cover social care.
- **Supervisors' group:** If your organisation does not provide one, you can set this up yourself. Look at Team Manager Support in the next section.
- **The supervision you receive:** This should conform to the same principles as the supervision you provide and should include the quality of your supervisory practice. Managers supervising managers run the risk of proceduralising the content of supervision even more than practitioner supervision does. Appropriate supervision may not be available to you within your agency's usual arrangements. You or your line manager can arrange additional or alternative supervision/consultation for you, often from another member of the agency. Sometimes the agency is willing to pay for an external supervisor, if you present a case for funding. You may decide that you will provide your own external supervisor.

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b) Effective Supervision

What do you do if any or all of these are missing?

You should check practice in other parts of the agency: this may be a local problem that the agency can bring into line with its expectations. Some you can get for yourself relatively easily. Spurs to organisational change include Investors in People, quality assurance models such as the (Business) Excellence Model. These may often be invoked at corporate level in local government. Within social care agencies, central Government drivers include Quality Protects or the White Paper 'Modernising Social Services' (www.doh.gov.uk) . Look at the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) website for more information about workforce planning (<http://www.idea.gov.uk/>).

For a list of useful literature see 7. Literature and Review, page 60.

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c) Team manager support

NISW research and development work has consistently found that first-line managers rarely give themselves the same support they provide to others, that is: the pooling of ideas and skills that comes from working as a team. A group of team managers has a wealth of experience of managing teams, some from years of experience, some with new and different approaches. This reference group can provide solutions to small but seemingly intractable problems, for example : 'How do I stop my team member arriving late every day?', that otherwise fester or are eventually directed up the management line, perhaps unnecessarily

You can put together a team if:

- You already have a peer group, where there are several of you with the same job title: for example, Children's Home manager, team manager for area based services for Older People. It is likely that you already meet, but work to a 'business and information' agenda.
- You are a 'one-off', for example, the manager of the agency's Leaving Care team, or of the Hearing Impairment team. You have peers even if they have a different job title or are located in a different section of the organisation. You will have circumstances in common besides managing the collective practice of a team. As 'specialist' teams managers you will be used to managing outside the organisational mainstream, possibly in isolation or with strong links with other agencies. You will be aware of the particular issues arising from managing the entire service provided by the agency.

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2. Team and Service Development

This section deals with managing the team as a whole for the better delivery of services to users and carers. It offers a number of simple exercises to undertake with the team. The topics covered are:

- Defining the team
- Establishing the team and its work
- Using the team's knowledge, skills and experience

and should help you to:

- outline team autonomy
- establish team boundaries
- define team tasks

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2. Team and Service Development

a) Defining the team

The main characteristics of a team are:

- three or more people
- an agreed structure
- a team identity and shared tasks.

Almost all social workers are located in teams. This can be an administrative device only. Examine who is really in the team or are there teams within teams?

How are the "support" members of the team (administrators for example) integral to the work of the team? Do they feel that they are the last to hear about things? Are they a team within a team?

What is a realistic size for team working? Between 6 to 11 members is usually considered appropriate but this can vary enormously. Communication between team members is crucial. Teams that are big (over 15 members) rarely meet together and if they are located in different venues will find communication and a sharing of a common and agreed task difficult.

How much autonomy teams have depends on the "culture" of the organisation they work in. Teams often have a great deal of autonomy and capacity to decide on their task. Within the parameters of the organisation's aims, team managers and their team members are in the best position to make judgements about their work - what can and cannot be done and how to be responsive to the needs of the particular area or client group they serve. However, this means that teams need to have good intelligence about their locality or their client group and their needs.

The team needs to know the stated aims and plans of the organisation. The Community Care Plan, Children's Plan and any departmental or organisational business plan, give written guidance to teams on the parameters or "skeleton" on which to base their own team aims and plans. It is the experience of most teams that these plans allow discretion for individual teams to exemplify their purpose and task, although the amount of discretion can vary considerably between local authorities. The limits of this discretion are not always tested out by team managers and their knowledge can be based on myth rather than actual limitations. There also may be some ambivalence by manager and team members about testing out the discretionary boundaries.

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2. Team and Service Development

a) Defining the team

- Are you clear as a team and team manager about the boundaries around you when making decisions about your work?
- Is it clearly stated in your organisation or is there a lot of custom and practice behaviour?
- What happens if you overstep your decision making boundary?
- How would you know when you have overstepped?

Defining the task of the team is a dynamic process which has to be restated from time to time. Changes in locality or neighbourhood characteristics, changes in law, changes in political policy and changes in social work and organisational practice, all require the team to reassess its purpose and function. To obtain a degree of consensus for all team members on the purpose and function of the team can take time. However, failure to address this issue can lead to poor practice and confusion for both staff and service users.

Team leadership is important but not all tasks have to be led by the team manager. To have credibility with a team, the team manager should be able to take on most of the team's tasks even if she or he cannot carry them out with the same degree of expertise as another team member. However, the manager's ability to carry out most team tasks may become less possible as social work practice moves increasingly towards specialisation. The manager who can only manage others and is without practice expertise is at a disadvantage in social work.

The team manager needs to delegate, not to suit him or her but for the most effective working of the team. Delegation needs to be made explicit and communicated clearly.

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2. Team and Service Development

a) Defining the team

To help establish the purpose of the team use the following exercises.

Exercise 1

Give yourselves a week to search for material; One hour to examine material

Involve all members of the team

Photo-copied material

Check whether there is any written material already in place which describes the purpose and tasks of the team. This can be a useful starting point even if it is out of date.

The whole team should look at what you have collected:

- is it up to date ?
- is it accurate
- does it include everyone
- is it about the team as a whole

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2. Team and Service Development

a) Defining the team

Exercise 2

This exercise is best given time for team members to think on their own and as a group. Allow up to two hours.

The whole team, but with some work alone and in smaller groups

Flip chart , paper & pens. Copies of grid

The dimensions of this grid are not alternatives, and for most service users, social work activities will cover a range of activities.

Each team member can do this for his or her work, or the exercise can be done by the team for the team. Teams have found this grid a useful outline for establishing a "picture" of their work.

a) Defining the team

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2. Team and Service Development

Exercise 3

One hour

The whole team, but with some work in pairs

Notepaper and pens, flip chart, paper & pens.

Flip chart , paper & pens.

Get every team member to think they are meeting an interested and friendly colleague at a conference and are asked to describe the purpose of their team.

Get team members to relate what they would say to the person sitting next to them (their neighbour) in the team meeting. Ask the "neighbour" to write it down and then get responses up on a flip chart.

This can be a very revealing exercise.

It can also lead to a discussion as to why there may be certain blocks to actually carrying out the team's function or how realistic is the agreed purpose of the team.

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2. Team and Service Development

b) Establishing the team and its work

The organisation has placed your team on its family tree. This is likely to be a one dimensional, administrative map, showing reporting, communication and possibly budgeting lines. This map probably determines the pattern of your team meetings: the forum for collective activity. Despite the many structural reorganisations your department is likely to have undergone in recent years, the appearance of this map has probably changed very little. It may reflect certain assumptions:

- that teams are small in number
- that they are geographically close
- that they cover one main task for their organisation and are therefore made up of people doing interchangeable jobs.

Organisations worry constantly about time spent in meetings. Individuals echo this when they complain that team meetings deal only with top-down information distribution. Team managers are often faced with running a meeting with an overlong agenda for a large group of disparate workers.

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2. Team and Service Development

b) Establishing the team and its work

Exercise 4

One and a half hours

Everyone that works in the team

Flipchart, paper & pens

- Do the assumptions of the administrative map adequately describe your team?
- How many people are in the team as a whole? If more than 12, the team is probably struggling with too many cross-references to function effectively as the main channel for development.
- How geographically spread are they?
- How many teams within the team can you identify? Where does allegiance and sense of membership lie for the individual?
- How many people in the team find themselves in more than one of these groupings?
- Are there outside teams that team members also belong to: for example, a multi disciplinary mental health team or an administrative teams in the building?
- How many of these groupings are about common tasks and skills, rather than organisational titles: e.g. initial assessment, therapeutic change, risk management?

Draw a map that displays these characteristics.

What new groupings does the map show?

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2. Team and Service Development

c) Using the team's knowledge, skills and experience

This will help you to:

- learn from the team's collective experience, knowledge and skills
- establish current best practice in the team
- support a collective approach to the work of the team
- define the development needs of the team

Traditionally social workers learn their craft as individuals. Supervision is usually on a one to one basis and training courses that remove individuals from their work setting invariably miss out on collective benefits to the team. Learning is often regarded as knowledge from outside imparted in a variety of ways to the individual. Opportunities for workbased learning have redressed this balance but can still default into this mode when training materials repeat "empty vessels to be filled" notions of learning. Paradoxically the expertise available to the team lies within their own experiences at work and with the experts in the problems they are presented with, namely the families and communities that come to them for help. The following exercise presumes that:

- There are no easy answers: if there were, your clients would not need you.
- Struggling with intractable and complex situations does not mean that you are doing your job badly
- By focusing on the difficulties that workers experience in isolation, the team can think about the collective skills and knowledge they can draw on for the problems they are asked to deal with.
- You are of most use to your clients as a problem solver, not a solution provider, although providing services may be a part of what you do.

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2. Team and Service Development

c) Using the team's knowledge, skills and experience

Exercise 5

a half day

This exercise can be used with the whole team or with those 'teams within the team' that the previous exercise may have identified.

Flipchart, paper & pens for each participant

This considers what experience and expertise members bring to the team. Each team member has a large sheet of paper on which they draw / list their professional 'path' to date. They can include personal information at their own discretion. They should think about what they have learnt as they have moved along this path, what has influenced their movement along it and any other reflections that come to mind e.g., how straight, twisted, short, long it is etc.

This can then be shared across the team in a variety of ways:

- With a partner who also asks further questions and who then presents it to the rest of the team
- By each member presenting their own career path to their colleagues

The team should then consider what experiences/ expertise they have become aware of and how they might make more/ better use of this. This exercise works best when given plenty of time, and works well as a team 'awayday' exercise.

As leader of this exercise you may wish to discuss these presumptions with the team as a basis for sharing practice and for developing the skills mix of the team.

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2. Team and Service Development

c) Using the team's knowledge, skills and experience

Skills Mix in Teams

It is useful to review the skills mix within the team from time to time, especially at times of change. Regular review becomes a normal team activity and encourages you and your team to know about specific and individual strengths. Collective skills and where there may be gaps you want to fill. It offers a good model for team members to build on when considering their own professional development.

It helps the team manager make best use of all available resource: NISW's experience is that teams that regularly review their skills mix become more aware of the role that can be played by good office managers. First-line managers and their teams are better able to focus on the content and quality of the services they deliver where they have the benefit of good administrative and financial management support. This is particularly so as more and more organisational maintenance, administrative tasks and financial responsibilities are given to first-line managers.

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2. Team and Service Development

c) Using the team's knowledge, skills and experience

Exercise 6

one hour upwards: material for presentation needs to be prepared, distributed and read prior to the session.

Practitioners

Choose a practice issue that you want to apply your collective wisdom to.

In other words, something that a number of you find difficult or intractable. The material for discussion is provided by the direct work undertaken by individual team members. Both the team manager and team members need to help the worker presenting material feel "safe" especially if this is a new experience for them. However, it should also be remembered that presenting and discussing one's work is part of any professional practice. The presentation will describe the initial referral, the worker's aims, actions and decisions taken and the difficulties they currently experience with the work.

Next, the team uses this information to consider:

- Who is involved: the social and the professional networks.
- The different perspectives of these people, including their concerns. How would a worker know? Has the worker spoken to each individual involved?
- What the service user or family wants and why and how would a worker know this?
- The worker's role: is the worker to be a solution provider or a problem solver? A problem solver is someone from outside the immediate situation with a fresh point of view.
- What do the participants think the worker's role is? What has the worker told them? What should the worker tell them?
- The social situation that has led to the referral and how a worker could give this outsider view to the people involved. How can a worker acknowledge the feelings of the individuals involved and the part feelings play in its problem?
- What does the team know about working with this type of referral? How can they use this knowledge and experience to help them in this case?

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2. Team and Service Development

c) Using the team's knowledge, skills and experience

Once you have looked together at the case(s):

- What kind of conversations does the worker need to have to undertake an assessment of need?
- What information and knowledge will help the individual worker?
- What information does the worker need to give to the participants?
- How might you 'capture' the knowledge you have produced from your collective experience?
- Have you identified any gaps in the team's skills that could be strengthened either by team members' contributions or from outsiders?
- If knowledge could be strengthened by people from outside the team, what are the routes available in your organisation for obtaining this expertise? Inviting appropriate staff from other teams or organisations to present their work at your team meeting can be useful, stimulating and will increase the team's knowledge base.

This exercise, is essentially a group supervision session. It does not replace the need for individual staff supervision and should not be viewed as an alternative to individual supervision.

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3. Managing Work

As a team manager, you are responsible for making best use of the resources of your team: to do this, you and your team need to know how and where to use your efforts, individually and collectively. This section looks at ways to manage the work. It looks at 3 related aspects:

- Caseload management
- Workload management
- Teamload management

Practice Guide 1: Managing Practice

3. Managing Work

a) Caseload Management

This looks at the direct work of individual client-worker transactions. It is primarily a tool for the immediate benefit to the client and professional supervision and development.

Caseload management sets out the kind and volume of work undertaken by the supervisee. A head count of case files or even of individual service users or families is not usually a good indication of the actual work involved.

If your organisation does not already operate a caseload management scheme for individual supervision, then you and your team can make one up

Remember:

This is to help view individual work in supervision, for the purpose of effective effort

Three major elements make up a workers effort:

Complexity: this includes the number of other professionals the worker is involved with. It recognises the social worker's role in drawing together professional networks, for example in Child Protection case conferences and plans, or when helping a family to make decisions about the care of vulnerable or frail family members

Risk: this considers the professional judgement required of the worker: are decisions to be made based on risk assessment; is the picture a fast changing one; is the work at a stage where professional anxiety is heightened because of lack of information.

Travel: does the worker have to travel appreciable distances to undertake the work with a particular individual or family; for example, placements in another part of the country.

Practice Guide 1: Managing Practice

3. Managing Work

a) Caseload Management

If you and your team can agree some definitions within these categories, say on a three point scale, you will have a consistent and clear weighting system for each case and therefore each worker's case load. You can use this to:

- agree appropriate weightings for them given their level of experience and expertise
- define and distil the kind of caseload to help the worker's professional development
- keep a watchful eye on potential stress levels: a preponderance of work with high weightings in one category may indicate potential stress levels better than a count of allocated files
- predict changes in weightings to help formulate professional interventions and intended outcomes

Here is an example of some caseload definitions and weightings and their application in practice. You and your team can use this as a basis for discussion in agreeing your own criteria to suit the type of service you deliver.

Complexity:

- Contact with other agencies either minimal or operating as regularised / unproblematic or standard.
- Contact with other agencies changeable, requiring initiation and/or maintenance.
- Multiple or complex contact with other agencies requiring careful negotiation / advocacy/ development or other high input.

Risk:

- No current risk involved /risk assessment known and understood by all parties, with consequent decisions and actions, including contingency plans negotiated.
- Risk assessment in process of being undertaken, with options for action and decision ready to be put into place.
- Current risk not assessed / change of circumstances requiring new assessment.

Practice Guide 1: Managing Practice

3. Managing Work

a) Caseload Management

Travel:

- No travelling outside usual agency area involved.
- Regular, planned travel, no more than 3 times per year.
- Unexpected travel on an occasional basis and/or regular travel more than 3 times per year.

Case Example:

Mrs Harrison is an 82 year old woman living alone. Last winter she fell leaving the house and broke her hip; she made a good recovery and was discharged from hospital to home: an assessment and care plan were undertaken then.

As a result, grab rails were fitted at the front door and in the bathroom; Mrs. Henderson began to attend a lunch club twice a week.

At the time, Mrs. Henderson's son was concerned that his mother should not return home alone but be admitted to residential care. Mr. Henderson lives in another part of the country and has said that he is not able to provide the regular contact he would like to give.

The assessing social worker ascertained that Mrs. Henderson wanted to return home from hospital. Mr. Henderson has contacted your team to say that his mother is no longer able to look after herself: she is being treated for a recurrent chest infection by her GP and is becoming forgetful.

Mr. Henderson says his mother is not eating properly and has not been attending her lunch club. The GP also writes to your team recommending residential care for Mrs. Henderson.

Practice Guide 1: Managing Practice

3. Managing Work

a) Caseload Management

In supervision, you and the worker rate the case as follows:

Complexity: Multiple or complex contact with other agencies requiring careful negotiation / advocacy / development or other high input 3.

Risk: Current risk not assessed / change of circumstances requiring new assessment 3.

Travel: No travelling outside usual agency area involved 1.

Total: 7/10

In discussion, you both agree that this rating should have lessened by the time of your next supervision in 2 weeks time. The anticipated changes through the worker's interventions are:

- A clearer picture about Mrs. Harrison's state of health and causes of current distress, the risks to her well-being and what this implies about her ability to continue living at home. Move to weighting 2 ?
- Renewed contact with Mrs. Harrison, her son and her gp to negotiate the options available to her, dependent on her wishes. Addressing Mr. Harrison's concerns as legitimate be a major part of this. Remain at weighting 3 for present?

Practice Guide 1: Managing Practice

3. Managing Work

b) Workload Management

This expands the focus beyond client-worker transactions and acknowledges that the worker operates within a professional environment of some complexity: welfare bureaucracies require considerable attention from their members. The team manager's role in managing practice is to help the worker:

- Be an effective participant in agency networks
- Recognise how these activities can provide a refuge from the emotional onslaught of direct work. Rather it looks at the whole work effort of an individual within a particular setting. It takes account of the indirect work such as professional meetings of various kinds, recording and communicating, the additional activity required at the start and end of a piece of work. For example:
 - workers in multi-disciplinary settings may attend more meetings than in single agency settings
 - day-care, residential and clinically-sited teams may have meetings that are direct client-based (e.g. ward rounds; hand-over sessions) and distinguished from administrative or business meetings
 - services will have different rates of intake and re-referral/closure

This format allows you and the worker to estimate the range of work undertaken by an individual and the resources they require. This takes time consuming but necessary activities into account, and also indicates any effort that has become redundant or is duplicated. It allows for individual circumstances in teams where workers have differing spheres of responsibility (e.g. a Youth justice team, where one worker may primarily work with school age children, another with older adolescents) or differing work settings (for example in a hospital social work team where workers have different clinical attachments).

This focus will enable you to help the worker:

- see the overall pattern and rate of their work
- estimate appropriate timescales and apportioning of the various activities
- determine most effective use of time and effort

Practice Guide 1: Managing Practice

3. Managing Work

b) Workload Management

You and your team will need to know how much time is spent on what activity, decide whether this emphasis is the one you think most effective and from that of a team. It helps measure the resources used and available to a work group, it provides management information to all members of the team and to the wider organisation, especially if the system is operated across all teams providing the service. It works equally well for a team of mixed professionals, eg a CMHT, supporting the development of integrated team work, where some professional activities will become common and shared (eg. duty work) whilst still allowing for some discrete professional tasks.

It attributes weightings to a variety of activities and therefore will need to be adjusted to fit particular work environments. Weightings usually measure risk, decision making and complexity (that is the networks the worker has to initiate/negotiate).

Practice Guide 1: Managing Practice

3. Managing Work

c) Team load management

This draws on workload data to provide the whole team with a useful picture of where its energies are going. It is essentially a local measure to aid the team in its service development and ultimately the organisation. It allows trends, successes, redundant activity to be spotted and adjustments made.

You and the team can aggregate the workload management format to give a picture of the whole team's activity. Is this how you should be spending your time: what proportion of the work should be given to direct contact with service users, how much time to recording: how many meetings do you want to have? Are some activities getting too much attention at the expense of others?

This activity gives you a very helpful background against which to try out some of the team development exercises which are in 2) Team and Service Development
a) Defining your team, page 22

Practice Guide 1: Managing Practice

4. Managing Information

This section looks at how first-line managers can use information, its collection, analysis and application, to support practice development in their team and service development and delivery in the wider organisation.

Practice Guide 1: Managing Practice

4. Managing Information

a) Contributing to the work of the organisation

There is an enormous resistance to data collection, evaluation, monitoring and inspection. This is often explained by a reluctance on the part of social care workers to 'stand up and be counted', to be specific and focused, to accept and work to standards, to be accountable. There are other reasons also:

- Linear input/output systems don't readily capture the complex and individualised nature of social care.
- In the last 2 decades, social work, along with the rest of the public services has been 'managerialised',¹ and subject to a proceduralised approach. Developing methods that focus on the outcomes for service users and the knowledge and skills required of workers to achieve these is only beginning to emerge.²

There are many influences on this development, not least the defence against the daily work of social care which must remain 'open to real moral, social and political dilemmas, and learn to live with inevitable uncertainty, confusion and doubt.'³ We constantly question whether social work is a 'rational-technical' or a 'practical-moral' activity? Is it an art or a science?

It is against this backdrop that team managers attempt to define and support good practice in their team. Can you have standards for an art: in what way can workers be accountable, understand whether they are useful and how they might be useful to the users of their services? Systems will need to reflect the arena within which social work operates and of the probable likelihood that data capture will not in itself reflect the complexity of users and their world. It is clearly proper that users have the right to know what they can expect and to state what they want. Indeed, the dual nature of social welfare requires us to provide ourselves with a running commentary of what is and isn't working. That running commentary is our management information, monitoring and evaluation.

¹ Pollitt C. *Managerialism & the Public Services*; Oxford, Blackwell 1993

² Parton N. ESRC Seminar 1: Some Thoughts On The Relationship Between Theory & Practice In Social Work; NISW on-line publication

³ Jordan B. A comment on 'Theory & Practice in Social Work' BJSW 8(11) 1978

Practice Guide 1: Managing Practice

4. Managing Information

a) Contributing to the work of the organisation

The following exercises can be used to think about your own responsibilities as a collector and user of management information, either for your own immediate use or on behalf of the wider organisation. You could also use them with your team to think about the collective responsibility you have for gathering data that can tell you something about effective practice.

Exercise

Look at the data you collect routinely and choose one set to look at in more details:

- What does the data measure?
- What does the data describe?
- Does the data allow performance to be measured?
- Who might the stakeholders be and how do they construct their knowledge of the service?
- Identify the type of data needed to evaluate the effectiveness of the service provision

Practice Guides 1: Managing Practice

4. Managing Information

a) Contributing to the work of the organisation

When you have answered the questions posed in the exercise above, you will have considered the 4 elements of any evaluation process:

Measurement: firm statements about how many users receive what sort of services, for what length of time, what range of results are obtained and on what scale. You will note that even basic measurement has qualitative elements: qualitative output, quantitative input.

Description: covers policy & procedures as well as delivery: the aim is to find out whether the service is actually delivered to those for whom it is intended rather than to a different group of users

- What does the agency wish to achieve with a particular service and who does it wish to apply the service to
- What kinds of people actually receive the service predicated by a policy statement?
- What does the service consist of?

Judgement: whether services delivered conform to the values espoused by policy statements.

Whether the outcomes achieved by these services are in line with policy requirements.

&Values The key issue is 'whose values' and being explicit about the reference group at any one time.

(adapted from Thorpe D, Thorpe S. *Monitoring & Evaluation in the Social Services*; Longman 1992)

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Practice Guides 1: Managing Practice

4. Managing Information

b) Data flow

How can you and your team make management information work for you and be useful to the organisation you pass it on to? In other words, how do you know what is going on in your team and what do you do about it?

Data flow & 'need to know'

Data and resulting knowledge can be fed up the organisation, avoiding over-collection, inappropriate and 'dead' data. That is, all data should be of use to the first-line manager, all stages above and beyond this should need a condensed or particular elements of this data collection.

Exercise

- What data collection systems do you use as the manager of your service?
- Which of these do you make use of and which do you collect for someone else?
- Do you know what happens to the ones you collect for someone else?
- Do any of these systems serve both?
- What do you do with those data you collect for yourself?

These questions will help you to distinguish how and why you gather information. You may find out that some data are collected when no longer needed; that there may be a better way of answering a question; that one collection of data can serve several purposes at once. Most importantly you look at how you can use the data you collect to contribute to providing a better service?

Practice Guide 1: Managing Practice

5. Managing Poor Performance

A poorly performing team member can take up a great deal of the team's time and energy. This section looks at some of the ways they might be managed effectively.

The National Institute for Social Work's (NISW) findings are that many first-line managers feel isolated when dealing with persistent poor performance. This is so even when the first-line manager's own manager is actively involved and supportive. One solution is for team managers to work as a practice reference group for each other. Meeting with other first-line managers specifically to discuss their collective task, share skills and offer encouragement to each other, can be particularly helpful in this area. Go to 1. Supervision and team leadership c) Team manager support, page 20.

However, groups and individual managers can see that some circumstances may need stronger action beyond effective day-to-day management or particular attention in individual supervision. Sometimes, first-line managers are expected, either overtly or unintentionally, to contain persistent poor performance because the Department otherwise might face protracted action that the local authority and elected members might be reluctant to take forward. (This has been a particular finding of the Utting report 'People Like Us'. See <http://www.elsc.org.uk/caredata/caredata.htm> to search for details on this report). This had the effect, particularly where departments had few lines of communication between first-line and senior staff, of making persistent poor performance an issue of the first-line manager's own competence. In this situation, first-line managers may think that they are poor professional supervisors or that they needed better management skills or 'more training'. In fact, this can mask two other approaches: using a collective and open management of practice approach; and using HRD and performance appraisal frameworks.

Practice Guide 1: Managing Practice

5. Managing Poor Performance

a) Using a collective and open management of practice approach

As the leader of your team and responsible for practice standards, are you involving your team in standard setting?

Ask yourself these questions:

Exercise

Are you clear about your own, the agency's, the profession's expectations of:

- acceptable behaviour at work
- performance standards
- ways of negotiating differences of professional opinion?

Are you confident that these expectations are explicit and shared within the team you manage?

How do you tell your service users and carers what standards they can expect from you and your team?

Are you confident that you will be told by team members about problems and concerns regarding behaviour and standards?

Does the whole team have a stated, shared responsibility for ensuring appropriate standards of behaviour and professional practice: that is, do you collectively safe-guard the interests of your service users and carers?

Practice Guide 1: Managing Practice

5. Managing Poor Performance

b) Using HRD and performance appraisal frameworks

Employers should have policies and written procedures for dealing with aspects of poor performance. These are rarely held together in one concise document: you may find all of the following in your agency:

- Performance Review & Appraisal procedures
- Staff Care policy
- Health & Safety at Work policy
- Sickness policy
- Staff Alcohol & Drug policy
- Accountability policy
- Competency procedure
- Poor performance procedure
- Disciplinary procedure
- Child Protection/vulnerable adults procedures in regard to allegations against members of staff

Between them, these will set out how the agency distinguishes between various levels of performance, ranging from the good, through the improvable to the unacceptable. Familiarity with the range of options will help you to decide which, if any, of these responses is the appropriate one in the circumstances.

Practice Guide 1: Managing Practice

5. Managing Poor Performance

b) Using HRD and performance appraisal frameworks

Exercise

- Do you know what policy and procedures exists in your agency?
- Do you have copies of these procedures?
- Are you clear about why, when and how to activate them ?
- All of these are the Department's way of handling poor performance, which, as a first-line manager, is your responsibility to ensure.
- Who can help and advise you ?

For example: personnel/HRD colleagues, your own manager, and fellow first line managers are all available to advise you, even at a very early stage of concern. Issues of poor performance and behaviour are particularly difficult to think about on your own and in isolation, so always consult.

Practice Guide 1: Managing Practice

5. Managing Poor Performance

b) Using HRD and performance appraisal frameworks

What kind of behaviour are you concerned about and what approach should you take?

Exercise

The following questions will help you to decide what to do next. It can be very helpful to discuss the problem with a colleague who can give a slightly distanced response to your concerns. Ideally this will be your own line manager, and a peer support group can be very helpful in keeping your sense of perspective. You need to feel supported and justified both when deciding whether behaviour is unacceptable and when deciding how to manage it.

Is your concern about professional behaviour i.e. about how the worker undertakes the tasks and activities particular to their post:

For example you may be concerned about:

- the adequacy of assessments undertaken by a social worker
- the dependability of the file storage system undertaken by an administrator

Is your concern about 'employee' behaviour i.e. about how the worker fulfils the general requirements of employment:

For example you may be concerned about an individual's:

- lateness
- discourtesy to colleagues

What level of concern does the behaviour cause you and / or others?

For example:

- have you received complaints, formal or informal
- is it persistent
- have you spoken to the individual but noted no change
- is the behaviour specifically covered by agency procedures as requiring formal action
- do you think you are dealing with dangerous or unsafe practice

Your answers to these questions will help you to decide whether your next action is **informal** or **formal**:

These are the words used by many agency procedures and, in this context, informal means action that does not invoke a procedure. It does not imply unclear, inconsistent or ambiguous management.

Practice Guide 1: Managing Practice

5. Managing Poor Performance

c) Informal action

This is action you undertake to ensure that you:

- tell the worker what aspect of their work you are concerned about
- tell the worker why you are concerned
- tell the worker what would be acceptable work
- discuss the reasons for the worker's behaviour
- agree how and by when the worker improves
- agree how you will help the worker to make the changes required

This framework is meant to help you give a clear message in a wide range of circumstances, including conduct at work and professional standards. Bear in mind that you may be dealing with a worker

- who has no idea of the impact of their behaviour or of the standard required;
- undertaking work they have not been adequately prepared or provided for
- experiencing stress or distress outside of or inside work.

A supervision session may be the appropriate place to raise these issues, where you have the benefit of setting your concerns in a formalised context of supporting the worker to do their best without being overly heavy-handed. Supervision allows you to record in writing that you have raised a concern without creating anxiety and ambiguity about whether this constitutes a 'formal written warning'.

However, you will have to use your judgement, about the worker, the behaviour and your own style of management to decide how best to have this first conversation. It may be more effective to have a chat in the car. Wherever you talk, you need to be polite, clear about your concerns and expectations and helpful.

Practice Guide 1: Managing Practice

5. Managing Poor Performance

d) Using formal procedures

Most formal procedures are detailed and are staged over time. They are always serious undertakings. Whilst this is partly because considering a person's employment is a serious matter, it is sometimes because procedures are invoked with no prior concrete, evidenced attempts to manage the matter: formal procedures should normally be a planned stage in a continuum of management attention to performance. You need to be confident that you know when, why and how to invoke formal procedures.

You will need to consider formal procedures if:

- You have managed the matter informally but observed no or insufficient improvement and/or
- The behaviour that concerns you is specifically covered by procedure

The procedures examples in the following sections are re-produced by permission of Medway Council and Peterborough City Council.

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5. Managing Poor Performance

e) Examples of poor performance

Unsatisfactory performance is covered by competency/poor performance procedures: these examples are given to illustrate the type and level of behaviour that you would be justified in finding unacceptable: they do not, of course, provide an automatic mandate for action unless contained within a formal agency procedure.

Unsatisfactory work performance can become apparent in a number of ways.

This may include:

- Poor standards of work, e.g. frequent mistakes, not following a job through, unable to cope with instructions given.
- Inability to cope with a reasonable volume of work to a satisfactory standard
- Attitude to work, e.g. poor interpersonal skills, lack of commitment and drive.
- Lack of apparent skill in tasks/method of work required
- Through the agency's Staff Review and Development process when an individual is consistently not achieving agreed and realistic set targets/objectives.

Practice Guide 1: Managing Practice

5. Managing Poor Performance

f) Checklist of actions when managing poor performance

Most formal procedures acknowledge that you may have already attempted to improve matters, and they allow for an informal 'manager only' stage. Formal procedures will follow a timetable and set out who is involved at what stage. Your organisation will or should have a similar chart.

In all cases where work or performance appears to be sub-standard, as manager, you should undertake all of the following steps, where appropriate:

1. Investigate fully the reasons for poor performance
2. Discuss with the employee his/her shortcomings and the standard required
3. Provide a reasonable time to improve.
4. Advise on how improvement can be made and provision of training and supervision where appropriate.
5. Warn the employee of the consequences of not improving.
6. Monitor the employee's performance during and at the end of the 'trial' period while providing the employee with feedback.
7. Where the required standard is still not reached consideration of other options before dismissal e.g. transfer to alternative work, premature retirement either in the interests of the efficiency of the service or on the grounds of ill-health.
8. In many cases improvement will not be instant and, depending on the nature of the job and on the effect of sub-standard performance on the department, the informal process should continue for a reasonable period.
9. This process is the concern of the manager and the employee and, although guidance and advice may be sought, representation of the employee by a Union representative or fellow employee is not appropriate at this stage.

Practice Guide 1: Managing Practice

5. Managing Poor Performance

f) Checklist of actions when managing poor performance

Continuing Problem of Poor Performance

If the informal process does not succeed in raising work performance to an adequate standard, you should arrange a formal hearing where he/she has the opportunity to be represented by a Trade Union representative or fellow employee. The managers present may be just you, you and a more senior manager or more senior managers without you: this will vary and will depend on the procedures set out by your own agency. At this stage, the agency's formal procedure is applied and all future management action will be according to this procedure. The Manager should normally be accompanied by a Personnel Officer. Each party may call a "witnesses" to attend the hearing if they have information which may help an understanding of the position. The purpose of the hearing is to establish as comprehensively as possible:

- The nature of the sub-standard performance and the effect on the department.
- The steps being taken to rectify the situation, their likely duration, and further options including alternative duties.
- Any other circumstances, e.g. personal or health considerations which may affect performance.
- Agreed written targets and objectives, including realistic dates for achievement, against which the employee's performance can be evaluated.

Flowchart of disciplinary process

http://www.elsc-bestpracticeguides.org.uk/first_line/managingpoor/flowdisc.doc

Flowchart of capability procedure

http://www.elsc-bestpracticeguides.org.uk/first_line/managingpoor/flowcapab.doc

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5. Managing Poor Performance

g) Examples of Misconduct

Misconduct is covered by disciplinary procedures: these examples are given to illustrate the type and level of behaviour that you would be justified in finding unacceptable: they do not, of course, provide an automatic mandate for action unless contained within a formal agency procedure.

Examples of acts of misconduct which could involve the disciplinary procedure include, but are not limited to, the following:

- a) Refusal or deliberate failure to comply with legitimate management instructions, agency policies or procedures.
- b) Unauthorised absence from work
- c) Poor time keeping
- d) Use of abusive language/behaviour
- e) Falsehood, e.g. knowingly or through wilful neglect make any false, misleading or inaccurate oral or written statement or entry in any record or document made, kept or required for the purpose of the agency
- f) The loading and/or using of non-authorised software onto agency computer equipment
- g) Acts of harassment.

Practice Guide 1: Managing Practice

5. Managing Poor Performance

h) Examples of Gross Misconduct

Examples of actions likely to be treated as gross misconduct include, but are not limited to, the following:

- a) theft, fraud, deliberate falsification of records
- b) arson
- c) corrupt practices
- d) submission of false references/information or failure to disclose relevant information when requested in connection with an application for appointment with the agency
- e) disorderly or indecent conduct, fighting at work or threatening physical violence
- f) drunkenness or use of illegal drugs on duty
- g) deliberate damage to agency property or that of other agencies or employees
- h) persistent or substantial failure to follow agency documentary procedures and regulations
- i) breaking statutory provisions which would render the agency or its employees liable to prosecution
- j) serious breach of health and safety rules
- k) serious breach of confidence/confidential information
- l) serious or persistent acts of harassment
- m) incitement to discriminate or actual acts of discrimination in contravention of the agency's Equal Opportunities Policy.

Also see:

5. Managing Poor Performance

e) Examples of poor performance, page 55.

f) Checklist of actions when managing poor performance, page 56.

Throughout this Best Practice Guide there have been summaries of key literature for you to read, and you have been given pointers to other useful literature, listed below.

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6. Literature and Review

a) Useful literature

Key Texts

Jordan B. A comment on 'Theory & Practice in Social Work'

BJSW 8(11) 1978

Resume of Froggett L (1998) Sustaining Tensions in Practice Supervision, Social Services Research 1998 1 pp.32-42

(http://www.elsc-bestpracticeguides.org.uk/first_line/supervision_team/froggett.pdf)

Resume of Harkness D and Hensley H (1991) Changing the Focus of Social Work Supervision: Effects on client satisfaction and generalised contentment, Social Work 36 (6) pp.506 - 512

(http://www.elsc-bestpracticeguides.org.uk/first_line/supervision_team/harkness.pdf)

Barbara Kahan. Growing Up in Groups. London HMSO/NISW 1994 CareData
Managing Practice: supervision and the organisation.

(http://www.elsc-bestpracticeguides.org.uk/first_line/supervision_team/supervision.doc)

Mattison Jane. The Reflection Process in Casework Supervision. Institute of Marital Studies. Tavistock Institute of Social Relations, London: 1975.

McCoughan Nano, Palmer Barry. Systems thinking for harassed managers. Karnac, London: 1994

Morrison, Tony. Staff Supervision in Social Care: an action learning approach. Harlow Longman 1993 CareData

Parton N. ESRC Seminar 1: Some Thoughts On The Relationship Between Theory & Practice In Social Work; NISW on-line publication

Pollitt C. Managerialism & the Public Services; Oxford, Blackwell 1993

Thorpe D, Thorpe S. Monitoring & Evaluation in the Social Services; Longman 1992

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6. Literature and Review

b) CareData

You can also find useful literature by searching the bibliographic database CareData. See <http://www.elsc.org.uk/caredata/caredata.htm>

c) Practice, guidance and standards database

This is another bibliographic database. See <http://www.elsc.org.uk/practice.htm>

d) Internet Social Work Tutorial

You can also use the Internet to identify literature and other information by using the Internet Social Worker Tutorial.

See <http://www.sosig.ac.uk/vts/socialworker/index.htm>

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7. Standards

There is an extensive range of standards in use throughout the social care field. This section gives you access to some sets of standards that can be of particular use to you as a first-line manager of practice.

The Training Organisation for the Personal Social Services (TOPSS) says:

"Delivering high quality social care services requires strategic leadership and clear operational management. Managers using National Occupational Standards have found that the standards help to reinforce the link from strategy to operational management and to service standards.

The standards can contribute to:

- Business planning
- Workforce management
- Benchmarking
- Change management
- Contract specification for care services
- Marketing
- Risk management."

You can find out more about this approach from the TOPSS booklet : A Manager's Guide to Developing Strategic Uses of National Occupational Standards.

First-line managers can also use other standards, originally meant to support qualifications or services, as a sounding board for managing practice. They help you and your team to look at how you work to these standards; how you manage and develop practice accordingly; and give a sounding board for the quality of your collective work.

Practice Guide 1: Managing Practice

7. Standards

These are some of the standards you can use:

1. National Occupational Standards

These have been developed in most areas of work. In social work and social care, the standards have been identified and agreed by representatives of employment through TOPSS.

Standards currently in development or published cover:

- Residential Managers (Adults)
- Registered Managers (Childcare)
- Regulators (Registration & Inspection)
- PQ Childcare
- Youth Offending Teams
- Induction (including a Manager's Guide)

You can find further details on the TOPSS website: <http://www.topss.org.uk/>

2. SSI Inspection Standards

The Social Services Inspectorate set standards for each national inspection and evaluate quality of services against those standards. Standards are service specific and cover a range of settings. You can find these at <http://www.doh.gov.uk/cos/ssi/standard.htm>.

Useful Reading:

Quality Assurance in Social Work: a standards & audit approach for agencies and practitioners

Christine Smythe, Lorraine Simmons and Gerardine Cunningham
NISW 1999

The Standards We Expect - what service users and carers want from social services

Tessa Harding (comp)
NISW 1996