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## *Administrative Supervision Within an Organizational Context*

### **Introduction**

Supervising teams of staff members in social services organizations is demanding. It also can be personally satisfying as supervisors see workers grow in skills and confidence, and as consumers benefit from the services provided. Agency staff members with little specialized education or training in supervision, however, often are promoted to supervisory roles. Yet many management or supervision texts offer general information about administration and management, but they rarely include some of the more practical strategies and tools necessary for day-to-day supervisory practice. This handbook is designed to help address those gaps by providing supervisors with critical concepts, strategies, and tools that can be easily applied to first-line supervision with their teams.

*Note.* We move back and forth between workgroup and team to signify both in human services, but in many situations workgroups do not function as highly collaborative teams. However, we might say that whether we are talking about a group or a team, the supervisor's role requires the same use of tools and techniques.

In this handbook, we will focus on providing social services supervisors with materials to help them become more effective in meeting the demands of a role that requires competency in a wide variety of tasks and skills at several different levels of practice—both within and outside of the organization. These functions that require managing and coaching social services staff include, but are not limited to, (a) understanding the primary roles of a supervisor, and how professional values, ethics, law, and policy guide the supervisor;

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(b) recruiting, screening, selecting, and orienting new employees; (c) designing and allocating personnel resources and job tasks; (d) supervising and coaching ongoing task performance of individuals in a changing organizational environment; (e) managing and facilitating task groups; and (f) participating in the design and implementation of agency policy, conducting performance appraisals, and when necessary, participating in decisions about employee terminations.

Many aspects of supervision could be listed, but this handbook will focus on practical strategies for being effective in what we believe is a key critical path for successful supervision.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, we begin by first laying a foundation of the factors associated with organizational excellence as a platform necessary for sound supervisory practice. This foundation provides a more comprehensive context for the second section of the chapter, which discusses the aspects and roles of supervision, emphasizing how quality supervision is essential for organizational effectiveness.

### COMPONENTS OF ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE

When we think about an excellent organization, what qualities spring to mind? What aspects of that organization distinguish it from others? Is excellence related to the presence of a clear focus of the service or product being delivered? Is excellence created because staff in the organization know what is expected of them and have a clear sense of what constitutes success? Are staff praised and rewarded for performance tied to those identified elements of success? Is excellence tied to the fact that consumers and/or clients are valued and respected by the organization? Is it because leadership is shared within the organization? Or is it because staff members are valued and respected by agency leaders? (See, for example, Collins & Porras, 2002; Goleman, 2000, 2008; Grant & Crutchfield, 2007; Schwartz & McCarthy, 2007.)

To deliver effective services and be considered an excellent place to work, an organization must have several of the above components in place. Workers and supervisors need to be supported in specific ways that complement the agency's mission and program objectives. Unfortunately, too many social workers and other human services practitioners work in "toxic organizational environments" characterized by unclear missions, overcrowded office space, poor supervision, low salaries, large caseloads, and troubled working relations (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2006; Ostroff, 2006). These poorly functioning organizations would not meet many of the administrative standards published by the national accrediting bodies, such as the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA), Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO), Council on Accreditation, or other accrediting organizations (CWLA, 2005; JCAHO, 2006; NASW, 2006). In contrast,

leaders in several public and private agencies that have been recognized as successful operating environments have paid attention to how the following organizational, managerial, and structural components support the effective delivery of human services:

The organization's mission and program philosophy must be clearly articulated and understood by individuals at all levels of the organization. Organizational effectiveness is also dependent on understanding the individuals, families, and communities being served. This understanding will ensure that the most cost-effective services are being provided. What bolsters and increases effectiveness over time is an organization-wide dedication to using service outcomes data through a Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) process.

Strategic planning informs the mission in a continuous process. Can staff clearly summarize the organization's mainstream services, most effective programs, and unique client groups? What is the most cost-effective way to ensure your market share? Which organizational objectives need to be achieved in the next 2, 4, and 6 years to achieve key aspects of the organization's mission? These are just three of the many strategic questions that need to be addressed.

A clear understanding of what organizational excellence is in a particular service area, which can be clearly communicated to staff, is essential. Logic models clearly demonstrate how elements of an organization are connected and form a foundation for articulating how organizational processes work. This is the foundation for understanding and communicating excellence. "Logic models" are essential planning and management tools that help the operationalization of organizational excellence. These models outline key short-term, intermediate, and long-term processes and results to be achieved by staff, along with the identification of necessary equipment and essential resources. After identifying the components of the logic model, required costs to be incurred in order to achieve the desired outcomes need to be specified.

Organizational excellence is rooted in being an expert in the strengths and needs of your clients/consumers and what interventions or services will be most effective for meeting their needs. Excellence also involves paying attention to strategic planning, understanding your market area, as well as being focused on the well-being and the skills of your staff. Furthermore, excellence means paying attention to the outcomes achieved as an aspect of program performance and paying attention to the quality and consistency of services (e.g., Collins, 2005; Packard, 2004). Effective organizational designs and service technologies also must be implemented, including paying attention to program capacity. Balancing service capacity and quality is an additional hallmark of an excellent organization.

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Developing a human resource focus, which includes a positive organizational climate and the development of staff through regular training opportunities, will produce organizational rewards. Achieving these rewards involves supporting social services staff members by treating them with dignity, maximizing professional discretion to the extent possible, and promoting a small set of key staff competencies (Glisson, 2007; Glisson & James, 2002). Reasonable caseloads and adequate clerical support are also important, which include careful personnel recruitment and selection. Social services organizations do not accomplish their work through a machine-laden manufacturing process but through the interactions between human beings and their ability to share information and learn from their supervisor and each other. Thus, personnel can make or break the effectiveness of a social services organization. Excellent service quality and outcomes are achieved with fundamental organizational commitment to providing staff with appropriate and adequate resources (Mathis & Jackson, 2006).

High-quality, ongoing coaching and monitoring of staff activities, and a strong system of supervisory capacity and supports, contribute to the creation of an excellent organization. High service quality and fidelity will be attained with adequately trained and coached supervisors who can operationalize these concepts. Note that poor supervision ranks as one of the top complaints of social services employees (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002). This handbook can provide some strategies that build staff confidence in their supervisors. For example, clear and measurable performance criteria, and clear worker appraisal methods, are crucial. This goal involves regular supervisory “check-in” sessions with staff members, and it requires realistic and adequately resourced staff development plans. Applying these methods sets the infrastructure for creating a work environment where information is shared and everyone benefits from the sharing of information to learn.

In many organizations, effective worker performance appraisal depends on having access to a larger set of organizational performance data. A system for regular collection and use of key program performance data, including performance measurement, analysis, and knowledge management, is also essential. Many organizations are drowning in data, but they are thirsty for information. Both service output and client/consumer outcomes data are important. Experts urge that a more consumer-oriented management and service delivery system be adopted, where client outcome becomes more of the program focus rather than how much service was provided (Fetterman & Wandersman, 2007).

In addition, data need to be organized and analyzed to make them accessible at multiple organizational levels and in ways that can inform program refinement decisions. Any quality organization achieves success by delineating performance expectations and then rewarding people when those performance

expectations are met. This approach is not taken without a vibrant and practical management information system that has the commitment of leadership, supervisors, and staff. Performance measurement ultimately should be tied to a strong process management system, including ongoing assessment of program fidelity, outputs, outcomes, and other aspects of quality.

*Organizational Standards of Quality Produce Effective Results and Minimize Liability Exposure*

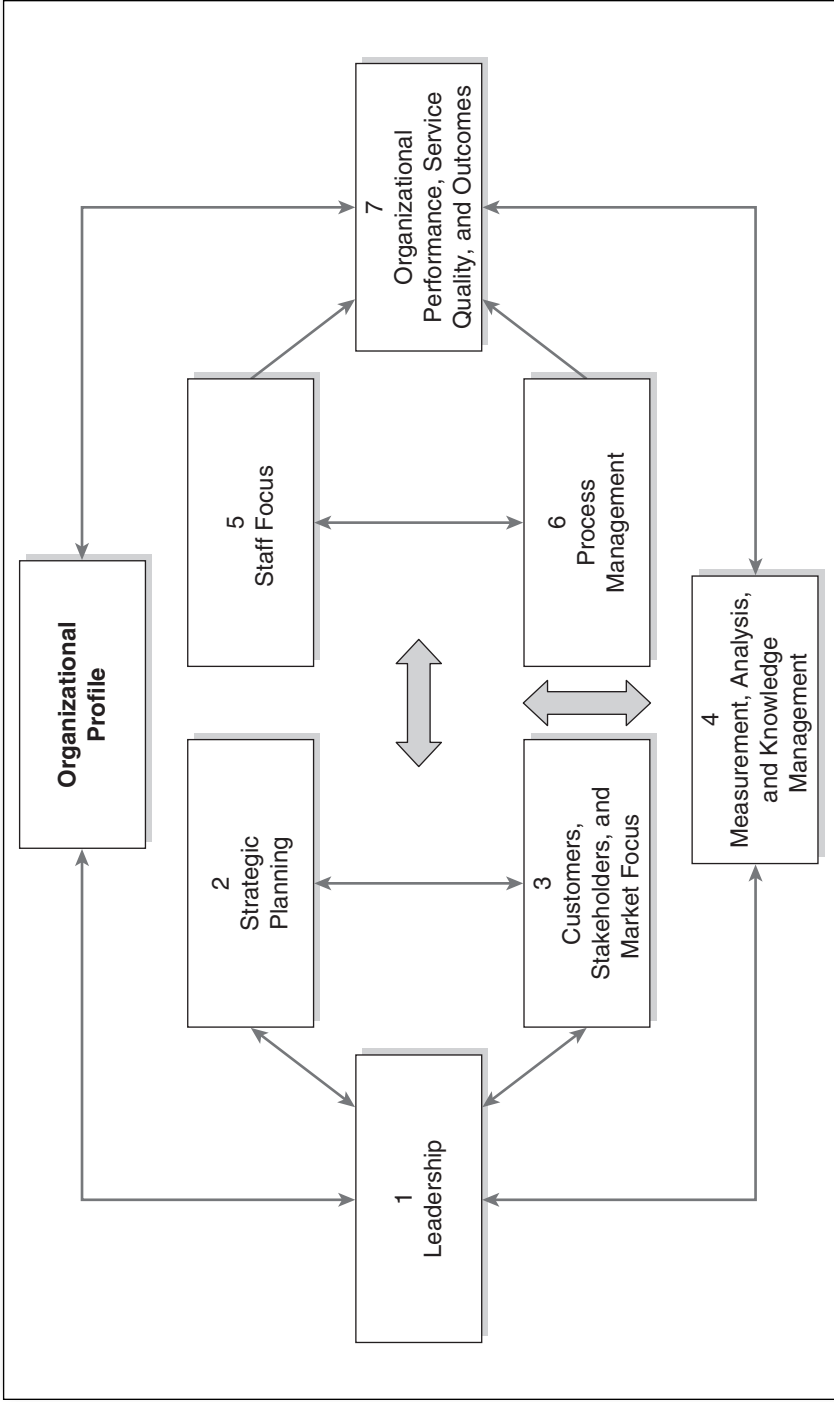
Performance data must be tracked over time to establish trend lines. These trends are then compared with standards of quality and key program expectations (CWLA, 2005; Fisher, 2005). Over time trend data help agency administrators, managers, supervisors, and direct staff see patterns and to not become distracted or misled by an occasional bad quarter or year.

Quality improvement and comparing agency performance with other similar organizations or client populations (benchmarking) can be informative supervisory practices that promote staff learning as well as protect both the organization and its workers from liability. Minimizing liability begins with expert knowledge of your service delivery process, strategies for risk management, and implementation of other preventive programs. Also, a political component to management of liability must not be ignored. Identifying and understanding what kinds of political support are essential to buffer a social services agency and its staff from the day-to-day controversies is prudent.

*Wise Use of Technology Is Essential*

Because technology can be an expensive distraction from the difficult and non-glamorous work of day-to-day service delivery and supervision, it is important to balance the need for technology versus the illogical attractiveness of this aspect of the work. In other words, a wise leader and supervisor carefully balances the kinds of technology staff need versus the kinds of technology staff want (e.g., mobile phones, fax, e-mail, portable computers, teleconference facilities, data-capturing white boards, voice-activated computers, dial-in Web-based assessment measures,<sup>2</sup> and all the other technological infrastructure that a social services agency could use).

The interrelationships among many of these factors are illustrated in Figure 1.1, which presents the Baldrige performance framework (U.S. Department of Commerce, National Institute of Standards and Technology [NIST]—Technology Administration, 2008). Note that although front-line supervisors are not primarily responsible for all of these areas, supervisors work within the larger context that is bounded by these parameters and illustrates how these functions are exercised.



**Figure 1.1** Baldrige criteria for performance excellence framework

Source: From 2008 Baldrige National Quality Program: *Criteria for performance excellence* (p. iv), by U.S. Department of Commerce, NIST—Technology Administration, 2008, Gaithersburg, MD: Institute of Standards and Technology, Technology Administration. Retrieved July 27, 2008, from [http://www.quality.nist.gov/PDF\\_files/2008\\_Business\\_Criteria.pdf](http://www.quality.nist.gov/PDF_files/2008_Business_Criteria.pdf). Copyright 2008 by NIST, Technology Administration. Adapted with permission.

## SOCIAL WORK SUPERVISION

Much attention has been focused on the dynamics of clinical supervision in social work (Munson, 2002; Shulman, 1998; Shulman & Safyer, 2007) and educational supervision of students in the process of learning social work practice (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002; Tsui, 2005). In addition, focused attention has been given to the issues critical to the overall management of social services organizations (e.g., Kettner, 2002; Patti, 2008; Perlmutter, Bailey, & Netting, 2001). With some exceptions, however, relatively little social work literature is available that provides practical strategies for the first-line supervisor in the social services agency (Austin & Hopkins, 2004). And yet business literature has many managerial and administrative concepts to offer that inform supervisory practice.

The role of supervisor in the social services organization requires a multifaceted approach to the supervisory role and a systems perspective of the organization's role in the community. The first-line supervisor is continually using a 360° view. Specifically, the supervisor is the conduit for using information gained from service delivery through and across the organization; transmitting knowledge and information up, down, and across agency levels; and even transmitting knowledge and information to those outside the agency boundaries to the community served by the agency. The supervisor here is truly a critical organizational conduit for learning and using knowledge to take action on behalf of consumers and the organization.

This supervisory role is made more complex when the organizational mission and program goals are in a state of change, influenced by shifts in local funding patterns as well as national or regional priorities. Despite these complexities, opportunities for creativity abound. One recent example is how child welfare agencies are implementing evidence-based practice models like Functional Family Therapy or Multi-Dimensional Treatment Foster Care in response to state and national emphasis on evidence-based practice in services contracts. In certain states like Illinois and California, Title IV-E Waivers are changing funding patterns to enable more funds to be spent on program innovations. Finally, supervisory management practices also are affected by regional differences in policies, funding mechanisms, multiculturalism and feminist management practices, and how privatization of services and unionization have shaped (or not shaped) certain social services and other nonprofit sectors<sup>3</sup> (e.g., Chaison, 2006; Connerley & Pederson, 2005; Mor Barak, 2005; Nightingale & Pindus, 1997; Van Slyke, 2003; Van Slyke & Hammonds, 2003).

## EMERGING CONCEPTS IN SUPERVISION: THE LEARNING ORGANIZATION IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

Organizational transformations are often complex, and they almost always reflect how the organization responds to external forces. In this context,

organizations must be dedicated to continuous efforts at improvement. Quality improvement simply means that an organization is committed to striving to understand its consumers' needs and to monitoring, analyzing, correcting, and improving actual services to meet those needs. With this approach, information derived from regular measurements of worker performance, program performance, and outcomes is used for maximizing agency success in an environment where quality and cost-effectiveness are critical. An organization that shares useful and key information about agency performance with all personnel is open and transparent. Thus, knowledge about services grows, is used to create improvements, to make change processes explicit, and to sustain quality. The supervisor is critical in facilitating these learning and improvement processes. Therefore, a renewed emphasis is placed on the important roles played by the first-line supervisor in the social services organization (Austin & Hopkins, 2004).

In an effective organization, one of the primary roles of the supervisor is to facilitate direct-line staff, sharing information in such a way members learn from the results of their interactions with each other and the environment in which they implement their practice, and conversely, the organization learns from its members. This knowledge and the reflection in action process are critical to both assuring the quality of service delivery to consumers and improving the organization at the level of service delivery. In addition, this learning process assures that not only services but also the policies and procedures that govern service provision are examined and improved. Providing an infrastructure that allows that information to be used and the knowledge gained to flow to and from first-line staff is the critical role fulfilled by direct-line supervisors.

Thus, a first-line supervisor must have the skills to facilitate this development. Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, and Smith (1994) refer to this process as creating a "learning organization." They identify five "disciplines" that are critical to a learning organization and are necessary to be adopted by the supervisor in his or her role as a facilitator in this type of organization:

***Personal Mastery:*** This is the strategic skill in which supervisors learn to create in themselves personal goals and purposes that they can use to best affect the organization, and in which they gain mastery in the performance of tasks related to their own sphere of work.

***Mental Models:*** The goal is for supervisors to understand their own mental models that require "continually clarifying and improving [their] internal pictures of the world" (p. 6), including the use of theoretical and more concrete management and practice frameworks. For human services professionals, this also includes investigating and understanding the mental models that have been constructed about their clients and the agency in which these models function to keep people from learning.



**Shared Vision:** Supervisors' use of this strategic skill facilitates a sense of group commitment that is developed and upon which individuals agree about the vision of the organization and its goals. As a group, the task team or project team needs to have a clear sense and agreement about the tasks, the goals, and the processes required to achieve the desired outcomes.

**Team Learning:** The goal of supervision in the learning organization is to allow an environment to encourage information sharing and reflection in order to enhance the creativity and skill of the team. Essentially, the process involves and uses sharing individual information about the task with team members to generate knowledge for action that will positively impact the organization.

**Systems Thinking:** In this context, supervisors model and develop their own frames of reference that recognize the interrelatedness of systems that influence language and perspective. The supervisors also must absorb and process information from the larger organizational environment.

As supervisors work to identify their own professional goals, they enhance the growth and effectiveness of the agency. In addition, engaging in that type of professional discipline can function to provide a model for supervisees and peers. Continually questioning and clarifying one's assumptions—the schema by which one navigates through issues in the organization—can help one perceive experiences more accurately without the cloud of assumptions, beliefs, and inference that often obscure the essence of the phenomena being observed.

The case example provided in Figure 1.2 illustrates how this learning process can be facilitated by a supervisor to resolve issues that may be hindering performance and, thus, hindering effective service delivery. The tool used in this example is called the ladder of inference, which illustrates how individuals, including supervisors, can leap to erroneous conclusions about situations because they have not checked out whether the validity of their assumptions is based on the facts of the situation (see Figure 1.3).

One concept that applies to this situation is *double-loop learning* (see Figure 1.4). Often as work groups explore improvement strategies and problem solving, the root cause of a problem is not, as in Figure 1.2, case example trying to teach staff about specific behavioral expectations, such as meeting attendance. When identifying behaviors that hinder effectiveness, such as tardiness to meetings, the immediate responses usually exist in the first loop of learning: understanding, identifying, and trying to resolve a problem. However, the second loop of learning involves understanding the values, beliefs, and assumptions people hold about why the behaviors occur and effective ways to intervene or alter the incentive for less than effective behaviors. In an effective organization that attempts to learn, both loops of learning are engaged, and the supervisor has to be able to facilitate the use of both learning loops to lead the organization to effectiveness. Additional opportunities for growth and development for all parties, in the context of the double loop of

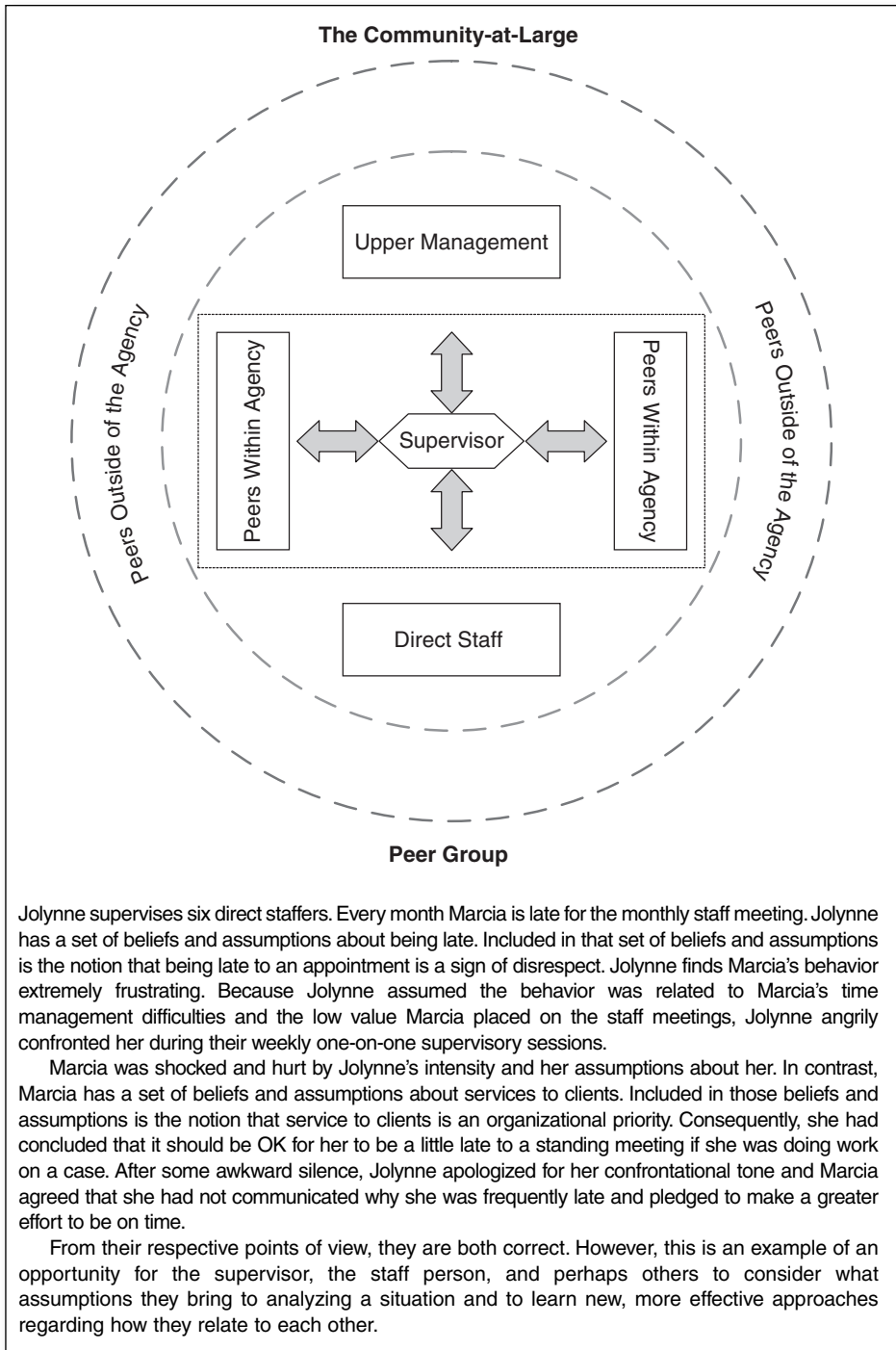
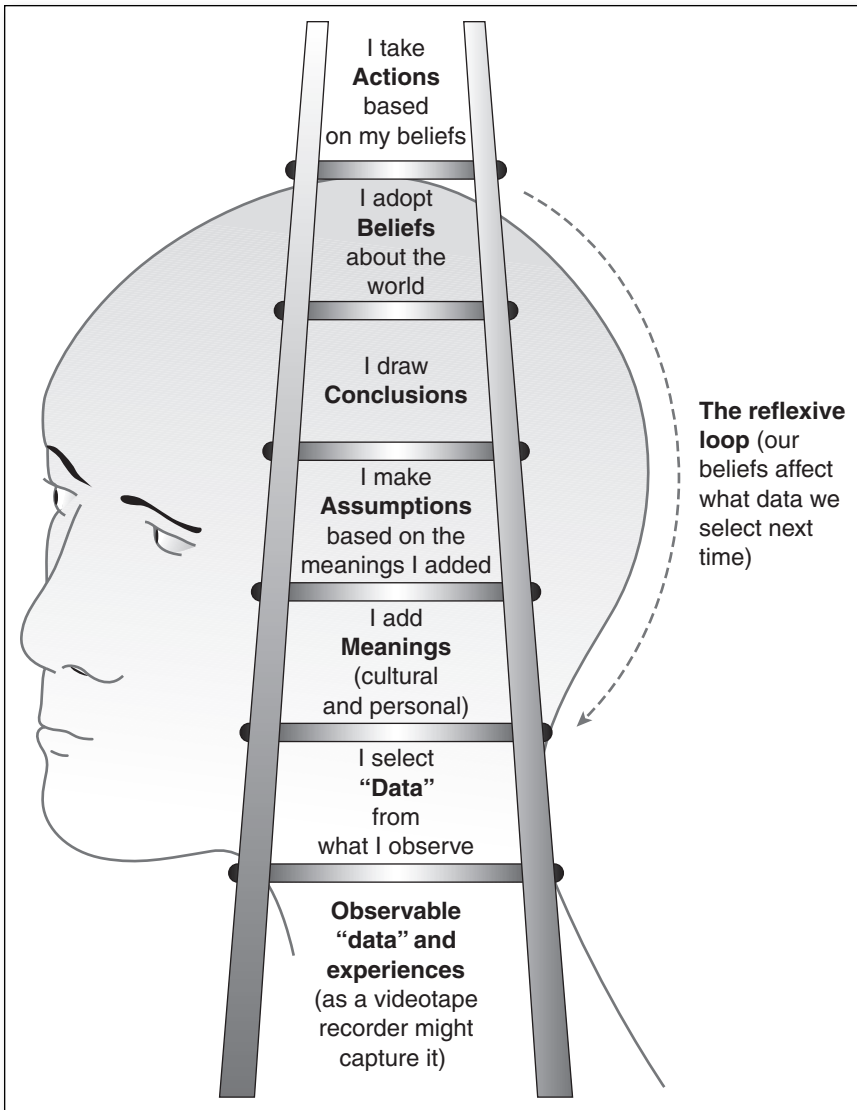
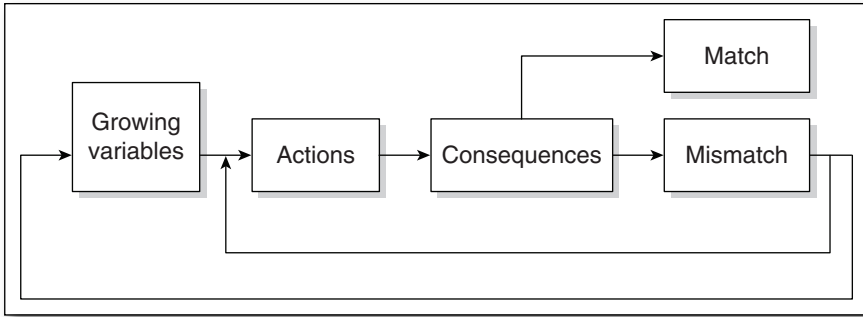


Figure 1.2 A situation of conflicting value sets



**Figure 1.3** The ladder of inference

Source: From "The ladder of inference," by R. Ross. In *The fifth discipline fieldbook* (p. 243), by P. M. Senge, A. Kleiner, & C. Roberts (Eds.), 1994, London: Nicholas Brealey. Copyright 1994 by Nicholas Brealey Publishing. Reprinted with permission. Adapted from C. Argyris (1982) and C. Argyris, R. Putnam, & D. M. Smith (1985).



**Figure 1.4** Double-loop learning

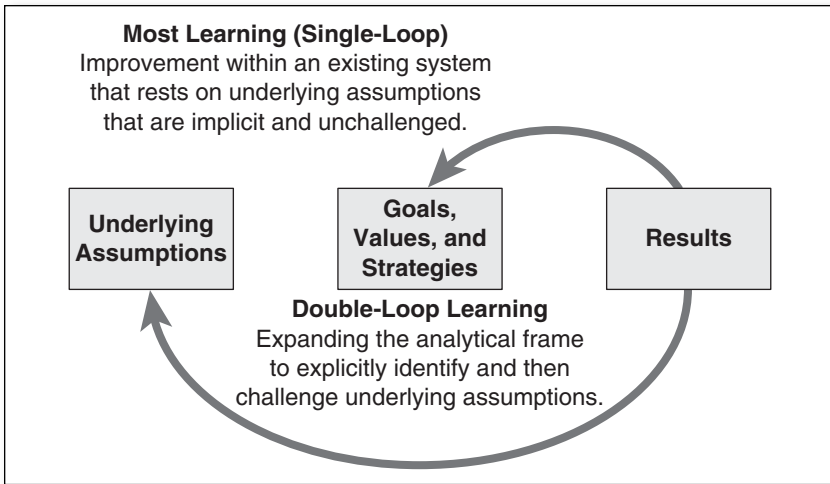
Source: From *On organizational learning* (p. 8), by C. Argyris, 1993, Cambridge, MA: Blackwell. Copyright 1992 by Blackwell. Reprinted with permission.

learning, include conducting performance appraisals, providing ongoing supervision, giving feedback, and addressing performance problems (Argyris, 1993; Smith, 2001). Essentially, problem solving involves both mitigating the immediate issue and then understanding what about the organization permitted the problem to exist. The continuous quality organization knows that to achieve effectiveness, both the cause and effect and the culture need to be explored.

In many supervisory situations, we examine performance data and other feedback to improve our performance relative to a set of work unit goals and other factors that are taken for granted. “Feedback from our performance (or ‘learning from our mistakes’) typically cycles immediately back into our analysis of the strategies, tactics, or techniques that led to our performance. This is important, but it is inherently limited by the environmental and cultural factors that are taken for granted and that remain unchallenged by an assessment of the performance results” (Batista, 2006, p. E1). Double-loop learning occurs when we expand our analytical frame to identify explicitly and then challenge any underlying assumptions that support our stated goals, values, and strategies. Rather than only ask, “How can we achieve our goals more effectively?” Batista encourages us to look deeper and also ask the following:

- What assumptions support our goals, values, and strategies?
- How can we test these assumptions?
- Having tested these assumptions, should we change our goals, values, or strategies?

In contrast, if we can pull back and expand the frame of our analysis, we begin to call into question some of the factors that we usually take for granted. Our performance results aren’t simply used to assess the strategies that have been derived from those factors—they question the factors themselves (p. E1).



**Figure 1.5** Double-loop learning as contrasted with single-loop learning

Source: From Double-loop learning, by E. Batista, 2008. Retrieved July 27, 2008, from <http://www.edbatista.com/2008/05/double-loop.html>. Copyright 2008 by Ed Batista. Reprinted with permission. Adaptation of Table 2.1. Decision Methods for Group and Individual Problems from *Leadership and Decision-Making*, by Victor H. Vroom and Philip W. Yetton, copyright 1973. Reprinted by permission of the University of Pittsburgh Press.

Double-loop learning is both an individual counseling tool and a team learning tool. At the individual level, double-loop learning can be a source of personal growth and development. At the group level, double-loop learning can be used to challenge assumptions, values, and beliefs that hinder effective service delivery. The supervisor can facilitate the learning process specifically by providing service delivery data and by soliciting feedback from individuals on the team to help staff understand how the values, beliefs, and assumptions about how things are done can hinder work processes or service delivery.

To provide a framework for the chapters that follow, we conclude this chapter with an examination of the core functions of a supervisor.

## Defining Supervision

### DIMENSIONS OF SUPERVISORY LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOR

A supervisor is a staff person to whom authority is delegated to direct, coordinate, enhance, and evaluate on-the-job performance of one or more line staff. An effective supervisor applies leadership skills to facilitate accomplishment of agency goals through interactions with line staff. In a social services

organization, a supervisor's ultimate objective is to ensure that effective services are delivered to clients/customers in accordance with organization policies and procedures. To be effective, a supervisor also may need to challenge organization policies and procedures. Supervisors, thus, focus on the relationships with staff, the tasks to meet the organization's mission and goals, and the constant assessment of whether policies and procedures continue to meet the organization's mission and goals (Burgess, 2006; Collins, 2005).

Quality supervision includes attending to people, process, and tasks (Interaction Associates, 1997). Traditionally, leadership has been conceived around the idea that one person is firmly "in charge" while the rest are simply followers—what is termed "vertical leadership." More recent research indicates that leadership can be shared by team leaders and team members—rotating to the person with the key knowledge, skills, and abilities for the particular issues facing the team at any given moment. In fact, research indicates that poor-performing teams tend to be dominated by the team leader, whereas high-performing teams display more dispersed leadership patterns, i.e., shared leadership (Pearce, 2004; Pearce & Sims, 2002).

More specifically, at least four important types of leadership behavior can emanate from the vertical leader or be shared and distributed among the members of a team instead of residing totally with the supervisor as "vertical" leader: directive, transactional, transformational, and empowering (Ford, Heaton, & Brown, 2001; Lawler & Finegold, 2000; Pearce, 2004):

*Directive leadership* involves providing task-focused direction or recommendations. Directive leadership has been advocated in knowledge worker contexts as providing a much-needed structure for inherently unstructured tasks. For example, highly skilled social services workers, be they vertical leaders or other members of the team, might well find a receptive audience among less experienced or less knowledgeable members for well-meaning and constructive prescription and direction.

*Transactional leadership* entails influencing followers by strategically supplying rewards—praise, compensation, or other valued outcomes—contingent on follower performance. Typically the source of such rewards has been the appointed, vertical leader. However, shared transactional leadership in a team of social services workers might, for example, be expressed through collegial praise for contributions toward serving families or improving work unit outcomes. Colleagues might also award valued assignments or recommend financial or gift awards based on individual- or team-level attainment of milestones, quality targets, excellent interpersonal relationships, financial stewardship, innovations in cultural diversity, or other key performance metrics. (This kind of recognition program has been operating successfully in a child welfare agency since 2007.)

*Transformational leadership* adopts a more symbolic emphasis on commitment to a team vision, emotional engagement, and fulfillment of higher order

needs such as meaningful professional impact or desires to engage in breakthrough achievements. On the one hand, one of the vertical leader's tasks is clarifying the vision for the team. On the other hand, social services teams might engage in shared transformational leadership through peer exhortation or by appealing to collegial desires to design better intervention approaches, locate new sources of funding, connect with key community-based resources, or some other kind of innovation.

*Empowering leadership* emphasizes employee self-influence rather than top-down control. In many ways, empowering leadership epitomizes the role of the designated, vertical leader under conditions of team-shared leadership. Empowering leadership can also be shared and projected laterally among peers. Examples of shared empowering leadership in a team of knowledge workers might include peer encouragement and support of self-goal-setting, self-evaluation, self-reward, and self-development. Shared empowering leadership emphasizes building self-influence skills that orchestrate performance while preserving autonomy (adapted from Pearce, 2004, pp. 53–54).

From another perspective, supervisors can tap into the power of participation and bring out the best in others by demonstrating the Seven Practices of Facilitative Leadership: (a) coach for performance; (b) celebrate accomplishment; (c) share an inspiring vision; (d) focus on results, process, and relationship; (e) optimize appropriate staff involvement; (f) design pathways to action by being aware of when to focus on problem identification and analysis, visioning, solution development, and implementation of the solutions or strategies; and (g) facilitate agreement (Interaction Associates, 1997, p. 1–14). The types of specific skills associated with the supervisory functions include administrative skills; teaching, coaching, and support; cross-cultural communication skills; and leadership skills, which are itemized in the sections that follow (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002; Casey Family Programs, 2002).

## ADMINISTRATIVE SKILLS

Administrative supervision refers to leadership, the oversight of staff performance, and other personnel management tasks. These tasks include articulating a vision and mission of the organization in an ethical and forward-thinking manner. Administrative skills require a thorough grounding in key laws, ethics, and policies.

Another administrative supervisory skill is recruiting and selecting staff, which involves assessing individual capacity to succeed in a challenging culture that nonetheless encourages growth and development, both personally and professionally. As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, recruitment and employee selection are crucial public relations functions for the organization, as it interacts with a community of persons who might have applied for positions. The process of selecting new staff must result in successfully identifying competent

individuals to fill staff positions to further the work of the organization; otherwise, the organization as a whole will suffer by enduring the inadequate performance of a poorly selected staff member until that person is fired or quits.

Orienting new staff is another key aspect of administrative supervision. Orienting new employees involves planning tasks for new employees, specifying responsibilities and authority, and clarifying expected and desired outcomes to the new employee. Part of this orientation should focus on promoting cross-cultural competence. When direct line staff have clearly defined job tasks that fit into the vision, mission, and goals of the agency, not only can the supervisor provide regular reflection of the individual's effectiveness on the job, but also each staff person potentially can conduct an increasingly accurate self-assessment. This capability, of course, paves the way for a performance appraisal that accurately reflects the staff person's ability to perform his or her job.

Participating in program planning and guideline development is another closely related aspect of administrative supervision. Planning and monitoring resources is very much part of that work. It will involve advocating for staff and those who receive services from the social services organization. Coordinating the work in the program and unit includes developing task groups and leading teams. Facilitating teamwork is one of the key functions of a supervisor that is often not highlighted in generic supervision texts. However, here we devote a chapter to the leadership of work teams (Chapter 6).

Monitoring, analyzing, and evaluating work usually occurs in the context of measuring staff performance (Chapter 7) and in terms of addressing performance problems (Chapter 8). Line staff may have made commitments to personal and professional growth and development in the context of the organization; yet when concerns about performance problems occur, opportunities for learning may also be present. Finally, administrative supervision involves managing the flow of information to and from employees as well as serving as a change agent. As a middle manager, supervisors must be clear communicators and should be prepared to "manage up" by communicating staff concerns and suggestions to agency leaders (Bruce & Austin, 2000).

## TEACHING SKILLS

Through the process of disseminating knowledge, supervisors help line staff learn the skills they will need to complete their jobs effectively. In the process of transferring knowledge, supervisors facilitate the accomplishment of agency goals as well as facilitate the professional development of line staff.

One of the most powerful vehicles for staff learning and reinforcement of those concepts is learning through team experience or dialogue. "Team learning" is a process designed to create a workplace that encourages and supports staff in learning from their daily experience and from each other. For example,



in the case of a health care employee who has difficulty in getting health care vendors out to a patient's home, the learning environment would encourage this team member to share the information they have obtained with others in the team. This process also builds the team's knowledge about the health care vendors used by the agency. This type of individual experience and information sharing at the group level can improve overall service provision. This is what is meant by learning at the level of the group, engaging in group reflection, and then using knowledge gained for action—change or improvement.

The team learning is accomplished with other team members, rather than using traditional classroom methods of transferring knowledge. Furthermore, team learning is directed to improvement in knowledge, skills, attitudes, or other aspects of performance. The supervisor, through processes like the one above, coaches individuals on how to use information and on how to share ideas, and then he or she facilitates the group in the process of reflecting on this information and building knowledge to achieve change. In the case of the above example, the group might conclude that it needs to select better vendors or improve instructions to existing health care vendors. The team members teach and support each other in a giving and receiving environment. Team learning builds on the concept that learning is a lifelong process that does not just occur when one attends a training workshop. In addition to teaching, supervisors must model lifelong learning and be open to learning from staff.

Team learning also should be understood through the lens of quality improvement. Part of the focus of team learning is that all staff should understand how the agency's service delivery process works, the key results to be achieved, and the criteria for how things are most effectively done and with what methods. This knowledge will affect how professionals work with consumers as well as how services are documented and monitored. With a clear understanding of the work processes, the team can effectively monitor its work and gather information that will be helpful in recognizing how customers receive services and whether these services are working. Ultimately the team is exposed to the outcomes of their work and can improve, change, and strengthen what is being done. The supervisor plays an instrumental role in facilitating this team learning process by clarifying expected results, by helping the team develop the most effective work processes, and by gathering and using the performance data in discussions that engage in learning and change.

In another example of team learning, consider the situation of five pediatric social workers at the local children's hospital who are each responsible for providing services to four patients, their parents, and their entire families, when necessary. Keeping up with the mandates for accountability under managed care, as well as providing direct services, keeps these social workers very busy. The lead social worker for the pediatric unit, in consultation with the director of social work services, has created an opportunity for each of the

social workers to provide the leadership for trainings at every other pediatric social work unit meeting. The trainings include content on ways to maximize efficiency, access to community resources, and new therapeutic techniques. In this example, each member has a chance to demonstrate leadership, gather data, analyze data, and share findings to the benefit of the entire team.

Supervisory promotion of employee learning is distinguished from agency-wide staff development or the in-service training processes, because a supervisor's focused knowledge/skill building opportunities are targeted to the needs of a particular employee in the context of day-to-day work. Supervisory teaching has been rated as one of the two top sources of satisfaction by employees (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002). This latter point has been validated in research studies regarding employee satisfaction in learning and nonlearning environments regarding worker motivation (Latham & Ernst, 2006). Conversely, a supervisor's failure to use effective teaching skills is one the greatest sources of frustration for supervisors and for other team members (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002).

## COACHING AND SUPPORTIVE SKILLS

The coaching and supportive function of supervision is focused on helping employees meet requirements of their jobs, using several specific methods, such as the follows:

1. Scheduling regular standing times for supervision, where staff have the undivided attention of the supervisor is critical. This is one outgrowth of valuing positive working relationships between supervisors and staff.
2. Communicating staff concerns and ideas for quality improvement to management, but also respecting the confidentiality of personal information regarding employees, enhances a supervisor's capital with direct line staff and can be informative to management.
3. Ensuring that direct line staff receive necessary resources to do their job, which includes making sure that staff safety and health needs are met, elicits the confidence of direct line staff.
4. Providing regular feedback about performance through coaching sessions, much like a baseball coach would do; timely instruction and practice on a particular skill with a player are critical. This feedback also includes recognizing the achievements and competencies of staff as well as targeting attention to areas that need work.
5. Setting clear expectations regarding the job, including skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to perform duties and responsibilities. This encourages continuous professional growth and skill development. Setting clear expectations also motivates staff to meet the expectations. (Latham & Ernst, 2006; Rowe, de Savigny, Lanata, & Victoria, 2005).

## CROSS-CULTURAL SKILLS

The effective first-line supervisor must not only incorporate the above skills—increasingly, these skills must be developed and enhanced in the context of supervision in a multiethnic or multicultural workforce. Consequently, supervisors must display skills that include the critical aspects of managing cross-cultural communication and cross-cultural interpersonal dynamics, so that the respective skills and resources of an ethnically, racially, culturally, economically, and sexually diverse workforce can be brought to bear in the service of the goals of the organization. Globalization is having powerful effects on the workforce in the United States in terms of hiring practices. Thus, first-line supervisors need to be effective at supervising a multicultural group of employees and at figuring out how best to integrate these diverse workgroups to develop a cohesive work team (Laroche & Rutherford, 2006; Mor Barak, 2005).

In this context, an essential skill for first-line supervisors is the ability to model positive cross-cultural interactions. For example, effective cross-cultural communication facilitates a respectful “pluralistic perspective” with a commitment to understanding and acceptance of those with different views (Pinderhughes, 1989; Thomas & Ely, 2002). From one perspective, supervisors must be able to model this skill to staff; and from a second perspective, supervisors must pay attention to the interactions among staff in order to observe opportunities to reward staff for engaging in the process of creating and supporting an environment that recognizes and embraces “different-ness” (Thomas & Ely, 2002). From a third perspective, supervisors must ensure that no staff engages in biased behavior against any client, customer, patient, or colleague; and should it occur, they need to correct the behavior promptly. Furthermore, this correction must occur in a clear, civil, and nondenigrating manner.

Also, first-line supervisors are the key in helping managers and agency executives honestly recognize the concerns of those who are ethnically, racially, culturally, economically, and sexually different within the agency; and they must understand how differently staff who are in the minority may feel in comparison with those who have numbers and/or power and influence in the organization. This understanding throughout the agency, and specifically from management, is necessary in facilitating the organization’s overall ability to provide effective and efficient services to ethnically, racially, culturally, economically, and sexually diverse clients, customers, and/or patients. This understanding may take different forms, given the variation in social services organizations in the United States.

Supervisors who can demonstrate, model, and coach these skills enhance the cross-cultural communication skills of their workgroup. Both human services organizations and businesses are beginning to recognize that cross-cultural skills are critical, particularly in terms of population demographics that are increasingly less homogeneous (Mederos & Woldegiorgis, 2003).

If supervisors with cross-cultural skills can use a variety of approaches to demonstrate their cultural competence, they can provide staff with a variety of tools to use to enhance their effectiveness. For example, a supervisor who demonstrates open regard for her direct line staff will be more likely to establish rapport; create a safe and accepting environment for frank discussion; and to provide opportunities for all staff members to feel the confidence to be effective in their practice. The approaches to enhancing cross-cultural skills can be employed in individual supervision, as well as in group supervision, providing opportunities for the workgroup to learn from each other regarding these issues.

One caveat is that a potential result of dealing openly with difficult issues is the development of conflict. Effective resolution of cross-cultural conflicts requires addressing the issues openly and honestly. Done well, conflict resolution can increase the effectiveness of team functioning. However, these individual and group approaches to enhancing cross-cultural skill development require sensitivity. Supervisors must be careful to recognize their limits and the limits of their team, so as to not to create a more difficult situation (Hyde, 2004). Ultimately, first-line supervisors must have cross-cultural skills, knowledge, values, and sensibilities to assess the cross-cultural skills, knowledge, values, and sensibilities of staff; and they must recognize that if they do not have these skills, they need to get individual assistance and/or assistance for their workgroup.

## LEADERSHIP SKILLS

The “leadership system” is one of the key areas examined by the Malcolm Baldrige Award reviewers because it places into context the importance of good management and highly skilled supervisors (U.S. Department of Commerce, NIST—Technology Administration, 2008, p. 68). Supervisory leadership functions as the process of effectively interacting with people at all levels in the organization, including superiors, peers, and subordinates, in order to influence others and bring about desired organizational outcomes (Fisher, 2005; Packard, 2004). In a secure environment that promotes increased interdependence, staff members can achieve the high levels of development and growth that allow for the formation of leadership. To create this environment, supervisors must establish cooperation and trust between themselves and their staff, as well as among the members of their staff. This sense of trust is enhanced when supervisors accurately and tactfully represent the issues of their staff members to upper management.

Assessing social, political, cultural, and other trends, and their implications for the long-term success of the organization, is another aspect of leadership. An effective leader also influences people from other departments, functions, and divisions to bring about desired organizational change. Positive and fair corrective feedback will also improve working relationships. Supervisors must engage

staff in actively understanding their agency's vision, mission, and goals, while anticipating and planning for staff to change, grow, and develop in their support of these goals.

## Summary

By applying the functional skills presented above, the new first-line supervisor can begin to create a climate that facilitates their own professional growth, and the professional growth and learning of those they supervise. In the organization that is open to building a dynamic environment, the supervisor is a valuable source of information so that upper management can (a) learn about the actual working conditions of those on the front line and (b) sustain the context necessary to promote service quality and effectiveness. Similarly, front-line workers in an open environment not only should understand the implications and limitations of external policy mandates on their direct practice, but also they should be encouraged to “manage up” by communicating their concerns and ideas to agency administrators through their supervisors.

Supervisors are critical in orchestrating the effective implementation of a social services organization's mission and goals. Using the various supervisory skills, supervisors function as “cross-trainers,” spanning across several levels of the organization: up, down, and across the agency, working with those within the agency and with those outside of the agency (Casey Family Programs, 2002).

Similarly, a supervisor can facilitate the development of a climate where the team learns from each other and recognizes their interconnectedness to the entire system. This area is explored in more depth in our next chapter. The concept of “double-loop learning” can assist the development of this sense of interconnectedness. Essentially, supervisory excellence builds on the accomplishments of key functions, such as recruiting, selecting, and orienting new staff members; teaching, coaching, and leading; as well as utilizing and modeling effective cross-cultural communication. Thus, a progressive “building block” approach to the acquisition of supervisory skills illustrates how each skill rests on the development of a previous skill.

In the rapidly changing social services environment, supervisory skills that help staff thrive in that environment are the key. The effective supervisor in the effective social services organization responds with increased flexibility to the environment. The organization that operates in such a manner is more able to respond quickly and effectively to the changing social services needs of people and communities.

Finally, supervisors in the social services usually function within larger organizations that exist within a community environment. The organizational cultures shape both supervisory functioning and the structure of organizational

components. Supervisors need to know how to use their knowledge of this culture, to both mediate between the organization and the direct staff and to mediate between individual direct-line staff and their workgroup in order to empower the staff members to sustain effectiveness in service delivery. Thus, Chapter 2 focuses on organizational culture.

## Endnotes

1. Other critical ongoing supervision tasks in a social services organization include making the transition from line worker to supervisor, participating in staff development, providing clinical supervision, and understanding the interactional nature of supervision (Austin & Hopkins, 2004; Bruce & Austin, 2000; Edwards & Yankey, 2006; Kadushin & Harkness, 2002; Munson, 2002; Shulman, 1992; Tsui, 2005; Weinbach, 2008).

2. For examples of Web-based, free instant-scoring assessment tools for human services, see <http://www.caseylifefskills.org>.

3. Privatization does reduce the number of public employees if services formerly performed in the public sector are shifted to the private sector. But it is not clear that workers are necessarily worse off in terms of employment, wages, morale, or job satisfaction. Many examples are available of negotiated arrangements for transferring public employees to private employment or to other public agencies. Undoubtedly, though, a clear reduction in public employee members of unions is occurring, although some privatized workers may join other unions (Nightingale & Pindus, 1997, p. 1).

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## Web-Based Resources

American Management Association: <http://www.amanet.org/> (Publications and training opportunities)

American Society for Public Administration: <http://www.aspanet.org/scriptcontent/index.cfm> (Publications and training opportunities)

Child Welfare League of America: <http://www.cwla.org/> (Practice standards, publications, and training opportunities)

National Association of Social Workers: <http://www.socialworkers.org/> (Practice standards, publications, and training opportunities)

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