Canadian Social Work Review
Revue canadienne de service social

Leadership Support of Supervision in Social Work Practice
Challenges and Enablers to Achieving Success

Rosemary Vito

Cite this article

Article abstract

This article discusses research findings that highlight the importance of leadership support of supervision for social workers in human service organizations. While supervision is considered a cornerstone of social work practice, whether and how such supervision is supported by human service leaders is not adequately analyzed. Using qualitative research data from interviews with supervisors and managers in southern Ontario, this article presents the vital role social work leaders play in supporting supervision by modelling values, and creating a safe organizational culture. The challenges of providing this support are also discussed in the current context of new public management. The article concludes with a series of recommendations, including: prioritizing supervision to promote organizational learning, organizational restructuring to reduce power differentials, modelling social work values to create a safe learning culture, and supporting supervisory and leadership training for social workers. Findings may be of interest to social workers who are leading, supervising, teaching or practicing in human service organizations.

LEADERSHIP SUPPORT OF SUPERVISION IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE:
Challenges and Enablers to Achieving Success

Rosemary Vito

Abstract: This article discusses research findings that highlight the importance of leadership support of supervision for social workers in human service organizations. While supervision is considered a cornerstone of social work practice, whether and how such supervision is supported by human service leaders is not adequately analyzed. Using qualitative research data from interviews with supervisors and managers in southern Ontario, this article presents the vital role social work leaders play in supporting supervision by modelling values, and creating a safe organizational culture. The challenges of providing this support are also discussed in the current context of new public management. The article concludes with a series of recommendations, including: prioritizing supervision to promote organizational learning, organizational restructuring to reduce power differentials, modelling social work values to create a safe learning culture, and supporting supervisory and leadership training for social workers. Findings may be of interest to social workers who are leading, supervising, teaching or practicing in human service organizations.

Keywords: social work, supervision, leadership, new public management, human service organizations

Abrégé : L'article présente les résultats d'une recherche qui souligne l'importance pour les dirigeants de soutenir la supervision des travailleurs sociaux dans les organismes de services sociaux. Bien que la supervision soit considérée comme un principe fondamental du service social, peu d'études ont vérifié si les dirigeants de services sociaux la soutenaient et de quelle manière. À partir de données

Rosemary Vito is a current PhD student in, and MSW graduate from, the Faculty of Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier University. She is a sessional instructor in the School of Social Work, Renison University College, University of Waterloo. She has over 20 years experience as a clinical supervisor and worker in children's mental health services.

qualitatives obtenues au moyen d'entrevues auprès de superviseurs et de gestionnaires dans le Sud de l'Ontario, cet article fait valoir le rôle vital que jouent les dirigeants de services sociaux pour soutenir la supervision en mettant en pratique les valeurs du travail social et en créant une culture organisationnelle sûre. Les difficultés d'offrir un tel soutien sont aussi abordées dans le contexte actuel de la nouvelle gestion publique. L'article se termine par une série de recommandations, y compris : faire de la supervision une priorité pour favoriser l'apprentissage organisationnel, procéder à la restructuration de l'organisme pour réduire les différences de pouvoir, mettre en pratique les valeurs du travail social pour créer une culture d'apprentissage sûre, et soutenir la formation en supervision et en direction de travailleurs sociaux. Les résultats de l'étude intéresseront les travailleurs sociaux qui assurent une direction, supervisent du personnel, enseignent, ou travaillent dans des organismes de services sociaux.

Mots clés : travail social, supervision, leadership, nouvelle gestion publique, organismes de services sociaux

Introduction

The importance of ongoing supervision for social work practice has been well established in the social work literature (Bogo & McKnight, 2005; Gibbs, 2001; Hensley, 2002; Kadushin & Harkness, 2002). Supervision is considered a cornerstone of social workers' practice and professional development; reflecting on their experience during supervision has been a primary way that social workers develop their knowledge and practice skills (Hair, 2013; Hensley, 2002; Jones, 2004). In a recent study, social workers in Ontario confirmed the need for effective, available, and ongoing supervision (Hair, 2008), preferably by social workers with supervisory training (Hair, 2013). Despite this need, there has been a reduction in the availability and quality of social work supervision, resulting in a negative impact on social workers' professional development and their practice with clients, as there is less time for clinical discussion, feedback, reflection, and learning (Aronson & Sammon, 2000; Berger & Mizrahi, 2001; Bogo & McKnight, 2005; Jones, 2004; Kadushin, Berger, Gilbert, & De St. Aubin, 2009; Noble & Irwin, 2009).

While there has been much written about the importance of supervision in social work practice, less is known about how leaders can support supervision, particularly from the view of supervisors and managers. In traditional bureaucratic, human-service organizations, there is a clearly defined hierarchical structure (O'Connor & Netting, 2009), with senior leaders (usually executive and other directors), followed by service managers and supervisors. These leaders set the tone within organizations, either facilitating or hindering supervision, depending on the nature of their leadership practice (Jones, 2004; Kadushin et al., 2009). Leaders with social work experience are preferred because they are more likely to understand the importance of social work values, such as social

justice and empowerment, and the development of practice skills (CASW, 2005; Healy, 2002; Wuenschel, 2006). However, leaders are challenged to provide this support in the current context of new public management, which emphasizes accountability, efficiency, and competition for resources (Aronson & Sammon, 2000; Hasenfeld, 2010). This environment creates further pressure on leaders to eliminate supervision, thus reducing opportunities for social workers to reflect on their practice (Noble & Irwin, 2009).

According to Hopkins and Austin (2004), balancing organizational pressures is key: "To meet the challenges of today's human service industry, agencies need to balance effectiveness, efficiency and innovation, as well as engaging in interdisciplinary, culturally competent and self-reflective practice" (p. 4). Using qualitative research findings, this article aims to consider these challenges from a new perspective of leadership. Specifically, it explores how important leadership is in supporting social work supervision from the perspective of social work managers and supervisors. What are some of the leadership barriers and facilitators that support or hinder social work supervision? This article may appeal to those who are currently in a supervisory or leadership position, as well as those who are practicing or teaching social work.

Literature Review

Importance of Social Work Supervision

Several authors have noted that experienced social workers continue to value both educational and supportive supervision, which has been found to increase social workers' job satisfaction and retention, and reduce burnout (Hair, 2008, 2013; Lietz, 2010; Mor Barak, Travis, Pyun, & Xie, 2009). This type of supervision, combined with reflective discussions about social work ethics and values, supports social workers' practice and professional development (Berger & Mizrahi, 2001; Wuenschel, 2006). Moreover, effective supervision, including task assistance (educational supervision), social and emotional support (supportive supervision), and positive supervisory relationships, increases workers' effectiveness and organizational commitment, leading to improved service delivery and client outcomes (Mor Barak et al., 2009). Effective supervision is best provided by experienced social workers with advanced skills and knowledge of ethics (Hair, 2008; Kuechler, 2006). However, many practicing social workers report receiving inadequate and primarily administrative supervision, leaving less time for educational and supportive supervision that focuses on the needs of clients (Hair, 2008; Jones, 2004).

Reflective supervision involves asking social workers critical questions to elicit their thoughts and feelings about complex client situations and promote awareness of their perceptions and potential biases,

which impact their practice with clients (Gibbs, 2001; Gray & Smith, 2009; Lietz, 2010). This critical reflection promotes learning and creative problem solving and enables social workers to respond in a more thoughtful way with clients (Davys & Beddoe, 2009; Lietz, 2010; Young, Lambie, Hutchinson, & Thurston-Dyer, 2011). The quality of the relationship between supervisors and workers is central to the development of reflective supervisory practice (Bogo & McKnight, 2005; Mor Barak et al., 2009; Noble & Irwin, 2009). Supervisors who create a trusting relationship, and open and respectful communication, enable workers to explore their impact on clients within a safe context, which furthers their professional growth and development (Hensley, 2002; Lietz, 2010). These qualities of supervision, such as respect and integrity, reflect core social work values (CASW, 2005). Supervisors and managers who model these values help to foster an organizational culture that supports supervision and learning, both of which are likely to yield improved client outcomes (Hardina, Middleton, Montana, & Simpson, 2007; Hopkins & Austin, 2004).

New Public Management Context

The decrease in quality and availability of supervision can in part be attributed to the incompatibility between supervision as a reflective process and the current new public management context. Most human service organizations in Western countries are facing increased government pressures for accountability, efficiency, competition for resources, and performance outcomes, which has caused them to respond using business management strategies (Hasenfeld, 2010; Healy, 2002; Lawler, 2007; Noble & Irwin, 2009). This new public management context shifts the focus of supervision to the agency's administrative needs rather than to the needs of clients and workers, compromising professional and practice development and reflective learning opportunities (Aronson & Sammon, 2000; Kadushin et al., 2009; Noble & Irwin, 2009). The focus of supervision has become on workers' performance evaluation and accountability, and supervisors are required to assume more management responsibilities (Noble & Irwin, 2009).

As well, the rise of managed care in some areas and cost efficiencies in health, mental health, and social service organizations have resulted in the elimination of middle management and supervisory positions (Bogo & McKnight, 2005; Kadushin et al., 2009). For example, social workers are increasingly being supervised by nurses in hospital settings (Berger & Mizrahi, 2001; Kadushin et al., 2009). In Ontario, these constraints are acute: children's mental health agencies are facing a ministry system transformation agenda, including greater expectations for accountability, quality assurance, and performance indicators (MCYS, Sept. 2013); while child welfare agencies are coping with new balanced budget legislation, funding formulas, and accountability agreements (MCYS, Jan. 2013) that

may lead to staff layoffs. In this tight fiscal environment, leaders are constrained in prioritizing supervision, which is costly and time consuming (Aronson & Sammon, 2000; Noble & Irwin, 2009).

Lack of Supervisory and Leadership Training

Along with external pressures, there is lack of supervisory and leadership training in human service organizations. Most supervisors do not have formal supervisory training and have learned their skills by "the seat of the pants" (Kuechler, 2006, p. 88) through their practice work (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002). Moreover, most social work schools are not educating social workers for administrative positions and the number of social workers in supervisory and leadership positions is diminishing (Healy, 2002; Lawler, 2007; Wuenschel, 2006). In the U.S., these leadership positions are increasingly being filled by professionals in business and public administration (Wuenschel, 2006). As a result, social workers are increasingly being supervised by people in other professions (Berger & Mizrahi, 2001; Bogo & McKnight, 2005; Wuenschel, 2006) who may not be aware of the values and ethics of the social work profession. Several authors have noted that for social work leaders to be effective, they need training and skills to be proficient leaders in the context of public sector reforms (Hair, 2013; Healy, 2002; Mor Barak et al., 2009; Wuenschel, 2006).

Methodology

The findings reported in this article are part of a broader research project, which was conducted by a team of five researchers during the winter of 2012 in southern Ontario (see Adamowich, Kumsa, Rego, Stoddart, & Vito, 2014), that explored the use of self in social work practice. Use of self was defined as the practice of critical self-reflection (see Mandell, 2008). The research questions for the broader research project focused on participants' use of self, including their definition, awareness, training and experience, influence on client and colleague relationships, challenges with agency and external context, and recommendations for teaching. This research project produced five thematic areas, including training, finding self, supervision, tensions in practice, and institutional self-reflection. During the interviews, an interesting subtheme emerged regarding social workers' critical self-reflection and how this is or isn't supported by supervision. There were also suggestions on how leaders can support this process. As a result, this subtheme within supervision was extracted from a rich qualitative data set for discussion here, with the participants' and co-researchers' permission.

Ten practicing social workers (seven females, three males), each with a master of social work (MSW), participated in the study. This was a purposive sample (Rubin & Babbie, 2011) of practitioners, identified through

the researchers' professional contacts in southern Ontario. The chosen participants were known by the researchers to have engaged in reflective practice for at least five years, and were from demographic and social work backgrounds that were as diverse as possible. The participants varied across a number of important demographic features including age, gender, ethnicity, culture, race, religion, sexual orientation, and social class. They also came from diverse areas of social work practice, including administration, research, education, and direct practice. They brought a range of six to 26 years of practice experience in a variety of settings, including mental health, child welfare, education, and community settings; several were in supervisory or leadership positions.

The study was qualitative in nature and used a narrative approach (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Using a conversational guide, the researchers carried out in-depth, dyadic conversations with participants about their use of self in terms of training, awareness, practice, relationships, challenges, and rewards within their specific agency context. To enhance their own reflective research practice, the researchers first carried out these conversations with each other in pairs, then with the rest of the participants. The conversations were approximately 90 to 120 minutes in length each and were audiotaped and transcribed with participants' consent (one conversation was documented through detailed note taking).

For the broader research project (see Adamowich et al., 2014 for details) a phase-by-phase, narrative analysis was used (Fraser, 2004). The researchers immersed themselves in the data generated, listened to the tapes, re-read notes taken, and each transcribed two conversations. The researchers interpreted the data using narrative inquiry (Xu & Connelly, 2010) and checked meanings and findings with participants. Through the various phases, they took individual reflexive notes and shared a collective blog, meeting weekly to debrief. In their overall analysis, they included data generated from all dyadic conversations, feedback from participants, research team meetings, collective blog and individual reflexive journals. They pulled out five emerging common themes, under which several sub-themes were clustered.

Under the theme of supervision, the sub-theme regarding social workers' self-reflection, supervisory, and leadership support was extracted for inclusion here. Within this subtheme, the information gathered was then organized into smaller themes using thematic analysis, with participants' quotes used as details to support the themes (Creswell, 2007). Each participant was given a code (e.g. P1, P2…P10) to identify their quotes and to ensure that a range of participants was quoted. There were two specific themes that emerged from this data: the challenges of organizational pressures and power differentials; and the vital role of social work leaders in modelling values and creating a safe organizational culture.

Themes

Organizational Pressures and Power Differentials

Several participants discussed external and internal organizational challenges to providing supervision, highlighting the increasing pressure for efficiency and accountability. A manager in mental health stated: "We have demands from our funders to put out numbers like we never had before … so there is a lot of pressure." (P7) Another participant, who has practiced in mental health and child welfare, related: "People don't like when you're reflective and when you think about power and you think about yourself … especially in an agency context, they just want you to do the work ... The pace is very quick." (P4) Within the context of child welfare service, lack of time was cited as a factor in providing supervision. In response, one manager suggested: "I want us to begin to see it as social workers as the very foundation of what we do … build it (supervision) into the ethics, so we can't dismiss it away as not having enough time." (P3)

The power differential in the leadership role was cited as another barrier to supervision. One supervisor discussed the impact of hierarchical supervisory positions: "if people are perceived as not following the rules, they can be written up, and that can really create a culture of fear." (P2) In this situation, hierarchy can be misused to reinforce power and authority. Another manager recognized the importance of acknowledging this openly, "saying what the parameters are of your position or power, whether that's in a therapeutic relationship or a leadership relationship … you should not ever get yourself into a place where you've abused your power."(P7) Similarly, an Aboriginal educator reflected:

> With respect to reducing power or creating equitable relationships, I recognize that there are times that modeling works … but there is also recognition that I may not be able to change powerful processes and practices that are embedded in large organizations. (P5)

Thus, while supervisors and managers can endeavour to reduce their positional power, there is acknowledgement of the limits of such equality within the broader organizational context. Leaders can be instrumental in this, by making meaningful efforts to reduce the power differentials between management, staff, and clients. One suggested solution involves restructuring the organizational hierarchy. A manager in child welfare related: "In my work setting, it's about how you engage with people and how you give other people voice, and how you minimize your own voice." (P3) This participant identified that the first step is recognizing the power differential and the second step is taking action to deliberately shift power. For example, in this manager's workplace, a new meeting structure was implemented to disrupt privileged positions and create more equitable power between management, staff, and clients. This included everyone

coming into the room together and introducing themselves, sitting together without tables, clients choosing their seats first, shared agenda setting, and documentation with clients using a whiteboard. This manager supports this shift: "If we truly want to change this, we really need to be shining lights and challenging ourselves and being very, very deliberate about our change process." (P3) However, as this manager reflects, it is difficult to enact such changes: "Everyone can agree and understand and believe it theoretically but when you actually try to change the way we interact and engage it's very, very hard." (P3) This manager had a goal of implementing a new meeting structure throughout the agency. Similarly, another supervisor commented "unless we change and become less comfortable, and share some of that power, that's how you make it different." (P2) This supervisor discussed rotating the chairing of team meetings with workers to share power. Disrupting privileged positions is challenging because it makes obvious the inherent power imbalance between management, staff, and clients. Leaders, who are in privileged positions of power, need to initiate these changes in organizational structure, consciously working to reduce power differentials between themselves, staff, and clients.

Modelling Values and Creating a Safe Culture

One participant, who is a manager in mental health, recognized the importance of modelling values, such as honesty and respect, to foster trusting supervisory relationships:

> If you don't have fundamentally a good relationship with your worker or your colleague, and if you're not truthful, if you don't openly honour and respect them as people, you're not going to get anywhere and they're not going to get anywhere. (P7)

By modelling these values, supervisors create a sense of safety that encourages staff to bring forward complex or controversial issues, which can thereby contribute to their professional growth and also mitigate risk. According to this manager, these values are also touchstones, or signals that alert something is wrong:

> If you see something struggling or not working in an organization, it often still comes back to the lack of trust, the lack of integrity, the lack of authenticity in relationship between the staff and leadership and those things are still at the core. (P7)

Thus supervisors and managers play a pivotal role in modelling these values and creating a trusting supervisory relationship to support staff professional development.

Living these values and promoting a safe culture for supervision is

important at every level of the organization. According to one manager in mental health:

> Even though it is really difficult to stay true to those values and principles, if you don't have cohesion among your leadership team, that can really throw things off … it comes back to maintaining that culture at every level of the organization. (P7)

Maintaining these values ensures cohesion at the leadership level, which guides the organization. Similarly, a mental health supervisor discussed the importance of integrity in leadership: "leadership is critical; you need to lead with integrity and humility … that's really the foundation of good leadership practice and good social work practice." (P2) Leading with integrity, according to another manager, includes admitting mistakes: "If we make mistakes that can hurt either clients or community, or the agency's relationships, if you're always open about that, you can fix anything." (P7) Similarly, a child welfare manager discussed leaders getting feedback and modeling being vulnerable to staff: "We should actually be the leaders in this!... In our desire to professionalize our work … we're dismissing some of the most important things about our actual craft … what a social worker is at heart." (P3)

　　There are ways that leaders can model values and foster a safe culture, which several participants commented on. According to one manager, "looking at mission, vision and values, your principles, your strategic directions, all those things should gel together and they should always reflect your core values and you should always be able to use those as your touchstones." (P7) It is important for senior leadership to model these values, as one supervisor stated: "if we've got our values up on the wall then … we need to live them at all levels and how can we expect our staff to do that, to treat our clients well, if we don't do it internally?" (P2) Transparency in leadership is also important, according to another manager: "There's nothing worse than the perfect leader, who really doesn't exist, right?" (P7) Inclusion of front-line staff and clients in decision-making is also key: "Some of the biggest mistakes we ever made were management … making this decision and then front-line saying … how do you operationalize that down here?… I think we've all gotten wiser on having consumer input into anything we do." (P7)

　　As these participants emphasize, leaders are in prime positions to model these values with their staff, and thereby create a safe culture for supervision in their organizations. As one manager reflected:

> You can still create safety for staff to bring forward troubling situations, but it has to come from the top down as well … there has to be conscious effort on senior leadership to develop that culture with all those extra demands and to protect that. (P7)

Another supervisor reflected this depends on leaders' awareness of their own impact: "I do think that depends on the person's strength of their own ego … [it] requires an openness to learning about ourselves, flexibility to change, humility to recognize our issues." (P2) As these participants noted, leaders have a key role in fostering a safe culture for supervision and they need to be purposeful in creating this.

However, there are also challenges to leaders modelling values and creating a safe culture. Several of the participants highlighted the fact that leaders did not have training in reflective practice, despite being in a leadership position. One supervisor felt "it should be part of our formal training … ongoing, built into practice." (P2) There are also organizational barriers to leaders modelling values and fostering a safe culture. Barriers cited include: leaders' egos, fear of speaking out due to authority and lack of courage to address issues. One of the participants described the challenge to her own integrity as a social work supervisor: "that's when your own integrity plays in, can I stay in an organization that treats people like this, or do I have to go?" (P2) As these participants illustrate, it is difficult for social work supervisors and managers to maintain their own values and integrity if this is not supported at the senior leadership level, which can adversely impact the supervisory relationship.

Discussion and Recommendations for Practice

The two main themes that emerged from these findings reflect both the challenges and enablers to leaders supporting supervision, including organizational pressures and power differentials on the one hand, and modelling values and creating a safe culture on the other. These contrasting themes help to inform recommendations for leaders, around prioritizing supervision and promoting organizational learning, reducing power differentials, modelling values and creating a safe culture, and supporting supervisory and leadership training. These recommendations may also provide new insights for those interested in fostering organizational change at the system level.

Prioritizing Supervision and Promoting Organizational Learning

The first theme stressed the challenge supervisors and managers face in supporting supervision in an organizational context of increasing internal time pressures and external pressures for accountability and efficiency. This finding supports others' assertions that new public management is having a deleterious effect on supervision in social work practice (Aronson & Sammon, 2000; Berger & Mizrahi, 2001; Jones, 2004). While supervision is a cornerstone of social work practice, it appears it is more challenging than ever for leaders to support this, given external demands. However, all hope is not lost; others have found that leaders can make a difference by prioritizing supervision. Indeed, organizational sanctioning

(by leaders) of social work supervision and allocation of resources is the greatest influencing factor on the type, frequency, and availability of supervision in hospital settings (Kadushin et al., 2009).

Leaders can also promote organizational learning by supporting staff development of knowledge and skills through supervision. Rather than viewing supervision as a luxury they can no longer afford, leaders can recognize workers' knowledge and skills as a rich source of learning that will contribute to their organization's ability to thrive when in a climate of fiscal constraint (Noble & Irwin, 2009). Leaders can also safeguard supervisory practice through inclusion in organizational policies and investment of resources (Mor Barak et al., 2009; Noble & Irwin, 2009). Recent scholarship supports the development of worker-centred policies, practices, and activities to support reflective learning by workers and the creation of an organizational learning culture, as a way to respond to the complexity most organizations are facing (Noble & Irwin, 2009). Supporting staff learning through supervision may be an effective way for leaders in organizations to respond to the current challenges presented by the new public management context.

Reducing Power Differentials

The first theme also raised the challenge for managers and supervisors to reduce the inherent power and authority in their role, which echoes previous commentary (Jones, 2004; Kadushin & Harkness, 2002; Noble & Irwin, 2009). As participants noted, being aware of and openly discussing your positional power with workers is one way to reduce this hierarchy, which is similar to others' findings that the power differential can be reduced when discussed as part of a transparent process (Hair, 2008, 2013). This creates a sense of safety in the supervisory relationship that can allow social workers to honestly share their struggles and learn through reflection and feedback (Hair, 2013). This modelling of openness in turn encourages social workers to be more honest and open in their work with clients (Hensley, 2002).

Participants also commented on their limits in shifting power that is embedded in organizations and leaders' roles in reducing power by restructuring the organizational hierarchy. To unleash the rich resources available in their organizations, leaders need to consciously strive to reduce the power and hierarchy in the supervisory role and organizational structure. Using a "critical lens" to reflect on the underlying power structure in the supervisory and client relationship, and shifting towards a more equal balance, may be one approach to achieving this (Noble & Irwin, 2009).

Another innovative leadership approach is to restructure the organization; flatten the hierarchy, and involve workers in key decisions; and empower workers through self-directed teams and peer supervision (Hardina et al., 2007). There is some evidence that this is happening, as traditional supervision is in transition and peer group supervision is being

used to discuss practice issues (Jones, 2004). For example, a recent study found that supervisors in child welfare agencies supported the development of an organizational learning culture, self-reflective practice, staff empowerment, peer consultation, and a strength-based approach. In turn, these practices encouraged greater teamwork, critical thinking, creative problem solving, client-centred practice, and empowerment (Collins-Camargo & Millar, 2010).

Modelling Values and Creating a Safe Culture

The second theme emphasized the significance of supervisors who foster trusting relationships and model values such as respect and honesty, to create a sense of safety for learning. This mirrors earlier findings on the importance of trust and the quality of supervisory relationships (Bogo & McKnight, 2005; Hensley, 2002; Mor Barak et al., 2009; Noble & Irwin, 2009). Modelling social work values in practice is considered foundational for social workers (Bisman, 2004). Social work leaders have also highlighted the importance of relationships, trust, respect, empowerment, and a strengths-based approach in their role (Healy, 2002; Jones, 2004). These supervisory qualities correspond to social work values such as respect and integrity (CASW, 2005).

The second theme also underlined the vital role leaders play in modelling core values such as integrity, humility, and transparency and in purposefully creating a safe culture by embedding these values into the organizational mission, vision, and culture. This requires leaders who are self-aware and act in congruence with social work values (CASW, 2005). This theme strengthens others' findings of the need for leaders to support a safe learning culture to develop self-reflective practice (Hopkins & Austin, 2004). In a safe learning culture, workers are encouraged to try out new ideas, learn from them, and share their knowledge with one another; through a parallel process, they are equipped to support their clients' learning and problem solving (Hopkins & Austin, 2004). A supportive learning culture has been linked to improved staff well-being, quality client services, and organizational benefit (Hopkins & Austin, 2004).

Supporting Supervisory and Leadership Training

The second theme also brought forward the challenges of creating a safe culture, given leaders' lack of training in reflective practice, and existing barriers at the organizational level, which reflects others' findings (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002; Kuechler, 2006). It also underscores the point that in order for social work leaders to effectively support supervision, they need training and skills in this area (Hair, 2013; Healy, 2002;

Mor Barak et al., 2009). This is especially relevant as most social workers have been promoted into leadership positions without the necessary training, and most schools of social work are not preparing social workers to work in administrative positions (Wuenschel, 2006). Some authors suggest that leaders need to foster an organizational culture that promotes the development of positive supervisory relationships and provides training for supervisors in such areas as educational, supportive, and relationship-based supervision (Mor Barak et al., 2009). Leadership support of training for social workers in supervisory and leadership positions is critical to achieving this goal.

These recommendations are all closely interrelated. Effective supervision supports social workers' practice, learning, and the development of a learning culture in organizations; a learning culture fosters adaptive, innovative solutions, which are key to organizational survival in the context of new public management (Jones, 2004). However, Gibbs (2001) asserts that supervisors are challenged in supporting these innovative processes due to the current political and organizational climate that focuses on work completion and meeting standards of practice. She argues that supervision needs to go beyond educating individuals and requires systemic change in organizational culture and priorities. Leaders are influential in changing this culture, and their commitment reflects the quality of supervision provided within organizations (Jones, 2004). Strong leadership is pivotal to realizing success with these recommendations; let us hope the leaders of the future embrace these innovative ideas, and rise to meet these challenges.

Conclusions

Two leadership themes, emphasizing both the challenges and enablers for leaders supporting supervision, were highlighted in this article. Several recommendations for practice were provided, noting the positive organizational outcomes that would result. These included prioritizing supervision and promoting organizational learning; reducing power differentials; modelling values and creating a safe culture; and supporting supervisory and leadership training. These considerations may appeal to those who are currently in a supervisory or leadership position, as well as to those who are practicing or teaching social work. The limitations of this research also need to be recognized, as the sample size of this study was quite small and was not linked to client, worker, or organizational outcomes. Also, the recommendations are suggestive, and would benefit from further research in practice.

REFERENCES

Adamowich, T., Kumsa, M. K., Rego, C., Stoddart, J., & Vito, R. (2014). Playing hide and seek: Searching for the use of self in social work practice. *Reflective Practice (15)*2, 131-143.

Aronson, J. & Sammon, S. (2000). Practice amid social service cuts and restructuring: Working with the contradictions of "small victories." *Canadian Social Work Review, 17*(2), 167-187.

Berger, C., & Mizrahi, T. (2001). An evolving paradigm of supervision within a changing health care environment. *Social Work in Health Care, 32*(4), 1-18.

Bisman, C. (2004). Social work values: The moral code of the profession. *British Journal of Social Work, 34,* 109-123.

Bogo, M. & McKnight, K. (2005). Clinical Supervision in social work: A review of the research literature. *The Clinical Supervisor, 24*(1/2), 49-67.

CASW (2005). Guidelines for ethical practice. Retrieved from the Canadian Association of Social Workers website: http://www.casw-acts.ca

Collins-Camargo, C., & Millar, K. (2010). The potential for a more clinical approach to child welfare supervision to promote practice and case outcomes: A qualitative study in four states. *The Clinical Supervisor, 29,* 164-187.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Davys, A. M. & Beddoe, L. (2009). The reflective learning model: Supervision of social work students. *Social Work Education, 28*(8), 919-933.

Fraser, H. (2004). Doing narrative research: Analysing personal stories line by line. *Qualitative Social Work, 3*(2), 179-201.

Gibbs, J. A. (2001). Maintaining front-line workers in child protection: A case of refocusing supervision. *Child Abuse Review, 10,* 323-335.

Gray, S. W., & Smith, M. S. (2009). The influence of diversity in clinical supervision: A framework for reflective conversations and questioning. *The Clinical Supervisor, 28,* 155-179.

Hair, H. J. (2008). *Perspectives on the post-degree supervision needs of Ontario social workers.* Unpublished PhD dissertation, Wilfrid Laurier University, Canada.

Hair, H. J. (2013). The purpose and duration of supervision, and the training and discipline of supervisors: What social workers say they need to provide effective services. *British Journal of Social Work, 43,* 1562-1588.

Hardina, D., Middleton, J., Montana, S., & Simpson, R. (2007). *An empowering approach to managing social service organizations.* New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company.

Hasenfeld, Y. (2010). Introduction. In Y. Hasenfeld, *Human services as complex organizations* (2nd ed., pp. 1-5). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Healy, K. (2002). Managing human services in a market environment: What role for social workers? *British Journal of Social Work, 32,* 527-540.

Hensley, P. (2002). The value of supervision. *The Clinical Supervisor, 21*(1), 97-110.

Hopkins, K. & Austin, M. (2004). The changing nature of human services and supervision. In M. J. Austin & K. M. Hopkins (Eds.), *Supervision as collaboration in the human services* (pp. 3-10). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Jones, M. (2004). Supervision, learning and transformative practices. In N. Gould & M. Baldwin (Eds.), *Social work, critical reflection and the learning organization* (pp. 11-22). Burlington, VT: Ashgate.

Kadushin, A. & Harkness, D. (2002). *Supervision in social work*, (4th ed.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Kadushin, G., Berger, C., Gilbert, C., & De St. Aubin, M. (2009). Models and methods in hospital social work supervision. *The Clinical Supervisor, 28,* 180-199.

Kuechler, C. (2006). Practitioner's voices: Group supervisors reflect on their practice. *The Clinical Supervisor, 1/2,* 83-103.

Lawler, J. (2007). Leadership in social work: A case of caveat emptor? *British Journal of Social Work, 37,* 123-141.

Lietz, C. A. (2010). Critical thinking in child welfare supervision. *Administration in Social Work, 34,* 68-78.

Mandell, D. (2008). Power, care, and vulnerability: Considering use of self in child welfare work. *Journal of Social Work Practice, 22*(2), 235-248.

Ministry of Children and Youth Services (Jan. 2013). *Blueprint for fundamental change to Ontario's child welfare system.* Retrieved from http://www.children. gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/topics/childrensaid/childrensaidsocieties/ reports/youthleavingcare.aspx

Ministry of Children and Youth Services (Sept. 2013). *Draft child and youth mental health service framework.* Retrieved from http://www.children.gov. on.ca/htdocs/English/documents/topics/specialneeds/mentalhealth/ ServiceFramework.pdf

Mor Barak, M. E, Travis, D. J., Pyun, H. & Xie, B. (2009). The impact of supervision on worker outcomes: A meta-analysis. *Social Service Review, 83*(1), 3-32.

Noble, C. & Irwin, J. (2009). Social work supervision: An exploration of the current challenges in a rapidly changing social, economic and political environment. *Journal of Social Work, 9*(3), 345-358.

Ollerenshaw, J. & Creswell, J. W. (2002). Narrative research: A comparison of two restorying data analysis approaches. *Qualitative Inquiry, 8*(3), 329-347.

O'Connor, M. K., & Netting, F. E. (2009). Organization practice: *A guide to understanding human service organizations.* (2nd. ed.). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Rubin, A. & Babbie, E. (2011). *Research methods for social work* (7th ed.), Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole, Cengage Learning.

Wuenschel, P. C. (2006). The diminishing role of social work administrators in social service agencies: Issues for consideration. *Administration in Social Work, 30*(4), 5-18.

Xu, S. & Connelly, M. (2010). Narrative inquiry for school-based research. *Narrative Inquiry, 20*(2), pp. 349-370.

Young, T. L., Lambie, G. W., Hutchinson, T., & Thurston-Dyer, J. (2011). The integration of reflectivity in developmental supervision: Implications for clinical supervisors. *The Clinical Supervisor, 30,* 1-18.