

“WHAT’S IN IT FOR US?” SUPERVISION AND EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS: ANALYSIS OF SURVEY RETURNS

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Introduction

In the previous paper in this issue we have discussed some of the macro or organizational benefits of supervision, and in particular its contribution to the healthiness of the organization (Leyden and Kuk, 1993). The current paper presents a statistical analysis of a subset of the returns from those practising psychologists from the 1991 survey who told us that they were actually receiving supervision. This paper should therefore be seen as complementing those by Elsie Osborne, Martin Powell, Mike Pomerantz and Ingrid Lunt elsewhere in this issue.

In these difficult and stringent times, can we afford what might in some quarters be seen as the “luxury” of supervision? We believe the answer to be “yes”, from a number of different perspectives.

First of all, the educational psychologist has to balance the complexities of working with children, parents, teachers and systems (e.g. schools) at a range of levels, and integrating the respective practical, theoretical, emotional and ethical issues. The case for supervision to assist this process has of course been advanced in earlier papers by members of the Working Party on Supervision (Osborne et al., 1990; Powell et al., 1990).

The arguments put forward for supervision included both the nature of the psychologist’s work and its potential implications for children, their parents, teachers and the educational system. Although the earlier papers addressed the needs of trainee educational psychologists on fieldwork placement, the arguments apply equally to qualified practitioners. Powell et al. (1990) summarized the position as follows:

we should reflect on the tasks in which trainees might be engaged with their supervisors; ... interventions which may substantially influence the lives of others. They may also be influencing decisions about: the need for expensive extra-district residential school placements; the use of expensive unit or special school provision within the LEA; recommendations for the reception of children into care; referrals to other costly treatment programmes; and participation in the presentation of expensive authority wide in-service training.

Few would contest the notion that the educational psychologist’s task has already become substantially more difficult even since those earlier papers were published in 1990. In respect of our statutory work, perhaps the one procedure common to all educational psychology services, is the increasing use by parents and by parent support and special interest groups of legal redress, Judicial Review and Appeal procedures, against a background of diminishing LEA budgets, which has presented us with additional practical, theoretical and ethical challenges. In such a climate few would quibble with the need for staff (as well as organizational) support and development to withstand and cope creatively with the rapidly changing circumstances, and the need for effective and sensitive decision

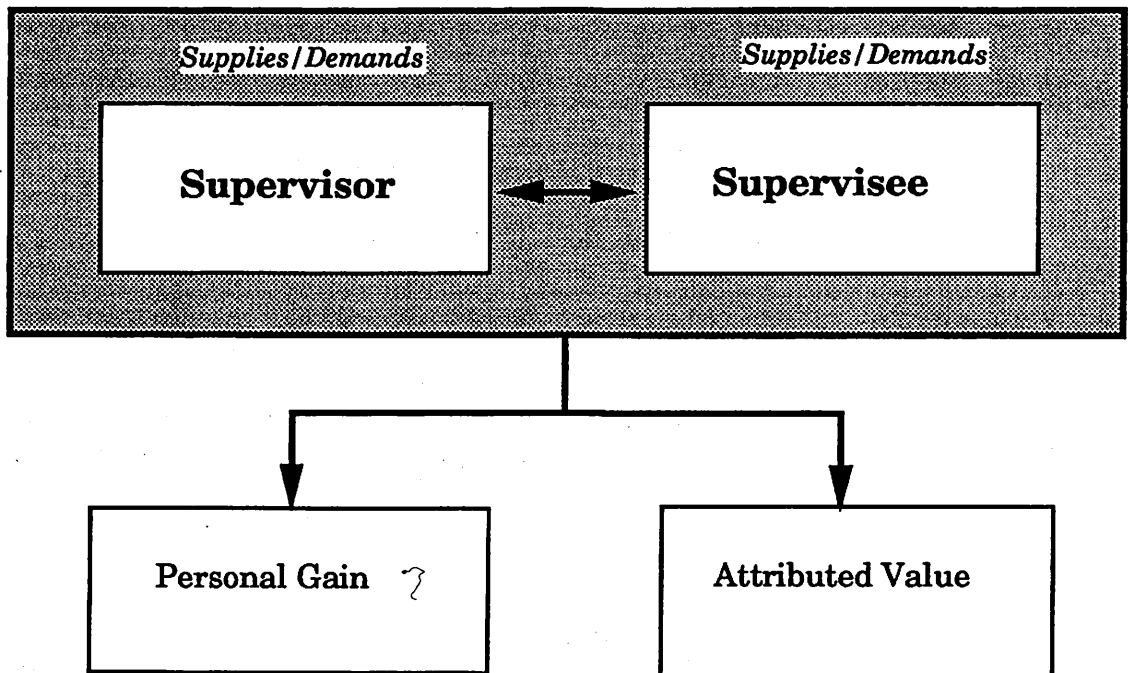


Figure 1. P-E Fit model for supervision

making. The more “difficult and stringent” the times, the greater the need for good quality supervision.

In our earlier paper on organizational healthiness (Leyden and Kuk, 1993) we described the contribution of the “Person-Environment Fit” (P-EF) model developed by the Michigan school in their studies of the relationship between organizations and the well-being of the employees. At the risk of both over-simplifying and repeating what we say elsewhere, the Michigan model distinguishes between the *demands* an organization makes of its employees (e.g. expertise, skills, effort, commitment) and the benefits which it *supplies* them in return (e.g. salary, security, variety of work, opportunities for training and to exercise skills). The Michigan model also draws a distinction between the fit between the *individual* and the *organization*, and between the *subjective* and *objective* dimensions of each.

Using this notion of “fit”, we have devised a simple, provisional model to describe some of the transactions in the supervisory process. This model also incorporates supervisees’ appraisal of what they “gain” from supervision, and its importance for them (see Figure 1).

From this perspective, the supervisory relationship has some of the characteristics of a cost-benefit model of interactions, although it is much more complex and subtle than a simple trade-off. Osborne’s paper describes the qualities of commitment, trust, a non judgmental attitude and respect for the professional nature of the relationship which characterize successful supervision. These qualities cluster round the concept of “boundaries” which protect the tasks of supporting and learning. Our simplified model proposes that, within good supervision, these qualities (including supplies and demands) resonate both between and within the supervisor and supervisee.

The needs of supervisors and the ways in which they are protected, or not, from the risk of emotional burnout (i.e. arising from constantly giving support and supervision to others) is a separate question, and not for this paper. However, we acknowledge that supervision not only makes demands of the supervisors, but that it may also supply them, via the professional relationship with the supervisee, with a sense of being valued and trusted. However, the focus of supervision remains on the piece of work that the supervisee presents. In those circumstances where the supervisory relationship is problematic, or where there are unresolved organizational tensions or incompatibilities, the supervisor may well receive and experience more negative feelings. Supervisors themselves also need their own professional, personal and training needs met, and this should be at an appropriate level within the organization.

Survey design

Background

A detailed account of the survey on which this analysis is based is to be found in the papers by Pomerantz and Lunt in this issue. This paper provides a factorial analysis of the replies to those items from the questionnaire which were designed to explore how personal and professional needs might be met through the process of supervision at work.

Instruments and items

The items for the initial analysis are presented in Figure 2. These items appeared on the final page of the questionnaire (see the Appendix to this issue for a copy of the full questionnaire). Responses were categorized on a five point scale: "Strongly agree", "Agree", "Neutral", "Disagree" and "Strongly disagree".

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1. I have a reasonable degree of choice in selecting my supervisor
 2. Supervisors do not require training in supervision *per se*, but simply job experience
 3. My supervision takes place in an atmosphere of trust and confidentiality
 4. My supervisor is not competent in this particular role
 5. My supervision is sufficiently independent of appraisal that I feel confident to address issues without fear of the consequences
 6. Emotionally based issues like my frustration, anger or helplessness cannot be adequately addressed in my supervision
 7. I wish I could have more training in how best to take advantage of supervision
 8. Supervision is not under my control and I really cannot influence what we talk about
 9. Ideally a supervisor should not be a psychologist's line manager
 10. With more experience in the job, the need for supervision declines

Figure 2. Meeting personal and professional needs through supervision: survey items

*“We would like to know what you personally gain by this type of activity”
(i.e. supervision)*

1. Recognizes personal issues within the job framework (*RPI*)
2. Helps me face issues I might otherwise choose not to acknowledge (*H*)
3. Reduces stress (*S*)
4. Encourages personal learning (*EPL*)
5. Helps me feel valued and respected (*VR*)
6. Gives constructive feedback (*FB*)
7. Helps develop coping strategies (*CS*)
8. Empowers me (*E*)
9. Other (please specify)

Figure 3. Supervision: items measuring reported gains

In order to test the aspects of “personal gain” and “attributed value” from the model in Figure 1 we used two further categories from the survey. Responses to the item which invited respondents to rate on a five-point scale the importance they attached to supervision (from “No value” to “Extremely valuable”) constituted the “value” analysis.

We assessed “personal gain” from the returns to the ten items which invited respondents to circle one of eight possible benefits from supervision (see Figure 3).

The data analysis was based on the subsample of 51 from the survey who reported that they were receiving supervision at work, and this was reduced to 41 following a deletion of missing data from some of the returned questionnaires.

In view of the size of this statistical subsample the results require cautious interpretation.

Statistical procedures

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the initial stages of the factor analysis of the ten items from Figure 1. These include the checks for kurtosis and item skew which might have a spurious effect on the final factor solution. The adequacy of the correlation matrix was then tested using Bartlett’s test of sphericity. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin procedure (which examines whether pairs of variables can be explained by a smaller set of variables) produced an acceptable figure of 0.69.

The correlation matrix of the ten by ten items was initially extracted using a principal components analysis. The K1 extraction rule suggested a three-factor solution which explained 66 per cent of the variance. In the subsequent varimax rotation items loading greater than 0.4 were used to describe the rotated factors.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the ten items concerned with supervision (n=41)

Questionnaire item	Mean	S.D.	Kurtosis	Skewness
1. I have a reasonable degree of choice in selecting my supervisor	3.96	1.28	-.014	1.04
2. Supervisors do not require training in supervision per se, but simply job experience	3.95	1.20	.765	-1.23
3. My supervision takes place in an atmosphere of trust and confidentiality	2.47	1.35	-.794	.594
4. My supervisor is not competent in this particular role	3.33	1.32	-.991	-.316
5. My supervision is sufficiently independent of appraisal that I feel confident to address issues without fear of the consequences	2.71	1.38	-1.25	.289
6. Emotionally based issues like my frustration, anger or helplessness cannot be adequately addressed in my supervision	3.21	1.43	-1.41	-.193
7. I wish I could have more training in how best to take advantage of supervision	2.52	1.13	-.625	.345
8. Supervision is not under my control and I really cannot influence what we talk about	3.84	.998	1.36	-.101
9. Ideally a supervisor should not be a psychologist's line manager	3.09	1.13	-.842	-.294
10. With more experience in the job, the need for supervision declines	3.72	1.18	-.761	-.695

Factorial structure

The resulting factor structure was both clear-cut and theoretically justifiable (see Table 2).

Factor one encapsulates the *importance of safe professional boundaries*. Supervision takes place in an atmosphere of trust, the supervisee feels able to contribute to the process, it allows emotionally based issues to be addressed, is independent of appraisal and the supervisor is competent and probably should be the supervisee's line manager. Factor two appears to describe the *individual's appraisal of the underlying rationale for supervision*. This includes the feeling of having a reasonable degree of choice in the selection of supervisor, a desire for some training in making the best use of supervision and a belief that the need for supervision does not decline with experience in the job. Factor three, a single item, deals with the *training needs of the supervisor*. Supervisees do not believe that job experience itself provides supervisors with a sufficient training in supervision.

Table 2. Factors and factor solutions (n=41)

Questionnaire item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
3. My supervision takes place in an atmosphere of trust and confidentiality	-.886*	.096	.120
6. Emotionally based issues like my frustration, anger or helplessness cannot be adequately addressed in my supervision	.884	.076	-.085
4. My supervisor is not competent in this particular role	.866	-.032	.070
5. My supervision is sufficiently independent of appraisal that I feel confident to address issues without fear of the consequences	-.769*	.309	.059
8. Supervision is not under my control and I really cannot influence what we talk about	.695	-.071	.092
9. Ideally a supervisor should not be a psychologist's line manager	.532	-.132	-.085
10. With more experience in the job, the need for supervision declines	.186	.775	-.326
1. I have a reasonable degree of choice in selecting my supervisor	-.155	.760	.144
7. I wish I could have more training in how best to take advantage of supervision	.288	-.611*	-.144
2. Supervisors do not require training in supervision per se, but simply job experience	-.003	.050	.952

* Items marked with an asterisk are positive. Scales for these items were reversed prior to scoring

Factors and outcome measures

The final statistical analysis looked at the link between the three factors and the outcome measures.

While there was no clear link between the outcome measures and factor three, there were significant relationships between both factors one and two and five of the eight possible reported gains from supervision. Factor one was also significantly associated with the item exploring the value attributed to supervision. The statistical basis for this analysis is summarized in Table 3.

The three outcome measures for which there was no significant link with the factorial model of supervision were:

Table 3. Correlation matrix between Factor 1, 2, 3 and outcome measures

	F1	F2	F3	RPI	H	RS	EPL	VR	FB	CS	E	VALUE
F1	1											
F2	.22	1										
F3	-.06	.00	1									
Personal Gain												
Recognises personal issues (RPI)	.49**	.19	-.11	1								
Helps face issues (H)	.13	.07	-.24	.36	1							
Reduces stress (RS)	.37*	.07	.10	.36	.08	1						
Encourage personal learning (EPL)	.20	.24	.06	.31	.14	.34	1					
Feel valued/respect (VR)	.48**	.40*	.23	.22	-.14	.36	.31	1				
Constructive feedback (FB)	.31	.03	-.19	.54**	.23	.44*	.37*	.14	1			
Supports coping (CS)	.41*	-.11	-.20	.41*	.22	.43*	.39*	.11	.40*	1		
Empowers me (E)	.30	.42*	-.21	.26	.06	.27	.23	.36	.37*	.20	1	
VALUE	.58**	.24	-.10	.52**	.20	.57**	.48**	.41*	.59**	.52**	.37*	1

Note: n = 41; * p < .01; ** p < .001; aspects of personal gain are measured dichotomously with 0 = not at all to 1 = yes; VALUE stands for the attributed value towards supervision and is measured on a 5 point likert scale ranging from 1 = no value to 5 = extremely valuable.

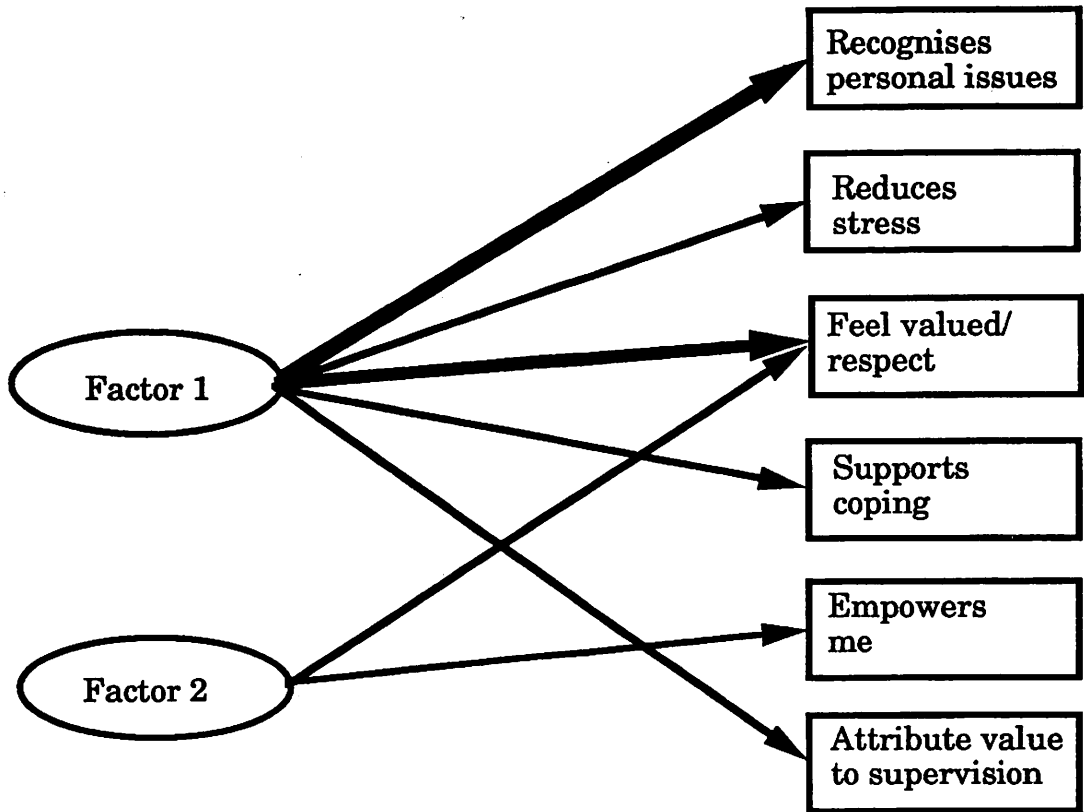


Figure 4. Path relationships between factor 1, 2 and outcome measures. For the sake of clarity only those significant path coefficients are shown (see also Table 3). Thicker lines signify significance at 0.001 level, and thinner lines at 0.01 level

1. "Helps me face issues I might otherwise choose not to acknowledge."
2. "Encourages personal learning."
3. "Gives constructive feedback."

The visual path between factors one and two and the outcome measures is illustrated in Figure 4.

Factors one and two both contribute significantly to the personal gains that supervisees report from supervision.

Summary and discussion

The analysis of the returns from the subsample of those educational psychologists who reported that they were receiving supervision produced a three-factor structure for the supervision items on the questionnaire. When these factors were augmented with the "outcome" measures, a richer picture emerged. For instance, while factor one relates to safe professional boundaries within which individual needs can be addressed, it also describes the contribution supervision makes to providing support for the supervisee (i.e. through reducing

stress) and help in the development of coping strategies, perhaps by the process of shared or assisted problem-solving.

The “outcome” measures also illuminated the role of supervision in enhancing the supervisee’s feelings of self-worth and empowerment.

Yet there were less clear links with such outcome measures as confronting difficult issues, personal learning, or (more surprisingly) providing constructive feedback. Although the sample size cautions against generalizing beyond the immediate findings, there may well be a real issue here. These results may point to a reluctance or uncertainty among some supervisors in confronting difficult issues with supervisees, and in abstracting general learning points or principles from the particular instances of professional practice presented for supervision.

The difficulties experienced in confronting difficulties with trainees was a major concern of supervisors and tutors in the earlier fieldwork supervision during professional training (Pomerantz et al., 1987; Lunt, this volume). The balance between support and challenge is clearly difficult to hold in any circumstances. It would not be surprising if the emphasis is on the former, particularly in difficult professional times. However, this may be at the cost of some development opportunities for the supervisee, and argues for the provision of training and support for the supervisors in carrying out what is a complex and increasingly important task.

From the organizational perspective, there are grounds for considering that the potential contribution of supervision has yet to be realized within EPSs. Good quality supervision for all psychologists should be considered not only an individual entitlement, but also an organizational necessity. This has training implications for the supervisors and their services.

Among the factor one items, we were interested to note that most, but not all supervisees did not object to the notion of supervision from a line manager. In view of the power and trust issues that permeate the supervisory process, this is an intriguing finding. While this is open to many interpretations - not least the possibility that educational psychologists may in fact trust their line manager - it is consistent with the notion of fit developed earlier in this paper. Perhaps supervision with a trusted line manager provides the individual psychologist with a tie to the service organization, and its legitimate authority structure, in contrast with the feeling of vulnerability that may be presented by the idea of solitary professional practice.

Line manager supervision, where it is successful, may supply not only a sense of support, but also the experience of shared purpose, and help bridge the subjective gap between the individual and organization. If so, then this may be a mechanism through which supervision can contribute to the overall healthiness of the organization, as well as the well-being of individual staff members. The link between supervision and organization healthiness has been argued elsewhere in this issue, but the open-ended explorative possibilities of the supervisory relationship is consistent with our knowledge of how systems function, and the need to recognize the importance of the interaction and balance between different parts of the organization.

Conclusions

The preliminary analysis described in this paper, based on a subsection of the returns from the questionnaire survey, provided a model of the supervisory process and a factorial study

of the returns. The aim of the factorial study was to clarify the data and refine the questions for subsequent enquiry.

The factorial analysis identified three main components. When linked with the outcome measures these factorial components supported the case for supervision within psychological services. Good supervision provides support, coping strategies and empowerment for most of those educational psychologists who experience it. However, this must be qualified by the finding that less than 50 per cent of EPs reported receiving any supervision at all. There is also a dearth of training opportunities for supervisors. In view of the potential benefits of supervision for both individual psychologists and the services in which they work, this is perhaps one area in which services and training courses could combine to provide in-house training and development work in supervision, for the benefit of both parties. In these uncertain and challenging times it is particularly important to take responsibility for protecting and developing those activities which support the development of staff and services and ensure high-quality decision making.

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