

THE ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESS IN SOCIAL WORK SUPERVISION

ROSHAN H. DASTUR*

The supervisor is the overseer of the work of another person to ensure its quality and completion within the stipulated period. In this sense, supervision is employed widely in many fields of human endeavour, especially the scientific, industrial, commercial and educational fields.

Even in social work in its early stages, supervision was employed to see that the framework of the policies and regulations set down by the agency were observed. Knowledge, information and training, just enough to fulfil this goal, were given and workers were shown how to do a particular type of work without indicating how by so doing greater efficiency was achieved. Training was by apprenticeship, largely imitative and lacked conceptualisation. The educational aspect of supervision, as understood today, was not developed, while the administrative aspect was emphasized.

With the growth of schools of social work and scientific information in social work, improved supervisory methods were introduced. Detailed case recordings were emphasized and used for analysis of the worker's casework methodology. Regular conferences between the supervisor and the worker became an essential feature of supervision technique. Among other learning principles, systematic teaching and proceeding from simple to complex situations were advocated. These principles have been retained to a considerable degree in supervision even today.

Supervision is necessary because in social work it is the public support that counts and makes it a specific welfare service rather than the private practice of a group of professional social workers. It becomes the

responsibility of the agency administration to institute and sustain a pattern of activity, accountable to the community at large.

From the 1920's, psychiatry began to have a dynamic influence on casework in Western countries, particularly in the U.S.A., and its effect was felt both in teaching and supervisory methods. The advent of psychiatry created a new understanding of the worker-client relationship with attention focussed on the worker's attitudes as they affected this relationship. By a direct therapeutic effort, the supervisor hoped to modify the attitudes of the worker and to resolve any of his personality conflicts. This therapeutic function contrasted sharply with the administrative and teaching components of supervision that required the worker to be accountable for his own activity and progress in professional development.

In India, psychiatry did not have as much influence on supervisory methods as it had in the West, except in a few cases, where persons trained in the U.S.A. introduced the idea of therapeutic supervision into agencies where they worked. This phase, however, did not last long even in the West. During the depression and World War II the need for large scale programmes in agencies and expansion of the social work staff to man them shifted the emphasis in supervision from its therapeutic function to more pressing administrative and educational matters.

Supervision has, today, emerged in social work practice as an administrative process, in the conduct of which the supervisor has two main functions, namely administrative and teaching (Berkowitz,

* Mrs. Roshan H. Dastur is a member on the Faculty of the Institute of Social Services, Nirmala Niketan, Bombay-20.

1952: 419-423). Though both these functions are given due recognition, there still remains the predominant attitude that administration is something separate from professional practice, and that the skills required for administration are quite different from those required for the practice of social work. For executive and managerial professions, the knowledge of administrative theory and practice has traditionally been regarded as essential. It is now recognised that for social workers too, an understanding of administrative principles should make for more effective use of their professional skills. Administration is often described as a function of only the executive arm of an agency, excluding its other members of the staff. However, "when administration is regarded as a system of cooperative effort, the stake of all staff members is considerable, not only in managerial competence, but also in making their own appropriate contribution to administrative process" (Stein, 1965). It must be recognised that dynamic administration does not exist as something apart from the rest of the agency's functioning.

THE ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESS

Administration is an enabling and directing force, continually trying to create conditions to improve the quality of the agency's services and to enhance its value to the community and to the field.

ADMINISTRATIVE FUNCTIONS

The supervisor's position in the administrative structure is unique. He is the link that binds such diverse groups as the board, the executive and the staff, and works for understanding between them. He establishes a two-way communication between the staff and the executive,

enabling an understanding of each other's need. Towle (1963: 403-415) has very aptly described the supervisor's role as the "mid-position" role. Decision making should be a two-way process. Certain decisions may be made by the supervisor; but they must be conveyed even to the junior-most member of the staff. However, the supervisor should not be empowered to make all the decisions; certain decisions must be left to the workers. The channel of communication must be easy and free as between the supervisor and the executive, and the supervisor and the workers. Both verbal and written communications should be used, and channels of communication always kept open to avoid a build-up of silent hostility in the workers.

An important function of the supervisor is to organize, assign and distribute work in accordance with the worker's ability and skill, and time available for the same. In a good administration, the resources should match the tasks required, for example, if the workers are expected to keep case records, they should at least be provided with paper, files, filing cabinets and so forth. The supervisor must judge what facilitates or interferes with a worker's activities. This ability will depend upon his own developing professional skill. At the same time he must understand the psychology of having to be an administrator, just as much as the psychology of those being administered by him. For effective administration it is not sufficient to be just 'one of the boys' (Smalley, 1968 : 160-161).

The supervisor is also responsible for the students of schools of social work undergoing field work training at the agency. Many schools of social work send their own faculty members for supervising students placed in agencies for field work. This system has its advantages as well as drawbacks. Such a supervisor naturally has

a closer relationship with the school and its total curricula; hence he has greater facility in the teaching aspects of supervision. He would know what is possible for the student to do at a particular stage, what is educational for him and would be able to keep the focus on the student's professional growth and development.

However, the faculty supervisor is not an integral part of the agency and, therefore, does not experience the same kind of necessity and accountability for service that is true for the agency-employed supervisor who has the unique advantage of helping students become professional social workers through giving an agency service. "This administrative requirement constitutes a powerful impetus which the student feels and incorporates as agency responsibility for service" (Smalley, 1968: 297). The student acquires knowledge and skill through this requirement of giving service rather than depending entirely on the motivation of his own professional development for his learning. No matter who is supervising, the agency administrator (the supervisor of the agency staff) being in overall charge of the students should serve as a liaison between the school and the field work supervisors on the staff of the agency, to ensure that students get a meaningful learning experience in relation to the theory covered at their school.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

It is the responsibility of the supervisor to create and provide the best working conditions for optimum performance, efficiency and productivity, and to organize and implement staff development programmes. He must decide a clear and consistent staff development philosophy along with staff development programmes. The staff must first be convinced that the programme will be beneficial to them and

consequently to the agency and their clientele.

Characteristics: In planning a staff development programme, the workers' existing knowledge and skills, and their intellectual and emotional readiness should be taken into account. The programme should proceed from here to a level commensurate with the functions to be performed. The staff should be actively involved in the programme in order to acquire an appreciation of it and to feel partly responsible for its success or failure.

Staff development should be continuous and progressive. There should be expectation on the part of the staff and the administration that educational opportunities will be provided in an uninterrupted manner. The executive's reactions to these programmes will depend upon the way the supervisor represents the profession to him and the importance the supervisor himself gives to these programmes as a means of improving the agency or departmental services.

Another essential characteristic is that staff development should be planned. Time and financial support must be planned for and carefully safeguarded by the supervisor along with the executive (Schroeder, 1966: 38-50).

Content: (Finestone, 1966: 51, Wax, 1966: 78-82; Meyer, 1966: 98-118; Miller, 1960: 69-76). The content of a staff development programme will depend upon the set-up of the particular agency or institution which engages social service staff. In a primary setting it may be simpler for the staff and the community to understand the role the agency plays in serving its clientele or the community, while in a multidisciplinary set-up or a secondary setting, e.g., a hospital social service department, it may be difficult for the new workers, the other staff and the community to understand the particular role and

function the department is expected to perform. In a setting such as this, the new workers have to understand the meaning of the "ultimate medical authority" in a case situation, the idea of working in a team and so on.

1. Orientation programme: New workers, whether they work in primary or secondary settings, must be given an orientation, so that they can understand fully the role played by the particular agency or department in serving the community, policies and programmes of the agency and the type of clientele served by it. This can be done individually or in groups by giving a descriptive talk or conveyed through reports or journals of the agency concerned.

2. In-service programme: Of equal importance to the orientation programme for new workers, is the in-service programme for untrained or partly trained workers. In our country many welfare institutions still employ untrained workers due to various reasons. In-service training is especially important in such agencies.

3. Supervisory conference: Supervisory conference should be arranged once a week for new workers and, as often as necessary, for more experienced workers. The learning in the supervisory sessions should be consciously geared to the demands of the job and the levels of the workers.

With more experienced workers, the proportion of teaching content would naturally decrease and supervisory sessions would become largely but not wholly consultations. These sessions are in the nature of two colleagues discussing problems of casework or group work or administration together.

4. Open system: Another relatively new staff development device is called the "open system". In this system, a worker who has a special problem is able to step out of the supervisory or

administrative channels, and get consultation from any other person in the department or agency, who has specialized knowledge of the area in which her problem lies.

5. Preceptorship: For inexperienced workers the supervisor may have to create a situation where learning and teaching are accomplished by direct observation and participation. This device of staff development is called preceptorship. The supervisor can provide an opportunity for the inexperienced or the untrained worker to watch the skilled worker (the preceptor) in actual practice.

6. Role-playing: Role-playing is another device which can be used for training the staff. One staff member can take up the role of the interviewer and the other, that of a client. If the interview is well conducted, very lively and stimulating discussions follow and the leader of the group or the supervisor is able to select many areas for learning.

7. Group meetings: It has been observed that adult learning is much more facilitated in groups of peers, i.e. groups of adults who are relatively of the same age, of roughly comparable experience and training. By sharing experiences with other adults in the same situation, with similar problems, this procedure acquires the role of supporting the adult ego. Group meetings should be arranged regularly and should proceed on a planned basis.

Where the number of staff members is not big enough to separate the experienced from the less experienced workers, as often happens in Indian agencies, particularly in multidisciplinary settings, common programmes may be organized, but the experienced workers should be encouraged to participate with a view to enriching the experience of the younger staff.

8. Professional Library: Any staff wishing to keep abreast of the current

trends in social work and interested in professional growth should endeavour to build a professional library of its own. This may be difficult in agencies with limited financial resources and rather small staff, very often comprising only of one or two workers. Where the group is larger and better facilities are available, the administration should be made aware of the importance of subscribing to professional journals and magazines, if not books. In a multidisciplinary set-up, e.g. Hospital, a section can be reserved for social service in the medical library.

Journal review meetings of the staff can be arranged and can profitably be followed by a general discussion.

Evaluation: (Austin 1952: 375-382; Black, 1950: 223-229; Finestone, 1966: 59-60; Schroeder, 1966; Wax, 1966).

Evaluation of programmes and staff evaluations are necessary, both for administrative and teaching purposes. The idea of evaluation in work situation is still unfamiliar and is often not accepted as a necessary and normal part of employment. Due to this unfamiliarity there is often reluctance on the part of the supervisor to evaluate his staff or the administrative set-up of the agency, or the staff development programmes he has introduced. The workers react in a similar way and quite often fears and anxieties are built up around evaluation. Being evaluated should be a formal experience, but certainly not a formidable one. The purposes of evaluation can be discussed in staff meetings and the workers' feelings regarding these can be explored.

While planning programmes, introducing new policies or modifying the existing ones, there should also be a concern for evaluating the results. Unless emphasis is placed on this "feedback", i.e. the review of a programme in the light of the result it has produced, the full value of the

programme cannot be assessed. Whenever a group programme has been planned and put into practice, the final session should be devoted to group evaluation and suggestions gathered for future programmes. Another evaluation method is to appoint a small "steering committee" of one or two experienced members, who can note reactions as the programme is proceeding. In some situations the use of written questionnaires may be desirable. All members of the group may be asked to rate the value of each of the sessions or aspects of sessions, giving reasons for the rating as well as suggestions for improvement. As in planning programmes, in evaluation too, the participation of the members should be sought.

Individual evaluations should be made only at the "pivoted" points in the worker's professional development, and at certain intervals, to assure him of his progress. The worker needs to know where he has reached and how much further he has to go. The supervisor should set up reasonable average standards of performance, rather than exceptional ones. There should be a principle of automatic salary increments operating within the administrative structure with an efficiency bar or an examination if necessary for higher grades. Individual evaluations would include such items as observance of administrative requirements, professional behaviour, and worker's contribution to the agency and the community it serves. An individual assessment of each worker is necessary to elicit pertinent facts like her present level of competence, weakness that needs strengthening, areas that could and should be advanced. On the basis of this assessment of the individual's educational level, educational objectives can be set up and the ways in which these can best be achieved, determined. In evaluating a worker, certain personal factors like age,

her life circumstances, the type and intensity of her motivation, e.g. the motivation to learn, to improve, to enhance income or status or the desire to be left alone, should be taken into consideration. The worker's professional development will also depend upon her willingness to assume responsibility and take risks. Another point for consideration is the amount of energy and time the worker is willing to devote to professional pursuits. Other significant factors in individual assessment are the worker's ability and effort to teach, to lead, and her ability to give of her professional knowledge and experience, her emotional stability, her resilience in time of stress, her integrity and her inter-personal skills as reflected in her dealings with the staff of the agency, other agency staff and the clientele.

Case records play only a small part in the evaluation of the worker. The worker's ability to express herself on paper and to record well does not necessarily indicate a high degree of skill and competency in work. The supervisor should look for change not only in paper and pencil performance but in actual working with clients. The worker's evaluation of her own work can also be very valuable.

CRITICISM OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESS

Though authorities like Towle (1963) and Berkowitz (1952) have recognized and emphasized the administrative as well as educational responsibilities of a supervisor, there are others like Lucille Austin who feel that when these two functions are combined in one individual, too much power is concentrated in that person and that no one person can be equally skilled in both administrative and educational aspects, and consequently one of the areas would suffer. She argues that when social work agencies were staffed with untrained

workers, the dual-role of the supervisor was accepted and proved useful. But during the last 25 years, the staff of social welfare agencies comprises mostly of graduates of schools of social work. Fully trained social workers do not like to be labelled "supervisees" in work situation and may not feel responsible enough in their work. It is also felt that a worker will not be able to accept teaching and help from a person who is administratively responsible for evaluation of her work.

Austin (1952) suggests that a person who is responsible for staff development should be a member of the agency's administrative staff, but should not hold line authority, i.e. should not be responsible for evaluating the staff and recommending promotions, etc. This person would be responsible for communicating formally any opinions he might hold about the worker's competence and ability, both to the worker and the administrator; but he would not be entirely responsible for staff evaluation and for recommendations about staff reassignment or continued employment.

However, in the majority of agencies abroad, supervisors continue to carry out the dual function; in some agencies, experienced workers are given only minimum administrative supervision and are free to seek consultation from a variety of sources.

In India, training for social work began only in 1936; hence the profession of social work is still young. Many of our agencies cannot boast of trained and sufficiently experienced workers among whom the functions can be divided. Moreover, many agencies or departments have no more than three to four workers on their staff and it is not possible to expect two out of the four workers to hold authoritative positions, even where the agency feels the need for professional supervision and a professional person to

evaluate.

If evaluation is accepted as a normal and natural process in any work situation and if it is also remembered that the person who evaluates the staff will himself be evaluated by the executive or the board, and that his evaluation will depend to a large extent on how he has developed his staff in terms of improving the services of the agency, it should not be difficult to conceive of one person performing this dual role. The writer feels that the person who implements programmes of staff development is in fact the best person to evaluate the staff, because the programmes are based largely on his assessment of the individual's level of knowledge and experience.

Thus in the writer's opinion, the said two functions can be combined in one person, provided the administrative structure is of a suitable type and the person selected to be the supervisor possesses the essential qualities required for such a position. Taking up the first point, the meaning of the administrative structure should be examined. The terms most frequently used to describe administrative structure are manifest, assumed, extant and requisite. The manifest is the official structure which is given in manuals, reports, and so forth. This is the structure that is planned originally according to the needs of the institution or the agency and to implement working towards its goals. The assumed structure is that in which the staff believe they are functioning, but actually it differs in many ways from the manifest structure. The term extant is used to describe the structure as it exists in reality, which in actuality may have no resemblance to the manifest structure. Finally, there is the requisite structure, the structure that is required for the most effective performance (Pettes, 1967: 28-32).

Difficulties in administration and in educating the staff arise when the manifest

structure is overshadowed by the assumed or the extant structure. In such a situation the supervisor's and the worker's roles and functions are not clearly defined and this fact gives rise to confusion and conflict. It so often happens that on paper the supervisor is given the authority to carry out certain functions or is held responsible for evaluating workers, but in reality situation, he is hardly consulted at the time confidential reports on workers are prepared. This situation often arises in a multi-disciplinary setting, for example a hospital, where, in the manifest structure, the senior social worker is given certain authority, but the Medical Heads of the Units to which the workers are assigned, do not recognise his authority in actual practice. In such a structure, the supervisor may find it difficult to make the social work staff, the medical personnel and the executive accept his dual role. Moreover, he will need to understand these various structures and recognise the significant difference between the manifest and the assumed structures of his agency to be able to recommend what may be the requisite changes. For, it often happens that when a structure is faulty, the requisite structure loses its significance and is not recognised as something necessary for proper functioning of the agency. Very often, in our agency situations it has been noticed that there is a lack of consistency in enforcing policies. For instance, certain policies are laid down in which the responsibility for taking certain decisions is delegated to the supervisor and the workers. However, in actual practice, this is not consistently observed and the supervisor is not even aware when the area for decision assigned to him has been taken over by someone else. Secondly, the success of a supervisor in combining the two functions will depend largely on the type of authority he enjoys. He may have

administrative authority, which goes with position within the agency. Authority may be derived from a person's seniority, his knowledge and skills, or his personality. It has been observed that some personal characteristics inspire far more confidence in workers and make the acceptance of authority more easy than do others (Pettes, 1967: 32-34). When these three attributes of authority are combined in a supervisor, he should be able to successfully perform both the administrative and the teaching functions.

The success of the supervisor will also depend upon the type of climate he creates for maximizing staff development. Certain amount of freedom (Wax, 1966) is required for the growth of the workers. If the supervisor is over-protective or too authoritative, the workers' professional and intellectual growth will suffer. The staff must have the freedom to examine, question and challenge the administrative and professional practices and policies of the agency or department. The supervisor should create an environment among workers which would encourage them to participate in the decision-making processes of the agency. For doing this, they must have a free access to the necessary data and they must feel free to comment on this data. The workers must also feel free to learn by experimentation — by the trial and error method. They should be free to test out new ideas, to try new methods and to develop new skills.

Another type of freedom to be fostered in an agency is the freedom to master anxiety. Supervisors at times become too protective and avoid all anxiety-creating situations for their staff. This protection though well-meant can be a block to professional growth and hamper the worker's ability to meet crises situations in a constructive way. An atmosphere of free and easy consultation among workers

should prevail instead of sole dependence upon the supervisor. The system of "open-consultation" described earlier in the paper should be encouraged.

A second requisite to a proper environment for professional growth and development is "responsibility". This has already been discussed at length in the course of the paper, but it is worthwhile emphasizing again that the supervisor while enabling the worker to develop professionally must not turn her into a passive receptacle. The initiative for seeking help when she needs it must come from the worker herself. The worker must be helped to assume all responsibility regarding her own practice. She should be accountable to the administrator or the supervisor, to the executive or the medical authority, as the case may be. There must also be a responsibility towards her own profession and her colleagues who will observe and comment on her professional behaviour.

Thirdly, the environment Should provide opportunities for making professional practice as visible (Wax, 1966) as possible so that the worker may get recognition and respect for the services she renders from her colleagues and other members of the staff. The worker may be allowed to present a case at an inter-agency conference or at a medical conference in the case of a multi-disciplinary setting or speak in her speciality at a seminar, etc.

It may not be out of place to emphasize here that just as staff development programmes need to be on-going, the supervisor's self-education and professional growth should also be a continuous process. Supervisor must explore and make the best use of all educational facilities that he may have access to. He may need consultation and guidance and should be able to recognise this need and to approach the right sources for help.

REFERENCES

- Austin, L. N.
1952, December "An Evaluation of Supervision", *Journal of Social Casework*, pp. 375-382.
- Berkowitz, S. J.
1952, December "Administrative Process in Casework Supervision" *Journal of Social Casework*, pp. 419-423.
- Black, B. J.
1950, June "Tools and Techniques of Administration", *Journal of Social Casework*, pp. 223-229.
- Finestone, Samuel
1966 "Concepts of Staff Development and Impact of Institutional Environment", in *Staff Development in Mental Health Services*, Edited by Magner, G. W. and Briggs, T. L., National Association of Social Workers: New York, pp. 51, 59-60.
- Meyer, Carol H.
1966 *Staff Development in Public Welfare Agencies*, Columbia University Press: New York, pp. 98-118.
- Miller, Irving
1960, January "Distinctive Characteristics of Supervision in Group Work", *Social Work*, pp. 69-76.
- Pettes, Dorothy, E.
1967 *Supervision in Social Work*, George Allen and Unwin Ltd.: London, pp. 28-32-34.
- Schroeder, Dorothy
1966 "Basic Principles of Staff Development and their Implementation" in *Staff Development in Mental Health Services*, Edited by Magner, G. W. and Briggs, T. L., National Association of Social Workers: New York, pp. 38-50
- Smalley, Ruth E.
1968 *Theory for Social Work Practice*, Columbia University Press: New York, pp. 160-161, 297.
- Stein, H. D.
1965 "Administration". *Encyclopaedia of Social Work*, (15th Issue) Edited by Harry L. Lurie, National Association of Social Workers, New York, p. 58.
- Towle, Charlotte
1963, December "Place of Help in Supervision", *Social Service Review*, pp. 403-415.
- Wax, John
1966 "Social Service Staff Development in Mental Health Installations", in *Staff Development in Mental Health Service*. Edited by Magner, G. W. and Briggs T. L., National Association of Social Workers: New York, pp: 72-82.

ADDITIONAL READING

- Family Service : *Administration, Supervision and Consultation*, New York, F.S.A.A.
Association of America
1955
- Rapoport, L. : *Consultation in Social Work Practice*. National Association of
1963 Social Work, New York.
- Siporin, Max : "Dual Supervision of Psychiatric Social Worker" *Social Work*.
1966
- Smith, M. C. : "Case Work Implications of Administration". *The family*.
1942