

# Social Work Supervision: Contexts And Concepts

ORIGINAL ARTICLE  
THEORETICAL RESEARCH

## Making the connections: A practice model for reflective supervision

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### ABSTRACT

**INTRODUCTION:** Over several decades, social work in Aotearoa New Zealand has undergone major alterations in service delivery in response to the management of risk and surveillance of practice within the neoliberal government agenda. Working in such an environment, social workers struggle to critically explore their position and professionally develop their practice. To support current professional practice in social work, reflective supervision has become a necessity for analysing and amplifying positive practice outcomes that benefit practitioners and service users.

**METHOD:** A four-layered practice model of reflective supervision has been developed by the researcher from a theoretical analysis of a study involving key informant and supervisory dyads. The purpose of the reflective supervision model is to support the agenda, task and process in the supervisory relationship towards critical reflection of practice.

**FINDINGS:** The four-layered practice model highlights the interrelationship between the social worker, the organisation, relationships with others, and the systemic contexts where practice occurs. The supervisee and supervisor have vital roles in order for reflection to occur in each supervision session.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Reflective supervision is seen as a co-constructed partnership between the supervisor and supervisee and the four-layered practice model assists in providing a structure for the session. The four-layered model supports critical thinking in the socio-political and socio-cultural environment, promotes social justice strategies and has versatility within a number of practice settings.

**KEYWORDS:** supervision; reflection; social work; social justice

The social work profession is in the midst of a challenging period of welfare austerity (Baines & van den Broek, 2016). Globally, neoliberalism and its accompanying managerialism have altered social work organisations and the way social workers work with service users (Gray & Webb, 2013). The socio-political and socio-cultural environment is now dominated by risk management, organisational accountability and government expectations to meet standards driven by compliance-focused agendas (Beddoe, 2010). The

impact of managerialism in social work has eroded a professional identity that values relationships, social justice and critical reflection. Social workers face a quality-versus-quantity dilemma between providing professional, accountable, ethical processes and an auditing, fiscal surveillance of activities (Beddoe & Maidment, 2009). As a profession moving forward, social work requires critical thinking, clear ethical codes, values and skills in order to change society for the better (Gray & Webb, 2013).

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