

Supervision's 'Three Amigos': Exploring the Evolving Functions of Supervision and its Application in the Field of Coaching

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Abstract

The literature on supervision includes an enduring theme related to the 'functions' of supervision. However, each helping profession has defined the functions of supervision somewhat uniquely. Within the field of social work functions are defined as being "administrative, educational and supportive" (Kadushin, 1976, pp. 20-21), indicating specific roles that are undertaken by the agent-supervisor. The notion of functions also appears to have been widely embraced within counseling literature, although the terms have been adapted as a framework of tasks being "formative, restorative and normative" (Proctor, 2000, p. 12), to describe processes which are for the benefit of the therapist. More recently, the concept of functions has made its way into the discourse on coaching supervision, where the main functions have been defined as "qualitative, resourcing and developmental" (Hawkins & Shohet, 2006, p. 57). Despite the use of these terms in different fields, there is little discussion on the extent to which these ideas have been adopted, and a lack of empirical research on the relevance and effectiveness of functions in relation to coaching supervision. This article explores the emergence of supervision functions, the context in which functions have been applied, and their translation from social work to therapy and more recently coaching. Further research is needed on the relevance and application of functions in the area of coaching supervision.

Keywords: Supervision functions, social work supervision, coaching supervision

Introduction

For over forty years, the concept of 'functions' has been a key theme in the literature on supervision. Dawson (1926) first described the educational, administrative and supportive functions of supervision, suggesting that supervision was as much a managerial process as "cultivating harmonious relationships and *esprit de corps*" (Dawson, 1926, p. 293). The term 'functions' has different meanings depending on the context in which supervision takes place. Within social work, Kadushin (1976) uses the term to describe the role of the supervisor in ensuring that charity organizations delivered an effective and efficient service, and that quality standards were

being maintained by the untrained volunteer social workers or “visitors” (Kadushin, 1991a, p. 2). In the arena of counseling, Proctor (1994) uses ‘functions’ in terms of benefits to the supervisee indicating the importance of support and well-being. Having worked with both models, Hawkins & Shohet (2006) developed their own model to focus on the process that takes place and the relationship between the supervisor and supervisee.

As the field of social work continued to develop in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Tsui (2008) noted that by the 1930s a closer integration was taking place between social work and psychoanalysis, with supervision becoming more of a therapeutic process or “casework for the caseworker” (Tsui, 2008, p. 193) rather than ensuring the efficiency of the agency. The psychoanalytic approach did not gain universal support among social workers, in part due to a concern over infringing on the autonomy of the social workers themselves and the nature of the social work profession where the focus of the agency’s effort was to meet the immediate survival needs of their clients, in contrast to providing therapeutic outcomes (Tsui, 2008).

Hawkins and Shohet (1989) use their definition of functions in a broader framework of ‘helping professions,’ and two recent papers have explored ‘developmental, resourcing and qualitative functions’ specifically in the context of coaching supervision (Clutterbuck, Whitaker, & Lucas, 2016a; Lucas & Larcombe, 2016). While there is some overlap between social work and coaching in terms of the quality and development functions of supervision, further consideration needs to be given to the role of the coaching supervisor. Specific focus areas include quality assurance for organizational sponsors, development and support for the coaches, and enhancing the reputation of the coaching profession.

The goal of this paper is to trace the emergence of ‘functions of supervision’ in social work, therapy and coaching, to discuss the challenges and opportunities of functions in coaching supervision, and to comment on a possible integrated view of functions as proposed by Hawkins & Shohet (2006).

Emergence: functions in social work supervision

The origins of social work date back to 1878 with the creation of the Charity Organization Movement (COM), which began in Buffalo, USA, in that same year (Tsui, 2008). The idea that supervision comprised three core functions emerged over many decades to ensure that agencies associated with the COM were providing an effective and efficient service to families in need,

while supporting visitors who were the front-line workers of the specific agency. The ‘visitor’, an untrained volunteer, was required to work closely with the agent-supervisor, a paid role within the charity organization, to recommend what support the agency could offer families in need.

In its original conception, social work supervision was related to the “inspection and review of institutions rather than the support of individual workers” (Kadushin, 1991a, p. 1), suggesting an administrative, rather than educational or supportive, focus for the supervision process. However, from the very beginning of the COM, visitors were also provided with education and support through the offices of the “agent-supervisor” (Kadushin, 1991a, p. 10). This was essential in the early development of the social work profession, as “most of the agency visitors were untrained” (Tsui, 2008, p. 192). According to Tsui (2008), many of these volunteer visitors came from middle and upper-class backgrounds and were unprepared to deal with the poverty resulting from economic depression and hardship.

The role and tasks of the agent-supervisor continued to develop as the field of social work gained momentum. An initial six-week training program for social workers commenced in 1898, and the first course in supervision was offered in 1911 with the support of the Charity Organization’s Department of the Russell Sage Foundation headed by Mary Richmond, one of the leading lights in development of social work practice (Kadushin, 1976; Munson, 2002a). And yet, “there were few or scattered references to supervision functions in the social work literature prior to 1920” (Kadushin, 1991b, p. 1).

The history of social work (Dan, 2017; Kadushin, 1991a; Munson, 2002b; Tsui, 2008) confirms growing ties between social workers and the psychoanalytic professions in the early twentieth century, and “the psychoanalytic treatment method was being widely used by caseworkers” (Tsui, 2008, p. 194). This approach, while still in use today, has been largely rejected by social workers who see the casework approach too closely aligned to the therapeutic model, as well as a potential “violation of the individual rights of the supervisees” (Tsui, 2008, p. 195). Munson (2002a) refers to social work moving back to its theoretical underpinning in social science, citing the work of Charlotte Towle who perceived the “process of supervision as consisting of three functions – administration, teaching and helping” (Perlman, 1969, p. 266, as cited in Munson, 2002b, p. 64). While there remains considerable debate within the social work literature as to which of the functions is dominant, administrative or developmental (Tsui, 2008), to the dispassionate observer each of these functions appears to have taken precedence

at a specific point in time to meet the changing needs of social workers and the social work profession.

The concept of functions appears to have found ready acceptance in the therapeutic context, although as will be seen in the following section, the focus of supervision was for the benefit of the therapist rather than the administration of the agency.

Expansion: Functions in counseling and therapy

Acknowledging the many distinctions within the psychoanalytic and psychological professions, Hawkins and Shohet (2006) coined the term 'helping professions' as a container for the expanding use of functions in the clinical and therapeutic domains.

The psychoanalytic professions were also expanding during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with a focus on case review as a form of "therapy for the therapist" (Carroll, 2007, p. 39). Freud (1910) has been credited with the development and expansion of psychoanalysis; however, others, such as Baldwin (1890), helped shape the new psychoanalytic theory and Josef Breuer, Freud's mentor, is credited with the development of the "talking or cathartic cure" (Breger, 2010, p. 6). Freud's focus on psychodynamic psychotherapy explored the underlying subconscious drives and motivations of the human personality. In his view, psychotherapists should themselves undergo regular psychotherapy to help them deal with the issues and challenges their clients bring to the therapy sessions. Freud's "Wednesday Society" (Munson, 2002a, p. 56), held at Freud's home, provided an early form of group supervision to discuss cases, treatment options and undertake "therapy for the therapist" (Carroll, 2007, p. 39).

With an increasing interaction between social work and therapy (Tsui, 2008), it is not surprising that the notion of functions also made its way into the therapeutic literature. Despite the analogous development in these fields, the literature related to supervision functions varies in both context and how the functions are applied. Proctor (2000) uses the term functions of supervision in terms of benefit to the supervisee, differentiating from Kadushin (1976), who described functions in terms of the role of the supervisor and in the context of the smooth running of the agency. Others, such as Bernard and Goodyear (2014), focus on the purpose of supervision, including the development and support for the supervisee, ideas which align with Proctor (2000).

Ten distinct elements or foci of supervision are outlined in Table 1, excerpted from Hawkins and Shohet (1989, p. 43), with each aligned to the main categories of supervision identified by Kadushin (1976). Each element contributes to “developing an integrated style of supervision in relation to the educative, supportive and managerial roles” (Hawkins & Shohet, 1989, p. 49), while the relational nature of supervision suggests an overlap between each of the categories.

Key elements	Main categories of focus
To provide a regular space for the supervisees to reflect upon content and process of their work	Developmental
To develop understanding and skills within the work	Developmental
To receive information and another perspective concerning one's work	Developmental/resourcing
To receive both content and process feedback	Developmental/resourcing
To be validated and supported both as a person and as a worker	Resourcing
To ensure that as a person and as a worker one is not left to carry unnecessarily, difficulties, problems and projections alone	Resourcing
To have space to explore and express personal distress, restimulation, transference or countertransference that may be brought up by the work	Qualitative/resourcing
To plan and utilize their personal and professional resources better	Qualitative/resourcing
To be proactive rather than reactive	Qualitative/resourcing
To ensure quality of work	Qualitative

Table 1: Key functions of supervision (Hawkins & Shohet, 1989, p. 43)

By contrast, Proctor (2000) reimagined the process of supervision being for the benefit of the supervisee, describing the functions as “formative, normative and restorative, or a framework of tasks between supervisor and supervisee within the working alliance model” (Proctor, 2000, p. 12). The working alliance model was first articulated by Bordin (1979) to describe the collaboration and mutual agreement between client and therapist or practitioner and supervisor, and is considered relevant in the context of coaching supervision.

The rapid expansion of both social work and psychoanalysis through the early decades of the twentieth century led to a number of shifts in the development of supervision. In the 1920s, supervision was based on the specific orientation of the therapist and needs of the individual, while in social work supervision was based on the needs of the agency to ensure the effective

and efficient delivery of services to those in need. Along with this expansion there was a shift in focus relating to the functions of supervision. Supervision was not simply a process that took place in a collegial setting, but also “in the training context” (Proctor, 1994, p. 310). Increasing attention was also being paid to the developmental stages of trainees (Stoltenberg & Delworth, 1987) and the role of the supervisor in ensuring the “confidence, competence and creativity” (Proctor, 1994, p. 309) of the individual practitioner.

There is little discussion in the literature on the functions of supervision in the context of coaching apart from the initial conceptualization by Hawkins and Shohet (1989). More recently Lucas and Larcombe (2016) comment on supervision supporting the business development function for independent coaches using the formative, normative and restorative classifications of Proctor (2000). In a similar vein, Clutterbuck et al. (2016a) make the point that the commercial reality of coaching may add to our understanding of the relevance or otherwise of supervision functions in providing development, support and quality assurance for coaching practitioners in a business context where there may be less focus on psychodynamic factors than in therapeutic settings.

Extension: Functions in coaching supervision

Over the past twenty years coaching has created an identity and rationale that is distinct from other domains. There are many definitions of coaching; however, for the purposes of this article, coaching will be defined as “partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential” (International Coaching Federation (ICF), 2018). Arguably, “coaching is different from other helping professions in that it is voluntary, works with healthy adults and is often focused in an organizational context” (Clutterbuck et al., 2016a, pp. 9-10), suggesting a need to expand the theoretical framework to include fields such as adult learning, organisational development, strategy, business development and systems thinking which are highly relevant in the complex business and executive coaching environment (Grant, 2005).

Little is known about the translation and adoption of supervision functions in relation to coaching apart from the initial descriptions of “developmental, resourcing and qualitative” (Hawkins & Smith, 2006, p. 151). With an estimated fifty-three thousand coaching practitioners world-wide, an increase of 10% since 2012 (International Coaching Federation (ICF), 2016, p. 8), a key argument of this paper is the need to build on what we already know

about coaching supervision functions from the social work and therapeutic domains while focusing on the distinct nature and purpose of coaching to build individual and organisational capability. To date there are only two known papers (Clutterbuck, Whitaker, & Lucas, 2016b; Lucas & Larcombe, 2016) that have explored the notion of functions and their application in coaching supervision.

Noting that “in the evolution of coaching supervision literature, it is striking how much influence the therapeutic world has had” (Lucas & Larcombe, 2016, p. 13), the challenges facing independent coaching practitioners led to a reconceptualization of the three core functions proposed by Proctor (2000). While maintaining the focus on professional development needs, Lucas and Larcombe (2016) highlighted the commercial challenges of independent coaches. The “formative would focus on articulating a coaching niche, the normative on how much a coach should charge and the restorative on having enough clients including the underlying question of is the individual a good enough coach” (Lucas & Larcombe, 2016, p. 6).

In their discussion on functions in coaching supervision Clutterbuck et al. (2016a) consider the practical application of the various functions providing examples of how each could be used in the supervision process in areas such as “maintaining professional standards, increasing self-confidence, challenging blind spots and offering new perspectives” (Clutterbuck et al., 2016a, p. 9). Despite some similarities between each description of supervision functions, a number of differences are noted in relation to coaching, such as the “voluntary nature of supervision, robustness of coaching clients, multiple stakeholders and commercial context of coaching (Clutterbuck et al., 2016a, pp. 9-10). It is these differences that provide both the challenge and opportunity for further research and development related to coaching supervision.

Coaching and, by corollary, coaching supervision, operates within a particular context, and starts from an aligned and yet slightly different premise to other helping professions. While there are many shared theoretical underpinnings from psychology, adult learning, strategy, systems theory and others, as Brock (2012) points out coaching is yet to fully emerge from its philosophical roots, and develop models and theories which are specific to this field. Coaching is focused towards the future rather than the past, builds on strengths rather than dealing with problems, and is non-directive in its approach. This is a stance that is closely aligned with the developments in positive psychology (Csikszentmihalyi, 2009; Donaldson, Csikszentmihalyi, & Nakamura, 2011; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) which align to coaching

with its focus on the future and on building individual and organisational capability. However, as Clutterbuck et al. (2016a) remind us, coaching has a number of distinctive characteristics in its independent nature and multiple stakeholders; factors which are also relevant in the context of commercial coaching supervision. Coaching supervision, at least in an organizational and executive coaching context, needs to help coaching practitioners manage the complexities of commercial and interpersonal environments.

Towards an integrative view

Writing in the context of residential social work, Hawkins (1982) argued that supervision has “three main focuses: management issues (including the carrying out of organizational and administrative tasks); work with the clients; and the work life of the individual being supervised” (Hawkins, 1982, p. 17). The “three circles model” (Hawkins, 1982, p. 19) offers one model of how functions integrate through the relationship between the supervisor and supervisee but does not explore this theme in any depth.

In their discussion on an integrative view of supervision, Carroll and Tholstrup (2001) present a kaleidoscope of supervision models from counseling and psychotherapy backgrounds, suggesting that an integrative view attempts to “connect the goals and purpose of supervision to the functions and tasks/roles of supervision” (Carroll & Tholstrup, 2001, pp. 48-49). Supervision can be described as “a complex, technical, sensitive, and fairly new area of facilitating professional competence” (Hewson, 2001, p. 74), alluding to the need for a pluralistic view of supervision as both an art and a science. An integrated developmental approach to supervision reflects the earlier work of Stoltenberg (1997), and advocates an integration of functions where “the supervisor has to integrate the developmental role of educator with that of the provider of support to the worker and, in most cases, quality oversight of the supervisee’s clients” (Hawkins & Shohet, 2006, p. 4).

The table below provides a consolidated view of the functions of supervision from each domain of practice, the context in which they are used, and an alignment of terminology in each area, underscoring the continuing process of adaptation in each domain of practice.

Author	Kadushin (1976)	Proctor (2000, 2008)	Hawkins & Smith (2006)	Newton (2012)
Domain	Social Work	Counseling	Coaching	Transactional Analysis
Context	Role of Supervisor	Supervisee benefit	Process	Transformation
Functions	Managerial Supportive Educational	Formative Restorative Normative	Qualitative Resourcing Developmental	Accounting Nurturative Transformative

Table 2: Supervision Functions by domain and context - adapted from Newton (2012, p. 104)

In each of the domains and contexts, a number of common elements emerge. Mapping the three functions, as in the figure below, shows the number of connections between each function. Some license has been taken in associating key words, with ‘quality’ including managerial, qualitative, and accounting and ‘development’ offering a catch-all for education, development and transformation. Functions related to ‘quality’ are common between social work, coaching and transactional analysis, while the theme of ‘development’ is strongest between social work and coaching. This is not to suggest that ‘quality’ and ‘development’ functions are not important in counselling or transactional analysis or that ‘supportive’ and ‘nurturative’ functions are not useful in social work or coaching, rather this model shows where the greatest level of overlap occurs. Other connections may also be possible.

Arguably, each context is integral to the goal and purpose of supervision – to build the capability and confidence of the supervisee and support the best outcome for the client. The element that holds each of these in a more integrated frame is “a supervisory approach which is relationship based” (Hawkins & Shohet, 1989, p. 5). In other words, there is joint accountability, with supervision being mutually supportive and beneficial to both supervisor and supervisee.

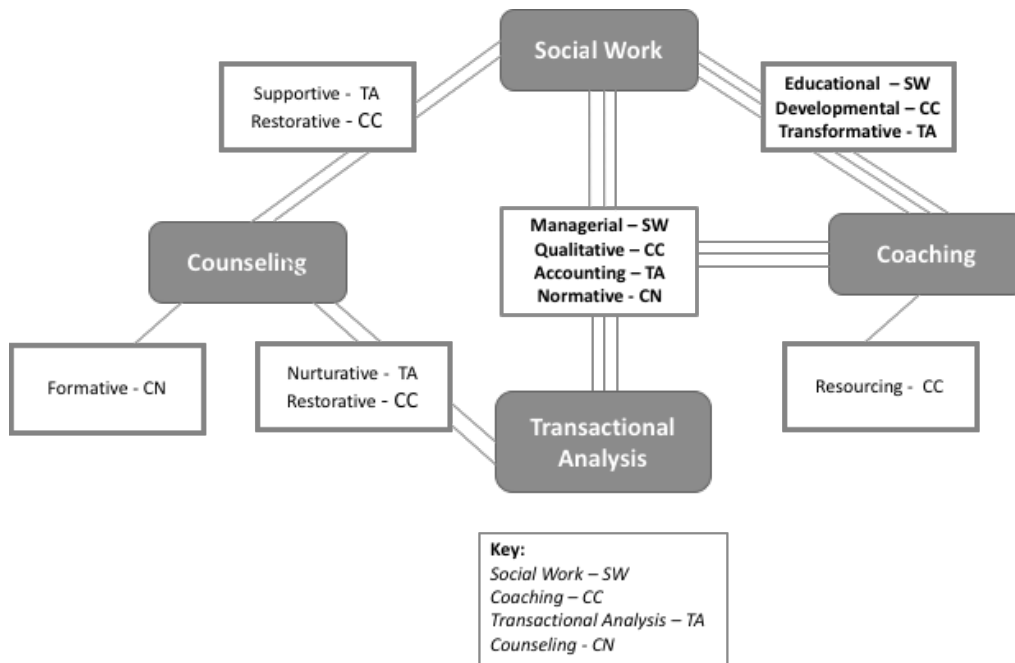


Figure 1: Map of connections between functions across each domain of supervision practice

In relation to coaching supervision, the key theme of the three functions is ensuring quality in meeting the needs of the client and developing the skills of the coaching practitioner (supervisee) which supports the process of building capability. For supervisors, this may mean incorporating a psychological approach to coaching supervision (Bluckert, 2005) and for Lucas and Larcombe (2016) this means understanding the commercial realities and organisational dynamics facing coaches.

Building on the earlier functions identified by Hawkins & Shohet (2006), Kadushin (1976), and Proctor (2000), a paper from the field of transactional analysis suggests an integrative approach to the functions of supervision in terms of “three existential hungers for structure (accounting), recognition (nurturative) and stimulus (transformative)” (Newton, 2012, p. 104). The key suggestion is that ultimately supervision is as much a transformative experience as it is an administrative or supportive process.

While agreeing with Hawkins & Shohet (1989) on the core functions of supervision for coaching, and that a holistic view of functions is important in the supervisory relationship, the challenge facing coaches, coaching supervisors

and coaching organizations is that coaching covers many dimensions including life, career, business and executive, among others. Given that the core functions of supervision remain consistent, there is a need to define the tasks and roles of coaching supervisors and supervisees in many areas of coaching, including business and organisational environments where supervision may need to be more fast paced and pragmatic than in other fields.

Recent literature (Grant, 2017; Nelson-Jones, 2011) suggests that coaching and therapy are more closely aligned than they are different, and that the tasks and functions of supervision might be equally relevant no matter what the domain of practice. Others have raised the distinctive needs of coaching supervision, particularly for independent, commercially-oriented coaches (Clutterbuck et al., 2016b; Lucas & Larcombe, 2016), suggesting the need to understand more about what is unique to the way that functions are described and applied in coaching supervision. As a 'helping profession' however, coaches and those who provide supervision services also need to be aware that issues of a personal and/or psychological nature may emerge in the context of coaching and that maintaining a psychological mindedness (Bluckert, 2005) is critical to ensure that boundaries of competence are maintained.

Coaching supervision, expressed as a need to provide on-going development, support and self-reflective practice for coaching practitioners, is still in its infancy. At a broader level, supervision is "an under-researched area of practice" (Beddoe & Davys, 2016, p. 3) and "there are comparatively few empirically based studies of its content and practice, and the evidence for its effectiveness remains limited" (Carpenter, Web, Bostock, & Coomber, 2012, p. 17). Irrespective of the specific domain of practice, it is worth reflecting on the overall purpose of supervision, which is "the professional development of the supervisee and the welfare of the client" (Carroll, 2001, p. 8). In coaching supervision, purpose is embodied through each of the three functions – developmental, resourcing and qualitative – which provides supervisors and coaching practitioners with processes to improve the effectiveness of coaching.

This paper has provided an overview of supervision functions, tracing their emergence in social work, therapy and recent adaptation in the context of coaching supervision. There is an essential simplicity to the idea of three functions of supervision, no matter what the context. There is, however, a significant level of complexity in how each of supervision's 'three amigos' are described as tasks, roles, processes, benefits or purposes of supervision. Perhaps as Newton (2012) suggests, the real integration of functions is not about how to blend the words or integrate the functions, but takes place through

the relationship or working alliance between the supervisor and the supervisee leading to a transformational experience for both and benefit to the client.

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