



# PSDP—Resources and Tools: An audit of your supervision role

## Introduction

The exercises that follow introduce you to an integrated model of supervision (often referred to as the 4 x 4 x 4 model). This model brings together three distinct elements, each of which has four interdependent components:

### The four functions of supervision.

### The four key stakeholders in supervision.

### The four elements of the supervisory cycle.

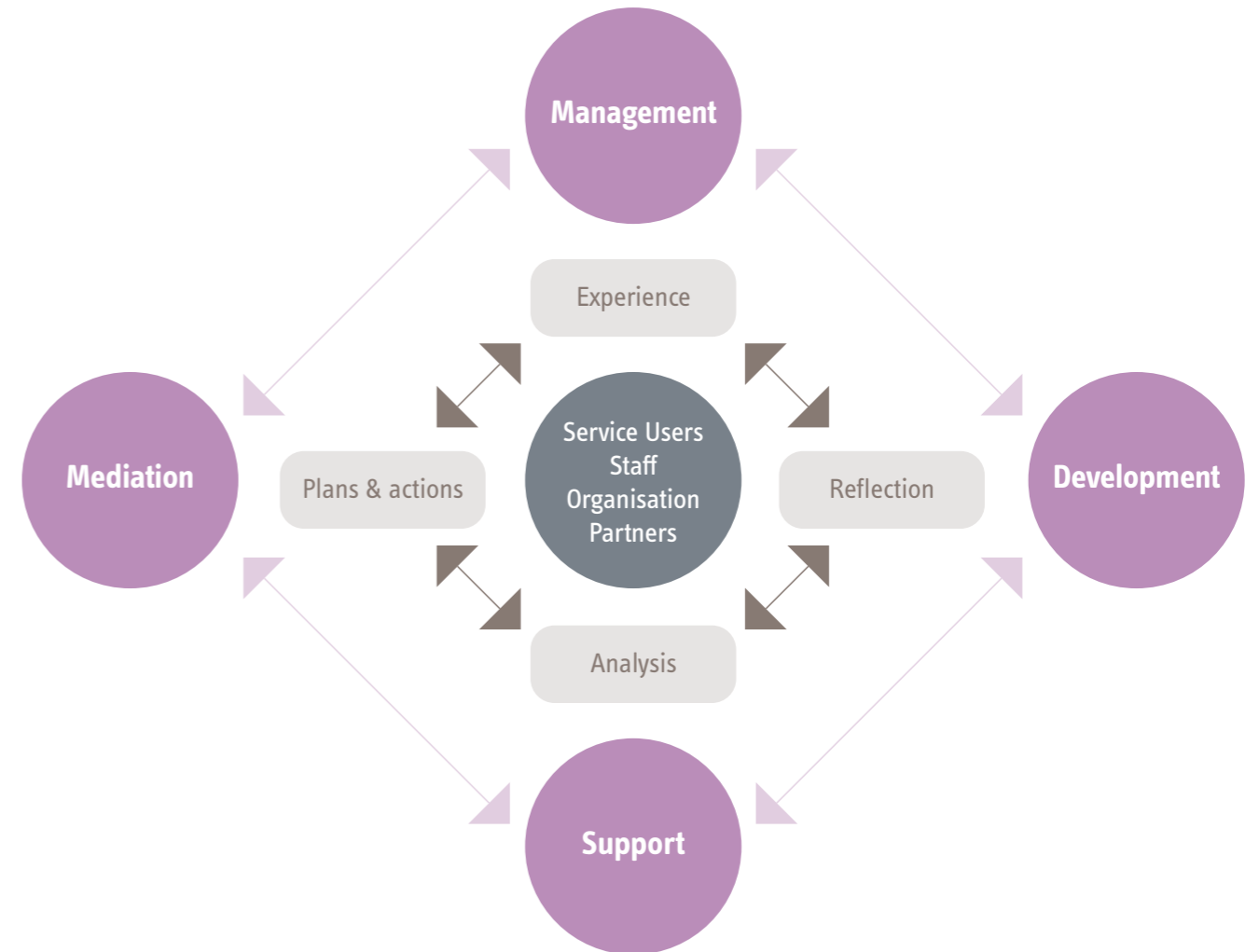
This approach encourages us to conceptualise supervision as a process that integrates three very different ways of understanding its purpose. It emphasises how your responsibilities as a supervisor engage you in a complex set of practical and cognitive activities, by bringing together ideas drawn from management theory, learning theory and outcomes-based approaches,

This learning tool is based on the integrated model of supervision developed by Tony Morrison (2005) as well as more recent developments of the model (Wonnacott, 2012, 2013 and 2014). Their approaches have been used by numerous social care organisations both in the UK and overseas, and have been positively evaluated and found to increase job satisfaction, worker retention and worker effectiveness (Carpenter et al, 2012).

The first part of this tool introduces you to the ‘integrated model of supervision’ (the 4 x 4 x 4 model) before outlining how you can use the idea of a problem-solving cycle to structure your discussion about practice with children and families in supervision.

Please note that, if you have already seen the ‘questions around the supervisory cycle’ tool, available from this section of the website, you will have already read the introduction to this one (see below).

## The integrated model of supervision



The ‘outer’ layer of this diagram represents the four distinct functions of a supervisor’s role and the objectives of supervision:

- > **Management** – ensuring competent accountable practice and performance.
- > **Development** – supporting continuing professional development, promoting learning.

- > **Support** – providing a secure, restorative relationship.
- > **Mediation** – engaging the individual practitioner / team with the organisation and serving as a bridge between the world of direct practice and the world of senior management / politics.

Examining the dynamic between these four functions of supervision helps us to understand how they come together to underpin good social work practice.

The central box in this diagram articulates how supervision must address a range of requirements on behalf of different stakeholders. On the face of it, each encounter between supervisor and supervisee is about their relationship and communication with each other. However, the quality and outcomes of their conversation have a direct impact on the child, their parents, family and friendships, the organisation as a whole, and the network of different professional disciplines and agencies engaged with the child.

The 'middle' layer refers to ideas drawn from learning theory about the need for supervision to engage practitioners in a cycle of thinking from different perspectives and using different cognitive skills. The essential message here is that all professional decision-making relies on supervisors and practitioners engaging in critical reflection and bringing robust analytical skills into discussions.

The key message here is that when supervision integrates these three distinct approaches, practitioners learn to:

- > recognise and value all four elements of supervision
- > understand how the primary goal of supervision is to achieve the best outcomes for the child
- > appreciate that it's their own responsibility to mobilise the full range of thinking skills and focus on each child's unique story before forming a plan of action.

## The four functions of supervision

The exercises that follow focus on the 'outer layer' of this model.

The four key functions are all needed to give a balanced approach to the supervision process. You cannot perform one element effectively without the others, they rely on each other.

This does not mean that they will all be given equal time and importance in every session but, over time, all should be visited, and none should dominate disproportionately.

### Within the **management** function the supervisor should address:

Overall management of the quality of the practitioner's work.	Overall management of workload and priorities.	Provision of resources.
Provision of a safe working environment.	Professional discussion of practitioner's performance against individual, service and organisational objectives and national standards.	The duty of the supervisor to ensure responsibilities of the organisation to the worker under the Equality Act 2010, including provision of reasonable adjustments for disabled social workers.

### Within the **support** function the supervisor should:

Support the practitioner both as a professional and as an individual person in their own right.	Support the practitioner's wellbeing at work.
Provide opportunities to reflect on how social GRRRAACCEEESSS (aspects of personal and social identity that include gender, geography, race, religion, age, ability, appearance, class, culture, education, ethnicity, employment, sexuality, sexual orientation and spirituality - Burnham, 2013) relate to the supervisory relationship.	

Within the **development** function the supervisor should:

Support the worker's career progression, recognising the need to take into account the cultural awareness and competence of the organisation.	Identify the practitioner's individual strengths.	Identify areas for development (both generally and in respect of specific assessment, planning and other practice issues) for the practitioner to progress and carry out the job to the required standard.
Identify development opportunities.	Plan how development needs could be met.	Ensure the practitioner has received all mandatory and necessary training required to fulfil the job function.
Log training and development activities undertaken on the appropriate record keeping system used by the organisation.	Evaluate the impact of development opportunities undertaken.	

Within the **mediation** function supervisors should:

Help the practitioner contribute to the development of the organisation.	Assist the practitioner to implement organisational policies and procedures, including issues of diversity and equality that arise either in the context of service provision or in employment practices.	Mediate in any conflicts between the practitioner and the council.
Act as a conduit for relevant information that needs to be shared between the practitioner and the organisation.	Deal sensitively but clearly with complaints about staff.	

Supervisors can find it hard to pay equal attention to all four functions, especially where employing organisations impose specific procedural expectations. It is therefore not uncommon for the management function to dominate.

Sometimes, however, supervisors seek to compensate for this by emphasising the support function and this might lead to a lack of challenge and poor performance.

Some organisations have responded to this tension by separating the functions of supervision, with different supervisors being responsible for different aspects. For example, some social workers in their assessed and supported year have been accountable to their line manager for their practice, but receive developmental support from a senior practitioner, as well as being assigned a personal mentor. Where a supervision system that splits roles and responsibilities is adopted, there is a risk of fragmentation and splitting, and careful attention should be paid to the totality of the supervisory experience.

If you are working in a system where the four functions are separated, you will need to ensure that information is shared. For example, the practitioner's line manager should be made aware of any personal difficulties that could affect the practitioner's work and, conversely, a mentor should be included in any discussion about performance concerns (a triangulation between supervisors with different perspectives can be detrimental to both the practitioner and their practice).

For these reasons, it is important for you as a supervisor to have a clear understanding of your role and responsibilities. These exercises are intended to help you ensure that tasks within each of the functions are co-ordinated, that no one function dominates over others, and that practice will not be compromised by unhelpful fragmentation.

## Exercise one

The following lists (adapted from In-Trac Training and Consultancy Ltd - 2012) are not exhaustive, but they may help supervisors to consider how far their supervisory practice delivers across all four functions of supervision. They also provide examples of the types of responsibilities that you have in your role as a supervisor.

Either print these out and complete the task using three marker pens of different colours, or you can use highlight colour (or the equivalent function) to complete this task on a screen:

Use your first colour to mark off the statements in each list that are your sole responsibility as a supervisor.

Use the second to indicate responsibilities you share with someone else.

The third is for tasks for which you hold no direct responsibility.

### The **management** function:

- > the worker understands their role and responsibilities
- > agency policies and procedures are understood and appropriately acted on / followed
- > the worker is clear as to the limits and use of their personal, agency and statutory authority
- > the purpose of supervision is clear
- > the overall quality of performance is assessed
- > work is reviewed regularly in accordance with agency and legal requirements
- > action plans are formulated and carried out within the context of agency functions and statutory responsibilities
- > the basis of decisions and professional judgments are clear to you and the worker, and made explicit in agency records
- > records are maintained according to agency policies
- > the worker knows when the supervisor expects to be consulted
- > the worker is given an appropriate workload
- > time management expectations of the worker are clear
- > the worker understands the functions of partner agencies, and their role and responsibilities when working with partner agencies.

### The **development** function:

- > develop the worker's professional competence, skills, knowledge and understanding
- > understand the worker's value base in relation to social GRRRAACCEEESSS and how these impact on their work
- > understand the worker's preferred learning style and blocks to learning
- > assess the worker's learning and development needs and how these can be met
- > facilitate the worker's capacity to set professional goals and engage in professional development
- > facilitate the worker's ability to reflect on their work, and interaction with users, colleagues and partner agencies
- > provide regular and constructive feedback to the worker on all aspects of their performance
- > promote the worker's capacity for self-appraisal and enable them to learn constructively from significant experiences, or difficulties
- > offer a relationship in which the worker provides constructive feedback to the supervisor and both can learn from each other.

### The **support** function:

- > create a safe climate for the worker to look at their practice and its impact on them
- > clarify the boundaries between support, counselling, and consultation
- > debrief the worker and give them permission to talk about feelings
- > help the worker to explore emotional blocks to their work
- > support workers who are subject to any form of abuse either from users or from colleagues, whether this be physical, psychological or discriminatory
- > monitor the overall health and emotional functioning of the worker, especially about the effects of stress
- > clarify when the worker should be advised to seek external counselling.

### The **mediation** function:

- > brief higher management about resource deficits or implications
- > allocate resources in the most efficient way
- > represent staff needs to higher management
- > negotiate and clarify the team's role and responsibilities
- > initiate, clarify or contribute to policy formulation
- > consult and brief staff about organisational developments or information
- > advocate between worker, or team, and other parts of the agency or with outside agencies
- > help the worker resolve difficulties in workplace or partner relationships
- > represent or accompany staff in work with other agencies
- > involve staff in decision-making
- > deal sensitively, but clearly, with complaints about staff
- > assist and coach staff, where appropriate, through complaints procedures.

## Exercise two

Having reviewed your role and responsibilities relating to these four functions, you can probably see why the role of supervisor sometimes feels like a big challenge!

### Consider these questions:

Do you have a strong preference for one or more aspects of the role?

Do you feel uncomfortable about some of your responsibilities?

Do all your supervisees allow you to fulfil all four functions?

Does your organisation allow you to fulfil all four functions?

How does your own line manager support you in these four aspects of your role?

## Exercise three

**If you have found that some or all of these functions or specific tasks are split, you should identify:**

How best to co-ordinate the roles of supervisor, mentor and line manager for the practitioner.

Whose responsibility it is to determine, monitor and record how information will be shared.

How decisions will be reached where there is disagreement.

## Exercise four

Consider how some of these functions might be complemented by activities undertaken outside of one-to-one supervision.

### For example:

Could action learning sets support workers who are subject to any form of abuse either from users or from colleagues (support function)?

Could a buddying system complement the supervisor's role in helping a new colleague to negotiate and clarify the team's role and responsibilities (management function)?

Could group supervision help workers to understand any blocks to their own learning (development function)?

## Other ways you can use this tool

Experiment with using the integrated model of supervision to:

raise your supervisee's awareness of their responsibility to anticipate and prepare for supervision

secure feedback from your supervisees about their perception of your role

secure feedback from your supervisees about your performance

generate team discussion about how one-to-one supervision could be complemented by other activities

explore how you and your team balance formal one-to-one supervision with the more frequent informal discussions you have in between

explore how the process of supervision is recorded

consider how it supports you to manage poor performance.



**We want to hear more about your experiences of using PSDP resources and tools. Connect via Twitter using #PSDP to share your ideas and hear how other practice supervisors use the resources.**


## References

Burnham J (2013) 'Developments in Social GRRAAACCEEESSS: visible-invisible, voiced-unvoiced' in Krause I (2012) *Cultural Reflexivity*. London: Karnac.



---

Practice Supervisor Development Programme  
The Granary Dartington Hall  
Totnes Devon TQ9 6EE

tel 01803 867692  
email [ask@rip.org.uk](mailto:ask@rip.org.uk)  
 [@researchIP](https://twitter.com/researchIP) #PSDP

[www.practice-supervisors.rip.org.uk](http://www.practice-supervisors.rip.org.uk)

**Author:** In-Trac Training  
and Consultancy

Research in Practice is a programme of  
The Dartington Hall Trust which is a company  
limited by guarantee and a registered charity.  
Company No. 1485560 Charity No. 279756  
VAT No. 402196875

Registered Office:  
The Elmhirst Centre, Dartington Hall,  
Totnes TQ9 6EL