

# KEY SUCCESS FACTORS IN IMPLEMENTING SUPERVISION MANAGEMENT IN SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

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## **Abstract:**

Supervision is a method increasingly used in social work. As an ongoing, structured process involving the social worker and the supervisor and based on openness and trust, it can be used in many areas and for many purposes within social work. It can be used as a method to counteract professional burnout of social workers (the so-called support function of supervision). It can be used to improve their efficiency and effectiveness (the so-called managerial function of supervision). Finally, one can treat supervision as a method of professional development of social workers, a method of developing their competences necessary in social work (the so-called educational function of supervision).

Supervision as a method of action thus gives the social organisation a space for reflection and mutual consultation. The result of this reflection and consultation can become the use of supervision for the comprehensive management of the social organisation and social work in the form of supervision management. In this approach to management, supervision becomes the *modus vivendi* of the functioning of the whole organisation and the implementation of its functions. For this to happen, however, in the process of implementing supervision management, attention needs to be paid to the factors that condition its implementation and functioning in the organisation.

The aim of this article is to identify the key success factors in the implementation of supervision management in a social institution. The author characterises the role and importance of supervision in social work, presents a methodology for the management of a social organisation based

on its use in all aspects of its functioning and, finally, the conditions that need to be met for the implementation of supervision management to be successful, and this methodology can effectively serve the work of a social institution.

**Keywords:** Supervision. Management. Supervision management. Social work. Success factors.

## Introduction

Supervision as a method of work and action has been present for a long time in social institutions. However, it seems that until recently they have not used the full potential of this concept of action, because, as Willan-Horla (2011, p. 117) writes, it was mainly associated with activities aimed at improving the quality of the work of social workers and adepts to the profession rather than a systemic approach to the implementation of tasks related to social assistance and social work.

As Dawidziuk (2015, pp. 78-79) writes, the progressive professionalisation of social work in relation to both the social work profession and the social institution, access to new tools for action, the expectation of high standards of work from both the state and the public require a new approach to the functioning and operation of social institutions, in which openness to change, continuous evaluation of the activities carried out, which stimulates continuous improvement of the standards of work, becomes important.

This new approach is supervision, which is gaining more and more importance and which is more and more widely used as a comprehensive method of managing a social institution both in the area of carrying out its administrative functions as well as in the area of carrying out social work tasks and supporting social workers.

The starting point for the considerations presented in this article is the characterisation of what supervision is and its importance in social work. In the next part of the article, the author addresses the issue of supervision management as a method that uses all the strengths of supervision to manage a social institution in all its aspects, with particular emphasis on its main function of helping people in need.

The last part of the article deals with the characterisation and analysis of the key requirements that need to be met for the implementation of supervision management in a social institution to be successful. Here, the author also

briefly describes the barriers that may be encountered in the process of its implementation.

### **Supervision and its importance in social work**

The essence of what supervision is, is most fully captured by the following three definitions. According to Domaradzki, Krzyszkowski, Sosnowski, Włoch (2016, p. 17), supervision is a specific learning-oriented process in which the social worker, interacting with the supervisor, develops their interpersonal skills. Mańkowska (2020, p. 19) treats supervision as a form of professional, methodical support and professional development, which involves systematic work of a social worker with an experienced supervisor, during which difficulties arising in all professional relationships are discussed. According to Pawlas - Czyż (2007, p. 31), supervision should instead be understood as a special, multifaceted view of work, leading to the resolution of substantive and emotional problems related to the performance of work. The author draws attention to the fact that supervising activities should aim to clarify professional identity and strengthen the professional and personal competences of social workers.

By compiling the definitions cited above, supervision can be defined as a continuous, structured process involving the social worker and the supervisor, based on openness and trust, aiming at solving work-related problems, learning and acquiring competences, and finally developing coping mechanisms to deal with stress and professional burnout.

An important aspect of the discussion on supervision is to identify those areas where it is particularly useful in social work. Karwacki (2014, pp. 165-172) points out that supervision allows to get to know the personal, family and professional context of the social worker and to analyse their situation. Pawlas - Czyż (2007, p. 33) points out, that supervision provides an opportunity for the social worker to analyse their own actions and emotions. It builds confidence, openness for support and constructive criticism. The social worker learns positive social relationships based on clear communication, tolerance, feedback. Using the experience of the supervisor, the worker learns how to solve problems, how to deal with emotions. An important part of the supervision process is not only to address one's own difficulties, but also to analyse the work of others, showing that they have similar problems. This reduces the feeling of incompetence and insecurity and results in an increased sense of self-worth.

The aspects discussed have a positive impact on the employee to counteract

stress, which is one of the main causes of job burnout.

In his work, Van Heugten (2015, pp. 40-44) outlines the concept of so-called *supportive supervision*, in which the supervisor builds on and builds on the employee's strengths, while the employee's weaknesses are treated as a '*developing boundary*'. The author of the concept postulates basing in the supervision process on the supervisee's core values, working on the strengths of the supervisee and paying particular attention to positive developments and opportunities for development.

A properly conducted supervision should strengthen the social worker, give him/her strength and confidence in his/her own abilities. It should be directed at his/her strengths (Szmagalski, 2011 - *the concept of strengths*, pp. 59-61). Supervision based on the *concept of strengths* is, like social work itself, in line with the social work mission because, by addressing strengths rather than deficits, it does not lead to feelings of guilt.

The above brief characterisation of supervision, its application and usefulness and its usefulness in social work clearly indicates that a properly prepared and conducted supervision process is an excellent tool for the development of social workers and one of the key methods of stress management in social work to counteract the negative effects of professional burnout. However, it is important at this point to point out some key factors that may determine the effectiveness of this method in the context of the goals set for it.

Among these determinants, Pawlas - Czyż (2007, p. 42) points first of all to the openness of the parties, their flexibility, empathy, activity in action, and a real desire for change. The author points to these as necessary for the exchange of experiences, reaching new solutions.

Other factors that are important for the success of the supervision process include the voluntariness of participation in the process. The employee should not be forced to participate, and their reluctance and other potential barriers should be overcome and eliminated in a cooperative way with him/her, using the language of benefits. Another factor to pay attention to in terms of the effectiveness of the supervision process is to ensure a sense of safety in the process, respecting discretion. The worker must not be in any doubt that his or her work with the supervisor will become the subject of public discussion.

Szyszk (2014, pp. 279-280) additionally points out in his work to factors of an institutional nature that favour the process of supervision. One of these is the introduction of the institution of supervision permanently into the organisation as a method of managing it. It is also important to promote this tool in social

institutions as an important element of emotional and substantive support. Under no circumstances must supervision be regarded as a tool for controlling social workers.

One more important factor for the success of the supervision process is the supervisor. The supervisor is responsible for the process of supervision. The supervisor should therefore be highly competent in various areas of life and professional work, among which the following come to the fore (Mańkowska, 2020, 136-144): empathy (understood as interpersonal sensitivity), a positive attitude towards the other person, expertise in the field of social work and therapeutic skills to guide the supervision process safely to its goal (questioning, paraphrasing, working on emotions, clarification, transference analysis, working with resistance). The supervisor should also represent high ethical and moral standards. Along with therapeutic knowledge and skills, they are a guarantee of the reliability and credibility of him or her and of the supervision process (Bąbska, Popłońska-Kowalska, 2014, p. 311). The supervisor should observe the principle of impartiality, the principle of maintaining boundaries and the principle of discretion, because in such a complex relationship they guarantee a more effective cooperation and a greater likelihood of achieving the assumed results of the process.

Supervision, although it undoubtedly has many positive aspects, can also cause many difficulties and concerns among its participants and lead to serious problems in the management of the social institution. One of the main problems that supervision encounters at the very beginning of the process is the social workers' fear that their work will be critically evaluated by others (Pawlas - Czyż, 2007, p. 43). They believe that the fact that a problem is discussed in the supervision process means that the worker has previously failed to deal with the problem, which can be a source of shame, insecurity and affect their self-esteem. Difficulties that arise during the supervision process can include the lack of an atmosphere and context in which the social worker can feel safe, comfortable. Finally, a very big challenge in the supervision process is that it is sometimes very difficult for the social worker to come to terms with the solutions worked out in the session, especially when he or she has a strong conviction that he or she has done the right thing, that he or she has made the right decision. This is a serious difficulty, as it determines to a large extent the effectiveness of the whole process of supervision. This is why the role of the supervisor is so important. On the one hand, the supervisor moderates the process in a way that leads to a decision being made, and on the other hand, the supervised employee should be provided with all the tools that will make it possible to put the decisions made and solutions worked out into practice.

It is also worth mentioning here other important difficulties and limitations that may occur and limitations that may occur in the process of supervision and affect its effectiveness. Factors limiting the effectiveness of supervision can include (Domaradzki, Krzyszkowski, Sosnowski, Italian, 2016, pp. 83-84, 192-193):

- communication problems on the employee-supervisor line (ambiguity of the message, incomprehensibility of the message, interpretation problems of the transmitted content);
- interpersonal difficulties between worker and supervisor (conflict, lack of trust);
- risk of supervisions turning into consultations;
- problems with the worker's time availability for the supervision process (problem of high workload of social workers);

The analysis of constraints and difficulties affecting the effectiveness of the supervision process is a very important element in the whole catalogue of activities that are undertaken for the proper implementation of supervision. As the above analysis shows, their importance is particularly important, as they can directly affect the outcomes of the supervision process. Hence, it is important to analyse the risk factors even before the supervision process starts and to prepare an action plan in case they occur.

### **Towards supervision management**

The essence of supervision management is the participation of the supervisor/manager in the different levels of the supervision process. This participation can be direct, when the manager of the institution simultaneously plays the role of supervisor, which requires him/her to have qualifications, relevant competences and experience in social work, and indirect participation when the supervisor is not a supervisor and supervisees cooperate with him/her on different levels and in different dimensions. Supervision thus becomes, in this management model, the *modus vivendi* of the implementation of managerial functions in a social institution and, in practice, may involve the organisation's activities in the following areas (Dawidziuk, 2015, pp. 80-81):

- Organising supervision processes;
- Organising staff and institutional evaluation processes;
- Multifaceted collaboration and consultation with supervisors;

- Participation in supervision and evaluation processes
- Transfer of observation results and conclusions to the practice of the institution.

The starting point for considering supervision management and presenting its importance in the functioning of social institutions as Szyszka writes (2014, p. 277) is that it is difficult to talk about improving through supervision the quality of social work, the competences of social workers in isolation from the context of the functioning of the organisation as a whole and from the context of the organisational culture. The integral perspective, which is further discussed by Szyszka, indicates that it is difficult to develop new methods of working with clients, it is difficult to talk about the development of employees of a social institution with the use of supervision without referring to it in terms of managing a team and leading a social institution.

It is therefore reasonable to ask at this point what is the relationship of supervision to the management of a social institution in all aspects of its functioning and how it supports the essential elements of this process such as planning, organising, directing and controlling, and then to try to define what supervision management is and what are its basic attributes.

Already the semantic analysis indicates that the notion of supervision refers directly to the notion of directing and organising, and further one can see direct connotations with the notion of control, the results of which and the reflections made thanks to it in the form of feedback influence, after all, the action planning function.

As Szymanowska (2020, p. 109) writes, each of the four main management functions should be considered from the point of view of the institution as a set of its employees and from the point of view of the institution as an organisational and administrative entity and its stakeholders. Let us therefore look at the management of a social institution and the main aspects of this process outlined above through the lens of the concept of supervision using the model proposed by Morrison (Reis-Jorge, 2014, pp. 38-39), which combines the four functions of supervision, i.e. management, development, mediation and support, with planning, organising, directing and controlling. In a similar vein is Dawidziuk (2015, p. 81), who speaks of the managerial/organisational aspect of supervision (managing and directing the institution) and the professional/personal (individual) aspect of it (managing and directing the institution's staff).

The first aspect focuses on the planning of the work, which consists of the organisational structure of the institution, the preparation of plans and schedules of activities, plans for supporting the clients of the social institution, decisions on how to allocate the necessary resources for the activity.

The area of organisation concerns the responsibility of the employee, the management and the institution as a whole for the work to be done, the leadership style of the people, the distribution of responsibilities, the management of the workload, the priorities and the resources needed to carry out the tasks and finally the interpersonal relations

The area of leadership concerns the professional and institutional aspects of the functioning of the institution. In professional terms, in this aspect of management we focus on the identification of staff needs, promotion, appraisal, training, recruitment policy, career planning advice. In institutional terms, we refer to the continuous improvement of the institution's performance standards and the quality of the services it offers.

The last area of control relates to supporting staff, improving the conditions in which they operate, preventing professional burnout, but it also addresses issues related to the effectiveness of the institution, its interaction with the environment, and provides an opportunity to correct its performance. It is an area of reflection on the performance of the institution and provides feedback creating a feedback loop in the management cycle leading again to the area of planning.

In the context thus characterised, the concept of supervision management fits directly, which in the professional aspect, as Olech and Trzaska (2011, pp. 134-135) write, is "a meeting of professionals from the same field, a meeting that is a joint problem solving", and as Szyszka (2014, p. 279) adds, is the participation of the person holding a managerial position in the institution in various aspects of the functioning and action of the institution's staff.

In the institutional aspect, supervision management, as Dawidziuk (2015, p. 81) writes, involves the organisation of procedures and organisational rules and their observance by subordinate staff.

The combination of the professional and institutional aspects of the concept of supervision and its use in management thus allows us to define supervision management as a method of managing a social institution and directing its staff, which uses the administrative, educational-developmental and therapeutic-supportive functions of supervision in the implementation of the planning, organising, directing and controlling functions in the area of management. What is important in this approach is that the concept of supervision permeates all aspects of the functioning and operation of the organisation and its staff.

An important point that should encourage social institutions to implement the principles of supervision management is the fact that they are a special type of entity because of the type of tasks they carry out and the way they are carried out.



The activities of social institutions are oriented towards the broadly understood support of people in need of help, which includes the creation of a framework for the implementation of such help, the building of strategies for action, the choice of tools up to specific actions. On the other hand, the subject at the centre of the activities of social institutions is the person, both the one who needs help, but also the one who provides such help within the framework of social institutions. Thus, the context in which social institutions operate is very specific. It is a context in which action is prone to the emergence of states of tension, conflict or sometimes even crisis situations. One could even pose the thesis that crises and turbulence are permanently inscribed in the specificity of the operation of social institutions.

From this perspective, therefore, it is important to highlight some particularly important aspects of the operation of social institutions where supervised management can play an important role.

The first such aspect is the image of the social institution, which has a direct impact on the perception of its stakeholders. Employees of the institution are the first group for whom image matters. When working in an institution that has a positive perceived and professional image, they feel proud to be part of it, it makes their work easier, but such an institution also finds it easier to recruit good job candidates. People in need of help trust an institution with a positive and professional image and feel safe in their dealings with it. A positive, professional image of a social institution catalyses cooperation with other aid organisations building a beneficial synergy effect for the environment. Finally, the authorities supervising the institution, setting the directions of its activities, are interested in the image of the subordinate institution, for example because of public opinion or the possibility of obtaining additional funds for its activities.

The second of these aspects is communication, both within the organisation and with the external environment. It is directly related to and influences the image of the institution, but can be viewed from a different perspective. This communication involves the establishment and continuous development of information links involving channels, ways and standards of communication. It should function properly within the institution vertically (management-employees) and horizontally (employees-employees). Proper communication facilitates the operation of the institution and has a direct impact on the effectiveness of the tasks carried out.

Another important aspect of operation that is a great challenge for social institutions today is their active creation of organisational culture and governance. While the principles of such governance and culture commonly exist in the business sector, their presence in the public sector is still negligible. However,

given the challenges of the modern world, social institutions should build their organisational culture based on specific principles.

Supervision management, is an excellent and very effective response to the challenges of these specific aspects of social institutions. Transferring the principles derived from the concept of super-vision, combined with the principles of professional organisational management, into the management of a social institution has the great effect of creating a management method that improves the effectiveness of the institution, allows it to continuously develop and improve, but at the same time preserves the identity of the institution resulting from the specific context of its functioning.

A specific problem that indirectly affects social institutions and directly affects their staff, to which supervision management may be the answer, is the problem of professional burnout. The problem of professional burnout obviously affects all professional groups, but it seems that social workers are a group particularly vulnerable to the occurrence of this phenomenon.

Czechowska - Bieluga (2013, p. 35), Szmagalski (2009, pp. 36-37) and Van Heugten (2015, pp. 28-36) point to such important factors that may lead to the occurrence of professional burnout syndrome in social workers:

- fulfilment of numerous and difficult and sometimes unusual tasks,
- insufficient resources to meet clients' needs,
- high workload and administrative demands,
- intensive contact with people who tend to show pathological tendencies,
- experiencing negative emotions from clients,
- the need to motivate clients who want to live „their own way“ to change,
- putting one's own health and life at risk,
- role conflict and lack of clarity about the role of the social worker,
- dissonance between the image of the job and the reality
- low social prestige of the work and the profession
- low income
- lack of control or freedom to make decisions.

These authors simultaneously classify professional burnout in the social work profession into three degrees:

- the first degree is of a warning nature, most social workers already have some seniority and are able to cope. They feel headaches, unremitting colds, feelings of irritability or insomnia.

- The second degree concerns those who have not coped with the first. Irritation and less efficient performance of professional tasks than before appear. At this stage of burnout, a longer rest from work and the pursuit of non-work interests are recommended.
- The third stage is chronic. Symptoms from the first and second stage and other psychosomatic and psychological symptoms: feelings of loneliness, crises in family life, lack of satisfaction.

It is therefore clear from the above that the problem of professional burnout is affecting an increasing number of people, including social workers, hence the importance nowadays of implementing methods, tools that in the short term will reduce the negative effects of this phenomenon, and in the long term will contribute to reducing its occurrence or dealing with it already at the stage of the first symptoms.

The impact of supervision management on the reduction of burnout among social workers should be looked at from the perspective of the functions it performs in the institution and from the perspective of the functions of the institution itself.

Supervision management in the institutional dimension encompasses and influences issues and problems related to the organisation of work, the proper distribution of tasks and roles in the organisation. The implementation of this function also aims at the proper assessment of an employee's competence in the context of his or her tasks and the evaluation of his or her performance in a broad context. It affects the relationships between employees and, as such, influences the perception of the organisation by its customers and the quality of the services provided.

The personnel function of supervision management is directed at improving the professional competences of employees, at matching competences to the requirements of the organisation and the working environment. This is a very important element in the prevention of professional burnout, which on the one hand allows employees to develop, but harmonises this development with the demands and needs of the market.

Supervision management in this area also includes the personal difficulties experienced by the social worker in relation to their work. Sometimes, when dealing with a large number of clients with whom he or she works on a social work level, natural reactions occur, such as, for example, negative emotions towards the client or the fact that a particular behaviour irritates him or her. Dealing with these emotions and becoming aware of one's own states and trying to control them improves the work and gives a sense of competence in

overcoming difficulties. The aim of the activities is to help overcome difficulties of a psychological nature. It allows you to focus on the needs and problems of employees who are not coping with their emotions at work, their decrease in motivation, the psychological burden of helping.

### **Supervision management – key requirements**

Supervision management is a management method based on the concept of supervision, which addresses fundamental issues in human life, but also in the life of an organisation, such as trust, acceptance and understanding. Therefore, in the process of implementing supervision management in an institution, attention should be paid to key requirements, key factors, the omission of which will result in the failure of efforts to implement this method.

Szmagalski (2011, p. 9) points to two reasons that may limit the implementation of supervision management in social institutions:

- it is only effective when its operation is formally sanctioned and is an immanent part of the functioning of the social institution.
- its use and effectiveness is conditioned by a thorough knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of this method, which allows, on the one hand, to fully exploit its potential and, on the other hand, to avoid potential mistakes, pitfalls, difficulties.

The two reasons are coupled to each other, which means that the effectiveness of the implementation of supervision depends on the elimination of both.

Bohdziewicz and Krzyszkowski (2016, pp. 49-51) point to three determinants that determine the effectiveness of the implementation of supervision management in social institutions. These are:

- determinants concerning the attributes of social institution staff (competence, personality, etc.),
- determinants concerning the characteristics of the organisational and cultural environment of the institution (procedures, organisation, management style, etc.)
- determinants concerning the way supervision management is implemented and practised in the institution.

They are further divided into those that ‘support’ the effectiveness of the implementation of supervision management and those that ‘stifle’ it.

„Supportive’ factors may include:

- promoting teamwork,
- building an effective communication system,
- positive management and staff attitudes to implementation,
- treating supervision as a permanent part of the management system.
- „Stifling’ factors can include:
  - the prescriptive and controlling management style of the institution,
  - negative attitudes of the institution’s management and staff towards the implementation process,
  - lack of conviction in the effectiveness of using the concept of supervision for the management of the institution,
  - a dysfunctional communication process within the institution.

This is an interesting and interesting approach to the analysis of the key factors determining the effectiveness of the implementation of supervision management in social institutions because it points directly to the elements that limit this process and those that catalyse it, support it.

Szyszk (2014, pp. 282-285) presents a list of key requirements for the implementation of supervision management. He treats them, on the one hand, as a kind of compass that sets the direction to be followed in order to reach the goal of successful implementation of supervision-based management and, on the other hand, defines them as limiting conditions, without the fulfilment of which it is impossible to reach the goal.

For the implementation of supervision management in a social institution to be possible, it is necessary that:

- a jointly agreed objective by the management and staff of the institution, which is adequate to the place and role of the institution in the system, which will define the target model of its operation based on the new method; everyone in the institution should identify with this objective and support its realisation;
- acceptance by the institution’s management and staff of the use of supervision as a method of its management;
- mutual understanding between the staff and the management of the institution based on a proper understanding of their role, strengths and weaknesses; dialogue between the parties, the sharing of feedback and the promotion of a relationship that actively supports the development of staff and management is essential for the effectiveness of the implementation process;
- authority in professional relations, which should not derive from legal

authority, but must be built on the manager's high competence combined with his charisma, leadership competence and high emotional and social intelligence;

- trust, which is an absolutely fundamental requirement; trust allows for open communication, enables problems, dilemmas to be shared and opens up the field for honest feedback, its acceptance and use for improvement;
- qualifications and appropriate training; it is difficult to talk about the functioning of revision management if there is a lack of knowledge of this method of operation, therefore training and development should be provided in this process in order to acquire new competences and build experience in this field;
- care for good relations and proper standards in the workplace, such as mutual respect between the parties, division of responsibilities, transparent criteria for recruitment, promotion, bonus, access to tools for development.
- symmetry in the employee-supervisor relationship, where the space of the employee and the manager must not be violated, and supervision-based management must not become a tool for exerting pressure, demonstrating power; the antidote to this must be good communication, understanding and acceptance of one's own roles in the organisation.

These conditions are not always easy to fulfil, however, without addressing them in the implementation process, it is not possible to complete the process successfully.

In conclusion of this part of the article, it is still worth noting, following Szmagalski (2011, p. 24), two important barriers that may hinder or even prevent the achievement of supervision management goals at the desired level. These are:

- conflict of interest between manager and worker
- the distance between the social worker and the manager, which may result from mental barriers and lack of trust

## **Summary**

To summarise the considerations in this article, it can be concluded that the successful implementation of supervision management in a social institution is a function of three elements:

- professional preparation, experience, adequate competence and personality traits of its managers and staff,

- an atmosphere that fosters communication, trust,
- mutually agreed goals, their acceptance and working together to achieve them.

It is important to note that all factors must be fulfilled in order to speak of the existence of supervision management in an institution.

Although the process of implementing the concept of supervision into the management of a social institution may be difficult, demanding and take time, the spectrum of benefits that flow from the use of this method is very wide and worth noting once again.

Supervision-based management in social work is therefore very important because, as a method of action, it gives the social organisation both institutionally and individually a space for reflection and mutual consultation. It allows to develop knowledge, to increase the quality and efficiency of action, to find optimal solutions for working with clients and, finally, to be a tool for the broader support of workers.

Supervision-based management makes it possible to quickly locate potential barriers and limitations in communication within the institution. It strengthens relationships and fosters the systematic development of staff competences and working methods. It allows employees and managers to draw on each other's experience. Employees can count on an understanding of their problems, difficulties and on concrete support to solve them. As far as the management of the institution is concerned, this approach creates opportunities for continuous updating of knowledge about the aid activities carried out, the problems faced by the employees and, in a way, forces the necessity of continuous improvement of management methods, learning about and implementing new tools for action.

Although the method of management of social institutions through supervision is not yet widespread in the Polish system of social assistance and social policy, it seems that this is the direction which should be followed by institutions of this sector, as this method of management corresponds to the specificity of their activity, to the objectives pursued.

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