

A Process Model of Social Development Supervision in Social Work

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Abstract

Supervision practice in social work is understood as the mainstay of the profession. However, various studies have pointed to the inadequacies of supervision to facilitate quality service provision. The collected data reflects a general misalignment between the approach to supervision practice and social work practice approaches as one inadequacy leading to the failure of supervision practice. Although there are numerous supervision models in the profession, some of which are aligned to certain practice approaches, none is directly identifiable with the social development approach, which should be at the core of a social work orientation in South Africa. Thus, in this article I provide a process model of supervision in social work that aims to establish a dialectical relationship between supervision and social development practice approach. The model is an output of a qualitative study with principles of a phenomenological design. In the study I employed a Research and Design approach to conduct individual interviews and focus group with social workers and social work supervisors, and their comments suggested the need for a social development approach to supervision.

Keywords

Social work; Supervision in social work; Social development; pedagogy of social work supervision.

INTRODUCTION

This paper articulates a novel approach to supervision by social workers in South Africa as a way to advance the aims of the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997). Social work is one of the leading professions in the implementation of the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997), and social work supervision plays a critical role in guiding social workers to provide quality social welfare services (Deleted for blind review, 2018). They however need to have an understanding of what constitutes social development, the aim that underpins the White Paper.

Although South Africa has made significant strides to address some of the challenges presented by the inability of social workers to either articulate or adopt the social development approach, through the adoption of various instruments including an Integrated Service Delivery Model (ISDM) (DSD, 2006), there has not been any significant attention given to the nature of social work supervision that could be informed by the social developmental approach. This gap has overtime compounded the problems faced by social workers in adjusting to the shift from residual approaches to social welfare to social development (Noyoo, 2000; van Breda, 2007).

In an attempt to address the implications emanating from the adopted developmental approach, government made two crucial moves, namely, the development of a Recruitment and Retention Strategy which was adopted in 2008, and the development of a Supervision Framework for Social Work Profession in South Africa adopted in 2012. The overarching aim of the Strategy is to ...determine conditions that impact on social work as a scarce skill and to provide guidelines for the recruitment and retention of Social Workers within the social work profession, the sector and the country. (RSA, 2008, p.15).

One of its objectives addresses the concerns and conditions of service that impact negatively on service provision (RSA, 2008, p. 33). The strategy identifies lack of structured supervision and the poor quality of supervisors who lack capacity to conduct professional supervision as a major concern. Accordingly, the strategy calls for an evaluation of the prevailing practices of supervision with the view of identifying gaps and development of a suitable supervision framework. Subsequently, the National Department of Social Development, in collaboration with the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP) (2012), developed a

Supervision Framework for the social work profession in South Africa. Nonetheless, the framework does not seem to be informed by any theoretical perspectives and fails to succinctly provide a model of supervision which could address fundamental challenges in the application of the social development approach.

Furthermore, Engelbrecht (2013) explains that the framework bears some characteristics of managerialism which in essence has been viewed as contrary to the purposes of social work supervision. Despite the fact that other recommendations in the Retention and Recruitment Strategy such as the recruitment of social workers have received considerable attention, it is concerning that recommendations on supervision are yet to receive an equal amount of attention to yield the desired results. A similar concern, albeit on a global scale, is raised by Tsui (2005) who highlights that while supervision is vital and an enabling social work process, it has not received a comparable amount of attention as other facets of social work practice that include administration and social work research. He further states that there is a noticeable lack of critical and in-depth discussion regarding social work supervision (Tsui, 2005). Similar sentiments are echoed by Silence (2017) who indicate that in light of the changing economic environment, there has been very little exploration of the impact of social work supervision on service delivery to make meaningful changes in people's lives.

The findings of this study indicated that the existing approaches to social work supervision were not facilitated by a social development practice approach and in turn did not facilitate the application of social development approach. Furthermore, they indicated that social workers in practice, who were both supervisors and supervisees, were not clear about the social development merits of such supervision. This state of affairs created a lot of anxiety among social workers which in turn negatively impacted on social welfare service delivery. Carpenter, Webb, Bostock and Coomber (2012b) aver that lack of specificity between supervision and outcomes for workers limits the usefulness of supervision practice. In addition, Brashears (1995) posits that separation of supervision from practice presents a false dichotomy. As such, in any context of social work practice, while social work practice should inform an approach to social work supervision, a corresponding approach to supervision should influence a practice approach. Hence, this

dialectical process ought to be maintained if a clear understanding of supervision practice is to be established, which in this case was the social development approach.

This paper establishes a dialectical relationship between social work supervision and social development as an approach in social work practice. This is a novel approach to supervision by social workers in South Africa as a way to advance a social development approach in practice. The research study was contextualised within a social development approach which is a model of practice within the broader South African social welfare sector.

In the study I employed a qualitative methodology with principles of a phenomenological study as the design. Furthermore, I used Thomas' (1984) Research and Design approach to conduct individual interviews and focus group with social workers and social work supervisors. Their comments suggested the need for a social development approach to supervision. Furthermore, I used these findings to consult with key informants in the field of social work, social development and supervision in social work based through a Delphi technique process. After three iterations of the Delphi technique, a process models of social development supervision in social work was designed and later taken through the development stage of the Research and Design process. Finally, the pilot testing process of the development phase culminated into the model as presented later on in this paper.

The model emulates Leila Patel's (2015) Social Development Planned Change Process. The key features of the model are phases of supervision that include: Engagement Phase, Exploration and Assessment Phase, Planning Phase, Working Phase, Evaluation and Termination Phase and the Consultation Phase. Parallel to each phase are phase descriptors, foundational skills and expected outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault (2016) loosely describe ‘design’ and ‘methodology’ as pre-field work in the social sciences. It details the approach and processes to research. The foregoing study followed a qualitative methodological approach which according to Babbie and Mouton (2010) is concerned with understanding and describing social action as experienced by the research subjects. The study population was social workers (practitioners, supervisors and academics). Bless and Smith-Higson (2000) define population as a set of elements/people from which the researcher extracts data. The researcher purposively selected government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as research sites from where the sample was drawn. These two settings were seen as ideal given that they employ the most numbers of social workers as agencies of social work.

Furthermore, the researcher used a semi-structured interview schedule for individual interviews. Remler and Van Ryzin (2015) argue that semi-structured interview schedules allow for flexibility within discussions. Among other sub-themes, the schedule required of participants to reflect on what could constitute social work supervision within a social development approach. The second data collection instrument was a moderator’s guide which was employed to collect data from the focus group. The guide assisted in getting participants to discuss summaries of data from individual interviews. It further aided to facilitate further group discussions on the provided topics. Remler and Van Ryzin (2015) assert that a moderator’s guide looks more like a semi-structured interview schedule designed to lead a group’s discussion. Lastly, the researcher used semi-structured schedules in three iterations of data collection from key-informants. The

schedule largely comprised of questions reflective of data collected from individual interviews and focus group. The intensity of the schedule lessened with each subsequent iteration in the process.

Data Analysis

Thematic content analysis was used to analyse data from individual interviews and the focus group. Generative themes that paved way for thematic content analysis from open-ended questions were identified. Thematic content analysis is a combination of content and thematic approaches of analysing data. This combination entails identifying recurrent themes during data collection (Neuendorf, 2002). Through thematic analysis, the researcher interpreted patterns and clusters of meaning provided by the data. The developmental social welfare policy that gives prominence to the social development approach in South Africa provided the context through which the content was analysed. Another set of data that was analysed came from the Delphi Technique with key-informants. Hsu (2007) indicates that measuring the stability of participants' responses in successive iterations is an appropriate way to analyse data collected through a Delphi technique where questionnaires would have been used. Thus, the researcher applied the same principle in the data collected through this technique.

A Process Model of Social Development Supervision in Social Work

In the conceptualisation of this process model, participants and I grappled with two critical questions that had a bearing on the outcome as recorded below.

Q1.

“How does the Social Development (SD) approach influence social work supervision? In this case, the principles of the SD approach need to permeate supervision to create a model of supervision practice that is informed and influenced by the social development approach. Thus, social work supervision needs to be conducted from a social development perspective. The outcome of such an effort would be a social development model of supervision.”

Q2.

“How can social work supervision influence social development practice? This is an angle towards which the findings from participants leaned. They were interested in a supervision approach that would capacitate them to practice from a social development approach. In this case, the model of supervision needs not to necessarily be from a social development approach even though it should lead to a social development practice approach. The outcome of such an endeavour would be a supervision model for social development.”

The focus of this study was largely on the first question with a dialectical impact between the social development practice approach and an approach to supervision. Conversely, while answering the second question would have resulted in identifying any supervision model in social work, it would not necessarily have led to an influence in the understanding and implementation of the SD practice approach. As such, the essence of this study was encapsulated in question one as illustrated in Figure 1 below. Thereafter, it's a section that presents a process model of social development supervision in social work as an outcome of the analysed data from the study.

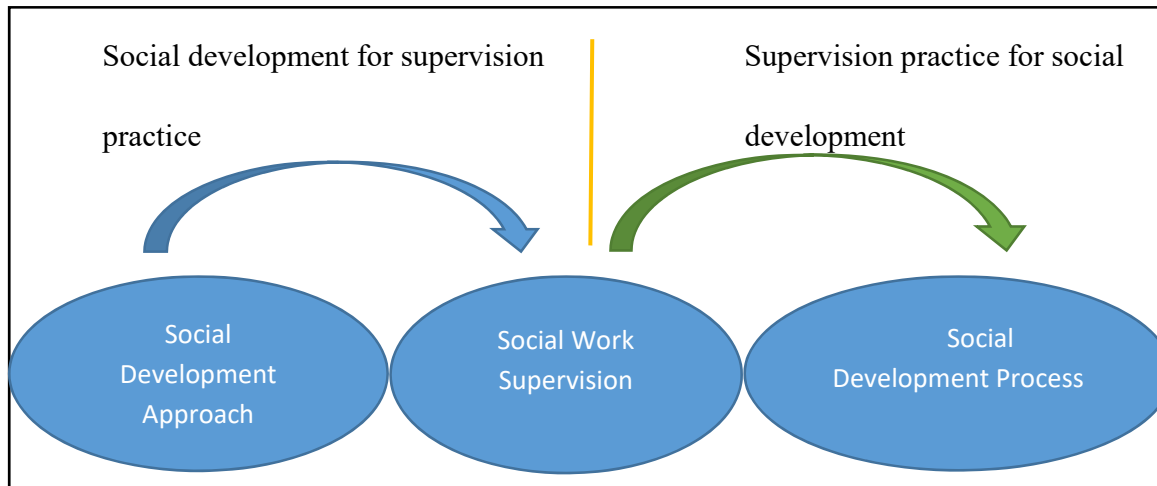


FIGURE 1 Parallel Process to Social Work Supervision

Source: Researcher's own conceptualisation

Table 1 A Process Model of Social Development Supervision in Social Work

ENGAGEMENT PHASE	Phase Description	Foundational Supervision Skills	Outcomes
Purpose: Establish a supervisory relationship.	This is the introductory phase of a supervisory relationship which lays the foundation for the relationship between supervisor and supervisee. The supervisor familiarises him/herself with the supervisee's	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tuning in - Empathy - Relationship building - Assessment skills 	Establishment of a positive supervisory working relationship.

	<p>professional background (knowledge and experience), motivations and career goals. The approach seeks to start where the supervisee is rather than where they should be. Open communication is encouraged between the parties to promote a mutually beneficial relationship. The supervisor may assume various roles including enabler and facilitator. Through these roles, the supervisor enables the supervisee to open up to the relationship.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Questioning - Probing - Reflection - Interviewing skills 	
<p>EXPLORATION AND ASSESSMENT PHASE</p> <p>Purpose:</p> <p>To assess the supervisee's capacity to apply the social development practice model in the agency setting.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Phase Description</p> <p>The supervisee is assessed by means of a dialogue on key features of the social development practice model and how the model can be applied in practice in the agency setting. The questions should be posed in an empowering manner to the supervisee to maintain an open, cordial discussion. The questions may seek to ascertain the supervisee's strengths and areas of development in line with the key features of a social development</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Foundational supervision skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Effective communication - Interviewing skills - Generalist practices skills (micro, mezzo and macro) - Advocacy skills - Assessing skills - Team-work skills 	<p style="text-align: center;">Outcomes</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Assessment of the supervisee's capabilities (strengths and challenges)</i></p>

	<p>practice model (<i>organising themes for practice, multi-modal intervention approach, knowledge, skills and values of the model</i>). Establishment of strengths and areas of development needs to be a collaborative effort between the supervisor and supervisee.</p> <p>The supervisor may assume a facilitator and educator role diffuse feelings of interrogation that may fill the supervisee.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Decision-making skills - Evaluation skills 	
PLANNING PHASE	Phase Description	Foundational supervision skills	Outcomes
<p><i>Purpose:</i></p> <p>To develop a supervisory contract based on the supervisee's mandate.</p>	<p>This phase focuses on contracting to formalise the supervisory relationship. While the contract may be verbal, it is advisable to have a written contract for ease of reference and record keeping. The contract must reflect frequency of supervision sessions, venue of supervision, description of roles, mutual obligations and expectations. This is a collaborative process in contracting.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sessional tuning-in skills - Contracting skills - Elaborating skills - Empathic skills, - Sharing skills - Sessional tuning-in skills - Sessional ending skills - Assertion skills - Communication skills 	<p>Contracting between the supervisor and the supervisee</p>

	<p>Furthermore, the contract must of necessity include an educational aspect to address the identified gaps between the supervisee's profile (as assessed in the previous phase) and the requirements of the job that they are being contracted for. It must be relevant to the setting of the agency and the service user group(s) being serviced.</p> <p>Of importance in the contract is explicit adoption of the social development practice model for the supervisee's interventions. In this regard, developmental social work becomes a theoretical framework that guides practice in service delivery and should constantly be reflected on in supervision sessions. Other theories and perspectives that resonate with the social development approach such as the Person-Centred Approach, Asset-Based Community Development Approach, Strengths Perspective, Sustainable Livelihoods Approach and</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Critical thinking skills- Advocacy skills- Assessment skills- Team-work skills- Decision-making skills- Evaluating skills- Anti-discriminatory practice skills	
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	<p>Resilience theory, among others may be considered as may be detected by the context.</p> <p>The last activity of this phase is assigning a workload by the supervisor to the supervisee. The parties should agree on how to manage the workload.</p> <p>Where the supervisor has more than one supervisee, they may develop a group supervision contract over and above individual contracts. This type of intervention would enable the bridging of the divide between various levels of social work practice within supervision.</p> <p>The supervisor may assume broker and facilitator roles to link the supervisee with various other sections of the agency and important stakeholders.</p>		
<p>WORKING PHASE</p> <p><i>Purpose:</i></p>	<p>Phase Description</p> <p>This phase corresponds to the implementation phase of the Social Development Planned Change</p>	<p>Foundational supervision skills</p>	<p>WORKING PHASE</p> <p><i>Purpose:</i></p>

<p>1. To set the aim/goal, objective/s and identify interventions for each assignment.</p> <p>2. To align interventions with applicable social development themes (e.g. rights-based approach, economic and social development etc).</p>	<p>Process. The phase is likely to be longer than the other phases of the social development supervision model. Ongoing evaluation is important at this stage as it informs continued supervision. The supervisor and supervisee need to collaboratively develop guidelines and where possible checklist to assess the application of the model in practice. This phase communicates how interventions of the assigned workload (the workload may be at micro, mezzo and macro levels) relate to the pillars of social development. Thus, the supervisor and supervisee must:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Collaboratively ascertain the aim/goal for each assignment/intervention in the supervisee's workload. 2. Collaboratively develop each assignment's/intervention's objective/s in line with the aim/goal of the assignment. 3. Collaboratively identify intervention/s for each assignment/intervention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assessment and intervention skills - Elaborating skills - Empathic skills - Sharing skills - Assertion skills - Transference - Counter-transference - Planning skills - Communication and networking skills - Critical thinking skills - Skills in mobilising people - Advocacy - Advocacy skills - Team-work skills - Decision-making skills - Evaluation skills - Anti-discriminatory practice skills - Conflict management 	<p>3. To set the aim/goal, objective/s and identify interventions for each assignment.</p> <p>4. To align interventions with applicable social development themes (e.g. rights-based approach, economic and social development etc).</p>
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	<p>from the multi-modal social development basket in line with the objectives of each assignment/intervention activity.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Collaboratively align the intervention/s of each assignment with its corresponding aim/goal. 5. Be mindful of organising themes as guidelines for every intervention. These themes might severally or jointly be applicable to any chosen intervention. Each identified objective should articulate into an already identified organising theme of the social development approach. 6. Collaboratively monitor and evaluate interventions. <p>The identified aim, objectives and interventions of the assignment/intervention are all tentative before the supervisee meets, discusses and agrees on them with the service user in line with the principles of the approach.</p> <p>The duration of this phase is dependent on the nature and</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Group work skills - Generalist practice skills - Community work skills - Research skills - Skills in mobilising people 	
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	<p>progress of the assignment/intervention before it either moves for termination or referral. Furthermore, both individual (one-on-one) and group forms of supervision may be employed at this stage. In addition, the supervisor may expose the supervisee/s to other platforms e.g. stakeholder forums or invite a specialist on a particular identified aspect as part of activities in supervision. The supervisor may also discuss and agree with the supervisee to identify a mentor or coach for the supervisee to broaden platforms of learning. If agreed, it would be best for the supervisee to identify a mentor or coach for themselves or the supervisor may suggest possible individuals. The choice of the type of supervision should be at the discretion of the supervisor and supervisee through mutual agreement.</p> <p>In light of the reciprocal nature between supervision and practice, the supervisor and supervisee/s</p>		
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	<p>may develop guidelines for practice in the field of the supervisees' practice. This could be an on-going process for the duration of a supervisory relationship.</p> <p>The supervisor may assume various roles including social protector - to protect the rights of the supervisee. He/she may also assume the role of an educator to facilitate the educational function of supervision with regard to, among other things the practice model. An innovator's role may also be assumed by both the supervisor and supervisee, as designing of pertinent programmes may be of necessity during this phase.</p>		
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Multi-Modal Social Development Interventions

This is a basket of interventions from which the supervisor and supervisee may choose through supervision. The supervisor and supervisee should deliberately discuss the basket of interventions in line with the aim guided by the organising themes of the social development approach. The interventions range from micro, mezzo to macro scale. The chosen interventions may be reviewed in each supervision session with the possibility of making adjustments as may be determined by the specifics of a given assignment/intervention as it unfolds.

<p><i>Poverty reduction and sustainable livelihood strategies.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Social relief and social assistance</i> - <i>Small and micro-enterprises</i> - <i>Entrepreneurship</i> - <i>Business development</i> - <i>Credit and microfinance</i> - <i>Savings schemes</i> - <i>Asset building</i> - <i>Income generation</i> - <i>Food security</i> - <i>Employment programmes</i> - <i>Community-based public works</i> - <i>Social capital</i> 	<p>Family-centred and community-based development strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Counselling</i> - <i>Peer and lay counselling</i> - <i>Self-help groups</i> - <i>Social support</i> - <i>Community care</i> - <i>Home-based care</i> - <i>Volunteerism</i> - <i>Community and youth service</i> - <i>Helplines</i> - <i>Community dispute resolution</i> - <i>Capacity building</i> - <i>Collaboration with and strengthening family and community networks</i> 	<p>Community information, education and communication strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Community education and prevention</i> - <i>Advice and information</i> - <i>Community education</i> - <i>Advice offices</i> - <i>Multipurpose community centres</i> - <i>Community media</i> - <i>Mass media</i> - <i>Community theatre and storytelling</i> - <i>Capacity building</i> - <i>Civic education</i> - <i>Community education for empowerment</i> 	<p>Social policy and planning strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Action research</i> - <i>Rapid appraisals</i> - <i>Consultation and participation in planning and decision-making</i> - <i>Designing and implementing developmental welfare programmes</i> - <i>Early warning systems</i> - <i>Service development in underserved areas</i> - <i>Community surveillance</i> - <i>Monitoring and evaluation</i> 	<p>Advocacy strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Awareness raising</i> - <i>Capacity building and education for empowerment</i> - <i>Organising, mobilising and networking</i> - <i>Campaigning for social justice</i> - <i>Legal advocacy</i> - <i>Social justice research</i> - <i>Protection and promotion of rights education</i> - <i>Action research</i>
<p>EVALUATION AND TERMINATION PHASE</p>	<p>Phase Description</p> <p>A model of developmental social work supervision posits that the evaluation and termination phase serves three purposes in</p>		<p>Foundational supervision skills</p>	<p>Outcomes</p> <p>Successful termination of either</p>

<p><i>Purpose:</i></p> <p>To prepare for endings, (evaluation, continued emotional support and termination)</p>	<p>supervision practice. Firstly, it may be used to wind down a relationship between a supervisor and supervisee in the event that the two are parting ways for whatever reason, including reassignment or resignation by either party. Secondly, the phase may be used to wind down an assignment whose interventions by a supervisee have come to an end. In this case, supervision assists the supervisor and supervisee to reflect on the assignment and possible ending including referral. The reflection relates to the aim/goal, objectives, intervention strategies used and capacitation of the service user for sustainability purposes. In essence, the supervisee terminates with the service user and the supervision at this point assists the supervisee to terminate appropriately. Thirdly, termination may be used in relation to a transition stage where the supervisee is released from any form of structured supervision to consultation. This phase may effectively take place within the last few sessions of supervision and depending on the issues to be covered in a given session, the type of supervision may either be individual or group. Invitation of a specialist on a particular subject of termination may also be done as part of supervision. Cognisance must be taken of the fact that development of a supervisee happens over time and should be marked by evidence of experience, autonomy (ability to work independently), motivation, awareness of self and competence across modes of the multi-modal approach.</p> <p>The following are issues that may be covered in the sessions:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sessional ending skills - Evaluation skills - Communication - Empathy skills 	<p>a supervisory relationship, supervisee/service user relationship or structured supervision.</p>
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	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The supervisor and supervisee remind each other of the remaining sessions before they terminate their relationship or before the supervisee terminates with a particular service user.2. Exploration of the supervisee's past experience with endings in the case of termination of a supervisory relationship. Exploration of the attainment of the purported assignment goal or alternatives in the event of termination with a service user.3. Workload is discussed in the event of ending a supervisory relationship due to resignation, redeployment or graduation to consultation.4. Supervisee is asked to complete required paperwork timeously according to the requirements of the agency.5. Where the supervisee terminates with the service user, he/she is assisted in handling service users who struggle in terminating relationships. Furthermore, the supervisor assists the supervisee to assess and inform the service user of points of capacitation for the service user's self-sustenance.6. Where the supervisee transitions from structured supervision to consultation, at termination the supervisor and supervisee need to determine the supervisee's mastery of: i) field work, ii) knowledge and application of social development approach and generalist practice approach, iii) skills use, iv) knowledge of guiding agency policies and applicable legislation.7. Where the supervisory relationship is being terminated, both the supervisor and supervisee reflect to each other lessons learnt from one another and honestly reflect on areas of improvement.		
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	<p>8. In any form of termination, a determination should collaboratively be made by the supervisor and supervisee on the outcomes of supervision. This should be made against supervisor's understanding of social development practice and whether interventions made any differences.</p> <p>The supervisor may assume the role of a counsellor to deal with supervisee's feelings of termination. The educator's role would also be of essence in advising how the supervisor may terminate certain contact with service users where applicable.</p>		
Consultation Phase	Phase Description	Foundational supervision skills	Outcomes
<p>Purpose:</p> <p>To acknowledge professional growth of the supervisee and inculcate autonomous practice.</p>	<p>Consultation is a function of supervision characterised by a considerable degree of independence/autonomy of the practitioner. The social work practitioner may be released to this stage after a joint assessment and agreement by the supervisor and supervisee that the supervisee understands the field of practice and equally has developed mastery and confidence of the social development's planned change process. These two aspects should enable the worker to function autonomously within a given field with an option of consulting the supervisor where need be. Nonetheless, organisationally, the supervisor remains tasked with delegated managerial authority over the worker who has graduated to consultation.</p> <p>Initially, the supervisor may still make follow-ups to assess if the supervisee is coping with autonomous functioning. Where</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work independently - Maintain relationships - Workload management - Leadership skills (vision and goal setting proactive facilitate decision-making motivator) - Communication skills 	<p><i>Autonomous practice</i></p>

	<p>need be, the supervisor may recommend that the supervisee attend short-term courses in line with skills that the supervisee may be in need of. These should be skills aimed at enhancing the supervisee's autonomous functioning. At this stage, the supervisee may identify various work-related forums to attend and also solicit knowledge from other individuals with work-related expertise.</p> <p>Lastly, the supervisor remains tasked with periodic monitoring and evaluation of the supervisee's work both for supervisee's developmental and accountability purposes.</p> <p>The supervisor still plays the role of educator as learning never ceases, even at this stage. Through mobiliser and facilitator roles, the supervisor may still need to link the supervisees to other forums through which they can enhance their knowledge.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Management skills (strategic planning, decision-making, problem-solving, team work analysing organising negotiating co-ordinating) 	
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Conclusion

In this paper I have presented a model of Social Development Supervision in Social Work. The model carves a form of social work supervision that is informed by the social development approach and it in turn facilitates a deliberate adoption of the approach in practice. The application of the model emulates Patel's Social Development Planned Change Process (Patel, 2015). Lastly, while the model will assist generalist social work practitioners, through a planned change process, it will equally be of assistance to specialists in their understanding and application of the social development approach in their contexts.

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