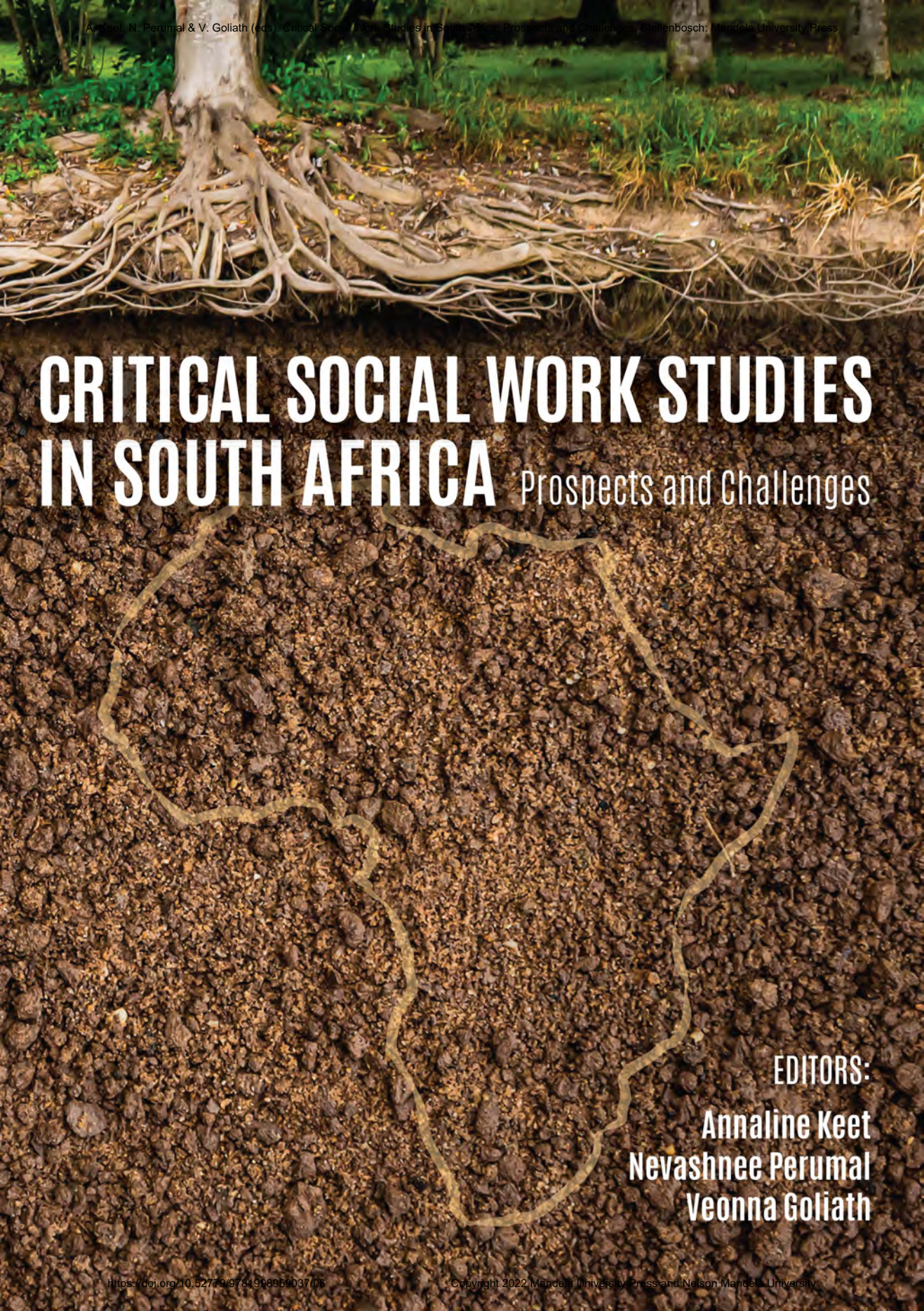


The background of the cover is a photograph of a forest floor. In the upper half, the thick, gnarled roots of a large tree spread out across the ground. Below the roots, the soil is dark and textured, with a yellowish-brown outline of the map of South Africa superimposed on it. The title text is overlaid on the upper part of the image.

CRITICAL SOCIAL WORK STUDIES IN SOUTH AFRICA

Prospects and Challenges

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AN ALLY OR AN ENEMY?

Developing a trusting relationship between supervisor and supervisee

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ABSTRACT

Social work supervision, which has evolved worldwide, has been influenced by the recognition of the centrality of a conducive supervisory relationship for effective supervision. However, most supervisees experience the supervisory relationship as an unsafe practice environment, influenced by power relations, while supervisors are grappling with balancing the educational, administrative and supportive functions of supervision. To address challenges faced by the supervisor and supervisee, it is essential to maintain a supervisory relationship that is based on trust, collaboration, joint accountability, honesty, openness and a non-judgemental approach. Often, such a relationship is subverted by the need to comply with a neoliberal agenda that promotes a 'tick-box approach' to supervision rather than a humanistic-based relationship. This chapter questions whether the neoliberal agenda fosters an alliance or rivalry between the supervisor and supervisee, and advocates for strategies that the supervisor and supervisee can adopt to prioritise relationship-based supervisory practices. It concludes that to foster trusting supervisory relationships, it is necessary to acknowledge the diverse cultures, work settings and needs of supervisors and supervisees.

KEYWORDS

social work supervision, supervisee, supervisor, supervisory alliance, supervisory relationship

INTRODUCTION

Supervision is one of the defining characteristics of social work practice and is recognised by most as a key component of the profession (Bartoli & Kennedy, 2015). Kadushin's (1976) seminal work refers to social work supervision as a process by which a supervisor performs administrative, educational and supportive functions while interacting with a supervisee in a *positive relationship*. Supervision is an ongoing

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process aimed at assisting social workers in practice so that they can learn how to use the supervisory process for their own professional development and competence, while serving clients effectively.

For the supervision process to thrive, a supervisory relationship needs to be mutually respectful to safeguard the well-being of practitioners (Wong Yuh Ju, 2014). However, existing research in South Africa has shown that most supervisees experience a supervisory relationship as an unsafe practice context that is influenced by power relations (Chibaya, 2018; Wynne, 2020). Given the collaborative nature of the supervision process, supervisees are not merely passive beings in the process, but have the role of either advancing or deconstructing the power dynamics in the supervisory relationship (Cook, McKibben & Wind, 2018). Such a relationship is often subverted by the need to comply with a neoliberal agenda that promotes a 'tick-box approach' that focuses on quantity over quality (Bartoli & Kennedy, 2015; Engelbrecht, 2013). The neoliberal agenda is target-driven instead of relationship-based, which shifts attention to the monitoring of supervisees' work rather than the process of social work intervention. Hence, this chapter questions whether such a neoliberal agenda fosters an alliance or rivalry between the supervisor and supervisees.

Based on their review of social work supervision research between 1970 and 2010, O'Donoghue and Tsui (2013) recommended that researchers should focus on the interactional practices within supervisory relationships. This chapter accordingly intends to explore whether the supervisor and supervisee consider each other as enemies or are prepared to form an alliance within the supervisory relationship. This chapter also responds to the scarcity of supervision research within the South African context that focuses on a supervisory relationship. Scholars such as Engelbrecht (2019a, 2021), Mamaleka (2018) and Ncube (2019) have responded to the gap in their research which seeks to decolonise and authenticate social work supervision within the South African context. For instance, Engelbrecht (2019a) developed a local model of social work supervision that identifies the key determinants in defining social work supervision in South Africa. Engelbrecht (2019a) posits that each of the determinants is open to further research and engagement to promote clarity in the striving for authentic supervision in South Africa. Mamaleka (2018) advocates for collaborative supervision, while Ncube (2019) proposes that social work supervision should be guided by a social development approach to service delivery. Different from the more traditional approaches that pitch supervisors and supervisees in different "camps", contemporary views foreground the centrality of the supervisory relationship in social work supervision (Mo, O'Donoghue, Wong & Tsui, 2020). This chapter thus focuses on the supervisory relationship as one of the determinants of supervision. The chapter will first conceptualise a professional supervisory relationship before describing the rationale for a supervisory relationship. It will then discuss the values

and ethical principles guiding a supervisory relationship, and finally focus on the challenges experienced within a supervisory relationship. The chapter concludes by outlining strategies that can be applied to prioritise relationship-based supervisory practices and maintain a trusting relationship between supervisor and supervisee.

CONCEPTUALISATION OF A SUPERVISORY RELATIONSHIP

In the initial stages of professional social work, the supervisory relationship was conceptualised in a manner similar to a teacher-student relationship or the master-apprentice model, and the supervisor was regarded as a respected and reliable source of knowledge and skills, professional authority and social status (Mo et al., 2020). This teacher-student approach was later superseded through the work of scholars such as Shulman (2010) and Kaiser (1997). Kaiser (1997) noted that a positive supervisor-supervisee relationship entailed mutual trust, respect and obligation. Kaiser (1997) further observed that the relationship between a supervisor and supervisee had an impact on the work between supervisee and client. Similarly, Shulman (2010) identified a parallel process whereby the way in which supervisors related to practitioners tended to have an impact on the way social workers related to their clients. Thus, the rise of social constructionist theories in the early 21st century placed greater emphasis on supervisor-supervisee interactions and how they constructed their reality within a supervisory relationship (Mo et al., 2020).

According to Wong Yuh Ju (2014), a supervisory relationship is both a personal and a professional relationship. As such, there is a need to maintain clarity in work expectations and in meeting job demands, while managing the relationship at a personal level. McPherson, Frederico and McNamara (2016) caution that it might be tricky for supervisors to maintain this balance because they need to consider when to allow supervisees to share personal issues without setting rigid boundaries. Supervisors also need to avoid taking on the role of therapist, which can create ethical dilemmas. Although supervisors by virtue of their positional power and organisational accountability hold dual roles of supervisor and line manager (Hair, 2014), emphasis on the significance of a supervisory relationship depends largely on the workplace context and policy directives. For instance, within the child protection sector, supervisors are often the link between management and frontline social workers, with their main responsibility being that of managing supervisees' performance, while supporting and facilitating their learning and development. Balancing these roles can sometimes be challenging for supervisors. Studies by McPherson et al., (2016) and Wong Yuh Ju (2014) have observed that the supervisory relationship tends to suffer because managerial and administrative matters are prioritised during supervision over reflective practices. McPherson et al. (2016:23) quoted one child protection supervisor who explained that:

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There is a tension. I am the line manager of those I supervise. There is tension always between management or administration or support...

In South Africa, the administrative function of supervision has been cited as one of the major contributing factors to burnout and the neglect of the supportive and educational function of supervision (Mamaleka, 2018; VETFUTI, GOLIATH & PERUMAL, 2019). In terms of policy directives by the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP), supervisors are directed by policy guidelines for code of conduct, code of ethics and the rules for social workers to supervise and evaluate the performance of registered social workers on social work matters in a fair and respectful manner. The policy guidelines also say that the supervisor could be held liable if a complaint of alleged unprofessional conduct is lodged against their supervisee (SACSSP, 2007).

This can lead to dual role tensions for the supervisor. As such, supervisees should be regarded as partners in the supervisory relationship by creating an enabling working environment through mutual learning and shared responsibility in the supervision process. This can be achieved by negotiating a supervision agreement between the supervisor and supervisee that lays out the expectations, roles and parameters of the supervisory relationship in a collaborative manner. Additional factors to be considered in a supervisory relationship include: (a) the structure (format and frequency of supervision); (b) quality (warmth and perceived safety) and (c) relational elements (gender, cultural similarities and differences, influence of power and authority) (Wong Yuh Ju, 2014). These factors are essential because they influence supervisees and supervisors' perceptions of the supervisory relationship. Therefore, maintaining a positive supervisory relationship is central to the supervision process, which is discussed further in the next section.

RATIONALE FOR A SUPERVISORY RELATIONSHIP

Having conceptualised the nature of a supervisory relationship, it is necessary to provide the rationale for it in social work practice before discussing the key values and ethical principles pertinent to the relationship. In an analysis of 34 empirical studies on social work supervision conducted between 1950-2002, Tsui (2005) found that very few focused on the supervisory relationship. The author noted that the relationship between the supervisor and supervisee was deemed pivotal in the supervision process, which consisted of the supervisory contract, the format for supervision and the supervisee's development (Tsui, 2005). Davys and Beddoe (2010) concur that the supervision process is defined in terms of the phases of a supervisory relationship, specified as the preliminary, beginning, middle and end stages. Hawkins and Shohet (2006) proposed a "seven-eyed" supervision model to describe different

modes of managing the supervision process. The model is relational because it focuses on the relationships between client, supervisee and supervisor, and the interplay between each relationship within the wider organisational and professional context. One of the seven modes that influence the supervisory process is the “focus on the supervisory relationship”. Hawkins and Shohet (2006) argue that such a focus on the supervisory relationship maintains the quality of the alliance between the supervisor and supervisee, thereby positively influencing the supervisee-client relationship. This notion is further encapsulated in the ecology of supervision espoused by Khosa and Engelbrecht (2021), who observe that the supervisory relationships are interdependent for the betterment of effective outcomes for service users, which is the ultimate objective of supervision.

In a study by Wong Yuh Ju (2014), the supervisors interviewed believed, that maintaining good supervisory relationships with their supervisees would retain social workers in the field. Relating this to the South African context, the Department of Social Development (DSD) in collaboration with the SACSSP developed a supervision framework for the social work profession in response to the Recruitment and Retention Strategy for Social Workers (DSD, 2006). This strategy recommended an evaluation of supervision practices in South Africa and highlighted the need for effective supervision within the social work profession to improve the quality of social work services. The supervision framework is further necessitated by the SACSSP’s resolution to regulate certain areas of specialisation in social work, including supervision. Central to the supervision process is a supervisory relationship that cultivates situation-relevant supervision.

A supervisory relationship should be characterised by constructive feedback, safety, mutual respect and self-care. The quality of the relationship between supervisor and supervisee is well documented and significant in achieving effective supervision outcomes (Davys & Beddoe, 2010; Wonnacott, 2012). Research has identified that a positive relationship between supervisor and supervisee maintains job retention and satisfaction, and skilful and experienced supervision can be a factor in reducing burnout (Carpenter, Webb, Bostock & Coomber, 2012). This is particularly necessary in South Africa, where social workers regularly experience stress and burnout because of individualistic, supervisory and organisational factors such as remuneration, caseload, unavailability of supervision and the overall working conditions of social workers (Calitz, Roux & Strydom, 2014). So, to foster a safe supervisory relationship, appropriate knowledge, leadership skills and an enabling organisational context are essential.

VALUES AND ETHICS IN SUPERVISION

Values and ethics are fundamental to social work practice, which makes them critical in supervision. O'Donoghue and O'Donoghue (2019), however, established that social work ethics have not been integrated into supervision processes. Additionally, the latter authors observed that the Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles (International Association of Schools of Social Work [IASSW], 2018) rarely mentioned the importance of ethics in supervision. O'Donoghue and O'Donoghue (2019) recommend that issues of values and ethics should be explicitly present and addressed within supervisory relationships.

After reviewing supervision policies across the globe, Khosa and Engelbrecht (2021) observed that some countries recognise the importance of adhering to professional ethical codes in social work while also embracing the relevant principles and values in the supervision process. Some core values highlighted in the supervision policies the authors reviewed include respect, fairness, social justice and integrity, while the principles address issues of cultural sensitivity, non-discriminatory practices and adult learning. Although most policies reviewed indicated principles and values guiding supervision practices, their operationalisation was not always evident. This section will focus on the ethic of care, the principle of *ubuntu* and the value of social justice, which are considered fundamental in promoting a trusting relationship between a supervisor and supervisee.

Ethic of care

According to Bisman (2004:117), “to practise social work is to act on the morality of social life. Such practice requires the profession to embrace its mission to enhance human well-being ...” Thus, an *ethic of care* is fundamentally a concern for people's well-being. It can be viewed both as a virtue in social work practice, but more pertinently as an attribute in a supervisory relationship. The ethic of care affirms responsibility and trusting relationships ahead of duty and ideologies. The sense of connection in a caring relationship is the focus of attention of the ethic of care (Banks, 2012). In the supervision process, the supervisor's duty of care is to the supervisees, their clients and the community. Sevenhuijsen, Bozalek, Gouws and Minnaar-Mcdonald (2003) emphasise that the ethic of care should be seen holistically and from the perspectives of both caregivers (supervisors) and care receivers (supervisees). Thus, co-operation, communication and a sound relationship between supervisor and supervisee are vital when applying the ethic of care in social work.

The ethic of care repudiates the individualistic approach that underlies the neoliberal agenda and instead embraces notions of relationality and interdependence – the basic idea that humans are engaged in each other's lives in a myriad of ways (Sevenhuijsen

et al., 2003). The ethic of care emphasises the significance of nurturing interpersonal relationships because of the collective nature of identity and the interconnectedness of people. In South Africa, such care may be linked to the principle of *ubuntu*, which embodies the interconnectedness of people. *Ubuntu* as a principle in supervision is discussed next.

■ *Ubuntu*

Ubuntu is one of the foundational principles of the White Paper for Social Welfare (RSA, 1997), which serves as a cornerstone for developmental social work services in South Africa. Similarly, *ubuntu* has also been adopted as a guiding principle within the draft Supervision Framework for Social Service Professions (DSD, 2019). This principle entails caring for each other's well-being and ensuring that a spirit of mutual support is fostered to promote human interdependence and a sense of togetherness (Makhubele, Matlakala & Mabvurira, 2018; Mupedziswa, Rankopo & Mwansa, 2019). As a foundational principle in social work practice in South Africa, it thus follows that *ubuntu* is applicable in supervision because it draws on the importance of humane and mutual respect.

Osei-Hwedie (2007) states that *ubuntu* as the notion of shared humanness provides the moral basis for behaviour and notes that it is often emphasised in building relationships, in processes of decision making and in enhancing efficiency and leadership, all of which are also fundamental elements of supervision. *Ubuntu* can serve as a foundational principle for supervision to strengthen supervisory relationships and enhance the delivery of social work services. Although the literature does not address the operationalisation of this principle in social work supervision, the DSD's move to embrace this principle in their draft Supervision Framework for Social Service Professions (2019) indicates an aspiration towards implementing standards of ethical practice that resonate within the African context. This correlates with the assertion by Makhubele et al. (2018) that philosophies, values and ethical principles such as *ubuntu*, togetherness and the need for symbiotic relationships can readily be incorporated into social work education and training to engender values and ethics that would resonate in diverse African contexts and enhance authentic supervision practices. *Ubuntu* is especially important in a supervisory relationship that recognises the impact of personal circumstances on the professional relationship. Thus, *ubuntu* as a principle for enhancing social solidarity and recognising the connectedness of people is central to the sustainability of positive supervisory relationships that highlight the responsibility between people and their environment.

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Social justice

Social justice is a central professional value of social work, and social workers are often criticised for not explicitly incorporating this professed commitment into their practice. Bisman (2004) observes that the concepts of caring and social justice are closely woven into the moral code of social work. Thus, supervision is an optimal space within which social workers can cultivate the knowledge and skills to attend to issues of social justice in their practice. Asakura and Maurer (2018) argue that clinical supervision is a pedagogical space to promote social justice in clinical practice. This can be achieved by promoting a collaborative supervisory relationship with strong co-learning and a mutual learning environment in which both the supervisor and supervisee can develop (and challenge) their understandings of social justice. This will help to regulate the power dynamics that may arise from their differential experiences of marginalisation, oppression and privilege based on race, class and social position. Collaborative engagement is therefore essential to ensure that those with marginalised social identities do not have to carry the whole burden of initiating and engaging in discussions of social justice (Asakura & Maurer, 2018; O'Neill & Del Mar Fariña, 2018).

However, despite the professed commitment of social work to promoting social justice, it is worth noting that neoliberal-oriented practices might prevent supervisors from having time for reflection on values and ethical conduct in supervision (O'Donoghue & O'Donoghue, 2019). Rather than prioritising the supervisee's learning needs or commitment to social justice, supervision in managerialist environments is a powerful vehicle used to audit worker performance and avoid agency liability (Beddoe, 2010; Engelbrecht, 2013). Although this is the reality of current practice and may be an inhibiting factor when engaging with issues of social justice, Asakura and Maurer (2018) call for practitioners and supervisors collectively to push against this constraint and find ways to navigate the neoliberal and managerial tendencies in supervision by jointly striving for social justice in a collaborative learning space.

In summary, Ncube (2019) asserts that when supervision practices are guided by the social development approach in South Africa, supervisors and supervisees need to remain mindful of the values of social justice and *ubuntu* in a caring relationship. To uphold the values of social justice and *ubuntu* in supervision, both the supervisor and supervisee need to respect each other's rights and human dignity. Engaging with these values stimulates robust debate, mutual understanding and tolerance between the supervisor and supervisee, thereby building an alliance. Consequently, supervision will move towards a more humanistic and supportive approach, enabling supervisors and supervisees to develop a trusting supervisory relationship. This will in turn stimulate a safe relationship that is founded on trust, collaboration, joint accountability, honesty, openness and a non-judgemental approach.

CHALLENGES WITHIN A SUPERVISORY RELATIONSHIP

Numerous challenges may arise during the supervision process. These will vary, depending on the work context in which supervision is practiced. This section presents the main challenges experienced within a supervisory relationship.

Unstructured supervision

Unstructured supervision in social work is a major problem in South Africa. Several local studies have confirmed this lack of effective and structured supervision in social work practice, especially in the public sector (Calitz et al., 2014; Engelbrecht, 2013; Mokoka, 2016). A lack of training and preparation of social work supervisors has been identified as one of the key factors contributing to unstructured supervision (Bradley, Engelbrecht & Höjer, 2010; Mokoka, 2016). According to Kadushin and Harkness (2014), many social workers are rarely prepared to assume the role of supervisor and receive very little support in their new job responsibilities. The training and preparation for assuming a supervisory role are crucial and should take place within the first year of functioning as a supervisor. Without proper training, supervisors will not be able to fulfil their roles effectively because they might not even be aware of what their job entails.

Although institutions of higher learning in South Africa which offer a Bachelor of Social Work degree are expected to equip students with supervision knowledge and assess their ability to use supervision effectively in practice in accordance with the standards of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) (CHE, 2015), the courses or modules offered at the undergraduate level may not necessarily prepare social workers to assume a supervisory role. Hence, Engelbrecht (2013) recommends that within the South African context, academic institutions should work collaboratively with practice organisations to introduce supervision training that will focus on theories and models of supervision to produce professionals who are able to apply the relevant knowledge and skills in their supervision. Some tertiary institutions have heeded the call and are in the process of designing postgraduate diplomas in social work supervision.

Power dynamics

Another challenge in supervision is the *power struggles* that may prevail in the supervisory relationship. Beddoe (2011) contends that the power dynamics in a supervisory relationship raise questions about the maintenance of an effective participatory relationship that ideally allows both parties to have an equal say. For example, when conflict emerges because the supervisee does not feel satisfied with the supervisor, and this cannot be adequately communicated in the supervisory relationship. Hence, when dealing with conflict, supervisees are faced with a dilemma because of the fear of

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repercussions. Scholars such as Munson (2002) stress that it is crucial to have healthy power relations in a supervisory relationship for effective supervision. Munson (2002) contends that supervisors need to use their authority to address their supervisees' needs so that they can reach their learning goals without abusing their power. Wong Yuh Ju (2014) concurs that social workers cannot feel emotionally safe about discussing ethically sensitive practice issues if they have fears about the potential of supervisors' abusing their position of power during performance evaluation.

Watkins, Hook, Mosher and Callahan (2018) propose that supervisor humility is a critical variable for effective supervisory practice, and that it can potentially transform supervisory relationships. Supervisor humility is viewed as an essential leadership quality. It is also a warmth-based virtue that is embraced to build people's characters. Humility involves openness, accurate self-assessment, recognising one's own imperfections, as well as guarding against harmful supervision. Supervisor humility is therefore in line with supervision best practices through (a) enhancing multicultural competence, (b) fortifying the supervisory alliance, (c) being receptive to supervisee feedback and (d) fostering engagement in peer consultation (Watkins et al., 2018). Supervisor humility is fundamental in the supervision process because the supervisor is routinely in a power position vis-à-vis the supervisee, sets the tone for the relationship and holds an evaluative role (Goodyear, 2014).

Managerialism

International research stresses the importance of the relationship between supervisor and supervisee in connection with the fulfilment of supervision objectives (Bartoli & Kennedy, 2015; Wong Yuh Ju, 2014). However, several studies indicate that this relationship rarely achieves the desired outcome because of the neoliberal box-ticking approach fuelled by managerialism (Bartoli & Kennedy, 2015; Wong Yuh Ju, 2014).

Managerialism assumes that organisations are most effective if they operate using business principles, including managerial norms, procedures, and standards as the yardstick through which organisational objectives are identified (Ornellas, 2018; Trevithick, 2014). This has implications for supervision because managerialism regards supervisees as mere implementers of what the manager thinks, plans and decides. As a result, this limits the balance between management and supportive functions in a supervisory relationship. Hence, Morrison and Wonnacott (2010) argue that while effective supervision needs to be recognised, there are inconsistencies, interruptions and an increasing dominance of managerial and performance agendas to the detriment of reflection, critical analysis and emotional support for the worker. Beddoe (2010) and Engelbrecht (2013) have also criticised the development and form of supervision within a bureaucratic management system. In such a system, supervision serves primarily as a yardstick for measuring the quantity of supervisees' work, more than

assessing the quality of services to clients, an approach which discounts the element of impact in the service user’s lives. This type of supervision may be more harmful than helpful to the supervisees and service users (Wynne, 2020).

STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING A TRUSTING SUPERVISORY RELATIONSHIP

After critical analysis of existing research on social work supervision globally, this section discusses strategies that can be employed to develop a trusting relationship between supervisor and supervisee. The proposed strategies seek to address the challenges within a supervisory relationship discussed in the previous section. Below is a graphic representation of the strategies linked with a specific challenge and which are guided by the values and ethics already discussed in this chapter. Figure 6.1 shows that each challenge within a supervisory relationship can be addressed by adopting the relevant supervision values and by applying the strategies discussed next.



Figure 6.1 Strategies for developing a trusting supervisory relationship

Emphasising the supportive function of supervision

The *supportive function of supervision* is crucial in deepening a safe and trusting relationship between supervisor and supervisee (Vetfuti et al., 2019; Wong Yuh Ju, 2014). Yet the issue of supportive supervision is largely absent in the literature. For example, a recent study posits that supervisory practices need to consider a balance between the administrative and educational functions of supervision to create more opportunities for the development of professional autonomy (Mo et al., 2020). But what about the supportive function?

Kadushin and Harkness (2014) state that the aim of supportive supervision is to promote the psychological well-being of supervisees to prevent stress and burnout. They further describe the supportive function as the maintenance of a harmonious

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and caring relationship between a supervisor and supervisee, and one that is aimed at preventing stressful situations. It is therefore important to emphasise the supportive function of supervision because it is concerned with supervisees' job satisfaction, morale, as well as personal development of the knowledge and skills necessary to render effective services (Carpenter et al., 2012). Practicing the supportive function of supervision is thus built on the *ethic of care* and is fundamental in addressing ineffective and unstructured supervision practices.

Supportive supervision recognises the need to build constructive relationships that will eventually create positive change within the supervision process (Nuttgens & Chang, 2013; Wong Yuh Ju, 2014). Vetfuti et al., (2019) found that current supervision practices do not adequately meet social workers' needs for support, and therefore advocated for prioritisation of this function. The strategies used for the supportive function of supervision involve providing affirmation and allowing space for emotional expression and honesty when engaging with the supervisee (Kadushin & Harkness, 2014). These strategies create the space for reflective practice in the implementation of the supportive function which is discussed next.

Practicing reflective supervision

Reflection is an important element in supportive supervision. Fundamental to effective supervision is the creation of a space for reflective learning. Reflective supervision provides the necessary space for social workers to reflect on their practice, discuss stressful situations and resolve practice dilemmas (Rankine, Beddoe, O'Brien & Fouché, 2018). Reflective supervision, with an emphasis on learning, professional development and social justice, can enable supervisees and supervisors to counter the negative impacts of managerialism on social work practice, thereby creating a safe professional space (Asakura & Maurer, 2018). Allowing supervisees to reflect on their skills and their working environment promotes a trusting supervisory relationship. Similarly, supervisors need to exercise reflective supervision through self-awareness and by critically analysing their supervisory relationships, as well as organisational and professional obligations towards improving social services (Rankine, 2019). Reflective supervision is vital for the continued analysis of dominant discourses in practice and ensuring that professional values and social justice remain central to social work. Furthermore, reflective supervision requires supervisors to form emotionally supportive and collaborative relationships with their supervisees to facilitate reflection and analysis throughout the supervision process in order to enhance the well-being of supervisors and supervisees alike.

Managing power relations

As discussed earlier in this chapter, *power dynamics* have been identified as a challenge within a supervisory relationship. Although power differential is a central factor in the supervisory relationship, Ammirati and Kaslow (2017) and Nuttgens and Chang (2013) believe that a strong working alliance within the supervisory relationship filters through to the supervisee-client relationship. A more equitable alliance can be achieved by reducing hierarchical differences and stimulating co-constructive and supportive conversations. This means that information between a supervisor and supervisee needs to be shared transparently and honestly to provide a mutual sense of safety and trust (Hair, 2014).

Moreover, power is inevitable in supervisory relationships due to the inherent hierarchical nature of supervision and organisational structures (Cook et al., 2018; Wong Yuh Ju, 2014). Therefore, both supervisor and supervisee need to learn the best possible ways to navigate the power dynamics in their relationship. Moreover, when working with a *social justice* lens, reflective practice and advocacy may help strengthen the supervisory relationship and manage the power dynamics. Research by Lusk, Terrazas and Salcido (2017) found that among supervisors and supervisees there is a wide range of critical awareness of power and privilege, and of structural and interpersonal forms of oppression. Each relationship is unique, as each person brings with them personal and inter-generational histories, as well as affective and objective experiences of racial and other social forms of injustice and oppression. Awareness of structural impediments to supervision is also important within the South African context.

Given the apartheid legacy of racial discrimination and persistent patriarchy in South Africa, it is important for organisations to foster anti-discriminatory supervisory practices by ensuring that supervisors and supervisees are mindful of the differences that could shape a supervisory relationship. Khosa and Engelbrecht (2021) recommend that organisations should develop supervision policies that seek to promote anti-discriminatory practices to ensure the safety of social workers and service users while embracing the diversity that exists in South Africa. Recognising the complexity of the South African structural conditions, the SACSSP (2007) and the Supervision Framework (DSD & SACSSP, 2012) emphasise the importance of maintaining professional, respectful and anti-discriminatory relationships in supervision. Hence, when both supervisor and supervisee acknowledge the power and privilege within the supervisory relationship, they can be challenged and reflected on to build a trusting relationship and dismantle power relations.

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Critical Social Work Studies in South Africa: Prospects and Challenges**Practicing empathy and mutual respect**

It is important for supervisors and supervisees to possess the qualities of *empathy* and *respect*. Supervisors should be able to create an environment conducive to learning characterised by a healthy interpersonal relationship with supervisees that fosters clear communication, mutual respect, shared decision making and a sense of trust. Thus, both parties need to respect the positive contribution of the other to construct a mutually respectful, constructive and accepting relationship. Empathy is essential in a supervisory relationship, especially when navigating the area of performance appraisal which may lead to power dynamics. Supervisors should evaluate supervisees' performance in a fair and respectful manner. The art of providing constructive criticism combines honesty and empathy to motivate the supervisee to achieve higher standards of performance. When providing feedback, supervisors are encouraged to use the praise sandwich technique of softening criticism by beginning and ending on a positive note (Brody, 2005).

Empathy and mutual respect can also be enhanced through cultural competence. Cultural competence is progressively seen as a requisite for effective social work practice given the racial, cultural and ethnic diversity that exists in South Africa. Similarly, supervision practices must respond by acknowledging the cultural orientation, values and social position of supervisors and supervisees. Social workers must therefore practice cultural competence by incorporating analyses of privilege and power in their supervisory relationship (Tsui, O'Donoghue & Ng, 2014). In supervision, cultural competence refers to the ability of supervisors and supervisees to relate to each other to achieve the objectives of supervision, regardless of any diversity issues or contextual differences. It involves subtle considerations in interpersonal communication and interaction (Lusk et al., 2017).

Cultural competence is a sincere and humble way of embracing diversity between the supervisor and supervisee during the supervisory process. The existence of diversity is necessary for achieving cultural competence (Tsui et al., 2014). Thus, diversity must be identified, addressed, valued and respected in a positive supervisory relationship. Although gender differences can enhance cultural competence, it can be a challenge in a supervisory relationship if the supervisor and supervisee do not have mutual respect based on gender, thus creating power dynamics. This can potentially be a challenge in South Africa where social work is a female-dominated profession and most supervisors are women (Bradley et al., 2010). Supervisors and supervisees, regardless of their gender orientation, should thus strive to understand each other's qualities and cross-cultural perspective. This is because cultural competence in supervision is based on the strength perspective and assumption that the culture and identity of social workers are among the person's best assets (Engelbrecht, 2021; Lusk et al., 2017).

Promoting collaborative partnership in supervision

Supervisors fulfil an array of roles, which include being an administrator, educator, expert, motivator, enabler, broker, mediator and activist. When all these roles are fulfilled, the supervisor can build a trusting relationship with the supervisee. However, supervisors often tend to focus more on being administrators and experts than on the role of activist or enabler (Engelbrecht, 2019b). The role of clinical supervisor requires a more collaborative process, working *with* rather than adopting a hierarchical position *over* supervisees. Supervisors who are mindful of the impact of power and authority often consider how they position themselves in relation to their supervisees so that they do not adopt a top-down approach. This kind of mindfulness could be influenced by their shared professional identity as social workers and the professional values that seek to respect and empower others (Wong Yuh Ju, 2014).

To *promote collaboration*, it is critical to negotiate a supervision agreement, which forms the basis of the nature of the relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee at the beginning of the supervision process (Ellis, 2017). Whilst supervision agreements are useful, they have a flipside influenced by managerialism where a business model of negotiating the supervision process may be adopted rather than a humanistic and collaborative stance. To minimise the managerial influence, a supervision agreement should foster partnership between a supervisor and supervisee, instead of merely being a tick-box exercise expected by the employer. Therefore, the supervision process must provide a safe and supportive environment for reflecting on practice and making ethical and informed decisions based on collaboration between the supervisor and supervisee.

Avoiding harmful supervision through ubuntu

Trust is an important element in the supervisory relationship. The development of trust is dependent on the supervisees' perception of safety instead of harmful supervision (Wong Yuh Ju, 2014). Kaiser (1997:21) defines safety as "the supervisees' freedom to make mistakes and to take risks without the danger of an excessively judgmental response from the supervisors". Harmful supervision occurs in situations where action, or inaction, on the part of the supervisor causes psychological, emotional and/or physical harm to the supervisee (Beddoe, 2010).

Supervisors and supervisees have a responsibility to safeguard against harmful supervision by embracing the principle of *ubuntu*. One way of doing this is to give and receive constructive feedback from each other regularly. Ammirati and Kaslow (2017) postulate that responsiveness to feedback involves ongoing, open and two-way communication that is timely and honest, and entails the communication of negative information without demeaning supervisees or putting them on the defensive.

6

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Another way to avoid harmful supervision practices is to develop an adequate structure by explicitly articulating the supervisory model that will guide the relationship (Ellis, 2017). Thus, to safeguard the well-being of both parties, mechanisms for supervisees to report harmful supervisory practices need to be in place for adequate support and assistance in managing such situations.

Recognising the well-being of supervisors and supervisees

Recognising the well-being of supervisors and supervisees is important given the nature of social work practice and the stresses associated with working in under-resourced contexts in South Africa. Given that supervision can have an influence on social workers' job satisfaction, if provided effectively, supervision has the potential to be a protective factor in reducing social workers' vulnerability to burnout. The supervisor is – and should be – the most appropriate resource for dealing with stressors, otherwise supervisees are left to struggle on their own (Calitz et al., 2014). Perumal and Tanga (2020) concur that a supervisor plays an important role in supporting supervisees when they experience stress and trauma, thereby enhancing self-preservation and preventing burnout.

Livni, Crowe and Gonsalvez (2012) found that perceived supervision effectiveness and positive supervisory alliance were associated with lower levels of burnout and higher levels of well-being and job satisfaction. Livni et al. (2012) found that supervision can have a significant positive effect on the supervisee's functioning and well-being when supervision involves a supervisory alliance. A constructive alliance between the supervisor and supervisee and practicing supportive function have proven to be critical components of supervision that strengthen the supervisory relationship. Congruent to this is the principle of *ubuntu* that strives for a humanistic approach to develop a trusting supervisory relationship.

Supervisors and supervisees need to promote their well-being and self-care to manage the increasing demands and constant changes in the operationalisation of social services (Pretorius, 2020). Some of the strategies for self-care that can be employed by supervisors and supervisees include self-compassion by engaging in fun hobbies to rejuvenate, identifying support systems outside the organisation, and mindfulness that improves clarity and perspective of one's surroundings (Perumal & Tanga, 2020; Pretorius, 2020). A study by Perumal and Tanga (2020) revealed that social workers keep their diaries and plan their work in advance as a strategy to gain a sense of control over their workloads, which contributes to a sense of well-being. All these strategies are aimed at building psychological resilience and positive capacity within a supervisory relationship.

CONCLUSION

Although challenges arising from the global neoliberal discourse affect social work supervision with its managerial focus on control, performance management and accountability, its power and influence still lie within the supervisory relationship. A supervisory relationship needs to be considerate of gender, culture and the context within which supervision is being carried out. However, managerialism has failed to acknowledge the importance of the emotional life of human beings and, more specifically, the significance of humanistic supervisory relationships. Change is needed to place sound relationships at the heart of supervision if social workers are to enhance the quality of services and promote the well-being of service users.

Social work training institutions and all practitioners have a role to play in this as social work champions promoting trust, integrity, justice, equity and fairness within supervisory relationships. Although the training of social work is generic and can arguably not prepare social workers to assume a supervisory role, social work education in South Africa needs to be responsive to equipping students with supervision knowledge that encourages reflective practices in social work supervision. Such foundational knowledge can help develop social workers' grounding to become reflective practitioners and supervisors, leading to effective supervision practices. Therefore, social work researchers and practitioners alike are compelled to pass on a scholarly theoretical body of knowledge and practice experience by instilling effective supervision practices to convey the nature of this professional activity entrenched within the social work profession.

This chapter reveals that the tick-box approach to supervision influenced by the neoliberal agenda can position supervisors and supervisees as enemies due to the pressure to comply with administrative tasks that emphasise quantity over quality. The chapter also shows the centrality of person-centred supervision practices and the need to return to the fundamental values of care, *ubuntu* and social justice that place the person rather than quantity at the centre of both social work practice and social work supervision. It is further espoused in this chapter that each challenge within a supervisory relationship can be addressed by adopting the relevant supervision values and by applying a set of strategies discussed. Thus, the strategies proposed in this chapter will assist in building a trusting relationship between supervisor and supervisee that promotes supervisory alliance rather than animosity.

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