

The Janus face of supervision – quality control or learning? A study of supervision of employees in the Norwegian Child welfare service

Torill Moe, Kjell Aage Gotvassli, Gunn Helen Wikan & Anita Skårstad Storhaug

To cite this article: Torill Moe, Kjell Aage Gotvassli, Gunn Helen Wikan & Anita Skårstad Storhaug (05 Nov 2023): The Janus face of supervision – quality control or learning? A study of supervision of employees in the Norwegian Child welfare service, Nordic Social Work Research, DOI: [10.1080/2156857X.2023.2278631](https://doi.org/10.1080/2156857X.2023.2278631)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/2156857X.2023.2278631>



© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 05 Nov 2023.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 263



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

The Janus face of supervision – quality control or learning? A study of supervision of employees in the Norwegian Child welfare service

Torill Moe^a, Kjell Aage Gotvassli^b, Gunn Helen Wikan^a and Anita Skårstad Storhaug^a

^aRegional Centre for Child and Youth Mental Health and Child Welfare, Department of Mental Health, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, Norway; ^bFaculty of Social Sciences, Nord University, Levanger, Norway

ABSTRACT

Supervision of employees in child welfare services (CWS) has many functions. Developments in recent years show that the function of supervision as an instrument for quality control has been strengthened. This can weaken the function of supervision as a source of learning and development. It appears that there is relatively little research on how managers and employees in the CWS perceive the balance between supervision as quality control, and supervision as a means of developing the CWS into a service that can continuously improve its practice, and become a learning organization. In our research we focus on in what way can supervision of employees in the CWS contribute to quality development and learning? We have interviewed both Child Welfare Managers and employees in Norwegian CWS. Both parts agree that case supervision is important for quality control, but this must be balanced against the need for a critical voice in supervision, and learning from each other in collective learning processes, where process supervision can play a very important role. In the Norwegian CWS, the employees in particular believe that process supervision must be better safeguarded than what they experience in current practice.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 7 August 2023
Accepted 28 October 2023

KEYWORDS

Supervision of employees; supervision functions; learning organization; child welfare service; organizational change

Introduction

The supervision of employees has had a central position in social work for a long time (Mo et al. 2021). In 2022, the Norwegian Child Welfare Act (Section 15–2) enshrined that municipalities have a duty to provide supervision to employees, and that employees are obliged to participate in the supervision. However, the law says nothing about the form and scope of the supervision. Supervision has a number of different purposes. In his classic text, Kadushin (1992) identified three main functions: administrative, educational and supportive. However, developments in recent years show that the function of supervision as an administrative instrument for the assessment and quality control of the work has been strengthened (Julien-Chinn and Lietz 2019).

There seems to be disagreement among researchers about the effect of supervision of employees in the Child Welfare Service (CWS). Several studies highlight supervision as being important for employees to thrive and feel safe in their jobs (Kruzich, Mienko, and Courtney 2014), to manage their workload (Kadushin and Harkness 2014; Mandell et al. 2013) and to prevent turnover from

CONTACT Kjell Aage Gotvassli  kjell.a.gotvassli@nord.no

© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

the profession (Chiller and Crisp 2012; Kruzich, Mienko, and Courtney 2014; Toros and LaSala 2019). However, other studies do not find any association between supervision and turnover (Strolin-Goltzman et al. 2008). Several studies show that supervision can have positive effects in the form of better coping skills for child welfare employees who are exposed to negative influences of working with challenging issues such as violence, abuse and traumatized children (Baugerud 2019; Boyas and Wind 2010; Molnar et al. 2020). Some studies also highlight potential negative effects of supervision. At the organizational level, it is argued that supervision can have a preservative effect. A dependency relationship can develop between the supervisor and the employee, and this, in turn, can lead to the cementing of existing practice, rather than a critical reflection related to one's own practice (Schein 1999).

Case and process supervision

It is common to distinguish between *case* supervision and *process* supervision (Eriksen and Sætre 2011, 230; Kvello 2014, 159). *Case* supervision deals with specific cases, and what employees can do to find good solutions in those cases. *Process* supervision is about stimulating the individual's development as a professional and reflecting on one's own practice (Kvello 2014, 160). Jones (2016) and Karvinen-Niinikoski (2016) point out that supervision of employees has taken a turn towards case supervision that will ensure prudence in case processing, and thus become a strong indicator for quality control (Webb 2001).

The function of supervision as a reflection on practice and the development of new practice is therefore reduced in favour of a control function. This is confirmed in other studies (Beddoe 2010; Munro 2011; Rankine et al. 2018). It is claimed that the supervision of CWS employees is in danger of being reduced to the management of risk and bureaucratic requirements, which is reflected in the fact that managers mainly focus on task-oriented case supervision.

Research objectives

It appears that there is relatively little research on how managers and employees in the CWS perceive the balance between supervision as quality control, and supervision as a means of developing the CWS into a service that can continuously improve its practice and develop the CWS into a learning organization. Based on this, we have the following research question in our study:

In what way can supervision of employees in the CWS contribute to quality development and learning?

More specifically, we will investigate this by addressing the following research questions:

- (1) Which functions are emphasized in the supervision of employees in the Norwegian CWS – seen from the perspective of managers and employees?
- (2) How can the supervision of employees contribute to the development of the CWS as a learning organization?

In the title of the article, we have used the metaphor of the Janus face, which refers to the Roman god Janus – the guardian of the gates and tents of ancient Rome, and a symbol of both entry and exit. The Janus face symbolizes everything that is divided and ambiguous – both the positive and negative aspects of a cause or action. The purpose is thus to investigate how managers and employees in the Norwegian CWS perceive which functions, both negative and positive effects, to be central in the supervision of employees, and whether the supervision promotes the development of a learning organization.

Norwegian CWS

Each Norwegian municipality is obliged to have a CWS, which is responsible for assessing referrals, implementing supportive measures in the home, and when necessary, out-of-home placements. Each CWS is led by a CWS Manager who leads a different number of CWS employees. Larger services are often organized in teams, so it is primarily team leaders who follow up the employees with supervision. Our study includes interviews with both managers and employees in the Norwegian CWS.

Theoretical perspectives – CWS as a learning organization

Many point out that employees in the CWS now, to a far greater extent than before, are faced with demands for continuous change (Beddoe 2010; Coulshed and Orme 2006; Gould 2000). In Norway, public bodies such as the Norwegian Board of Health Supervision (Helsetilsynet 2012, 2022) have strongly criticized the quality of the CWS's work. According to the Norwegian Board of Health Supervision the CWS does not conduct the investigations sufficiently thoroughly. The preparatory work for the new Child Welfare Act in Norway in 2021 (Prop. 106 L (2012–2013) states that the CWS shall be a learning organization, and this sets requirements for leadership in the CWS. The need for the child welfare services to develop into learning organizations is a development that is in line with international research in this area (Gould and Baldwin 2016; McPeat and Butler 2014). However, no further explanations have been given as to what the term 'CWS as a learning organization' entails. We will therefore take a closer look at the concept of learning organization (Baldwin 2016, 41–55; Gotvassli 2020, 101–114).

A key perspective on learning in organizations is that it takes place through individual cognitive learning, where concepts such as organizational memory and mental models of organizational learning are also used (Pedler, Burgoyne, and Boydell 1997). Kolb (1984, 1996) argues that learning in organization's is a circular process that encompasses four stages of learning and that constantly spirals. The first stage to pass through is *concrete experience* through action. The next stage is *reflection*, where the person analyses the experience – often as collective reflection – from as many perspectives as possible, and reflects on what it means. The data from the reflection is the starting point for a *generalization* of the concepts, where one tries to structure and generalize the experiences and abstract these into new theories and hypotheses. These shared reflections can then, in turn, lead to a collective change of understandings, leading to new *active experimentation* and new *shared learning*. This active experimentation, reflecting on goals, values and alternative ways of acting, is described by Argyris and Schön (1978) as *double-loop learning*. The simplest form of learning is referred to as *single-loop learning*, which is about simple error correction in the form of behaviour to achieve the desired result, without questioning goals and values. Single-loop learning does not promote new knowledge, so it is therefore essential to learn double-loop learning to promote the organization as a learning organization. The concept of a learning organization is also linked to informal learning through participation in practice, and reflection and discussion in what is called communities of practice (Elkjar 2005; Elkjar and Wahlgren 2006). In this reflection and discussion of practice it seems that process supervision plays a significant role (Lave 1999; Wenger 1998; Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder 2002).

Some of the literature on learning in organizations can be said to be *descriptive* in that it is concerned with identifying and describing how learning in organizations takes place (Örtenblad 2002; Wenger 1998). A significant part of the literature is *normative*, it provides clear advice on how to become a learning organization. Senge (1990) and Garvin (1993) have developed an ideal model with recipes for how an organization can develop into a learning organization. Senge's (1990) definition of a learning organization emphasizes continuous development, collective ambition and learning together. Senge's (1990, 1994) argues that organizations should be governed through creative tensions, and not through one-sided problem-solving. Creative tensions arise when there

is a distance between the organization's vision and objectives, and reality. The proactive attitude will facilitate a culture of wonder and according to Senge, this is achieved through five disciplines: personal mastery, shared visions, mental models of a desired future, learning in teams and systems thinking.

A critical look at the learning organization

Many have been critical of transferring the concept of a learning organization to social work. Gould and Baldwin (2016, 2) argues that the concept of the learning organization is originated in response to the needs of commercial enterprises under conditions of market turbulence. Doubts have also been raised about the scientific basis for what can be perceived as normative recommendations for methods of working. Tsang (1997) points out that Senge's model with five elements have only to a very limited extent been subject to empirical testing, and that the occurrence and strength of any synergies between the five disciplines constitute theoretical speculations. Another unresolved question is whether learning ability increases steadily with position in each of the five disciplines, or whether there is an optimum level. For example, there is reason to assume that, if the mental models become too similar, some of the cognitive variation that otherwise seems to contribute to new insights through creative group processes will disappear. A final point for which Senge is criticized is the absence of discussion of power and conflicts in organizations (Fielding 2001). In Senge's portrayal, organizations appear as *utopian sunshine*, characterized by harmony that presupposes agreement on goals, and that the organization members are prepared to learn together (Caldwell 2012; Granberg and Ohlsson 2014, 81–86).

Collective learning processes and supervision in child welfare

The theoretical basis for the development of CWS as a learning organization is linked to the development of collective work practices and critical reflection on own practice. In this section, we will briefly look at some studies that can give us some knowledge about such practices in the CWS. A review of all issues of the Norwegian journals *Norges barnevern* and *Fontene Forskning* from 2009 to 2021 shows that the topics of learning organization, supervision and collective working practices are hardly touched upon in these journals. We have found four articles that are relevant to our research question on supervision as a basis for employees' reflection on their own practice as a basis for learning and the development of the CWS as a learning organization. The articles of Hoverak and Gjedrem (2010), Heggen and Dahl (2017), Olsvik and Saus (2019) and Jørgensen and Heggen (2020) all argue that professional judgement in the CWS is strongly influenced by collective supervision and collegial discussions. This can be a strength if it leads to different points of view being presented and discussed, which is referred to as corrective discussion practice. However, such discussion practices can also be stabilizing in the sense that a person becomes locked into certain perceptions influenced by previous experiences at an early stage, and that there is little room for a critical voices.

Internationally, there is not much research addressing the terms *supervision* and *learning organization* used in the context of *child protection services* or *social work services*. One exception is the anthology *Social Work, Critical Reflection, and the Learning Organization* (Gould and Baldwin 2016), which shows the relevance of the concept of the learning organization and the development of better services through supervision characterized by sharing experiences, critical reflection and collective learning processes. The works of McPeat and Butler (2014) show that many employees do not feel supported to take risks, and neither are they encouraged to develop innovative practice; mistakes are not used as learning opportunities, and a culture of blame is felt to exist. The same is also shown by Turner-Daly and Jack (2014) and Julien-Chinn and Lietz (2019). Beddoe (2010) also states that employees in the CWS want supervision that is more characterized by intellectual refreshment, critical reflection and acknowledging successful work as priorities.

The function of supervision – control or learning?

The concept of the learning organization is based on a basic understanding that the development of learning is linked to sharing experiences and critical reflection on one's own practice. The question then becomes what role supervision of employees can have in their sharing of experiences and critically reflecting on their own practice.

Storhaug et al. (2022) have conducted a rapid review of studies concerning supervision in Nordic CWSs. The study shows that most of the supervision is related to specific cases – referred to as *case supervision*, whilst employees express a need for supervision of a different nature related to *process supervision*. There is a particular call for supervision where one reflects on one's own role, and which contributes to critical reflection, professional development and increased confidence in the professional role.

The importance of process supervision is also a topic that features in several studies. Turner-Daly and Jack (2014) and Toros and LaSala (2019) are concerned with the importance of child welfare staff receiving supervision that contributes to self-reflection and helps them to understand their own thoughts, feelings and reactions related to their work. This, they claim, can improve child welfare decision-making efforts. Additional studies (Beddoe 2010; Julien-Chinn and Lietz 2019; Munro 2011; Rankine et al. 2018), show that supervision of child welfare employees is at risk of being reduced to managing risk and bureaucratic requirements, as expressed by managers focusing mainly on case supervision. In line with this, Jones (2016, 10–22) shows how supervision of CWS staff has been coloured by a neo-liberal trend towards supervision as an important part of the quality control of social services.

Beddoe (2010) and Karvinen-Niinikoski (2016, 23–39) argue that there is a danger that reflection on one's own practice becomes reactive and mechanical rather than reflexive. To safeguard critical reflection related to one's own practice, one must allow space in supervision to explore employees' insecurities and complicated feelings related to work. Research shows that supervision of employees can be an important tool for coping with changes in the child welfare services (Storhaug et al. 2023). However, both Norwegian and international research indicates that the form and content of supervision have shifted towards case supervision, which means that, in the supervision of employees, emphasis is often placed on a review of cases and control of the legality of case reviews and decisions (Karvinen-Niinikoski 2016, 30–31; Storhaug et al. 2022). A dilemma often arises in the supervision of employees. On the one hand, supervision is an important quality control, but too strong a focus on quality control makes it difficult to ensure the development of employees who both individually and collectively critically reflect on their own practice (Jones 2016, 19–21). Fook, Ryan and Hawkins (1997) formulate that this is about both safeguarding the possibility of using professional judgement and at the same time safeguarding prudence in decisions – and accountability. It is this ambiguity – the 'Janus face' of the supervision – that we wish to examine more closely in our study of how Norwegian CWS managers and employees view the purpose and function of supervision.

Research design

Our data material consists of group interviews with employees and managers in municipal CWS. This study is part of a larger study consisting of a rapid literature review (Storhaug et al. 2022), and a survey to the entire population of child welfare managers in Norway (Storhaug et al. 2023). The survey was answered by 141 leaders (response rate 61%). One of the findings from the survey was that the supervision of employees was both individual and in groups. The main focus in individual supervision is reported to be professional issues in specific cases, followed by emotional stress in the work. While in group supervision the focus is mainly on process supervision, with emphasis to both emotional stress and role understanding. When constructing the interview study, we drew

inspiration from both the literature review findings and the survey results, specially the differences between use of case- and process supervision. Such an approach can be termed an ‘explanatory procedure’, in that the study first has a quantitative phase, where the results need to be elaborated and explained by being followed up in a qualitative phase (Blaikie 2010, 224).

The group interviews of 16 child welfare managers consisted of interviews with 2–5 participants, divided into 5 group interviews. There was 14 women and 2 men. They had about 10–30 years’ work experience from CWS, mostly as managers. We also conducted 4 group interviews with a total of 14 employees in the services, 13 women and 1 man. They had typically 5–10 years’ work experience from CWS, mostly as case handlers. In both recruiting welfare managers and employees we had in mind recruiting from both large and smaller services and geographical spread. Two separate semi-structured interview guides were prepared for managers and employees. The interview guides were structured according to the following themes: information about the informant and the CWS; practice related to individual and group supervision; the scope of supervision, supervisory competence; routines for supervision; and finally, experiences of supervision. Due to the large geographical spread of the informants, the interviews were conducted digitally via Teams.

The interviews were conducted by one or two researchers, recorded via the application *Diktafon*, and transcribed by a professional transcriber.

Ethical considerations

The anonymity of the informants was safeguarded in the study. SIKT (the Norwegian knowledge sector’s service provider) has assessed that the processing of data in the project is sound. The child welfare managers and the employees were sent a letter containing information about the purpose of the study, the safeguarding of privacy, and the processing and use of information and results.

Strengths and limitations of the data

The informants in the interview survey were from services that represent a wide range of geographical locations, sizes and organizations. We found that both managers and employees were nuanced and open in the interviews about their own experiences with supervision. In the study, we have strived for a form of naturalistic generalization (Tjora 2019, 148), whereby we provide sufficient details of the study, so to enable the reader to assess the extent to which the results will be valid. We have tried to achieve this by showing how we selected participants for the interviews, developed the interview guide and conducted the interviews. We have also emphasized conceptual generalization, which means that through qualitative research we can develop concepts, typologies or theories that may be relevant to cases other than those we have described (Simons 2009, 162–170; Tjora 2019). Therefore, through a presentation and analysis of the data, we have tried to provide insight into how we have worked to point out some patterns in the material, and how this can provide answers to our research question.

Analysis strategy

The analyses were inspired by Braun and Clarke’s (2021) thematic analysis, which consisted of an alternately inductive and deductive approach. The thematic analysis process focused on 1) *topics that were identified in the material through an inductive process*, and 2) *the research questions in the project through a deductive process*. We used NVivo (version 1.6.1) as a tool for the analysis process. Examples of codes in the first round of classification: ‘manager’s role in supervision’, ‘individual vs group supervision’, ‘internal vs external supervisor’, ‘case supervision vs process supervision’, and ‘what is good supervision?’ Everything from the various interviews that was classified under each individual code was then gathered into overarching themes where we saw that different codes belonged together, and then summarized and printed as a total analytical text.

Analysis of the data

Here we will present the key findings from the interviews with employees and managers. We will highlight the identity of the target group for supervision and which functions are emphasized in the supervision of employees in the Norwegian CWS. We will also illuminate how supervision can contribute to quality development and learning.

Case supervision, monitoring of emotional strains and reflection

Our material shows that supervision takes place both individually and in groups. Individual supervision is often carried out by team leader or the CWS manager. The main focus of individual supervision is described by both managers and employees as being mainly related to case supervision in specific cases, and monitoring emotional strain in the work. In group supervision, there is great emphasis on reflection on one's own practice, emotional strain, understanding of roles, professional safety and the working environment. We also find that process supervision in groups can be provided by an external supervisor. In many cases, this is a psychologist or an experienced social worker, who are not employed by the CWS. What is highlighted as a particularly positive experience of the use of external supervisors is that the employee gains an outsider's view of their own practice: *'When it comes to professional issues, an external supervisor can help to see the case from other sides and shed light on issues that have not been elucidated.'*

Both managers and employees maintain that process supervision in groups can provide good opportunities for collective reflection, and an opportunity for discussion about alternative practices. Managers, however, seem to make less use of participation in such reflections, but may need to obtain such information from an external supervisor or other opportunities. It also emerges from the interviews that some child welfare managers have regular follow-up meetings with an external supervisor in order to capture precisely such professional discussions, which have taken place during the supervision with an external supervisor. In the interviews, we also found that the use of an external supervisor often is insufficiently linked to strategies, goals, plans and professional development in the CWS.

The purpose of supervision - quality control versus critical reflection on practice

According to both managers and employees, the *purpose* of supervision is to provide advice on assessments and decisions, and for those being supervised to reflect on their own practice and learn from it. A widely used form of supervision is case supervision, which primarily deals with decisions and how to perform the work in individual cases with a focus on prudence and legal protection. Case supervision largely entails professional follow-up, but with room to explore how the employee is feeling. The control aspect is also described as an important purpose of supervision, as a means of ensuring the quality of case processing, related to prudence requirements and internal control.

Both managers and employees feel that it is important that supervision can ensure that they comply with the legislation, that families receive qualified help, and that contact with the CWS is positive. One manager expresses herself as follows: *'It's a way for me to have both a little bit of control over things, and a little bit of internal control, prudence requirements and to be able to follow along then'*. In this way, the supervision is used as a form of *internal control*. Many employees also find it reassuring that supervision also functions as a kind of control so that they are not alone in their responsibility.

In the *process supervision* of both individual employees and groups of employees, the focus is more on critical reflection on practice, personal and professional development, and reducing the risk of burnout and secondary traumatization. The managers are concerned with both the

individual employee's development and the development of the group as a whole, with a greater degree of collective practice and learning, and good interaction. Several managers believe that supervision should contribute to critical reflection on their own practice, and ensuring that employees do not feel that they are alone in their job:

Supervision should lead to development – personal and professional – that provides security in being in the job, in meeting people in crisis, and in the lives of the children we will be there for. To handle the job, and to be out in the field, you must be allowed to get more reflection [...] I think that critical reflection and ethical assessment are so important in this job, because there's so much discretion.

The employees also believe that the process supervision should contribute to professional development and increased competence. It is also important that employees feel empowered and confident in their own assessments – or, as one leader puts it: *'I think that supervision is also about development, and in a way having the will to develop and that you can learn from things. Right?'*

Several employees talk about process supervision being a lot about well-being, about critically assessing and further developing their own practice and safeguarding, so that they are able to stay in their jobs. The managers also point out the importance of employees not feeling that they are alone in their work, and that it is important to facilitate employee safety and also to contribute to critical reflection of their own practice.

It is also interesting that several of the managers emphasize the importance of a greater degree of collective practice and learning, as well as good interaction:

The purpose must be for the employee to be able to reflect, both on their own part and together with others, which will mean that good solutions can be found in cases. The goal is to have employees who can master their tasks, and who take with them not only the guidance in the specific case, but also what has transfer value in other cases.

A clear challenge that emerges in our study is to balance the relationship between supervision as an aid to quality control through case review, and supervision as an aid to learning and development. In many ways, this represents the Janus face of supervision. Some employees describe discussing cases as a form of case supervision, while others do not regard this as supervision: *If there were to be supervision, I think you should have sat down and spent more time saying like, well, what would have happened if you had done that, and so on*

The managers are also concerned that the objectives of supervision are complex:

One is, in a way, professional support. There is a form of internal control as well. I think that case reviews are not only a professional support for case processing, but also an internal control in relation to achieving the goals we are supposed to reach with the families, etc. [...] So there's a lot of different ones – looking after employees, secure professional development and taking care of cases.

The difference between case and process supervision

In summary, we can say that, in the supervision of employees, one can distinguish between individual employees and groups of employees. The second dimension indicates the type of supervision that is provided and what function it is intended to have. Here we have chosen to distinguish between case supervision and process supervision. By combining these dimensions, we get a matrix that says something about the different functions that the supervision seems to fulfil (Figure 1).

Figure 1 shows the main features of our analysis of the interviews. Firstly, the supervision of the employees is both about individual supervision and supervision of groups of employees. One finding is that child welfare managers are more engaged in individual supervision than in group supervision. In many cases, the latter is handled by external supervisors. The second dimension shows that supervision can be either case supervision or process supervision. *Case supervision* deals

Discussion and implications

We have studied the supervision of employees in the Norwegian CWS, focusing on which supervisory functions are emphasized by managers and employees. Furthermore, we wanted to look at how the supervision of employees can contribute to the development of the CWS as a learning organization. According to Wadel (2008), learning in an organization involves creating a culture of learning and development, and organizational conditions that facilitate learning. Gould and Baldwin (2016) and Julien-Chinn and Lietz (2019) argue that continuous sharing of experience, critical reflection, collective learning processes and a culture of learning are important for developing the CWS into a learning organization. These are important points for child welfare leaders to consider in their supervision of employees in order to create a learning organization. In relation to these requirements for the child welfare service to become a learning organization, we ask ourselves which role the supervision of employees in the Norwegian CWS has.

Firstly, both managers and employees state that the supervision of employees is an important element in the development of competent employees, who must master constant changes and complex tasks. Secondly, managers seem to view case supervision and quality control as an important function to a greater extent than employees.

The employees emphasize the importance of process supervision that not only focuses on the status quo but that also challenges common perceptions and understandings of the challenges they face in their daily work. The relationship between case and process supervision as it appears in our data provides a good representation of what Wadel (2008) refers to as reproductive and productive management. Reproductive management is concerned with specific knowledge, skills and solutions. Productive management is more concerned with creating reflection than specific answers. Here, the focus will also be on initiating reflection on the existing values and practices in the CWS – a double-loop learning (Argyris & Schön, 1978). The type of leadership and supervision exercised in an organization is important for the kind of learning culture that is developed (Frey, Schmitt, and Allen 2012). Attention to case supervision or process supervision will contribute to the development of two different learning cultures, referred to as fact culture and wonder culture (Wadel 2008). The former is characterized by maintaining stability and the status quo in the organization. The strength of the culture of wonder is that it has a greater capacity for reflection and can lead to an organization that is more concentrated on change and innovation. Our study clearly shows that both managers and employees are aware of this issue, but nevertheless, managers emphasize the importance of case supervision as a form of internal control to a greater extent than the employees.

Thirdly, many – especially employees – highlight the need for group supervision that can help to foster a workplace learning culture (Filstad 2014; Marsick 1987). In such a form of supervision, one can critically reflect on one's own practice and learn from each other's experiences. This appears to be very important when the CWS is facing increasingly stringent demands for change and must make complex decisions. Jones (2016, 21) states that, in creating new practices through reinvented forms of supervision and learning, front-line practitioners and managers will be working with changing and uncertain contexts. As we see it, the importance of supervision in organizational learning can be seen in the emphasis on experiential learning and tacit knowledge and the opportunity to learn from that knowledge through reflection, but also in the function of supervision of looking after the well-being of the practitioners in stressful work contexts.

Fourthly, many of the interviewees – both managers and employees – admit that it is difficult to balance the relationship between case supervision, which has a strong element of control, and process supervision, which is aimed at learning and development. Collective reflection on experiences with the goal of learning can be difficult to achieve if supervision of employees primarily concerns internal control and quality assurance.

As we have seen, managers in particular are concerned with this function when supervising employees. The employees also see such a need, but they are clear that this must not stand in the way of supervision related to continuous development and change of the daily work in the CWS – that the CWS should become a learning organization.

Working towards becoming a learning organization

If the supervision of employees is to have a strong role in the development of the CWS as a learning organization, it appears that there are a number of factors that need to be worked on. Firstly, a better balance must be struck between case supervision and process supervision. We have used the metaphor of the Janus face to represent this duality in the function of supervision. Our data shows that employees in particular feel that the CWS as an organization is too vague in relation to this ambiguity. Secondly, we would argue that, for supervision to be an element in the development of the CWS as a learning organization, it would seem to be particularly important that the services have a conscious attitude to the purpose of supervision within their organization. It is also important to have good structures and a systematic approach to supervision. This means being aware of the distinction between different forms and purposes of supervision. This applies in particular to case supervision as a control mechanism to help the service comply with legal requirements and guidelines, and supervision that facilitates a professional development process. Although specific cases are an important area in which to provide supervision, it is important that the services are aware that professional reflection through process supervision is also given priority. Targeted and systematic supervision is important for developing the CWS as a learning organization that is development-oriented and that has systems to ensure quality in the service. Thirdly, the results of the group interviews show that there are some areas that stand out as important in the work on developing supervision for employees in the Norwegian CWS. Key factors for facilitating good supervision practice are management support, and structure and systematics, which means that there is a plan for the supervision, in terms of both the timing and the content of the supervision.

In this article, we wanted to look at some aspects of supervision of employees in the Norwegian CWS – focusing particularly on the tension between case supervision and process supervision. Case supervision is important for legality and legitimacy, but our point is that this must be balanced against the need for a critical voice in supervision, and not least learning from each other in collective learning processes, where process supervision can play a very important role. In the Norwegian CWS, the employees in particular believe that this function of supervision must be better safeguarded than what they experience in current practice.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

References

- Argyris, C., and D. Schön. 1978. *Organizational Learning. A Theory of Action Perspective*. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley.
- Baldwin, M. 2016. "Critical Reflection: Opportunities and Threats to Professional Learning and Service Development in Social Work." In *Social Work, Critical Reflection and the Learning Organization*, edited by N. Gould and M. Baldwin, 41–57. New York: Routledge.
- Baugerud, G. A. 2019. "Barnevernet som arbeidsplass: en kilde til jobbtilfredsstillelse eller stressrelaterte belastninger? [Child welfare as a workplace: a source of job satisfaction or stress-related stress?]." *Tidsskriftet Norges barnevern* 96 (4): 230–245. <https://doi.org/10.18261/ISSN.1891-1838-2019-04-03>.
- Beddoe, L. 2010. "Surveillance or Reflection: Professional Supervision in 'The Risk society'." *The British Journal of Social Work* 40 (4): 1279–1296. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcq018>.

- Blaikie, N. 2010. *Analyzing Quantitative Data : From Description to Explanation*. London: Sage Publications.
- Boyas, J., and L. H. Wind. 2010. "Employment-Based Social Capital, Job Stress, and Employee Burnout: A Public Child Welfare Employee Structural Model." *Children and Youth Services Review* 32 (3): 380–388. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2009.10.009>.
- Braun, V., and V. Clarke. 2021. *Thematic Analysis. A Practical Guide*. London: Sage Publications.
- Caldwell, C. 2012. *Moral Leadership : A Transformative Model for Tomorrow's Leaders*. Hvard: Business Expert Press.
- Chiller, P., and B. R. Crisp. 2012. "Professional Supervision: A Workforce Retention Strategy for Social Work?" *Australian Social Work* 65 (2): 232–242. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0312407X.2011.625036>.
- Coulshed, V., and J. Orme. 2006. *Social Work Practice*. 4th ed. London: Palgrave.
- Elkjar, B. 2005. *Når læring går på arbejde [When learning goes to work]*. København: Samfundslitteratur.
- Elkjar, B., and B. Wahlgren. 2006. "Organizational Learning and Workplace Learning. Similarities and Differences." In *Learning, Working and Living*, edited by E. Antonacopoulou, P. Jarvis, B. Elkjar, S. Hoyrup, and V. Andersen, 15–32. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Eriksen, I., and I. Sætre. 2011. "Ivaretagelse av hjelperen – forebygging og håndtering av sekundærtraumatisering [Safeguarding the helper – prevention and management of secondary traumatization." In *Barn som lever med vold i familien. Grunnlag for beskyttelse og hjelp [Children living with violence in the family. Basis for protection and assistance]*, edited by U. H. Heltne and P. Ø. Steinsvåg, 219–234. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Fielding, M. 2001. "Learning Organisation or Learning Community? A Critique of Senge." *Philosophy of Management* 1 (2): 17–29. <https://doi.org/10.5840/pom20011211>.
- Filstad, C. 2014. "The Politics of Sensemaking and Sensegiving at Work." *Journal of Workplace Learning* 26 (1): 2014 pp. 3–21. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JWL-03-2012-0016>.
- Fook, J., M. Ryan, and L. Hawkins. 1997. "Towards a Theory of Social Work Expertise." *The British Journal of Social Work* 27 (3): 399–417. 3 June 1997. <https://org.ezproxy.nord.no/10.1093/oxfordjournals.bjsw.a011220>.
- Frey, B. B., V. L. Schmitt, and J. P. Allen. 2012. "Defining Authentic Classroom Assessment." *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation* 17. Article 2. <https://doi.org/10.7275/sxbs-0829>.
- Garvin, D. A. 1993 juli–august. "Building a Learning Organization." *Harvard Business Review* 71 (4): 78–91.
- Gotvassli, K. A. 2020. *Kunnskap, kunnskapsutvikling og kunnskapsledelse i organisasjoner [Knowledge, knowledge development and knowledge management in organization's]*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.
- Gould, N. 2000. "Becoming a Learning Organization: A Social Work Example." *Social Work Education* 19 (6): 585–596. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02615470020002317>.
- Gould, N., and M. Baldwin. 2016. *Social Work, Critical Reflection and the Learning Organization*. New York: Routledge.
- Granberg, O., and J. Ohlsson. 2014. *Från lärandets loopar till lärande organisationer [From learning loops to learning organisations]*. Stockholm: Studentlitteratur.
- Heggen, K., and S. L. Dahl. 2017. "Barnevernets kunnskapsgrunnlag [The child welfare service's knowledge base]." *Fontene Forskning* 10 (1): 70–83.
- Helsetilsynet. (2012). Oppsummering av landsomfattende tilsyn i 2011 med kommunalt barnevern –undersøkelse og evaluering [Summary of nationwide supervision of municipal child welfare services in 2011 – survey and evaluation]. *Rapport Helsetilsynet 02/2012*. <https://www.helsetilsynet.no/publikasjoner/rapport-fra-helsetilsynet/2012/oppsummering-avlandsomfattende-tilsyn-i-2011-med-kommunalt-barnevern/>.
- Helsetilsynet. (2022). Oppsummering av landsomfattende tilsyn med barnevernets arbeid med undersøkelser 2020–2021. Det handler om ledelse. [It is all about leadership]. *Rapport 2/2022*.
- Hoverak, S., and J. Gjedrem. 2010. "Læring og kunnskapsutvikling i kommunal barneverntjeneste [Learning and knowledge development in municipal child welfare services]." *Fontene Forskning* 2 (10): 39–49.
- Jones, M. 2016. "Supervision, Learning and Transformative Practices." In *Social Work, Critical Reflection and the Learning Organization*, edited by N. Gould and M. Baldwin, 11–22. New York.
- Jørgensen, T., and K. Heggen. 2020. "Det barnevernfaglege skjønnets og verdien av kollegiale drøftingar. [The child welfare professional discretion and the value of collegial deliberations]." *Tidsskriftet Norges barnevern* 97 (4): 236–249. <https://doi.org/10.18261/ISSN.1891-1838-2020-04-02>.
- Julien-Chinn, F. J., and C. A. Lietz. 2019. "Building Learning Cultures in the Child Welfare Workforce." *Children and Youth Services Review* 99:360–365. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2019.01.023>.
- Kadushin, A. 1992. *Supervision in Social Work*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kadushin, A., and D. Harkness. 2014. *Supervision in Social Work*. 5th ed. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Karvinen-Niinikoski, S. 2016. "Social Work Supervision: Contributing to Innovative Knowledge Production and Open Expertise." In *Social Work, Critical Reflection and the Learning Organization*, edited by N. Gould and M. Baldwin, 23–39. New York.
- Kolb, D. A. 1984. *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Kolb, D. A. 1996. *Management and the Learning Process*. edited by I K. Starkey. London: How Organizations Learn. International Thomson Business Press.

- Kruchiz, J. M., J. A. Mienko, and M. E. Courtney. 2014. "Individual and Work Group Influences on Turnover Intention Among Public Child Welfare Workers: The Effects of Work Group Psychological Safety." *Children and Youth Services Review* 42:20–27. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2014.03.005>.
- Kvello, Ø. 2014. "Daglig fagledelse [Day-to-day management]." In *Barnevernledelse. [Child Welfare Management]*, edited by Ø. Kvello and T. Moe, 156–173. Oslo: Gyldendal akademisk.
- Lave, J. 1999. *Learning and Everyday Life. Access, Precipitation, and Changing Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mandell, D., C. Stalker, M. De Zeeuw Wright, K. Frensch, and C. Harvey. 2013. "Sinking, Swimming and Sailing: Experiences of Job Satisfaction and Emotional Exhaustion in Child Welfare Employees." *Child & Family Social Work* 18 (4): 383–393. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2206.2012.00857.x>.
- Marsick, V. 1987. *Learning in the Workplace*. London: Croom Helm.
- McPeat, G., and L. Butler. 2014. "Residential Child Care Agencies as Learning Organisations: Innovation and Learning from Mistakes." *Social Work Education* 33 (2): 240–253. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2013.770833>.
- Molnar, B., S. Meeker, K. Manners, L. Tieszen, L. Kalergis, J. Fine, S. Hallinan, J. Wolfe, and M. Wells. 2020. "Vicarious Traumatization Among Child Welfare and Child Protection Professionals: A Systematic Review." *Child Abuse & Neglect* 110 (3): 104679. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2020.104679>.
- Mo, K. Y., K. O'Donoghue, P. Y. Wong, and M. Tsui. 2021. "The Historical Development of Knowledge in Social Work Supervision: Finding New Directions from the Past." *International Social Work* 64 (2): 187–200. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872819884995>.
- Munro, E. 2011. "The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report. A Child-Centred System." Department for Education. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/munro-review-of-child-protection-final-report-a-child-centred-system>.
- Olsvik, B. S., and M. Saus. 2019. "Skjønn i praktisk barnevernledelse. Kollektiv prosess med organisatoriske begrensninger [Discretion in practical child welfare management. Collective process with organizational constraints]." *Tidsskriftet Norges barnevern* 96 (4): 262–282. <https://doi.org/10.18261/ISSN.1891-1838-2019-04-05>.
- Örtenblad, A. 2002. "A Typology of the Idea of Learning Organization." *Management Learning* 33 (2): 213–230. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350507602332004>.
- Pedler, M., J. Burgoyne, and T. Boydell. 1997. *The Learning Company*. New York: Mc Graw-Hill.
- Rankine, L., L. Beddoe, M. O'Brien, and C. Fouche. 2018. "What's Your Agenda? Reflective Supervision in Community-Based Child Welfare Services." *European Journal of Social Work* 21 (3): s. 428–440. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2017.1326376>.
- Schein, E. 1999. *Process Consultation*. Boston: Adisson – Wesley.
- Senge, P. M. 1990. *The Fifth Discipline. The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. New York: Doubleday Business.
- Senge, P. M. 1994. *The Fifth Discipline Field Book. Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organization*. London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.
- Simons, H. 2009. *Case Study Research in Practice*. London: Sage Publications.
- Storhaug, A., T. Moe, M. T. Singstad, G. H. Wikan, M. S. Grip, and C. Thorhus. 2023. *Lederforankret veiledning. Systematisk veiledning for god kvalitet i tjenesten [Leader-anchored guidance. Systematic guidance for good quality in the service]*. Trondheim: NTNU- RKBU.
- Storhaug, A., T. Moe, G. H. Wikan, and M. T. Og Singstad. 2022. "Systematisk veiledning i det kommunale barnevernet – en kunnskapsoversikt. [Systematic guidance in the municipal child welfare services – a knowledge review]." *Norges barnevern* 99 (4): 168–185. <https://doi.org/10.18261/tnb.99.4.2>.
- Strolin-Goltzman, J., M. McCarthy, B. Smith, J. Caringi, L. Bronstein, and H. Lawson. 2008. "Should I Stay or Should I Go? A Comparison Study of Intentions to Leave Among Public Child Welfare Systems with High and Low Turnover Rates." *Child Welfare* 87 (4): 125–143.
- Tjora, A. 2019. *Qualitative Research as Stepwise-Deductive Induction*. London: Routledge.
- Toros, K., and M. LaSala. 2019. "Child Protection workers' Understanding of the Meaning of Value of Self-Reflection in Estonia." *Reflective Practice* 20 (2): s.266–278. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623943.2019.1588718>.
- Tsang, E. W. K. 1997. "Organizational Learning and the Learning Organization: A Dichotomy Between Descriptive and Prescriptive Research." *Human Relations* 50 (1): 73–89. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001872679705000104>.
- Turner-Daly, B., and G. Jack. 2014. "Rhetoric Vs. Reality in Social Work Supervision: The Experiences of a Group of Child Care Social Workers in England." *Child & Family Social Work* 22 (1): 36–46. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12191>.
- Wadel, C. 2008. *En lærende organisasjon. Et mellommenneskelig perspektiv [A learning organization. An interpersonal perspective]*. Oslo: Høgskoleforlaget.
- Webb, S. 2001. "Some Considerations on the Validity of Evidence-Based Practice in Social Work." *British Journal of Social Work* 31 (1): 579. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/31.1.57>.
- Wenger, E. 1998. *Communities of Practice. Learning, Meaning, and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wenger, E., R. McDermott, and W. M. Snyder. 2002. *Cultivating Communities of Practice*. Harvard: Harvard Business School Press.