

AN ANALYSIS OF THE  
PROCESS OF IMPLEMENTING GROUP  
SUPERVISION IN A CHILD WELFARE AGENCY

Practicum Report  
Presented to  
The Faculty of Graduate Studies  
University of Manitoba

In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Degree  
Master of Social Work

By  
Patricia Neira

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BY

PATRICIA NEIRA

A practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
of the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this practicum was to develop and implement a group supervision process for a small group of social work staff delivering protection services in a large child welfare agency in a northern rural community.

The central issue identified in this practicum was the development and implementation of a strategy which it was hoped would have the effect of concretely supporting social work staff in the performance of their job. The analysis of the process of implementing the group supervision process was based on the definition of effective supervision, group work processes for maintaining and developing a group and factors identified from organizational theory.

The criteria for this practicum were derived from social work supervision and group work literature with the inclusion of some principles of adult education.

The group supervision process was ineffective in supporting fully social work staff members in the time frame of the practicum. Two social work staff resigned during the process of implementing the group supervision. I have argued that in part this was due to both group factors and the organizational context.

Notwithstanding the above, the group supervision process did exhibit some characteristics of group development which in the long run might have the effect of providing support to group members.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This practicum intervention was implemented in a large child welfare agency in a northern rural community, with a unit of social work staff delivering protection services to a small urban centre and its adjacent rural community. 1

Historically the agency had experienced difficulty in delivering protection services to the community it serves. The agency is responsible for delivering child welfare services to a large widespread area which has been often described as approximately the size of the country of France. The population encountered in the area is very diverse. Major ethnic groupings which can be identified are: French, Ukrainian, Anglosaxon, and Canadian Indian people.

The agency is responsible for delivering child welfare services to fourteen Indian reserves. The economy of the area is resource based [mineral and pulp]. The secondary

1 The agency had recently formally changed its name from a children's aid society to child and family services. In this report, I refer to the agency as a child welfare agency since the agency had yet to integrate or adapt the change in philosophy. Therefore service programs at the time of the practicum did not yet encompass the broader concept of child and family services.

industry is tourism, mainly significant in the summer months. These factors have had considerable impact on administrative demands placed on the agency to respond to environmental stressors.

For example, in meeting the child welfare mandate for such a large area, social work staff may need to travel by road for approximately two and one half hours before reaching the small isolated communities to deliver services. Some communities can only be accessed by plane.

The advent of the concept of self-government by Canadian Indian people has also caused considerable adjustment for the agency in delivering child welfare services to the fourteen reserves.

The introduction by the provincial government of new child and family legislation has also increased the demand for greater accountability to the court, thereby increasing the volume of court work encountered. Changes by the provincial government in its overall philosophy of service delivery, such as standards in foster care and child abuse, have added increased expectations on the agency.

Mine closures and major forest fires have also had an impact on community and family functioning. These have contributed to family breakdowns and/or family problems which have required intervention by the agency. The agency had also been characterized by a significant turnover of both social work staff and management staff. The unit of

work where the intervention of group supervision was implemented had experienced a full turnover of both social work staff and supervisors for each of the years of 1986 and 1987. At the onset of this practicum the social work staff were all relatively new to the agency, as will be elaborated in chapter III. All these factors contributed to a sense of social change. When added to a context of fiscal restraint it was difficult for the agency to find a good "fit" with the environment.

The agency had primarily employed an individual model of supervision. Protection units had always used an individual supervision model. The agency had, however, previously encouraged and supported a modified model of group supervision in the delivery and coordination of foster care services.

During my employment history of nine years with the agency, I had held numerous jobs at the middle management level. For example, I held the office of the district foster care coordinator [functional supervision to foster care workers employed by the agency in each of the four branches]. At that time I had supplemented the individual supervisory-consultation sessions, with group meetings of all foster care social work staff. This group of social work staff met regularly for four years, two days of each month. The main task of the group was to develop, coordinate and evaluate foster care services in the overall

service area. This experience gave me an insight into the potential of team work in the implementation and delivery of services in a child welfare agency. Subsequent to 1984 the agency discontinued this pattern of program development and implementation in the delivery of foster services.

In 1986-87 I was the director of the agency's group home. During my short period as supervisor of the child care staff [providing residential counselling to eight children in the care of the agency] I became aware of the limitations of using only individual supervision to administer the group home. I believed that it was necessary for the effectiveness of the programme at the group home that there be consistency among child care staff in the implementation of planned interventions with the children at the group home. In order to accomplish this, I thought it was necessary that the child care staff have an opportunity to meet together regularly to address as a group the difficulties they were having in following up with the planned interventions. Also I hoped that group planning might enable staff to explore alternatives as a group. Further, I assumed that it might improve communication. As an employed, part time MSW student I began to explore the possibility of using this as the basis of my MSW practicum. Thus, the initial group selected for a group supervision practicum had been the child care staff of the agency's group home. However, in early September of 1987 the agency

decided that it would be cheaper to purchase residential services for the children in care rather than providing the services themselves and thus the group home closed. In November of 1987, I was transferred to supervise a social work unit delivering primarily protection services. Thus the MSW practicum, group supervision intervention, was implemented with the social work unit delivering protection services. Social work staff continued to receive individual supervision as required by the agency. The intervention took place in the period January 1988 to April 1988.

I assumed that the development of a social work team had a number of benefits for the agency, the team and for the delivery of child welfare services to the community. I assumed that it would provide an opportunity for social work staff to engage in a critical discussion of the services which they were providing to families and children in the community. In engaging in a critical discussion of services being provided, my assumption was that this process would enable the team to undertake a thorough review of what actions had been taken and what actions were needed in light of social work theory, the community, the agency and more specifically the situation. I visualized this process as requiring from the team the ability to integrate theory and practice and adapt these to each situation in the delivery of child welfare services. In essence then, I believed that a critical discussion by a team, [a group of social work

staff] had greater potential for: critical evaluation of the problem[s] in child welfare work; and also a greater potential for implementation of child welfare interventions which would heighten the positive functioning of families and children which were being served. Freire, [1985, 1978, 1974, 1973, and 1970] refers to this process as a dialectical process of action and reflection. He states:

Theory does not dictate practice, rather it serves to hold practice in order to mediate and critically comprehend the type of praxis needed within a specific setting at a particular time in history. [1985, p. xiii]

The discussion above summarizes in a general way the overall assumptions I foresaw in the implementation of a group supervision intervention which would lead to the development of a social work team. More specifically I assumed that group supervision would have the following benefits in building a social work team: [1] increase the overall knowledge of team members; [2] enhance social work skills of team members; [3] provide a vehicle for concrete support of social work staff in delivering child welfare services; [4] break barriers of isolation in delivering child welfare services, thereby creating a team of social work staff who would take collective ownership of problems facing team members in the delivery of child welfare services; [5] provide a better quality of child welfare services to the community.

Hence, the following is a case study of the process of implementing a group supervision intervention to develop a team. This practicum was conducted with a small working unit of social work staff delivering protection services to three small communities in a northern rural area. At the onset, the unit had three social work staff and one vacancy. This position had been vacant for one year. The supervisory position, which I filled had been vacant for approximately eleven months. The agency [as indicated earlier] was having difficulty in recruiting social work staff. In addition to group supervision the social work staff were supervised individually on a weekly basis during the implementation of the group supervisory intervention. Chapter III of this report discusses fully the framework for the group supervision intervention.

It is important at this time however, to note the limitations of the group supervision intervention. The group supervision intervention was implemented in an agency which adheres to a centralized and directive style of management. The group supervision intervention was ideally based on a consensus model of decision making. These different styles of leadership led to tensions in planning service delivery and recommendations of the team in the agency. This also had an impact on the development and maintenance of the team. The execution of the group supervision intervention from a theoretical point of view required a design which was

comprised of group work theory and social work supervision theory as discussed in chapter III of this report. However, the implementation of the intervention necessitated adaptation to the context -- the agency. Thus, the timing of sessions [although it was thought to be desirable that these be held consistently to enhance group development] was not always as scheduled due to caseload crises in the unit of work. The success of the group supervision intervention was dependent on the commitment of social work team members to the agency and to the team. Success of the intervention was also dependent on the agency's ability to minimize the stressors which had contributed to a pattern of high turnover of social work staff in their employment with the agency.

The time frame that the agency indicated I would be supervising the protection unit was also a limitation. The agency continued attempting to recruit another supervisor for the unit. My assignment was expected to be temporary and I was to be reassigned to a planning function in early spring or summer. However, at my instigation a commitment from the agency was made that I would not be transferred to different duties prior to the completion of my practicum. Nonetheless, the short span of time did not allow for as comprehensive a preplanning stage, as had been conducted at the group home. In retrospect this fact was a significant deterrent in delivering the group supervision intervention.

My rationale for undertaking this practicum was as follows. The concept of teamwork as an intervention to deliver social work supervision to a group of social work staff delivering child welfare services had not been tried in the agency. Brill [1976] in her discussion of teamwork, regards this approach with great potential for change and development. She has defined the concept of teamwork as follows:

"A team is a group of people each of whom possesses particular expertise; each of whom is responsible for making individual decisions; who together hold a common purpose; who meet together to communicate, collaborate, and consolidate knowledge, from which plans are made, actions determined and future decisions influenced." [p. 22]

Kadushin, [1985] in referring to group supervision has indicated the following benefits: "a worker often becomes aware that his problems are not unique, that his failures and difficulties are not the result of his own particular ineptitude, that all other workers seem to be equally disturbed by some clients and equally frustrated by some situations." [p.395]

Gitterman and Shulman, [1986] characterize the development of a group process as an:

"enterprise in mutual aid, and alliance of individuals who need each other, in varying degrees, to work on certain common problems. The important fact is that it is a helping system in which the client need each other as well as the workers." [p.9]

Thus, the development of a group/team was seen as having the potential to break down isolation. This process aids in building communication, collaboration, and as well facilitates planning and decision making of group/team members. As fittingly described by Gitterman and Shulman, a team is a helping system. The development of a team/group can provide the opportunity for change and development of staff.

The issue in the development of a team/group with the potential for change interested me for the following reasons: First, as noted earlier the agency in delivering protective services had suffered from a high turnover of social workers and managerial staff. Geographic isolation had continued to pose a difficulty for the agency in the recruitment of both social work and managerial staff. As a result a number of positions had remained vacant for long periods of time. Second, the ability of the agency to systematically orient and train staff had been inadequate. Third, the introduction of new child welfare legislation in the province left the agency with a heavy task of revamping the policies and procedures for operation. This task was not complete at the onset of this practicum. Fourth, the agency had been subjected to a strike which lasted six weeks. All of these factors had contributed to a sense of burn out and low morale.

The central question of what processes are necessary to fully implement the concept of supporting social work staff in carrying out their job function in a child welfare agency remained with me. Perhaps worded differently, the supervisor is responsible for ensuring that the necessary child welfare work is done. However, in order to ensure that this mandatory work is done well the supervisor must stabilize staff employment patterns in her unit, decrease staff burnout and increase staff morale. In essence, one of the major issues of concern which gave rise to this practicum was the need to develop a process which would enhance and reverse some of the problematic patterns which historically had affected the agency.

Hasenfeld [1983], in discussing organizational change has indicated as follows:

"A host of forces tend to keep organizations doing the things they have been doing in the recent past, and doing them in just the same way they have been doing them...So formidable is the collection of forces holding organizations in their familiar paths that it is surprising that any changes ever manage to run the gauntlet successfully." [p. 221]

Accordingly, the concept of implementing a teamwork/group supervision intervention appeared to offer the potential to provide a milieu in which social work staff could develop a strong sense of belonging to a team. It was anticipated that the team would serve the following functions:

- 1- To enhance morale of the social work staff;
- 2- To provide support to one another;
- 3- To provide the opportunity for social work staff members to learn from one another;
- 4- To allow the opportunity for each social worker to examine their own practice;
- 5- To assist each other in learning by critically engaging in problem solving;
- 6- To decrease staff turnover;
- 7- To break down some of the barriers of isolation;
- 8- To address some of the obstacles encountered in delivering protective services;
- 9- To provide some additional quality control to protection services.

Having identified the question of interest, why it raises concerns, and therefore the rationale for the intervention, the educational intention for this practicum was:

- 1- To conduct a review of the literature pertinent to social work supervision, small group work theory, adult learning theory, and organizational theory, to enhance my professional knowledge base;
- 2- To design and implement a group supervision process based on social work supervisory theory and small group work theory;

3- To implement the group work supervisory process in order that I might have the opportunity to develop the following skills: mediating / facilitating the group process; enhanced supervisory skills in data gathering and assessment; supporting and nurturing of workers; and resolution of conflict.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### IN SUPPORT OF THE GROUP SUPERVISION INTERVENTION

As indicated in the previous chapter the main purpose of the practicum was to implement an alternative approach to social work supervision, and to develop the concept of teamwork in a specific unit of work in a child welfare agency. The intervention chosen was group supervision. The literature review was conducted in light of a number of assumptions which I made regarding the group supervision intervention.

#### ASSUMPTIONS

I assumed that an intervention which was to be focused on group supervision required a framework which would incorporate the social work theoretical approach to supervision. In particular I looked for understanding of those behaviours a supervisor needs to engage in to facilitate and encourage supervisees in their performance of the job. I believed that given that the group intervention was to be primarily focused in group supervision, that this would necessitate a design for the intervention which would focus on the supervisor's functions and role.

Supplementary to developing a framework which would assist in incorporating the above processes, I assumed a

need for assimilating in the framework the concept of effective supervision. I assumed that supervisors may engage in supervision and carry out the functions and role of supervision but not necessarily be effective. Therefore, the framework of group supervision must accommodate processes which are geared to enhance the effectiveness of the supervisor in carrying out the supervision intervention. Further, I assumed that an understanding of the problems encountered in effecting supervision required some review in order to comprehend and avoid engaging in these behaviours which were countereffective in assisting social workers in their performance of the job.

The group supervision framework for the intervention also required merging theory from social group work. In particular I assumed, that the framework demanded processes which would facilitate the development and maintenance of a group. Thus, in implementing the intervention close attention to processes which are necessary for group formation and group development were essential. While the main theoretical framework of the intervention would rest in social work supervision theory, the concept of group supervision could not be undertaken without understanding what is required to form and maintain a group. This necessitated an understanding in addition to how you form a group, what are the group dynamics which strengthen the group process and which hinder it. In a similar way I

looked for an understanding of which behaviours are required of the supervisor to facilitate and mediate the group process.

I also assumed that the group supervision intervention needed to be based on some principles of adult education. This assumption is based on my belief that adults are more likely to be productive when they have a say in decisions that affect their working life.

Since the group supervision intervention was to be implemented in a child welfare agency I assumed that the organization itself might either hinder or enhance the process of the development and maintenance of the intervention. More specifically, I assumed that the ability of the agency to plan services, make decisions around services, engage in a problem solving orientation towards services and provide leadership would have an impact on the group supervision process. And that good group process within one unit might have a positive impact on the agency as a whole. I believed that these factors have a direct relationship on the job performance of social work staff. It is my belief that social work staff as part of an organization function within the framework or context of the larger organization. Thus, social work staff need a full understanding of services which are been planned and how their job performance will assist the organization in meeting the requirements for those planned services. I also

believed that an organization not only needs the ability to plan services but also needs to adapt these services to the environment, thus providing the flexibility to respond to situations which arise and require redefinition of initial plans. In my opinion, a failure of the organization to respond to these forces would have a negative impact on the morale of social work staff and on their ability to perform their job well.

I also assumed that leadership and organizational control were factors which would have a direct impact on the group supervision intervention. Leadership, I believe, is necessary in order for an organization not only to plan services but to adapt services to reality and environmental stressors. This in my view requires the existence of a process for engaging in collective problem solving. A failure to provide leadership when required in my opinion would not only contribute to low morale of the staff, but would also give the message that staff are not valued. Thus, I assumed that leadership has a direct relationship to the successful implementation of a group supervision intervention. Exercising good organizational control, I assumed would enhance the group supervision intervention in that group members clearly would have an understanding of patterns of behaviour which are desired by the organization, and patterns of behaviour which are not accepted by the organization. Further, this process would provide group

members with a clear understanding of the organizational context and its limitations.

Consequently in contemplating the concept of teamwork, it was essential to merge and develop a theoretical model which would include a range of theory such as social work supervision theory, group work/teamwork theory, principles of adult education and organizational theory for purposes of operationalizing the concept of group supervision. These specific fields of theory were selected to fit the nature and context of the intervention based on the assumptions outlined above. For example, social work supervision theory was used to understand the role and functions of the supervisor; group work/teamwork theory to assist in understanding how groups are formed, developed and maintained; organizational theory was used to assist in discerning the forces which hinder and assist the development and maintenance of a team in an organization, and the place of leadership.

This chapter has been organized as follows: First, a review of social work supervision literature; followed by a review of group work/teamwork literature; some principles of adult education; and some of the factors in organizational literature which appeared to be particularly relevant in this context.

## REVIEW OF SOCIAL WORK SUPERVISION LITERATURE

In the last decade special attention has been paid in the social work literature to developing, clarifying and synthesizing the theoretical concept of social work supervision. The work of Kaslow [1977], Munson [1979], Shulman [1982], Skidmore [1983], Munson [1983], Kadushin [1985], Middleman and Rhodes [1985], Russell [1985], Lang [1986], Patti [1987], and others have for the most part clarified the role, functions, and skills required in supervision. Rimstad [1984], in her review of the development of social work supervision indicated that earlier writings in the subject of social work supervision emphasized one function, education, over the others. In addition she noted "role confusion and/or emphasis of one role over the others has existed since the emergence of social work supervision." [p. 10] The last two decades however, have been characterized by a clear emergence in the social work literature of three supervisory functions: administrative, educational and supportive functions. Some consensus about the role of the social work supervisor is generally depicted in the social work literature, and this consensus can be articulated by quoting from Kadushin:

An agency administrative staff member to whom authority is delegated to direct, coordinate, enhance and evaluate the on -the-job performance of the supervisees for whose work he is held accountable." [1985, p. 24]

The crucial elements of the supervisory function: administrative, educational and supportive require further exploration and clarification. In general, the administrative function is directed toward ensuring compliance with policies, standards, and the administrative procedures of an agency. Problems exist and must be identified when there is a lack of congruence with the overall policies and procedures. The goal is to ensure compliance with the policies and procedures of the organization.

Middleman and Rhodes [1985] depart somewhat from the norm in that they have identified nine functions: [humanizing, managing tension, catalyzing, teaching, career socializing, evaluating, administering, changing and advocating]. The authors [Ibid] narrow the administrative function definition by clarifying the administrative responsibilities in supervision as "related to activities of planning, decision-making, and workload management as demanded by the service delivery situation." [p. 3-4]

The educational function is directed at building and enhancing knowledge, skills and appropriate attitudes. The problems encountered are deficiencies in the knowledge base or in the skill area. Building and enhancing knowledge and skill both in terms of theoretical concepts for intervention and practice skills, can generally be described as a process to facilitate the development of competence.

Kadushin [1985] has defined the educational function of supervision as "concerned with teaching the worker what he needs to know in order to do his job and help him learn it." [p.139]

Munson [1983], focuses on the need of the supervisor to teach specific techniques which he argues need to be client focused. [p.18]

Shulman, [1982] in discussing the educational function of supervision summarizes by pointing out that "the task for supervisors is to mediate between the learner and the subject areas to be learned." [p.210]

Thus, the educational function of supervision requires that the supervisor possess full knowledge of the nature of the job and be able to transmit this knowledge. In addition Shulman suggests in his summary that mediating skills are required in the interactional process of executing the educational function of supervision. As well I agree with Munson that in engaging in the interaction between supervisor and supervisee the supervisory discussions need to be client focused.

The supportive function is geared primarily to worker job satisfaction and morale building. The problems encountered are related specifically to poor morale, job dissatisfaction, burn out, and stress.

In reference to the supportive function of supervision Kadushin [1985] has discussed the importance of 1]

preventing stress and tension from developing; 2] removing the worker from the source of stress; 3] reducing the impact of stress; 4] helping the worker adjust to stress. [p. 263]

Middleman and Rhodes [1985] in their discussion of the humanizing, managing tension and catalyzing functions of supervision have outlined the critical component of the supervisor's responsibility to "encourage and enable workers to feel that both their work and themselves are important to the organization." [p. 121] In addressing managing tension the above authors have elaborated on the responsibility of the supervisor to help supervisees to cope with stress and conflict. [p. 129]

In essence then the supportive function of supervision requires of the supervisor an ability to identify stressors and conflicts in the nature of the work, and the context of the work, to assist in developing strategies to counteract these trends.

Having discerned which are the functions required in social work supervision, the question remains what is effective supervision. The social work literature is generally not as clear in defining this point. Munson, [1983] has however offered a definition of effective supervision: it is structured, regular, consistent, case oriented and evaluated. [p.5]

Kadushin, [1985] has addressed the issue of effective supervision by outlining the process of supervision and

listing skills required in the process of engagement. For example, he suggests that: effective supervision requires "free reciprocal communication with the supervisee...encouraging expression of authentic feeling" and "Has a problem solving orientation based on consensus and co-operation derived from participation." [p.428]

Skidmore remarks that effective supervision is concerned with uniformity of quality and quantity; not with how many sessions but, "enough to be meaningful". He also adds that effective supervision relates to the "availability and involvement of the supervisor". [1983, p. 214 - 219.]

Patti, [1987] in his discussion of behavioral patterns required of management for effective service delivery has elaborated on supervisory practices by stating the following:

"Several decades of research have identified two dimensions of leadership that appear to have significant effects on worker performance. One is consideration, or what leaders do to build relationships, support, sympathize, and individualize their subordinates. The other, task, or initiating structure, concerns setting objectives, clarifying tasks, monitoring and evaluating performance, and providing task-specific feedback." [p.379]

Hence, I can sum up that effective supervision entails a structured discussion focused on case related issues which clearly address the outcome of performance. This discussion should assist in identifying tasks and activities related to the desired performance, provide constructive feedback on

performance, and support the worker by individualizing him or her.

In my search to determine some of the problems encountered in putting into effect the concept and principles of supervision the literature has aided me in identifying the following issues.

The use of authority and power is a re-occurring problem for supervisors. Kadushin, [1985] has elaborated by testifying to some empirical studies which indicate that "social work supervisors are reluctant to use the authority and power they have available." [p. 102] He adds that supervisors are reluctant to use their authority or power to get "the work out". Difficulty in exercising authority and power arises from social work ideology and "values which emphasize egalitarian, democratic, non-coercive, non-hierarchical relationships. These practice precepts reinforce supervisors' ideological uneasiness about the exercise of administrative authority and power." [Ibid, p. 103]

Patti [1987] somewhat along the same vein shows that although "few studies have been conducted on the leadership styles of managers and supervisors in social service agencies, those available suggest that leaders, especially supervisors, tend to score low on task-oriented behaviours and high on consideration behaviours." [p. 379]

Hawthorne [1975] focused on coping mechanisms which supervisors develop to deal with authority. Supervisors engage in game playing with the supervisees to resolve the difficulty the supervisors have with authority.

Russell [1985] conducted an empirical research study on styles of supervisors in one of twelve state regions in Texas Department of Human Resources. [Approximately 13, 000 employees] The study critically emphasizes that most social work supervisors scored low on concern for production and low on concern for staff. In analyzing the results the author found that the supervisory style of low on concern for production and low on concern for staff "is usually not considered as a dominant style but as back-up style to which supervisors retreat when the environment is tense or stressful." [p. 163] Further, she added that supervisors may retreat to this style when they are frustrated, threatened or continuously meet resistance from others. This study crystallized and linked supervisors performance to the context, the organization where the job is being executed.

Middleman and Rhodes, [1985] have also linked the provision of competent supervision to the requirement for an organization to develop patterns of stability, effectiveness and adaptability. At the very minimum they have argued that supervisors must respond to these challenges. "Responding to the pushes and pulls of forces in the agency". [p. 119]

To develop the concept of group supervision, it is necessary to investigate the concept of group work.

#### REVIEW OF GROUP WORK THEORY.

The primary focus in conducting a review of the group work theory literature was to obtain an understanding of the theory in order to be able to develop a framework which would be compatible and assist in merging social work supervision theory with group work.

Therefore, the review of the group work theory was not as extensive as that which was undertaken on social work supervision or organizational theory.

In attempting to operationalize the concept of teamwork, I turned my attention to the literature of group work. The literature reviewed, Mc Gregor, [1967], Gershenfeld, [1972], Kaslow, [1972], Abels, [1977], Shulman, [1982], Toseland & Rivas, [1984], and Gitterman & Shulman, [1986]; differentiated between two kinds of groups. These two types of groups are generally referred to as treatment groups and task groups. Treatment groups are set up as a mode of intervention to assist group members with their social and emotional needs. Task groups are set up with the primary purpose of accomplishing a particular goal and objective which the group has been mandated to accomplish. In a task group while the primary purpose is to achieve the task for which the group was set up, it is also crucial that

the socio-emotional needs of group members be met. Toseland and Rivas, [1984] addressed this point by elaborating that the group must solve the instrumental tasks, and meet socio-emotional problems of the group members. These activities must be balanced. [p. 52] For purposes of this practicum the group supervision employed was characteristic of a task group, attempting to balance the task of the group and the socio-emotional needs of group members.

Mc Grath, [1987] has delineated the following strengths of a group work intervention:

1. Groups usually produce more and better solutions to problems than do individuals working alone.
2. Individuals contribute differently to the group product, depending upon the particular other individuals in the group.
3. High-cohesive groups are more effective than low-cohesive groups in achieving their respective goals.
4. Other things being equal, groups composed of members having diverse, relevant abilities perform more effectively than groups composed of members having similar abilities.
5. On difficult tasks, group performance is facilitated to the extent that group members can freely communicate their feelings of satisfaction [or dissatisfaction] with the group's progress toward goal achievement.
6. Goal clarity and goal-path clarity are positively related to the motivational characteristics and the efficiency of group members.
7. Homogeneous group goals facilitate effective group functioning, whereas heterogeneous group goals hinder effective group functioning." [p. 4-5]

Given that a group of individuals can produce better solutions by co-operating, resolving conflicts, staying on task and so forth, the implication underlying group effectiveness rests on the ability of the group as a whole

to address constructively the group dynamics. The work of Toseland & Rivas, [1984] and Gitterman & Shulman, [1986] discusses extensively the importance of paying attention to group dynamics in forming and maintaining the group. Group dynamics specified by these authors are: communication and interaction patterns, attraction, social controls, and group culture. Let me briefly elaborate on each of the above group dynamics.

The ability to communicate is central to group functioning. What is essential in communication is to develop and maintain "appropriate interaction patterns". [Toseland and Rivas, 1984, p.60.] Appropriate interaction patterns require the ability of the leader to keep the group focused on the task, to encourage regular and ongoing feedback; to address conflicts openly; to assist group members in resolving differences; to facilitate assessment, and planning and action for the problems identified. Shulman, [1986] indicates that what is required is to "help the individual group members to reach out for help from the group as a whole, to help the group members provide mutual aid to others, and to help the group as a whole pay attention to its own developmental tasks, such as developing a consensus on the directions of work and developing a climate of trust." [p. 29] In order to achieve a high degree of cohesion a high degree of interaction is

required; interaction which supports and enhances the task of the group.

Group attraction refers to the energy that keeps members staying in the group. In order for a group to accomplish a task certain incentives need to be incorporated, such as, recognition and/or security for group members; providing group members with an opportunity to belong; or providing the opportunity to influence the course of certain actions. Kaslow [1972] in reference to group supervision and its benefits suggests that group supervision "enables members...to benefit from pooling knowledge and insights, identify special competencies and have them serve as resources." [p. 120]

Social control as defined by Toseland & Rivas, [1984] is a "process by which the group as a whole gains sufficient compliance and conformity from its members to enable it to function in an orderly manner." [p. 67] In essence the group needs to develop clear rules or patterns of behaviour which enhance the ability of the group to meet its purpose. The accomplishment of this task is inherent in the group developing norms and roles, such as, rejecting inappropriate behaviour and encouraging appropriate behaviour.

The last dynamic to be explored is group culture. This refers to the values and traditions that group members [through the process of working on the group's goals] begin to hold in common. Toseland & Rivas, [1984] comment on the

need to pay specific attention to this matter in the early stages of group formation: In "early meetings, members explore each others' unique value system and attempt to find a common ground on which they can relate to each other." [p. 71]

The theory of group work also recognizes stages in the process of group development. [Toseland & Rivas, 1984]; [Shulman, 1982] and [Gitterman & Shulman, 1986] The understanding of these stages is of critical importance in developing a group supervision intervention in order that "the group exhibit certain properties and processes during the beginning, middle and ending stages of their development". [Toseland & Rivas, 1984, p.10] This in effect means that attention is required to certain processes in the beginning, middle and ending stage of group development which differ depending on the stage of group development. For example, in the early or beginning stage of group development members are more concerned with establishing themselves in the group, clarifying values, developing patterns of behaviour and so forth. In the middle stage of group development group members are focusing on getting the work done, and resolving conflicts which hinder the ability of the group to accomplish the task.

Critical for understanding the theory of group work is recognizing that the beginning, middle and ending stage in group work is an orderly process. Or in other words the

group develops by paying particular attention to task and maintenance needs which are characteristic of each stage. Abels, [1977] has elaborated on this point by indicating that "basic tools for understanding the group parts cannot be understood in isolation of the phases of group work." [p. 179] He elaborates by indicating that the forming stage is primarily concerned with security and safety of group members.

In planning the group supervision intervention, special attention needs to be paid to developing appropriate patterns of interaction which will facilitate the movement of the group through the stages of group development by paying close attention to group dynamics and developing specific processes which enhance group development in each of the stages.

The role of the group leader, or in this particular intervention the supervisor, needs consideration. Toseland & Rivas, [1984] have examined three models of the group worker's role. In the social goals model the group worker enables the group to reach its goals. In the remedial model the group worker focuses on helping change behaviour. Thus the group worker acts as a leader. In the reciprocal model, a system of viewing the group process as a programme of mutual aid, the group worker acts as a mediator, facilitating the group functioning. [p. 82 - 85] Gitterman & Shulman, [1986] provide additional insight on the role of

the group worker as a mediator. The mediating role can be defined as "mediating the individual group encounter, assisting each member to reach out to the group for help while simultaneously helping the group members to respond." [p.4] The authors elaborated and clarified the mediating role by the following illustration:

The worker's mediating function may involve providing support to a member by using the worker's capacity for empathy, while also confronting the member's denial and reaching for the underlying fears and apprehensions. And if the other group members appear to turn away from a member's direct and emotional appeal for help...the mediating function would call for them to confront the group members on their evasion and denial." [Ibid]

Thus, the mediating role of the worker would call for the following skills: listening and responding empathically; sharing personal thoughts and feelings connected to achieving the task; focusing the group members. Basically the role can be summarized by indicating that what is needed is the ability to guide the group process by reaching out to group members in aiding the accomplishment of the task. For purposes of this practicum I have selected the role of the supervisor as primarily that of a mediator.

In summarizing this section of the group work theory, the model identified for group supervision in this practicum has been based on developing a task group; recognizing that the process of group development entails four different stages of development; giving particular attention to development of group dynamics which will enhance the

accomplishment of the task. Last, the role of the supervisor has been identified as mediating the process in helping the group accomplish its task.

#### SELECTED PRINCIPLES OF ADULT EDUCATION

A brief review of some adult education principles of learning was identified as important. As stated earlier in this chapter, this assumption is based on my belief that adults are more productive in their work if they are given a voice in decisions which affect their work, and if their adult experience is recognized in the learning and change process.

Adult education has been defined by Darkenwald & Merriam, [1982] as "a process whereby adults... undertake systematic and sustained learning activities for the purposes of bringing about changes in knowledge, attitudes, values, or skills." [p. 8]

Hence, the group supervision intervention would require a process whereby group members, as adults, could engage in learning thereby making required changes to provide more effective services to the community.

Inherent in this process of learning are a number of adult education principles which might be seen as facilitating the learning process. Knowles, [1972] has stipulated that the key to the learning process for adults is to draw from their experience. Rimstad, [1984] has

synthesized adult learning principles into two comprehensive points, as follows:

Adults enter learning programs with immediate personal needs, feelings, hopes and expectations...[These feelings and needs] must be respected and recognized. Those which create obstacles to learning must be reduced or removed at the beginning of the learning.

Adult learners do not necessarily possess all the meanings, values, skills, and strategies required for effective learning or assumed to be an essential component of adulthood. Helping the learner to acquire missing components or adjusting activities to accommodate deficits must be regarded as an essential part of all learning programs. [p. 19 - 20]

Smith, [1988] has indicated in her review of adult education principles that "self-directed inquiries by adults will produce the greatest learning." [p. 26] She adds that this process can be encouraged by facilitating "learning in a supportive educative environment, from which the learners can extract learning [which] then guides the learners' interaction with it to maximize their learning." [Ibid]

In summary, I chose to incorporate in the framework for the group supervision intervention some principles from adult education: The group supervision intervention must be planned in a manner that will allow the process to systematically enhance the learning process and therefore improve the workers ability to provide better service. In operationalizing the group supervision process discussions need to be centered in drawing from the group members their own experience to assist in objectifying the situation. The group supervision intervention must be a vehicle which

meets the needs of group members in relation to their job, in addition to meeting socio-emotional needs of group members. Finally the group supervision process must provide the opportunity for the group members to discover, re-shape, re-formulate, their perceptions about work situations so that they are able to adapt and transform their reality.

### REVIEW OF ORGANIZATIONAL THEORY

The literature on organizational theory provides many perspectives on how organizations operate. Different models approach the analysis of organizations in various ways, any of which are legitimate and valid. Olmstead, [1978] in reference to this point has commented that "The problem is that the one phenomenon, an organization, can be validly approached from a number of different standpoints." [p. 92] One theoretical approach is the "contingency model" for analysis of an agency.

Mullis [1978] in defining the contingency model states: "the correct organizational structure and management plan is dependent on the situation." [p. 43]

The contingency model has been defined by Glisson, [1985] as:

"The model depicts the organization as a social system comprised of interconnected subsystems which exist in a suprasystem, or environment, consisting of other social systems." [p. 95]

The components of the contingency model are: the management system, the psychosocial subsystem, the structural subsystem, the technological subsystem, the goals and values subsystem and the environment suprasystem. One advantage in using the contingency model to analyze an agency is the flexibility it allows to incorporate a body of theoretical knowledge in addressing each subsystem. For example, in analyzing the psychosocial subsystem one can draw from small group work theory and group work process to examine the informal power component of the subsystem. The same applies for each subsystem and the suprasystem, the environment. In this model the main task of administering an agency is to facilitate the integration, coordination and interrelationships of each subsystem.

The agency administration must also develop a good "fit" relationship with the environment. The concept of "fit" in organizational theory has been defined and elaborated upon by Miles, et al. [1986]. "Fit is a process as well as a state...a dynamic search that seeks to align the organization with its environment and to arrange resources internally in support of that alignment." The authors indicate that successful organizations fit well with their environment and support their goals with organizational structure and processes which enhance the operation of the organization. They go on to state that organizations which exhibit poor fit with their environment,

and poor fit in their structure are not successful. In order to develop a good fit organizations must create a structure that allows for appropriate response to the environment or at a very minimum shape it to some degree. The organization also needs to set up an internal structure of departments which allows for effective work flow, coordination within departments, communication patterns, reward/control patterns, division of labour, hierarchy of authority, participation in decision-making, and policies/procedures which will allow effective management. Lastly, the organization must set up a mechanism which will allow it to respond to changes in the environment.

In reviewing the literature on organizational theory, a wide variety of factors can be studied. A comprehensive study of organizational theory and a wide array of factors is outside the scope of this practicum. However, I have selected the following factors for study: decision making, problem solving orientation, planning, organizational control, communication and leadership. This selection is not exhaustive, but it was intended to provide an understanding of the structural context of the practicum. The study of the structural subsystem and in particular the factors outlined have been selected on the assumption that these hinder or enhance the successful implementation of the group supervision intervention proposed for this practicum. The ability of the agency to plan services, make decisions,

engage in problem solving to elicit and/or develop patterns of behaviour which heighten the fit of agency goals and leadership in my opinion have a direct relationship to the outcome of the intervention. Toseland & Rivas [1984] in discussing the theory of group work have indicated that developing and maintaining a group depends on a number of interacting forces. One factor outlined is the larger system, which interacts with the group. [p. 82]

Decision making is the process of making decisions and implementing these decisions. In order to function effectively organizations must set up a vehicle for decision making. In essence organizations need to set up a structure of decision making, which is conducive to do what must be done. Skidmore [1983] indicates that "decision making is significant because it affects the morale of the staff and the eventual delivery of social services." [p. 57]

Organizations vary in their degree of hierarchy in decision making. Pennell [1989] has indicated that specific decision-making strategies are indicative of the form of authority exercised in organizations. "Group consensus" is an indicator of a style of authority in organizations which adhere to "participatory democracy" to provide leadership. "Group bargaining" is an indicator of organizations which engage in "representative democracy" to exercise leadership. Organizations which exercise authority by "dictation and/or expert judgement" are representative of a "hierarchy" style

of management in the execution of authority. "Avoidance", as a strategy for the decision-making process is indicative of an organization which can be referred to as "organized anarchy".

A problem solving orientation to decision making in organizations has also been identified as a critical component of organizational effectiveness. [Sarason, 1978; Slavin, 1978; Skidmore, 1983; Sashkin & Morris, 1984; Jelinek, et al., 1986]. A problem solving orientation implies the ability to identify and solve problems. Sashkin & Morris, [1984] have identified two kinds of organizational problems which require organizations to engage in a problem solving orientation for both content and process problems. Content problems can be defined as the substance of what organizations require to function. For example, policies and procedures to guide decision making in the service delivery.

Processing of problems is indicative of the manner in which organizations go about doing what needs to be done. These are referred to in the literature as process problems. For example, the process of how the organization engages in developing policies and procedures may enhance or be detrimental to the functioning of the organization. Further, the authors identify that it is a prerequisite that organizations develop this orientation and skill at six organizational levels: the individual level, the

interpersonal level, the group level, the intergroup level, the organizational level and the organizational-environment level. This decision making problem solving process requires the following tasks:

Recognize current conditions that are unsatisfactory or establish future desired conditions. Collect and analyze information relative to the difficulty of goals. Identify the underlying problem[s] that accounts for the unsatisfactory conditions. Establish constraints that limit what can be done. Develop alternatives for solving the problem[s]. Collect data to evaluate the alternatives. Make a choice. Gain support for the decision and implement it. Obtain feedback on the progress. [Skidmore, 1983, p. 58- 59]

Decision making, problem solving and planning require of an organization the ability to adapt and integrate to their unique situation. Freire, [1985] in his discussion of this point has indicated that "the act of knowing involves a dialectical movement that goes from action to reflection and from reflection upon action to new action." [p.50 - 51] This process requires that an organization demonstrate flexibility and adaptation in their decision making, problem solving and planning to exercise constantly the ability to engage in planning actions which are congruent with the reality of the situation. Above all it is important to recognize that the situation is not static but constantly in change. Thus decisions made around specific planned services require constant re-evaluation and adaptation to conform with the emergence of a situation which albeit

similar to the original situation, [problem] is different. Failure to do so, leaves organizations claiming that they engage in planning by identifying goals, objectives, strategies of implementation and evaluation but in essence are unable to adapt and integrate services to meet the complexity of the problems posed by the environment.

Equally significant and potentially problematic for organizations is what Argyris & Schon, [1978 & 1974] have defined as the difference between "espoused theories" and the "theories-in-use". The gap between what an organization or professional states in its planning, decision making and problem solving strategy and what the organization or professional actually does creates a disparity; this contributes to anxiety, frustration and conflict. The "espoused theory" can be defined as the "action theory" which the organization promotes. Basically this theory is a set of propositions which the organization indicates it adheres to, for example in planning services. The "espoused theory" would be based on assumptions about the population it serves, what values it holds, assumptions about inherent problems in the population, and a set of methods or strategies on how the organization intends to act to resolve the problems. "Theories-in-use", are the behaviours in which the organization, or individual, actually engages in, for example in implementation. The authors indicate that in order to establish consistency it is required that the

"espoused theory" and the "theory-in-use" be congruent with each other. "Theories-in-use tend to be self-maintaining. We tend to adopt strategies to avoid perceiving that data do not fit, that behavioral reality is progressively diverging from one's theory of it, that one's theory is not testing out." [Argyris & Schon, 1974, p. 32.] Argyris & Schon, suggest that organizations engage in strategies which prevent understanding of the gap between "espoused theories" and "theories-in-use" by compartmentalizing information. In this manner one could speak of the "espoused theory" and simultaneously engage in acting out the "theory-in-use" thus ensuring that both theories do not meet. Another strategy employed is becoming selective about the data so as to prevent the organization or individual from discovering the dilemma faced.

Both these limit planning, decision making and problem solving. The planning process fails to adhere to or to integrate/adapt to changes in the environment which require the organization to redefine the problems facing it; and the gap between the "espoused theory" and the "theory-in-use", can affect organizational or individual effectiveness. Failure to recognize, adapt, integrate, and act from one set of propositions reduces effectiveness and creates self-defeating actions.

Schon, [1971] also argues that a belief in "the stable state" leads people to resist change, and to maintain old patterns even when they are ineffective.

Ultimately, the consequences as outlined by Schon [1971] are:

Through dynamic conservatism, institutions may survive in the face of their mismatch to the situations in which they function. But in a period when the stable state has been lost, the forms taken by dynamically conservative institutions condemn them to increasing irrelevance. [p.59]

Organizational control is another major component required for organizational effectiveness. Flamholtz, [1986] indicated: "The objective of the control system is to increase the degree of goal congruence... A second managerial function of control systems is coordination of the efforts of diverse parts of an organization. Other functions of control systems are to help assure that organizational objectives are achieved, and to provide feedback." [p. 460]

Effective communication is a must for any organization. Communication can be regarded as fundamental to problem solve, and ensure accountability, control, decision making, and so forth. Without appropriate channels of communication an organization is hampered in its ability to perform the job that must be done. Sashkin and Morris, [1984] have indicated that "effective management is data based. Without information, actions cannot be planned on sound, rational

grounds." [p. 39] Further, the authors state that if you ask a manager what are his "two biggest problems...the chances are that one will be communication." [p. 113] In order for an organization to integrate subsystems and coordinate the required functions, it must have the ability for communication and "communing".

The final factor to be addressed is leadership. Skidmore [1983] has suggested that leadership "involves the ability to bring about a desired change or action from, or with, others." [p. 130] Effective leadership contains an element of trust. The ability to trust leads to enhancing morale. Leadership also entails an element of support. This support must be concrete and conveyed to an organization's staff. Consistency is another element, which is required for effective leadership. Finally, leadership must be provided with caring. For an organization leadership needs to be exercised with the concept of "teamship".

Simply put, this means working together. "The team work process includes five major subprocesses: communication, compromise, cooperation, coordination and consummation. Each is essential." [Skidmore, 1983, p. 154]

Summarizing then, the following factors have been selected for review from organizational theory: decision-making, problem solving, planning, organizational control, communication and leadership. These elements in the

structural subsystem of an organization are critical to the degree of effectiveness in an organization. The degree to which a supervisor can perform her/his supervisory function effectively, [introduce, implement and maintain group supervision], will depend to some extent on the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the structural subsystem.

### **CRITERIA FOR GROUP SUPERVISION PROCESS**

Based on the review of social work supervisory theory, group work theory and organizational theory I have identified the following criteria for the group supervision model for the practicum.

#### **1. CRITERIA RELATED TO SUPERVISION**

1.1 The group supervision must encompass the administrative, educational and supportive functions. These functions need to be balanced.

1.2 To achieve effective supervision requires a task orientation to promote behavioral patterns which assist in clarifying roles, rules, procedures and methods that attend to the desired performance outcomes.

1.3 Simultaneously the process of focusing on task oriented behavioral performance must enclose the ability to support group members by individualizing their contribution to the group performance.

1.4 The supervisor needs to be able to critically confront group members when behavioral patterns are impeding the work of the group to achieve its goal.

1.5 The role of the supervisor requires the ability to exercise authority.

## **2. CRITERIA RELATED TO GROUP PROCESS**

2.1 In implementing the group supervision intervention, attention must be placed in the development of group stages: for example, pre-planning, the beginning, middle and ending phase.

2.2 The supervisor must incorporate different processes which are characteristic of developing and moving the group through these stages, to maximize the ability of the group to accomplish effectively the task or purpose which the group has been convened for.

2.3 Necessity will dictate paying particular attention to group dynamics; communication, attraction, social control and group culture.

## **3. CRITERIA RELATED TO LEADERSHIP ROLE**

3.1 The role of the supervisor requires the ability to incorporate two separate and seemingly contradictory processes which create a dynamic tension: the exercise of authority and mediating the group process.

3.2 The paradox presented in the role of the supervisor demands the ability of the supervisor to clarify and identify for group members in which situations the group

is able to engage in group consensus for decision making; and, in which situations the supervisor must exercise her/his administrative responsibility to meet accountability requirements of the organization.

3.3 The supervisor must exercise authority only after receiving the input of group members as to the likely best choice of action.

3.4 The supervisor is expected to engage in directing, supporting patterns of behaviour in group members which will augment the ability of the group to reach its goal.

3.5 The supervisor must engage in facilitating the process of "mutual aid" -- reaching out to group members, so that they in return can reach out themselves to other group members, and ultimately to clients.

3.6 Therefore, the exercise of leadership is characterized by an anomalous process: two contradictory processes of authority and support operating at the same time.

#### **4. CRITERIA RELATED TO ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE**

4.1 The organization must have the ability to plan, to make decisions, to engage in problem solving, to exercise control, communicate decisions and provide leadership.

4.2 The organization must recognize that strategies for planning [and thereby decision making and problem solving] require the capacity to adapt and integrate on a constant basis to in relation to the environment.

## **5. CRITERIA RELATED TO CHANGE**

5.1 The organization must develop a capacity to learn from its history and present situation, to integrate and adapt theory and practice to effect change.

5.2 The gap between theories of action exercised by the organization, the "espoused theory" and the "theory-in-use", will reduce the effectiveness of individuals and the organization.

5.3 The organization must be able to grieve the "loss of the stable state" prior to formulating a new one.

### **CONCLUDING SUMMARY**

In summary effective group supervision demands that the supervisor engage the group members in patterns of behaviour that are conducive to task management. This requires the ability to initiate a structure, set objectives, clarify tasks, monitor and evaluate performance. This process needs to be balanced with patterns of behaviour which individualize supervisees. This requires engaging in supportive patterns, such as empathy, relationship building, and assisting each supervisee in getting in touch with feelings. The exercise of leadership requires that the supervisor be able to balance two separate processes [the exercise of authority and mediating]. The development of a group intervention in an agency is an interactional process.

The agency requires the capacity to adapt and integrate on a constant basis in relation to the environment.

## CHAPTER III

### IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GROUP SUPERVISION PROCESS

Based on the understanding developed from the literature review in the previous chapter, and the criteria identified, the intent of this chapter is as follows:

1. To elaborate on the group supervision intervention, by examining in greater detail the processes and tasks required for each supervision session and incorporating these into a framework for the group supervision intervention;
2. To discuss briefly the organizational context where the group supervision intervention was implemented;
3. To discuss the methodology utilized in the group supervision intervention;

Social work supervision as reviewed in the previous chapter requires three functions; administrative, educational and supportive functions. Effective supervision demands two processes to be generated: the ability to individualize the supervisee and to be task focused. These two processes require a balance. The process of supervision moves through specific stages not unlike the theory of group work.

These stages are: **the preliminary stage** in which the supervisor prepares herself for the session . Shulman, [1982] describes the need for preparatory empathy. This refers to the ability of the supervisor to envision the purpose of the meeting, to address and deal effectively with her feelings. Lastly she must put herself in the place of the supervisee and reach out to get a sense of how the supervisee may be feeling about the supervision session, the work and so forth.

The **beginning stage** requires the establishing of rapport with the supervisee and contracting for the session. In the beginning stage what is required of both the supervisee and supervisor is a mutual obligation to contract the purpose and goal of the session and clarification of roles.

The **middle stage** of supervision is often referred to as the work phase of the supervision session. Here, the supervisor makes a demand for work by being task focused and utilizing techniques which assist in individualizing the supervisee such as: empathic skills, and skills in sharing of feelings. In the process of being task focused the supervisor utilizes problem solving skills, such as: elaboration skills, skills in sharing data, skills in analyzing; and identification of obstacles.

The **ending stage** of the supervisory process in a supervision session requires the ability to summarize by

moving from the concrete to the general; facilitating the process of identification of what is required next; finalizing a plan for action; and reviewing what has been learned.

The group work theory as reviewed in the previous chapter, also suggests three stages in group formation and group development and for the most part the literature also identifies a fourth stage [Shulman, 1982; Toseland & Rivas, 1984; Gitterman & Shulman, 1986] which is the preplanning stage of the group process.

These stages then are, preplanning, the beginning stage, the middle stage and the ending stage of the group process.

[Toseland & Rivas, 1984]

The **preplanning stage** in group work entails activities or processes directed at forming the group. This would require clarifying for the group leader the group's purpose, focusing on individual group members as well as focusing on the whole group as members. Special attention also needs to be paid to the environment. Toseland & Rivas, [1984] have specified the following: In focusing on individual group members some planning is required in relation to individual motivations for becoming part of the group. In addition, planning around individual group members' expectations concurrently with goals of individual group members for entering the group process. In considering the group as a whole some planning is required around how the group may

develop, and it particular what strategies would be conducive to enhancing the group process. In relation to the environment the authors, have addressed requirements of preplanning in assessing the impact that the organization may have in the development and maintenance of the group process. [p. 113]

Toseland & Rivas [1984] have identified in the preplanning stage the following requirements which have been enumerated for clarity:

1. Establishing the group's goals.
2. Determining membership for the group.
3. Recruitment of members for the group.
4. Establishing the group.
5. Orienting group members.
6. Contracting with group members for rules and procedures which will guide the behaviour of group members. Contracting for goals and objectives of the group.
7. Preparing for the intervention. [p.117 -135]

The beginning stage in group work is primarily concerned with the formation of the group. This stage is characterized by individual group members beginning to open up to one another simultaneously keeping a distance from other group members. The mediator of the group process facilitates the group process by ensuring that the overall

purpose of the group's purpose is clear; and that the specific goals and objectives of the group sessions are clearly understood by all members. In essence during the beginning stage of group formation the process is geared toward facilitating communication, interaction and understanding of the group as a whole. This fosters the process of building a mechanism for mutual aid of members during the group process. Concurrently, the mediator in the beginning stage of group formation encourages the group in meeting the task of each of the group sessions. Thus, the process of beginning the group is similar to social work supervision in that accomplishing the task and encouraging, supporting patterns of behaviour which enhance the ability of the group to meet the task need to be balanced with individualizing each group member and the group as a whole so that the group:

1. Develops cohesion and members have a feeling of belonging.
2. Develops controls and rewards patterns of behaviour.
3. Develops a mechanism of feedback for the group.
4. Assists each individual to define the reality and thereby assist the group in formulating a joint reality.
5. Encourages and supports group members in sharing their feelings with the group.

The **middle stage** of group work is characterized according to Shulman, [1982] and Toseland & Rivas, [1984] by a concentration on getting the task done. The group engages in problem solving, problem resolution and maintenance of the group to reach its goals. In this stage of group work, group members begin to resolve effectively any conflict which was found in the beginning stage. Greater group cohesion develops. Group culture is solidified and members deepen their understanding of one another.

The **end stage** of group work is characterized by the group having accomplished the task. In this stage particular attention is paid to evaluating the outcome and making final recommendations as these affect the task. In addition it is helpful to review with the group as a whole the process of working as a team. The mediator assists members to evaluate the outcome, make decisions and helps bring the group to an end.

In essence the process of social work supervision and the process of developing and maintaining a group entail four stages each of which are similar in process and skill. These are preplanning, the beginning, middle and ending stages. The main process which needs to be established in both social work supervision and group work is to develop patterns of behaviour which are geared to getting the job done. This needs to be balanced with individualizing and supporting the supervisee and/or group members, thus meeting

the socio-emotional needs of either the supervisee or group members.

The following figure summarizes and illustrates the tasks required of the supervisor in the process of each of the group supervision intervention sessions.

STAGE	TASKS
I. Preliminary	Tuning In Preparatory Empathy
II. Beginning	Establish Rapport Contracting
III. Middle	Empathy Getting Information: general questions specific questions Clarifying Elaborating Active listening Moving from General to Specific Sharing own feelings Demand for work Painting Out Obstacles Sharing Data Getting supervisee/group to Use Information they already have
IV. Ending	Summarizing Generalizing Identification of next steps Rehearsal

Fig. 1 Tasks of Supervision in Group Supervision  
[Based on Shulman, 1982 and problem solving methodology.]

## THE CONTEXT

The unit's workload was organized into three generalist social work positions. This in effect meant that there was no differentiation or specialization in the delivery of services by the social work unit. All three social workers were responsible for intake, investigations into neglect or child abuse, and ongoing protection services both with families and children in care. Intake was rotated amongst the three social workers. Each social worker was on intake for one day with intake rotated to the next social work staff member the following day.

The three social workers all had a social work degree [BSW]. For all three of them, this was their first job. They were all young single adults ranging in age from twenty years to twenty seven years. They were all new to the community, having moved to take up their first social work job following graduation. All three social work staff had been with the agency less than one year. Their employment with the agency ranged from three months to ten months.

There were a number of obstacles identified which could affect the outcome of the group supervision intervention:

1. Orientation and training of social work staff in the unit had not been systematically employed. The agency had not been able to recruit for the staff development position which had been vacant since the beginning of

employment for all three social work staff members in the unit.

2. Due to the supervisory vacancy the allocation of time allowed for regular and ongoing supervision of the unit social work staff had not been sufficient to ensure full knowledge of agency's policies, procedures, recording requirements, assessment of child abuse and neglect; case planning.

3. The organization of the delivery of services in the unit was also problematic. The rotating of intake on a daily basis from social worker to social worker created difficulties: All social work staff had to dedicate one day or two days per week to be in the office to respond to any intake calls. In addition every social work staff member had responsibility for their own caseload of protection and children in care services. The caseload organization and distribution was too high to ensure full compliance with policies and procedures of the agency. Intake cases were carried by the social worker who was on intake on the day the case was referred to the agency. Consequently, there was a disparity in the number of cases each social worker carried. Nor were cases assigned with consideration of the range of cases a worker had or the volume of work the case would require. Also there was no consideration given to the social worker's skills, experience or preference.

4. Another obstacle identified was the ability of the social worker to meet the recording requirements of the job. The recording for a majority of the cases was behind by six months. This factor was causing considerable stress to the workers. They were having difficulty in balancing all the requirements of the job.

5 Another problem facing the unit was the lack of foster care resources available to them if a child had to be brought into care.

6. Due to the supervisory vacancy confusion developed as to the status of cases being carried in the unit. Prior to my commencement as supervisor most of the cases had been designated as preventative. My stricter application of the child welfare legislation resulted in most of the cases being labelled as protective. This change in status caused stress for the social workers in the unit.

7. The final obstacle identified was the incomplete set of policies and procedures in protection [as a result of recent changes in legislation] to assist social work staff in performing their duties. This led to different protection units in the Branch following different policies. This resulted in a lack of consistency in delivering protection services. For the social workers this increased their anxiety in conducting investigations, making decisions, and in generally executing the job.

8. Some social workers in the unit were also struggling with the decision as to whether to leave the agency or not.

In summary together these obstacles had a significant impact on the morale of the social work staff in the unit. Thus, at the onset of the group supervision intervention the ability to develop and maintain a team: [cohesion, commitment, working through issues, dealing with conflict, developing trust, developing a strong sense of group] was seriously impaired.

#### METHODOLOGY FOR THE PRACTICUM

The analysis of the process of developing the group supervision intervention as such is a case study. Case studies are subject to biases and they do not lend themselves to verification of theory. However, case studies can help identify important factors and areas for further study and contribute to initial formulation of theory. Thus, the following quotation from Middleman and Rhodes, [1985] applies to the foregoing:

Supervision will spring from the application of a "foursome mentality as you seek to understand the whole situation. It is me, looking at it, with our shared contexts, and history." [p. 223]

The following methodology was employed. Group supervision sessions were held every two weeks for three months. The sessions lasted approximately two hours each. The sessions

were begun towards the end of January 1988 and ended at the beginning of April 1988. A total of six group supervision sessions were held. However, as stated in chapter I of this report, while the group supervision sessions were planned to be held every two weeks, this was not always accomplished. Crises in the workload of group members, and unanticipated emergencies necessitated the re-scheduling of some group supervision sessions.

Further, the group supervision was modified during the process of implementation [as discussed in this chapter]. Following the recommendations of the second group supervision session, the group decided that there was a need to meet daily for a very brief period of time to review any new intakes which required investigation and assessment of protection issues. This was done in response to the needs of group members, as well as in response to organizational-environmental stressors.

In addition, regular weekly scheduled, individual supervision sessions continued during the implementation of the group supervision intervention with each of the group members.

During the preplanning stage of the group supervision intervention, I undertook the following steps:

1. I established, as the supervisor, my own personal goals for the group supervision intervention. As indicated in the first chapter, I wanted to design and implement a

strategy that would effect change. My own personal goals were to develop staff patterns in the unit where the intervention was implemented that would: assist supervisees to develop competence in exercising their work in protection; to develop patterns of support for workers and break the sense of isolation which appeared to be present; generate a climate where the supervisees would learn from one another and critically examine their practice of social work in a child welfare agency; establish a vehicle whereby the supervisees, as group members, could identify, assess and plan the delivery of services.

2. The recruitment of group members for the group supervision intervention was a non-issue. The members included for the group supervision, were all social workers assigned to me for supervision by the agency.

3. Each social worker was approached by myself in individual supervision. I undertook to present the adoption of the group supervision intervention. I outlined, how I saw the process developing, as well as outlining the potential benefits for the intervention. During this process I endeavoured to ensure that in adopting a new intervention as outlined by Hasenfeld, [1983] both the supervisees who would be part of the group and the agency were part of the decision about establishing the group supervision process. I attempted to ensure that there was

consensus, and that it was understood and seen as having a value -- attractiveness. [p. 234]

4. Contracting for the group supervision, purpose, goals, rules of procedures and so forth was conducted at the first group supervision session.

5. Each of the six group supervision sessions was specifically planned to meet a particular objective. In other words, each session was planned with a clear task. These objectives, were derived from the first session in which the group members identified particular areas of learning, and delivery of protection services which were important to them as group members and supervisees.

6. An agenda was circulated a week in advance of each group supervision session. The agenda outlined clearly the purpose of each specific group session. As well the tasks required for the group supervision session were identified.

7. Sessions were organized primarily using group discussion. A variety of learning experiences were provided such as lecture presentation, group discussions, group members case presentation of case material and a specific session on a service delivery issue which was identified by the group as a problem. This particular session incorporated a problem solving focus.

8. In dealing with issues which raised conflict amongst group members, I employed a problem resolution strategy. This required specifically identification of the

problem or issue which was in contention; definition of the problem and elaboration of the problem; discussion of values held by members in relation to the problem. This was followed by attempting to bring group members to compromise, consensus, and resolution of the issue.

9. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the development of the group supervision process entailed establishing a structure which would develop patterns of behaviour which were directed toward getting the job done. And simultaneously, engaging in patterns of behaviour which individualize group members, thus supporting group members by meeting socio-emotional needs of the group members. The style of leadership exercised was dependent on each of the group supervision sessions or the situation. My personal preference was to engage primarily in mediation behaviours. However, in attempting to meet the task of the group supervision session, and generally the goals of the group, the style of leadership exercised was at times directive, task focused, supportive and mediation focused.

10. The Mc Gregor Team Development Scale was utilized to evaluate each group session. [Appendix A] Mc Gregor, [1967] commented on the instrument as an: "...Instrument for helping the group understand the dimensions of becoming a team, reporting their feelings and sharing in discussing common concerns." [p. 163]

The scale was modified to allow for comments in each of the seven ratings, to allow for clarification; as well I adjusted it from a seven point rating system to a five point rating system for greater simplicity. The scale attempted to measure: clarity of objectives, trust, communications, support, conflict, individual members influence in the group process, and organizational environment.

The underlying assumption was that group members would initially rate each item towards the low range of the scale and in the latter part of the group supervision intervention a discernible change in rating could be seen as members found the process more satisfying. It was assumed that growth would be noted both in task and meeting socio-emotional needs of group members. In fact the reverse was true. Members rated higher at the beginning.

After each group session, group members were given the scale to complete and add their comments.

In filling out the evaluation forms after each group supervision session some resistance was encountered from group members. Some group members had to be requested to complete the evaluation form and they then handed the form to me. While the instrument assisted the group in analyzing the group process and was instrumental in helping me prepare for the sessions, the scale measured only the perceptions of group members as to each of the factors which were specified in the tool.

The last group supervision session held was an additional session scheduled purposely to allow group members to say good-bye to one another given that two group members were leaving the agency. For this session, evaluation forms were not completed.

Thus, I can conclude that the evaluation tool had a number of limitations, it did not directly, for the purpose of the practicum, measure the impact of the group supervision intervention.

Impact evaluation has been described by Rossi & Freeman, [1987] as "evaluation of the extent to which a program causes changes in the desired direction." [p.14]

11. The issue of confidentiality was fully discussed and reviewed both during the individual sessions held with the supervisees and at the first group supervision session. A commitment was made to the group members that I would not reveal any specific content of the conversations held in the group supervision sessions. Further, that their names or any information that may assist in placing them would not be shared. The agency was also given a commitment that no information pertaining to clients, specific resources would be identified.

The analysis of the group supervision sessions will adhere to the agreements made to the group members and to the agency.

## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS OF THE GROUP SUPERVISION SESSIONS

The establishment of criteria for the group supervision has provided a vehicle for analysis of the effectiveness of the group supervision intervention. The group supervision process analysis was directed primarily toward furthering my own learning in the implementation and delivery of a group process.

#### FIRST GROUP SUPERVISION SESSION

##### CONTENT

The first group session was focused on contracting for the group supervision intervention. Careful attention was paid to allowing for a full discussion on the purpose of the group supervision. In this session the group identified and agreed upon on the goals of the group supervision. The rules and procedures for the group supervision were established. Issues such as: frequency of meetings, confidentiality, duration of meetings, time and place of meetings, decision-making, conflict resolution were all discussed and agreed upon. The role of the supervisor as a mediator was reviewed and agreed upon.

At this session the group members identified the purpose of the group as: a vehicle for support for one another, a vehicle for exchange of ideas in social work

interventions, a vehicle to identify and review obstacles encountered in providing effective protection services and a vehicle for monitoring the overall caseload of the unit.

The goals of the group supervision were as follows: To enhance the skill level and knowledge of group members in their job as protection social workers. To identify, assess and reduce obstacles encountered in the delivery of protection services by the unit. Specific content objectives identified for the group supervision sessions were: to clarify and review policies and procedures of the agency in delivering protection services; to clarify the role of the protection social worker; to assist with caseload management; to review and apply theory pertinent to child welfare [such as, normal human development, assessment of families]. While these specific objectives are geared to the improvement of service delivery, as well as being educational in focus, the objectives were also supportive as these were specifically identified by the group members. The team selected and identified the specific content areas which they felt was needed by them.

#### PROCESS

All three social workers participated in the first group supervision session. In this session I spent a significant portion of the time on the beginning stage of group building. To accomplish this, an emphasis was placed in sharing how I viewed the purpose of the group. I

encouraged and supported group members in discussing how the group process could be of assistance to them. I clarified my role as a supervisor. Group members were encouraged to express their own opinions. As well they were encouraged to verbalize clearly what their needs as protection workers were. Group members identified, reviewed and agreed upon the purpose and objectives of the group supervision and the rules of the group.

The first session ended with a summary of the group supervision contract and a review of the task for the next group supervision session. Group members identified and selected caseload management, and in particular verbalized their difficulty in meeting the requirements of the job, as the topic for discussion of our next group supervision session.

#### ANALYSIS

The beginning stage of group work entails the ability of the mediator to assist group members in articulating clearly the purpose of the group. Shulman [1982] suggests that this can be accomplished by the mediator sharing with the group her own sense of purpose, to clarify the role of group members and the mediator's role and to reach out to group members, so that they as well can express how they envision the process, what fears they may have and what are the potential benefits.[p. 31] In doing so an attempt is

made at clarifying the issue of authority which may, if left unspoken retard the process of group development.

Toseland & Rivas [1984] have indicated that at "the beginning of any group, members are not fully certain about the purposes of the group." [p. 141] It is important that the purpose of the group be clearly articulated. The mediator helps group members share their interest in participating in the group as well as expressing their concerns. This assists group members with developing trust.

Thus, in the initial session of the group intervention I encouraged group members in the discussion of group purpose, goals, objectives, and rules, in order to clarify how the group supervision intervention may assist them; to articulate their needs as protection workers; and to express some of their concerns.

The issue of authority, in particular, in developing group supervision had to be addressed. Group members needed to clearly understand my role before they could fully grasp their role in the group supervision process. Addressing this issue, I reviewed the three functions of supervision: administrative, educational and supportive. I concurred with Patti, [1987] in that to be supportive of supervisees, one must be task focused. [p. 379] The role of the mediator was clarified by examining how I would assist the group in meeting its task. I raised issues which needed further clarification and or exploration. I attempted to reach out

and help members address issues which they appeared to be resisting and to provide an opportunity for all members to express themselves, and assisted in facilitating the process of resolution when differences presented themselves.

The end of the session confirmed that there was a need for the group supervision intervention. The group members were relatively new to the agency and a number of common issues in the delivery of protection services were affecting them in the performance of the job. The group supervision intervention was seen as a vehicle to address some of the problems.

The criteria established for the group supervision process was met. Effective group supervision was accomplished by developing patterns of behaviour which were geared to meeting the task of the session. Group members articulated and agreed upon the group purpose, goals, objectives, rules and decided upon the content of the sessions. The process of engaging in the task for the session was complemented by recognizing difficulties encountered in the performance of the job. In essence this was done by reaching out and assisting group members to articulate their feelings. The group interaction process was characterized by group members participating in the discussion. Group members, however, were careful in their communication and interaction patterns with each other. In this group supervision session communication patterns were

directed from group member to myself more so than from group member to group member. The first group supervision session, I hold, began the process to support social work staff in their performance of their job by providing an opportunity for group members to come together and jointly establish a structure for the group process which would meet their needs as articulated by themselves. In addition, the process of the first group supervision session helped individual group members to learn that other group members were also feeling some frustration in the performance of the job, thereby learning that they were not all alone in their feelings.

#### THE ORGANIZATION

During the interval between the first group supervision session and the second group supervision session the following issues had an impact on the development and maintenance of the group supervision intervention:

The unit's caseload in intake of both child abuse cases and neglect cases continued to rise. Normally the investigation of a child abuse case takes approximately five working days. Two cases of child abuse at this time presented above normal difficulty due to the nature of the allegation. Two social work staff were fully deployed to investigate and assess these two cases. This also required that the third social worker cover intake for the period of

investigation and assessment of the two child abuse cases. This had the effect of increasing stress on the overall unit. As the group had identified in the first session, they were already experiencing stress around caseload management, particularly as the unit was operating with one staff vacancy. As a result of the two child abuse investigations and the ongoing investigation of neglect of children a number of children came into care. The available foster care resources were insufficient to meet the demand. This factor, also added stress to the social work staff in meeting the requirements of their job.

Miles, et al. [1986] have elaborated on the requirement of an organization to develop what they call a good fit with the environment. This concept presupposes that an organization must align itself well with the environment and arrange their organizational structure and work demand to meet environmental pressures. In the case of the agency the recognition of unsatisfactory conditions in the delivery of protection services was necessary. While the agency recognized that insufficient foster resources were a problem, the response out of necessity was to focus specifically on the immediate problem of finding the required beds. However, the agency did not then engage as an agency in planning further around the shortage of foster care resources.

Rather the agency responded to a crisis without engaging in a problem solving orientation to ongoing deficiencies in the delivery of services. Had the agency been able to engage fully in a problem solving orientation to plan for foster care resources, this would have provided a model for workers to follow in their own practice. In my view more overall planning around the lack of foster care resources would have had the effect of improving morale, and decreasing stress, even when workers were required to respond in a crisis.

The need for additional social work staff in the unit was identified by the agency. While the agency advertised and took necessary steps in attempting to recruit social work staff, the agency was not immediately successful. The unit's existing social work vacancy was not filled until April 1988. This factor continued to cause stress to social work staff.

In summary, lack of foster care resources, and lack of a full complement of social work staff in the unit where the group intervention was implemented contributed to staff stress and hindered the initial process of developing and maintaining the group/team approach to supervision.

## SECOND GROUP SUPERVISION SESSION

### CONTENT

The content of the second group supervision [as indicated earlier in this chapter] was to identify obstacles in meeting caseload management requirements.

### PROCESS

All three social workers participated in the second group supervision session. In preparation for this group supervision session, group members had been asked to review their caseload and identify which caseload requirements had not been met or were behind.

I began the group supervision session by articulating clearly the task for the session. In addition, I summarized from the previous group session by indicating my awareness of difficulties they were encountering in meeting all the caseload demands as had been expressed by the group in the previous group supervision session. I utilized empathy skills and paraphrased to encourage group members to get in touch with their feelings and assist group members in supporting one another. Munson, [1983] indicated that in group supervision, the supervisor must consider methods which would "be used to get practitioners to risk exposure in the group and how will anxiety about such risk be dealt with." [p. 131]

The group discussion was then structured first to identify which caseload requirements were not met or were

behind. Second, each of the problems was then analyzed to obtain further data on the problem. Finally, plans were made to address the problems identified. Toseland & Rivas, [1984] have indicated that the group mediator must "help members to stop and think about the problem, collect data, analyze alternative solutions before deciding what to do." [p. 272]

The group members identified the following problems in caseload management: Too many disruptions with new intakes and crises in the caseload which interfered with carrying out their planned activities for their caseload; a lack of foster homes, homemakers, and other one-to-one resources which hindered the ability to carry out the job; a lack of knowledge about the agency policies and procedures regarding recording which created problems in recording; a lack of knowledge as to the expectation of what is required in assessing and working with families, in view of a recent message from administration that protection units were to begin to provide treatment as opposed to utilizing outside resources; and last, not sufficient time to carry out all the job requirements.

The following responses were agreed upon by the group: First, to deal with crises and intakes, the group agreed to meet briefly at the beginning of each day and to review as a group all incoming intakes. The assignment of cases for investigation would take place after considering the other case requirements which individual workers had outstanding.

It was also hoped that this process would allow for individual group members to help one another in addressing what areas in the investigation needed to be dealt with. Group members hoped that this would also allow for individuals to choose cases which they felt able to handle well.

Second, a review of policies and procedures for recording were to be dealt with in individual supervisory sessions.

Third, as a group we acknowledged that administration's direction to move towards treatment had some merit. However, as a group we decided that the unit staff required further knowledge and skills in investigation, assessment and general case management before we could tackle treatment issues.

The issue of lack of resources was discussed. The group agreed this created major difficulties for the agency, but was beyond the scope of the group to address.

#### ANALYSIS

The decision to focus the second group supervision on difficulties in case management was a challenge. In particular I feared that it would raise too early in the process of group development issues of emotional content and conflict for the group. Toseland & Rivas, [1984], Gitterman & Shulman, [1986]; Shulman, [1982]; and others have indicated that in the beginning group stage, the mediator

should avoid emotionally charged issues. The subject of case management would require the group members to critically address problems they were having in meeting all the requirements of the job. The discussion could possibly move into issues which were unsafe for group members early in the process of group development. At this stage in group development members might be assumed to be establishing connections with other group members. Further, group members are not necessarily ready to fully expose themselves for fear of how they may be perceived by other group members.

Group members participated fully in the beginning section of the session, as well as identifying clearly what caseload requirements were causing problems. Communication patterns while primarily group member to mediator, began moving to communication from group member to group member.

Analysis of each of the problems, however, produced less communication. Some resistance was clearly operating, and members were not prepared to risk themselves. I raised the problem in general terms of the difficulty in critically assessing oneself in the performance of the job function. I attempted to help the group see how they were not alone. The group members were able to overcome some of the obstacles, however, I sensed resistance which I chose to leave at this time.

The group was able to meet the task of the second group supervision successfully. While there was some resistance in addressing obstacles in performance of the job, most obstacles were acknowledged. Shulman [1982] suggests:

"As the work progresses, it is not unusual to encounter some resistance from staff members, who often are of two minds about proceeding in difficult areas of work. In part they reach out for growth and change, while at the same time they want to pull back and hold on to what is known and comfortable." [p. 90]

A problem solving approach was primarily utilized by myself in this second group supervision session. As Toseland & Rivas, [1984] have elaborated on this approach, the process utilized was one of: Assisting group members to identify the problem[s], develop specific goal[s], collect data in relation to the problems, partialize problems, prioritize problems, select the best plan, and set the stage for implementation of the plan.

Effective group supervision was met by accomplishing the task of the second group supervision session supplemented by individualizing of group members. This process was accomplished by myself acknowledging in the early part of the session any feelings such as frustration or incompetence which the group members might be experiencing. This was helpful for group members to express, and they could recognize that other group members were also feeling the same. The criteria established for the group development process began to unfold as group

members began to establish patterns of communication from member to member. The analysis of the problems encountered in meeting caseload demands allowed group members to share with one another some of the difficulties they were having in meeting the requirements of the job. This process also allowed group members to share to the degree of personal comfort which they had with the group. This involved some risk to the level of trust which had been obtained by the group, and thereby facilitated the ongoing development of the group process. The criteria related to the leadership role presented a dichotomy, a division of two separate processes engaged by myself which at first glance may appear conflicting: mediating and exercising authority judiciously. The development of the group process called for mediating; engaging all group members and assisting the group to reach consensus. Group supervision however, called for the exercise of authority when necessary and applicable. The combination of these two roles required clarity on my part to set parameters where group members could fully engage in consensus decision making and where these parameters could not be exercised by group members due to my administrative job responsibility. To demonstrate this point more fully, the suggestion by group members to meet daily to review all intakes and decide how to proceed in the investigation and assessment required the engagement of group members in group discussion and consensus in decision

making. Ultimately each new intake case required investigation and assessment. Failure of the group to arrive at consensus as to who of the group members would conduct the investigation, would require that I utilize my authority and assign the case. Group members, in my opinion, clearly understood the limitations inherent in the consensus decision making model. They recognized that I was ultimately administratively responsible to the agency for service delivery decisions. In practical terms this meant that staff recognized that all new cases would have to be assigned. Group members, through discussion, participated fully in ensuring that assignment of cases was fair and allowed for individual expertise and preference.

#### THE ORGANIZATION

During the two week interval between the second and third group supervision sessions a number of factors continued to mitigate against the development of a team/group supervision intervention. These can be summarized as following: Intake of new child abuse cases and neglect cases continued to rise. The unit handled five new cases of child abuse during this period. Second, two social work supervisees indicated in individual supervision that they would be resigning. Third, the additional children brought in to care created difficulties for placement which further over extended the available resources.

The continued increase of intakes for the group/team had a serious affect on the group's morale and the stress level. The agency was also faced with a service delivery problem which needed prompt resolution. The agency in addressing this problem of shortage of staff to handle intakes in the unit, obtained the assistance of staff from other social work units to cover intake for the unit temporarily and this freed up unit social work staff to conduct the investigations. This solution, I hold, was appropriate for the immediacy, although inadequate for the long term. Jelinek, et al. [1986] have indicated that the availability of resources affects performance, culture and the overall performance of the organization. The authors add that organizations require flexibility and the need for continuous correction. These processes are essential to respond appropriately to environmental forces. [p. 7 - 15]

The agency did not have in place appropriate mechanisms to engage in regular evaluation, problem identification, and problem solving. The resignation of two social work staff from the unit contributed further to the problems the agency was having. For the group supervision intervention, the group continued to meet for the remaining sessions, notwithstanding the group intervention did not reach the middle stage of group development. [This issue has been addressed in the analysis of each of the following group supervision sessions.]

The lack of foster resources to accommodate the children coming into care as indicated above continued to increase the agency's difficulties. The agency had developed specific plans for the recruitment and maintenance of foster care homes. However, the agency in implementing its plans for recruitment, and maintenance of foster homes did not employ the plans made. As Argyris & Schon [1978 & 1974] have noted a gap in the internal consistency between the "espoused theory" [in this case the specific plans adopted by the agency to recruit foster homes], and the "theories-in-use" [what actually was done to recruit foster homes], differed significantly, and were therefore ineffective.

As a result of the pressures of staff shortage to handle intakes, and lack of foster resources the agency began to experience conflict between work units: most notably between the protection unit and the resource unit. Meetings held to plan placement of children were focused on challenging decisions made about why children were in care. Social work staff continuously challenged resource staff over lack of resources. Both these processes were counter-effective for the morale of agency staff.

### THIRD GROUP SUPERVISION SESSION

#### CONTENT

The content of this session was educational in nature. The main focus was a review of normal human growth and development. This area had been identified in the first group supervision session as requiring review to assist in conducting investigations of neglect of children.

#### PROCESS

All three social workers participated in the third group supervision session. I introduced the material for this session by linking knowledge of normal human growth and development as essential in helping group members conduct investigations of neglect. In addition, I indicated that it would foster an understanding in investigations to apply community norms when making family assessments regarding protection matters. I reviewed the initial group supervision session by elaborating that group members had requested that this issue be addressed. The main task of the session was to review theory and apply the theory to the concept of community norms held by families in relation to child rearing practices.

The format employed for reviewing the theory of normal human growth and development was presented by myself following the general recognized stages of human development, as indicated by Falconer & Swift, [1983].

The presentation was followed by a number of questions, specifically posed to generate a discussion of different cultural norms held by ethnic groups who resided in the delivery service area.

The discussion was also focused on group members addressing different values in relation to parental responses. In particular this was chosen to assist the group at arriving at a common value stance. [Toseland & Rivas, [1984] have elaborated on the need for group members to discuss their value stance and thereby arriving at a common value stance generated by incorporating and changing personal points of view.]

The group supervision session ended by identifying the task for the next group supervision session. Group members identified as the subject of discussion a thorough review of the protection worker's job.

#### ANALYSIS

Linking the understanding of normal human growth and development to the task of service delivery and investigation allowed for continuity in the group supervision intervention. Given that this particular group supervision session was educational, an attempt was made to employ adult educational learning principles. Knowles [1970] has elaborated on the need to set educational experiences for adults in a manner in which adults as participants are able to self-actualize themselves as

individuals. This was accomplished by choosing a topic for presentation which had been selected by the group. The discussion was facilitated by having group members critically apply knowledge of human behaviour to situations occurring in the local communities served and exploring differences in child rearing practices in different ethnic communities. The discussion afforded the opportunity for group members to participate fully and geared the discussion to specific issues in which group members wanted input, and clarification of their own.

Shulman [1982] has also identified the requirement for the maintenance of a group to engage in discussion of values early in the process of group development. This particular discussion provided the group with the emergence of some common values and thereby began the process of developing the group culture; it also provided the opportunity for group members to strengthen communication patterns which were member to member rather than member to myself.

Given the level of group member participation in this session, I assumed that individual group members had not shared with other group members their intention to leave the agency. As a group mediator, I decided not to disclose this information at this time.

The task for the third group supervision session was met. This group supervision was effective in assisting individual group members by engaging them in a process of

understanding human growth and development. The development of the group process was enhanced by the group members themselves. In this group supervision session the group communication and interaction patterns were primarily from group member to group member. Individual group members reached out to one another in helping clarify and understand values held by group members around child rearing practices. Some individual group members reached out to other members and acknowledged different values held by individuals. Group members gave permission for some differences but generally strove for commonality of values in regard to what behaviours minimally are the community norm for appropriate parental response in raising children. Thus, group members helped recognize and value each other's point of view and moved the group to a common definition. Some aspects of group interaction were however guarded. The group process had yet to reach complete trust. Hence, group members challenged each other to a degree in regards to values held by individual group members but did not fully engage in resolving every aspect of the conflict which arose as a result of different value stances held by individual group members. Consequently, the criteria established for the group process continued to assist in the development of the group. The criteria related to the leadership role was met by helping the group express individual differences and

mediating to arrive at some degree of consensus in decision making.

#### THE ORGANIZATION

During the two week period between the group supervision sessions the two social work staff resigned. In addition to the difficulties discussed under this section in the two previously reviewed group supervision sessions earlier in this chapter, additional administrative duties were assigned to me, which included the direct investigation of a particularly difficult case and some increased administrative responsibilities. This increased responsibility reduced my effectiveness in planning and delivering the next two group supervision sessions.

#### FOURTH GROUP SUPERVISION SESSION

##### CONTENT

The task of this group supervision session was to review, clarify and discuss fully the protection worker's role.

##### PROCESS

All three social workers participated in the fourth group supervision session. I began the group supervision session by stating the purpose of the group supervision session and asked if there were any issues which group members wanted to discuss prior to beginning the task of

today's meeting. I made eye contact with all group members, and expressed openly the difficulties we had as a group in delivering services and the impact on group members. Supportive supervision as elaborated by Smith, [p. 190 - 196] requires the ability to help express job related discouragement and discomfort.

This process opened the door for group members to share with one another the fact that two of them were leaving the agency. Through this discussion, I helped group members express their conflicting feelings about leaving.

The discussion was then focused on group members outlining their role as protection workers. I facilitated this process by assisting group members to categorize their role in specific areas: protection, investigation, assessment, intervention, apprehension, court, supervision, advocacy, and coordination.

Group members addressed each of the areas and as the discussion proceeded switched back and forth between the areas as they discussed issues which had not been raised in either of the categories.

The discussion ended by summarizing what the protection worker's role is. Group members then selected family assessment as the topic of group discussion for the next group supervision session.

## ANALYSIS

I believe that I could have handled this group supervision session much better. Specifically, I stopped the discussion of group members dealing with their resignation and the group's feelings about it too early in the process. This was partially due to my not having dealt with my own feelings and my being unable to share my feelings with the group. Thus, I left the group hanging and not having fully addressed and resolved feelings of guilt, or feelings of being deserted.

In facilitating the discussion around the protection worker's role, I failed to fully utilize problem solving skills. While, I helped to initially partialize the topic, I did not help the group members to clarify each of the areas. As the group struggled back and forth in each of the areas, I made no attempt to either define the area, elaborate, paraphrase and so forth; neither did I raise with the group feelings which arose due to frustration and lack of clarity. I hold with Russell, [1985] that as the supervisor and mediator I retreated to a leadership style which demonstrated little concern for the task and the group. Russell [1985] in detailing this leadership style has commented that "this style of supervision is usually not considered as a dominant style but as back-up style to which supervisors retreat when the environment is tense or stressful." [p. 163]

In summary, the group was able to complete the task for the session, however the group supervision as discussed above did not effectively meet the requirements in the criteria for both effective supervision or group development. In particular in the middle phase or work phase of this group supervision session, patterns which assist in task performance as elaborated by Patti [1987] initiating structure, clarifying tasks, providing task specific feedback [p.379] were not utilized. What Patti [1987] has stated, has also been supported by Toseland & Rivas, [1984] in their discussion of the skills required of a mediator to enhance the process of group development. The criteria established related to the leadership role was also not met in this group supervision session.

#### THE ORGANIZATION

The interval between the fourth and fifth group supervision was three weeks. During this period, the agency was successful in recruiting a social work staff member to fill the vacancy which the unit had at the onset of the group supervision intervention. This factor assisted in lifting the morale of the group, even though the new worker would not arrive until April.

Given the stressors the agency was facing , as outlined in chapter 1 of this practicum report, the agency experienced difficulty in communicating promptly to agency staff the government's impending new direction for child

welfare services integration in the particular community in which the agency functioned.

Due to the smallness of the professional community, staff at other community agencies were fully informed of the new developments and shared this information with the Agency's staff, "over the back fence". This factor created some additional stress and anxiety for social work staff as they lacked official knowledge of what impact this new direction might have on them. Communication as outlined by Skidmore, [1983] is "essential". "Teamwork begins with communication among staff members. This means sharing ideas... it means interacting and reflecting back ideas. [p. 154] Jelinek, et all. [1986] have detailed the necessity for organizations to "engage in an ongoing process of evaluating their purposes, questioning, verifying, and redefining the manner of interaction with their environments." [p.59] Effective organizations, the authors maintained align themselves regularly with their environment.

Difficulties in communication with social work staff members by the Agency had a negative impact. Team members were already experiencing stress as noted earlier. A lack of clarity as to how integration of services would affect service delivery and in particular, potential redefinition of service delivery in protection added additional stress for group members.

## FIFTH GROUP SUPERVISION SESSION

### CONTENT

This group supervision session was specifically structured in content to address assessment of families, and issues of child neglect. The ecological approach, a tool for family assessment of neglectful families as elaborated by Maidman, [1984] was reviewed.

### PROCESS

The material was presented by beginning with a definition of child neglect. This was followed by establishing an operational definition of child neglect. A review of the characteristics of neglected children was conducted. Group members applied the ecological approach to two families in the unit's caseload. The content was delivered in a lecture format. All three social workers participated in the fifth group supervision session. In the process of this group supervision three different processes were employed. First, group members were encouraged and supported in defining from their knowledge and experience the concept of neglect. The discussion which followed began by asking group members to verbalize clearly what factors in family dysfunction lead to neglect. The discussion proceeded by having group members consider and elaborate on behaviours which are deemed characteristic of both neglected children and neglectful families. This process entailed

mediating the group discussion to focus at arriving at a definition of neglect. Group members were encouraged to participate by elaborating on their experience in investigation and assessment of families.

Second, operationalizing the concept of neglect to arrive at a working definition of neglect required problem solving skills in assisting group members to identify data, clarify and partialize this data, plan and evaluate. In this section of the group supervision process, an attempt was made to utilize the information provided by the group and putting it together to arrive at the working definition of neglect. Group members were encouraged to define neglect by combining the characteristics of families who neglect their children with the indicators of both neglected children and neglectful families. The definition by Maidman, [1984] was then compared and reviewed. Group members discussed the definitions and arrived at consensus as to the definition to be employed in investigation and assessment of families who neglect their children.

Third, the ecological approach to assessing families who neglect children was presented by myself with the aid of flip chart paper. Group members were then asked to select two cases, and apply the knowledge learned.

## ANALYSIS

In the beginning part of this group supervision session the decision to have group members engage in defining neglect was very helpful and supportive. In the supervision process, the supervisor must convey [as Smith, [1988] has indicated] a sense of their worth as professionals.[p. 160] In having recognized for group members that they have the knowledge and the competence to arrive at a definition of neglect the supervisor affirms supervisees in the performance of the job.

Supervision as discussed in chapter II of this practicum report and in chapter III, also demands that the supervisor employ an educational function. This was accomplished in this session by making a demand for work, partializing the information, obtaining data, planning an outcome.

During the process of applying the ecological knowledge to the two specific cases, group members challenged each other to critically assess the situation; and group members provided support for one another by recognizing stresses in the assessment of families. Patterns of communication were open, and member to member during this section of the group supervision session.

During the presentation of the ecological approach by myself there was little discussion. Members although encouraged and supported to participate were primarily

silent. Feedback on this area noted that the lecture presentation was not appreciated. This could have perhaps been averted by having asked group members to read the material prior to the meeting and having structured the discussion to review the material. Another factor operating in this session was that members had clearly begun to distance from one another, as two members prepared to leave. Lang [1986] in her discussion of why some collectivities do not develop a group identity outlined lack of commitment of group members to the group process as a factor impeding the development of a group. In addition she suggested that the life span of the group would also determine whether or not a group moves from collectivity to reflect full characteristics of a group.

In summary the group supervision session accomplished some of the tasks for the session. Group members were individualized through the process by recognizing their competence, by assisting them to get in touch with their feelings. Both criteria required of supervision were met by structuring the group discussion with patterns of behaviour which were conducive to achieving the task and in balancing this process with individualizing group members.

The criteria for the group process was not met. The group began to disintegrate as members engaged in the process of separation from other members and the agency. Communication amongst group members and communication between group

members to myself also decreased. The criteria related to the leadership role was accomplished to a degree. I was able to facilitate and encourage group members to engage in some of the group discussion. The group was able to arrive at consensus in the definition of neglect. However, the choice of presenting the ecological material by lecture format was counterproductive. Group members were very quiet during this part of the session. I was unable to engage them in discussion. Thus, I can say that I did not exercise well enough the criteria established in relation to the leadership role. In retrospect as supervisor I could have elicited feedback from group members. It is possible that this might have resulted in a different mode of learning, for example individual group members might have undertaken to present certain sections of the material to the group.

#### THE ORGANIZATION

The agency was successful in recruiting social work staff [for the two vacancies created by the two social work staff leaving the agency] to begin employment in April. Since the agency had been successful in filling the vacancy which the unit had at the onset of this practicum there was an expectation that the unit would be at full complement. In addition, the agency recognized that the caseload had significantly increased and that there was a need for an additional social work staff position. Thus, by the end of the practicum the work unit ended up with a compliment of

five social work staff. The staff morale improved. Further, the opportunity was available for the unit to restructure the overall caseload in the unit. This afforded the opportunity for implementing specialization of job duties. Group members had clearly stated the need for an intake position and a child abuse specialist. The agency moved in this direction, thus being supportive of staff's needs.

### SIXTH GROUP SUPERVISION SESSION

#### CONTENT

The content of the last group supervision was twofold: One, the group supervision session was scheduled to specifically say "good-byes" and deal with the separation of two group members. Second, the session was also structured to hold a discussion of recommendations from the group members of what the agency may be able to do to diminish turnover of social work staff.

#### PROCESS

All three social workers participated in the last group supervision session. This group supervision session was held one week after the fifth group supervision session. The final group supervision session began by outlining the purpose of this session. I introduced the topic of separation by recognizing and elaborating on the difficulties encountered by us as individuals in expressing the conflicting feelings which are normally encountered. I

elaborated specifically by indicating that those leaving often feel some guilt as well as relief if the situation has been stressful as it had been working with the agency. I also commented on how group members staying may feel deserted and some anger. This process allowed group members to openly discuss their feelings and share this with the group.

In this particular session, I ensured that sufficient time was allowed to discuss how group members were feeling prior to moving on with the task of the group supervision session.

In summarizing this particular segment of the group supervision, I helped group members acknowledge the contributions that individual group members had made towards the delivery of protection services in the unit. This was effected by recognizing skills and strengths which individual members have and linking the overall strengths of the group to make up a unit.

I moved the discussion towards the overall accomplishment of having five social work staff working in the unit in the very near future, and on the positive outcome of allowing for specialization of duties.

Group members engaged and participated fully in this discussion. The group had a clear sense that regardless of the difficulties encountered, some effective change in the structure and delivery of services in the unit would improve

the delivery of services and decrease the work related stress for workers.

The group discussion then focused on encouraging group members to identify and elaborate what the agency can do to alleviate social work staff turnover.

Group members identified the following issues:

Interview procedures for job applicants should be reviewed. Potential employees should receive a better understanding of what the job function is. In particular the agency should clarify the difficulty encountered by protection workers in placing children in foster care. Other difficulties were encountered due to lack of protection policies and procedures, and in meeting recording requirements. Group members recommended that a social worker should be part of the interviewing team for job applicants to assist in clearly presenting some of the problems encountered in delivering service.

Group members also identified the need for the agency to pay more attention to worker's needs when hiring recent BSW graduates without prior experience and who were new to the community. The staff identified a need for a support network for social work staff in this position.

Group members recommended that the agency review the recording guidelines to streamline the process, decrease redundancy and rationalize the requirements in a manner that can be conducive to planning services for families.

Orientation and training of new social work staff was identified as taking priority. The training of social work staff should be systematic with specific goals and objectives and regularly evaluated. Social work staff should receive their orientation within the first three months. Regular and ongoing training should continue for the first full year of employment.

Group members recommended that new protection policies and procedures should be finalized by management and implemented as soon as possible.

The agency needed to address fully the lack of foster resources and to plan strategies to increase these resources or to address alternatives. Additional resources to support families without apprehending children should be planned as well, such as homemakers.

The group session ended with group members feeling positive about the direction of the unit. Group members were also able to accept the resignations of the two social work staff.

#### ANALYSIS

In this group supervision session, I assisted group members to express their feelings, thereby creating a supportive climate. Kadushin [1985] has referred to the need for supervisors to assist supervisees in expression of their feelings. [p.263] This process, he adds, builds a sense of psychological well being which is critical in

helping supervisees move to effective performance of their task.

An effort was also made to ensure that as a group we worked through the termination process, thus allowing the group the capacity to continue its work when new members joined. The literature of separation emphasizes the need for individuals to terminate with significant others prior to establishing new significant relationships. Jewett [1982] in discussing separation and loss has elaborated on the need for adults "to make sense of what has happened and to understand the hows and whys." [p.78] This decision proved very beneficial for the group members. The group discussion was open. It allowed for individual group members to express their feelings, receive and offer support to group members.

The group then engaged in the task for the group supervision session, identifying and elaborating on how the agency can prevent staff turn over. By this group supervision session, group members were very familiar with the problem solving approach, and the discussion flowed easily. Group members themselves ensured that there was clarification of the problem, contributed data, planned and made recommendations. The recommendations outlined in the content of this group supervision were arrived at from a discussion of the problem, data which elaborated and

partialized the problem, and alternatives on how the problem could be addressed.

In this group session, group members had established patterns of behaviour which were conducive to the performance of the task. This group supervision was effective in meeting the task of the session. Both processes required to be effective in the group supervision process were operating: Patterns of behaviour which enhanced task performance were encouraged and supported; the expression of individual group member's feelings was facilitated, thus allowing the individualization of group members and creating a climate conducive to task accomplishment. Thus, the criteria for effective supervision was met. Group members engaged in problem solving concurrently meeting socio-emotional needs of the group. The criteria related to the group process was met even though individual group members were leaving the group. Group members fully engaged in communication and interaction patterns with each other. Also group members expressed and shared their feelings with each other reaching out to one another. Group members had no difficulty identifying issues, and elaborating recommendations to the agency for implementation of ways which would decrease staff turnover. Group members expressed clearly satisfaction at the prospect for the unit of five social work staff. In this part of the discussion group members expressed optimism at the potential

of delivering better services to the community and in particular at the opportunity to allow for specialization of service delivery [intake and child abuse]. The criteria related to the leadership role was met. In this group supervision session I was fully aware of group members feelings. I made a definite effort to ensure that the group discussion allowed sufficient time for members to work through leaving the group. Engaging the group in identifying, and elaborating a list of recommendations for the agency presented no difficulty. I believe this was due to group members who appreciated having input into perceived potential change, as well as recognition of themselves as valued group members. The fact that two group members were also leaving the group allowed them perhaps to honestly express themselves.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

#### SUMMARY

This practicum was undertaken to develop and implement a group approach to supervision with social work staff delivering child welfare services. The rationale for this intervention was based on the assumed benefits of a group/team approach to the delivery of social work services. Brill [1976] has outlined the following benefits of team work:

Team practice is an experience in participatory learning for team members. Team practice not only increases the effective use of specialized knowledge but also provides a more comprehensive but integrated range of service. Team practice promotes focus on total problems rather than on segments, as well as thinking about how parts fit together into the whole. The process of team practice possesses "emergent" qualities, which lead to self-actualization and self renewal. It is a dynamic procedure, promoting personal and group growth. [p. 26]

In addition to the benefits of a group work approach to the delivery of social work services, I wanted to implement a process which would enhance and support social work staff delivering protection services. The team approach to social work supervision had the potential to assist social work staff in: enhancing morale; provide an opportunity for social work staff to learn from one another; establish a vehicle for social work staff to critically examine their

practice; provide an opportunity to engage in problem solving to address service delivery problems; break down barriers of isolation for social work staff in the unit; address obstacles encountered in the delivery of social work services; decrease social work staff turnover.

A review of the social work supervision, group work and organizational theory was conducted to assist in developing the criteria for the group supervision intervention. The framework for the supervisory tasks in group intervention identified the need to engage in preplanning, and to encourage patterns of behaviour which would enhance the group moving through the stages of group development. In order to meet the tasks of the group, the supervisor/mediator is required to balance patterns of behaviour which support task performance with patterns of behaviour which support or individualize group members.

The development of a group intervention in an agency is an interactional process. The literature of group work recognizes that the situation will have an effect on the maintenance and development of the group. Specific factors were selected [decision making, problem solving orientation, planning, organizational control, communication and leadership] on the assumption that these hinder or enhance the successful implementation of the group supervision intervention as these in particular have either a negative

or positive impact on the delivery of services and thereby on the morale of the social workers.

There were six group supervision sessions. Each session was structured around a specific task. Group members evaluated each of the first five sessions at the end of each session.

The analysis of the group supervision sessions did reveal that group members were successful in so far as: clearly determining the purpose of the group supervision intervention, establishing goals, objectives, rules of procedure and contracting tasks for each session.

The following themes in the development of the group process were beginning to be established: Interaction and communication patterns were initially from group members to group leader. However, by the third group supervision session group members had established a communication pattern of group member to group member. The group as an entity had begun to establish some degree of trust. Group members were able to openly express some negative feelings without fear of how they may be perceived by other group members. Individual group members had begun the process of finding their own role in the group. One group member assumed leadership from the third session on in meeting the needs of other group members by regularly expressing her/his own feelings. For example, making connections between her/his feelings and that of others in the group discussions

["That sounds like you are feeling..... I also, sometimes feel...." ]. Another group member assumed leadership by assisting the group to stay on task. This pattern began to clearly establish itself in the fourth group supervision session [ "Let us now review what is our role in court"; "what is required of us as protection workers?"]. Group members engaged in clarification of value stance to a degree. As group members they probed into each others stance in regards to what was considered appropriate parenting of children. Group members acknowledged individual differences, but pushed one another to arrive at consensus in relation to minimum standards of adequate parenting. Conflict did arise between group members but this process was not fully resolved. The group process began to disintegrate clearly in the fourth and fifth group supervision session following the resignation of two group members. Communication and interaction patterns decreased significantly in this group session. The group supervision process reached only the beginning stage of group formation. However, the sixth session was more positive.

The tasks for each of the group supervision sessions were accomplished. The processes which were stipulated in the tasks for the intervention, as described in chapter III, were met. The group supervision intervention was geared to balance patterns of behaviour which are conducive to task performance with the ability of the mediator to engage in

patterns of behaviour which individualize group members. Some group supervision sessions were more effective than others. In the fourth group supervision session, I hold that the session could have been handled better. The criteria established for the group supervision, as elaborated in chapter II, of this practicum report was partly met as has been elaborated upon in chapter IV.

The group supervision process was also not successful in fully supporting social work staff members. Factors suggested by Lang [1986] such as time for the group experience, the time frame from session to session, and the commitment of the group members to the agency and thereby to the group, played a significant role in the maintenance of the group. Many of the factors suggested by Lang [1986] were encountered through out the implementation of the group supervision process. Lang suggests that collectivities do not always move from a collective to exhibiting group processes. Factors which she has outlined which inhibit the movement from collectivity to group were encountered in the implementation of the intervention.

The timing between group sessions should be established at intervals which are conducive to the development of group processes [Not too soon between intervals and not too long between intervals]. Thus, ideally the group supervision sessions should have been held

regularly every second week. This was not always accomplished.

Further, the overall time frame for the group intervention process was too short in duration. In my opinion, the use of group supervision requires a minimum of six months, meeting regularly and with consistent membership.

Commitment by group members to the process and being part of the group for the entire process was a factor. The decision by two group members to leave the agency curtailed the development of the group process. Other factors which hindered the development and maintenance of the group supervision intervention can be summarized as follows: lack of available resources to support social workers in the performance of their protection job; a continued increase in intakes which resulted in service delivery problems; complexity in the nature of new referrals of child abuse; shortage of social work staff to handle the volume of investigations. I have argued that these factors were compounded by the inability of the agency to engage in a long term problem solving approach. The concept of problem solving requires the ability of an agency to provide leadership, and teamship. The agency's solution to the problems were short range and addressed the immediate problem without a thorough analysis of all the factors impinging on the problem, therefore the solutions only

partially addressed the problems. In addition I have argued that the agency began to face a dilemma caused by the lack of fit between the "espoused theory" and the "theory-in-use". The gap in congruence between these theories in action led to conflict creating stress, anxiety and/or ineffectiveness for group members and the agency.

Obstacles outlined at the onset of the intervention significantly decreased the likelihood of the successful completion of the intervention. These can be summarized as follows: the lack of a systematic orientation and training approach in place for new social work staff; the lack of clear policies and procedures in the delivery of protection services; a cumbersome and repetitive recording package; insufficient available time for direct supervision of new social work staff at the beginning of their employment; a unit all composed of recent BSW graduates with no previous work experience and new to the community. These factors and those discussed above had the effect of lowering the morale of the unit. Further, individual social work staff felt overwhelmed and unable to deliver adequate protection services. This in turn contributed to two staff deciding to leave the agency.

## CONCLUSION

The group supervision process was unsuccessful in meeting the issue of central importance which led to the implementation of this practicum. Namely, the development of alternative measures to concretely support social work staff members in performing their job. Group supervision, I assumed offered the potential to build staff members' morale; to stabilize staff patterns of employment in the unit of work; and to decrease staff burn out. During the process of implementation of group supervision two staff members resigned from the agency.

Even though the group supervision intervention was not effective in developing and maintaining a team, I still hold that the concept of teamwork has a valid place in supporting social work staff members and aiding in building staff morale. As a result of the increase in new intakes and the agency having been successful in the recruitment of social work staff, the unit overall caseload was able to be reorganized in a manner which allowed for specialization of duties: intake, child abuse, children in care and two family protection workers. All group members believed that the organization of services by function would provide support to all group members in delivering services.

The failure of the intervention was more an outcome of the forces operating in the agency combined with group

factors in the development and maintenance of the supervision process than the concept itself. Shulman [1982] has indicated the following in his summary of the interactional process of supervision:

A number of obstacles can complicate the interactions between staff members and these important systems, including problems associated with complexity [e.g., the inherent problems found in large organizations], difficulties in maintaining accurate communications, and the ease of overlooking the common ground between workers and their relevant systems. [p. 32]

In concluding this report I submit that the goals established for this practicum have been achieved:

1. I have obtained a knowledge base in the areas of social work supervision, group work and organizational theory;
2. Criteria for the group supervision process were established based on social work supervision and group work theory;
3. The group supervision was implemented affording me the opportunity to gain further experience in group work. This process helped improve my social work skills; mediating skills, assessment skills, supportive skills and conflict resolution skills.

The development and implementation of the group supervision process has provided me with a greater understanding of the relationship between theory and action  
For example:

1. The role of the supervisor, arrived at from the literature review had its shortcomings. Difficulty arises in attempting to combine two different processes: mediation and task oriented behaviours. Work reality does not always allow for mediation, which is time consuming and open ended. Theory is always general and practice is always content specific.

2. A very comprehensive analysis of the potential group must be undertaken prior to deciding whether to implement a group supervision process. A critical factor in the development of the group is commitment of group members to the organization. In determining whether group members have a commitment to the organization, in addition to approaching individual social workers to obtain feedback from them, the analysis should address patterns of behaviour exhibited by individual social workers in the performance of the job. For example, if a social worker is regularly late for work, or regularly he/she appears unable to make changes required in the pattern of work this might be an indication that the social worker may not stay in the employment of the organization.

3. Prior to determining the main purpose of the group supervision process an analysis should be undertaken to determine what main focus the group should take. My experience suggests that group supervision might be focused

on one of the following: a supportive group; an educational group; or "group supervision".

In my view a supportive focused group should be undertaken if social workers exhibit patterns of behaviour which are characteristic of high stress, low morale and burnout. The content should be geared to assisting social workers to identify stress, examining ways to cope with stress, such as time management, learning how to meditate and visualize, and others. The group sessions should be planned in a manner that the group members can also have fun.

An educational group supervision should be implemented if social workers are relatively new to the organization. This is even more important if the social workers are new to the social work profession. In general, I would state that this type of group would be beneficial when social workers have been with the organization less than one year.

The implementation of group supervision, as has been discussed in this practicum report, should be undertaken primarily with social work staff who have some experience in social work and are not exhibiting patterns of behaviour which might be indicative of burnout. Where social work staff exhibit patterns of burn out one might begin first with supportive group intervention followed by group supervision [task focus supplemented with individualizing group members] as identified in this practicum.

4. The theoretical concept of group has some inherent limitations in the implementation of a group supervision process. Trust needs to be developed by the group without full disclosure by either the group members or the supervisor. The supervisor due to the administrative responsibility to the organization cannot raise all issues which either specifically relate to a group member, or issues which the organization might be struggling with. Group members might also be limited in the extent of disclosure about clients in order to preserve confidentiality. This implies that group supervision in practice is limited in some areas. The agency should have in place formal mechanisms to allow discussion of issues [for individual staff or management] that are not appropriate to be dealt with in the context of group supervision.

5. Group supervision is not an answer to all problems which might be facing a unit of work or an organization. Group supervision should not replace individual supervision of social work staff.

6. The implementation of a process of group supervision requires legitimization by the organization for support of group members and supervisor.

7. Effective development of group supervision requires in addition, to commitment of group members, regular time intervals between group supervision sessions. I would

recommend two weeks between sessions. The overall time frame of the group supervision to develop the group and reach the middle stage of group work might take approximately six months. However, this would depend on the composition of the group and the focus of the group supervision sessions.

In concluding this practicum, it has been interesting to note that the unit of staff which I presently supervise are working together as a team. Staff turn over has been reduced. Some of the foundational attitudes and expectations laid down in the initial practicum group have persisted. I assume the persistence is due to the group members having experienced a process which they found helpful and supportive, in terms of their work.

APPENDICES



APPENDIX B

FIRST GROUP SUPERVISION SESSION

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Team Objectives: Not understood, rating of 1; Clearly understood, rating of 5.				2	1
2. Degree of Mutual Trust: High suspicion, rating of 1; High trust, rating of 5.				3	
3. Communications: Guarded, rating of 1; Open, free, rating of 5.	1			2	
4. Degree of Mutual Support: Each takes of himself, rating of 1; Shared responsibility, rating of 5.			2		1
5. Handling Conflicts Within Team: Avoidance, rating of 1; Working through conflicts, rating of 5.			2	1	
6. Degree of Influence on Other Team Members: None, rating of 1; A great deal, rating of 5.			3		
7. Organizational Environment: Restrictive, rating of 1; Supportive, rating of 5.				1	2

Comments: "started group process well, by enticing feedback and providing suggestions..."  
 "Appears to be mutual respect and acceptance of another. Higher trust & ease in dyads than in group as a whole."  
 "we are working towards a "team" and all seem to open & responsive to this."

APPENDIX B

SECOND GROUP SUPERVISION SESSION

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Team Objectives: Not understood, rating of 1; Clearly understood, rating of 5.				1	2
2. Degree of Mutual Trust: High suspicion, rating of 1; High trust, rating of 5.		1		2	
3. Communications: Guarded, rating of 1; Open, free, rating of 5.			2	1	
4. Degree of Mutual Support: Each takes of himself, rating of 1; Shared responsibility, rating of 5.		2	1		
5. Handling Conflicts Within Team: Avoidance, rating of 1; Working through conflicts, rating of 5.		1		2	
6. Degree of Influence on Other Team Members: None, rating of 1; A great deal, rating of 5.		1	2		
7. Organizational Environment: Restrictive, rating of 1; Supportive, rating of 5.			2		1

Comments: "You handle and encourage participation from all members. Organized, but flexible."  
 "Did not perceive significant conflicts this meeting."  
 "More a sense of trust of the group as an organized unit."  
 "There is openness to discussion of what personal perceived problems are."

APPENDIX B  
THIRD GROUP SUPERVISION SESSION

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Team Objectives: Not understood, rating of 1; Clearly understood, rating of 5.					3
2. Degree of Mutual Trust: High suspicion, rating of 1; High trust, rating of 5.			1	2	
3. Communications: Guarded, rating of 1; Open, free, rating of 5.		1	1	1	
4. Degree of Mutual Support: Each takes of himself, rating of 1; Shared responsibility, rating of 5.			1	2	
5. Handling Conflicts Within Team: Avoidance, rating of 1; Working through conflicts, rating of 5.		2			1
6. Degree of Influence on Other Team Members: None, rating of 1; A great deal, rating of 5.		1	2		
7. Organizational Environment: Restrictive, rating of 1; Supportive, rating of 5.			1	1	1

Comments: "More relaxed, progression towards more openness and ease".  
 "I feel comfortable asking for clarification from other workers, supervisor."  
 "Patricia takes concrete measures to reduce stress for unit. These measures are effective [so far!]"

APPENDIX B

FOURTH GROUP SUPERVISION SESSION

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Team Objectives: Not understood, rating of 1; Clearly understood, rating of 5.					3
2. Degree of Mutual Trust: High suspicion, rating of 1; High trust, rating of 5.			3		
3. Communications: Guarded, rating of 1; Open, free, rating of 5.		1	2		
4. Degree of Mutual Support: Each takes of himself, rating of 1; Shared responsibility, rating of 5.			3		
5. Handling Conflicts Within Team: Avoidance, rating of 1; Working through conflicts, rating of 5.			3		
6. Degree of Influence on Other Team Members: None, rating of 1; A great deal, rating of 5.		3			
7. Organizational Environment: Restrictive, rating of 1; Supportive, rating of 5.					3

Comments: "Group "bonding" has not taken place, unlikely to  
until new staff established."  
"Some "distancing" occurring with staff leaving  
unit."  
"Conflicts are not taking place."

APPENDIX B

FIFTH GROUP SUPERVISION SESSION

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Team Objectives: Not understood, rating of 1; Clearly understood, rating of 5.					3
2. Degree of Mutual Trust: High suspicion, rating of 1; High trust, rating of 5.					3
3. Communications: Guarded, rating of 1; Open, free, rating of 5.				3	
4. Degree of Mutual Support: Each takes of himself, rating of 1; Shared responsibility, rating of 5.			3		
5. Handling Conflicts Within Team: Avoidance, rating of 1; Working through conflicts, rating of 5.			2	1	
6. Degree of Influence on Other Team Members: None, rating of 1; A great deal, rating of 5.				3	
7. Organizational Environment: Restrictive, rating of 1; Supportive, rating of 5.					3

Comments: "Do not sense a feeling of cohesion yet."

"I would not recommend the "lecture format", a discussion of the information would have been more stimulating, and interaction among group members."

## APPENDIX C

### PLAN FOR GROUP SUPERVISION SESSIONS

#### FIRST GROUP SUPERVISION SESSION

**Goal:** To develop a group process in supervision;  
To develop the concept of teamwork.

**Objectives:** To establish a group contract for the group supervision sessions.  
To begin the formation of the group.

**Strategies:**

1. To promote group discussion and agreement on the overall goals of the group supervision process. The discussion to be focused on an statement of intent. The statement of intent to be broad enough to encompass individual need and preference of group members.

2. To develop specific objectives for the group supervision process by group discussion and group consensus. Objectives for the group supervision process to be specific statements of intent which could be operationalized and measured. The group objectives to be a means to reaching the overall group goals established by the group.

3. To encourage discussion and agreement by group members as to the rules and procedures for the group supervision process. Issues to be discussed and agreed upon: group rules; frequency of meetings; duration of meetings; time of meetings; place of meetings;

confidentiality; audio-taping; decision-making process; and group conflict resolution process.

4. To discuss fully and agree upon the group supervision content by group members.

5. To develop a group contract including group supervision purpose; goals; objectives; rules; procedures and content.

6. To encourage all group members to participate fully in the discussion of all items to be agreed upon. To support individual group members in participating in the group discussion. To recognize for the group individual member's differences and needs. To facilitate and encourage communication patterns from group member to group member. To facilitate a discussion which establishes a process of decision-making and conflict resolution which is fair to all group members and recognizes group members values. To encourage and support individual group members attempts in leadership.

7. Group members to evaluate the group supervision session and provide feedback.

#### SECOND GROUP SUPERVISION SESSION

**Goal:** To develop a group process in supervision.

To develop the concept of team work.

**Objectives:** To assist group members in identifying obstacles in meeting caseload requirements.

To assist group members in developing effective plans to meet caseload management requirements.

**Strategies:**

1. Begin the group discussion by acknowledging difficulties encountered by group members in meeting all caseload requirements.

2. Recognize for group members feelings engendered due to caseload requirements being behind.

3. Allow an opportunity for group members to engage in discussion of feelings which they may have regarding not meeting caseload demands.

4. To establish links between group members and begin to break down isolation. Caseload predicament may allow for links to be made between group members.

5. To begin the discussion of caseload management by requesting individual group members to identify for the group some issues from the total caseload.

6. To request that each group member provide data on the total caseload broken down into: number of neglect cases; number of child abuse cases; number of child care cases; number of cases at the investigation stage; and number of cases in front of the court.

7. To ask individual group members to identify in each grouping of cases what are the problems in meeting caseload requirements.

8. Ensure that the problems identified are specific enough so that plans for change can be generated and implemented.

9. Encourage and support group members to discuss fully problems identified by the group by engaging in a description of the problems.

10. Assist group members in categorizing overall problems into major areas.

11. Facilitate group discussion so that the group can arrive at consensus regarding categories for the problems.

12. Focus group members discussion in an analysis of the problems. Arrive at some consensus of the analysis of the problems.

13. Facilitate the group discussion to move towards plans to overcome problems.

14. Make a demand of group members to make a commitment to the group to begin and implement plans arrived at by the group to meet caseload requirements.

15. Help group members share feelings and thoughts in addition to information throughout the process.

16. Summarize major problems, analysis of the problems and plans to overcome problems.

17. Ask group members to evaluate the group session to provide feedback.

### THIRD GROUP SUPERVISION SESSION

**Goal:** To develop a group process in supervision.

To develop the concept of teamwork.

**Objectives:** To increase group member's knowledge and understanding of human growth and development.

To assist group member's in applying theory of human growth and development to child welfare protection.

**Strategies:**

1. Present the material of human growth and development as outlined by Falconer & Swift, [1983].

2. Encourage and facilitate a discussion of what is normal child development. In particular in light of the recognition that almost all families experience problems which affect their children also. However, many of these children develop well within the norm. Thus, we need to develop a working definition of what is normal for a child within his/her culture.

3. Facilitate discussion of normal child development addressing in each stage of development: parenting, emotional/social development of the child, and milestones of each stage of development.

4. Help the group members to identify, elaborate on different parenting styles and expectations of families in their caseload. Assist group members to discuss and assess

these differences in relation to the definition of normal child development arrived by the group.

5. Facilitate the group discussion in a manner that all group members participate equally.

6. Encourage and support member to member discussion of issues.

7. If value conflict arises, help members recognize the conflict, by asking individual members to express their thinking in relation to their opinion. Encourage group members to examine alternatives. Encourage and support group members to agree on criteria which is derived from different points of view.

8. Discuss fully the following questions:

a- "Identify two cultural minority groups in our area of service. What are some of the cultural norms in these groups for the different developmental stages?" [Falconer & Swift, 1973, p. 36]

b- A parent is asking for help about her six and a half year old daughter due to her behaviour at home. What kinds of information do you need in order to assess the problem?

9. Ask group members to evaluate the group supervision session for feedback.

#### FOURTH GROUP SUPERVISION SESSION

**Goal:** To develop a group process in supervision.

To develop the concept of team work.

**Objectives:** To arrive at a clear definition of the protection worker's role.

To ensure all group members fully understood the protection job.

**Strategies:**

1. To promote and facilitate a working definition of protection by group members.

2. To arrive at group consensus on the working definition of protection.

3. In light of the working definition of protection focus the group in discussing: under what circumstances and conditions are children in need of protection.

4. During this process ensure that all individual group members have input. Encourage group member to group member discussion. Validate group members for their contribution. Offer positive feedback.

5. When group members express a strong difference of opinions leading towards conflict: recognize group members differences, ask each group member to elaborate and clarify their opinion, attempt to find common ground, build on common ground and help the group to arrive at a redefinition of the issue. During this process provide positive feedback to group members expressing differences of opinion.

6. Upon agreement by group members about the circumstances which give rise to children being in need of

protection focus the discussion on what is the role and job of the protection worker.

7. Initiate the group discussion by focusing on protection as our first responsibility which entails:.....  
[ensure that the following areas are identified, discussed and understood fully:

a- investigating suspected abuse or neglect to verify or negate the need for service;

b- determine the social - familial factors underlying the neglect or abuse;

c- conduct a thorough family assessment;

d- plan jointly with the family interventions to alleviate the problem;

e- apprehend the child if necessary;

f- prepare for court when a child has been removed from the home or when we are seeking a court order for supervision of the family;

g- supervise children in or out of care as necessary [established by planned services];

h- if children are in care regular visits are required to deal with: why they are in care; separation and attachment; keeping bond with biological family; and planning their stay in care;

i- advocacy for families in caseload for services required from community agencies;

j- making recommendations to other agencies about treatment plans and goals for families and children.

8. Assist group members in identifying clearly all the job responsibilities of their job as protection workers.

9. Clarify and elaborate on areas in which group members are not clear about their job.

10. In the implementation of this part of the group discussion assist group members to identify, partialize and elaborate on each of the protection worker's functions.

11. In addition recognize group members feelings of being overwhelmed. Facilitate the expression of feelings by all group members. Help group members make connections with each other.

12. Assist group members to develop a plan which would address educational needs in regards to job function.

13. Ask group members to evaluate the group supervision session for feedback.

#### FIFTH GROUP SUPERVISION SESSION

**Goal:** To develop a group process in supervision.

To develop the concept of teamwork.

**Objectives:** To enhance the knowledge of group members in family assessment.

To help group members understand the ecological approach to family assessment.

To have group members apply the ecological approach to families in their caseload.

**Strategies:**

1. To promote group discussion by assisting group members to define child neglect.

2. To facilitate the group discussion of child neglect to arrive at a working definition of child neglect.

3. To assist group members to categorize child neglect by following the provincial statute: abandonment, lack of appropriate physical care [lack of supervision, lack of medical dental care, lack of adequate education, lack of adequate nutrition, lack of adequate shelter] and emotional cognitive care.

4. Review with group members characteristics of children who have been neglected.

5. Throughout this process encourage group members to participate fully in the group discussion by making eye contact. Paraphrase regularly in response to group members contribution to encourage communication. Assist the group to stay focused by clarifying when necessary, repeating and/or summarizing. Encourage group member to group member communication by linking remarks made by one member to another. Facilitate the learning process by helping group members understand what a thorough family assessment is and knowing what to look for will help them in working with the

family. Family assessment is the basis for developing plans to work with families.

6. Help group members express feelings and thoughts about problems in family assessment. Make connections about feelings and thoughts of all group members. Redirect the group to address these feelings and thoughts in a goal oriented manner. Thus, the discussion is constructive.

7. Present the material on family assessment based on an ecological perspective by Kish & Maidman, [1984]

8. Material to be presented on a lecture form with the use of wall paper to summarize main points.

9. In each section of the material summarize and ask group members regularly if they understand or need clarification of the material.

10. Summarize the material clearly.

11. Ask two group members to apply the material on family assessment based on an ecological perspective to one of their families in the caseload. In addition, based on family assessment to recommend a treatment plan.

12. Facilitate the learning experience by encouraging group members to make parallels with families in their caseload. As well to help group members assess differences in their families.

13. Promote a group discussion in planning alternatives by drawing from their own experience what has worked with some of their families.

14. Encourage group members to discuss fully obstacles in working with families and exploring alternatives. Help group members to use their imagination in attempting to explore alternatives.

15. Thank group members for presenting their family assessment and the plans for intervention.

16. Request group members to evaluate the group supervision session for feedback.

#### SIXTH GROUP SUPERVISION SESSION

**Goal:** To develop a group process in supervision.

To develop the concept of team work.

**Objectives:** To allow group members to separate from the agency.

To encourage group members to identify obstacles in working for the agency.

**Strategies:**

1. To convey clearly to all group members my feelings of warmth, respect, sadness, happiness and trust by making eye contact and portraying an attitude of respect.

2. To begin the group discussion by personally expressing how I felt about two group members leaving, recognizing the contradictory feelings engendered.

3. Encouraging and supporting group members in their expression of their own feelings regarding two members leaving.

4. To allow sufficient time in the discussion of leaving so that the group members could move on to the task of the meeting.

5. To help group members address in a constructive positive manner the contribution to the agency of the two group members leaving.

6. To assist group members turn the discussion to group accomplishments to date.

7. To help group members begin the discussion on obstacles by being goal directed of what is required for effective service.

8. Through above process encourage active participation and discussion by group members to group members. Validate individual group member contribution by paraphrasing and making links with other group members.

9. Focus the group discussion on obstacles in working with the agency, by indicating how the agency would benefit from learning about some of the obstacles they as workers encountered.

10. Facilitate the group discussion by eliciting descriptions of what problems were encountered.

11. Encourage group members to fully describe the problems they encountered.

12. Facilitate the group discussion by helping group members to partialize and categorize the problems encountered.

13. Provide an opportunity for group members to review the information and reflect on it, to ensure that the problems have been clearly defined.

14. Summarize the group supervision session by making the connection between the first and second part of the session.

15. Thank group members for their contribution and participation in the group supervision sessions.

16. Help group members to begin to prepare themselves for the new group members joining the group in the near future.

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