

STRENGTHENING CHILD WELFARE SUPERVISION: A Participatory Design Process

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Supervision is Critical to Child Welfare Systems

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When child welfare supervision is strengthened and child welfare supervisors are fully supported:

- Practice improves;
- We infer that better child and family outcomes are achieved;
- Worker retention improves; and
- Measures of supervisor effectiveness, team effectiveness, and worker and supervisor job satisfaction improves.

Aligned Systems and Supervision

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Child welfare agencies that are getting better results for children and families are “aligned systems”:

- The agency has invested time and energy in a participatory effort to define its mission, vision, and the values and principles that guide its work and operations.
- All the agency’s subsystems are aligned with these definitions: (1) practice model; (2) training system; (3) information technology (IT) system; (4) quality assurance (QA) system; (5) the supervision system.

Challenges in Strengthening Supervision

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- Over 20 States focused on child welfare supervision as a strategy to improve outcomes in their Round 1 Program Improvement Plans (PIPs).
- Many of these States were not as successful as they hoped because they took a one-dimensional approach—for example, focusing only on strengthening supervisor training or rewriting supervision policy.
- This one-dimensional approach of States was “necessary” but not “sufficient.”
- Taking a comprehensive approach is key, and that is the goal of the Supervision Redesign process.

Key Elements of Supervision Redesign Process

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- NRCs meet with State, Regional, and County Leadership to clarify vision for supervision.
- Supervisory Workgroup is formed that includes a diverse group of respected Supervisors from around the state and other key stakeholders.
- Leadership gives a charge to Workgroup and NRCs facilitate 4-6 Workgroup meetings over 6-8 month period.
- Workgroup debriefs with leadership after every meeting to ensure ongoing feedback.
- Workgroup members serve as ambassadors to leadership and staff in their own offices to get additional input and ensure ongoing feedback.

Key Elements of Supervision Redesign Process (cont.)

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- Workgroup defines current approach to supervision and then identifies the values and principles that should guide supervision
- Workgroup engages in brief time and activity study to capture information on their current activities
- Workgroup develops comprehensive strategic plan to strengthen supervision
- Workgroup prioritizes and sequences the strategic plan
- Workgroup presents the plan to Leadership
- State implements the plan

Roles in the Supervision Redesign Process

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State Leadership (State, regional, local and community):

- Vision, buy-in and support
- Ongoing participation in the process
- Partnership with Supervisors
- Ownership of the results, barrier busters

State Coordinator:

- Work intensively with NRCs in developing and implementing the process so it works for the state
- Ensure constant feedback loops and transparency
- Ensure productive meetings, participation, continuity

Roles in the Supervision Redesign Process (continued)

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Supervision Work Group:

- Experts in the field, empowered to develop the Strategic Supervision Plan
- Ambassadors to the field throughout the process
- Practice change agents during implementation

NRCs:

- Facilitate the process
- Provide subject expertise, broker knowledge and resources
- Convene webinars between Workgroup meetings
- Manage Time and Activity Study
- Facilitate planning for evaluation of results

Steps in the Supervision Redesign Process:

Step 1: NRCs Meet with Leadership

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- **Determine Leadership's vision for child welfare supervision**
- **Relate Vision to agency framework:**
 - Agency mission
 - Agency vision
 - Agency guiding principles and values/practice model
 - Agency Program Improvement Plan
- **Identify areas of focus**
- **Gauge Leadership commitment to:**
 - This Supervision Redesign Process as a major effort to build the Agency's practice capacity
 - Meeting with the Workgroup after each session for continuous feedback loop (no surprises)
 - Act on resultant plan

Steps in the Supervision Redesign Process:

Step 2: Formation of the Supervision Work Group

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Range of Membership—approximately 12 (small population States) to 24 (large States):

- State Coordinator to manage the process
- Representative supervisors Office (highly respected by their peers) chosen by Regional Managers and Central:
 - Representing all programs (e.g., CPS, in-home, foster care)
 - Representing both small and large offices
 - Representing different levels (time) of supervisor experience
- Mid-managers (supervisors of supervisors)

Steps in the Supervision Redesign Process: Step 2: Formation of the Supervision Work Group (*cont'd*)

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- Central Office Representatives (for example, CFSR/PIP, QA, IT, Training Unit)
- Representatives of State Association of County Directors/appropriate Committee(s)
- University partners
- Partner agencies if the Child Welfare Agency has privatized services
- Ad hoc participants as needed (e.g., human resources)
- NRCs staff/consultants

Steps in the Supervision Redesign Process:

Step 3: First Meeting of the Work Group

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Four Agenda Items for the First Meeting:

1. Agency Leadership provides the charge and offers support.
2. Work Group serves as a focus group to provide a full picture of current culture, structure and practice of supervision.
3. Work Group develops vision of child welfare Supervision.
4. Work Group defines purpose of child welfare Supervision and principles and values to guide supervision.

Steps in the Supervision Redesign Process: Step 4: Supervisor Time and Activity Study

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- Workgroup decides whether to conduct study
- Time spent on each activity, plus planned vs. unplanned
- One “typical” week captured
- NRC-CWDT conducts analysis to preserve confidentiality
- Benefits to individual supervisors and agency
- Results help inform strategic plan elements

Steps in the Supervision Redesign Process:

Step 5: Development of the Supervision Strategic Plan

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- Developed by the Workgroup and ad hoc participants with special knowledge as needed
- In person meetings, conference calls and webinars
- Meetings of entire Work Group and sub-groups (assigned different sections of the strategic plan)
- Work requires 6-8 months to complete the Supervision Strategic Plan (not implementation)

Steps in the Supervision Redesign Process:
Step 5: Development of the Supervision Strategic Plan (cont'd)

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The Impact of the interaction between Agency Leadership and Supervisors in Step 5:

- In many jurisdictions, there is not a strong relationship between leaders and supervisors.
- Interaction gives both a chance to learn, and there is a transference in both directions:
 - ✦ Supervisors learn what it takes to get something through state office.
 - ✦ State office staff learn what Supervisors deal with at the local level.
- So in the development of the Strategic Plan, Workgroup members go beyond “pie in the sky” ideas and focus on practical goals and actions that will really make a difference.

Steps in the Supervision Redesign Process:
Step 5: Development of the Supervision Strategic Plan (*cont'd*)

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Each State's Supervision Strategic Plan is different and unique. However, the categories of topical areas have tended to be the similar, including:

1. Supervisor Recruitment, Training, and Professional Development
2. Supervisor Support
3. Casework/Clinical Supervision
4. Administrative/Management Supervision
5. The Supervisor's Role in the Agency and the Community

Steps in the Supervision Redesign Process:

Step 6: Presentation of the Strategic Plan

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- The Workgroup completes, prioritizes and sequences the draft into a multi-year child welfare strategic plan
- Presentation to leadership (Central Office, Regional Managers, Association of County Directors, etc.).
- Modifications are made as needed
- Presentation to internal and external stakeholders, with opportunities for feedback and modification
- Finalize

Steps in the Supervision Redesign Process:

Step 7: Beginning Implementation

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- Agency leadership assigns each goal to appropriate persons/departments/counties/agencies/stakeholders.
- Work Group members sign up as liaisons and monitors for each of the goals.
- Work Group liaisons meet with assigned people/departments, etc. for background and orientation to the goal and its meaning.
- Work Group meets quarterly to monitor implementation, celebrate successes, deal with emergent barriers, and modify the plan as needed; meets with leadership quarterly to report progress and get assistance with barriers.

Essential Ingredients for Success

#1: Leadership and the Supervision Redesign Process

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Leadership:

- Vision
- Buy-in
- Participation in the process
- Partnership with supervisors
- Ownership of results

Essential Ingredients for Success:

#2: Participatory Design Process

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- The Principle of Participatory Design: the people who will be responsible for implementing the work should be involved in designing the plan.
- This is a principle which guides all the work of this Supervision Redesign process.
- Of course, this means the supervisors.
- But it also means leaders, mid-managers, and other internal and external stakeholders who can make or break this plan.

Essential Ingredients for Success:

#3: Feedback Loops and Transparency

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- Leadership consultation and buy-in is critical for the success of this process. At the end of each meeting of the Work Group, Central Office and regional leaders are asked to meet with the Group for a review of what happened at the meeting.
- Supervisors serve as “ambassadors” back to their offices and to the leadership and supervisors in their region, briefing them on developments at each meeting and asking for feedback.
- Regular presentations to the Association of County Directors and/or appropriate Association Committee(s) and solicitation of feedback.
- The goal: a totally transparent process where there are no surprises and everyone owns the Plan.

Essential Ingredients for Success:

#4: Marketing Plan

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- The feedback loops are, in a sense, part of a marketing plan.
- As and after the Strategic Plan is developed, the Work Group needs to spend time on how to “sell” the plan to internal and external stakeholders.
- The Work Group “spins” for different stakeholders, identifies potential barriers, and develops plans to address these.
- A Marketing Plan is particularly helpful in state-supervised/county-administered systems and in states that have fairly autonomous counties.

Essential Ingredients for Success:

#5: Ensuring Sustainability

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- If a child welfare system does not continuously monitor child welfare supervision, it will deteriorate.
- Change the agency culture of practice and supervision AND create a child welfare supervision system in the agency.
- Embed systemic reform at the mid-level of the agency by making child welfare supervisors the agency's practice change agents. This is one way for agencies to "weather" change in leadership.
- Some States have formalized the Supervision Work Group to continue after development and implementation of the Strategic Plan as a means to monitor supervision continuously and to provide the leadership a forum for ongoing dialogue about child welfare practice and outcomes.

Sources

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