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Introduction

Whether you work with demanding and unruly students in a school, the emotional distress of those who are traumatized, depressed, existentially despairing or mentally ill, disturbed and fragmented families, the sick and the dying, angry criminals or the homeless and destitute, you are all part of the helping professions and this book is written to support you in learning, developing and doing high quality work throughout what may be a 50-year career.

As we have worked with a growing variety of different helping professions and in different countries, we have increasingly recognized that quality work by an individual professional cannot be sustained alone. We cannot rely on the learning we received in our initial training, for the needs of individuals, families, communities and helping organizations are constantly changing and so are expectations and professional best practice. We need to be continually learning, not just new knowledge and skills, but developing our personal capacity, for our own being is the most important resource we all use in our work. We also need to be continually supported and held in staying open to demands of emotionally relating to a wide range of people and needs. We need the open honesty of our colleagues constantly to attend to how we each fall into illusion, delusion and collusion in our work and develop our ethical capacity to respond to complex and competing demands. Quality work cannot be sustained alone.
The first part of the chapter presents the foundation or our thinking which has remained constant since our first edition. The second half addresses how the world has changed dramatically since then. For now the helping professions are in a world where there is more demand, with greater expectations of quality of help and with fewer resources at a time when the world is inevitably more volatile, disturbed and interconnected. We have now hit ‘the limits to growth’ and the economic, ecological and human crises are combining to create both a ‘great disruption’ to life as we have previously known it and the enormous challenges of our times.

‘Good enough’ supervision

The late Donald Winnicott, paediatrician and psychoanalyst, introduced the concept of the ‘good enough mother’ – the mother who, when her child throws the food back at her, does not overreact to this event as a personal attack, or sink under feelings of inadequacy and guilt, but can hear the child expressing his or her temporary inability to cope with the external world. Winnicott points out that it is very hard for any mother to be ‘good enough’ unless she herself is also held and supported, either by the child’s father, or by another supportive adult. This provides the ‘nursing triad’, which means that the child can be held even when he or she needs to express their negativity or murderous rage.

This concept provides a very useful analogy for supervision, where the ‘good enough’ counsellor, psychotherapist or other helping professional can survive the negative attacks of the client through the strength of being held within and by the supervisory relationship. We have often seen very competent workers reduced to severe doubts about themselves and their abilities to function in the work through absorbing distress, dis-ease, and disturbance from clients. The supervisor’s role is not just to reassure the supervisee, but to allow the emotional disturbance to be felt within the safer setting of the supervisory relationship, where it can be survived, reflected upon and learnt from. Supervision thus provides a container that holds the helping relationship within the ‘therapeutic triad’.

In choosing to help, where our role is to pay attention to someone else’s needs, we are entering into a relationship which is different from the normal and everyday. There are times when it seems barely worthwhile, perhaps because we are battling against the odds, or because the client seems ungrateful, or because we feel drained and have seemingly nothing left to give. In times of stress it is sometimes easy to keep one’s head down, to ‘get on with it’ and not take time to reflect. Organizations, teams and individuals can collude with this attitude for a variety of reasons, including external pressures and internal fears of exposing one’s own inadequacies.

At times like this supervision can be very important. It can give us a chance to stand back and reflect; a chance to avoid the easy way out of blaming others – clients, peers, the organization, ‘society’, or even oneself – and it can give us a chance to engage in the search for new options, to discover the learning that
often emerges from the most difficult situations, and to seek support. We believe that, if the value and experience of good supervision are realized at the beginning of one's professional career, then the ‘habit’ of receiving good supervision will become an integral part of the work life and the continuing development of the worker.

In the last 35 years there has been an enormous increase in the use of counselling and other therapeutic approaches in many of the helping professions. This has in part been fuelled by the move away from more traditional methods, including institutional containment to ‘community care’ for those needing help and support such as supporting old people in their own homes more often than in residential care. This move has led to an ever-increasing demand not just on families and relatives, but also on the whole range of helping professionals who have had to learn new ways of relating to the distress, disturbance and dis-ease they meet in their work. At the same time there has been an increased acceptance by the general public that most of us will benefit from some form of counselling, coaching or professional support at certain stages of our lives.

This enormous upsurge both in counselling and psychotherapy, and in therapeutic approaches within many of the helping and people professions, has brought in its wake the recognition that such work benefits enormously from supervision.

In Chapter 6 (p. 60) we define supervision as follows:

**Supervision is a joint endeavour in which a practitioner with the help of a supervisor, attends to their clients, themselves as part of their client practitioner relationships and the wider systemic context, and by so doing improves the quality of their work, transforms their client relationships, continuously develops themselves, their practice and the wider profession.**

Thus the supervisor has to integrate the developmental role of educator with that of being the provider of support to the worker and, in most cases, ensure the quality of the supervisee’s work with their clients. These three functions do not always sit comfortably together (see Chapter 6), and many supervisors can retreat from attempting this integration to just one of the roles. Some supervisors become quasi-counsellors or coaches to their supervisees; others turn supervision into a two-person case conference, which focuses on client dynamics; others may have a managerial checklist with which they ‘check up’ on the client management of the supervisees. It is our intention in this book to help the supervisor develop an integrated style of supervision. We are not only advocating integration of the developmental, supportive and qualitative functions, but also a supervisory approach which is relationship based.

Sometimes, even in the best supervisory relationships, there will be occasions of being stuck, of wariness and even avoidance. For one reason or another, fear and negativity can creep in and it is useful for both parties to be able to recognize this and have tools for going through and beyond it. This book is addressed to both supervisor and supervisees, for we think that both have some responsibility for the
quality of supervision; both form part of the same system geared towards ensuring the quality of the work. As part of taking joint responsibility for the supervisory relationship which we are advocating, we have given guidelines to check out the process, especially around the initial forming of a contract for the working relationship. This working contract can be very important as it forms the boundaries and baseline to which both parties can refer. We emphasize how contracting is not just something that happens at the beginning of a relationship, or even at the beginning of each session, but is a process that needs constant revisiting.

Before entering this relationship, however, we believe that supervision begins with becoming a reflective practitioner and forms of self-supervision. Our reflective practice needs to include not only reflecting on our current work but also our core beliefs and motivations for being a helper. By doing this we can lessen the split that sometimes occurs in the helpers, whereby they believe they have no legitimate needs, and see their clients as only sick and needy, without their own resources. As Margaret Rioch says: ‘If students do not know that they are potentially murderers, crooks and cowards, they cannot deal therapeutically with these potentialities in their clients’ (Rioch et al. 1976: 3).

Our experience has been that supervision can be a very important part of taking care of oneself, staying open to new learning, and an indispensable part of the helper’s well-being, ongoing self-development, self-awareness and commitment to professional development. In some professions, however, supervision is virtually ignored after qualifying. We think that lack of supervision can contribute to feelings of staleness, rigidity and defensiveness which can very easily occur in professions that require us to give so much of ourselves. In extremes the staleness and defensiveness contribute to the syndrome that many writers have termed ‘burnout’ (see Chapter 2). Supervision can mitigate this process by breaking the cycle of feeling drained which leads to a drop in work standards which produces guilt and inadequacy which leads to a further drop in standards. Supervision is not just about preventing stress and burnout, however, but enables supervisees to continually learn and flourish, so they spend more time working at their best than would otherwise be possible.

Supervision, like helping, is not a straightforward process and is even more complex than working with clients. There is no tangible product and very little evidence whereby we can rigorously assess its effectiveness, although in recent years more research on outcomes has been carried out (see Chapter 6). One person brings to another a client, usually never seen by the supervisor, and reports very selectively on aspects of the work. Moreover, there may be all sorts of pressures on either or both of them from the profession, organization or society in which they both work to focus on a variety of differing agendas. So, as well as dealing with the client in question, they have to pay attention both to their supervisory relationship and to the wider systems in which they both operate. There is a danger that both the supervisees and the supervisor can be overwhelmed by the degree of complexity and become like the centipede who, when asked which foot it moved first, lost the ability to move at all.
Beyond ‘good enough’: the new challenges for supervision

Peter Hawkins has written this section to set supervision in the context of the challenges of the twenty-first century. Our basic position on supervision, outlined above, was developed when we first wrote on supervision 25 years ago. Today it still forms the foundation of our work and the trainings we give. Supervision that attends to the quality of the work with the clients as well as the support and development of the supervisee is, we believe, essential for all helping professions, not just at the time of training or being newly qualified, but for the entirety of one’s career. All of this is necessary but no longer sufficient.

We need to recognize that in the last 25 years the world has radically changed. In the mid-1980s, when we started writing the first edition, we lived in a world that believed that perpetual economic growth was possible and that with it would come constantly increasing resources for the helping professions, and improved quality of life for all. Although some wise and courageous writers with great foresight were already warning of the looming ecological crisis (such as Rachel Carson 1962 in *Silent Spring* and Bateson 1972) we could still pretend that it was a great way off and hopefully human ingenuity and science would find ways of avoiding it. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, this denial is no longer sustainable. Tim Smit, the founder of the Eden Project, wrote that the next 30 years are one of the most exciting times to be alive in the whole of human history, for in that time we will either discover whether ‘Homo is truly sapiens’ or we will join the fossil records. Thomas Friedman wrote in the New York Times (7 March 2008) in the midst of the economic crisis:

> What if the crisis of 2008 represents something much more fundamental than a deep recession? What if it is telling us that the whole growth model we created over the last 50 years is simply unsustainable economically and ecologically and that 2008 was when we hit the wall – when Mother Nature and the market both said: ‘No more.’

The economist Kenneth Boulding (quoted in Gilding 2011: 64) went further and wrote: ‘Anyone who believes exponential growth can go on forever in a finite world is either a madman or an economist.’

We cannot blame economists, bankers, governments or regulators for either the economic or the ecological crisis. We all created it with our addiction to, and reliance on growth and we will all be living with the entwined ecological and economic crisis for the foreseeable future until we make the necessary enormous changes to our expectations, our lives and our approach to living. So what does this mean for the helping professions? There are four key incontrovertible forces that are and will continue to shape the context of the helping professions for decades to come:

- greater demand
- higher expectations of quality of service
SUPERVISION IN THE HELPING PROFESSIONS

- fewer resources
- the great disruption.

Greater demand

The world's population is still exponentially growing. When I (Peter Hawkins) was born in 1950 the global population was only 2.5 billion. In 2011 it reached seven billion for the first time. The United Nations predicts that population growth will continue at 0.7 per cent a year which will lead to a world population of nine billion in 2050. So I will probably see it more than treble in my lifetime. Some people comment that the birth rate has been falling in developing countries, but in these countries the exponential rise in life expectancy is still fuelling the growth and, what is more, the people over the age of 70 are the biggest users of the helping professions. Migration, despite political rhetoric, will continue to increase. The poorest in the world can increasingly discover the disparity between their living standards and those of the rich world and the ecological crisis disproportionately creates severe hardship in the poorest parts of the world.

Higher expectations of quality of service

Not only are there many more people to help, but the expectations of all users of the helping professions are increasing exponentially. Thomas Friedman (2008) wrote that the world was not only getting ‘hot’ and ‘crowded’, but also ‘flat’, by which he meant that we all know what each other is getting. The number of mobile phones in the world reached seven billion even before the world population reached that figure. Even the economically poorest parts of the world have internet access by mobile telephony so we are all interconnected in new ways. This has two major impacts on the helping professions. Propriety knowledge of the professions is now democratized and liberated so that clients can become better informed than the professionals in many areas and can know what others are receiving in different parts of the country or in different parts of the world. Increasingly we are all demanding the best and when caring services get it wrong the media and internet can ensure that everyone knows about it.

Fewer resources

Many people still believe that the current economic downturn is a temporary setback in the inevitable rise in prosperity and continued economic growth. Yet the weight of scientific evidence shows us that this is a form of dangerous collective denial. Scientists show how it would take more than 1.4 worlds to sustain human life as it currently operates. That means we are annually using 140 per cent of the world’s available resources, or in other words eroding the fundamental resources year on year in a way that cannot be sustained. Economic forecasts on population growth and world consumption predict that by 2050 we will have a world that will annually run at 500–700 per cent of capacity (Gilding 2011: 51). Our wealth and
prosperity fundamentally come from the world we live in and we are massively overdrawn and we are eroding the base capital.

Combined with this we are seeing a large-scale move in economic power, with European and North American economies declining and rapid growth in the economies of Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRIC) and the N11 (the next 11 which all have the potential to overtake the current G7 leading economies in this century). Economic growth is moving south and east. In the overspent first developed countries, fewer resources in relation to the growing demand is an inevitability. We need to learn to adjust to living with this.

The Great Disruption

The Great Disruption is the title of Paul Gilding’s book (2011) in which he presents an overwhelming body of evidence that the world is facing an unprecedented time of challenge on all fronts. Climate change is no longer a threat but a reality and moving faster than the maligned ecologists of the last century were warning. Global warming is happening and leading to climate volatility including: increased floods, droughts, heatwaves and intense cold. Different regions will be differently and sometimes unpredictably impacted. Economic volatility is inevitable with our global interdependent economy at a time when we hit the limits to growth. We will see the price of basic food, energy and raw materials such as wood, fibre, concrete and minerals continue to rise faster than incomes. Political challenges will increasingly be beyond the capacity of nation states to resolve and we lack the global governance structures that can address them. We only need to look at the failure of the global eco-summits, the euro crisis, or the Israel–Palestine conflict to realize the extent of this.

This means that there is an inevitable increase in human disruption, disturbance, distress and dis-ease and where will the human consequences of this be most felt? It will turn up daily in our schools, hospitals, prisons, care homes, on the streets and in our workplaces. The helping professions will be at the front line of addressing the human consequences while they will also have to adjust to fewer resources and greater demand.

How can we respond?

A few years ago I spoke to a conference of teachers from across the developed world. They were all complaining about more being demanded of them – larger classes, year-on-year improvements in the exam performance of their pupils, children and parents demanding more and giving less automatic respect, and yet no increase in resources. The more they complained, the more powerless they became. I decided to challenge the disempowering consensual collusion and presented a few demographic, economic and scientific projections. I concluded by saying: ‘It seems inevitable that you will year-on-year be asked to do more at higher quality with fewer resources in a more disrupted and disturbed world. The question is what can we do together to step up to this challenge?’
I do not believe that our choices in response to the global challenges are either denial or powerlessness. Neither do I believe that heroically doing more, trying harder under greater pressure, will be sustainable. The challenges are beyond individual leadership or individual coping mechanisms. We need to work on this together and that means far greater levels of collaboration and combining than ever before. Supervision, teamwork and staff support are more crucial than ever, but they too have to develop and evolve far more quickly than ever before. We cannot supervise, lead or operate teams in the way we did when this book first came out. At that time I used to ask supervisees what they wanted from supervision and teams what they required from their team consultant. Now, when I supervise individuals, I ask them: ‘What is the world you operate in requiring you to step up to and what are the areas in which you struggle to respond?’ When I work with teams, I ask them: ‘What is the world you operate in asking you collectively to step up to, to which you, collectively, have not yet found a way to respond?’ Contracting needs to move from being more focused on the outside-in and future-back than starting from the individual’s needs and the problems of last week.

The world is requiring the human species to evolve and change. What is needed is major transformation in human consciousness, ways of thinking, behaving and relating, both to each other and ‘the more than human world’ (Abrams 1996). Supervision in the helping professions needs to play its part. Helping professionals will need to be constantly increasing their individual and collective capacities to respond and supervision needs to be in service, not just of quality assuring last month’s work with clients, but developing the human capacity to address the increased demands of tomorrow. In Chapter 2 we address what we see as the five fundamental capacities that we will all need to develop to be helping professionals who can respond fully to the great challenges of our time. Supervision will also face increased pressures, with supervisees better informed about what they could or should be getting from their supervisor, and supervision will have to respond to the conflicting needs of different stakeholders. (see Chapter 9)

Conclusion

In our first edition we were building on the work of Winnicott and many others to show how the challenges of deep emotional work with the clients of the helping professions cannot be met alone. We saw that it requires that you are constantly learning and developing your capacities and are yourself held and supported. Now in our fourth edition, 25 years later, the challenge is fundamentally greater. The argument that supervision is necessary for all helping professionals and not just for those in training and newly qualified should now be settled. We can move on to the bigger questions of how we support individuals, teams and organizations in a time when more is demanded, at a higher quality, with less resources and in the midst of a ‘great disruption’ with inevitable fallout.

When I was young, children would ask their grandfathers, if any were still alive: ‘What did you do in the Great War Grandpa?’ Our grandchildren will ask us: ‘What
did you do in the great disruption?’ We owe them an answer. We are certainly daunted by the task ahead, but cannot afford to be faint-hearted, for there is much to be done. We hope that this fourth edition of our book supports us in each making our faltering steps towards rising to the challenges of our time.