

**PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH IN ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE WITH  
SOCIAL WORK SUPERVISION**

**by**

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## DECLARATION

I, Esther Kgauhelo Lekalakala, declare that Participatory Research in Organisational Change is my own work and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



E.K. Lekalakala

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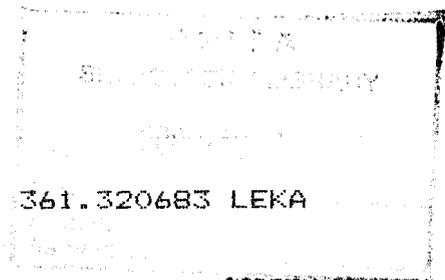
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## SUMMARY

The dissertation presents a participatory research process in organisational change with social work supervision. The study was conducted with a group of social work supervisors employed by the Department of Health and Welfare in the Central region of the Northern Province from September 1997 to November 1998. The participatory research process engaged the participants in a consciousness-raising and educational process. They were enabled to identify problems which rendered them ineffective, brought about by the socio-political transformation process in South Africa since 1994, and were strengthened as a collaborative group to work together to bring about change in their situation. Going through the process of dialogue as a group, the participants became empowered and more confident to do participatory supervision, which in turn would empower the supervisees as direct service providers.

Key concepts for the study are:

- Participatory research
- Participatory research process
- Participation
- Dialogue
- Organisational change
- Social work supervision.

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## CHAPTER 1

### ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

#### 1.1 Introduction

Just before the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa in 1994, the South African government had four provinces which had to merge with four independent states (Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei known as the TBVC states) and six self governing territories (Kwa Ndebele, Ka Ngwane, Kwa Zulu, Lebowa, QwaQwa and Gazankulu). The South African Government was in charge of the four provinces and three houses of parliament which were governed from Cape Town and Pretoria. After the elections, all the other governments were integrated into one central government with nine provinces.

The Northern province, like other provinces, had to integrate all the three houses of parliament (House of Assembly, Delegates and Representatives); the two self-governing territories (Lebowa and Gazankulu); one independent state (Venda) and the Transvaal Provincial Administration into one provincial government. The three houses served Whites, Indians and Coloureds respectively. The two self governing territories and the independent state served three ethnic groups (Pedi, Tsonga and Venda) in the Northern Transvaal, now called Northern Province, as part of the divide - and - rule policies during apartheid. The fourth government was meant to serve Blacks in white areas in the Transvaal. The implication was that all government departments with the same function in the four governments had to merge as well. This process continued after the 1994 democratic elections.

Like other departments, the Department of Welfare also experienced organisational change. As part of the system, the social work supervisors experienced changes within the work situation. Their work is not well structured as they are compelled in many situations to do both field work and administration. The latter is done without training, support, incentives, formal appointment, proper induction nor even a job grading. The atmosphere lowers their morale. The situation compels them to develop coping mechanisms in order to survive.

Individually, they devise means of coping, some of which are destructive to the individual or to the clients or both. These for example could be absenting oneself from work, dishonesty or aggression, which may lead to counter-transference.

The study describes the process the social work supervisors collaborated in in order to manage the change process using participatory research (PR).

This chapter will look at the following sub-headings:

- Background to the study
- Research questions
- Reasons for choice of participatory research
- Research methods
- Stakeholders
- Processing and recording of data
- Limitations
- Findings
- Conclusion

## **1.2 Background to the study**

The researcher worked as a social worker in the Department of Health and Welfare in the Northern Province for six years, during which she was a supervisor for the last three years. As a person who was once in the same position, the researcher decided to work with the group of social work supervisors, who work in the Department of Health and Welfare in the central region of the Northern Province. The research was done because participatory research encourages people to share problems and come up with ways of acting together to alleviate problems and bring meaningful change to their lives and their organisations, creating a conducive environment for growth. The researcher agrees with Chambers

(1992), Fals Borda and Rahman (1991) and Freire (1970) when they say that people cannot be liberated by a consciousness other than their own.

Participants included two men and ten women, including the researcher. Their ages ranged from 35 to 55 years. Eight of the participants had a post-graduate degree and four had an undergraduate degree. Their level of experience in social work ranged from ten to twenty-five years. Four of the participants are presently studying towards a master's degree. The region has five districts : Mankweng, Bochum, Pietersburg, Sekgosese and Seshego. These districts are manned by the participants as supervisors.

When the intention to do participatory research in organisational change in social work supervision was presented to the group, it was most welcome as it was a felt need. The researcher explained that the participants would decide which areas to focus on. This enabled an easy entry for the researcher into the group. The group acknowledged that they were experiencing problems as supervisors, coping with the transformation process without the necessary skills as supervisors and being put in positions without the authority and the power to manage social workers.

Participants of the study found themselves in a situation in which they were given positions of power but still felt helpless mainly due to lack of skills and support from the Regional office. Denying people a chance to independently reflect and use past experiences to make informed decisions whilst claiming they have the power is not empowerment but oppression. The PR process aims at giving the participants courage to participate and take charge of their lives.

The researcher moved to the non-governmental organisation sector in 1996 where she also holds a supervisory position, hence the need from her side to engage in the process and become part of the group as a participant, learner and facilitator.

According to the agreement between the researcher and the eleven participants, there would be five fortnightly meetings between September 1997 and November 1997.

### 1.3 Research questions

The research questions for the study are the following:

- ◆ what are the problems (and their underlying causes) that social work supervision is facing in relation to organisational change?
- ◆ what process will the social work supervisors go through to be empowered to deal with organisational change?
- ◆ what do they wish to do to change their situation?
- ◆ what lessons can participants learn through a participatory research process?
- ◆ what do they plan to do differently as a result of what they have learned?

### 1.4 Why participatory research

The researcher has chosen to use participatory research with the group because it is an alternative system of knowledge production, which disregards the myth of neutrality and objectivity. It also emphasises subjectivity, involvement, insertion and consensual validation. The process of engaging with people as they reframe their frames of reference through a process of consciousness-raising is viewed to be vital. As Freire (1970:68-69), puts it "it is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their view and ours. We must realise that their view of the world, manifested variously in their actions, reflects their situation in the world. The methodology of the investigation must be dialogical to provide the opportunity both to discover generative themes and to stimulate people's awareness in regard to these themes".

Furthermore, Tandon (1988:7) says that participatory research attempts to present people as researchers themselves in pursuit of answers to questions of their daily struggle and

survival. Cunningham (1993:67) adds that engaging a group in this process would enable them to produce information needed to understand and transform their own lives themselves with increased self-reliance.

The researcher's understanding of PR, is that it is an emancipating and consciousness-raising process, and she believes that this approach would enable the participants to address their concerns.

#### **1.4.1 The role played by the researcher**

Cunningham (1993:4) says that "a participatory researcher is a person with a scientific attitude and understanding of qualitative research principles, has an understanding of the dynamics of change, and a commitment to studying problems that are relevant to real life settings". The researcher brings into the process knowledge about participatory research gained through research seminars facilitated by Dr KJ. Collins at UNISA in 1995 as well as group work and community development skills gained as an honours and MA Social Work student at UNISA from 1993 to 1997. Three years experience as a social work supervisor in the Department working as the participants' colleague. The researcher had an advantage, as she did not need additional time to get acquainted with the group as she had worked with them as a colleague before.

The researcher attended and completed the following workshops where she was trained in the various techniques that constitute the researcher's alternative approach, namely:

- ◆ Advanced Communication techniques facilitated by UNISA under the MA SS in Mental Health programme in 1996. This included participatory rural appraisal.
- ◆ Boal Community Theatre techniques facilitated by Eugenie Grobbelaar at UNISA in 1996.
- ◆ Participatory Hygiene and Sanitation Transformation techniques facilitated in Namaqualand by Ron Sawyer in 1998.

- ◆ Supervision and Performance Appraisal facilitated by Benita Pavlicevic in Environmental and Development Agency Trust (EDA) in Johannesburg in 1998.

The above training opportunities empowered the researcher to confidently engage in participatory research with the supervisors as the tools learned could be used with ease with any group, regardless of their literacy level.

### **1.5 Research method**

The meetings would be characterised by dialogue, that is, discussions, which would encourage giving and receiving feedback within the group about experiences in and outside of the group. Participatory rural appraisal tools would be used and self-reports would be given by the group members.

### **1.6 Stakeholders**

“In choosing points for intervention to achieve planned change, one begins to find possible points and to discover that change may be facilitated by manipulating several variables, some of which may affect change directly” (Clark 1972:2). Participatory research generally has three taskmasters, which, according to Clark (1972:22) are “the sponsor, the behavioural science practitioner, and the scientific community”. This research process engaged three stakeholders: the management of the regional office, which is the sponsor, the researcher as the behavioural science practitioner, and the supervisors, managing the districts as the scientific community. All three stakeholders would become fellow learners.

The research community consisted of:

1. Mr M. -regional chief social worker
2. Mr S. -head of professional services in the central region
3. Mrs. R. -senior social worker regional office
4. Mrs. T. -senior social worker regional office

5. Mrs. S. -supervisor - Pietersburg hospital
6. Mrs. M. -supervisor - Sekgosese
7. Ms B. -supervisor - Bochum
8. Ms M. -supervisor - Seshego
9. Ms M. -supervisor - Mankweng hospital
10. Ms M. -supervisor - Mankweng magistrate
11. Mrs. A. -supervisor - Pietersburg district

The researcher wrote a letter (appendix 1) to the regional head of professional services, asking permission to work with the central region supervisors on a participatory research project in line with their problems of change and ineffectiveness in supervision. After the approval by the head, the researcher attended the supervisor's meeting during which she presented her intentions and request to the group. The proposal was accepted and it was agreed that the Department would get the copy of the final research paper.

Due to the fact that the researcher was previously employed by the Department of Health and Welfare as a social worker and supervisor, gaining entry was not an issue for the group and they easily accepted the researcher as one of them without feeling threatened. This might not have been the case if a stranger joined the pre-existing group. A collaborative network was then formalised between the participants and the researcher.

The concerns of participants were that they are experiencing problems of lack of motivation and support from the Regional office, which has led to ineffective supervision. They see these problems as a result of changes they are subjected to because of the transformation process, initiated after the democratisation of the South African government.

Coping with these changes became very difficult, especially because they did not have skills to supervise and due to the fact that their appointments to supervisory positions were not formalized and proper procedures for promotion were not followed. There was no transparency and those in power used it to impose their decisions on their subordinates.

The supervisees were not happy about some of the supervisors who were placed to manage them without the necessary skills and experience. The social workers felt powerless and the decision gave them an impression that “sincerity is sometimes punished while promotions are given for unquestioned support of superiors” (Burkey 1993:170).

### **1.7 Processing and recording data**

The participants agreed to take turns in chairing and taking minutes of the discussions. At the end of each meeting, an agenda for the next meeting would be set and two participants would volunteer to take the responsibility for the next meeting. Minutes would be read and approved. Written minutes would be sent to the regional office for typing and distribution. The researcher would be responsible for compiling the final research report.

Material used during the process included flipchart paper, minute book, pens and coloured paper.

### **1.8 Limitations of the study**

Although participatory research is done by the people for themselves to generate knowledge for action, it also has limitations like any other research process. The limitations in this study are as follows:

- ◆ management’s presence in group meetings disturbed the free flow of information
- ◆ changes in the participants’ work programme retarded progress
- ◆ sending of new representatives from the districts to meetings (due to supervisors’ other commitments) created barriers for continuity.

### **1.9 Findings**

The findings for each session would be used to set goals as it was intended that the process would lead to action. Findings would also increase the participants’ knowledge and enable them to effectively deal with change in the future.

## **1.10 Conclusion**

Chapter one has outlined what would occur in the study. The lay-out for the rest of the study is as follows :

Chapter two deals with literature review on participatory research, organisational change, and social work supervision as main concepts of the study. Chapter three presents the findings of the study and chapter four summarizes findings, lessons learned and presents conclusion.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

It is very important to review literature related to the study because it will “enable the researcher to learn from the mistakes of others and to build on the existing knowledge base” (Collins 1999:45). Furthermore, it tells the researcher what is known about the subject and methodologies that could be used.

In this study, the literature review will look at what other researchers say about organisational change in social work supervision and how the use of participatory research can help supervisors deal effectively with change. The literature review has four sections:

- ◆ participatory research
- ◆ the participatory research process
- ◆ organisational change
- ◆ social work supervision

#### **2.2 Participatory research as an alternative paradigm to positivist research**

Traditional research mainly addresses the needs of the researcher disregarding the subjects' perspectives about the issues being investigated and how they affect their lives. Traditional research differs from participatory research regarding where power is located during the research process. Participatory research distinguishes itself from orthodox research by its focus on social change goals and the utilisation and modification of methods in a way that promotes production of collective knowledge investigation and critical analysis by groups and individuals (Maguire & Mulenga 1994:16), hence participatory research was chosen as an alternative paradigm.

Secondly, “participatory research focuses on a process of sequential reflection and action, carried out with and by local people rather than on them. Local knowledge and perspectives are not only acknowledged but form the basis of research and planning. Participatory research raises personal, professional and political challenges which go beyond the bounds of the production of information” (Cornwall & Jewkes 1995:1667).

### **2.2.1 Definition of participatory research**

Participatory research is defined differently by various authors. Rahman (1993:151) sees participatory research as an organised activity to attain objectives that people have set for themselves. It is geared towards structural change and social transformation. According to Chambers (in De Koning & Martin 1996:4), “participatory research emphasises the process of knowledge production which firstly, helps especially marginalised and deprived people to gain self confidence and pride in being able to provide a useful contribution to community life; secondly, builds respect and empathy in professional groups for the insights and knowledge people have and the problems they face; and thirdly, by listening to local people helps avoid mistakes and to develop programmes that take into account the specific situation and conditions which will influence the outcomes of programmes”.

Collins (1999:2) says “ Participatory research is the collective generation of knowledge which leads to the planning and achievement of jointly set objectives”. The objectives may, for purposes of the study, be for organisational change, project management, community development and personal growth, or any other objectives the participants may decide upon. Gaventa (in Small 1995:943) says participatory research is a research process that :

“attempts to break down the distinction between the researchers and the researched, the subject and the objects of knowledge production by the participation of the people - for - themselves in the process of gaining and creating knowledge. In the process, the research is seen

not as a process of creating knowledge, but simultaneous, as education and development of consciousness, and the mobilisation for action”.

According to Fals Borda and Rahman (1991:4), the final aims of this combination of liberating knowledge and political power within a continuous process of life and work are : (1) to enable the oppressed groups and classes to acquire sufficient creative and transforming leverage as expressed in specific projects, acts and struggles; and (2) to produce and develop socio-political thought processes with which popular bases can identify.

The above definitions differ but have a lot of commonalities which lead to the conclusion that participatory research is understood to be a collective process in which both the researched and the researcher become partners in generating knowledge that develops consciousness of the people and enables them to take action that would bring meaningful change in their lives.

The study is guided by theorists such as Collins (1999), de Koning and Martin (1996 ), Fals Borda and Rahman (1991), Freire (1994), Small (1995) and others who believe in the significance of local knowledge advocated by local people and collaboration in social transformation.

### **2.2.2 Aims of participatory research**

Maguire and Mulenga (in van Rooyen & Gray 1995:89), identified three principal aims of participatory research :

- ◆ to develop knowledge and critical consciousness
- ◆ to improve the lives of those involved in the process
- ◆ to transform social relationships and societal structures.

They saw these aims being achieved through three intrinsically linked, inter-related processes which gave participatory research its fundamental strength and power. The identified processes are :

- ◆ the collective investigation of problems involving the active participation of those affected by them
- ◆ the collective analysis of data so that participants gain an enhanced understanding of both the problems identified and their underlying structural causes.
- ◆ the collective action of participants to yield both short-term and long-term solutions to their identified problems.

### **2.2.3 Characteristics of participatory research**

According to Maguire and Mulenga (1994:12), participatory research has five main features :

- ◆ it is a process of knowing and acting
- ◆ it is initiated in a context of actual reality
- ◆ the researcher is a committed social actor
- ◆ it is collective education
- ◆ it is political practice.

The characteristics above show that PR encourages people to engage in an action and reflection process together with a committed people centred researcher, on issues affecting them.

#### It is a process of knowing and acting

“Because liberating action is dialogical in nature, dialogue cannot be a posteriori to that action, but must be concomitant with it. And since liberation must be a permanent condition, dialogue becomes a continuing aspect of liberating action” (Freire 1994:120). PR involves gaining knowledge for empowerment, using it to reflect and guide action.

It is initiated in the context of reality

Change agents do not go to the people in order to bring a message of salvation, but in order to come to understand through dialogue with them both their objective situation and their awareness of that situation, the various levels of perception of themselves and of the world in which and with which they exist (Freire 1994:76).

The researcher is a committed social actor

“Participatory research takes place in time as part of the analysis - action - reflection process where the people are both the subject and the object of the research, where the investigator not only shares this reality, but in fact participates in it as an agent of change” (Burkey 1993:61). The dialogue enables the researcher to learn from the people as he or she affects and is in turn affected by the people.

It is collective action

Freire (1994:73) says that “true dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking - thinking which discerns an indivisible solidarity between them - thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity - thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved”. Dialogue encourages the development of trust which leads to a conducive atmosphere for critical thinking and symbolisation of experiences amongst the people which leads to collective action.

It is political practice

PR aims to enhance growth in people, not only in the sense of being psychologically capacitated but rather in the sense of being in power politically to effect needed social change (Maguire & Mulenga 1994:13). The PR process increases people’s knowledge, which is transformed into power. This will in turn enable supervisors to be empowered managers of social services. Burkey (1993:60) adds that “to maintain the empowering position people must rely on themselves to retain genuine control over their own

organisation". The participants must use knowledge gained to think, plan and act for their own good.

### **2.3 The process of participatory research**

One of the important parts of the participatory process is "building self-confidence among those who are all too often ignored or just given instructions". Participatory research methods address this aim explicitly, providing a context for recognition of people's knowledge and abilities. Social services that are guided by local knowledge and people's lived experiences, can ensure greater participation, increased "self-awareness and self-confidence" (de Koning & Martin 1996:105).

#### **2.3.1 Participation as a key concept in participatory research**

De Koning and Martin (1996:167) say "participation is about facilitating processes whereby people can reflect, analyse, plan and take action". It enhances growth in people through the development of new skills and knowledge and building on existing ones and it increases confidence. Participation as an empowering process, "leads to potential changes at a structural as well as personal level"

There must always be a genuine commitment on the side of the researcher to encourage participation in all aspects and at all levels of development. According to Burkey (1993:56) participation is "an essential part of human growth, that is, the development of self confidence, pride, initiative, creativity, responsibility and cooperation".

According to Rahman (in Burkey 1993:58), participation is "a continuous educative process - a process of progressive conscientisation". Through collective self-reflection on their experiences and problems, people become more aware of the dimensions of their reality and what their role could be in transforming it. Collectively, people also come to the realisation that the problems they never shared openly are not theirs alone.

When participants begin to share, they gain more knowledge, develop trust and grow together as a strong supportive network.

Once people are in empowering positions, they themselves must work towards retaining “control over own organisation” (Burkey 1993:60). Collectively, they are able to reflect, make decisions, act together and collectively reflect on the results to grow together. “Thus they move on with progressively advanced knowledge of their evolving reality” (Burkey 1993:58).

When an outsider is involved to facilitate the process, the researcher must “practise co - intentional education” (Freire 1994:51). “Teachers and students co - intent on reality, are both subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re - creating that knowledge”. During the process of knowledge attainment through reflection and action, participants come to realise that they themselves are the “re - creators” of knowledge. When the oppressed take their rightful positions in their liberation struggle, their presence becomes what it should be: “not pseudo - participation, but committed involvement”. Participation in PR is an empowering tool that restores pride and ownership in participants.

### **2.3.2 Dialogue as enquiry and intervention**

Engaging a group in dialogue through a PR process is a healing process that enables participants to act together, as “the looking glass self” or a mirror for one another, and together repackage their frames of reference. “At the point of encounter, there are neither utter ignoramuses nor perfect sages; there are only people who are attempting together to learn more than they now know” (Freire 1994:71).

Authors like Brown(1985), Freire(1994), Reason and Rowan(1981) and Tandon(1988) also agree that dialogue presents a potent method of integrating inquiry and intervention, and that it can contribute to the intermingled process of knowing and changing (Reason

& Rowan 1981:293). Dialogue in participatory research involves the researcher and the researched who jointly become responsible for a process in which all grow. Both are critical co-investigators engaged in constant process of uncovering reality (Freire 1998:62).

Dialogue as inquiry and intervention has “mutual impact” because “both the researcher and the subjects learn from each other; they also learn together from the very situation that they are part of and are engaged in an analysis of. The interests of both parties are mutually inclusive and supportive in dialogue”(Reason & Rowan 1981: 299).

Freire (1994:70) stresses that “dialogue is indispensable to the act of cognition which unveils reality”. He goes on to say that since dialogue is the encounter in which the united reflection and action of the dialoguers are addressed to the world which is to be transformed and humanised, this dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person’s “depositing” ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be consumed by the discussions. Dialogue is thus essential for existence.

As dialogue is based on “love, humility and faith”, it leads to a trusting relationship between the dialoguers (Freire 1994:72). A trusting relationship encourages meaningful dialogue which requires critical thinking to enhance the development of critical consciousness.

In the researcher’s view, it is therefore critical that there is willingness amongst participants to share their thoughts, ideas and experiences and be open to review these critically for true change to occur. Faith in other participants is essential and it adds value to dialogue.

### **2.3.3 Validity**

In PR the parties involved validate the knowledge generated during dialogue. According to Reason and Rowan (1981:299), dialogue as a method of inquiry and intervention, nullifies the traditional research criteria for validity because the data gathering methods used are ratified through a collaborative effort between researcher and the researched, as it should be the case in PR.

According to the researcher, dialogue is vital because without it, there will be no communication, and without communication there can be no true education, an important characteristic of participatory research.

### **2.3.4 Communication**

Communication is the means by which we come to an understanding of others and ourselves. To grow and develop as persons, we must communicate. "Communication is the human connection" (Reece & Brandt 1996:22). Freire (1994:58) adds that "it is only through communication that human life holds meaning".

In participatory research, dialogue happens because there is more than one person engaged in communication, that is, interpersonal communication. According to Reece and Brandt (1996:34) interpersonal communication is a quality of communication that occurs when the people involved talk and listen in ways that maximise their own and other person's humanness. Interpersonal communication has many goals, which include information sharing and building stronger, trusting relationships with other people.

According to the researcher, for communication to flow smoothly, the message transmitted must be understood by the receiver the way it was intended by the sender. The feedback process that occurs, will confirm to the sender whether there was shared meaning or not. The environment for participatory research is expected to be supportive, creative, consensual and facilitative leading to sharing of ideas through dialogue. For

this to happen, the researcher needs to have communication skills for facilitating the process as a co-learner.

### Communication skills

Effective communication depends on the ability of the skilled facilitator to use communication skills that enhance the development of a rapport amongst the participants. Focus here will be on advanced communication skills which are, according to Egan (1994:178 - 187) :

- ◆ creating new perspectives
- ◆ advanced empathy
- ◆ self-disclosure
- ◆ immediacy

*Creating new perspectives:* The aim of this skill is to remobilize and reactivate the client or community and to instil hope. The researcher and the participants engage in dialogue to create a different meaningful perspective on the situation, which mobilises them to action. Of importance in this process is that when the community realises that the researcher has learned from them as well, their self worth is boosted. Schenck (1996:159) adds that participants “start to value resources and skills that they have never valued before, and their human dignity is also respected”.

*Advanced empathy:* In communication, feedback is essential as it confirms that the intended message has been received and understood. Giving empathic responses during a communication process makes the sender feel understood. Advanced empathy has a further function of mobilising and activating people by triggering a thought process. This means that the researcher must be able to “hear the implied messages and themes in the community and eventually communicate these messages back to the community” (Schenck 1996:159).

*Self-disclosure:* The researcher doing PR is engaged in a collaborative process during which he or she shares experiences, ideas and knowledge with the community. A worker who, during self-disclosure, is frank, transparent and empathic, is better able to create an atmosphere that encourages participants to openly share their ideas and experiences for participatory development to take place (Schenck 1996:160).

*Immediacy:* Immediacy is a cardinal communication skill which can be used as “direct, mutual talk” that can enable the researcher and the researched to communicate a personal experience of a particular situation (Egan 1994:186). Egan (1994:186 - 187) mentions three kinds of immediacy.

*Immediacy that focuses on the relationship:* In PR focus will be on the researcher’s relationship with the researched as well as the group’s relationship with the researcher. This means that differences are settled openly and the researcher discovers what role he or she should play in the group in situations, for example, giving feedback to the group about the need to deal with the relationships in the group if there are problems in how group members relate.

*Here and now immediacy.* This is useful when dealing with the immediate situation. It can help the worker to get out of an awkward situation by addressing problems as they emerge.

*Self-based statements.* These are positive personal comments that the researcher makes about the group which lead to changed self-image and sense of worth.

The researcher sees the communication skills above as key elements in the characteristics of PR. The researcher must use the skills to create an environment conducive for sharing, self-disclosure, learning and personal growth leading to increased ability to accommodate and accept others unconditionally. The skills are also useful in change management.

## 2.4 Organisational change

Organisational change invariably involves people, their individual attitudes, beliefs or opinions, firmly established social relationships, and the organisations political system (Burack & Torda 1979:xii). Organisational change is “a term of many and various meanings”. On the one hand, it is used to refer to very basic changes in individual beliefs, values, and attitudes within an organisation. On the other hand, it has been applied in a holistic sense to complete change in organisational objectives, policies and all methods of operation. In between the two extremes, the term has been applied to changes in almost all imaginable aspects of an organisation (Burgher 1979:95).

In the researcher’s view, political changes in South Africa led to total change in policies and governance, which affected how general systems operated.

According to Ross (1996:75), “the period immediately prior to South Africa’s non-racial election in April 1994 was characterised as a time of turbulent transition from an apartheid - dominated society to a non-racial democracy”. During the transition, many South African social workers were reported to be working under severely stressful conditions, subject to rapid socioeconomic and political changes characterised by unrest, crime and violence, sometimes victims of physical and verbal abuse. They were faced with very heavy caseloads and required to make decisions which substantially affected the lives of their clients; whilst they were personally frustrated by low salaries to meet their own needs and inadequate resources to meet the needs of communities racked by high rates of poverty, unemployment, housing shortages and family breakdown.

An organisation never stops changing, no matter how well it is functioning. As part of larger systems like the neighbourhood, region, or country, it also must adapt to socioeconomic, and political changes occurring at each level (Burack & Torda 1979:42), as is the case above. Internal conditions like resignations, retirement and new employees joining the organisation also require further adaptation within the organisation.

Furthermore, the point at which decisions are made, the distribution of personnel between departments, and the relative number and type of managers and support personnel change, leading to the need for both “new procedures and new skills”(Burack & Torda 1979:42).

In the new South Africa, integration of the four governments (Lebowa, Gazankulu, Venda and the Transvaal Provincial Administration) in the Northern Province created the above situation. The integration also meant promotions on the one hand, and demotions on the other. Being sincere at that time called for punishment while passivity or giving unquestioned support to superiors earned others promotions (Burkey 1993:170). Each government came with its procedures and the most complex were adopted without empowering staff with the necessary skill to carry them out. The situation pressured social workers to change and adapt their approaches in service delivery to be more relevant and appropriate (McKendrick in Ross 1996:83). Social workers were also expected to review old policies, strategies, and methods of service delivery and come up with new ones relevant to the new dispensation which would have a high impact on mass poverty and inequality (McKendrick in Ross 1996:83).

When change occurs quickly as it did in South Africa, people tend to be caught unaware and as a result, resist change. Reece and Brandt (1996:372) say “the greater the change, the stronger the resistance”. They also say “stress builds up as we resist change” and they mention five reasons why resistance to change occurs:

- ◆ *Feelings of inadequacy.* When people must learn new skills, accept more responsibilities, or take on challenges that stretch their abilities, they may feel inadequate to the task. Usually resistance is based more on lack of self-confidence than on lack of ability.
  
- ◆ *Threat to personal security.* Personal security (physical or psychological) is one of everyone’s basic needs. For example, substantial changes in the nature of work may make one wonder if one will be laid off. Downsizing has created turmoil for

millions of workers during the 1990s. The new government has also been rationalising the public service in South Africa.

- ◆ *Fear of the unknown.* This is a common reaction to a new situation and it may be aggravated by inadequate or lack of communication.
- ◆ *Lack of trust.* Sometimes resistance to change is not directed at change itself but at those who introduce it. The degree of openness and trust between management and employees often determines how readily change is accepted or opposed. This lack of trust may mean that if change is forced on employees, it may leave in its wake reduced productivity, resentment, and even greater distrust of management.
- ◆ *Inability to see the big picture.* If employees are not included in the process of change from the beginning, they quite often cannot see beyond their own attitude and opinions or understand the change in terms of the goals and needs of the organisation.

In the researcher's view, lack of communication between supervisors and their superiors created uncertainty and resistance to change occurred. This view is supported by Collins (1997:101) when she says that threats emanating from changing situations could lead to self-protection and defensiveness, and prevent participation when it is needed the most.

Poor management of human resources is likely to aggravate lack of meaningful participation by employees as it may result in a host of employee behaviour problems like excessive absenteeism, poor performance, tardiness, theft, and high turnover. Managers have recognised that their main responsibility is to optimally use the human resource under their control. In doing this they have made an effort to have a better relationship with subordinates to improve the work environment and increase productivity (Burgher 1979:201), hence the need by supervisors to be effective in order to enhance social work service delivery.

### 2.4.1. Climate for organisational change

According to Brooks (1980:213), the climate of change can only be defined when major concerns of organisations faced with implementing change have been identified. He identified four major concerns :

- ◆ individual acceptance and identity with change objectives
- ◆ feedback of, and involvement with change initiatives
- ◆ goal integration
- ◆ and control and influence over organisational change

“In the newly found democracies like South Africa, the challenge is to identify, understand and acknowledge the intricate patterns of hidden but interdependent variables in the changing environment and to realign organisations accordingly” (Gxwala 1995:15). Gxwala (1995:16) adds that the first step involves systematic thinking, collaboration and team learning to emancipate people from “mental prisons which are a result of the pervasive prejudice of the past”.

The oppressed also need to realise that the transformation brings with it changes in the power structure. For that reason, they have to stand together to fight the opposition because “power and socio-economic benefit are jealously protected, and all attempts to alter existing relationships will be rigorously resisted by those who stand to lose their relative advantages” (Burkey 1993:166). Power is always protected against all odds.

The researcher sees the PR process as an outlet for participants to identify their concerns, solutions and for collective action.

### 2.4.2 Strategy for change

Formulating the change strategy requires the involvement of both the researcher and the researched in examining and assessing how unresolved concerns at different managerial levels can be dealt with by means of data gathering, problem analysis and managerial

decision-making (Brooks 1980:20). The responsibility of the change agent is to devise a plan that ensures a fit between organisational objectives and individual goals. Such a plan should provide for a process of interaction whereby there is a gradual merging of the objectives of the organisational innovators and the goals and aspirations of the people who are affected by the change, and on whom the change is dependant for execution (Brooks 1980:220).

The South African situation of political, racial and social change necessitates active collaboration by all relevant stakeholders for the country to achieve its goals (Collins 1997:101). Leaders and followers must support one another so that their confidence is developed in their new roles during the transformation process (Collins 1997:105).

In the researcher's view, the involvement of all stakeholders in planning and implementation of organisational change cannot be overemphasised, especially if people are going to implement or be affected by it. Supervisors as change agents have an important role to play in managing organisational change.

## **2.5 Supervision**

It is important, for purposes of the study, to define what social work supervision means. The definition will help clarify what the role of the supervisor is in welfare service delivery and which are the necessary skills for effective supervision.

### **2.5.1 Definition of supervision**

Kadushin (in McKendrick 1990:208) defines social work supervision as follows:

“A social work supervisor is an agency administrative staff member to whom authority is delegated to direct, co-ordinate, enhance, and evaluate the on - the - job performance of the supervisees for whose work he is held accountable. In implementing this responsibility the supervisor performs administrative,

educational, and supportive functions in interaction with the supervisee in the context of a positive relationship. The supervisor's ultimate objective is to deliver to agency clients the best possible service, both quantitatively and qualitatively, in accordance with agency policies and procedures".

### **2.5.2 Need for supervision**

A human service organisation is no different organisationally from other complex bodies and needs to develop some bureaucratic structure in order to function effectively. It also requires supervision for its employees to ensure it achieves its goals. McKendrick (1990:208) mentions the following as needs for supervision:

- ◆ The work of different employees needs to be planned, co-ordinated and integrated.
- ◆ Monies and other supportive services provided require accountability
- ◆ Protection of the client requires a procedure for periodic review of worker activity.

### **2.5.3 Components of supervision**

In supervision, administration, education and support are viewed as complementary functions, which have their own set of specific knowledge and skills (McKendrick 1990:209). Kadushin (in McKendrick 1990:209) emphasises the vital role each function has in ensuring the achievement of the supervision objective. A detailed discussion on the three components of supervision follows.

#### Administrative component

"Status differentiation and division of labour define different levels of management, developing a structure with a system of grades and status or authority ranked one above the other. The supervisor occupies an administrative managerial position in the hierarchy at middle - level, and takes responsibility for organisation management in order to accomplish its service objectives through the generic functions of planning,

directing, organising, and controlling service programmes implemented by workers responsible to the supervisor” (McKendrick 1990:209).

#### Administrative functions

McKendrick (1990:10-11) identifies the following functions:

- ◆ planning with clearly communicated measurable objectives
- ◆ organising
- ◆ directing
- ◆ controlling
- ◆ staffing
- ◆ assessment of job performance

#### Administrative skills

Skill is a prerequisite in the effective execution of functions inherent in supervision (McKendrick 1990:212). George (in McKendrick 1990:212), identifies three clusters of skills which make for effective execution of functions: “technical, human and conceptual skills”. In addition, the importance of communication skills cannot be overemphasised for they are useful in formal communication at all levels of the authority structure and within each level horizontally amongst employees. Communication is more useful when it is relevant, clear in meaning, has adequate details, timeous and leads to giving and receiving feedback between dialoguers (McKendrick 1990:212).

Decision-making skills enable service delivery by structuring the process of problem definition; analysis; fact-finding; selecting the most appropriate solution from alternatives developed and evaluated; implementing action; and finally, feedback (McKendrick 1990:212). Social work service delivery can therefore not succeed without the administrative component.

### Educational Component

Educational supervision aims to expand and refine the worker's knowledge, skill and values expressed in attitudes. Austin (1990:213) refers to supervision as "the management of change" while Watson (in McKendrick 1990:213), writing from a management perspective, emphasises it as "a necessary requirement for the long - term success of an organisation". Educational supervision enables employees to function with less dependence on administrative supervision. It aims at empowering the worker to improve his or her professional performance as expected and it is person-centred, starting where the employee is in terms of education, experience and competencies (McKendrick 1990:213). In the end a fit will be achieved between worker's skills and what the organisation expects him or her to deliver.

### Educative functions

According to McKendrick (1990:214), five functions comprise the educative thrust of the supervisor. These are :

- ◆ educational diagnosis
- ◆ educational objectives
- ◆ educative content
- ◆ implementing the educative process
- ◆ evaluating the outcome of the educative process

### Educative Skills

According to McKendrick (1990:218), skills which improve the quality of the educational function are conceptual skills specifically related to teaching, constructing the educational cycle; giving structure to the educational process, direct teaching; and guiding and managing the educative process. The educational component is essential for enhancing growth in employees and developing their critical consciousness, leading to improved productivity.

### Supportive Component

Supportive supervision is an enabling resource for taking measures to resolve job related tensions and stressors which may, if unattended, impair work to the detriment of service effectiveness (McKendrick 1990:219). According to Reece and Brandt (1996:381), the following are some of the effects of lack of supervision:

- ◆ an increase in working long hours or in tardiness and absenteeism
- ◆ difficulty in making decisions
- ◆ an increasing number of careless mistakes
- ◆ problems in interacting and getting along with others
- ◆ too much focus on mistakes and personal failures.

Other sources of job-related tension are:

The way in which an organisation is structured and performs can cause tension. Frequently changing directives to suit people in power, inflexible and formalised hierarchical system, and very complicated rules and procedures serve as some examples. Supervisory meetings can be stressful because, for the mere fact that they present a threat to worker independence, and demand admission of ignorance which exposes worker vulnerability, they are capable of provoking anxiety. (Austin in McKendrick 1990:219). The threat associated with change may also aggravate anxiety as it stimulates self-protection and defensiveness and prevents participation (Collins 1997:101).

Incompetence, on the side of the supervisor, may also be a source of stress. The supportive function may not be easy to do if the supervisor feels incompetent and powerless to face the vulnerabilities because these feelings may lead to conflict or withdrawal in situations where his or her adopted system of ideas clash with what is happening in reality. Reece and Brandt (1996:380) identified reasons for incompetence to be as follows :

- ◆ lack of training
- ◆ lack of systematic feedback regarding performance
- ◆ inability to learn from experience

- ◆ no capacity to think strategically
- ◆ personality shortcomings.

### Supportive Functions

The goal of supportive supervision is to promote the psychological well-being of the worker, which the supervisor endeavours to do through the supervisory functions.

### Supportive skills

McKendrick (1990:220) classifies supportive supervision skills into three categories:

- ◆ skill at reinforcing ego defences and strengthening the capacity of the ego to deal with job stresses and tensions
- ◆ skill in supportive leadership which inspires, animates, exhilarates and in consequence relieves, restores and comforts and replenishes the psychic resources of workers
- ◆ skill in anticipating and recognising elements of impending and beginning stress.

In the researcher's view, without supervision skills discussed above, the supervisor is likely to be incompetent to do his or her job. The frustrations emanating from incompetence could lead to self-doubt, contributing to the supervisor's resistance towards organisational change. It is therefore very important for organisations to empower supervisors with the necessary skills to ensure effective service delivery and to promote organisational health.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

Participatory research as an educational process which occurs through collaboration between role players, is useful as a tool to enable people to deal with change at individual, group and organisational level. It encourages ownership of the outcomes as the researched are involved as equal partners with the researcher and actively participate throughout the process of the inquiry.

Dialogue plays a very important part in ensuring the success of the inquiry because it allows the participants to share ideas and experiences through action and reflection. This interaction is made possible by communication. For communication to enhance positive transformation, the researcher should be equipped with communication skills to be better able to facilitate a participatory communication process based on understanding and trust amongst the participants.

The information above has clearly indicated that organisational change can come about as a result of a variety of factors, one of which is political. It is also clear that change in organisations can be a stressor. Supervisors have also been said to be people that can play a vital role in assisting supervisees to deal with stressful situations. It has also been said that to do this supervisors need to be empowered or skilled to manage change. They also have to be aware that power is not lost or gained without a struggle. Participatory research is seen as a tool that can make positive change possible.

The next chapter will describe the participatory research process and how participants experienced it.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH PROCESS**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the PR process with social work supervisors. The process started after the researcher wrote a letter to the head of the Welfare section, asking for permission to do PR with supervisors. The request was approved. Due to changes in the supervisors' work schedule, the programme was interrupted and meetings were cancelled. Six meetings were held including one introductory meeting and a closing workshop over a period of thirteen months instead of five as originally planned. An account will be given of the PR process that took place from the end of 1997 to the end of 1998. Meetings were held on Mondays fortnightly. Throughout the process the meetings were held at the regional offices of the Department of Health and Welfare in Pietersburg.

The group process is presented according to the following structure:

- ◆ Theory
- ◆ Planning
- ◆ Method and outcome and
- ◆ Reflection

What follows is a lively account of the PR process as confirmed by the participants. It presents the researcher's subjective perception of the group's experiences and is therefore written in the first person.

#### **3.2 The introductory meeting**

After presentation of my request to the regional head, he invited me to attend the supervisors' meeting to present my proposal to the group. The meeting was held at the regional office in Pioneer Building, Pietersburg and twelve participants attended the

session. My meeting with the group took ten minutes, as the PR discussion was not on the agenda.

### **3.2.1 Theory**

The session was guided by Rogers' (1951) theory which stresses the importance of understanding the group from their frame of reference. My enthusiasm to enter into this community and willingness to be involved in addressing their concerns, as guided by Swanepoel (1992), helped me to gain entry.

### **3.2.2 Planning**

The aim of the session was to present to the group my ideas about doing PR in organisational change as it affected them. I needed to know from them if they were interested, which areas they would be interested in and where and when will we meet.

### **3.2.3 Method and outcome**

The group used discussions to facilitate the group process. The Assistant Director introduced me and requested that I present my request and ideas to a group of supervisors. Since the group members were known me, no introductions were necessary. I presented the ideas I had about the inquiry with a motivation that such an inquiry should focus on real issues affecting the group. The participants had the power to decide whether to take part or not and what the focus should be.

The group became excited about the topic of the research as it was relevant to their daily functions as supervisors in a changing organisation. It was agreed that the researcher should attend their next fortnightly supervisors' meeting during which contracting and needs assessment could be done.

### **3.2.4 Reflection**

The first encounter enabled me to re-establish a relationship with my ex-colleagues as equals again. This position made it easier for the participants to view me as a co-learner in the process. From that point onwards, power was shared between the researcher and the researched.

### **3.3 Second encounter**

Ten participants attended, including the researcher. The meeting was held at the Department of Health and Welfare regional office in Pietersburg. It took forty five minutes.

#### **3.3.1 Theory**

I was guided by people centred approaches of Burkey (1993), Freire (1994) and Rogers (1951) which encouraged the use of dialogue to understand the group's ever changing world of experience which is only known to the group. Throughout my training in MA SS Mental Health at Unisa, I learned, practised and internalised the approach as my own. It influenced how the session was facilitated as the participants were enabled to engage in dialogue and symbolise their experiences in a collaborative group. Collins' (1999) theory was also a foundation guiding me through the PR process to encourage collective discovering of knowledge.

#### **3.3.2 Planning**

During this session, I had a tentative agenda which I presented to the group  
The agenda was as follows :

- ◆ Contracting
- ◆ Rules
- ◆ Time frame

- ◆ Emerging themes

### 3.3.3 Method and outcome

The group used discussions and brainstorming in facilitating the group process.

The group accepted the agenda that I presented.

#### Contracting

The participants agreed to meet as a PR group, every second week, an hour prior to the regional supervisors' meeting. They felt that this arrangement was perfect for them as they did not need a special day for the meeting because they would be at the regional office at that time. The management gave permission for the process to occur during working hours, as it was assumed it would benefit the organisation. As part of the supervisors' meeting, the regional office management was willing to participate in the PR process.

#### Rules

Since the PR process is also about participation and equal partnership, the participants did not have a problem in sharing the responsibilities for taking minutes, chairing and reading as part of preparations for presentation during the PR processes. It was agreed that at the end of each session two participants would volunteer for chairing and minute taking for the next meeting. The group agreed to keep time and co - operate in taking responsibility to ensure the success of the process. It was stressed that time should be observed.

#### Time frame

The group agreed to meet for forty - five minutes for five months and to review at the end of the period if there was a need to continue. The period changed to thirteen months because of changes in supervisors' work programmes related to departmental demands and transformation processes.

### Emerging themes

It was agreed that since this is the first session with more time for dialogue, we should focus on identifying areas of concern to determine the direction of the PR process.

During the discussions, the following themes emerged :

- ◆ relationship between supervisor and supervisees not clarified in terms of status;
- ◆ office supervision for hospital and district social workers was not clearly outlined and the authority to do it was not formalised;
- ◆ channels of communication overlook the person responsible for implementing change;
- ◆ effectiveness in supervision was lacking as there was uncertainty about what and who to supervise;
- ◆ no clear demarcation of areas because of the changes in district boundaries since the 1994 election of the democratic government which resulted in the integration of four governments into one provincial government;
- ◆ uncertainty about who does the supervision of specialising social workers
- ◆ inadequate human resources in the region;
- ◆ lack of continuity in supervision;
- ◆ no shared meaning amongst participants of the word “supervision” ;
- ◆ lack of continuous and regular in-service training for supervisors has hampered them in keeping abreast of developments relating to their professional work;
- ◆ supervisors have been put in positions without being empowered as to how to be effective in those positions;
- ◆ changes that occurred in the government also happened in the Welfare department and the regional office was not able to provide extra resources required, for example, human resources, office accommodation and transport;

- ◆ untrained supervisors taking over programmes they had never worked on before.

The above themes were grouped into four categories :

Service delivery

Clarity of status and authority

Human resources management and training (supervision)

Transformation.

### **3.3.4 Reflection**

Participation was satisfactory as all participants actively took part showing commitment to the process. A lot of themes emerged which indicated how stressful the working environment is for supervisors. The mere fact that they are surviving, proved that people always have the power, though they may not use or be aware of it. The group decided that since they could not tackle all the emerging themes, they would choose to focus mainly on social work supervision as it affected them on a daily basis. It was agreed that participants should work towards gaining more knowledge and shared meaning of social work supervision. Each participant had a task to read about what supervision is in order to share with the group during the next meeting. I took the reading material a week prior to the next meeting, to the regional office and one participant distributed it to all members of the group.

### **3.4 Third encounter**

Nine participants attended the session, which was held at the regional office in Pietersburg for forty -five minutes.

### **3.4.1 Theory**

During this session I was guided more by theories of McKendrick (1990) and Reece and Brandt (1996) on the definition of supervision and its three components, than by the personal and group influence on the content level. The reason being that as a group of supervisors, we were uncomfortable about the meaning of “supervision” and what it involved. On the other hand, on the process level, theories of Burkey (1993), Collins (1999), De Koning and Martin (1996), Egan (1994), Freire (1994) and van Rooyen and Gray (1995) were used to guide me in facilitating a participatory process, using communication skills like empathy and attentive listening, to encourage collective analysis of data so that participants would enhance their understanding of both the problems identified and their underlying causes. The theory of Brooks (1980) highlighted the need to identify major concerns for the climate of change to occur.

### **3.4.2 Planning**

During this session, the group planned to review the last meeting; agree on the agenda; discuss the definition of social work supervision; and look at what the group would do next.

### **3.4.3 Method and outcome**

The group processes were facilitated through discussions. Participants gave different definitions of social work supervision. This included putting emphasis on the three functions of supervision: educational, administrative and supportive. On the supportive function, more emphasis was placed on communication skills. Within communication skills, focus was on the use of advanced empathy as an enabling tool to help supervisees achieve a professional use of the self and to respond to his or her colleagues and clients with warmth and skill.

When looking at the elements of supervision, the group understood their responsibilities

to include the following :

- ◆ to orientate the worker to the agency and community
- ◆ to teach the worker the specific nature of his or her task
- ◆ to have an understanding of a worker as a person
- ◆ to have regular conferences in order to supplement the worker's orientation and to identify training needs
- ◆ to check on progress made by the worker.

The participants felt strongly about enabling the worker to be free to talk, to encourage mutual understanding. Understanding a worker as a person was explored and in the end, participants agreed that some limitations are necessary, as people's private lives should not be interfered with as much as it should be known where it interferes with service delivery.

The supervisors realised the need to work on creating an enabling atmosphere for workers to trust them and open up to them. The question was how to go about creating such an enabling setting. In addressing this issue, each participant engaged in a self-evaluation exercise to check how well he or she knew the supervisees. The report back indicated how little co-workers knew of each other's backgrounds like qualifications, how many children one had and whether one is a single parent or not and why. These issues were seen as important because lack of this knowledge during interactions might lead to actions that could strain relationships where the other party might not be aware of the effects of his or her action.

#### **3.4.4 Reflection**

At the end of the session the participants realised their inefficiencies in dealing with what is expected of them in supervision. Lack of access to supervisees' personnel files was disempowering as they were supposed to have access to information as figures of authority in the district. The regional office was hanging onto power, which belonged to

the district. This behaviour is criticized by Burkey (1993:166) when he says that “one aspect of power structure remains constant”, and that those with power will strive to keep it against all odds.

Despite being in a powerless position, the supervisors chose to start working on their attitudes towards the supervisees to encourage building relationships of trust, a move that is encouraging at the beginning of a PR process. The first task was to adopt a positive supportive attitude in which focus was on acknowledging the positive things the supervisee did. The second task was for participants to be ready to give feedback on action taken outside the group and how supervisees received it, during the next session.

### **3.5 Fourth encounter**

The meeting was held at the regional office for forty five minutes and seven participants attended.

#### **3.5.1 Theory**

The session was a continuation of the last session and I was guided by the theories mentioned in the third encounter.

#### **3.5.2 Planning**

Participants planned to do a review of the last session, focus on feedback on creating an enabling environment and identification and clarification of roles.

Each participant had a chance to share his or her experiences, problems and ideas with the group about the themes of the day.

### 3.5.3 Method and outcome

Discussions were used as a method to facilitate this session.

#### Feedback on action taken

The group reported that their experiences on creating an enabling setting in the districts after the last session made them realise that it was a long process and could not be accomplished within a short time. The agreement was that report back on this aspect should be given as sessions continue. The feedback follows.

Since understanding the supervisee required one to know him or her more as a professional, the participants felt it would be useful to access the supervisees curricula vitae. The setback was that as administrative heads in the districts, they did not even have the supervisees' files or any other information about them. This raised the issue of being disempowered by the regional office, which made them more afraid to deal with people they did not really know. The disempowering process was very painful because it often went to extremes when the regional office summoned supervisees to do tasks without informing the supervisor.

The supervisors acknowledged amongst themselves that lack of information is a barrier and that asking for curricula vitae from the supervisees, after working with them for so long, would expose their inadequacies further or arouse suspicions. They then opted for a participatory process with their supervisees that would enable the staff in the district office to, through a meeting, share personal information, get to know one another better and thus relate well. The outcomes would then be shared during the next PR meeting.

#### Identification and clarification of roles

The roles of supervision were identified, by participants in accordance with what the department expects of them, as being administrative, educative and supportive in nature.

The administrative roles identified were as follows:

- ◆ to serve as an administrative link between the organisation and the

regional office

- ◆ to act as a liaison officer
- ◆ to act as a head of the institution
- ◆ to make decisions
- ◆ to see to it that reports are compiled and submitted to various organisations
- ◆ to convene office or district meetings
- ◆ to be accountable for safety of the property of the organisation
- ◆ to channel and refer cases in the office or district

The educative roles were identified as follows:

- ◆ to guide and help personnel
- ◆ to help the supervisee in writing quality reports
- ◆ to ensure the supervisee observes deadlines
- ◆ to ensure the supervisee knows and implements the policy of the organisation
- ◆ to have supervision sessions with the supervisee, the number and frequency being determined by the need of the supervisee
- ◆ to ensure the supervisee implements all methods of social work
- ◆ to orientate newly employed social workers and student social workers.

The supportive roles identified were:

- ◆ to act as a consultant to the supervisee
- ◆ to ensure that the needs of the community are met by field observation and ensuring that case objectives are met on record
- ◆ to create healthy working conditions in the office for the supervisee by attentive listening
- ◆ to know and respond to the supervisees' weaknesses and strengths through communication between the supervisor and the supervisee
- ◆ to identify the needs of the supervisee by attentive supervision

### **3.5.4 Reflection**

Participants were satisfied with the discussions as they were able to collectively identify their roles in the department and exactly what is expected of them. The process was educational as it also encouraged the development of the critical consciousness of the participants. They started to look at themselves differently, being more aware of their responsibilities. These outcomes were frightening for the participants as they realised that they do not listen attentively. An interesting factor is that acknowledged that they create dependency by taking over the role of the supervisee because of sudden change of roles and fear for delegation which is associated with lack of trust. The outcomes also led to the need for discussions on effectiveness in supervision. Reflection led to the development of critical consciousness about the roles they were playing in supervision. Participants also realised that the values they believed in were not used when they designed their actions because as social workers they are supposed to play an enabling role instead of encouraging dependency.

### **3.6 Fifth encounter**

Nine participants attended the meeting. It was held at the regional office for forty - five minutes.

#### **3.6.1 Theory**

I was guided throughout this meeting by Egan (1994) on communication skills and especially the use of empathy, connecting the islands and themes in the supervisors' lives. Burkey (1993) influenced my role as an agent of change who also shared the researched's reality as they engaged in an attempt to empower themselves to be self reliant in gaining genuine control over their own organisation. The theories of Burack and Torda (1979) and Burgher (1979) and Ross' (1996) on organisational change influenced the researcher's intervention during this session. These theories shed light on what was happening in the researched 's environment which was characterised by turbulent social

and political changes from the apartheid-dominated society to a non-racial democracy. They also highlighted stressful conditions and pressure South African social workers were exposed to without the necessary skills and support to adapt to the situation, and how these created resistance to change.

Underlying the theory, my personal experiences as a social work supervisor guided me as I operated under similar circumstances. This enabled participants to share openly with me. Power was evenly shared and conclusions were reached by joint reflection.

### **3.6.2 Planning**

Planning for the meeting was done during the previous meeting and it is as follows :

- ◆ Report back on implementation of creating an enabling working environment
- ◆ Discussion on effectiveness in supervision

### **3.6.3 Method and outcome**

The group used discussions as a method during this meeting. The outcomes of the discussion follow.

#### Implementation on creating an enabling working environment

Supervisors pursued the curricula vitae issue with the supervisees. According to the feedback given, the supervisees at the district did not co-operate with the supervisors when they requested their curricula vitae as they felt it was confidential information. When this issue was probed, it became evident that communication between the parties was not clear because the supervisee in question perceived the request as an instruction and assumed that the powerless supervisor was being authoritative and without the right to be, hence the misunderstanding. The participants realised the need to sharpen their communication skills as enablers.

The supervisors viewed the response as confirmation for lack of recognition of the supervisor as a figure of authority. The authority of the supervisors was not recognised by

supervisees because the regional office did not formalise it verbally and on paper. Generally, there were difficulties in creating an enabling environment. The reflection process pointed out the causal factors to be:

- ◆ lack of contracts between the employer and employee
- ◆ lack of adequate human resources to cover the needs of the community because scarce resources available were under pressure due to high case loads
- ◆ lack of incentives like promotions, awards, and working flexi hours
- ◆ lack of adequate work tools like transport and office accommodation
- ◆ administrative role was viewed negatively by supervisees who saw it as policing and this prevented trust between the supervisor and the supervisee
- ◆ lack of information on labour relations policy
- ◆ bad labour relations within the entire departmental hierarchy

Due to lack of time, effectiveness in supervision could not be discussed.

#### **3.6.4 Reflection**

The PR process enabled the participants to share their experiences freely. The realisation that their situation was similar strengthened their relationship. A relationship of trust developed and with it came deeper reflection.

To avoid straining relationships over curricula vitae issues, it was stressed again that supervisors try and get to know the supervisees informally in a non-threatening way. Realising that communication with supervisees has not been positively engaging and that they need to focus on ways of enhancing effectiveness, the participants decided to prepare for participatory supervision through openness and transparency in their respective offices. Data generated during the session enabled the PR group to make informed choices about the action they jointly designed which was congruent with their values and beliefs.

It was agreed that the next session would be the last one for the PR process. For this reason, the session would take the whole morning to cover aspects that still needed attention and would include evaluation.

### **3.7 Sixth encounter**

The session took four hours. It was held at the regional office and twelve participants attended.

#### **3.7.1 Theory**

The theoretical background which influenced the process was that of Collins (1999), Egan (1994), Freire (1994), Haggmann et al (1998) and Pavlicevic (1998). They provide guidelines on how to enhance effectiveness in supervision by using PR to plan and achieve jointly set objectives, improve communication skills, use dialogue to unveil reality, discourage dependency. They also use building blocks of appraisal and review meetings, that is, clarifying the purpose of the meeting, listening attentively, exploring alternatives, agreeing to action and recording. Burkey's (1993) warning that power can be jealously protected was helpful in preparing participants for the struggle ahead.

Concerns of the participants regarding their need to perform better in supervision also determined the flow of the process, especially because the head of the regional office was also keen on addressing performance appraisal to enhance effectiveness in social welfare service delivery and strengthen employee commitment. I moved from where the participants were by focusing on their pressing needs as a people-centred researcher. I facilitated a collective process, which enabled the participants to yield both short and long-term solutions to their problems in the context of their reality.

#### **3.7.2 Planning**

The session focused mainly on participatory supervision which included the

following:

- ◆ “The river code”
- ◆ what is going wrong that supervision can and should fix?
- ◆ what would supervisors like to see happening ?
- ◆ communication skills for supervision
- ◆ performance appraisal and building blocks of appraisal and work review meetings.

### 3.7.3 Method and outcome

The session was facilitated through the use of the river code, discussions and role plays.

#### The river code

At the beginning of the process, I presented a play called “the river code” (Hagmann et al 1998) with two other participants. The river code is a play without words. Two lines were made with paper fairly wide apart on the ground to represent the banks of a river. Pieces of paper were used to represent stepping stones in the river and an “island” was placed in the middle of the river.

The play reads as follows:

Two participants A and B went to the river and found the current to be too strong. They stood there, being afraid to cross, when the third participant C came and saw their difficulty. C led them up the river, showed them the stepping stones and encouraged them to step on them but both A and B were afraid. C agreed to take A on her back. When she got to the middle of the river, she was very tired, as A was very heavy. She put her on the little island. She went back to fetch B who also wanted to climb on her back. C refused and instead took B’s hand and encouraged her to step on the stones herself. Halfway across, B started to manage alone. They both crossed the river. When they got to the other side, they were extremely pleased with themselves and they walked off

together, completely forgetting about A, sitting alone on the island. She tried to get their attention, but they did not notice her frantic gestures for help.

The participants understood the play to mean that when people have to change, there is always fear but each person is responsible for making an effort to take the first step. The exercise was also linked to dependency, which supervision could create in supervisees if they were not helped to grow as professionals.

The exercise encouraged the participants to strengthen their collaboration in a different way by first identifying what kind of a river they were to cross together, how deep it was and how best to cross it. This became the foundation for the discussions that followed.

#### What is going wrong that supervision can and should fix ?

The following themes emerged from the participants' responses:

- ◆ supervisees are not disciplined by management when they commit offences against the state
- ◆ supervisors do not get incentives or recognition as motivation
- ◆ supervisors are not trained on new development trends
- ◆ supervisors are put on supervisory positions because they have been in office the longest, regardless of their level of competence
- ◆ appointments are verbal and no formal contract is signed to that effect, leading to uncertainty about authority
- ◆ supervision of supervisees is not monitored
- ◆ social workers report late to work
- ◆ social workers fail to maximise utilisation of working hours - lack of time management
- ◆ procedures are unknown
- ◆ there are no service standards to ensure effective service delivery by supervisees
- ◆ there is inequitable allocation of resources like transport, offices and other equipment

- ◆ social workers are stressed and unable to cope with changes and heavy workload
- ◆ there is poor work performance by employees
- ◆ relationships with clients are poor
- ◆ relationships with colleagues are poor
- ◆ supervision relationships are poor
- ◆ there are communication breakdowns
- ◆ there is a tendency to misuse state property
- ◆ there are no duty sheets to guide performance
- ◆ responsibilities are not clear for both supervisor and supervisee
- ◆ supervisors do not get support from their superiors
- ◆ there is never a call to the supervisor from his or her seniors to say “ Are you coping?”
- ◆ there is no supervision for the supervisor
- ◆ there is lack of clarity about what to expect from the provincial office
- ◆ supervisees have a negative attitude towards supervision
- ◆ supervision follow-ups are lacking due to poor planning, heavy workload
- ◆ responding to crisis situations at community level
- ◆ supervision is irregular
- ◆ there is lack of support by supervisors in work performance
- ◆ in-service training for supervisors is irregular
- ◆ social workers have a low self esteem.

After identifying the themes above, participants felt confident about the next step. Each aspect mentioned was discussed and the participants formulated strategies of addressing the issues as a group to negotiate for an effective change process at district, regional and provincial levels. Despite being in an environment that was not stimulating, supervisors accepted their role and its responsibilities, an indication of awareness for the need to change and willingness to go through a change process.

What would supervisors like to see happening ?

Basically, for change to occur, the group felt they need to stand together to be more empowered to act on the above issues. At the end of the meeting this was achieved as they enthusiastically rushed to meet the Provincial chief director of Welfare services to discuss supervision. Since the issue on performance appraisal was raised during the last meeting as pressing, the researcher shared with the group the information she had about doing performance appraisal. The performance appraisal and work review discussion focused on the building blocks of appraisal and review meetings which is summarised as “clear” (Pavlicevic 1998:91). “Clear” means:

- ◆ Clarify the purpose of the meeting
- ◆ Listen actively
- ◆ Explore alternatives/options
- ◆ Agree on action
- ◆ Summarise and record

The participants’ inputs, my preparations on communication, work review and supervision enabled an enriched discussion.

After discussing performance appraisal and work review, the group discussed communication skills, which enhance effective supervision. Communication skills include listening, observation, empathy, constructive questioning, suspending judgement, summarising, flexibility, constructive feedback, giving encouragement and the ability to be consistent.

As a way of refining knowledge and skills, the participants engaged in a role play in pairs to practise summarizing, one of the communication skills. Two participants had to choose a topic, which they felt strongly about for discussion. One person started by making a statement. After the statement, the partner had to repeat back the substance of the statement to the speaker’s satisfaction, before answering the statement. The partner

also had to repeat back what he or she has heard before continuing with the conversation.

The feedback by participants indicated that the exercise was helpful it forced one to listen, clarify and understand before responding. One usually feels it is unnecessary initially when summarising because one already has an answer and it is not necessary to confirm what was said first. The assumption that what you heard is what is perceived was shown to be incorrect during the exercise.

#### Seven habits of effective people

At the end of the session one of the participants, who was motivated by what transpired indicated to the group that she had attended a meeting previously during which she learned about the seven habit of effective people (Covey 1989). She then shared what she learned with the group. The presentation stressed effective time management.

#### **3.7.4 Reflection**

The participants acknowledged that the exercises had clarified why they had difficulty in coping with change in their work. The different perspectives on supervision and change, emanating from the diversity of backgrounds existing in the group, enriched the dialogue. Awareness was raised on how to avoid creating dependencies in supervision and in other spheres our lives. We learned how to improve our communication skills. The exercise also made participants realise how vital summarising is in communication and they were prepared to try it out with their supervisees. Using summarising and other communication skills will help us to listen and understand and not to be judgemental. They have learned ways of rendering effective supervision. All the above have encouraged them to be more confident in dealing with the changes they were facing. Lastly, they also felt ready to meet the provincial office to get clarity about what is in the pipeline for the management of supervision.

In terms of supervision issues raised throughout the process, participants felt the PR process had empowered them to improve their supervision performance. They view what they acquired in the process as being practical and within their control for immediate implementation with their supervisees.

Knowledge gained from the PR process would be used during a foster care report writing workshop, to be organised by one of the participants. She indicated that the PR process has motivated her to start working on setting standards for service delivery and she volunteered to share the experiences with the group on what she has already done in her district. The participants made a commitment to, in future, allocate tasks to group members during internal in-service training workshops for sharing and continuing to learn together. The PR process encouraged them to collectively read, gain knowledge and share, and this they wanted to see happening continuously.

Since this was the last session, participants evaluated the session.

### **3.8 Evaluation of the session and the PR process**

In assessing beneficiary reaction to PR, evaluation was done to describe the results or the impact of our actions with the participants. Evaluation is concerned with how we have changed as well as what other aspects need to be worked on (Collins 1999:47). The group agreed that evaluation would cover the last session and the whole PR process. Due to lack of time during the session, mainly because the participants were to meet the Chief Director at the provincial office, they wrote down their evaluation of the process which follows:

“ The session was very informative and educative. It was an eye opener. Supervision needs commitment and knowledge of a person for it to be successful. Support at all levels is essential”.

“The session came at the right time when mostly needed, it was an eye opener for our responsibilities as supervisors. The facilitator had done thorough preparations for the session. She also encouraged active participation. Most of the questions we had were answered and needed our willingness to start implementing. Supervision is really made to guide one”.

“Excellent presentation by the trainer, relevant to the actual work situation. The session was really participatory, colleagues were able to contribute positively”.

“The workshop was an eye opener. I have gained a lot, and I am ready to share whatever I have gained with my colleagues. I have observed that training is important and should be continuous”.

“My opinion is that, in order to improve service rendering in general, it is important to train supervisors who in turn, will be able to assist supervisees. Today I have learnt many things which empowered me to be more assertive as a social worker”.

“The session was an eye-opener. As a supervisor, I learned that you should not always look for mistakes with negative criticism. You should not always confront but rather give guidance and lead”.

“Very informative. Practical-in order ‘How to do it’. Thank you for helping us with supervision”.

“Session informative and clarifying issues. Session made me to stop and think about the present situation and to commit oneself to take action to correct”.

“Able to address problems experienced by supervisors. Able to know the importance of supervision”.

“The session was very informative. Participants were given the platform to share the problems they encounter in their various districts”.

“The session was informative and empowering”.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

The participants' needs and availability determined the process of PR. As a result focus was on their real life experiences. Being focused on issues that affect them encouraged active participation and willingness to be involved. Participation led to sharing amongst participants and ultimately the development of a trusting relationship, which encouraged critical thinking, increased knowledge and empowerment of all the stakeholders.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the researcher's perceptions of the findings, lessons learned and conclusion drawn from the study.

#### 4.2 Findings

The PR process unearthed the concerns of the social work supervisors in relation to the organisational change with which they were faced. The PR process also uncovered the potential the participants had in creating an enabling change environment for themselves and others. The findings of this PR process are presented by reviewing the research questions.

Question one: What are the problems and their underlying causes that social work supervision is facing in relation to organisational change?

Problems facing social work supervision as well as their underlying causes were identified. They mostly emanated from sudden political changes in South Africa. As a result of these changes, social work supervisors:

- ◆ were unable to cope with change due to a multitude of factors, for example, lack of skills, work overload and other resources which made them inefficient, lowered their self esteem and put tremendous stress on them
- ◆ operated without employment contracts
- ◆ became disempowered figures of authority without a support system
- ◆ became disillusioned, afraid and less assertive to act against their authority to emancipate themselves
- ◆ were uncertain about their roles

- ◆ became demotivated and saw their professional development as being the responsibility of the department

Question two: What process will the social work supervisors go through to be empowered to deal with organisational change?

The social work supervisors chose to participate in the PR process which helped to increase their knowledge about their situation and gave them the courage to take action to address the identified issues. During the PR process, participants engaged in a continuous reflection - action - reflection cycle when they shared experiences, feelings and needs, acted on generated ideas and reviewed their actions. Their main focus was creating an enabling setting for supervisees in the districts.

At the end of the PR process, the group planned to discuss the management of supervision with the Provincial Chief Director for professional welfare services.

Question three: What do they wish to do to change their situation?

When the PR process started, all participants had wishes, which we hoped the PR process would make real. What was learned has given participants courage and confidence to act on the following:

- ◆ gain skill in supervision either through the employer or independently
- ◆ negotiate with relevant stakeholders at district, regional and provincial level for how the change process could be managed to create an enabling setting for all
- ◆ demand contracts and the formalisation of their positions

The participants have realised that working collectively as a team is a powerful tool, which must be utilised to strengthen their voice.

Question four: What lessons can participants learn through a participatory research process?

Participants learned that:

- ◆ They are not the only ones experiencing problems
- ◆ One can investigate, learn and act at the same time
- ◆ Their views are very important for mobilising the process of their development
- ◆ The researcher can learn a lot from the participants
- ◆ They are masters of their own destiny
- ◆ Two views are better than one
- ◆ They can organise themselves
- ◆ Being put in a position of authority without the necessary skills is damaging to people's self respect
- ◆ Unmanaged and unplanned change could result in demotivation, confusion and stress. A supportive environment guided by communication enables people to be more willing to change
- ◆ Setting an agenda as a group, in advance, promotes participation
- ◆ Being part of a collaborative group that has common concerns strengthens powerless people's willingness to grow and change
- ◆ The empowerment process is like fire, it affects others in the environment of the empowered, like the supervisees and supervisors' superiors
- ◆ Training is important, therefore it should be continuous
- ◆ Instead of always looking for mistakes, we should put more effort in providing guidance, leadership and giving positive feedback
- ◆ Supervision is an important tool for providing guidance and support.

Question five: What do they plan to do differently as a result of what they have learned?

Participants feel capacitated to create an enabling change setting for supervisees by communicating better, rendering effective participatory supervision and voicing their

concerns collectively to their superiors. Their self esteem has increased and they plan to use “clear” which is:

- ◆ Clarify the purpose of the meeting
- ◆ Listen actively
- ◆ Explore alternatives/options
- ◆ Agree on action
- ◆ Summarise and record

The use of “clear” will help improve communication, supervision, social workers performance, relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee and it will enable early identification of problem areas.

In addition, participants have agreed to continue to read and share knowledge. To achieve this they will allocate tasks to group members for presentations during their supervision meetings.

### **4.3 Lessons learned**

I engaged in the PR process as a co-learner and going through the journey with the participants empowered me as a supervisor to be more aware of the stumbling blocks in supervision and to be ready to deal with them. As part of a collaborative group, I learned the above-mentioned lessons. In addition, as a researcher I learned the following:

- ◆ Initiating the research in the context of the participants’ actual reality enhances participation, develops critical consciousness so that people are aware of good qualities they never realised they had. It may lead to the development of interest in nurturing these qualities. It encouraged people to critically look at themselves and their situation and to explore ways of dealing with it
- ◆ I realised I could never, as PR practitioner, be sure of my preparation for the session as well as the outcome because if you are people-centered you are led by the

- people's needs and not your plans because they are the ones that know their situation better
- ◆ Participatory processes can be frightening for an inexperienced researcher because the group might plead with you to direct the process and you might be tempted to take the lead as it is an easy way out
  - ◆ There are not many people who have exposure to PR, as a result, it was difficult for me to find a support system
  - ◆ I felt confident in facilitating the process because I have internalised participatory development approach as my way of doing things which is congruent with my beliefs and values
  - ◆ PR benefits the researched.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

The PR process has brought out of the participants the urge to empower themselves as custodians of the empowering profession. Empowering the supervisors through a participatory process ensured that they themselves act by reading material on supervision to gain knowledge to be effective in practising participatory supervision. If this is encouraged throughout the province it would rekindle the fires in social workers to really practice people centred development in communities and thus reduce poverty.

The development process did not only benefit the participants, but their superiors and the supervisees in the work situation. This was achieved during their interactions with their environment.

The researcher concludes that the use of participatory research is enabling in dealing with change and other situations because it gives back the power to the people. It ensures sustainability as it gives to the people who participated in it, self worth and emancipation for life.

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## APPENDIX ONE

### LETTER TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND WELFARE

5 Gemsbok Avenue  
Faunapark  
0699  
01 October 1997

The Director  
Department of Welfare  
Central Region  
Pietersburg  
0700

Attention: Mr Sehlako

Dear sir

RE: Request for permission to do research with Social Work Supervisors

I am doing MA SS Mental Health specialising in Community Development with Unisa. As part of my studies, I have to do a mini thesis. I have chosen to do Participatory Action Research (PAR). Realising that the changes in South Africa and in government have put supervisors in a difficult position of having to deal with change themselves and to manage it, I decided that if my target group is the supervisors, we will both learn a lot from each other throughout the process and also work out together constructive ways of dealing with change.

My topic is "Participatory Research in organisational change with Social Work supervision".

I would appreciate it if I could be granted permission to work with this group.

Yours sincerely



.....  
Kgauhelo Lekalakala

APPENDIX TWO  
PARTICIPANTS' EVALUATION

EVALUATION.

The workshop was an eye opening. I have gained a lot, and I am ready to share whatever I have gained with my colleagues.

I have observed that training is important and should be continuous.

My opinion is that, in order to improve service rendering in general, it is so important to train supervisors who then, in turn, ~~can~~ will be able to assist supervisees. Today I have learnt many things which empowered me to be more assertive as a social worker.

## EVALUATION OF THE SUPERVISORY RESEARCH SESSION

The session was informative and an eye-opener. As a supervisor I learned that you should not always look for mistakes with a negative criticism. You should not always confront but rather give guidance and lead.

### EVALUATION OF THE SESSION

- Excellent presentation by the trainer, relevant to the actual work situation.
- The session was really participatory, colleagues were able to contribute positively.

### EVALUATION OF SESSION

- Session informative and clarifying issues
- session made me to stop & think about present situation and to commit oneself to take an action to correct.

## Evaluation -

- The session was informative and empowering

- Able to address problems experienced by supervisors

- Able to know the importance of supervision

## EVALUATION.

- The session came at the right time when mostly needed, it was an eye opener for our responsibilities as supervisors.

- The facilitator had done thorough preparations for the session.

- She also encouraged <sup>active</sup> participation.

- Most of the questions we had were answered, and needed our willingness to start implementing

- Supervision <sup>is</sup> really <sup>made to</sup> guide one

The session was very informative and educational. It was an eye opener. Supervision needs commitment and knowledge of a person for it to be successful. Support at all levels is very essential.

- Very informative.
- Practical. - in order "How to do it."
- Thank you for helping us with "Supervision".

#### EVALUATION

1. The session was very informative
2. Participants were given the platform to share the problems they encounter in their various districts.