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SOCIAL WORK SUPERVISION - CONTRIBUTING TO INNOVATIVE KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION AND OPEN EXPERTISE

Synnöve Karvinen-Niinikoski

Introduction

The construction and development of knowledge and expertise has become the central focus of organisational development and organisational learning in the rapidly changing societies of our post-modern era. This is also opening a new role for professional supervision, especially in the field of social work. Our understanding of knowledge and knowledge creation is changing. Knowledge and expertise are understood to be in a new way reflexive by their nature very much due to contingency and ambiguity in our post-modern world. There is a shift from acquisition and transmission of knowledge to construction and invention of knowledge, towards innovative knowledge production. Expertise shows itself more and more as a mechanism of reframing problems, which incorporates not only scientific judgements or technical decisions but also more basic and deeper social and cultural predispositions and commitments. (Eräsaari 2003.) In social work this shift toward constructive expertise matches the urge to cope with the ever-changing complexity that has to be dealt with in the everyday practices of the profession.

One could actually speak of a paradox of scientific and professional expertise (Nowotny 2000). In our traditions of modernity we used to think about professional expertise as institutionalised and individually mastered specialist knowledge based on scientific evidence and reason. Today the trend is towards de-institutionalisation, hybrid forms of organisation and co-operative mastering of knowing and knowledge production, towards open expertise produced in multi-actor networks. The paradox concerns the need not only to support organisational and individual learning but also to transfer knowledge and expertise into and from productive practice. The case is similar with organisations, which are being forced to adapt to continuous and rapid change in their environment. Structures and mechanisms for supportingreflexion, learning and innovative knowledge generation are of increasing interest, one of these being the learning organisation. Supervision is also part of these processes, attaining a new role and scope.

In social work, supervision carries traditions of reflexive knowledge creation and learning. Coping with uncertainty and ambiguity is 'baked' into the very essence of social work as a professional practice dealing with social problems and people's everyday life. The new feature of 'expert knowledge being involved in social life and appropriated within everyday life itself' (Eräsaari 2003) is a basic element in social work. Today, supervision and other reflective methods of supporting individual and organisational reflection and learning are becoming important to organisational development. This is after having been mainly used as methods for administration, individual support, learning and management of the psycho-socially loaded working tasks in social work. (Abbott 1995 and 1988; Bruce & Austin 2000; Engeström 1987; 1992; Eräsaari 1998 and 2003;

Fook & al. 1997; Hakkarainen & al. 2003; Hawkins & Shohet 2000; Juuti 1999; Kadushin & Harkness 2002, Karvinen 1996 and 1999; Payne 1991; 1999; Parton & O'Byrne 2000; Tynjälä & al 1997.)

Social work can be defined as a profession initiating change in social life in order to improve opportunities for a human life with dignity or for social sustainability, a concept used in discussion about eco-social social work (Karvinen 1999; Närhi & Matthies 2001; see also Smale & al. 2000; Besthorn 2003). Professional social work practice in post-modern society can be described as more reflexive in nature, which means that social workers increasingly have to look for flexible solutions in different situations and working contexts instead of leaning on given and existing professional methods in institutionalised settings (Satka & Karvinen 1999). The great challenge and difficulty in social work is to cope with uncertainty and continuous change, the urge to interpret and create understanding according to the different and particular living situations of people and to find optional ways and methods in solving and combating social problems. Treating cultural differences and gender identities in a respectful and sensitive way is also a big challenge for reflexivity in professional work (Karvinen 1999). At the same time there is in the search for expertise in social work an internationally strengthening neo-positivistic trend towards controlled good practice based on scientific evidence (Webb 2001). In any case the shared coefficient between these two is the need for organisational learning and (innovative) knowledge production in and through the practice context.

The aim of this chapter is to look at how supervision in social work with its long traditions and almost a pioneer role of supervision in human services (e.g. Middleman & Rhodes 1988; Brown & Bourne 1996 or Karvinen 1993) could contribute to organisational learning and what would be the theoretical grounds for supervision promoting, critical and ethically sustainable professional developments and innovative knowledge production (e.g. Banks 1999; Ife 1997 and 2002).

I will first look at the ideas of expertise and organisational learning. Secondly I will discuss the idea of the learning organisation. Thirdly I will look at the traditions and theoretical understanding of social work supervision. The following section will discuss the idea of reflexive supervision and expansive learning. In the last and conclusive section supervision as a contributor to innovative knowledge production will be discussed.

The role of supervision in promoting open expertise

Traditional expertise, based on the three pillars of its constitution - scientific knowledge, professional agency and institutional traditions - can be considered to be in crisis because of rapid change, uncertainty and ambiguity in our societies. It is especially institutions that are in turbulence in post-modern societies, but also the nature of knowledge and scientific truth and knowledge generation are questioned. The crisis of expertise could be described as the crisis of expert institutions. Instead of traditional knowledge development, gradual accumulation of knowledge or constant epistemological revolutions we now have to look for spatial arrangements and transformations in the relationships between these arrangements (Eräsaari 2003). In the case of expertise as a particularly legitimate form of knowledge, the emphasis has moved onto contextualisation or "context-dependency" (Nowotny 2000). That means also a new kind of interaction between "practical knowledge" and "explicit knowledge" taking place on individual and institutional levels in knowledge spirals or cycles of learning. The context has become an important source for generation and validation of knowledge. This development also raises different kinds of expertise like open and closed expertise and lay and contra expertise. (Eräsaari 2003; Saaristo 2000.) In social work contextual practice is an emerging concept in response to these changes in

understanding expertise (Fook 2002, 142-147). Supervision as a forum for reflecting and relating contextual knowledge seems to be gaining a new interest in managing social work.

Open expertise recognises uncertainty and instead of claiming to be the only one to possess proper knowledge and professional skills it will be ready to question communication and even polemics as well as a willingness to negotiate and reconstruct expertise according to the different contexts of action. The context (the space for communication) is left open (to allow communication) (Eräsaari 2003). In many cases expertise will be created together in multi-professional co-operation and communities, as traditional profession-centred solutions don't work. Expertise is created in the processes of learning and practising something that does not even exist, yet, something that is in the process of evolution and potential in unrecognised or unrealised options. This makes tacit and experiential knowledge important constituents of expertise as well as scientific knowledge. (Engeström 1987; Eräsaari 2003; Hakkarainen & al. 2003a; Tynjälä & al. 1997; Karvinen 1993). Closed expertise, as opposed to open, is 'a severe and unconditional strategy, ethos or mentality, which creates a strong link between core knowledge and specific advice or recommendations' (Eräsaari 2003). This form of expertise prevails in the administrative traditions and may be even strengthening in social work through managerialist ideas of knowledge and evidence based practices. In its very essence social work, however, inclines towards open expertise for example through being client-centered or, to put it in politically more strict discourse, citizen-centered (Lister1998). This is at least an issue for reflection, to ponder which kind of expertise supervision is promoting.

There is an urge and a wish for continuous, life-long learning and professional development to be found in ideas of open and reflexive expertise. The importance of supervision in organisational learning can be seen in the emphases on experiential and tacit knowledge and the opportunity to learn from this knowledge through reflection, but also in the functions of supervision in looking after the well-being of practitioners in stressful work contexts. (Baldwin 2000; Hakkarainen & al. 2003b;Hawkins & Shohet 2000; Kadushin & Haerkner 2003, Karvinen 1993; Yliruka 2000.) The experience of partnership, the opportunity for dialogue and reflection provided in supervision can be considered as important contributors to –'organizational trust' (Kramer 1999) and the reconstruction of professional identity in accordance to the demands of trust and co-operation in the networking organisations' knotworks (see Engeström & al. 1999b).

There are several approaches for organisational learning and knowledge creation or innovative developmental work. There is life-long adult learning and staff development (Tynjälä & al. 1997; Usher & al. 1997), knowledge management and knowledge creation (Nonaka & al. 2000;Virkkunen 2001), learning communities of practice (Wenger 1998), the ideas of learning organisations (Gould 2000; Frydman & al. 2000; Senge 1999 and 1994), of expansive learning (Engeström 1987; 1992) and of innovative knowledge communities (Hakkarainen &al 2003, Bereiter 2002). A central theme within these discourses is the search for models of collaborative and innovative learning allowing the search for alternative methods of action and innovation. Many of these models will include moments for research, critical reflection, studying, experimentation and evaluation following the same cyclical ideas that can be found in the Kolbian (Kolb 1984) model of experiential learning or the ideas of reflective practices and the double-loop learning developed by Schön (1983;1987) and Argyris and Schön (1974; 1996).

In social work much professional practice includes inventing new models and methods of working. The embryos for these innovative practices quite often can be found in the experiences of social workers and their clients in everyday practices. One of the dilemmas for developing social work lies thus in supporting these innovative processes and much of that is dependant on organisational

learning and developmental work for innovation (Gould 2000). In social work the idea of open and innovative expertise (Eräsaari 2003) or interpretative expertise (Bauman 1992) is justified by the very nature of the professional ideal which recognises and respects particularity and cultural difference in individual living situations as the starting point professional practice (Karvinen 1999; Raitakari 2002). This kind of knowledge could be called "orientation knowledge" (Eräsaari 2003). There are, however, in the nature of social work and the institutions constituting professional jurisdiction opposing factors which force much social work expertise to be closed (Eräsaari 2003) or legislative (Bauman 1992) in its nature. The Finnish researcher in expertise, professor Risto Eräsaari (2003) warns professionals not to lose and close off differentiating and possibly unrecognised opportunities in the orientation processes of our post modern life. He sees that opening and negotiating different perspectives is important. He encourages a certain lightness and imagination and awareness of the structures and processes of governance and power in society. In social work, as an institution of social welfare, there are elements of that kind of communication, 'first order seriousness' (Eräsaari 2003, 29-35), which make social work in many senses 'closed' and preconditioned. Closed expertise as the opposite of open expertise, is according to Eräsaari (2003) 'a severe and unconditional strategy, ethos or mentality, which creates a strong link between core knowledge and specific advice or recommendations'. In social work with efforts to confirm expertise and credibility through evidence-based practices this is causing ethical conflicts and raising debate about the essence of the social work profession as a sensitive, critical and empowering, democratic force in society. The ethical mission that for example Jim Ife (1997; 2000) or Walter Lorenz (2003) are posing for social work is looking for open and reflexive expertise. Reflexive expertise is a kind of orientation process relating experience to powerful meanings and calling also for an epistemological standpoint in contextual and experiential factors of knowledge generation without excluding forms of counter-expertise or lay experience (Eräsaari 2003). The social work profession is close to the critical point in society at the intersection of system and lifeworld, indicating an ethical connection to the reflexive epistemological standpoint and knowledge generation in social work (Lorenz 2003: 16).

Traditionally supervision has been one of the main methods for supporting practitioners in the emotionally demanding work and the solutions and choices to be made in the manifold realities of clients. Also protection of 'closed practices', 'parochial and hierarchical mechanism' (Harris 1998, 121; see also Kadushin & Haerkness 2002) for political and administrative control prevails in supervision. On the other side there also is the strong tradition of looking for autonomy and open development of expertise (Bruce & Austin 2000). For example, Swedish social workers regard supervision as the most important source for reflection and support, learning and knowledge creation in social work (Nordlander & Blom 2002). Supervision may in its essence become a method and forum for critical reflection on experiences gained from professional practice. But for it to face the contradictions of professional expertise, supervision needs to become more analytic and critical. There is also the need to sharpen understanding of the theoretical grounds for supervision and its capacity to develop expertise.

Organisational learning and supervision

There has been an extensive change in the constellation of organisations in post-modern society partly due to developments in expertise and knowledge production and, especially, due to globalisation processes in the information society. The search has been towards flexible, light and innovative organisations like teams and networks or, to use the latest term, 'hybrid knotworks' (Engeström et al. 1999b). This has led to the development of leadership and aroused the need to create more space and forums for dialogue and reflection. One could even speak about a new kind

of empowering and collaborative leadership, with a strong emphasis on supervisory methods and mentoring. (Frydman et al. 2000; Juuti 1999.) On the other hand there has been an increasing need for new methods of governance and control, a development that managerialism is concerned with. In social work the idea of knowledge-based practices seems to have become the strategy of social services management even on the national level, e.g. Sweden (e.g. Socialvetenskaplig forskning 2002), UK (Walker 2001; Webb 2001) and Finland (The National Programme 2003). The idea is to promote expertise and quality of services through evidence-based knowledge for good practices. This development includes contradictory elements in regard to open and closed expertise. New managerialism is also using supervision (Harris 1998), but more in the sense of governance and closed expertise. This trend may be strengthening in social work where the space for social worker autonomy is reduced and questioned by strengthening managerialism (Raunio 2003).

Organisational development as the evolution of organisational culture and psychology (Schein 1994) and of organisational learning (Argyris & Schon 1974;1996) has been discussed for decades. It has been a long process of paradigmatic development to the present situation where knowledge and expertise are understood to be constructed and negotiated through professional practice within their different contexts. Both individual experience and knowledge learned and transferred into a shared organisational knowledge and knowing have led to a search for methods of managing and promoting that learning - organisational learning. Argyris and Schön (1996: 280 - 286) speak about a learning paradox and double-loop learning and the relationship between the individual member creating her theory-in-use and organisational learning. They address the problems of change and knowledge creation, seeing that practice should be the primary context for both research and development of organisational learning (Argyris and Schon 1996: 285).

Through the dynamics seen here, the role of supervision in promoting organisational learning becomes evident. The ideas of organisational culture and organisational psychology (Schein 1992; 1994) have set a certain place for supervision, especially in the psychodynamic, classical form of supervision, which still is the main focus for supervision (e.g. Hawkins & Shohet 2000; Kadushin & Haerkner 2002). Though there is also research showing that when the main emphasis of supervision lies on the individual level of coping and support (Bruce & Austin 2000; Egelund & Kvilhaug 2001) supervision could be used in a more comprehensive way.

In professional learning, becoming a reflective practitioner (Schon 1983) or a transformative learner (Mezirow 1981 and 1991) - a practitioner who has learned to learn and is capable of developing expertise through practice and who also is a conscious subject of the activity and able to take alternative actions - has become mainstream in educational (Tynjälä & al. 1997) and even social work research (Fook & al. 2000; Healy 2001; Karvinen 1996; Taylor & White 2000). The idea of transformative learning is central for the theory of supervision as it is perspectives of meaning and the changing of these, which according to Jack Mezirow (1991) are guiding our actions. Meaning perspectives are developed through several processes in human development, many of these processes being of that kind of meta-cognition and emotions that are also the focus of supervision theories (Egelund 1999; see also Gardiner 1989), e.g. the psycho-dynamic approach (Hawkins & Shohet 2000) and systemic supervision (Barnes et al. 2000). There seems to be a need to re-construct not only role and position, but also theoretical understanding of social work supervision for it to contribute to critical practice and the demands of reflexive and open expertise (Karvinen 1996; Phillipson 2002; Fook 1999; Egelund & Kvilhaug 2001; see also Gardiner 1989).

One of the main lines in the discourse on organisational learning, especially in the connection to leadership and management in the business field, is based on the work of Senge (1990) and his idea 'the fifth discipline' in organisational development and 'the change as a dance' (Senge & al. 1999)

(see Juuti 1997; Frydman et al. 2000) There is a good portion of idealism in organisational learning approaches, overemphasising the leadership function in approaching organisational learning as something that individuals share and create and that can be managed. Argyris and Schön (1996: 180 – 199: 281 - 286) criticise both Senge's (1990) 'Fifth discipline' that 'unites systems thinking with organisational adaptation and with the realisation of human potential in a mixture that has a distinctly Utopian flavor' and Edgar Schein's (1979) idea of managing organisational culture by emphasising the paradox of learning and opportunities overcoming it. The ideas of paradox of learning and organisational learning developed by Argyris and Schon reflect Kolbian experiential learning, the cornerstone of cyclical models of learning for organisational development and change. New solutions for tackling the problems of the co-operative learning and knowledge generation in organisations, for stretching understanding of organisational relations (see Argyris & Schön 1996, 190) are ideas of 'communities of practice' (Wenger 1998) and shared space for knowledge creation (Nonaka & al. 2000).

Argyris and Schön (1996, 190) are right in stating 'that a theory of learning must take account of the interplay between the actions and interactions of individuals and the actions and interactions of higher-level organisational entities such as departments, divisions or groups' and that the learning problem on the organisational level is 'stretching our ordinary understandings of individual and organisation'. This could be interpreted either as a challenge for subjective spheres or as a challenge for contextualisation. The risk in forgetting the context has - according to the ideas of material constructivism and actor network theory in the footsteps of Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar (1979) - a material side, as the social cannot be considered only as the interaction between individuals, but needs to be seen as a network of action, where the material and artefacts for their deal construct social relations. The agency, like that of a social worker's, is not defined only by intentional action but also by the position of the actor in relation to the network in each case. The dynamic understanding of the actor as a product of the network and a subject of the agency provided by the network, as well as also as a creator of the network, raises the intermediary elements of the networks as actors on the side of the acting individuals. The actor network approach describes how prevailing understandings, occasions, physical elements, relations in between different actors among other things construct the options and decisions in the network. They start to define the space around them. All this is important both to organisational learning as well as for the knowledge formation and processing. The ideas produced in actor networks tend to become facts and construct what would be proper knowledge and in that sense also proper agency. (Peltola and Åkerman 1999.) Combined to theories of social construction (Parton and O´Byrne 2000) and/or to the ideas of structuration (Giddens 1984) efforts in promoting organisational learning, supervision, development of expertise or innovative knowledge production necessarily lead to looking for methods of treating the paradox of learning and the creation of intermediate factors and space within the organisational or activity system level.

It seems that getting holistic understanding in the processes of expertise generation one will have to look at the process of knowledge generation from three different perspectives. First there is expertise as knowledge acquisition for the individual expert. Secondly there is expertise as social-cultural processes of knowing. In this case the expertise is socially shared and participative. The two mentioned approaches, or metaphors of learning do not treat the third angle, the problem of generating new knowledge and overcoming the old solutions. Knowledge generation of progressive problem solving angles are central in achieving innovation needed in the complex contexts of agency. (Hakkarainen et al. 2003; 2002.) The development of expertise and production of knowledge is a progressive problem-solving process, where people continuously reflect and re-frame their work (Tynjälä 2003: 46 –47)

Professional supervision in the changing and contingent context of professional and expert action can be seen as a way of orientation, and gaining deeper understanding of our agency. It is a process of scrutinising and re-constructing professional orientation. This orientation is constructed in the dialogue of our experiences and the meaning perspectives we hold. The orientation is a process of relating experiences to powerful meanings. In this way we get more understanding, when we understand 'how our experience is contingent on our meanings' (Eräsaari 2003).

Social work supervision

Social work has long traditions of supervision. Supervision was a central method for early social work teachers, researchers and practitioners in their efforts to construct relevant practices and describe a theory of social work. Reflecting on experience and learning from practical experience were central ways of gaining social work knowledge and constructing practices. Supervision was developed as the forum and method for that reflection (Karvinen 1993). In the process of professional development supervision has had different roles, traditions and backgrounds, for example psychoanalytical and psychodynamic, administrative and competence oriented (Guttman and Eisikowitz 1988, Middleman and Rhodes 1985, Karvinen 1993). Professional supervision seems quite often to be understood either as a professional structure in organisational hierarchies or a specified method for the purposes of ensuring quality and effectiveness of services (Phillipson 2002; Hawkins and Shohet 2000). There are also different supervisory cultures in different countries (Stromfors 2002: 21 –25; Salonen 2003). Though comparative research is lacking (Bruce and Austin 2000), there are different systems. In the Anglo-American tradition supervision is part of hierarchical line-management (e.g. Kadushin and Haerkness 2002; Bruce and Austin 2000; Harris 1998). In the Scandinavian tradition (Egelund 1999) professional autonomy is guaranteed by a supervisor who comes from outside the organisation (Nordlander and Blom 2002). In Scandinavia, social workers want to use supervision as their own reflective support both in the daily chaos and in their professional practice. In these traditions supervision has been understood as a forum for knowledge production, professional learning and professional development since the early 1950s and the period of professional expansion in 1980s. (Egelund & Kvilhaug 2001; Karvinen 1993.)

There is also the tradition of attaching the professional development of social work to supervision. The focus here has been on supporting the individual social worker's role as an active and autonomous subject in developing professional practice. Questions include what is guiding the social worker and her choices (Karvinen 1993; see also Nordlander and Blom 2002), what makes the social worker do what she does and how supervision can be helpful for the social worker and her choices? How would it be possible for the social worker to keep up with and develop professionally and ethically sustainable practices and expertise in social work? How could discretion become a creative potential for social work practice (Baldwin 2001) or how could the autonomy of social workers be supported (Karvinen 1987)? All these questions lead to supervision as a method for supporting developmental potential. The most ambitious aim in these questions would be the theoretical understanding of supervision and in that sense one has to ask a question about the object of supervision? (Karvinen 1993). Developmental supervision theory must address professional action in a holistic way. Though some critique on social work supervision can be argued in its bias towards individual psychodynamic and emotional issues (Egelund and Kvilhaug 2001), there are models where supervision is given a wider perspective like the 'seven-eyed model for supervision' (Hawkins and Shohet 2000: 68) 'a foursome mentality' (Middleman & Rhodes 1985; 223) or 'developmental supervision"'especially in the perspective of action research (Baldwin 2000: 137 and 2001,292) and in the ideas of expansive learning as a background theory for supervision (Auvinen and Karvinen 1993).

A theoretical model grasping the complex and even contradictory contexts that constrain social workers' profession and professional practices in different cultural settings indicate the connections of individual action into wider organisational and social contexts. Also a model that would support the critical, reflexive practitioner is needed (Abbott 1988; Eräsaari 2003; Karvinen 1996; 2000; Mezirow 1981; 1991). Each social worker carries some kind of theoretical model about being a social worker in the context of the wider society in her or his mind. This model, which could be called 'the theory or self-understanding of social work' is developing or 'living' and continuously re- and de-constructed in and through professional and organisational practices. This model could also be described as the model of working orientation, a model that provides the contextual setting for different and developing meaning perspectives (Mezirow 1991) that are guiding choices of human actors such as social workers. Adapting the ideas of the Finnish professor in developmental working studies, Professor Yrjo Engeström, the model of self-understanding can be conceptualised as the model and theory of 'human activity system' (Engeström 1987).

The construction and transformation of meaning perspectives guiding the actor's orientation in the activity (Mezirow 1991) are central for the theoretical understanding of supervision. In aiming to develop professional practice, the actions of practitioners and the context of that action, it is the more or less shared meaning perspectives, the shared understandings, which need to be developed, or re- and de-constructed. This is also the object of supervision. According to Jack Mezirow (1991) change or alteration in meaning perspectives open up ways to take alternative action and innovative knowledge creation. Change may start in the simple daily routines and end up with new forms and artefacts and ways of organisation, new approaches and models of practices (see also e.g. Fook 2002). By no means is the change either only a result of the individual actor's actions and the issue here is not of voluntarism. In essence the need for change comes from changes and contradictions in the activity system itself (Engeström 1987).

Supervision as a forum for reflection allows social workers to reflect their experiences and emotions and through critical reflection to understand them in the wider context of work and thus to look for alternative methods of reaction, action and agency. The individual practical experience as the focus of reflection does not mean the exclusion of education, training, knowledge, research and science or anything in favour of mere practical knowledge. On the contrary, it is important that social work is seen in all its complexity – as well as in its developmental historical context. (See also Fook 2002, 142 – 147.) According to activity theory (Engeström et al. 1999a), human action has to be seen in its contextual development - from historical, present and future perspectives. Human action is also unavoidably complicated including different kinds of emotional, psychological, material, social and cultural dynamics, so social work supervision cannot be reduced either on cognitive or emotional sides.

In order to develop professional expertise in social work, supervision should help social workers to reflect and reconstruct their meaning perspectives, working orientation and 'self understanding' of social work. The core of meaning perspectives lies in understanding the object of social work, which is the everyday life and action of people in all its complexities. Real understanding of this cannot be achieved without a partnership in reflection and knowledge production with the working community and clients, the people, whom social work concerns (see also Baldwin 2001). This calls for new kinds of relationships and structures for research, supervision and developmental social work practices and expertise (Karvinen 1999.) In organisational learning and knowledge generation reflexive and shared forums for communication like supervision seem to be of great interest (Hakkarainen et al. 2003; Nonaka et al. 2000; Wenger 1998).

It is difficult to define supervision in a theoretically grounded way and definitions remain rather descriptive, general and circular (Hyrkäs 2002; Karvinen 1993; 1996). In developmental supervision it is essential to understand the processes whereby the actor is trying to grasp her own agency and the constraints of changing this agency in its subjective and societal and developmental contexts. From an activity theoretical point of view, supervision could be defined as the reflection process working on a professional's working orientation or self-understanding and the meaning perspectives constructing it (Karvinen 1993). This process could make use of ideas of expansive learning (Engeström 1987) where connection to innovative knowledge production and organisational learning are integral.

The model of expansive learning based on the ideas of the cultural-historical approach in activity theory develops the idea of learning cycles, in which by deconstructing and scrutinising existing practices, new models and solutions to solve problems of earlier practices will be developed. New models will in turn be put in practice and evaluated in action. As actors of the expansive cycle, participants will reconstruct their understanding and gain new meaning perspectives. The central idea of this approach is to help the organisation and working community to reflect on their practice in a systematic way. (Engeström 1987; 1992; Engeström et al.1999a; 1999b)

Reflexive supervision

Social work is about action (e.g. Adams et al. 2000, 6). Supervision in its efforts to help practitioners act in the best possible way is about very broad analys of action . The focus is on the social worker's action, which has its focus on peoples' action, all unavoidably in complicated contexts. Social work literature on holistic approaches throughout the development of professional education has described this complexity (e.g. Reamer 1994; Payne 1991; Mattaini and Meyer 1995). Although systemic eco-psycho-social models are quite comprehensive, only following them in the analysis of professional action would lead to the omission of the developmental perspectives found in the tensions and contradictions of professional action.
In current social work discourse the concept of critical practice (Adams et al. 2002) represents the effort of developing social work according to the ideas of the reflective practitioner and reflexive practice. Though 'critical practice is not social work per se but is integral to social work that makes use of criticality as the route to excellence in performance and advancing expertise' ..' we cannot claim that critical practice will change the world, but the constant interplay between our actions and the deconstruction and reconstruction that comprise our critical reflection gives us access to advancing our practice.' (Adams et al. 2002: xxi). Facing the idea of the shifting complexity and contextual multiplicity is unavoidable when trying to analyse social work practice and development. However, there is an obvious lack of both an inclusive comprehension of this complexity and a theoretically solid tool to analyse this complexity of human action. For example, Adams (Adams et al 2002:. 84) writes about the reflexive cycle and the 'demanding process of holistic engagement actually involved in practising critically; engaging with contexts, engaging with our-selves; engaging with knowledge, engaging with practice and engaging with paradoxes and dilemmas'. All this is good, but there still remains the difficulty of seeing the relations between these different elements. The difficulties lie especially in the problems of connecting the human action with the non-human structures and developmental processes and understanding the collective in relation to the subjective.

The concept and model of 'the mediated activity system' developed by Yrjö Engeström (1987; 1992. see for an case example below, Figure 1.), drawing on the cultural-historical theory of activity, offers tools to understand complicated collaborative human action (Miettinen 1998: 40). The strength of the model of an activity system is that it provides a conceptual tool addressing and

analysing the complexity of human action in its different and changing contexts and relationships in between the basic elements. The notion of mediation is of crucial importance as, 'the activity system comprises the individual practitioner, the colleagues and co-workers of workplace community, the conceptual and practical tools, and the shared objects as a unified dynamic whole' (Engeström 1992: 12 - 13). The multiple mediations between the different components are decisive features in the activity. The subject and the object, or the actor and the environment, are mediated by instruments, including symbols and representations of various kinds. There are also less visible mediators of activity like rules, community and division of labour. Between all the components of the activity system, there are continuous transformations and the system thus incessantly reconstructs itself. The system is also 'much more competent and robust than any of its individual expert members.' (Engeström 1992: 12 - 13). The system does not exist in a vacuum, but is a part of multidimensional networks of activity systems, a kind of 'neighbourhood activities' producing the components of the 'central activity', the activity in focus. In the network of the neighbourhood activities, systems connected to a given central activity - like for example the socials worker's practice - the exchanges and inter-penetrations of the different components potentially cause destabilisation and change. With the help of the model of mediated activity system and the critical reflection that it facilitates, professional practice can be described, conceptualised and further developed. In supervision the model can be used as an analytical tool for opening the connections from individual reflection to the wider societal and organisational processes (Karvinen 1993).
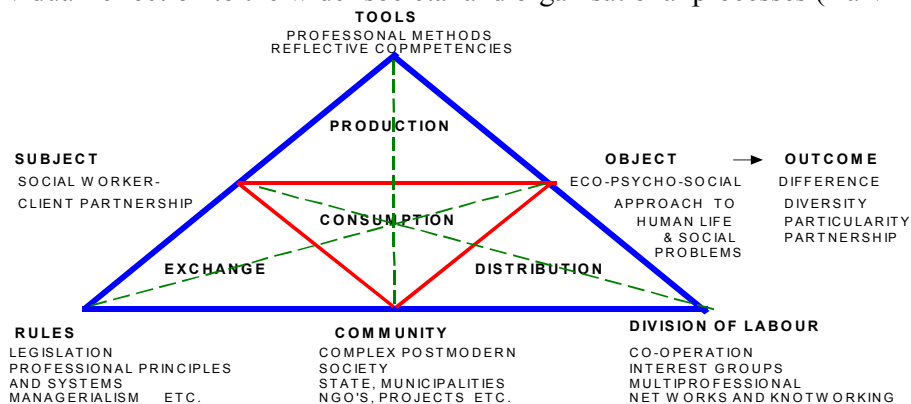

Figure 1 THE MEDIATED ACTIVITY SYSTEM (see Engeström 1987; 1992) ADAPTED AS A N OUTLINE MODEL FOR SOCIAL WORK SELF-UNDERSTANDING

The activity system is a concrete and contextual formation, where human and non-human entities have been developed into a historically developing system. This model of the human activity system can also be adapted as a model for professional self-understanding (Figure 1.). It provides a tool for a comprehensive analyse of professional and human action needed in critical social work. Here, in Figure 1., the idea is to describe contemporary social work in very broad terms only in order to give an example of the model.

An activity system is by definition a multi-voiced system, which is evolved through developmental cycles, where the different 'voices', the different viewpoints and approaches of various participants, are re-orchestrated. It is also important to understand the 'historicity' of this development, through which the future re-orchestration can be 'dramatically facilitated, when different voices are seen against their historical background'. (Engeström 1992: 17.) The challenge for developing expertise and 'learning what is not yet there"'as Engeström (ibid) points out, is the mastery of qualitative transformations and reorganisations of work activities, the challenge for learning organisations as well. For Engeström and the activity theoretical thinking he is referring to learning is 'a question of joint creation of a zone of proximal development for the activity system'… it is … 'a venture of

designing, implementing and mastering the next developmental stage of the activity system itself'. (Engeström 1992: 17.) Engeström (1987; 1992, 17 - 18) has developed also a theory and model of expansive learning describing the phases starting from individual experience and the need for change reaching up to diversification of the initial action model into various applications and modifications. According to Engeström, the developmental cycle has an expansive character and, starting with a few individuals acting as spearheads of change, the cycle can lead to a movement or a bandwagon that involves the entire community.

The developmental tensions in the action system are quite often grasped as problems and disturbances of everyday practices and also interpreted as characteristics of individual practitioners. The solutions to these tensions or contradictions may be studied and drafted by analysing the developmental phase and constructing possible solutions, the zone of proximal development. Change and transformation will be generated through developing or inventing new ways and tools for practice as the steps in proximal field of the new possible action. The theory of expansive learning explains the dynamics in the development of knowing and the creation of new concepts for action. It offers a model for conscious systematisation of developmental processes. This model is based on similar ideas of the now widespread notion of reflexive cycle (Adams et al. 2002), experiential learning (Kolb 1984; Schön 1987), reflective learning (Boud et al. 1985) or transformative learning (Mezirow 1981) and organisational learning (Tuomi 1999). There is no space in this chapter to go any deeper into the methodology of expansive learning, but it is important to note that it often is in supervision, where the often tacit 'spearhead ideas' can be made visible and heard from the reflections based on the experiences of the individual practitioners, the supervisees. Getting a grip of the tacit knowledge so central in organisational learning (e.g. Nonaka et al. 2000) is both an issue of listening to the emotional reactions of the practitioners as well as an issue of constructing concepts and models for giving this knowledge a form.

This compact model of mediated action describing the basic elements of human and societal activity in dynamic relations to each other can also be seen to reflect different mental models which guide human action and represent the elements of professional self-understanding or theory-on-action (see Engeström 1987). The model in itself is a model of the basic elements of action, but by focusing or zooming on different modes, episodes, developmental processes or even systems of professional practice and thinking, it is a useful tool. The model allows a holistic and dynamic analysis of the descriptions of problems, experiences and ideas brought to supervision by supervisees. The analysis can be focused both on the specific and unique micro contexts of individual work and on the wider contexts of meso- or macro-level phenomena. The model provides tools for the conceptualisation and modelling needed for shared understanding and further development of issues under discussion. The holistic use of the activity model also enables understanding professional practices, scientific research-based knowledge and theories in their developmental contexts. In its dynamic understanding of the development of human activity the model also advocates constructionist and contextual awareness (see Payne 1999; Parton and O'Byrne 2000) of professional action.

Also the ideas of the innovative learning community developed by Nonaka et al. (2000), where the organisation is seen as an entity that creates knowledge continuously through action and interaction with its environment, propose a further developed model of the knowledge creating process to help us understand the dynamic nature of knowledge creation and to manage such a process effectively - the discipline of knowledge creation. In this model there is a constructive space for the kind of forums for reflection that reflexive supervision can provide and what it also needs in becoming an integrated part of organisational learning and construction of expertise instead of staying 'an autonomous pocket of relief' for social workers or a 'parochial-hierarchical mechanism' of management.

Supervision and innovative knowledge production

Current interest in knowledge creation through learning communities in learning organisations suggests a reinvention of supervision in organisational developmental work and knowledge management. In social work supervision has a long tradition in these processes, but somehow the professional approach has made it either an oasis of the ideal of professional autonomy or the forum for controlling best practices and professional ideals. There are, however, even traditionally, efforts to establish reflective and developmental approaches in supervision. Current trends seem to revive these ideas.

The question of how supervision in social work could contribute to organisational learning and what would be the theoretical grounds for supervision in promoting, critical and ethically sustainable professional developments has been approached in this chapter with an interest towards new understanding of expertise, innovations and knowledge production. Today the urge to cope with the ever-changing complexity that has to be dealt with even in the everyday practices of social work calls for innovative and open expertise. It calls for learning organisations. In the emerging knowledge society of increasing complexity (Urry 2003) expertise is created in the processes of learning and practising something that does not even exist, yet, something that is in the process of evolution and potential in unrecognised or unrealised options. The challenge for developing expertise and 'learning what is not yet there' as Engeström (1992) points out, is the mastery of qualitative transformations and reorganisations of work activities, a challenge for learning organisations as well. The change and transformation will be generated through developing or inventing new ways and tools for practices as the steps in the proximal field of new possible action. A search can be seen for open and reflexive expertise. Open expertise recognises uncertainty and instead of claiming to be the only position from which to possess proper knowledge and professional skills it will be amenable to questioning, communication and even polemics. This connotes to a willingness to negotiate and reconstruct expertise according to the different contexts of action instead of merely relying on given good practices.

Social work is becoming ever more context bound and contextual in its approaches, which means that much of the professional practice includes inventing new models and methods of working. Innovative knowledge production is embedded in social work in two ways: adapting practical approaches to new and changing situations and innovating new methods is one, but for the second the knowledge learned and produced about peoples' everyday lives could call for innovations in the wider society. The embryos for these innovative practices quite often can be found in the experiences of social workers and their clients in everyday practices. This makes tacit and experiential knowledge unavoidably important constituents of expertise in addition to more traditional and established scientific knowledge. One of the main challenges for developmental and reflexive supervision in social work lies in supporting these innovative processes.

The model for developing expertise and suiting also developmental supervision discussed in this article is the model of expansive learning and the mediated action system (Engeström 1992). It seems that expertise will be created co-operatively in multi-professional co-operation and communities, as traditional profession-centred solutions do not work. Organisations are also changing in their constellation and new flexible, light and innovative hybrid networks and knotworks are emerging. Reflexive expertise can be seen as a kind of orientation process relating experience to powerful meanings and calling also for an epistemological standpoint in contextual and experiential factors of knowledge generation. This kind of knowledge could be called 'orientation knowledge' (Eräsaari 2003).

Today, there is thus an increasing need for methods like supervision both in the field of organisational leadership as well as in organisational development. The importance of supervision in organisational learning can be seen in the emphases on experiential and tacit knowledge and the opportunity to learn from this knowledge through reflection, but also in the functions of supervision in looking after the well -being of practitioners in stressful work contexts. One could even speak about a new kind of empowering and collaborative leadership. There seem to be emerging several approaches for organisational learning and knowledge creation or innovative developmental work with an emphasis on supervisory methods and mentoring. Here supervision could be used in a more comprehensive way in the creation of knowledge, expertise and innovations. A reflexive and developmental supervision theory must address professional action in a holistic way. There is a need for conceptual tools addressing and analysing the complexity of human action in its different and changing contexts and relationships between the basic elements of the activity system.

The learning problem on the organisational level is 'stretching our ordinary understandings of individual and organisation' (Argyris & Schön 1996: 190). However, there is an obvious lack of both an inclusive comprehension of this understanding and a theoretically solid tool to analyse the complexity of human action. The difficulties lie especially in the problems of connecting the human action with the non-human structures and developmental processes and understanding the collective in relation to the subjective. It is the difficulty of understanding our agency as acting subjects. A central theme within the discourses in the theory of organisational learning is the search for models of collaborative and innovative learning allowing the search for alternative methods of action and innovation. Many of these models will include moments for research, critical reflection, studying, experimentation and evaluation following the same cyclical ideas that can be found in the Kolbian (Kolb 1984) model of experiential learning. The idea of transformative learning is central for the theory of supervision as it is the meaning perspectives and the changing of these, which according to Jack Mezirow (1991) are guiding our actions and thus also a key to change them. Meaning perspectives are developed through several processes in human development, many of these processes being of that kind of meta-cognition and emotions that are also the focus of supervision theories. The mediated activity system offers tools for analysing the meaning perspectives.

Professional supervision in the changing and contingent context of professional and expert action can be seen as a way of orientation and gaining deeper understanding of our agency. It is a process of scrutinising and re-constructing professional orientation. This orientation is constructed in the dialogue of our experiences and the meaning perspectives we hold. Supervision as a forum for reflection allows social workers to reflect their experiences and emotions and through critical reflection to understand them in the wider context of work and thus to look for alternative methods of reaction, action and agency.

Supervision may in its essence become a method and forum for critical reflection on experiences gained from professional practice. But for it to face the contradictions of professional expertise, supervision needs to become more analytic and critical. There is also the need to sharpen understanding of the theoretical grounds for supervision and its capacity to develop expertise. A theoretical model grasping the complex and even contradictory contexts that constrain social workers' profession and professional practices in different cultural settings indicate also the connections of individual action into wider organisational and social contexts.

Supervision has strengths in meeting the contemporary challenges of developing professional expertise and organisational learning. As this chapter has shown, there are ongoing efforts to develop fi theoretical bases for developmental and reflexive supervision. Looking at the challenges

of today, one may feel tempted to turn back to the solid traditional psychodynamic core of supervision, supporting individual practitioners in their daily stress and in coping with the emotional burdens. However,the speed of change, the 'supercomplexity' and uncertainty of our age may cause both conceptual and emotional insecurity... Reflexive supervision can be qualitatively different compared to its antecedents, and by being able to grasp complexity, uncertainty and the dynamics of ongoing change, can help in coping with the anxiety these can generate.

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