

The Utility of Peer Group Supervision for Psychologists in Practice

Dylan Jiva Evans

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Declarations

Unless specifically stated to the contrary in the text, this thesis is the original work of the undersigned.



Dylan Jiva Evans

I hereby declare that this thesis / ~~dissertation~~ has been submitted for examination with / ~~without~~ my approval.



Dr Jacqui Akhurst
(Supervisor)



Date

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Abstract

Peer group supervision has the potential to play an important role in the continuing professional development of practising psychologists, by providing a forum where practitioners can learn from each other in a supportive environment, while still maintaining their autonomy. However, research in the area is limited and theoretical conceptualisation around the topic is still at an elementary level. Therefore, one of the aims of this study was to evaluate the utility of peer group supervision for psychologists in practice. The second aim was to generate theory on the relationships between the various factors that play a role in determining the utility of peer group supervision and the mechanisms through which these factors operate.

In order to achieve these aims, the research approach was exploratory and qualitative. The naturally occurring group processes of a single group of practising psychologists, who used a model of peer group supervision proposed by Akhurst (2000b), was the focus of this study. Five of their group sessions were audio-taped and transcribed to form the major data source. A brief questionnaire was also administered. A general analytical approach derived from grounded theory was used to analyse the data, with a particular focus on the processes and interactions within the group. Theoretical insights from the field of group dynamics were used to interpret and explain the findings generated from the analysis.

The findings of this study suggest that peer group supervision has the potential to meet a number of the professional needs of practising psychologists and is therefore able to make a positive contribution to their professional development. A number of factors that mediate the potential utility of peer group supervision were identified. These factors include membership diversity, group developmental level, group orientation, facilitation style, interaction patterns and the use of structure. Plausible relationships between these factors were suggested, providing an initial picture of the complex interlocking web of factors that act on the group process to determine the utility of peer supervision groups. This understanding was used to suggest possible adaptations that may increase the utility of the model used to structure the group that participated in this study.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to set out the field of study of this research project. A brief introduction to the area of supervision of psychotherapeutic work will be presented which will lead to a discussion of the motivations for this study's focus on peer group supervision. A definition of peer group supervision will be formulated, followed by a brief overview of the research in the area of peer group supervision, highlighting areas that need further exploration and the methods most suitable to do so. The aims of the current research project will then be outlined.

1.2 Defining supervision

An overarching definition of supervision is difficult to formulate because it occurs in a wide variety of professions and there are a number of different models and contexts of supervision practice. Definitions have often tended to be too specific, making them only applicable to limited contexts or forms of supervision. For example, in attempting to define supervision, Bernard and Goodyear (1998) maintain that evaluation is an integral component and they also differentiate consultation from supervision. However, in so doing, they exclude many forms of supervision that are not evaluative in nature.

Akhurst (2000b) has proposed a definition of the supervision of psychotherapeutic work that is specific enough to be useful, yet broad enough to encompass the diversity that exists in the practice of supervision. She defines supervision as

a learning process within the context of (a) collegial relationships(s) in which a person reflects collaboratively upon different aspects of her or his therapeutic work with clients in order to facilitate the ongoing development of professional competencies (p.11).

This definition highlights that the major aim of the supervision of psychotherapeutic work is to promote the professional growth of psychologists through regular

meetings where clinical and professional issues are discussed (Holloway, 1995). Supervision has therefore played an important role in the training and professional development of psychologists and has been an integral part of training programmes. In fact supervision is mandatory in South Africa for trainee psychologists (Akhurst, 2000b).

1.3 Developments in supervision

Traditionally, supervision has followed the apprentice model where an expert practitioner oversees a trainee's practical work in a dyadic context (Marks & Hixon, 1986). The majority of research and theoretical conceptualisation in the area has focused on this model of supervision.

There have been a number of criticisms levelled against traditional dyadic supervision. The differences in experience levels between supervisor and supervisee, and the fact that the supervision often occurs in a training context where the supervisee's practical performance is being evaluated, mean that supervision has tended to be hierarchical and evaluative in nature (Schreiber & Frank, 1983; Winstead, Bonovitz, Gale, & Evans, 1974). Therefore, instead of fostering autonomy, traditional dyadic supervision may foster dependency, inhibit independent action and suppress a supervisee's individual style and spontaneity (Akhurst, 2000a; Schreiber & Frank, 1983; Shatan, Brody, & Ghent, 1962). Traditional dyadic supervision tends to be one-sided because the supervisee is only exposed to the therapeutic orientation of the supervisor. This may lead to a biased selection of case material in an effort to fit the supervisor's orientation (Winstead et al., 1974). A further criticism is that this type of supervision is resource intensive and demands large amounts of professional time (Hardcastle, 1991).

In an effort to address some of the difficulties with traditional dyadic supervision, other forms of supervision have been explored, either as an alternative or as an adjunct to traditional dyadic supervision. Examples include dyadic peer supervision (Remley, Benshoff, & Mowbray, 1987; Wagner & Smith, 1976), triadic peer supervision (Spice & Spice, 1976), group supervision, and peer group supervision (Hare & Frankena, 1972; Winstead et al., 1974). These forms of supervision differ

according to the number of people involved in the supervision process and whether or not an expert supervisor is present. Dyadic and triadic peer supervision involve two or three peers respectively, who supervise each other without the presence of an expert supervisor. Group supervision is a format where "supervisors oversee a trainee's professional development in a group of peers" (Holloway & Johnston, 1985, p. 333). Peer group supervision involves a group of peers who meet to supervise each other, usually without the presence of a supervisor. Research on the utility of these alternate forms of supervision is limited, but growing.

1.4 Focus on peer group supervision

This study's focus on a particular model of peer group supervision has come about for a number of reasons that will now be outlined.

Peer group supervision has the potential to meet the needs of practitioners who have completed their training, yet still would like supervision to develop professionally. For these practitioners, a hierarchical and evaluative model of supervision would be inappropriate because they have completed their training and are functioning autonomously as professionals. An egalitarian approach, such as peer group supervision, would be more relevant and provide an environment where peers can learn from one another and stimulate each others growth, while still maintaining their autonomy (Schreiber & Frank, 1983). Peer group supervision also has the potential to provide practitioners with an opportunity to relieve the potential isolation that is common in private practice (Greenburg, Lewis, & Johnson, 1985).

A further reason for the focus on peer group supervision is that it potentially has benefits that are unique, because it is different to traditional dyadic supervision. Research by Akhurst (2000b), comparing the two types of supervision, confirms that peer group supervision has unique benefits that may counteract the weaknesses of traditional dyadic supervision. These benefits will be explored in greater depth in the literature review section of this thesis.

It has been recognised by the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA), that continued professional development is crucial for psychologists to keep up to

date with developments in the profession and also maintain ethical standards. In order to encourage practitioners to continue their development as professionals, the HPCSA has instituted a system whereby psychologists need to earn a certain annual amount of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) points, in order to keep their registration. These CPD points are awarded for being involved in activities that stimulate professional development. Peer group supervision has the potential to play an important role in this context, as a means by which practitioners can stimulate their professional development and maintain ethical standards by discussing clinical and professional issues within a group of peers. The HPCSA has recognised this potential, by beginning to award CPD points to psychologists who attend peer supervision groups regularly (HPCSA, 2003). However there is a need for research to evaluate the contributions that peer group supervision makes to the professional development of practising psychologists in South Africa.

The potential unique benefits of peer group supervision, its appropriateness as a form of supervision for practising psychologists, and the current focus on continuing professional development of psychologists in South Africa make peer group supervision a topic that deserves further research attention.

1.5 Defining peer group supervision

Before briefly considering the research that has been conducted on peer group supervision, it is important to define peer group supervision. There is some confusion in the literature about the definition of peer group supervision, specifically in differentiating peer group supervision from group supervision. This confusion seems to revolve around whether a supervisor is present or not, and if present, what role the supervisor plays in the group.

Many authors (Akhurst, 2000b; Billow & Mendelsohn, 1987; Gomersall, 1997; Hare & Frankena, 1972) maintain that, by definition, peer group supervision should not have a leader who differs in status to the other group members. However, other authors (Borders, 1991; Christensen & Kline, 2001; Crutchfield & Borders, 1997; Crutchfield et al., 1997; Starling & Baker, 2000) describe research on group supervision processes that include the presence of a supervisor and yet they define

these as peer group supervision. In trying to resolve this dilemma it is useful to consider the various forms of group supervision that exist.

Inskipp (1996, cited in Akhurst, 2000b) conceptualises the various forms of group supervision along a continuum based on the levels of involvement of the supervisor and the group members. Figure 1.1 illustrates this.

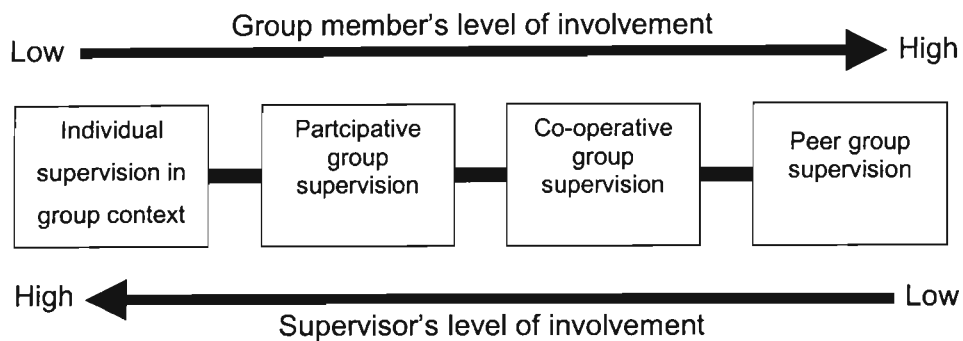


Figure 1.1 Continuum of forms of group supervision (adapted from Akhurst, 2000b)

Individual supervision in a group context is similar in style to traditional dyadic supervision, the only difference is that it occurs in a group context. A supervisor supervises individuals in turn while the other supervisees listen and stay relatively uninvolved. In this form of group supervision the supervisor directs the group process and the group members' involvement levels are low. In participative group supervision, group members are encouraged to contribute to the discussion as the supervisor supervises individuals. Co-operative group supervision entails an increase in the group members' involvement as they take responsibility for supervising one another, while the supervisor is less involved and takes a facilitative role in the group process. Peer group supervision involves members supervising one another and also being responsible for the way the group functions and is structured (Akhurst, 2000b).

The confusion over defining peer group supervision seems to be related to the fact that the literature does not clearly differentiate between co-operative group supervision and peer group supervision. This is understandable, because in both forms of group supervision the group members have a high level of responsibility for

supervising each other by using their own resources. Another reason why the boundaries between co-operative group supervision and peer group supervision have blurred, is that models of co-operative group supervision (Borders, 1991; Wilbur, Roberts-Wilbur, Morris, Betz, & Hart, 1991) have been adapted by a number of authors (Agnew, Vaught, Getz, & Fortune, 2000; Akhurst, 2000b; Ingham, 2002) and used to structure peer supervision groups.

For the purposes of this study, peer group supervision will be defined in such a way so as to include both co-operative group supervision and peer group supervision. There are a number of reasons for doing this. Firstly, the research on peer group supervision in the strict sense is very limited and by widening the definition, other relevant research may be considered. Secondly, the central feature of peer group supervision is that a group of peers "take responsibility for their own and each other's professional development" (Hare & Frankena, 1972, p. 527). The presence of a supervisor may not necessarily mean that group members abdicate this responsibility, especially if the supervisor takes a facilitative role. This is what occurs in co-operative group supervision. Thirdly, as has been mentioned, much of the literature does not distinguish between the two.

Therefore for the purposes of this research project, peer group supervision will be defined as:

A group of people who set aside regular committed time in order to discuss clinical and professional issues and take responsibility to promote their own and each other's professional growth.

1.6 Research on peer group supervision

1.6.1. Prevalence

Research on the practice of peer group supervision among psychologists suggests that it may be a common phenomenon. A questionnaire survey of 480 psychologists in private practice in USA conducted by Lewis, Greenburg and Hatch (1988) found that 23% of the sample belonged to a peer supervision group. However, the prevalence of peer group supervision in South Africa is virtually unknown. Only two

research projects (Akhurst, 2000b; Ingham, 2002) have investigated peer group supervision in South Africa and both of them focused on single groups and did not provide information on the wider prevalence. However, this author is aware that there are a number of peer supervision groups that meet in the Pietermaritzburg and Durban area and there is no reason why other groups should not exist in other parts of South Africa. Therefore, although the exact prevalence is unknown, there are a number of groups using this model of supervision in South Africa.

Despite the fact that peer group supervision is a widespread practice among practitioners in the U.S.A. and is used in South Africa among psychologists, there is relatively little research in the area. Table 1.1 (on the next two pages) provides a summary of the research accessed by this author on peer group supervision as defined above. In this table, information is provided on a number of aspects of the studies conducted, some of which will only be referred to in the literature review chapter of this thesis.

1.6.2. Anecdotal studies

The majority of articles on peer group supervision consist of anecdotal descriptions of the author's experiences of belonging to a peer supervision group, or accounts of a group that met in particular institutional setting (Greenburg et al., 1985; Hare & Frankena, 1972; Hunt & Issacharoff, 1975; Nobler, 1980; Schreiber & Frank, 1983; Shatan et al., 1962; Todd & Pine, 1968; Winstead et al., 1974). All but one of these articles describes groups of practitioners, as opposed to trainees, who meet in a peer context to supervise one another. These articles are a rich source for theoretical conceptualising about peer group supervision, however they are also problematic because their conclusions are not drawn from any systematic data analysis. The authors' lack of distance from the group they are describing may also introduce an element of bias.

Table 1.1 Summary of studies conducted on peer group supervision.

STUDY	MEMBERSHIP			ORGANISATION			STRUCTURE	✓ = Supervisor present	ORIENTATION		METHODOLOGY	DATA SOURCE	NOTES
	Group size	Level	Profession	Time (Hrs)	Frequency	Duration			Intellectual / Case centred	Emotional / Process centred			
Shatan, Brody & Ghent (1962)	3	Trainees	Psychoanalysts	2-4	Weekly	3 yrs	Presentation of patient or broader issues with a number of patients, followed by discussion			✓	Anecdotal descriptive study	Own group experience (taped sessions)	
Todd & Pine (1968)	10	Practitioners	Psychiatrists	1 ½	Monthly	13 yrs	Presentation of case followed by discussion		✓	✓	Anecdotal descriptive study	Own group experience	
Hare & Frankena (1972)	4	New practitioners	Social Work & psychologists	2	Weekly	?	Group A: case presentation Group B: case review selected by group members		✓		Anecdotal descriptive study	Group in specific institution	
Winstead et al. (1974)	4	2 nd yr residents	psychiatry	1	Weekly	1 yr	Case presentation, discussion. "One shot" initially then consecutive in-depth presentations		✓	✓	Anecdotal descriptive study	Group in specific institution	
Hunt & Issacharoff (1975)	11	Practitioners	Psychiatry & Psychology	2 - 2½	Weekly	3 yrs	Unstructured. Anybody brought up a problem to discuss		✓	✓	Anecdotal descriptive study	Own group experience	
Spice & Spice (1976)	3	Trainees	Counsellors	?	?	?	Triadic format with three roles: Supervisee, Commentator, Facilitator		✓	✓			Describes a model of PGS
Nobler (1980)	5	Practitioners	Social workers & psychologists	2	Biweekly	6 yrs	Leaderless, Discussion around wide range of therapeutic situations and personal life as they effect therapeutic work. Precedence given to any member who indicates disturbance.		✓	✓	Anecdotal descriptive study	Own group experience	
Schreiber & Frank (1983)	7	Experienced practitioners	Social workers		Twice a month	5 yrs	Single case presented at each meeting. Similar concerns and case examples were shared by other group members which provided the therapist with additional insight.		✓		Anecdotal descriptive study	Own group experience	
Greenburg, Lewis & Johnson (1985)	6	Practitioners	5 Psychologists 1 Social worker	4?	Monthly	3 yrs	Unstructured. Any member can raise an issue or present a case. Norm: allowing all members to participate. "Responsive structure"		✓	✓	Anecdotal descriptive study	Own group experience	
Marks & Hixon (1986)	5 to 10	Practitioners	Social Workers	1½	Biweekly	1 yr	Case presentation, discussion, response to suggestions, process observer feedback		✓	✓	Evaluation study that employs both quantitative & qualitative methods of analysis	Evaluation questionnaire	

Billow & Mendelsohn (1987)	?	Practitioners	Psychoanalyst	?	?	?	?				Anecdotal descriptive study	?	Describes continuum from case centred to process centred orientations in PGS.
Lewis, Greenburg & Hatch (1988)											Survey	Questionnaire sent to large USA sample	USA survey of private practitioners use of PGS
Wilbur et al. (1991)	8 to 10	Trainees	Counsellors	3	?	?	Case presentation, Request for assistance, questioning, feedback & optional discussion.	✓	✓	✓			Describes a model of PGS
Borders (1991)	3 to 6	Suitable for trainees and practitioners	Counsellors	1½-3	Weekly or Biweekly		Question, assignment of roles, presentation, feedback, discussion, summary and presenter's response.	✓	✓	✓			Describes a model of PGS
Wilbur et al. (1994)	8 to 12	Trainees	Counsellors	3	Weekly	1 yr	Structured group supervision (Wilbur et al. 1991)	✓	✓	✓	Pre/Post test quasiexperimental design	Participant questionnaire rating of peer's counselling skills & personal growth	Significant difference btw pre & post test measures and btw control & experimental groups indicating effectiveness of SGS.
Crutchfield et al. (1997)	5	Practitioners	School counsellors	1½	Weekly	9 wks	Borders (1991) model	✓	✓	Minimal	Survey with qualitative methodology. Thematic analysis of data.	Questionnaire & telephonic interviews of group participants.	
Crutchfield & Borders (1997)	10	Practitioners	School counsellors	1½	Weekly	9 wks	Borders (1991) model Other groups dyadic peer supervision or control group	✓	✓	Minimal	Pre/Post test quasiexperimental design	Battery of self report scales	No significant variable changes from pre to post test.
Agnew et al. (2000)	4	Practitioners	School counsellors	2	Bimonthly	6 yrs	Presentation based. A number of peer group supervision models used (Including Borders 1991; Wilbur et al. 1991). Presenter chooses structure at beginning of session.		✓	✓	Evaluation study using a mixed methodology. Use of thematic analysis.	Battery of self-report quantitative scales & interviews	
Starling & Baker (2000)	8	Master's degree students	Counselling	1	Weekly		Borders (1991) model	✓	✓	Minimal	Qualitative grounded theory study	Semi-structured interviews	
Akhurst (2000b)	9	Interns	Psychologists	1½	Biweekly	18 wks	Adaptation of Wilbur et al. 1991 model. No supervisor and added discussion time.		✓	✓	Qualitative grounded theory study	Interviews & transcripts of group sessions	
Christensen & Kline (2001)	6	Master's degree students	Counselling	1½	Weekly	15 wks	Process sensitive peer group supervision (Based on Borders 1991; Wilbur et al. 1994; Bernard 1997; Bernard & Goodyear 1998)	✓	✓	✓	Qualitative grounded theory study	Structured interviews & participant observation	
Ingham (2002)	10	Lay counsellors	Counselling	1½	Biweekly	5 wks	Adaptation of Wilbur et al. 1991 model. No supervisor and added discussion time.		✓	✓	Qualitative grounded theory study	Participant observer, transcripts, questionnaires & a focus group	

1.6.3. Quasi-experimental studies

Two studies of peer group supervision have used a quasi-experimental pre/post test design in an effort to see whether peer group supervision leads to increased professional development (Crutchfield & Borders, 1997; Wilbur, Roberts-Wilbur, Hart, Morris, & Betz, 1994). Wilbur et al.'s (1994) study focused on trainees and suggested that peer group supervision may be effective in increasing personal growth and skill development. Crutchfield and Borders' (1997) study focused on practising school counsellors. The results showed no significant changes from pre to post test in the counsellor's levels of job satisfaction, counselling self-efficacy and counselling effectiveness. The contradictory results of these studies may be due to the difference in dependent variable measurement instruments or the fact that the participants of the studies were at different levels of professional development.

These quasi-experimental studies do not throw any light on how peer group supervision exerts its effects on professional development. Holloway and Johnston's (1985) critique of the state of research on group supervision also bears relevance to this research on peer group supervision. They maintain that precise descriptive models of the group process are needed in order to identify relevant variables and their possible relationships. Only then should quasi-experimental studies be used to test these relationships. Exploratory qualitative research methods would be the most appropriate method to develop these descriptive models of peer group supervision.

1.6.4. Qualitative studies

Seven studies of peer group supervision using a qualitative methodology could be located (Agnew et al., 2000; Akhurst, 2000b; Christensen & Kline, 2001; Crutchfield et al., 1997; Ingham, 2002; Marks & Hixon, 1986; Starling & Baker, 2000). These studies have a wide variety of foci and have explored areas such as the structure of peer group supervision, the learning strategies used by group members, and the benefits and limitations of peer group supervision. Some studies have included a limited focus on group dynamics, investigating factors such as group cohesion, anxiety, the role of peer feedback and the role of the facilitator. While these studies have identified and described important factors of peer group supervision, there is a

lack of coherent theory in the area. There also seems to be a lack of research that focuses predominantly on a group dynamics perspective.

These studies have used a range of data sources to investigate peer group supervision. All of them have used self-report data where the group members report on their own experiences of peer group supervision in the form of interviews or questionnaires. Only three studies (Akhurst, 2000b; Christensen & Kline, 2001; Ingham, 2002) have also used data that directly represents the process of peer group supervision, such as transcripts or participant observation of group sessions. There seems to be a need for research that focuses on the actual group process of peer group supervision and not just on the group members' reports on the group process.

The majority of qualitative studies are based on groups that have only met for short periods of time, in some cases only a number of weeks. Only two studies (Agnew et al., 2000; Marks & Hixon, 1986) were based on groups that had met for longer than one year. Additionally, in all seven studies the researchers initiated the peer supervision groups that they studied. These studies therefore provide little information on naturally occurring groups that are at later stages in their development.

The levels of professional development of the group members in these studies have varied. Three of the studies have been conducted on trainees (Akhurst, 2000b; Christensen & Kline, 2001; Starling & Baker, 2000), one on lay counsellors (Ingham, 2002) and three on practitioners who work in the fields of either school counselling (Agnew et al., 2000; Crutchfield et al., 1997) or social work (Marks & Hixon, 1986). There is no qualitative research on peer group supervision with practising psychologists.

1.6.5. Needs for further research

This brief overview of the research on peer group supervision has highlighted a number of issues that need attention in any further research on the topic. There is a need for exploratory qualitative research that can contribute to the development of

descriptive models of peer group supervision. A particular focus on group dynamics may be useful in this regard. This will require research that focuses on the actual group process of peer group supervision and not just on self-report measures. There also is a need for research on naturally occurring peer supervision groups of practising psychologists, particularly on groups that have existed for an extended period of time.

1.7 Aims of the current study

The current study aims to contribute towards theory building in the area of peer group supervision. This will be achieved through an exploratory qualitative study of the group process of a peer supervision group of practising psychologists who have been meeting together for an extended period of time.

A further aim is to evaluate the utility of peer group supervision for practising psychologists in South Africa. This will contribute to the current debate around the promotion of continuing professional development among psychologists in South Africa.

1.8 Thesis outline

This introductory chapter has focussed on providing the context for the current study. The discussion of the research on peer group supervision in this chapter has therefore attempted to give the reader a broad overview of the state of research in the area and also the possible issues that need further attention.

The literature review chapter will also discuss the research conducted on peer group supervision, but instead will focus on describing and evaluating the specific findings of this research. Selected themes from the field of group dynamics will also be discussed in order to provide a theoretical framework to understand the processes involved in peer group supervision.

The methodology chapter will outline the research decisions that were taken in this study. The research design and methodology will be discussed, followed by a

description of how the data was collected and analysed. Finally, the validity and ethical issues involved in this study will be considered.

The findings chapter will present the results of the data analysis. These results will be presented according to the type of data collected i.e. questionnaires and transcripts of audio-recorded group sessions.

The discussion chapter will evaluate and interpret the findings of this study by comparing them with previous research on peer group supervision and also using theoretical insights from the field of group dynamics to provide possible explanations for the findings and explore their implications.

In the concluding chapter, the limitations of this study will be discussed and a number of recommendations for further research will be made. Finally, the significance and possible implications of this study will be discussed.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to provide the theoretical background for this study and to review the literature that exists on peer group supervision. One of the purposes of this study is to investigate the group processes that occur in peer supervision groups. In order to provide a theoretical framework in which to understand these group processes, this chapter will include a discussion on group dynamics. The purpose of this discussion is not to provide a review of the entire field of group dynamics, but rather to briefly highlight areas that are particularly relevant to peer group supervision. Once this theoretical background has been sketched the research findings of studies conducted specifically on peer group supervision, will be reviewed.

2.2 Group dynamics

Group dynamics is a term used to refer to the “powerful processes that influence individuals when in group situations” (Forsyth, 1990, p.13). It also refers to the wide, interdisciplinary field of study that focuses on these processes. In order to provide a theoretical background to understand peer group supervision, the following topics in the field of group dynamics will be briefly considered: the formation and functions of groups, different group modalities, group development, group structure, leadership of groups, and group effectiveness.

2.2.1. Group formation and functions

One of the ways that researchers have tried to explain why groups form is to focus on the functions of groups. The assumption is that groups form because they meet certain needs that individuals cannot fulfil on their own. These needs or functions can be psychological, informational, interpersonal or practical in nature. Each of these needs will be briefly described following Forsyth's (1990) review of the topic.

Among the various psychological needs that are met by groups, particular focus has been given to the need for affiliation and the need for power. The need for affiliation refers to the desire for inclusion in a group in order to gain acceptance and sense of belonging. By definition this need requires a group to be met. It is also not surprising that the need for power would be met in a group context because group interactions provide many opportunities to influence and control others.

A further reason for the formation of groups is that they fulfil individuals' needs for information. Groups provide an arena in which people can evaluate and validate the accuracy of their personal beliefs and attitudes by comparing themselves to those around them. This process of social comparison is often aimed at acquiring reassuring information especially in ambiguous situations.

Belonging to a group also fulfils a number of interpersonal needs, particularly the need for social support. The social support obtained from membership of a group plays an important role in assisting group members during stressful experiences and also preventing loneliness. Social support can take many forms and includes emotional support, advice, guidance, and positive feedback by members of a group.

Lastly, groups fulfil practical needs as they enable the achievement of collective goals that cannot be attained by an individual working alone. These collective goals are varied and may include collaborative efforts such as a construction crew or a discussion group.

2.2.2. Group Modality

Groups take on different forms depending on the function that they perform. Betz, Wilbur, and Roberts-Wilbur (1981) provide a conceptual model or typology that differentiates group processes into three modalities depending on the objective of the group. It is a useful model because of its applicability to a wide range of groups.

The first group modality is the task-process group cluster. The primary objective of task-process groups is extra-personal in nature, as the aim of the group is to accomplish a task, complete a project or produce a product. Group members do not

focus on personal or interpersonal needs, but rather subjugate these in order to accomplish the collective task. Examples of task-process groups include committees and action groups.

The second group modality described by Betz et al. (1981) is the socio-process cluster. The group's objective is inter-personal in nature and aims to examine "member's attitudes, values, belief systems, ideas, and opinions through a combination of information, orientation, and discussion" (p.33). However these exchanges remain at a cognitive level and do not attempt to focus on emotional aspects. Discussion groups are an example of a socio-process group.

The third group modality is the psycho-process cluster. Groups in this modality have an intra-personal focus as the exchanges between group members are used to enable individuals to gain emotional and psychological insight. Attention is concentrated on the behaviour of group members in the actual group process and most often these groups are therapeutic in nature. Examples include group therapy and encounter groups.

Betz et al.'s (1981) typology highlights that the function of a group determines the processes within a group. However group processes are not solely determined by the functions that a group performs. Another important factor is the developmental stage of a group, which will now be briefly discussed.

2.2.3. Group Development

Groups display patterns of growth and change throughout their life cycle. A number of theoretical models have been proposed to explain the developmental changes that occur in groups. Based on a review of 50 articles on the topic of group development, Tuckman (1965) proposed a five stage model of group development that has gained wide acceptance.

The first stage Tuckman's model is the orientation stage. Group members are unfamiliar with each other when a group forms and therefore their interactions are tentative as they test the boundaries of the groups. During this stage members

exchange information about each other and their goals, thereby negotiating the function and modality of the group. This stage ends once group members have identified commonalities and rudimentary levels of trust and interdependence have been built.

The second stage is the conflict stage and is characterised by disagreement, the expression of dissatisfaction, resistance and responding on an emotional level. This surfaces when the actions of one or more members are incompatible or resisted by other group members. This may lead to polarisation and the formation of coalitions within the group. This conflict may be positive for the group functioning or it may lead to the disbanding of the group. If members can resolve differences, the group process often moves onto a deeper level of stability (Forsyth, 1990).

The third stage in Tuckman's model is the cohesion stage where a sense of group unity develops. Once conflicts have been resolved, the group members become more cohesive. This cohesion is related to a stabilisation of the norms that control the group's internal dynamics. During this stage group membership is stable and members report high levels of satisfaction. Harmony is of primary importance to group members and as a result overt conflict is often avoided.

The fourth stage of group development has been labelled the task performance stage. In the first three stages the group is concerned with resolving the structural issues within the group, which include group goals, norms, member roles and interpersonal relationships. Once these structural issues have been negotiated, the group's energy is channelled into the performance of the group task through mutual co-operation.

All groups eventually end and the negotiation of group termination has been labelled the dissolution stage. During this dissolution phase the group process may become disintegrated as group members withdraw in an effort to increase their independence from the group. Dissolution may be planned, such as when a group accomplishes its goals, or spontaneous as group members leave because the group fails to meet their needs (Forsyth, 1990).

Tuckman's (1965) model is a successive stage model and specifies the order of the various group phases. However it is important to note that groups may follow different paths of development, experiencing these stages in a different order or even skipping some.

There are other models of group development. Some models are cyclical as they recognise that stages of group development tend to reoccur later on in the life of the group. Another model, proposed by Bales (1965, cited in Forsyth, 1990), understands group development as a homeostatic process in which groups attempt to maintain an equilibrium between task performance and the maintenance of good interpersonal relationships. During their development groups tend to oscillate between these two concerns.

Group development can be understood as the process whereby group members negotiate the structure of the group over a period of time. The discussion will move on to consider the nature of group structure.

2.2.4. Group Structure

The structure of a group consists of the underlying pattern of relatively stable relationships that exist among group members. These patterns of relationships are determined by the roles that members fulfil in the group, the status relations between group members, and the patterns of communication between them. Each of these three structural components will be briefly discussed.

2.2.4.1 Roles

Roles within a group context can be defined as a characteristic set of behaviours that a group member performs, which fulfils a particular function in the group. In all groups members assume specific roles and as the group develops, these roles become more differentiated (Forsyth, 1990).

Two types of roles emerge in virtually all groups: these are task roles and socioemotional roles. Members who assume a task role concern themselves with

achieving the goals of the group, and therefore tend to organise and direct other members, summarise discussions and provide ideas. On the other hand, members who take on a socioemotional role tend to involve themselves in the expressive and interpersonal affairs of the group by alleviating frustrations, resolving tensions and mediating conflicts (Forsyth, 1990; Johnson & Johnson, 1991).

Bales' (1965, cited in Forsyth, 1990) equilibrium model of group development explains why group members differentiate into these two broad roles. The dynamic tension that exists in groups between accomplishing the group task but also maintaining interpersonal relationships, makes it extremely difficult for a single member to fulfil both these needs. Some group members may therefore specialise in the socioemotional role while others may focus on the task role in an effort to resolve the dynamic tension in a complementary manner.

2.2.4.2 Status relations

Just as certain roles tend to emerge within groups over a period of time, so do status differences between group members. As groups develop certain members acquire more authority to direct the activities of the group than others do.

One of the factors that plays an important role in determining how status is allocated in groups is the expectations of group members. Group members who have characteristics that other members expect will help the group accomplish its goals are initially conferred more status in the group. However, diffuse characteristics such as age, gender, and ethnicity, which may not be related to a person's abilities, also play an important role in determining members' status in groups (Forsyth, 1990). In this way status differentiation in groups often mirror the status relations that occur on a societal level.

Status patterns within a group are expressed through interpersonal behaviours that demonstrate dominance and submissiveness. For example high status individuals in a group will often express their dominance by referring to their wider experience or greater knowledge than others (Forsyth, 1990).

2.2.4.3 Communication networks

Communication networks refer to regular patterns of information exchange between group members. Patterns of communication develop in groups which determine the manner in which interactions are distributed among members. Communication networks often parallel the status patterns within groups with higher status individuals occupying more central positions (Forsyth, 1990).

The most important feature of communication networks is the degree of centralisation. In centralised networks one person occupies a position at the crossroads of communication and typically collects information, synthesises it, and sends it back to others. In decentralised networks there is no central hub but rather group members are able to communicate with all the other members around them.

A number of experimental studies have investigated the effects of different communication networks on the performance of small groups and the satisfaction of the group members. These studies have used a methodology where group members are placed in cubicles and the communication patterns are controlled by closing and opening slots between members.

A review by Shaw (1978) of these experimental studies concluded that the effectiveness of groups depended on the complexity of the task given to the group and the degree of centralisation of the group communication network. Centralised groups tended to be more effective at performing simple tasks than decentralised groups. However as the task grew in complexity decentralised groups fared better than centralised groups. Shaw explains these findings by using the concept of saturation. In simple tasks the central group member is able to synthesise all the information passed on by other group members and effectively co-ordinate the group's activities. However as the task complexity increases the central group member becomes saturated with information and cannot process the information effectively.

The satisfaction of group members also seems to be a function of the centralisation of a group communication network. Shaw's (1978) review suggests that the overall

satisfaction of group members is greater in decentralised networks. In centralised networks the satisfaction of members varies according to their position within the network, with greater satisfaction reported by group members who occupy a central position. Shaw uses the concept of independence to explain these differences in the satisfaction levels of group members. He argues that group members in decentralised networks are more satisfied because they enjoy greater independence in terms of who they can communicate with, and the independent action that they can take. In contrast, members of centralised networks tend to be dependent on the central group member and are therefore less satisfied. Shaw does admit that the relationship between satisfaction and independence may be culturally determined. Cultures differ in the value that is placed on independence and autonomy and therefore one could expect that this relationship could vary according to cultural context.

2.2.5. Group leadership

Group leadership can be defined as “a reciprocal, transactional, and transformational process in which individuals are permitted to influence and motivate others to promote the attaining of group and individual goals” (Forsyth, 1990, p.247). The emergence of a leader in a group is a process of status and role differentiation, where one member gains the status to influence other group members and begins to fulfil a certain role in the group.

A number of factors may determine which member of a group will emerge as a leader. Physical and personal characteristics play an important role, but surprisingly, correlational research suggests that the participation rate of a group member is one of the strongest factors in determining who will emerge as a group leader (Stein & Heller, 1979, cited in Forsyth, 1990). Group members who have the largest amount of participation in the group, regardless of the quality of that participation, tend to become the group leader. One possible reason for this is that the group may assume that a high level of involvement by a member indicates a high level of interest in the group and therefore that member would be willing to take responsibility for the group (Forsyth, 1990).

The behaviours that make up the role of leadership fall into two general clusters, relationship behaviours and task behaviours. These behaviours are analogous to the functions performed by group members who take on socioemotional and task roles respectively. These leadership behaviours assist the group to complete the group task, while maintaining effective collaborative relationships (Forsyth, 1990; Johnson & Johnson, 1991).

2.2.6. Group effectiveness

Groups vary in their effectiveness at accomplishing group tasks with some groups being counterproductive while others are highly productive. Johnson and Johnson (1991) suggest that an effective group is involved in three core activities:

- (1) accomplishing its goals, (2) maintaining good working relationships among members, and (3) developing and adapting to changing conditions in ways that improve its effectiveness (p.21).

The first two core activities highlight once more that the balance between task related behaviour and relationship maintaining behaviour is a central dynamic within groups and plays a central role in group effectiveness. The third core activity suggests that groups are not static and neither is the context in which they exist. Effective groups therefore adapt flexibly, as they respond to their own development and to the changing context in which they exist.

Hackman and Morris (1978) provide a theoretical model of group effectiveness, which emphasises the centrality of group interaction processes. They differentiate between the initial state of a group (input), the group interaction process (process), and the group's performance effectiveness (output), and propose that these are related in a linear fashion (input→process→output). Group interaction processes therefore mediate the relationship between input factors and output factors.

Input factors such as the group structure, personality characteristics of members, the group developmental history, and the nature of the task all affect the interaction processes in the group. These interaction processes subsequently play a role in determining how effectively a group performs a given task. Hackman and Morris' (1978) model focuses on three aspects of the group interaction process, namely the

level of member effort, the strategies used to perform a task, and how the knowledge and skills of members are utilised in a group. They do, however acknowledge that there are other aspects of the interaction process that may also play a role in mediating the effectiveness of groups.

2.2.7. Summary

In this section a number of topics within the field of group dynamics have been briefly discussed. These topics included the formation and functions of groups, different group modalities, group development, group structure, group leadership, and group effectiveness. This discussion aimed to provide a broad theoretical perspective from which to understand the group processes in peer group supervision. The literature that specifically explores peer group supervision will now be reviewed.

2.3 Review of research on peer group supervision

The introductory chapter presented a review of the research on peer group supervision in order to justify the focus of the current research project. That review focused on the types of groups that were studied, the methodologies used, and the foci of the studies.

The review in this chapter will concentrate on the specific research findings of these studies. Firstly, the benefits and limitations of peer group supervision will be discussed, followed by a review of the numerous factors that play a role in mediating the utility of peer group supervision.

2.3.1. Benefits of peer group supervision

The utility of peer group supervision depends on the extent to which it fulfils the needs of group members. However research on the needs of practising psychologists is limited. A questionnaire survey by Lewis et al. (1988), of a large sample of American psychologists, asked respondents to indicate what needs they expected would be met by joining a peer supervision group. The three needs that

were identified most frequently were the need for suggestions for problem cases, the need to discuss ethical and professional issues and the need to counter isolation. Over 80% of respondents indicated that they felt these needs were met by peer group supervision, which suggests that they experienced the groups as beneficial.

Other studies do not explicitly investigate the needs of participants in peer supervision groups and whether these needs are met, however they still report a wide variety of beneficial aspects of peer group supervision. These will now be discussed.

The social support provided by peer group supervision seems to be particularly beneficial to participants. Peer supervision groups may help members when they undergo personal difficulties and stressors by providing a supportive stabilising influence where members can share and ventilate difficulties, and express a shared concern for one another (Greenburg et al., 1985; Marks & Hixon, 1986; Todd & Pine, 1968). The sense of acceptance and belonging provided by a supportive group may also help counter the isolation that is often experienced by private practitioners. Through the sharing of difficulties group members may realise that they are not alone and that others are struggling with similar issues (Agnew et al., 2000; Greenburg et al., 1985; Winstead et al., 1974).

Peer group supervision may also increase the autonomy of group members, as they are no longer solely dependent on expert supervisors, but instead take greater responsibility in supervising themselves and their peers. This may lead to increases in independent and interdependent functioning (Akhurst, 2000b; Marks & Hixon, 1986; Todd & Pine, 1968). This increased control over the supervision process may empower group members and result in increased self-efficacy, self-esteem and confidence (Akhurst, 2000b; Christensen & Kline, 2001; Crutchfield et al., 1997; Nobler, 1980; Starling & Baker, 2000).

The fact that group members play an active role in supervising each other may increase group member's abilities to monitor themselves as they internalise the skills involved in supervision. Receiving feedback from peers heightens the self-awareness of group members, especially in the realm of interpersonal behaviours,

which may also contribute to the abilities of group members to supervise themselves (Akhurst, 2000a; Christensen & Kline, 2001; Winstead et al., 1974). Peer group supervision also gives members an opportunity to reality test self-assumptions as they compare the feedback received from peers with their evaluations of themselves (Christensen & Kline, 2000).

Peer feedback may also assist group members with difficulties they encounter with counter-transference. The fact that there are a number of individuals supervising each other means that there is a greater likelihood that blind spots in therapeutic practice will be recognised (Shatan et al., 1962). Marks and Hixon (1986) suggest that peer group supervision also has the potential to identify and deal with counter-transference issues through an awareness of the group process. They maintain that interactions between group members may parallel the interactions that occur between the group members and their therapeutic clients. The group therefore may help in identifying and working through counter-transference difficulties by attending to the interaction process in the group.

Not all authors report that peer group supervision is helpful with counter-transference issues. Akhurst (2000b) suggests that peer group supervision is less effective than traditional dyadic supervision in dealing with counter-transference. There are indications that the level of group development may play a role in this regard, as the development of the group has to reach a level where group members feel safe enough to trust each other before these issues are raised.

There are some indications that peer group supervision is effective at increasing the counselling skills of members. In Agnew et al.'s study (2000), group members reported that their counselling skills improved through peer group supervision. These perceptions of group members are supported by research using direct observation methods. Wilbur et al.'s (1994) study suggested that membership in a peer supervision group resulted in an increase in the counselling skills of group members. These findings were based on a comparison of the external ratings of the counselling skills of group members before and after being part of a peer supervision group. These ratings were also compared with those of a control group.

Another benefit attributed to peer group supervision is its potential to maintain ethical standards through a system of peer review. Presenting cases to peers may lead to greater accountability as peers become aware of each others therapeutic practises (Greenburg et al., 1985; Hare & Frankena, 1972; Lewis et al., 1988; Schreiber & Frank, 1983). Peer group supervision may also increase professional standards by increasing the amount of supervision available to members (Winstead et al., 1974).

Peer group supervision may also improve professionalism by providing a forum for professional issues to be raised. This also provides the opportunity for increased networking among professionals and may lead to improved professional relationships (Agnew et al., 2000; Crutchfield et al., 1997; Schreiber & Frank, 1983).

Members of peer supervision groups may also benefit from enhanced learning opportunities as the group provides an opportunity for stimulation, transmitting of new information, and collaborative learning among peers (Bernard & Goodyear, 1998; Christensen & Kline, 2001; Schreiber & Frank, 1983). This learning differs from the evaluative and hierarchical nature of learning in formal training programmes.

There has been a movement to include forms of peer group supervision in formal training programmes in order to provide an opportunity for collaborative learning. Akhurst (2000b) suggests that the learning that occurs in peer supervision groups may complement other forms of learning that tend to be hierarchical. Starling and Baker (2000) also argue that peer group supervision may play an important role in a training context, as peers may model appropriate levels of professional development for each other. Peers may also be able to explain difficult concepts to each other in language that they find understandable.

Peer group supervision may promote divergent thinking by exposing members to the different theoretical perspectives of others in the group. This variety of perspectives may lead to the re-examination of familiar issues and so members may become more reflective of their work. This exposure to diverse perspectives and experiences may also increase members' abilities to cope in a wider variety of therapeutic

situations (Bernard & Goodyear, 1998; Crutchfield & Borders, 1997; Schreiber & Frank, 1983; Todd & Pine, 1968).

Numerous potential benefits of peer group supervision have been identified in this discussion. However, groups have the potential to produce both good and bad consequences and therefore the discussion will move on to consider the limitations of peer group supervision.

2.3.2. Limitations of peer group supervision

One possible limitation of peer group supervision is that at certain stages in a group's development, cohesiveness and support may become primary in the group process. This becomes problematic when group members never challenge each other because they fear disapproval. Instead they may offer excessive advice and support. Patient care may be sacrificed in favour of group cohesiveness, and the expression of diverse perspectives in the group may be suppressed. This may lead to the loss of the potential benefits associated with a diversity of perspectives in a group (Agnew et al., 2000; Greenburg et al., 1985; Winstead et al., 1974).

This sense of group cohesion may lead to what Shatan et al. (1962) describe as "sectarian self sufficiency" (p.338) where groups develop an insular and exclusive attitude. This may limit the group's horizons or, if the group exists in an institutional setting, create divisive compartmentalisation within the institution (Marks & Hixon, 1986). Instead of increasing the standards of the group's profession, these groups may instead become sites for professional protectionism (Gomersall, 1997).

A further possible limitation is that peers who are more competent may be assisted less than other members in peer group supervision (Agnew et al., 2000; Akhurst, 2000b). Diversity in experience levels may therefore lead to inequality in the help received and provided by group members.

The leaderless format of peer group supervision increases the risk that a single group member may dominate the group, leading to other participants becoming passive and guarded (Shatan et al., 1962). The lack of a leader in peer group

supervision may also lead to groups having difficulties negotiating sensitive periods in their development (Hunt & Issacharoff, 1975).

2.3.3. Mediating factors

The benefits and limitations of peer group supervision identified in the literature have been briefly discussed. The literature identifies a number of factors and characteristics of groups that play a role in determining the utility of peer group supervision. These factors will now be reviewed.

2.3.3.1 Group membership

The relative homogeneity or diversity of the membership of peer supervision groups affects their potential utility. Group members may differ in numerous ways, however the two most relevant dimensions identified in the literature are the levels of professional experience and the theoretical orientations of group members.

Diversity in theoretical orientation among group members is reported as being beneficial. The sharing of different theoretical perspectives stimulates growth in members and expands their horizons, as they are exposed to the varied approaches and skills of their peers (Greenburg et al., 1985; Schreiber & Frank, 1983).

On the other hand, diversity in experience levels may hinder the group process, as the inclusion of a more experienced member tends to decrease the participation levels of less experienced members. Less experienced members may also request disproportionate levels of help from the group (Hare & Frankena, 1972). Therefore groups that are homogenous in terms of membership experience levels are likely to be more beneficial. A certain level of homogeneity in group membership may also lead to a mutual identification among members resulting in increased group cohesiveness and support (Greenburg et al., 1985).

Schreiber and Frank (1983) suggest that the value of diversity in group membership depends on the professional development levels of the members. As group

members develop professionally they become more secure in their own skills and therefore do not feel threatened if other members are experts in diverse fields.

2.3.3.2 Group size

The size of peer supervision groups affects the group process in a number of ways. As groups increase in size so do the levels of anxiety and defensiveness experienced by members. Larger groups may also make it difficult for a sense of group cohesion to develop and all group members may not get an opportunity to participate. On the other hand, large groups do ensure a wide diversity of members (Hare & Frankena, 1972; Marks & Hixon, 1986).

An optimum size peer supervision group therefore needs to be large enough to ensure diversity yet small enough to make sure that all members participate, a sense of cohesion develops, and that the anxiety experienced by members is kept at manageable levels. Marks and Hixon (1986) recommend a figure of 5-10 people while Nobler (1980) maintains that 6 members is the maximum size for an effective peer supervision group.

2.3.3.3 Meeting regularity and frequency

Regular scheduled meetings are important for the development of continuity in peer group supervision. This continuity may lead to greater levels of trust among members and consequently a deeper exploration of the issues that affect them (Greenburg et al., 1985).

An increased frequency of meeting may also foster greater trust and cohesion among group members. Marks and Hixon (1986) confirm this in their comparison of a group that met weekly and another group that met biweekly. They found that the group that met weekly had greater levels of trust and cohesion, and was more emotionally orientated, than the group that met less frequently.

2.3.3.4 Context and motivation

Peer supervision groups tend to be more successful if the group members take the initiative in organising them (Akhurst, 2000a; Shatan et al., 1962). Group members are more motivated if their participation is voluntary, as they tend to “own” the group process. Peer supervision groups in institutional settings may therefore be problematic, as membership in supervision groups is often not voluntary. Group members have to work together outside of the group and therefore there is a danger of the group becoming an arena in which the political entanglements and conflict in the organisation are played out (Bernard & Goodyear, 1998).

2.3.3.5 Expectations of members

Hunt and Issacharoff (1975) warn of the danger of group members having unrealistic expectations of peer group supervision. They describe a group that they belonged to where the members began to expect the group to “be a source of salvation that would enable them either to accept their lives or to find new ones” (p.1167). These unrealistic expectations led to disappointment and as a result the group ended. Nobler (1980) also maintains that without unrealistic expectations there will be no corresponding frustration over unmet needs.

2.3.3.6 Group norms

In order to function effectively, a group needs ground rules or norms that determine acceptable behaviour within the group. A number of these norms are identified as important in the literature.

A regular time slot and length for the group meetings enable groups to establish continuity (Marks & Hixon, 1986). Consistent attendance of meetings by members is also important for group continuity and the establishment of a cohesive group identity (Hunt & Issacharoff, 1975). Gomersall (1997) emphasises the importance of admission criteria to control group membership and suggests a sponsorship system for potential new members, together with a probationary period.

A further aspect of the group's functioning that needs to be negotiated is the structure used for group meetings. This includes details such as the roles of members in a session, the control of time and the focus of the group. Confidentiality is also an important ground rule in meetings as group members often discuss sensitive information about clients and themselves (Hunt & Issacharoff, 1975).

Other group norms may involve the quality of the interactions within the group. Christensen and Kline (2001) suggest that group members should negotiate norms such as a commitment among members to give honest feedback to each other and to involve themselves in a collaborative learning process.

2.3.3.7 Professional development of group members

As practitioners develop professionally their needs change and therefore the benefits of peer group supervision may differ according to the group members' levels of professional development.

Reising and Daniel's (1983) study of counsellor development indicates that initially novice counsellors are highly anxious and focus their energies on the acquisition of the skills needed to be an effective counsellor. They also tend to be dependent on their supervisors and struggle to confront them. However as counsellors develop professionally they become less anxious, more independent, and are able to tolerate mutual confrontation in a supervisory context.

For group members in the early stages of their professional development, peer group supervision may provide a supportive environment, where members can express their anxiety and doubts about their performance and gain reassurance that others are struggling with similar issues. Achievable levels of skill development may also be modelled in these groups (Borders, 1991; Winstead et al., 1974).

For members at a later stage of professional development, peer group supervision may provide a collegial climate in which group members can challenge one another. Peer group supervision may also allow members to receive consultation on ethical and professional issues while maintaining their independence (Borders, 1991).

2.3.3.8 Group development

Just as the development of individual members plays an important role in peer group supervision, so does the development of the group as a whole. The benefits and limitations of peer group supervision may differ according to the developmental stage of the group. The description of group development in the literature on peer group supervision closely resembles Tuckman's (1965) model (see section 2.2.3) of group development. This model will therefore be used to structure the following review of group development in peer supervision groups.

The orientation stage of peer supervision groups is characterised by the establishment of group norms and the building of relationships among group members. During this phase anxiety levels are high and group members feel vulnerable about exposing themselves to their peers. Their interactions may therefore be guarded and defensive as they cautiously test each other. The building of trust is the central issue at this stage and any challenge or criticism among members tends to be avoided until some degree of trust is built. In the group sessions, the presentations may be general and impersonal focusing solely on the case with little expression of any emotional reactions (Billow & Mendelsohn, 1987; Greenburg et al., 1985; Hunt & Issacharoff, 1975; Nobler, 1980; Schreiber & Frank, 1983; Todd & Pine, 1968; Winstead et al., 1974).

In the conflict stage of peer supervision groups, competition emerges between group members. Members begin to confront one another and conflict may emerge (Greenburg et al., 1985; Schreiber & Frank, 1983). Todd and Pine (1968) describe how rivalry was expressed in their group through members trying to outdo each other with dramatic case presentations. Through this conflict and competition the status relations between group members are established.

If this conflict is resolved peer supervision groups tend to move into a stage characterised by cohesion among members. Negative feelings are suppressed for the sake of harmony in the group and there may be few disagreements or alternate perspectives expressed (Greenburg et al., 1985; Winstead et al., 1974). The

presentations may begin to focus more on the therapist and their emotional reactions to the case (Nobler, 1980). Schreiber and Frank (1983) suggest that group cohesion is necessary, before group members can tolerate criticism without conflict developing.

Once a cohesive group identity based on trust has been developed, peer supervision groups tend to move into the task performance stage of group development. During this stage a "group supervisory alliance" (Winstead et al., 1974, p.319) is formed where there is more constructive criticism and diversity in the feedback offered. Both professional and personal issues may be explored at a much deeper levels than was previously possible in the group (Greenburg et al., 1985).

The dissolution stage of group development refers to the period immediately preceding the termination of the group. During this period, some regression in the group process may occur as group members disinvest from the group (Greenburg et al., 1985). Groups terminate for various reasons. Two reasons provided in the literature, are that the group may fail to meet the unrealistic expectations of the members (Hunt & Issacharoff, 1975), or that members' life circumstances may change in such a way that membership is not possible (Winstead et al., 1974).

Not all groups described in the literature went through all these developmental stages in the same sequence. For example Winstead et al. (1974) describe a peer supervision group in which group cohesion preceded a stage where conflict occurred. Another example is a group that Nobler (1980) describes, where very little conflict was expressed between members.

A number of events can serve as catalysts that provoke change in peer supervision groups. For example, the addition of a new member may lead to a temporary regression in the group's development, as trust has to develop between the new and original group members (Winstead et al., 1974). Groups may also be moved to re-evaluate their purpose when members join or leave. The designation of a leader or facilitator often provokes a change in the nature of the group interactions and may lead to greater safety and cohesiveness, or provoke resistance to authority (Billow & Mendelsohn, 1987).

2.3.3.9 Group orientation

The modality or orientation of the group will determine the group's focus and therefore the kind of benefits that it offers. Billow and Mendelsohn (1987) conceptualise the different orientations of peer supervision groups as existing on a continuum from case-centred to process-centred groups.

In case-centred groups, the focus of the group is fixed on clinical cases and the group format normally consists of a case presentation, followed by discussion. Although emotional openness may enhance the group process, the group concentrates on extra-personal issues and attempts to gain an intellectual understanding of the presented case (Billow & Mendelsohn, 1987; Hunt & Issacharoff, 1975).

On the other side of the continuum, process-centred groups focus on the interactions that occur within the group. The sharing of emotional and intellectual responses to the group interactions structures the sessions. The group tends to concentrate on personal issues and emotional expression is an important part of the group process. (Billow & Mendelsohn, 1987; Hunt & Issacharoff, 1975).

At the midpoint of the continuum between case-centred and process-centred groups are dual-focus groups. In these groups both case material and the emotional responses of group members to the group process are considered. This dual focus may be used to gain an increased understanding of cases by considering how the interactions between group members mirror the dynamics occurring in a case (Billow & Mendelsohn, 1987).

The majority of peer supervision groups described in the literature (see table 1.1) function somewhere in the midpoint range of the continuum. A number of possible reasons exist for the popularity of dual-focus groups. Firstly, they have the potential to assist members with a wider variety of needs. Dual-focus groups are able to provide help with difficult cases and also allow members to express emotional difficulties and gain emotional support. Secondly, when relationship difficulties arise

in case-centred groups, a process-centred approach is often needed to resolve these difficulties (Todd & Pine, 1968).

One of the challenges faced by groups with a dual-focus is resolving the tension that exists between the extra-personal focus of the case-centred orientation and the intra/inter-personal focus of the process-centred orientation. This tension is often expressed through debate about the appropriate levels of self-disclosure in groups. Shatan et al. (1962) suggest that self disclosure in peer supervision groups should be limited to problems that are directly related to the patient or to issues in the immediate group context.

The orientation of a group is not static and may vary according to the developmental level of the group. Todd and Pine (1968) describe a group that started with a case-centred focus but then, as trust and cohesion developed among group members, the group changed to a dual-focus that considered the emotional reactions of the therapist.

2.3.3.10 Management of leadership

The peer supervision groups described in the literature managed group leadership in one of three ways, with varying effects on the functioning of the groups. The groups were either leaderless, rotated leadership within the group, or had a single appointed leader.

The majority of the groups who were leaderless consisted of practitioners who had completed their training and were seeking a form of supervision where they could learn and gain support from peers and still maintain their autonomy (Agnew et al., 2000; Greenburg et al., 1985; Hare & Frankena, 1972; Hunt & Issacharoff, 1975; Marks & Hixon, 1986; Nobler, 1980; Schreiber & Frank, 1983; Todd & Pine, 1968; Winstead et al., 1974). Guidance and direction within these groups came from any member who could best interpret the process at a particular time (Hunt & Issacharoff, 1975). Nobler (1980) proposes that the leaderless format may be preferable, as the presence of a leader may foster dependency patterns among group members. A leader may also act as a buffer between group members and

prevent them from working directly with each other to develop mutual trust and equal sharing. However, the leaderless format has potential problems. Without a recognised leader, it is possible for one member to dominate the group process (Shatan et al., 1962). Leaderless groups may also struggle to negotiate sensitive periods in their development (Hunt & Issacharoff, 1975).

The peer supervision groups that had a single leader occurred mostly in a training context where a supervisor took responsibility for leading the group (Borders, 1991; Christensen & Kline, 2001; Crutchfield & Borders, 1997; Crutchfield et al., 1997; Starling & Baker, 2000; Wilbur et al., 1994; Wilbur et al., 1991). Even though a supervisor was present in these groups, the focus still remained on the group members using their own resources to assist one another. The role of the supervisors varied on a continuum from being directive to being facilitative. A study by Christensen and Kline (2001) suggests that group members learnt more, felt more confident, and showed greater self-exploration, when leaders were more facilitative. Their study also indicated that supervisors' roles changed as they responded to the development of the group members. Initially supervisors were directive and supplied the structure for the sessions, however as group members developed and their involvement increased, the supervisors took on a more facilitative role and focused their attention on the group process.

A small proportion of groups rotated leadership (Akhurst, 2000b; Ingham, 2002). Members took turns being the facilitator whose role was to ensure that the group remained task focused and followed the model used to structure the group sessions. Akhurst's (2000b) study suggests that this method of leadership had variable success, as some facilitators were very active in the group process while others were passive and uninvolved. She suggests that further training of participants in the skills of facilitation may improve the implementation of this form of leadership.

The different ways that leadership has been managed in peer supervision groups seem to be related to the context of the groups and the professional development of the members. Groups that exist in a training context tend to have an external leader that is imposed by the training institution. In contrast, groups of practitioners have

tended to use a leaderless format, which may be a reflection of their developmental need to maintain their autonomy.

2.3.3.11 Structure of sessions

The manner in which peer group supervision sessions are structured significantly impacts on group processes by influencing the group orientation, the involvement levels of group members, and the patterns of interaction between members.

The groups described in the literature vary widely in the way that sessions are structured. Some groups are unstructured where any group member can raise an issue for group discussion (Greenburg et al., 1985; Hunt & Issacharoff, 1975; Nobler, 1980). A large number of groups used an informal case presentation format where members took turns in presenting a case which was then discussed by the other group members (Hare & Frankena, 1972; Marks & Hixon, 1986; Schreiber & Frank, 1983; Shatan et al., 1962; Todd & Pine, 1968; Winstead et al., 1974). Still other groups used a highly structured approach where a specific group model was used to structure the sessions (Akhurst, 2000b; Borders, 1991; Christensen & Kline, 2001; Crutchfield & Borders, 1997; Crutchfield et al., 1997; Ingham, 2002; Starling & Baker, 2000; Wilbur et al., 1994; Wilbur et al., 1991).

Advocates of a structured approach to peer group supervision suggest that using an explicit structure for group sessions has a number of benefits. These benefits include helping groups stay task focused, enhancing group productivity and effectiveness, and providing consistency and a sense of safety for group members. Structured group sessions may achieve these benefits by ensuring the orderly input and processing of information, by giving all members an opportunity to participate, and by helping members give focused objective feedback to one another (Akhurst, 2000a; Borders, 1991; Schreiber & Frank, 1983; Wilbur et al., 1991).

However, Nobler (1980) warns that there is a "fine balance achieved in the group process between maintaining a position and allowing for change and growth within the structure" (p.60). The rigid use of a certain structure may therefore hamper the development of a group. Wilbur et al. (1994) suggest that the utility of a particular

structure may depend on the developmental level of the group and the professional developmental level of the members. As the group becomes more cohesive and as members develop professionally, a high level of structure may impede the group process. This may explain why all the groups in the literature that used less structured approaches consisted of practitioners whereas more structured groups tended to consist of trainees.

Relatively few models have been developed to structure peer supervision groups, with only two (Borders, 1991; Wilbur et al., 1991) receiving any research attention. These two models have also been used as the basis for nearly all the other models described in the literature (Agnew et al., 2000; Akhurst, 2000b; Christensen & Kline, 2001; Ingham, 2002). Wilbur et al.'s (1991) model will be briefly described, as the peer supervision group studied in the current research project used an adaptation of this model (Akhurst, 2000b) to structure their group sessions.

Wilbur et al.'s (1991) model of Structured Group Supervision consists of five phases. These phases keep the group task-focused by ordering the nature of the interactions between group members. A time period of one hour is normally allocated for the five phases of the model.

The first phase is the Request-for-Assistance Statement. During this period one of the group members, who is the supervisee for the session, presents a case that they require assistance with. The supervisee then asks the group for assistance by formulating a Request-for-Assistance Statement.

The second phase is the Questioning Period and Identification of Focus. Group members use a round-robin technique to ask the supervisee questions in order to gain more information to better understand the supervisee's Request-for-Assistance Statement. At the completion of this phase the focus for the rest of the session is identified using Betz et al.'s (1981) typology of group modalities (i.e. task-process, psycho-process or socio-process) and Hart's (1982, cited in Wilbur et al., 1991) models of clinical supervision, which include skill development, personal growth or integration models.

The third phase is the Feedback Statements phase, where group members respond (in a round-robin format) to the information from the previous two phases, by stating how they would handle the supervisee's difficulty. The supervisee does not respond to the feedback and remains silent, in order to listen without feeling the need to justify her actions. After the group members have finished giving feedback, there is a short pause while the supervisee assimilates the feedback and prepares for the next phase.

In the fourth phase the supervisee responds to each group member individually, telling them what parts of their feedback was helpful or unhelpful and why. The group members remain silent as they receive feedback from the supervisee. If time is available, the group may engage in an optional fifth phase of discussion around the issues brought up during the session.

Wilbur et al.'s (1991) model of Structured Group Supervision was developed in a training context and it stipulates that a supervisor should be present in the group. The role of the supervisor is to facilitate the group's use of the model and assist the group in identifying the focus of the sessions. However, the model has been adapted for use without the presence a supervisor by Akhurst (2000b). Her major adaptation was to replace the supervisory leadership of the group with a system where group members took turns to facilitate the group. The appointed facilitator's role is to ensure that the group process remains structured and task-focused, that time limitations are kept, and that the presenter (supervisee) does not suffer any overly harsh criticism from other group members. A summary of Akhurst's (2000b) model is included in appendix A.

Akhurst's (2000b) adaptation of Wilbur et al.'s (1991) model has been used in used with groups in a master's level psychology training context and also in a lay counselling context (Ingham, 2002). Group members in both these contexts have indicated that they found the model highly beneficial.

2.4 Summary

This chapter has focussed on establishing a theoretical basis with which to understand peer group supervision. This has been achieved by highlighted a number of relevant areas in the field of group dynamics and by reviewing the literature that exists on peer group supervision.

The literature identifies a number of potential benefits and also some limitations of peer group supervision. Many factors have also been identified that play a role in mediating the utility of peer group supervision. However there is a lack of coherent theory in the literature that attempts to explain how these factors operate and the relationships that may exist between them. Therefore, one of the aims of this study is to contribute to possible theory building in the area of peer group supervision by exploring how these mediating factors operate within a specific peer supervision group. In order to achieve this a focus on group dynamics is necessary as group interaction processes mediate the effectiveness of any group (Hackman & Morris, 1978).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research questions

This study has two major aims. Firstly to evaluate the utility of peer group supervision for practising psychologists in South Africa. Secondly, to contribute towards theory building in the area of peer group supervision by studying the group processes of a peer supervision group of practising psychologists who have been meeting for an extended period of time. In this context, theory is defined as a set of plausible relationships that exist between concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Based on these aims, a number of research questions were generated to guide the study. These questions were:

How do psychologists in practice use the peer group supervision model?

The major reason for asking this question is that a careful description of the use of peer group supervision is a necessary first step in analysis, before it's utility can be evaluated and any theory generated. Furthermore, little research exists on how peer group supervision is used by practising psychologists.

Does peer group supervision meet the needs of psychologists in practice?

This question explores the utility of peer group supervision by focusing on whether it meets the needs of psychologists in practice. In order to answer this question the needs of psychologists in practice need to be identified. The sub-questions that form part of this question are:

- What are the needs of psychologists in practice?
- Which of these needs are met, or not met, by peer group supervision?

What factors mediate the utility of peer group supervision?

This question aims to explore the utility of peer group supervision at a deeper level by identifying the factors and processes that determine how useful it is. Little coherent theory exists in this area and therefore this question may be useful in generating theory.

How can peer group supervision be adapted to increase its utility?

The question involves the practical application of the findings from the previous questions to try and increase the utility of peer group supervision. This question will be addressed in the discussion chapter of this thesis.

3.2 Qualitative evaluation

This study aims to evaluate the utility of peer group supervision for two purposes. Firstly, to gain an understanding of how the group dynamic processes effect and mediate the utility of peer group supervision. Secondly to use the findings to adapt peer group supervision in an effort to improve its utility. From an evaluation perspective this study would therefore be understood as both a process and formative evaluation.

Process evaluations involve the systematic and detailed observation of what occurs in a particular programme (i.e. peer group supervision) in an effort to understand the processes through which a programme produces the results it does (Patton, 1987). The intervening processes that occur between what goes into a programme and the programme outcomes are the focus of process evaluations (Robson, 1993). This focus is often particularly useful in revealing ways in which a programme can be improved, which is the aim of formative evaluations. Formative evaluations intend to assist in the development of a programme by suggesting ways in which it can be improved. This often involves a process evaluation in order to understand how the programme produces its outcomes.

It is important to note that an evaluation is not a distinctive research strategy, but rather, it is a study with a distinctive purpose (Robson, 1993). Therefore a research strategy has to be developed that is appropriate to the purpose of the study. In order to conduct a process and formative evaluation of a peer supervision group, detailed descriptive information about the internal dynamics and processes of the group are required. A qualitative research strategy is best suited for this purpose, as the internal dynamics and processes within a group are not easily quantifiable, as they consist of language and subtle interactions between group members. Qualitative

research has the potential to provide a deeper understanding of these social interactions (Silverman, 2000). The exploratory nature of the study means that no specific hypotheses are being tested, but rather that hypotheses and theory about the dynamic processes of peer group supervision are being inductively generated. Again, qualitative methods are particularly appropriate to this exploratory inductive approach.

3.3 Research design

The aims and research questions of this study determined the choice of research design. The exploratory nature of this study and its aim to gain an in-depth understanding of group processes made a case study design particularly appropriate. Case studies focus on investigating a particular phenomenon (individual, group, institution etc.) within its real life context and enable one to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. This is often achieved through an inductive approach based on qualitative data (Robson, 1993).

An experimental or survey design would not be appropriate for this study because its focus is not on testing the causal relationships between variables (experimental design), or on collecting a relatively small amount of information from numerous people in order to make generalisations about the wider population (survey design).

The research design used for this study, is therefore a case study of a single peer supervision group of practising psychologists, over a period of time, within the natural context of their group meetings.

3.4 Sampling

A review of the literature on peer group supervision indicated that there was a lack of research on the use of peer group supervision by practising psychologists, and also on the use of peer group supervision by groups who had been meeting for an extended period of time. These gaps in the research guided the research questions and therefore the selection of the group that was studied. The sampling technique

was therefore purposive and theoretical, as the group was chosen on the basis of its relevance to the research questions (Silverman, 2000).

The criteria used to select the group that participated in this study were:

- The group members had to be practising psychologists
- The group had to be using peer group supervision
- The group had to have existed for an extended period of time (over one year)

One of the critiques of the case study design is that samples are too small and often not random and therefore one cannot generalise the findings of the study to the wider population. However, these critiques are based on a quantitative logic of statistical probability, which does not apply to most qualitative research. Silverman (2000) argues that the concept of generalisability in a qualitative research context should be theoretically determined. The generalisability of findings should be judged on their ability to extrapolate theory that may be transferable to other cases.

3.5 Negotiating entry

A group that fulfilled the sampling criteria was located and a request was made to one of the group members for permission to study the group. This member relayed the request to the whole group at one of their group meetings and this author was subsequently invited to present a research proposal to the group. A few days after the presentation the group indicated that they were willing to take part in this study. This negotiation of entry into the group ensured that the group's participation in this study was voluntary and that the research was conducted with the full knowledge and consent of all the group members.

The demographic details of the members of the peer supervision group in this study are presented in chapter four as part of the findings.

3.6 Data collection methods

The selection of the method of data collection was based on the research questions of the study. In order to answer these questions, data had to be collected that represented the naturally occurring group processes of the peer supervision group.

3.6.1. Audio-taping

Various methods of data collection may have provided this, however not all of them were appropriate for this study. Direct observation of the group was a possibility, however the presence of the researcher would have changed the nature of the group interactions. Video-taping of the group sessions would have enabled the recording of both verbal and non-verbal interactions, however groups are often resistant to allow themselves to be video-taped. It was therefore decided to audio-tape the group sessions as this method of data collection was less invasive of the group processes and less anxiety provoking for the participants.

There were a number of additional reasons that made audio-tapes an appropriate method of data recording. Silverman (2001) maintains that "conversation is the primary medium through which social interaction takes place" (p.160) and therefore audio-taping the conversations between group members provided a relatively accurate representation of the group interaction process. The focus on naturally occurring social interaction provided by audio-taping also fills a gap in the research on peer group supervision. The majority of this research has relied on "researcher provoked data" (Silverman, 2001, p.159) in the form of interviews, which provide information on the participant's perceptions but do not represent the actual group interactions. Another reason for the use of audio-tapes is that they provide a public record of data and they can be replayed for data analysis and verification purposes.

Five group sessions were audio-taped for the purposes of this study. The decision to tape five sessions was based on a trade off between obtaining adequate coverage of the group meetings, but also keeping the amount of data acquired at a manageable level. The original intention was for these sessions to be consecutive so that any development in the group processes over time could be tracked. However, only the

first three taped sessions were consecutive. After these three consecutive sessions the group cancelled a number of meetings (mostly for logistical reasons) and then ceased meeting for a period of eight months, before the group was reconstituted. Therefore the last two sessions that were taped, occurred at a substantially later period than the first three sessions. More detail on the history of the group will be provided in chapter four of this thesis.

3.6.2. Transcription

In order to aid analysis of the data, the audio recordings of the sessions were transcribed word for word. To ensure the reliability of the transcription, the tapes were listened to repeatedly and checked to see whether the transcriptions matched the conversations on the tapes. Elements of a conversational analysis transcription convention, suggested by Silverman (1997), were used in transcribing. Significant silences, overlaps between members, laughter, and interruptions were indicated in the transcript, which enabled the use of conversational analysis. However, complex elements of the transcription convention were not included, such as changes in pitch, stressed syllables and breathing. These elements were excluded from the transcripts because they were extremely time consuming to include and conversational analysis was not the primary analytical technique used. It was also possible to add these elements to the transcripts at a later stage if they were needed. These decisions highlight that transcribing itself is part of the process of data analysis, because the method used, determines what data is included and excluded (Silverman, 2000).

3.6.3. Questionnaires

Although the group interactions and processes were the major interest in this research study, it was decided to also collect data from the group members by giving them a short questionnaire to complete. The initial reason for the questionnaire was to collect demographic information about the group participants, in order to consider how these member characteristics impacted on the group process. However additional questions were added to the questionnaire in order to obtain data about the members' perceptions of their needs, their expectations of peer group

supervision, the perceived utility of peer group supervision, and changes that they thought may increase the utility of peer group supervision. A copy of the questionnaire is included in appendix B. Data on the members' perceptions of these aspects of peer group supervision allowed a comparison with the transcript data. Multiple data collection methods also allowed the use of triangulation in data analysis.

The questionnaire was constructed using a number of closed-ended questions, open-ended questions, and a single Likert scale item. The closed-ended questions were used to collect demographic data on the group members. In contrast, open-ended questions invited group members to give their point of view on a number of factors related to the utility of peer group supervision. The open-ended questions achieved this by not leading respondents with pre-constructed response categories, but rather letting them identify factors that they felt were relevant. A single Likert scale item was included where members were asked to rate the utility of peer group supervision on a five point scale ranging from "not useful" to "extremely useful". This scale provided a crude summative measurement of the perceived utility of peer group supervision.

The questionnaires were given to group members to complete at the first audio-recorded session that they were present at. The majority of group members completed the questionnaire immediately before the group session began and all group members completed and returned the questionnaires.

3.6.4. Reasons for excluding interviews

In order to conclude the discussion on data collection, it is necessary to briefly explain why semi-structured interviews were not included in this study. Firstly, the focus of this study was on the naturally occurring group processes, not on the group member's perceptions of those processes, which the majority of other qualitative research has focused on. Secondly, the data corpus had to be kept to a manageable size, in order to ensure depth of analysis. Thirdly, the group's participation in the study was voluntary and the time demands placed on the members by the study had to be kept to a minimum.

3.7 Data analysis

The methods used to analyse the data were contingent on two factors, the research questions and the type of data collected. The data collected was qualitative in nature and the research questions required an analytical approach that was sensitive to process factors and able to generate a set of plausible relationships between the various factors that effect the utility of peer group supervision. A general analytical approach derived from grounded theory was most suited for the purposes of this study.

3.7.1. General analytical approach: grounded theory

Grounded theory can be defined as “a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analysed” (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p.273). The central analytical technique used in this methodology is one of constant comparative analysis. Theoretical propositions about the relationships between concepts are inductively derived from a section of the qualitative data collected. These theoretical propositions are then systematically compared to the rest of the data corpus. Through this comparative process, they are adapted and refined till they fit all aspects of the data collected. Data analysis therefore tends to be an inductive, iterative and emergent process. Grounded theory is particularly suited to the analysis of process because of its focus on conceptualising the patterns of relationships between factors and the reciprocal changes that occur in these relationships as a result of changes in external or internal conditions (Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

Coding is an important method used in grounded theory to develop theoretical propositions systematically from data. Coding involves identifying categories, themes and patterns in the data and giving them descriptive labels. This coding takes place at increasing levels of abstraction, progressing from a descriptive level where categories and subcategories are identified, to a more abstract level where relationships and interactions between previously coded categories are identified. These proposed relationships between categories are developed into theoretical

propositions, which are then systematically compared to other portions of data to assess their explanatory power (Hutchinson, 1988).

The grounded theory methodology is highly inductive in nature, which the initial conceptualisations of the approach emphasised (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). However recently there has been a growing recognition that no research is wholly inductive as researchers are theoretically sensitised before they approach data analysis. This theoretical sensitivity introduces a deductive element to analysis, as prior conceptions and understandings are tested against the data. Instead of viewing this as a limitation, Strauss and Corbin (1994) maintain that this can be used advantageously:

Researchers carry into their research the sensitising possibilities of their training, reading and research experience, as well as explicit theories that might be useful if played against systematically gathered data, in conjunction with theories emerging from analysis of these data (p.277).

This study included deductive and inductive elements in the data analysis following Strauss and Corbin's (1994) approach. The literature on peer group supervision identifies a number of broad factors that may play a role in mediating its utility, such as group development, group orientation and the group's use of structure, to name a few. A reading of this literature led to an increased theoretical sensitivity of the potential role of these factors, which provided a conceptual framework for the data analysis. These factors were used as different perspectives, from which to approach the data. An inductive approach was then used to analyse the group process from these perspectives and also generate plausible relationships between the various factors.

Grounded theory was the overarching general analytical approach used in this study, however, the specific grounded theory techniques of data analysis were not followed rigidly. In addition to the grounded theory techniques of coding and the constant comparative method, additional analytical techniques were used with the data, such as elements of conversational analysis, thematic content analysis and also some quantitative measures. Although grounded theory is a methodology employed almost exclusively to qualitative data, the methodology is not necessarily against the use of

quantitative data to assist in the generation of theory. Glaser and Strauss (1967) maintain that:

there is no fundamental clash between the purposes and capacities of qualitative and quantitative methods or data ... We believe that each form of data is useful for both verification and generation of theory, whatever the primacy of emphasis" (p.17-18).

This quote highlights that the choice of data and analytical techniques in the grounded theory approach is based on their potential to generate theory, not on a dogmatic adherence to fixed techniques.

The specific procedures and techniques used to analyse the data of this study will briefly be described.

3.7.2. Analysis of questionnaires

The methods used to analyse the questionnaire responses varied according to the data generated. Demographic data was analysed using basic descriptive statistical methods in order to show the central tendencies in the data.

The data generated by the open-ended questions was analysed using thematic content analysis. Content analysis involves the establishment of relevant categories and then counting the number of instances of these categories in an item of text (Silverman, 2001). In this study, the categories were established inductively through an initial close reading and descriptive coding of the textual data, focusing on the recurrent themes that occurred in the data. Once the classification system of categories was established, the number of instances of these categories in the text were counted and rank ordered for each question. This provided a clear indication of the most common themes from the group members' responses to the questionnaire.

3.7.3. Analysis of transcripts

Once the audio-tapes were transcribed, descriptive summaries of the content of each of the group sessions were prepared. These summaries provided a quick reference to the entirety of the sessions, which was useful to maintain a wider

perspective when the data analysis began to focus on the small details of the group interaction processes.

The process of coding the transcripts followed, with the conceptual perspectives derived from the reading of the literature, providing the initial categories to guide the coding. These categories included the use of structure, facilitation, utility of peer group supervision, group orientation, and the interaction patterns between group members. A qualitative data analysis software programme called "Nvivo" (version 1.3) was used as a tool in the coding and analysis of the transcripts.

Initially the coding was descriptive and a large number of codes were generated. However, through repeated readings of the transcripts, the codes were refined and reduced. They were sorted into categories and subcategories, as logical relationships between them became apparent from the data. Some codes were combined as they labelled similar phenomena in the data. Reliability of coding was enhanced by carefully defining the coding categories and repeated reading of the transcripts. A table was generated that showed the codes, together with the number of passages coded, for each of the five session transcripts. This table gave an indication of the processes occurring within each of the group sessions. A copy of the transcript coding table is included in appendix C. Numerous matrices were also generated, which identified codes that co-occurred in the same passages and also codes that occurred in similar sequences. These matrices assisted in identifying possible relationships between categories, which were then tested and refined against the data through constant comparison.

Elements of conversational analysis were used to analyse the interaction patterns between group members. Conversational analysis is an analytical technique that focuses on the sequential organisation of interaction and how this organisation generates meaning (Heritage, 1997). Pauses in conversations are often significant and may foreshadow a difficulty in interactions between people, or a departure from the normal turn-taking sequences that occur in conversations (Silverman, 2001). In this study, major pauses in the interactions between members were flagged and analysed in order to determine whether they indicated any difficulties in the group process and how these difficulties were negotiated.

A number of quantitative measures were also used to analyse the transcripts, specifically the group's use of structure in the sessions, the levels of involvement of the group members, and the communication networks in the group.

The groups' use of structure was analysed by coding the different phases of the session structure in the transcripts. The number of characters spoken by all members during each coded phase were then calculated and expressed as a percentage of the total characters spoken in the particular group session. These percentages allowed a comparison of the relative length of each phase of the structure across the five group sessions.

Character counts were also used as a measurement of the involvement levels of the group members in each session. The number of characters spoken by each group member in a session were calculated and converted to a percentage of the total number of characters spoken by all members in a particular group session. These percentages enabled a comparison of the relative involvement levels of group members across the five group sessions.

A different quantitative measurement method was used to analyse the communication networks in the five group sessions. Instead of using character counts, the utterances or interactions of group members were counted, noting which group member the interaction was directed at. A matrix was generated depicting the number of interactions occurring between each of the group members. These interaction totals between group members were then converted into percentages of the total number of interactions in a session, which permitted comparisons to occur across sessions.

In summary, the various analytical techniques that have been described were used to produce a rich description of the process of peer group supervision and suggest plausible relationships between the categories and concepts that emerged from the interface between previous theory and the data.

3.8 Validity

Validity refers to the extent to which research findings accurately reflect the social phenomena to which they refer (Hammersley, 1990, cited in Silverman, 2001). A number of methods were used in this study to ensure that the results accurately reflected the group process of the peer supervision group studied.

Collecting data from more than one source enabled the use of triangulation in data analysis. The findings from the transcripts and the questionnaires were compared with each another, which assisted in providing a more complete picture of the group process. However Silverman (2001) warns that triangulation should not be viewed as a method that enables the discovery of the single objective truth, as the various sources of data collection and analysis are often context-bound.

A further method used to increase the validity of the findings was the constant comparative method. This ensured that the findings were not based on a single instance in the data, but rather that they were developed through a comparison with the entire data corpus. This constant comparison also ensured that deviant cases in the data were considered and used to refine the findings. The data was therefore analysed comprehensively as all cases of the data were included in the analysis (Silverman, 2000).

Tabulations of the coding of the data also increased the validity of the findings as they provided a survey of the data corpus and provided evidence that the findings presented were not based on isolated cases in the data (Silverman, 2001).

3.9 Ethical considerations

The major ethical consideration in this study was confidentiality. During the peer group supervision sessions, the group members discuss confidential details of their clients and they may also disclose their own personal feelings and difficulties. It was therefore important to protect the identity of both the group members and their clients in this study.

As part of the negotiation of entry into the group, a contract of confidentiality was drawn up between the group members and the researcher. The contract specified that the only person who would have access to the transcripts was the researcher's supervisor and that at no point during the research would the group members be identified by name. A copy of this contract is included in appendix D. The identity of the group members was protected by two methods in this study. Firstly, the group members were not required to provide their names on the questionnaires. Secondly, numbers were used to identify individual group members in the transcripts.

A further ethical consideration in this study was that the research should benefit the participants in some way. Strauss and Corbin (1994) maintain that:

We owe it to our "subjects" to tell them verbally or in print what we have learned, and to give clear indications of why we have interpreted them as we have (p.281).

Therefore immediately after the submission of this thesis, a written summary of the findings will be given to the group members and an offer will be made to discuss the findings and their implications with the whole group if they wish to. It is hoped that this may assist the group to increase the utility of their peer group supervision meetings.

4. Findings

4.1 Introduction

The data used as the basis for this study was derived from two sources, questionnaires and transcripts of audio recordings of five sessions of peer group supervision. Although there are overlaps, the findings from these different sources of data will initially be presented separately. Firstly the findings from the questionnaires will be discussed, followed by the findings from the transcripts. The overlaps between the findings derived from the different data sources will then be briefly considered, and then the data will be considered in a more integrated interpretative manner.

When referring to individuals in the second person, female gender identification terms, such as “she” and “her”, will be used even if the individual is male. This is done to protect the identity of the one male member in the group.

4.2 Questionnaire Findings

The questionnaires provided a variety of data on the membership history of the group, the demographic details of the group members, and their perceptions of the utility of peer group supervision.

4.2.1. Membership History

During its history, the group has varied considerably in membership and size, ranging from a small group of three members to a relatively large membership of eight. Table 4.1 graphically depicts the membership history of the group and also shows the two periods during which the group sessions were audio taped for the purposes of this study. The table was constructed using the group joining date information from the questionnaires.

The group has been meeting for three years and a total of ten members have participated in the group at some point during this period. Each group member was assigned a number (1 to 10) which was used for identification purposes in both the questionnaires and the transcripts.

Table 4.1 Group membership history

Group members	Group Membership (indicated by shading)								Total m'ths
	TIME (with units in months) →								
Member 1	■			■				■	→ 24
Member 2	■				■				→ 29
Member 3	■				■				→ 29
Member 4	■				■				18
Member 5	■				■		■		2
Member 6	■				■				→ 10
Member 7	■				■				→ 11
Member 8	■				■				→ 11
Member 9	■				■				→ 10
Member 10	■				■				→ 11
Total members	3	4	5	4		6	8	8	
Notes			Taping of sessions	Group stopped meeting for 8 months	Group reconstituted with new members	Taping of sessions	Group continues to meet		

The peer supervision group was initially started with three core members who met for five months before being joined by another member. These four members then met for thirteen months, once every three weeks. Near the end of this period, another member briefly joined the group for two months and it was at this time that the current study began. Up to this point the group was small (3-5 members) and had a consistent group of members who had been meeting together for an extended period of time (up to 18 months). However, after a number of poorly attended meetings with only two or three members, the group stopped meeting.

After eight months of not meeting the group was reconstituted with three of the original members and five new members. Two of the original members dropped out. One joined another peer supervision group and the other has not rejoined any group. The reconstituted group met together at a new venue on a monthly basis for eight months before entry was renegotiated for the current study. At the time of writing, the

group still continues to meet. The reconstituted group has a much larger membership (8 members) and has been meeting consistently for nearly a year.

A possible difficulty in conceptualising the group's developmental history is whether the initial group and reconstituted group should be understood as a single group that has undergone a developmental change or whether they should be seen as separate, different groups. The fact that three members who were part of the initial group continued to be part of the reconstituted group, and that one of them played an important role in initiating the reconstituted group, suggests that there is a developmental continuity between the two groups. On the other hand, the changes in the size and membership of the reconstituted group would substantially change the character of the group. For the purposes of this research project the initial and reconstituted groups are conceptualised as a single group that has undergone substantial developmental changes. However, to recognise that the groups are likely to be very different in character, they have been labelled "Group A" and "Group B". Although a comparative study of the groups is not the major focus of this study because of the conceptual difficulties in differentiating the groups, they will be compared when appropriate.

4.2.2. Demographic details of group members

The demographic details of the group participants are of importance in this study because the characteristics of individual members of a particular group will affect the overall functioning of the group. In order to reflect this, the demographic information will be presented on a group basis and will be presented separately for groups A and B. This means that the demographic information for the three participants who have been continuous members of the group throughout its development will be included twice.

4.2.2.1 Group A

All five members of group A were female and ranged in age from 27 to 31 years with a mean age of 28.8 years. For their professional training as psychologists, all the group members had recently completed a masters degree, four in counselling and

one in educational psychology. Their professional experience ranged from two to six years with a mean of 3.4 years. Theoretical orientations of the group members were diverse with many reporting that they operated from more than one orientation. The reported theoretical orientations (with the number of group members in parenthesis) included humanistic-existential (2), cognitive-behavioural (2), psychodynamic (2), eclectic (1) and gestalt (1).

The group members also differed in their work settings and activities. Two members worked at a university counselling centre while the other three were in private practice. They reported the following work activities: adult individual therapy (4), career counselling (4), group work (3), couple counselling (1), and educational assessments (1). Four of the group members indicated that they were in individual supervision.

In summary, the membership of group A was relatively homogenous in some respects and diverse in others. The group membership was homogenous in terms of gender, age, level of training, and professional experience, whereas there was diversity in theoretical orientation, work settings and work activities.

4.2.2.2 Group B

Group B consisted of seven female members and one male member. Their ages ranged from 30 to 53 years with a mean of 37 years. For their professional training as psychologists all the group members had completed a masters degree, three in counselling psychology, three in educational psychology, and one in clinical psychology. Their professional experience ranged from one to twenty years with a mean of 6.6 years. Theoretical orientations of the group members were diverse with many reporting that they operated from more than one orientation. The reported theoretical orientations included humanistic-existential (2), cognitive-behavioural (2), psychodynamic (3), strategic (1) and systemic (1).

The group members were all in private practice but reported being involved in a range of different activities which included adult individual therapy (7), couple counselling (3), career counselling (2), educational assessments (2), child therapy

(2), group work (1), community work (1) and forensic assessments (1). Five of the group members indicated that were in individual supervision.

The membership of group B was more diverse in many respects than group A. There was a greater diversity in age, professional training, and professional experience levels. There were similar levels of diversity in theoretical orientation and work activities. Group B was more homogenous than group A in work setting as all members reported being in private practice.

4.2.3. Perceptions of the utility of peer group supervision

The questionnaire included one Likert scale item (where 1 = Not useful and 5 = extremely useful) that asked members to rate the utility of the peer supervision group that they belonged to. The mean rating given was 4.4 and the ratings ranged from 3 to 5. This suggests that all the participants found peer group supervision a useful experience.

The questionnaire also included six open-ended questions that aimed to explore group members' perceptions of the utility of peer group supervision at a deeper level. These questions probed member's views on the following six related topics:

1. Primary needs of psychologists in practice.
2. Expectations of what peer group supervision would provide.
3. Helpful aspects of peer group supervision.
4. Unhelpful aspects of peer group supervision.
5. The structure used for the peer group supervision.
6. Changes that would improve the utility of peer group supervision.

The findings of the analysis of the questionnaire responses are presented in table 4.2. The themes arising from the responses are rank ordered according to the number of references to them. Please refer to the methodology chapter (section 3.7.2) for an explanation of how these themes were extracted.

Table 4.2 Rank-ordered themes from questionnaire responses

Topics	Themes	Description	No. of refs
Needs	• Continued education	Continued training, skill development & access to information & research.	6
	• Peer support	Support from professional peers in order to deal with ethical dilemmas, isolation and obtain peer verification.	5
	• Case management assistance	Assistance & supervision with difficult situations & cases.	4
	• Business administration	Assistance with the business aspects of private practice.	4
	• Leisure time	Need for leisure time & to escape duties	2
	• Other	Stress management, Professional network.	1
Expectations	• Continued education	Learning through sharing of knowledge & different experiences.	6
	• Support	Support in dealing with challenges of practice.	6
	• Case management assistance	Assistance & supervision with case management	4
	• Sharing & space	Space to share, reflect & discuss experiences with peers.	3
	• Diversity	Exposure to diverse ways of working with others	3
Most helpful	• Sharing	Sharing of ideas and difficult feelings about cases.	6
	• Support	Support and reassurance from the group.	4
	• Learning	Learning especially about other theoretical perspectives	3
	• Case management assistance	Suggestions and advice on cases	2
	• Safety	Sense of safety & trust in the group	2
	• Other	Structured format, increased confidence, growth, Co-operation, Ethical guidelines.	1
Least Helpful	• Nothing	No unhelpful aspects reported	3
	• Group diversity	Different work settings and experience levels of group members.	2
	• Other	Inconvenient scheduling of meeting, Too much literature review, inconsistency in meeting, unequal participation & power, competitiveness.	1
Structure comment	• Useful - Task focus	Structure keeps group task focused. It contains or frames the process.	3
	• Useful - Equal participation	Ensures that all members participate.	2
	• Useful - Efficient use of time	Structure enables the efficient use of time	2
	• Break from structure	Use of informal discussion & flexible use of structure depending on case.	2
	• Description of structure	Response described the structure used	2
	• Useful - Flexibility	Structure allows flexibility	1
	• Useful - General	"well structured", "contributed to the success of the group", "gives good guidelines".	1
	• Role of previous experience	Previous exposure to structured format leads to increased use of particular structure in subsequent groups.	1
	• Adjustment difficulties	Initial difficulties adjusting to structure.	1
Changes	• No change	Would not make changes to peer supervision group	2
	• Increased homogeneity	More homogeneity in work settings, activities & level of professional development.	2
	• Increased educational input	Theoretical input & practical training.	2
	• Other	Increased general discussion, increased diversity of cases, increased consistency in meeting scheduling and membership, longer session time, change of meeting time.	1

4.2.3.1 Primary needs of psychologists in practice

The most common need expressed by the group members was for continued education in order to keep up to date with the latest developments in the field of psychotherapy. For example, member five responded that she needed *“further training and access to latest research and developments in the field”*.

The need for peer support was also a frequent theme. For example, member two responded that she needed *“support from peers and interaction with peers - especially since working in private practice can be lonely”*. Her response suggests that peer support was needed in order to counter the isolation associated with private practice. Other responses indicated that peer support was needed to obtain verification from peers, or deal with ethical dilemmas.

Assistance with case management was another recurrent theme, with a number of group members indicating that they needed assistance and supervision with difficult cases. The administration of the business aspects of private practice was a further difficulty that members indicated they required help with. Other needs that were identified included the need for leisure time, stress management and a professional network to make the market more efficient.

4.2.3.2 Expectations of what peer group supervision would provide

The expectations of what peer group supervision would provide were remarkably similar to the needs that the group members identified. This suggests that the group members had high expectations of peer group supervision, as they anticipated that the group would fulfil many of their needs as practitioners.

Expectations for continued education and support from peers were the most common responses, followed by expectations that they would be assisted with case management difficulties and that the group would provide a space where they could share and discuss their experiences. The expectation that peer group supervision would provide a space for sharing and discussion was mentioned in the context of the expectations for support and ongoing education. This suggests that the group

members expected that they would gain support and learn through the medium of sharing and discussing their experiences.

Another commonly identified expectation was that peer group supervision would expose members to diverse ways of working with clients. Member four expressed this expectation: *"I was also hoping to share ideas and learn about other ways of working with people."*

According to the responses in this question, group members did not seem to expect peer group supervision to meet a small number of the needs they identified in the previous question; namely the needs for assistance with business administration, leisure time and stress management.

4.2.3.3 Helpful aspects of peer group supervision

The most helpful aspects of peer group supervision that were identified by group members contained many similar themes to their needs and expectations. The most common response was that group members found the sharing of ideas and feelings to be most helpful. An illustrative example is member four's response, that she found the *"sharing of ideas and ways of working with clients very helpful"*. Sharing was the medium through which many of the other identified benefits emerged. In their responses group members linked sharing with being able to learn, feeling that they were understood, gaining support and expressing their fears in a safe environment.

Other benefits of peer group supervision that were mentioned included assistance with case management, guidance with ethical dilemmas, and increased confidence and growth. These responses to the questionnaires suggest that peer group supervision fulfilled the majority of the identified needs and expectations of the group members.

4.2.3.4 Unhelpful aspects of peer group supervision

The most common response was that there were no unhelpful aspects of peer group supervision at all. All of these responses were from group B members who

completed the questionnaire in a relatively hurried manner before one of their group sessions. These responses may therefore be due to group members' unwillingness to engage in the relatively more difficult and risky process of critiquing the group to which they belonged.

The diversity in the group members' work settings and experience levels were identified as unhelpful. One member reported that other group members, who did not work in the same setting as her, did not always provide suggestions that were relevant for her work setting. Another member expressed frustration that group members with less professional experience continually enquired about issues.

Other aspects of peer group supervision that were viewed as unhelpful were the inconvenient and inconsistent scheduling of meetings, unequal participation of members and competitiveness.

4.2.3.5 Comment on the structure used for peer group supervision

The group used Akhust's (2000b) model to structure their sessions. The majority of group members (70%) commented that they found this model useful. The structure was felt to be useful because it kept the group task-focused and contained or framed the group process. It also gave all group members an opportunity to participate and ensured the efficient use of the limited time available to the group. This is illustrated in member four's response to the question:

The structure was great as it organised the sharing of information and gave everyone a voice in a limited time span. The structure ensures that ideas, thoughts, etc are shared.

Two members commented on how the group deviated at times from the structure in the meetings in order to respond flexibly to the presented case. Informal discussion was used at times. Other comments on the structure highlighted the importance of previous experiences of groups, suggesting that previous exposure to a structured format led to the increased use of that structure in subsequent groups. One member commented that the structure was initially difficult to adjust to.

4.2.3.6 Changes that would improve the utility of peer group supervision

Two group members reported that they would not make any changes to the peer supervision group to improve it. These same members also indicated that they found nothing unhelpful about peer group supervision. As mentioned earlier, their responses may be due to their unwillingness to engage with the difficult and risky task of critiquing their group.

Other members suggested a range of changes. The two most commonly suggested changes were for increased homogeneity in the group membership (in terms of work settings, activities and levels of professional development), and for increased educational input and training. Other suggested changes were for increased general discussion, increased diversity of cases, increased consistency in meeting scheduling and membership, longer session time, and changes in the meeting times.

4.2.3.7 Summary

The group members' expectations of peer group supervision were high as they anticipated that the group would fulfil many of their needs as practitioners. According to the questionnaire responses, it seems that peer group supervision met the expectations of group members and fulfilled many of their identified needs. The group structure used was seen as useful. A few minor changes were suggested that might improve the utility of the peer group supervision sessions.

4.3 Findings from the transcripts of group sessions

The findings from the transcripts of the five audio taped peer group supervision sessions will be presented across sessions, according to a number of factors that emerged from the interplay between previous theory and the data. These factors include group membership, use of structure, facilitation, utility of sessions, group orientation, and interaction patterns. The relationships between these various factors will also be considered.

A detailed summary of the content of each group session is provided in appendix E. These summaries may be a useful reference in order to situate the findings presented within the context of the content of each of the sessions.

4.3.1. Group membership

As discussed in section 4.2.1, the peer supervision group changed substantially in membership during its history and in order to recognise the differences in membership, the group was labelled group A and group B. Three sessions of group A were audio-taped, which will be referred to as sessions A1, A2 and A3. Two sessions of group B were audio-taped and they will be referred to as sessions B1 and B2.

The differences in the group size and levels of diversity/homogeneity between the sessions are depicted in table 4.3.

Table 4.3 Group membership of each audio-taped session

	Session A1	Session A2	Session A3	Session B1	Session B2
Number of members present	5	5	3	6	7
Diversity	Theoretical orientation, Work settings, Activities.			Gender, Age, Professional experience, Theoretical orientation, Activities.	
Homogeneity	Gender, Age, Training level, Professional experience.			Training level, Work setting	

Only two sessions (A1 and A2) had exactly the same members present. All other group sessions differed in terms of membership. The size of the groups ranged from only three members (A3) to seven members (B2). The group membership differed substantially between the group A sessions and the group B sessions. These differences have already been discussed in depth in section 4.2.2. The major difference between group A and B, is that group B had a larger membership with a greater diversity in terms of age and levels of professional experience. The diversity in levels of professional experience was especially apparent in session B1, with one of the group members having a single year of experience, while another member had 20 years of experience.

4.3.2. Use of Structure

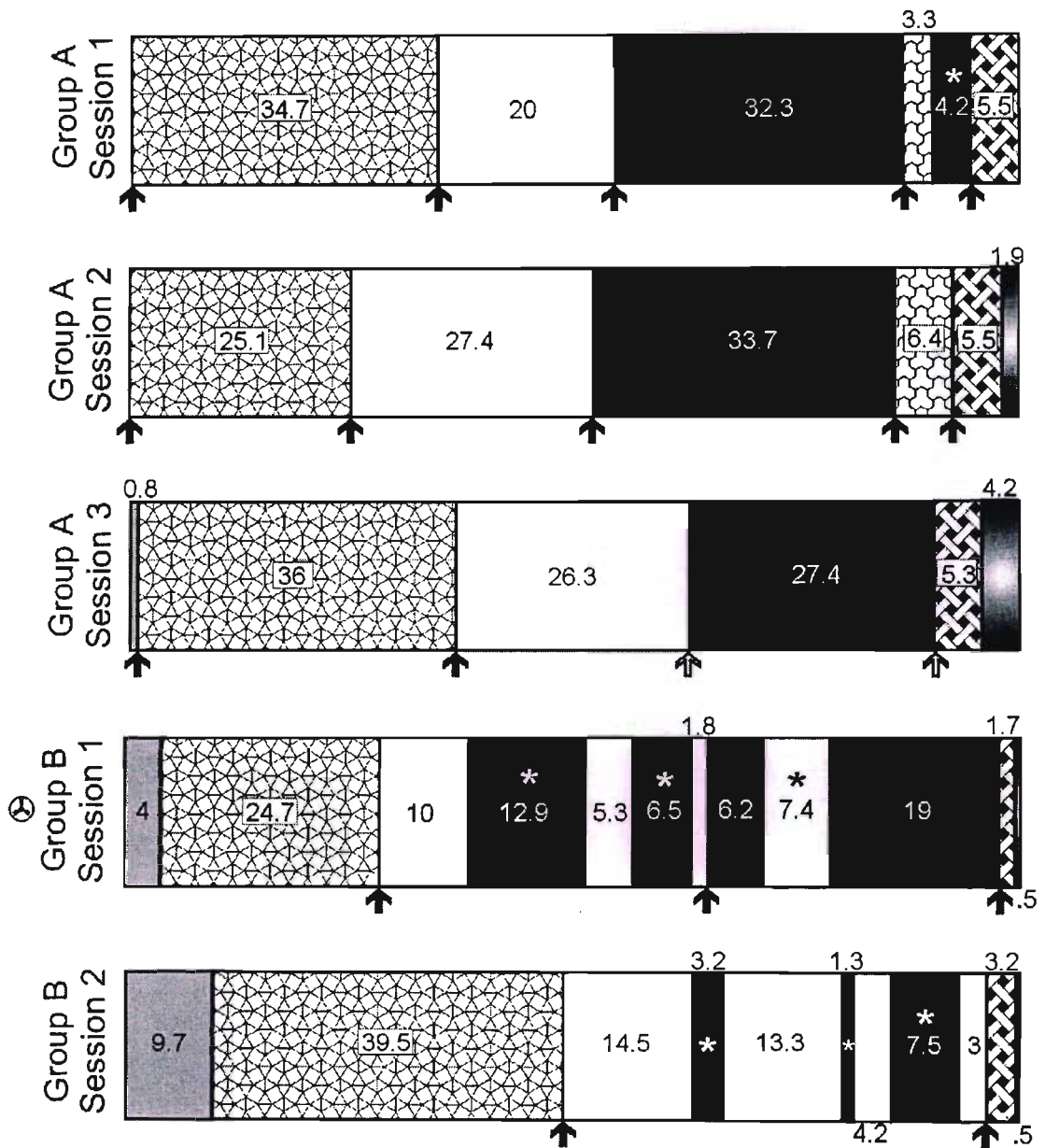
The group used Akhurst's (2000b) model to structure the peer group supervision sessions. In order to guide their use of this model, members referred to a summary sheet of the model, a copy of which is provided in appendix A. A summary of the model is provided in table 4.4 for quick reference purposes. From this point forward Akhurst's (2000b) model will be referred to as "the model".

Table 4.4. Summary of phases in Akhurst's (2000b) model

Phase	Focus of Phase
Phase one Presentation & Request For Assistance (RFA) statement	Presenter provides background information to the case or issue with which they would like assistance. A RFA statement identifies the areas in which the presenter would like help.
Phase two Questioning period & identification of focus	Group members use a "round robin" technique to ask for additional information and gain clarity on the RFA.
Phase three Feedback statements & discussion	Again a "round robin" technique is used for productive suggestions to be made by group members. The presenter does not respond and should be spoken about in the third person.
Phase four Presenter's response	Presenter responds to the feedback, providing details of what was useful or not useful about the feedback.
Phase five Optional discussion period	General discussion period if time allows.

The groups used the model to structure their sessions with varying degrees of flexibility. In some sessions the model was used rigidly where in others it seemed to be hardly used at all. A graphical depiction of the structure of each session is presented in figure 4.1, showing the proportion of the entire session that each phase occupied. A discussion of each session's use of the structure will follow.

Figure 4.1 Use of structure in sessions



Legend

	Beginning/ending socialising & informal discussion.		Presenter's Response		A group member other than the facilitator initiates movement to next phase.
	Presentation & request for assistance statement.		Optional discussion	123	Numbers within the bars are percentages which indicate the proportion of the session that the phase occupied. Character counts are used to calculate the percentages.
	Questioning period	*	Indicates a break from model used to structure group sessions.		Facilitator initiates movement to next phase.
	Feedback statements & discussion.		Facilitator initiates movement to next phase.		Percentages and proportions shown are not accurate due to the bad audio recording quality of this session.
	Facilitator's summary				

4.3.2.1 Use of structure in session A1

The group followed the model relatively closely during session A1. All the phases of the model were included in the appropriate sequence with clear boundaries between the different phases. The two phases that occupied the majority of the group process were the presentation phase (34.7%) and the feedback and discussion phase (32.3%), as would be expected.

There were indications during the group process that the group members may have been slightly unfamiliar with the model and that being audio-taped led to an increased use of the model. For example, at the beginning of the questioning phase the facilitator educated the group about the model:

Facilitator: At this phase we ask the presenter questions to get more information, then if you don't understand then you query about what she said.

This suggests some unfamiliarity with the model, especially considering that the group had been meeting for 18 months. If they had been using the model for that period they would probably not have needed to be reminded of how to use it.

An addition to the model used in this group session was the facilitator's summary of the feedback and discussion phase. This summary highlighted the themes of the feedback just before the presenter was given an opportunity to respond. There was a short period of optional discussion at the end of the session that was not taped because the members switched the tape recorder off. After the session one group member reported that this was when some "interesting discussion" took place.

There were a number of parts of the group session that did not follow the model strictly. There was a short period of discussion after the facilitator's summary where the presenter asked the group a question related to case management and a group discussion around the issue followed. This break from the structure did not seem to interfere with the group process but rather allowed the group members to respond flexibly to the presenter's needs.

Another deviation from the model was that the “round robin” format was not followed strictly during phases two and three. At times group members followed threads of questioning and discussion where one member would interact with the presenter over a number of turns. However no single member monopolised the session and each member had ample opportunity to participate if they wished.

A further break from the model occurred during phase three. During this phase the presenter is not supposed to participate in the discussion and group members are expected not to address the presenter directly. This is a strategy that the model uses to allow the presenter to listen to feedback without feeling a need to justify their actions or take the feedback given as personal criticism. However, during this session the presenter participated in the discussion and other group members addressed the presenter directly on a number of occasions. Another departure from the model was that the facilitator participated in the group discussion on four occasions.

On many occasions, the group members were aware that they were deviating from the model. They negotiated these departures from the model in three different ways. They either requested permission from the group before they did so, or they apologised afterwards, or they acknowledged that they knew they were breaking from the structure and proceeded with a brief hesitant interaction. This acknowledgement seemed to function as an indirect request to the group to tolerate the deviation. For example, the presenter negotiated the asking of a question after the facilitator’s summary in the following way:

Presenter: I don't know whether this is appropriate, it seems as if, our structure (...?) it's a question that I was supposed to pose right at the beginning that um, that originally he was supposed to come back after Easter but he has not yet come back. So must I (phone?) for instance?

The group members responded to the question with a short discussion and then the presenter continued with a response to the feedback given earlier in the session.

4.3.2.2 Use of structure in session A2

In session A2 the model was followed rigidly, mostly as a result of a very directive facilitator who enforced the structure. The session followed the phase sequence set out by the model, the only addition being the facilitator's summary of the feedback and discussion phase. The group utilised the optional discussion period, which was used mostly to provide support to the presenter.

The proportion of the session that the presentation phase occupied was relatively short (25.1%) compared to the other sessions. This was due to the fact that the facilitator kept to the suggested times strictly and stopped the presenter in order to initiate the questioning phase.

There were minor breaks from the structure, similar to those that occurred in session A1. The "round robin" format was not followed strictly and the presenter was addressed directly during the feedback and discussion phase. These breaks from the model were negotiated by asking permission from the group. For example, a member negotiated a contribution in the feedback and discussion phase, even though it was not her turn, by asking permission in the following way:

Member three: Okay can I just follow this up with you? Okay because my feeling is that this thing...

[laughing]

Member three: Can I continue?

Group: Yah

Member three: Okay, my feeling ...

The fact that some group members laughed at her request may indicate some resistance to let her continue, although when the member repeats the request insistently, the group agrees and she continues.

One aspect of the model that the group followed carefully was that the presenter did not participate in the feedback and discussion phase at all, even though the presenter was referred to in the first person at times.

4.3.2.3 Use of structure in session A3

There were only three members present at session A3, which meant that the group could not follow the model strictly. If they did, there would be only one member who would ask questions, give feedback, and discuss the case presented! The group therefore began the session by negotiating the structure that they were going to use:

Presenter: Hey listen if one person is facilitating that means only one person's responding [...?]

Facilitator: Well I'll respond as well, since we so short today. We're short of two people, so lets just, ja ...

Member four: We'll both give you [instructions?]

The group decided to follow the general structure of the model in terms of the phases however they negotiated that the designated facilitator would actively participate in the questions and discussion. During the course of the session, the functions of the facilitator were shared among the two members who were not presenting.

Despite the lack of members, the model was followed relatively closely with all the phases occurring in the correct sequence. The additional facilitator's summary phase did not occur in this session, probably as a result of the facilitator's role being shared among members. After phase four, the group did have an optional discussion period where one member encouraged the presenter by highlighting what she had already achieved in the case.

The breaks from the model were similar to those that occurred during the preceding sessions. The "round robin" technique was not used in the questioning period, with members followed threads of questioning instead. On one occasion the presenter participated in the feedback and discussion phase.

4.3.2.4 Use of structure in session B1

Session B1 began with a significant period of initial socialisation and discussion. The proportional value of 4% for this period is based on a character count of the researcher's notes on this period and is probably an underestimate. The author was

present during this initial period in order to start the recording, which only occurred when the presentation phase began. During the initial socialisation and discussion period, the group discussed difficulties associated with the business aspects of private practice, the hiring of assessment tools, and the rules for obtaining CPD points. A number of announcements were also made about forthcoming conferences. This initial period was an important time in the group process because it allowed group members to raise issues and difficulties that were not directly case related and also to share information.

The audio quality of the recording of session B1 was extremely bad and much of what was said during the session was inaudible on the tape. The character counts of each phase were therefore not accurate which means that the proportions depicted on figure 4.1 are estimates. However the sequence of the phases could be identified from the recording.

The group did not follow the model strictly. After the presentation of the case by the presenter there was very little differentiation between phases. Questioning, feedback and discussion occurred intermittently with feedback and discussion making up the greatest part (44.6%). As a result of the loose structure the session seemed to lack focus and some members dominated the session while others remained uninvolved. The "round robin" format was not used at all.

In contrast to the previous sessions, the group in this session did not openly negotiate deviations from the model. This may indicate that the group members were used to using the model on a very flexible basis and therefore did not feel they had to negotiate departing from it.

On one occasion during the session the facilitator attempted to differentiate between the questioning phase and the feedback and discussion phase:

Facilitator: Ja, we're in the discussion phase now [some group members laugh]

The laughter may indicate the group's awareness that they were not following the model or it may have been a way of resisting the facilitator's hesitant attempt to enforce the structure.

4.3.2.5 Use of structure in session B2

Session B1 also began with a substantial period of initial socialising and discussion which was recorded and therefore the proportion of 9.7% in figure 4.1 is accurate. During this period the group members discussed the difficulties that the group had with confirming the group's accreditation for CPD points. As in session B1, this period was used by the group to discuss professional issues that were not directly case related.

Time management during this session was poor, which may be due to the passive role of the facilitator or possibly the group's unfamiliarity with the structure. The presentation phase occupied the greatest proportion of the session (39.5%), more so than in any of the other group sessions. Following the presentation phase, the facilitator initiated the questioning phase. However during this phase the questioning alternated with periods of discussion among the group members and the "round robin" format was not used. This period of alternating questioning and discussion accounted for 47% of the session. Discussion only made up 12% of this total and therefore the presenter received very little input from the group members in this session, compared to that received by presenters in other sessions.

Other breaks from the model that occurred during the session included the presenter and the facilitator participating in the group discussion, and the presenter being addressed directly during feedback by a group member.

The facilitator attempted to initiate the feedback and discussion phase near the end of the session. However instead of the group moving to the feedback and discussion phase, the presenter moved on to the presenter's response phase. This may suggest that the presenter was unfamiliar with the model. Another possible explanation is that this was a strategy by the presenter to end the session, which had already continued for a longer period of time (76 minutes), than any of the other group sessions. The session ended without a clear conclusion when one of the group members excused themselves and left the session.

4.3.2.6 Summary of the use of structure

There were major differences between the group A sessions and the group B sessions in their use of the model. Group A followed the model relatively closely, including all the phases in the correct sequence. Any deviations from the model were negotiated with the other group members. An additional phase, in which the facilitator summarised the feedback before the presenter responded, was added to the model in two of the sessions (A1 and A2).

In contrast, Group B did not follow the model closely. In both sessions (B1 and B2) the questioning phase and the feedback and discussion phase were not clearly differentiated and for much of the session there was no clear structure to keep the session task focused or make sure that the available time was used effectively. This flexible use of the model seemed to be the norm in group B as the deviations from the model were not negotiated with the other group members. The initial socialisation and discussion period played an important role in the group B sessions.

The groups were similar in some of their deviations from the model. None of the sessions used the "round robin" format during the questioning phase and the feedback and discussion phase. Also, the presenter participated in the feedback and discussion in all but one session (A2).

This discussion of the groups' use of the Akhurst's (2000b) model has briefly indicated the important role of the facilitator in the group process. The discussion will now move on to consider this in greater depth.

4.3.3. Facilitation

The facilitation of each of the sessions differed considerably, with varying effects on the group process. Each session will be briefly described in terms of facilitation, with relevant examples from the transcripts. The trends in the facilitation across the sessions will then be considered.

4.3.3.1 Facilitation in session A1

The major role assumed by the facilitator in session A1 was to ensure that the group stayed task focused and followed the model. In order to fulfil this role, the facilitator initiated the phases of the model, educated the group about the model, and enforced the structure when the group strayed. For example, when a discussion started during phase four, the facilitator allowed the discussion to continue for a short period and then intervened to allow the presenter to respond:

Facilitator: Okay, can we just let (the presenter) respond and then ...

Member five: Oh, sorry, okay.

The facilitator also took an active role in timekeeping in order to ensure that the limited available time was used effectively.

The facilitator had a high level of control in the group, yet did not appear to be overly rigid. The group members relied on her to structure the session, even to the extent of expecting her to designate the next speaker at the start of the feedback and discussion phase:

Facilitator: Okay, if you'd like to (...?) we'll have feedback. [silence] Don't all rush. [laughing]

Member four: We are waiting for you to tell us who is going.

Facilitator: Oh, go.

This excerpt also shows some dependence on the facilitator.

The facilitator tended to wait for natural pauses in the group process before she intervened. Group members were given an opportunity to finish expressing themselves and were not cut off. The facilitation style was therefore flexible and responded to the needs of the group, yet still managed to keep the group task focused.

On four occasions, the facilitator broke out of her role and participated in the feedback and discussion. However, before she participated she requested permission from the group who encouraged her to continue.

4.3.3.2 Facilitation in Session A2

The facilitation in this session was very rigid and directive. The facilitator had a high level of control in the group and directed the participation of the group members. She took responsibility for initiating the various phases of the model and kept time strictly. As a result, the group session was very task focused.

If there were any deviations from the model, the facilitator enforced the model vigilantly, even to the extent of cutting members off in mid sentence. For example, during the questioning phase a group member starts off her turn with an observation:

Member three: Just listening to your case there are lots of issues...

Facilitator: Questions (...?)

Member three: It is a question [laughs]. Ja a lot of issues, okay um, I just can't help (...?), how's it like working with this patient?

Before the group member completes her sentence, the facilitator interrupts to remind the group member that she is meant to be asking a question. This rigidity provokes a defensive response from the group member.

At one stage the facilitator's authoritarian style provoked open resistance in the group. A group member requested permission from the facilitator to participate in the feedback and discussion phase:

Member three: Can I just say something?

Facilitator: Say something

[laughing]

Member two: Ma'am. [sarcastically]

The curt, directive facilitator response led to awkward group laughter at first, but then a group member openly expressed resistance by addressing the facilitator as if she were a teacher.

During this session the facilitator did not step out of role and participate in any discussion and no other group members assumed a facilitative role.

4.3.3.3 Facilitation in session A3

There were only three members present in session A3. The facilitator responded flexibly to the lack of members and played a dual role in the session, acting as a facilitator and also participating actively as a group member.

The facilitation style for this session tended to be democratic. For example before initiating the next phase the facilitator checked with the presenter whether they had finished saying all they wanted to:

Facilitator: Mmm, are you done? Great okay, questions?

For the first half of the session the facilitator actively facilitated the group by initiating phases one and two, and also keeping the time. However when the facilitator began participating in the discussion, the other group member took on the facilitation role and initiated both phases three and four. At the end of the session the facilitator again assumed her role by indicating that the session was over.

4.3.3.4 Facilitation in session B1

The facilitator in session B1 was relatively uninvolved in the group process. Her major activity during the session was initiating the phases of the model, however she did not attempt to enforce the structure when the group deviated from it. She also did not organise the participation of group members, and allowed a single group member to dominate the session completely. On one occasion, the facilitator played the role of timekeeper and stopped the presenter because of time constraints.

Overall, the facilitator seemed hesitant to be assertive in the session. For example, when the facilitator attempted to initiate phase three, her comment was:

Facilitator: Ja, we're in the discussion phase now [some group members laugh]

The group, however, had already been involved in a period of discussion before the facilitator's comment. Therefore, instead of playing an active role in initiating the next phase, the comment described the obvious, which led to some laughter.

4.3.3.5 Facilitation in session B2

The facilitator began session B2 by taking an active facilitation role, however as the session continued she slipped out of her role and began to participate as a normal group member. From then on, she never regained control of the group.

The facilitator initially attempted to manage the time in the group, however she lacked the assertiveness to do so effectively. For example, after an extended period of initial socialisation and discussion the facilitator apologetically suggested that the group reduce the time for the session:

Facilitator: Sorry, do we need to cut down on time?

Member one: I think that one and a half-hours is sufficient.

Facilitator: Is okay.

However one member expressed a differing opinion which the facilitator accepted immediately.

Once the presentation phase finished, the facilitator summarised the request for assistance statement and then initiated the questioning phase. However she then stepped out of the facilitation role and participated as a group member. The time management of the group suffered as a result with the allocated time for the session ending before the group had discussed the case in any depth.

The presenter of the session stepped into the gap and assumed a facilitation role by organising the participation of the members. However, near the end of the session she attempted to return the role back to the facilitator by prompting the facilitator to intervene in order to conclude the session, which had become unfocused with group members whispering amongst each other. The facilitator then unsuccessfully attempted to initiate the feedback and discussion phase, however the presenter gave her response instead and effectively concluded the session.

4.3.3.6 Summary of facilitation

The facilitation styles varied considerably between the five sessions. It is possible to conceptualise these different styles as occurring on a continuum ranging from rigid,

highly directive facilitation on one side, to uninvolved, passive facilitation on the other side. Facilitation styles occurring at either extreme of the continuum were problematic. Highly rigid, directive facilitation (session A2) kept the group task focused but provoked resistance from group members. On the other hand, passive and uninvolved facilitation (session B1 and B2) led to the session lacking focus, the group process being dominated by some group members, and the available time being used ineffectively. Facilitators who were directive, yet able to flexibly respond to the needs of the group, seemed to be most effective at keeping the group task focused yet also maintaining good relationships among the members.

Table 4.5 summarises the functions performed by the facilitators during the group sessions and the frequency with which these functions were performed in each of the sessions.

Table 4.5 Facilitator functions in each group session

Facilitator Functions	Session	Session	Session	Session	Session	Totals
	A1	A2	A3	B1	B2	
Initiate next phase	2	3	2	3	2	12
Timekeeping	1	3	2	1	2	9
Organise participation	1	6	1	-	-	8
Enforce structure	1	3	-	-	-	4
Educate group about structure	1	-	-	-	1	2
Direct feedback to RFA	-	1	-	-	-	1
Summarise/clarify RFA	-	-	-	-	1	1
Totals	6	16	5	4	6	

The frequency totals for each session in the table gives a rough indication of the relative involvement levels of the facilitators in the five sessions, highlighting the high activity level (16) of the facilitator in session A2. From this table it is clear that the three most common functions performed by the facilitators were initiating the phases of the model, time keeping and organising the participation of the group members. By fulfilling these functions, the facilitator helped the group to remain task focused and made sure that all members had a turn to participate in the limited available time.

4.3.4. Utility of peer group supervision sessions

In order to explore the utility of each of the sessions for the group members, a comparison was made between the needs they expressed, the help provided, and the aspects of the session reported by the presenter as helpful. The results from this comparison are presented in table 4.6. Each session will not be discussed individually as table 4.6 displays this information, rather the important themes from across the sessions will be considered.

Table 4.6 Utility of peer group supervision sessions

	Expressed needs	Help provided	Aspects reported as helpful by presenter
Session A1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnostic assistance (1) • Assistance with ethical dilemmas (1) • Case management (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case management assistance (7) • Psychotherapeutic suggestions (2) • Diagnostic assistance (2) • Theoretical diversity (2) • Ethical review (1) • Sharing experiences (1) • Empathetic support (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnostic assistance • Provision of diverse perspectives • Case management assistance • Clarification of issues/ Case conceptualisation
Session A2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empathetic support (2) • Assistance with ethical dilemmas (1) • Theoretical Diversity (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empathetic support (11) • Case management assistance (7) • Ethical review (7) • Clarification of issues - case conceptualisation (5) • Recognition of gains achieved (4) • Psychotherapeutic suggestions (3) • Theoretical diversity (1) • Diversity of views (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarification of issues/Case conceptualisation
Session A3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assistance with ethical dilemmas (1) • Case management (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case management assistance (6) • Psychotherapeutic suggestions (4) • Clarification of issues - case conceptualisation (3) • Recognition of gains achieved (3) • Ethical review (2) • Empathetic support (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case management assistance • Assistance with ethical dilemmas
Session B1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case management (1) • Empathetic support (1) • Assistance therapeutic intervention (1) • Need for reassurance (1) • Gaining CPD points (1) • Business admin. assistance (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case management assistance (6) • Assistance with assessment (5) • Psychotherapeutic suggestions (1) • Empathetic support (1) • Sharing information about up and coming professional events (1) • Business admin. assistance (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General comment that session was helpful
Session B2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theoretical Diversity (4) • Programme development assistance (4) • Gaining CPD points (2) • Diagnostic assistance (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarification of issues - case conceptualisation (4) • Programme development suggestions (4) • Diversity of views (3) • Psychotherapeutic suggestions (2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggestions for programme development • Theoretical diversity

Note. Number of passages coded are indicated in parentheses

4.3.4.1 Needs expressed

The majority of the needs expressed during the group sessions were case related. The presenters commonly requested assistance with issues such as case management, ethical dilemmas, diagnostic difficulties and a need for diverse theoretical perspectives on the case at hand. These needs were requested directly, most often in the request for assistance (RFA) statement. For example, in session A3 the presenter directly requested help with how to manage a case by formulating this RFA:

How do I handle this, this change in the referral, you know, from their referral question being "He's inconsistent in school", to actually what I'm finding now is the real problem?

Case related needs were not the only needs expressed by the presenters. More emotionally orientated needs, such as the need for empathic support and reassurance, were also expressed, although not as frequently as case related needs. These emotionally orientated needs were communicated indirectly during the sessions and often took the form of the presenter expressing her difficulties with a case. On occasion, group members responded to this with a reflective, empathic statement. An example from session A2 follows:

Presenter: Yeh, and I'd speak, contact the appropriate individuals. That was a verbal contract that we had, um, and I struggled with it, partly because I viewed her family as abusive, or contributing, contributing factor in what was going on with her.

Member two: It sounds almost like the dilemma is who do you call? That you're, she's needing and you're needing to refer to somebody who can help contain those things and there is nothing there.

Group members other than the presenter also requested assistance from the group. The expression of these needs was limited to the initial socialisation and discussion phase, as once the case presentation started, the group structure focused the group's attention on the needs of the presenter. Assistance was requested with the business aspects of running a private practice and also in obtaining psychological

assessment tools. The needs expressed therefore tended to be of a practical nature and were dealt with immediately through informal discussion and suggestions.

In two sessions (B1 and B2), there was a discussion during the initial socialisation and discussion phase about the group's accreditation for CPD points. This indicates that the group members have a need to obtain CPD points and that their membership in the group is a means through which to do so.

4.3.4.2 Help provided

Help was provided for almost all the presenters' expressed needs during the group sessions. This help occurred almost exclusively during the feedback and discussion phase as the group members discussed the case and provided feedback to the presenter based on her RFA. The help provided was not limited to the presenter's expressed needs and in all sessions the members provided additional assistance especially with psychotherapeutic and case conceptualisation suggestions.

Case related needs were the major focus of the sessions and tended to be addressed by members giving feedback to the presenter or discussing the issues among themselves. The manner in which this help was provided varied and could be categorised as being directive, suggestive or facilitative in nature.

Suggestive feedback was the most common form, with 38 passages coded as such. Suggestive feedback was tentative in nature and was often expressed using phrases such as "might" or "maybe". The following excerpt is an example of suggestive feedback by a group member, which was aimed at assisting the presenter with case management:

... I'm wondering whether it might help to have almost that supportive team, and also maybe then for her to develop a relationship where she's got more than one support person, for example, even if it's a support professional.

A substantial amount of the help provided was directive in nature, with 33 passages coded as such. Directive feedback was phrased in an instructive manner using phrases such as "What you need to do is..." or "You must...". An extreme example

of directive feedback occurred in session B1, when a highly experienced member gave feedback to a newly qualified member who had presented a case she had done an assessment on:

... But there, if she has specific difficulties, I go back to saying a proper assessment should have been done ... and then having done the proper assessment, I've always found that it is so useful to generate a report. Once you've got this report, then you sit the parents down and say "I've done the testing on your child, these are my findings, here is a copy for you, take it away, go home, read it and we'll talk about it ", then you organise a round table with the school, the school teachers [...?]....

Not only was the feedback directive, but it was also highly evaluative as it implied that the assessment conducted by the presenter was inadequate. It is hard to conceive that such feedback would have been experienced positively by the presenter. Thus, even though the feedback and discussion in a session may have been responsive to an expressed need, it does not mean that the presenter experienced it as helpful.

A small amount of the help provided was facilitative in nature with 7 passages coded as such. Help that was facilitative assisted the presenter in thinking through the issues involved in a problem without suggesting a specific solution. This often occurred in the form of questions posed to the presenter. The following excerpt is an example of how a group member assisted the presenter to think through the issues involved in an ethical dilemma by posing a number of questions:

But the question is, and then what? You know, is it notifying the parents to cover your back, you know, and what happens? Do the parents actually do what's, you know, for the reason for you have had to make the ethical decision? Do you know what I'm saying? So it sounds like, yah it's like, the whole thing of there is this gap and how do you cope?

Emotionally orientated needs were addressed differently to case related needs. Empathic support was given in the form of reflective statements that acknowledged the difficulties faced by the presenter. For example:

Member three: It's quite a, what?...

Member two: Hectic

Member three: Yeh, it feels heavy. It's a case that actually makes you feel where do I start with it?

Another way in which the group members gave emotional support to the presenter was by recognising the gains already achieved in the case presented. In this way the group members validated the presenter as they confirmed that she had done positive work despite the difficulty of the case. For example:

Member two: But it sounds like, sorry, that you, I mean, that you have shifted, there's been lots of shifts. It begins to feel circular but it sounds like there actually has been a hell of a lot happening.

4.3.4.3 Aspects reported as helpful

All the presenters reported that they found the input from their peers helpful. Generally the aspects of the sessions identified as being helpful matched the presenters' expressed needs and the help provided during the sessions.

However, the presenters also identified additional helpful aspects that were not needs that they expressed, such as the provision of diverse perspectives, the clarification of issues, and help with case conceptualisation. It seems that the presenters found the dialogue of different perspectives between members useful in clarifying and conceptualising the cases.

In the presenters' responses none of the emotionally oriented help provided was identified as being helpful. This may be because these needs were not directly expressed and also that the session structure maintained the focus on case related needs.

Session B1 was the only session where specific helpful aspects were not identified by the presenter. The presenter made a general comment that the session was helpful but was reluctant to identify specific aspects. This may be related to the highly directive and evaluative feedback that was given to the presenter in this session. It is likely that the presenter did not find this feedback positive but was reluctant to confront members with their failure to meet her needs. This may suggest that there was a norm in the group sessions that criticism would be suppressed.

4.3.4.4 Summary

By way of summary, table 4.7 shows a rank ordered list of the needs expressed and the help provided across all of the group sessions. These were ranked according to the number of sessions, out of the total of five, in which they occurred.

Table 4.7 Rank ordered list of expressed needs and help provided

Expressed Needs		Help provided	
Case management	3	Psychotherapeutic suggestions	5
Assistance with ethical dilemmas	3	Case management assistance	4
Theoretical Diversity	2	Empathetic support	4
Empathic support	2	Ethical review	3
Diagnostic assistance	2	Clarify issues - case conceptualisation	3
Gaining CPD points	2	Diversity of views	2
Business admin assistance	1	Theoretical diversity	2
Assistance therapeutic intervention	1	Recognition of gains achieved	2
Assistance with programme development	1	Diagnostic assistance	1
Need for reassurance	1	Assistance with assessment	1
		Programme development suggestions	1
		Sharing experiences	1
		Business admin assistance	1
		Sharing information	1

4.3.5. Group orientation

The major focus of all the group sessions was on the case presented by the presenter. The questions and group feedback and discussion concentrated on obtaining an intellectual understanding of the presented case and relatively little attention was paid to the presenter's emotional reactions to the case or to the interactions in the group process. An indication of the extent to which the sessions were case-focused can be obtained by comparing the amount of case related help provided to the amount of emotional related help provided. Table 4.8 provides this comparison based on the number of passages coded.

Table 4.8 Comparison of case vs. emotional related help levels

	Session A1	Session A2	Session A3	Session B1	Session B2	Total passages
Case related help*	15	24	15	13	13	80
Emotional related help**	1	15	4	1	0	21

* Includes all passages coded as providing help in the following areas: Psychotherapeutic suggestions, diagnostic assistance, diversity of views, assistance with assessment, ethical review, case management, programme development suggestions, clarification of issues - case conceptualisation, sharing of experiences, theoretical diversity, and sharing information.

** Includes all passages coded as providing empathetic support and recognition of gains achieved.

Table 4.8 clearly shows that the group members focused almost exclusively on providing help that was case focused. Very little help focusing on the presenter's emotional reactions to the case was provided.

The only exception was session A2 where the levels of emotionally related help were far higher than in any of the other sessions and were comparable to the case related help. The presenter in session A2 expressed her personal difficulties with the case more often than the presenters in other sessions. This may be a reason why the group members responded on a more emotional level to the presenter rather than focusing solely on an intellectual understanding of the case.

There was only one session (A3) where issues around counter-transference were addressed. In this session the presenter expressed difficulties with her own emotional reactions to a case:

Presenter: Um, no. That's, okay. The relationship with the girlfriend is tricky for me because of the transference that I am feeling at the moment. He wants, he's testing me constantly to see whether I'm going to react like the jealous mother...

One group member responded by suggesting that there were similarities between the presenter's reactions to the client and the mother's behaviour.

At no point during any of the sessions did the group deal openly with any issues related to the interactions occurring in the immediacy of the group process.

In summary, the group sessions were primarily case orientated and focused on the intellectual issues of professional practice. On occasions there was a dual orientation where the group focused on case issues as well as more emotionally orientated issues however these were never primary in the group process.

4.3.6. Interaction patterns

The preceding discussion of the findings from the transcripts has alluded to the important role that the interactions between group members play in peer group supervision. The specific role of these interactions will be discussed, focussing particularly on the relative involvement levels of group members and the communication networks between them. The role of status relations and support versus criticism in the group process will also be examined.

Figure 4.2 graphically depicts the relative involvement levels of the group members in each of the sessions. The number of interactions occurring between members is also displayed in this figure, giving an indication of the communication networks in the sessions. Figure 4.2 was generated using a drawing software package called "CorelDRAW" (version 9).

Figure 4.2 Involvement levels and communication networks

Legend

- * Circles represent the group members present. The percentage labels indicate the proportion of characters spoken by the group member in the specific session. The size of the circle is related to this percentage.
- * The lines that join the circles represent the interactions that occur between group members. The percentage labels indicate the proportion of the total number of interactions, that the interactions between the two group members occupy. The thickness of the line is related to this percentage.
- ❖ The arrows that point out from the circles to the larger encompassing circle, are similar to interactional lines, except that they represent outgoing interactions that are either directed to the group as a whole, or are of unclear direction.

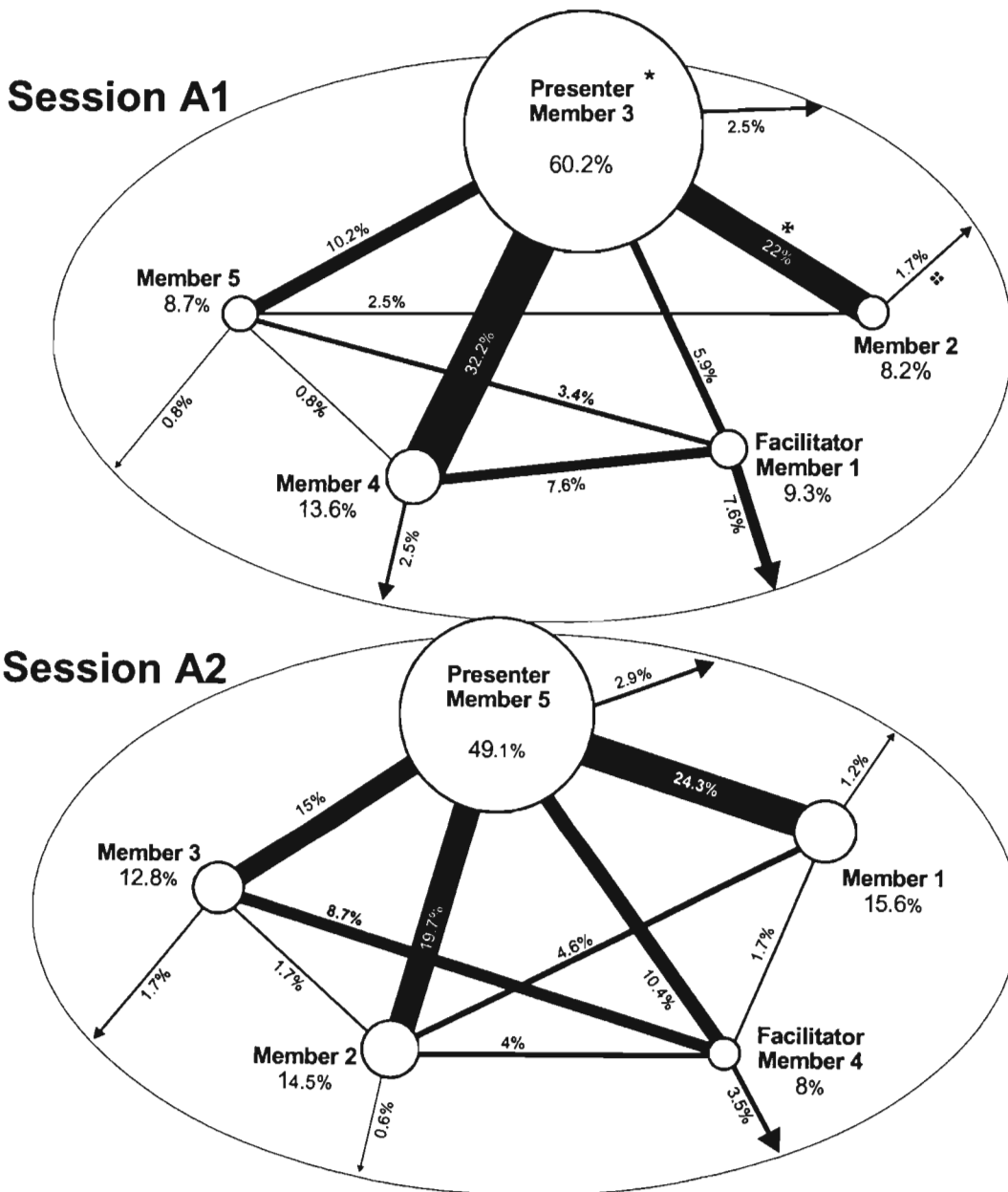
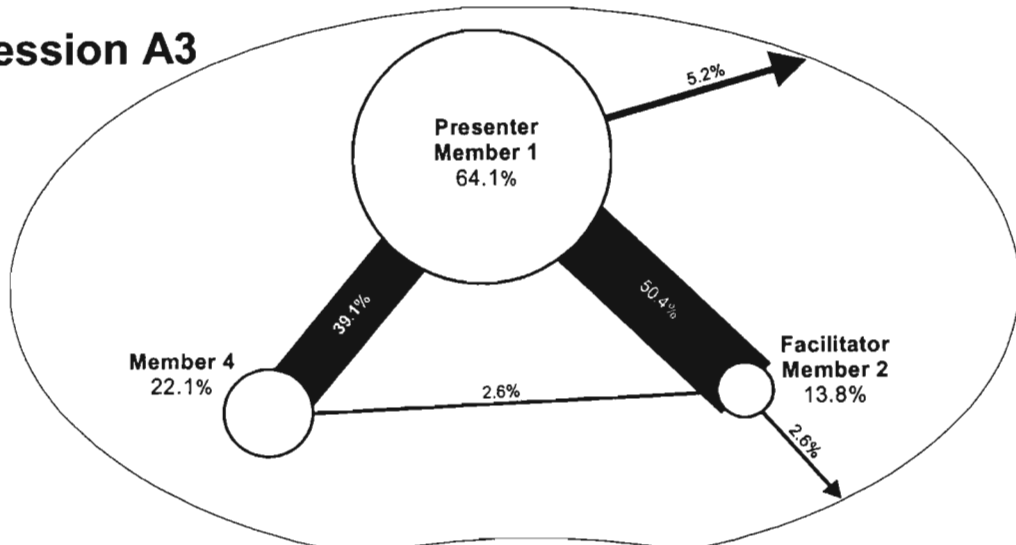
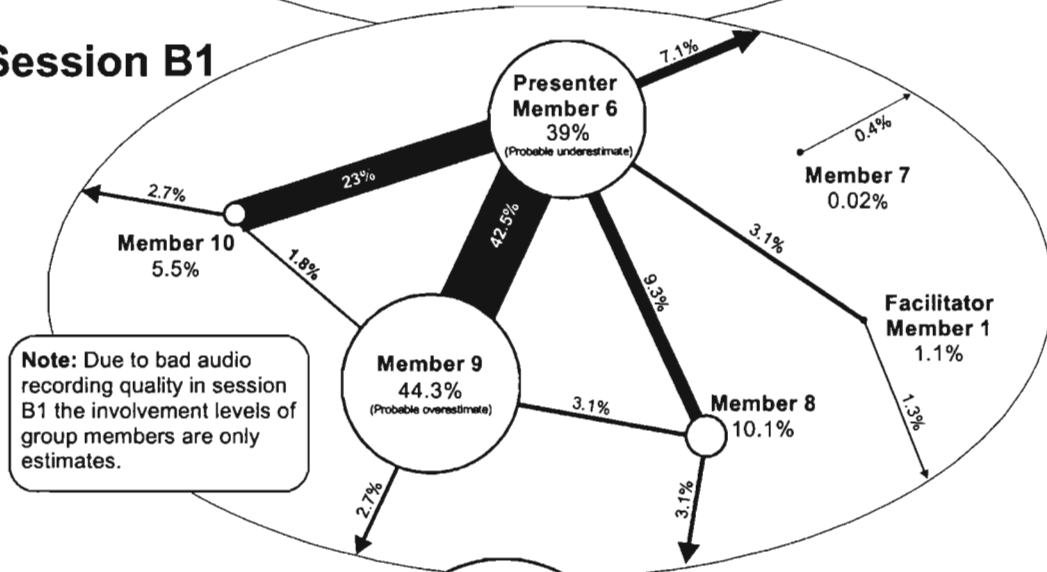


Figure 4.2 Continued

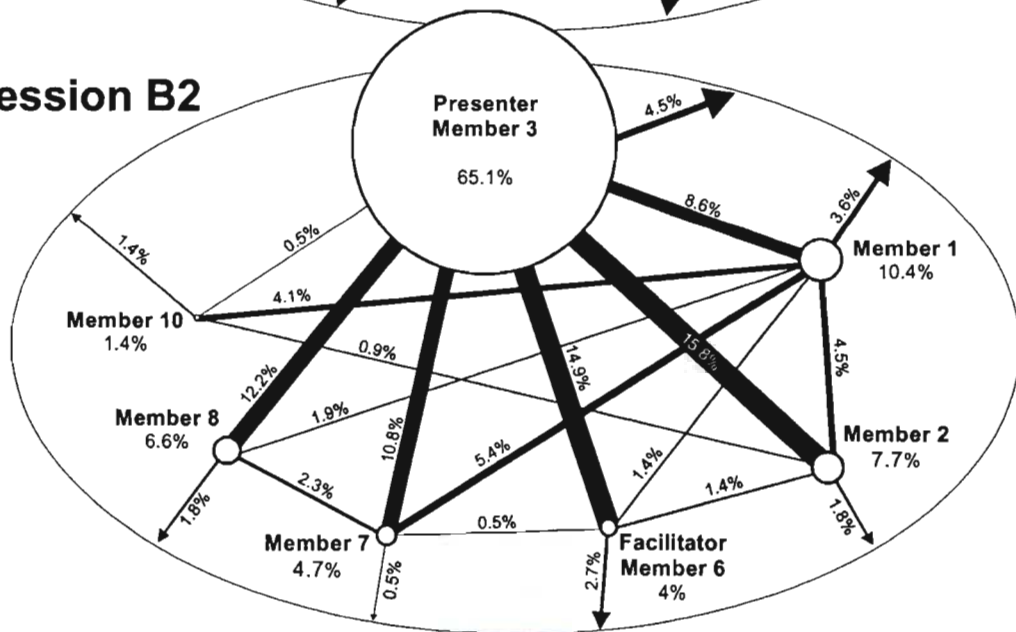
Session A3



Session B1



Session B2



4.3.6.1 Involvement levels

Referring to figure 4.2, a comparison of the relative levels of involvement of the members in all the sessions reveals a number of trends. In four of the group sessions (A1, A2, A3, B2), the presenter's involvement levels were substantially higher than the other group members. In these sessions the characters spoken by the presenter accounted for half or more of all characters spoken during the session. Relative to the presenter, the other group members' levels of involvement were uniformly low.

Session B1 differed considerably from all the other sessions, as a group member other than the presenter (member nine) had the highest measured involvement level in the group. However this may not necessarily be a true reflection of the group process because the bad audio quality of the session recording meant that accurate character counts were impossible. The involvement levels of the presenter may therefore be an underestimate. However the measured involvement levels do correctly indicate that member nine dominated the session, which may have resulted in the extremely low levels of involvement seen in the other group members.

4.3.6.2 Communication networks

The majority of interactions in the sessions occurred between the presenter and the group members. Figure 4.2 clearly shows the presenters as the central figures with the majority of interactions radiating from them in a wheel-like pattern. In contrast, interactions between the group members, other than the presenter, were at lower levels. One minor exception to this trend occurred in session B2, where member one also played a central role in the group with interactions occurring between her and every other group member. This is a result of the interactions during the initial socialisation stage of this session where member one was the focus of a discussion about CPD points.

In four of the sessions (A1, A2, A3, B2) the groups seemed relatively cohesive units with each group member interacting with a number of the other members. There were no subgroups in these sessions.

Session B1 differed from this trend. The group in this session was not cohesive with two members (one and seven) having few, if any, interactions with other members. One of these members was the facilitator, which is a further indication of the uninvolved facilitation style in this session. In contrast, three of the other members (nine, ten and the presenter) in the group had extremely strong interaction links. A visual inspection of this session in figure 4.2 shows the formation of a subgroup between these members. This subgroup formed around one member (nine) who dominated the session. The other group members withdrew from the group process, reluctant to challenge the dominating member.

4.3.6.3 Support vs. criticism

The discussion of the utility of the sessions in section 4.3.4 highlighted the important role that empathic support of the presenter played in the group sessions. This support was a response to the difficulties faced by the presenter with the case that they were presenting. However, group members also required support that was not related to the case presented but rather to the anxiety that they felt as a result of the actual group process.

On a number of occasions group members became hesitant and anxious after they had made a contribution in the group. For example, in session A2 member two made a reflective statement to the presenter after she had given some feedback:

Member two: ... testing the relationship, testing you. It sounds like you feel quite tested and challenged? ...

[silence 5"]

Member two: ... Do what you have to do with that awareness, but [laughing]...

[silence 4"]

Member one: It's such a mess and it's hard for me to, to conceptualise how I'm going to respond like to you ...

However when the presenter did not respond, she appeared to become anxious and began to downplay her contribution, possibly in an effort to elicit a supportive response from the presenter. Again, the presenter did not respond, and after a period of silence member one intervened, in order to continue the flow of interaction.

On other occasions when members expressed anxiety after making a contribution, they did receive supportive responses. An example follows:

Member four: ... because ethically, you kind of, you placed in this position. I don't know whether I'm making sense here.

Presenter: Okay no I know what you're saying here.

These examples highlight that group members felt anxious in the sessions as their contributions involved exposing themselves to their peers. This anxiety prompted a need for support and reassurance, which was not always met.

On occasions during the sessions, group members openly disagreed and criticised each other. In order to maintain good relationships, group members used a number of strategies to negotiate these disagreements or criticisms.

One method used to negotiate differences or criticisms was to juxtapose them with supportive statements. For example in session A2 a member expressed an opinion about case management that differed from the previous member. This difference in opinion was negotiated by first expressing an understanding of the other member's perspective and then identifying aspects that they agreed with, before going on to give a different opinion:

I hear what you are saying but I don't know, I don't know, I mean I suppose it [depends?] on your experience of the client and what is happening, and I agree, you know, in a sense it seems like a critical point almost, you know, in the therapy, and ideally to work intensely, if she's kind of receptive to that. But it's like, I think this, the tension also with the ethical stuff is, you need to do that and there also needs to be containment, and the dilemma with this is that there's no containment outside of it.

The initial support and agreement served to acknowledge the value of the other member's contribution before going on to express an alternative opinion. This strategy may have minimised the possibility of any conflict.

The presenter in session A2 used a similar strategy during her response to the group. She began by being critical of the group's feedback by rejecting some of the psychotherapeutic suggestions that were made:

I tried visualisations and she just blocks out, dissociates completely. Goes away, and you can see it happening, you know. So I'm a bit worried about that. I'm just giving you feedback now. I think that what you guys said is so amazing, so valuable.

However she then went on to report that the feedback was valuable. She therefore negotiated her criticism of the group by juxtaposing it with support of the feedback she was given.

Another strategy used to negotiate criticism was to retract critical statements by apologising. For example in session A3 a member asked the presenter a number of questions that were critical of the role she was taking in therapy:

Member four: If you look at it dynamically when you look at it you are playing the same role as the mother, aren't you saving him? Aren't you protecting him by calling her in and wanting to discuss this? Aren't you?

Presenter: Mmm.

Member four: But um, sorry I didn't mean to say that, I meant to ask you, are you comfortable enough to talk about transference with him?

The presenter did not respond positively to the criticism, which then prompted the member to retract the criticism and repair the possible break in the relationship by apologising.

A number of disagreements or criticisms were not negotiated using the methods discussed, with varying consequences. Minor differences in opinions on case management and theoretical conceptualisation occurred without any negotiation and resulted in no observable negative consequences for the group process. In fact these seemed to be beneficial, as they provided a diversity of opinions within the group, which was necessary to meet the presenter's expressed needs.

However, in session B1 a particularly dominant group member provided the presenter with some very critical feedback about the assessment she presented.

This critical feedback has already been discussed as an example of directive feedback in section 4.3.4.2. The dominant member did not negotiate the criticism in a manner that would maintain a good relationship. The presenter did not seem to respond positively to the feedback and replied with deferential minimal phrases such as “Mm” or “Ja”, or else she become defensive and began to justify what she had done.

Some group members used overt agreement or “pseudo-agreement” to avoid disagreeing with other members. For example in session B2, member seven made some treatment suggestions and then asked the presenter whether she thought these suggestions would work:

Member seven: Do you think that would work?

[silence 3”]

Presenter: Mm. Possibly ...

The silence that followed and the presenter’s hesitant response suggests that the presenter may have been sceptical of the suggestions but felt that she could not reject them. She therefore gave a hesitant affirmative response or “pseudo-agreement”. Another example of the use of “pseudo-agreement” to avoid disagreeing with another member occurred earlier on in the same session:

Member three: ... But um, is that predisposing factor?

[silence 5”]

Facilitator: Could be.

In summary, group members were generally anxious about exposing themselves during the group sessions and therefore required support and reassurance that their contributions were valued. Disagreement and criticism were avoided when possible, even to the extent of using pseudo-agreement. However when criticism or disagreement did occur, they were generally negotiated carefully in order to maintain good relationships between members. Strategies that were used included the juxtaposition of support and criticism, and the apologetic retraction of criticism.

4.3.6.4 Status relations

The group members were peers and therefore were of relatively equal professional status. Within the group sessions, they generally attempted to maintain this equal status quo. This may be one of the reasons that any criticism was carefully negotiated so that no member increased in status at the expense of another member.

An example of an attempt to maintain equal status relations could be seen in how a member in session A2 negotiated giving an opinion:

Um, you know with addictions, I don't deal very much with addictions so I'm afraid my experience is a bit limited, with any kind of addiction problem you, the client needs to have the skill and the coping mechanisms, um, and they need to manage and control that addiction ...

She began her feedback by disclaiming that she had any expertise in the area of addiction, however she then went on to provide an opinion. The disclaimer may have been to communicate to the other group members that the opinion was not an attempt to increase her status relative to the other group members.

Despite attempts to maintain equal status, differentiation of status did occur during the group sessions with some group members becoming more dominant. This differentiation in status was related to the role played by a group member in a particular group session, and the difference in the experience levels between members.

Group members generally became more dominant when they took on the role of the facilitator. For example, a dramatic difference in status between sessions was evident in member four. In session A1 she deferred all authority to the facilitator of the session:

Facilitator: Okay, if you'd like to (...?) we'll have feedback. [silence] Don't all rush.

[laughing]

Member four: We are waiting for you to tell us who is going.

However in session A2, she played the role of the facilitator and became very dominant and directive during the session. Examples of her dominance and the group's efforts to resist it have already been provided in section 4.3.3.2.

However, some facilitators seemed reluctant to take on a more dominant status even though the role of facilitator sanctioned it. This was evident in sessions B1 and B2 where the facilitators took on a more dominant role initially but then resisted this and attempted to participate as a normal member.

Differentiation in status also occurred as a result of diversity in the experience levels of members. A clear example of this occurred in session B1, which was dominated by a member who had considerably more professional experience than any other group member. None of the other group members attempted to actively confront this dominance but instead deferred by becoming very passive in the group process. The relatively inexperienced presenter in this session also deferred to the dominant member and accepted some very directive and evaluative feedback from her without any challenge. These examples suggest that relative experience levels are an important determinant of status in these group sessions.

This discussion has highlighted that group members attempted to maintain equal status relations during the session by negotiating criticism and also disclaiming any expertise. However status differentiation did occur at times between group members. Determinants of status included the facilitator role and the relative professional experience levels of members.

4.4 Comparing questionnaire and transcript data

The questionnaires and transcripts both provided data on the utility of peer group supervision, specifically the needs of psychologists in practice and the help provided by peer group supervision. The questionnaires accessed the group members' perceptions on these topics whereas the transcripts provided data from the actual group process. A comparison of this data (see Table 4.2 and 4.6) reveals that there was a remarkable concordance between the group members' perceptions and what actually occurred in the group process.

The needs of practising psychologists identified in the questionnaires and the needs expressed during the group sessions were very similar. Furthermore the aspects of peer group supervision reported as being helpful in the questionnaires and the help provided in the actual group sessions were comparable. Interestingly, group members were able to report that they needed peer support in the questionnaires but during the group sessions, needs for support were only expressed indirectly.

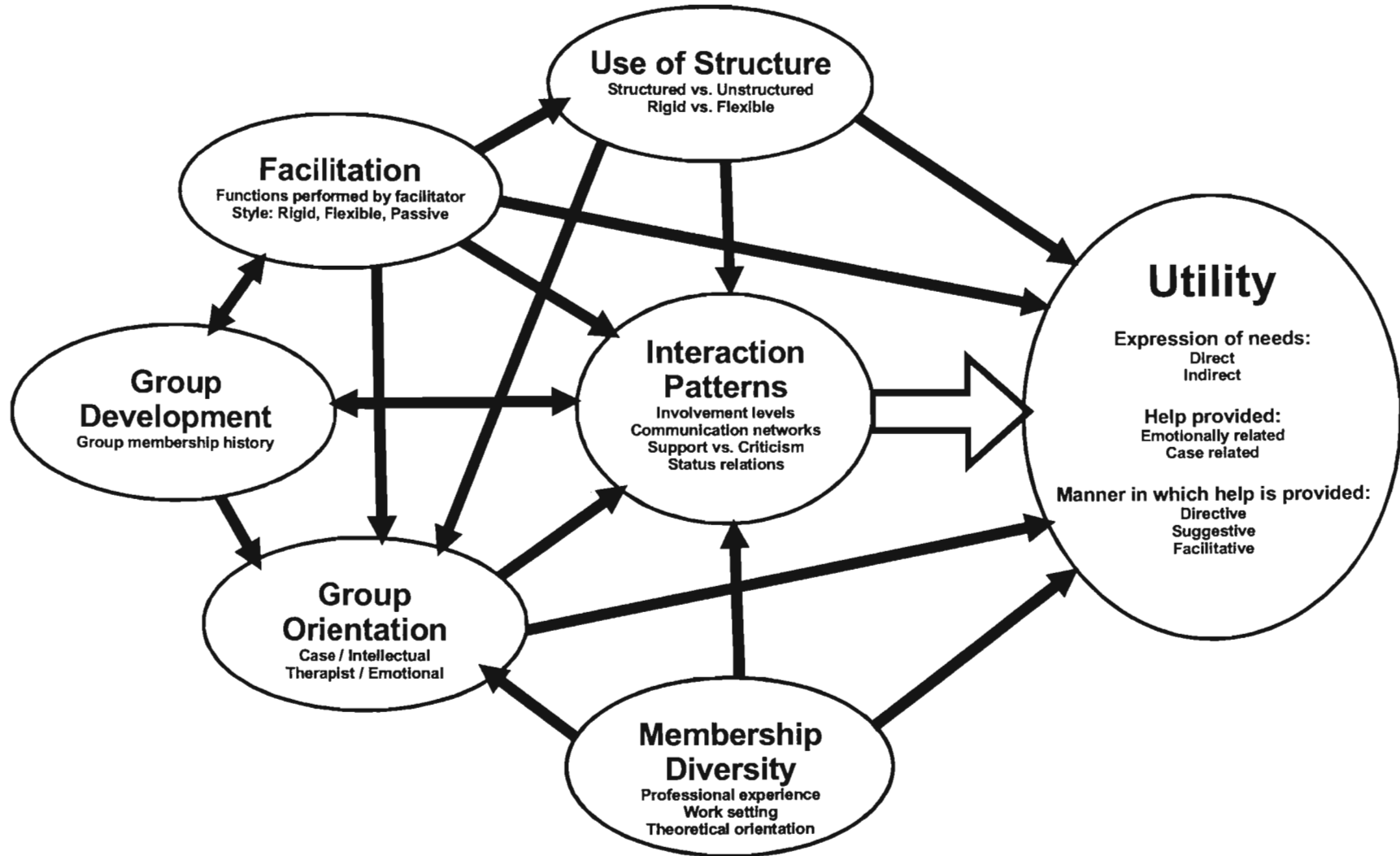
Data from the questionnaires may help in trying to understand why Groups A and B differed substantially in their use of structure. A group member, who had been a member of both groups, made a comment in her questionnaire that group A adhered more closely to Akhurst's (2000b) model because the group members had been exposed previously to the model. In contrast, many of the members of group B had never had any previous experience of the model. This suggests that the previous group experiences of group members play an important role in determining how groups structure themselves.

Diversity in the experience levels of group members was identified as being problematic in one of the questionnaires. This view was supported by data from the transcripts, specifically in session B1 where a highly experienced member dominated the entire group session.

4.5 Integration of findings

A number of factors that may play a role in mediating the utility of peer group supervision emerged from the literature and the data analysis of this study. These factors include membership diversity, the use of structure, facilitation, group orientation, and interaction patterns. The findings on each of these factors have been considered separately in this chapter, however, it is important to note that they do not operate separately from each other and are interconnected. In an attempt to integrate these various factors, a model that proposes a number of plausible relationships between these factors will be presented. Figure 4.3 graphically depicts this model.

Figure 4.3 Model of relationships between factors



The use of structure, facilitation, the developmental stage of the group, diversity of membership, orientation of the group and interaction patterns between members all play an important role in the utility of peer group supervision. These factors determine how needs are expressed in the group sessions, the type of help provided and the manner in which it is provided. They therefore can be conceptualised as factors that mediate the utility of peer group supervision.

For example, in all the sessions the use of structure played an important role in determining the orientation of the group. The structure maintained the group's focus on case related issues by using a case presentation format, and therefore group sessions tended to be case orientated. The facilitator also played an important role in keeping the group focused on the case presented. This case orientation led to the relative neglect of emotionally related needs during the sessions as the presenters did not directly express these needs and the group did not focus on providing help for them. This example illustrates how the use of structure, facilitation, group orientation and utility are connected.

The inter-relatedness of these factors can be seen in another example. In session B1 the group membership diversity in terms of experience levels led to an interaction pattern where one member dominated the session. A passive uninvolved facilitator allowed this to continue and as a result the presenter received little help from less dominant members. This example demonstrates how the membership diversity, interaction patterns and facilitation mediated the utility of the session for the presenter.

Figure 4.3 indicates the central role played by interaction patterns in peer group supervision. All the other factors influence how group members interact with each other and it is these interactions that mediate the utility of the group sessions. For example the structure of the sessions determines the communication networks and relative involvement levels of the group members. These communication and involvement patterns influence whose needs are expressed, whose needs are met, and the manner in which these occur.

4.6 Connecting research questions and findings

This chapter has not been structured explicitly around the research questions. Rather, for ease of discussion, it has been structured according to the different types of data collected in this study. This means that specific research questions have been addressed in a number of different sections.

For purposes of clarity, table 4.9 links the research questions to the sections that addressed them.

Table 4.9 Research questions and the sections that addressed them

Research question	Questionnaire data	Transcript data
How do psychologists in practice use the Akhurst's (2000b) model?	4.2.3.5 Comment of the structure used	4.3.2 Use of structure
Does peer group supervision meet the needs of psychologists in practice? Sub questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the needs of psychologists in practice? • Which needs are met? • How are they met? 	4.2.3 Perceptions of the utility of peer group supervision.	4.3.4 Utility of peer group supervision sessions 4.3.5 Group orientation
Which factors mediate the utility of peer group supervision?	4.2.1 Membership history 4.2.1 Demographic details of group members	4.3.1 Group membership 4.3.2 Use of structure 4.3.3 Facilitation 4.3.5 Group orientation 4.3.6 Interaction patterns 4.5 Integration of findings

5. Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to evaluate and interpret the findings of this study. This will be achieved by comparing the findings with previous research on peer group supervision. A theoretical framework derived from the field of group dynamics will also be used to interpret the findings and explore possible explanations for them. The insights generated from the evaluation and interpretation of the findings will be used to suggest possible adaptations that may increase the utility of the model used to structure the group that participated in this study.

5.2 Benefits of peer group supervision

There were a number of similarities between the benefits of peer group supervision found in this study and those identified in the literature. These will be briefly reviewed.

The findings of this study suggest that social support is a beneficial aspect of peer group supervision. Group members showed empathic support when the presenter expressed difficulties and they also affirmed the presenter by recognising the gains achieved by the presenter in difficult cases. Group members also indicated in the questionnaires that social support was one of the most helpful aspects of peer group supervision. These findings are supported by the literature, which cites social support as one of the major benefits of peer group supervision (Greenburg et al., 1985; Marks & Hixon, 1986; Todd & Pine, 1968).

Schreiber and Frank (1983) argue that one of the benefits of peer group supervision is that it provides a forum for the expression and exploration of clinical options. This is supported by Lewis et al.'s (1988) survey, where the majority of respondents indicated that peer group supervision was beneficial as it provided suggestions for problem cases. The findings of the current study also suggest that assistance with

case management is one of the major beneficial aspects of peer group supervision. In the group sessions, case management assistance was the most common form of help provided.

Both the literature and this study's findings suggest that one of the benefits of peer group supervision is that it provides a forum for ethical review. In the group sessions studied, the ethical dilemmas of the presenter were often the focus of group discussions. This confirms the views of a number of authors who argue that peer group supervision has the potential to maintain ethical standards through a system of peer review (Greenburg et al., 1985; Hare & Frankena, 1972; Lewis et al., 1988; Schreiber & Frank, 1983).

Diversity in theoretical perspectives was one of the most commonly expressed needs and type of help provided in this study. This finding lends support to the many references in the literature that the diversity of perspectives, provided by peer group supervision, is particularly beneficial (Bernard & Goodyear, 1998; Crutchfield & Borders, 1997; Schreiber & Frank, 1983; Todd & Pine, 1968).

Schreiber and Frank (1983) suggest that a potential benefit of peer group supervision is that it provides a forum for the discussion of professional issues. Other authors suggest that this may lead to increased networking among professionals (Crutchfield et al., 1997) and improved professional relationships (Agnew et al., 2000). The current study's findings confirm that peer group supervision has this potential. The group in this study used the initial socialisation and discussion period as a forum to discuss professional issues such as CPD points and assessment tools.

Winstead et al. (1974) argue that one of the major benefits of peer group supervision is that it increases the amount of supervision available to professionals. This is supported by this study. Four out of the ten group members indicated on the questionnaire given to them that they did not attend traditional dyadic supervision. Peer group supervision was therefore the only form of supervision that they received.

One of the major benefits associated with peer group supervision in the literature is its potential to assist group members with the difficulties they encounter with counter-transference (Marks & Hixon, 1986; Shatan et al., 1962). The findings from this study only lend partial support to this, as there was only one occasion where difficulties with counter-transference were addressed during the five group sessions studied. However this may be due to the case orientation of the group sessions which did not focus on the emotional reactions of the therapist.

Two studies suggest that peer group supervision is effective at increasing the counselling skills of group members (Agnew et al., 2000; Wilbur et al., 1994). The current study cannot confirm these claims, as there was no measurement of counselling skills included in the study. However, psychotherapeutic suggestions were the most common type of help offered during the group sessions, with group members making numerous suggestions of possible issues to focus on or techniques to use in psychotherapy. It is possible that these suggestions may help to improve the counselling skills of the group members.

The current study cannot comment on the assertion in much of the literature that peer group supervision leads to increases in autonomy, self-esteem and self-efficacy among group members (Akhurst, 2000b; Christensen & Kline, 2001; Crutchfield et al., 1997; Marks & Hixon, 1986; Nobler, 1980; Starling & Baker, 2000; Todd & Pine, 1968). The absence of measures of the group members prior to their participation in peer group supervision, meant that any changes in these attributes could not be assessed. Furthermore, the data collected in this study was not appropriate for the measurement of these attributes. Similar reasons also prevent this study from commenting on the suggestion in the literature, that peer group supervision may increase group members' abilities to supervise themselves (Akhurst, 2000a; Christensen & Kline, 2001; Winstead et al., 1974).

In summary, the findings of the current study provided support for much of the assertions in the literature about the benefits of peer group supervision. Attention will now be turned to the factors that mediate these benefits. A group dynamics perspective will be applied to understand how these mediating factors operate and the relationships between them.

5.3 Group membership

The characteristics of the group members played an important role in affecting the group interactions in this study. The most significant attribute was the experience levels of the group members, with a large discrepancy in experience levels leading to problematic interactions between group members. A member with substantially more professional experience tended to dominate other group members in the sessions where she was present. This finding supports Hare and Frankena's (1972) suggestions that diversity in experience levels may hinder the group process, as the inclusion of a more experienced member tends to decrease the participation levels of less experienced members.

A possible reason that diversity in experience levels becomes problematic is that it leads to a differentiation in status between group members. Group members who have more experience may be attributed more status, possibly because they are older or they may have more expertise. These status patterns then tend to be expressed through interpersonal behaviours that demonstrate dominance and submissiveness (Forsyth, 1990), such as differential levels of participation and directiveness.

The problems associated with diversity in experience levels may also be a function of the accompanying diversity in levels of professional development. As psychologists develop professionally, their needs may change and therefore they may require different things from peer group supervision (Reising & Daniels, 1983). It may be difficult for the same group to meet these divergent needs, which results in the problems experienced.

5.4 Group development

Situating the group, which was the subject of this study, in its developmental context may help to explain and interpret a number of the study's findings. Tuckman's (1965) successive stage theory of group development (described in section 2.2.3) will be used as a theoretical framework to conceptualise the development of the group in this study.

During the period of this study, the group underwent major developmental changes that have been described in section 4.2.1. As part of these changes, group A was reconstituted with several new members to form what has been designated group B. It is likely that, due to these changes, the developmental levels of group A and B differed at the time that their sessions were audio-taped.

Group A had been meeting for 18 months before the three group sessions were taped. During these sessions, there were some indications that a certain level of trust had developed in the group, as members exposed themselves by discussed some of the emotional difficulties that they were having with their cases. The group sessions were clearly structured, which suggests that the norms and goals of the group had been negotiated. These factors suggest that the group had progressed past the orientation stage of group development. There were some indications that group A was in the conflict stage when their sessions were audio-taped, as there was tension and conflict between group members during session A2. This conflict seemed to be centred on issues of power and control over the group structure. A failure to negotiate this sensitive conflict stage of group development may have been one of the factors that led to the group disbanding for a period of time.

The reconstitution of the group after eight months to form group B, with a number of new members, probably led to a regression in the group's development as the group members had to orientate themselves to the new group. There were a number of indications from the two audio-taped sessions that group B was still at the initial orientation stage of group development. The lack of expression of emotional difficulties by group members implied that significant levels of trust and safety had not yet developed in the group for peers to expose themselves to one another. The lack of structure in the group sessions also suggested that the norms and modality of the group had not yet been fully negotiated between group members. One of the possible reasons that group B was still in the orientation stage, despite having already having met for eight months for being audio-taped, may be the frequency of the group meetings. The monthly meetings of Group B may not have allowed enough continuity in the group process for trust and cohesion to develop among group members.

This developmental perspective on the functioning of the group in this study may assist in explaining the study's findings on group orientation and the interaction patterns between group members.

5.4.1. Group development and group orientation

The group A sessions were primarily case orientated, however, there were aspects of the sessions that included a process or emotional orientation (especially in session A2). The fact that group A had successfully negotiated the orientation stage meant that rudimentary levels of trust had developed between group members, despite some of the conflict that existed. These trust levels may have enabled group members to begin exposing themselves by discussing emotional issues during the group sessions.

In contrast, the group B sessions were solely case-orientated. The fact that the group was most likely at the orientation stage meant that levels of trust among members were low, because they were still cautiously testing each other as they orientated to the group. These relatively low trust levels may have led to group members being guarded and focusing on issues that were case related in an effort to avoid exposing themselves.

These relationships between the groups' developmental levels and orientations suggest that group orientation may change and become more emotionally orientated as the group develops and members become more willing to expose themselves and discuss emotional issues.

The developmental levels of the groups may have had an effect on the utility of peer group supervision, by effecting the group orientation, which in turn influenced the types of needs expressed by group members and the type of help provided. For example, a peer supervision group at the orientation stage will most likely be case-orientated, which means that emotionally related needs will not be expressed or met. This was the case in group B.

5.4.2. Group development and interaction patterns

This study's findings on the interaction patterns of support and criticism in the group sessions may also be related to the group developmental levels. Members tended to be anxious in the group sessions and required support and reassurance from other group members when they made contributions in the group. This initial anxiety may be due to the fact that the groups were at the beginning stages of group development when anxiety levels are often high, as group members feel vulnerable about exposing themselves in a group context.

The group members also tended to avoid disagreeing or criticising each other in the sessions, and if they did, these criticisms were normally carefully negotiated. These interaction patterns may be due to the fact that the building of trust is a central task during the initial stages of group development. Therefore, any criticism or challenge tends to be avoided, until some degree of trust is built in the group.

5.5 Group session structure

The model (Akhurst, 2000b) used to structure the group sessions had a substantial impact on a number of aspects of the group process in this study, especially the group orientation, the involvement levels of group members, and the communication networks.

5.5.1. Group session structure and group orientation

Group development was not the only determinant of the orientation of the groups. The group session structure played an important role in this regard by focusing the groups' activities on the case presented, which led to the groups being case orientated.

As discussed previously, the group orientation may change and become more emotionally orientated as the group develops. This suggests that the group session structure may need to adapt, as the group develops, in order to fit the group

orientation. Wilbur et al., (1991) comment on this topic in the conclusion of their study on peer group supervision:

As the group becomes more cohesive and trusting, however, the positive effects of structure decrease, and continued use of high structure even may impede the group process (p.99).

It is also a possibility that the group session structure may affect group development by influencing the group-orientation. If the session structure keeps the group's orientation case focused, it may prevent the group from sharing emotionally, which in turn may prevent higher levels of trust developing between group members. Group development may therefore be impeded, as the higher levels of trust required for later stages of group development may not be developed.

5.5.2. Group structure and involvement levels

One of the findings of this study was that the involvement levels of the group members differed substantially. The presenter's involvement levels were far greater than the other group members, whose involvement levels were uniformly lower. These discrepancies in involvement levels are most likely a product of the structure used for the group sessions. In this structure, the presenter occupies a considerable amount of the group process by presenting the case, answering the questions posed, and responding to the feedback provided by other group members.

Although the structure attempts to focus the groups' activities on assisting the presenter, the resultant discrepancy in involvement levels may be problematic for the dynamics of the group. Group members who have low levels of involvement in the group may disengage from the group process. This occurred on a number of occasions in sessions B1 and B2 when group members began parallel conversations that were unrelated to the case being discussed.

5.5.3. Group structure and communication networks

The model used to structure the group sessions had a major impact on the groups' networks of communication. Phase two (questioning) and phase three (feedback and

discussion) both channelled interactions so that they only occurred between the presenter and the other group members. Interactions between group members, other than the presenter, were limited, as the session structure inhibited these. This resulted in the groups' communication networks forming a wheel-like pattern with the majority of interactions radiated between the central presenter and other members.

From a group dynamics perspective, the groups' communication networks could be described as being centralised, because the presenter occupied a central position at the hub of the groups' interactions. Although this centralisation allowed for the orderly processing of information, there are aspects associated with centralised networks that may make them problematic for peer supervision groups.

Numerous studies suggest that centralised networks are more effective at performing simple tasks, while decentralised networks are more effective with complex tasks (Shaw, 1978). The tasks that peer supervision groups are required to perform are often complex in nature and involve the processing of large amounts of information that is frequently inconsistent. A group structure that allows a decentralised communication network may therefore enable peer supervision groups to perform more efficiently, as more threads of information can be processed if group members are able to interact with a wider network of other members.

Research has also indicated that communication networks are related to the satisfaction levels of group members. Overall satisfaction of group members seems to be highest in decentralised networks, whereas satisfaction in centralised networks depends on the group member's position in the network. Greater satisfaction is reported by members who occupy more central positions (Shaw, 1978). Applying these research findings to the current study, it is possible that the centralised communication networks evident in the groups studied, may have resulted in differential satisfaction levels among group members, with the presenter in each session experiencing higher levels of satisfaction than other group members.

It is difficult to assess whether the satisfaction levels of group members actually followed these patterns, as the data collected did not provide a measurement of member satisfaction for each session. However, the fact that the centralised

communication networks concentrated the groups' efforts on assisting the presenters' with their expressed needs may have resulted in the presenters having higher levels of satisfaction compared to the other group members. Group members who occupied relatively peripheral positions in the communication networks, would not have their needs considered on a manifest level during the group sessions and therefore their satisfaction levels may have been lower. This may be problematic, as there are usually large intervals between group members getting the opportunity to present a case and request assistance from the group. A group session structure that produces a more decentralised communication network may possibly lead to the needs of more than one member being expressed and addressed in a single session. As a result, overall satisfaction levels in the group may increase.

The propositions that have been made on the relative benefits of different types of communication networks for peer supervision groups should be treated with caution. These propositions were based on communication network research that was conducted in laboratory settings with measurements of task complexity, group effectiveness and member satisfaction that may not be relevant to group situations outside a laboratory setting. Further research that focuses on communication networks in naturally occurring groups is needed.

5.6 Limitations of the peer supervision group

The preceding discussion has identified a number of characteristics of the peer supervision groups in this study that may limit the groups' potential utility. These will be briefly reviewed. Following this review, the possible negative effects of certain styles of facilitation will be discussed.

The exclusive case orientation of the group B sessions may limit the group's utility for a number of reasons. Firstly, emotionally related needs are not expressed and therefore the group may not provide assistance with these needs. Secondly, an exclusive case orientation may limit the group's abilities to deal with any difficulties that arise in the relationships between group members. A process orientation may be needed to help resolve any emotional reactions that occur between group members (Greenburg et al., 1985; Hunt & Issacharoff, 1975). A dual orientation may

therefore assist the group to stay task focused, but at the same time maintain collaborative relationships between group members.

The lack of criticism and challenge evident in the groups studied may also limit their potential utility by reducing the diversity of views expressed. This may limit the potential benefits which have been attributed to the exposure to diverse perspectives, such increases in divergent thinking, coping abilities, and reflexivity (Bernard & Goodyear, 1998; Crutchfield & Borders, 1997; Todd & Pine, 1968). A lack of criticism and challenge may also be problematic, if patient care is sacrificed in favour of a supportive group atmosphere (Winstead et al., 1974).

Other characteristics of the groups that may limit their utility include the diversity in experience levels of the group members, the discrepancy in involvement levels between members, and the strong centralised communication networks present in the groups. The possible negative effects of these characteristics have already been extensively discussed.

The facilitation styles varied widely in the five group sessions that were studied, with different effects on the group process. Two facilitation styles seemed to negatively affect the group processes, possibly limiting the potential utility of the groups. Passive, uninvolved facilitation was associated with unstructured group sessions where time was used ineffectively and some group members dominated others. On the opposite side of the extreme, facilitation that was overly rigid and directive provoked resistance from other group members. However rigid and directive facilitation was also associated with increased sharing of emotional difficulties among group members. This rigid and directive facilitation style may have provided a level of safety in the group process that allowed group members to expose themselves by sharing their difficulties.

5.7 Adaptations to increase utility of peer group supervision

One of the aims of this study was to evaluate the utility of peer group supervision in order to reveal ways in which its utility can be maximised. The insights generated by

the evaluation and interpretation of the findings of this study will be used to suggest a number of adaptations to the group that may increase its utility.

A number of the adaptations that will be suggested aim to balance the group's functioning between the three core activities that Johnson and Johnson (1991) suggest are essential for group effectiveness. These activities include task-related activities, relationship-maintaining activities, and developing and adapting to changing conditions.

The fact that group B deviated considerably from the model used to structure the group sessions suggests that the session structure may need to be renegotiated and adapted by the group. The group's deviations from the structure may indicate a lack of familiarity with the model, or they may be a form of resistance against it. The participation of all group members in a renegotiation of the structure may assist the group in three ways. Firstly, the group member's familiarity with the group structure will increase. Secondly, the participation of all group members in the decision making process may decrease any resistance to the structure. Thirdly, a renegotiation will give group members an opportunity to adapt the structure to suit their own needs.

It may be useful to make this renegotiation of the session structure a regular occurrence in the life of the group, possibly annually. This may enable the structure to adapt to the changes in the group, which occur as individual members and the group develops.

One of the possible changes that may increase the group's utility, would be to include a stage in the session structure that stimulates a process orientation within the group. This could take the form of a phase near the end of the session where each group member is given an opportunity to reflect on the group process. This reflection may include a comment on the relationships between group members during the session and possibly some sharing of the emotional reactions of the group member to the issues discussed in the session. Alternatively, a process observer could be designated for each session, whose task would be to comment on these issues.

The inclusion of a process orientation may increase the group's reflexive awareness of the relationship dynamics that occur in the group, which may help to identify and resolve relationship difficulties that invariably occur. In other words, the relationship-maintaining activities of the group may be increased. This would create more equilibrium between the relationship-maintaining activities and the task-related activities in the group. Furthermore, a process orientation may also allow an increased expression of emotionally orientated needs.

However, before the group is able to become more process-orientated, there may be a need for greater trust and safety within the group. An increase in the meeting frequency of the group may provide greater continuity for the group to develop to a stage of increased trust. However, the benefits of increasing the meeting frequency need to be weighed up against the costs in terms of professional time. More active facilitation may also provide the group safety required for an increased process orientation. Group members may be more willing to expose themselves if they know that the facilitator will protect them from any harsh criticism by other group members.

A greater sense of trust and safety within the group may also enable group members to tolerate more criticism, challenge and diversity in the group process, which may increase the utility of the group by exposing members to diverse perspectives.

The analysis of how the groups used the session structure revealed that the initial period of socialisation and discussion played an important role in the group process. During this period group members were able to discuss general professional issues and members, other than the presenter, were also able to request help from the group. It may therefore be useful to recognise the important role of this period by viewing it as a legitimate part of the group process, instead of preliminary chatter that occurs before the peer group supervision starts.

A further adaptation that may increase the group's utility is to decrease the centralisation of the communication networks in the group. A decrease in centralisation may lead to increases in overall member satisfaction and a greater number of group members' needs being expressed and met. A decentralised

communication network may also allow greater dialogue to occur between members with divergent views, which may help the group to resolve the complex issues that are often associated with the cases that are presented.

A decrease in the centralisation of the group may be achieved by allowing open discussion to occur between group members during the feedback and discussion phase. This would replace the "round-robin" format that inhibits interactions between group members and channels interactions between the group members and the presenter.

The open discussion may require more active and skilful facilitation to ensure that subgroups and parallel conversations do not occur and that the discussion remains focused on issues related to the case presentation. Active facilitation may also be effective in preventing more experienced group members from dominating the discussion and also ensuring more efficient use of the group's time.

In order to enable the facilitators to play a more active role, it may be useful for the whole group to negotiate the role of the facilitator. This may allow facilitators to become more assertive as their role has been legitimised through the negotiation and other group members will expect them to play the negotiated role in the group process.

In conclusion, the adaptations that have been suggested in this discussion are relevant to the group that participated in this study and have been based on a consideration of a number of characteristics of the group at a specific period in its development. These adaptations may therefore not be relevant to peer supervision groups with different characteristics and those who are at a different level of group development.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

In this final chapter the significance and possible implications of this study will be discussed. Following this, the limitations of this study will be considered and recommendations will be made for further research.

6.2 Significance and implications

The findings of this study suggest that peer group supervision has the potential to meet a number of the professional needs of practising psychologists and is therefore able to make a positive contribution to their professional development. This provides support for the HPCSA's current practise of awarding CPD points to psychologists, who participate in peer supervision groups.

Compared to a number of other activities that the HPCSA recognises for the purposes of CPD point accreditation (such as workshops, conferences and journal clubs), peer group supervision is a cost-effective method to stimulate the professional development of practising psychologists. It also has additional benefits that many of these other activities do not offer, such as the provision of emotional support.

On a theoretical level, this study has identified a number of factors that mediate the potential utility of peer group supervision. Plausible relationships between these factors have been identified, providing an initial picture of the complex interlocking web of factors that act on the group process to determine the utility of peer supervision groups.

This theoretical conceptualisation of the factors that mediate the utility of peer group supervision has the potential to play an important role in evaluating existing models

of peer group supervision and possibly adapting them to increase their utility for specific groups.

6.3 Limitations of current study

This study has been exploratory in nature with the purpose of generating ideas and theory. It therefore needs to be recognised that the conclusions drawn are not conclusive, but are open to further exploration.

One of the possible limitations of this study is that its focus may have been too broad and that it attempted to investigate too many aspects of the group process of peer group supervision. This broad focus may have limited the depth of the data analysis. On the other hand, this broad focus has been beneficial in providing an overview of many of the factors that play a role in mediating the utility of peer group supervision and the possible relationships that exist between these factors.

Another possible limitation of this study is that the process of data collection may have altered the interactions of group members. There were indications in the transcripts that group members censored their contributions to the group discussion because they were aware of being recorded. The audio-taping of the sessions may therefore have resulted in group members being more guarded than usual. It is difficult to address this problem, as audio-taping, with the informed consent of group members, is probably the least invasive and anxiety provoking method of ethically collecting data that represents the actual group process.

The focus on the group processes in this study may have resulted in the perspectives of group members being neglected. Their perspectives may have been useful when evaluating the utility of various aspects of peer group supervision. For example, an exploration of how the presenters experienced the help provided by other group members would have enabled a more accurate judgement on the utility of the help provided. The questionnaire data provided a very limited representation of the perspectives of group members as responses could not be clarified and explored. Interviews, which gave group members an opportunity to reflect on their

experience of the group sessions, may have provided a richer representation of the perspectives of group members.

A further possible limitation is that the group was only studied when it was at the initial stages of group development. Given that groups can change considerably as they develop, the findings may be limited to groups at the initial stages of group development.

The fact that only one group was included in this study may limit the generalisability of the findings to other peer supervision groups. The inclusion of a single group may also have limited the power of the data analysis by limiting the variability in the data. Including a number of groups with different characteristics in the study would have allowed a constant comparison between groups that would strengthen the validity of the conclusions drawn.

6.4 Recommendations for further research

There is a lack of research on peer group supervision with practising psychologists and therefore further research on the topic is still required. Exploratory qualitative research is most appropriate at this stage, because investigation of the topic is still at an elementary level. Therefore further research needs to focus on the development and refinement of descriptive models of the peer group supervision process (Holloway & Johnston, 1985). Many of the following recommendations for further research are aimed at addressing the limitations of this study.

There is a need for further research on the factors that mediate the utility of peer group supervision in order to refine and adapt the model developed in this study. The comparison of groups with different characteristics may be especially helpful in identifying the specific effects of particular factors on the group processes. It may be useful to compare groups that differ in terms of communication networks, group orientation, use of structure, facilitation style, developmental level, and membership diversity.

A longitudinal study that tracks a single group over an extended period of time may also be useful in investigating how the various developmental stages of the group effect the group process. It may also be interesting to see how the group adapts to changing conditions within and outside the group.

Research that focuses on a close-grained analysis of dialogues occurring between group members may be useful in describing how group members negotiate the patterns of interaction that seem to be central in mediating the utility of peer group supervision. Conversational analysis may be a fruitful analytical technique.

Future evaluations should possibly include an analysis of the group process together with interviews on how group members experienced the group process. The inclusion of the group members' perspectives may generate new insights about the factors that mediate the utility of peer group supervision.

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8. Appendices

- **APPENDIX A:** Summary of Akhurst's (2000b) model
- **APPENDIX B:** Questionnaire
- **APPENDIX C:** Transcript coding table
- **APPENDIX D:** Confidentiality contract
- **APPENDIX E:** Group session content summaries

APPENDIX A: Summary of Akhurst's (2000b) model

STRUCTURED GROUP SUPERVISION

This is an integrative model of supervision, developed by Wilbur et al (1991), which synthesises three concepts which have been found to be useful in training of therapists' skills. The three aspects relate to the task orientation, personal growth and integration of personal and practice issues. The phases of the model are listed below. Each phase requires 10 to 15 minutes of group time, and a group facilitator takes the responsibility for timekeeping and for monitoring the questioning and discussion. There is one presenter who has prepared material for the session.

PHASE ONE: Presentation and Request-for-Assistance Statement

These are the initial questions the presenter uses to frame the presentation: What are the facts? What was the process? What is the issue that you see you want help with? The information may be in the form of a written case analysis concerning a counselling session or portions of an audio- or videotape. Following the presentation of the summary information, the presenter completes a Request-for-Assistance Statement which specifies whether assistance is needed with regard to skill development, personal growth or issues related to the personal-practice interface.

PHASE TWO: Questioning Period and Identification of Focus

Supervision group members question the presenter in order to obtain additional information and/or to better understand / clarify issues with regard to the Request-for-Assistance (RFA) Statement. This is done by using a round-robin technique, where each group member asks one question, which may be repeated.

The Focus is identified from the RFA statement:

- 1) Skill development may be requested;
- 2) It may have a personal growth nature, with the goal being to increase personal insight and affective sensitivity;
- 3) It may relate to integration of beliefs/attitudes with regard to a particular issue. The identification of focus will impact on the discussion in the next phase.

PHASE THREE: Feedback statements and discussion

During this phase, the presenter is instructed to remain silent and listen, ie. no responses to feedback are made - the presenter may make notes. It is preferable to talk about the presenter in the third person rather than addressing her/him directly. After a short time for reflection for participants, the round robin technique is again used and group members are encouraged to make productive suggestions. These suggestions need to be phrased as "I ..." statements. The facilitator does not engage in discussion, but needs to monitor the group process (discouraging judgemental comments and overly harsh criticism), and keeping the discussion related to the presenter's RFA's.

A **pause period** then follows (about 5 mins), to give the presenter time to process the emergent material. It is recommended that the presenter does not engage in conversation / discussion at this time.

PHASE FOUR: Presenter's response

The presenter responds to the feedback with regard to which aspects were helpful, and is encouraged to say why the feedback and discussion was/was not beneficial. The facilitator may allow an optional discussion period following the completion of the four phases, should time allow.

Ref: Wilbur, M. P., Roberts-Wilbur, J., Moms, J. R., Betz, R. L., & Hart, G. M. (1991). Structured group supervision: theory into practice. *The Journal for Specialists in Group Work*, 16,2, 91-100

APPENDIX B: Questionnaire

GROUP MEMBER QUESTIONNAIRE

INSTRUCTIONS:

Please could you fill in this brief questionnaire as part of a research project being conducted on the utility of peer group supervision. You are not required to provide your name and therefore your answers will be confidential. Tick the item that best answers the question or write the answer in the space provided. **Please could you hand in this questionnaire at the end of the session or post it using the addressed and stamped envelope provided. Thank you for your participation!**

1. Age: _____ years

2. Gender: Male Female

3. What qualifications in psychology do you hold?

Masters	Doctorate	
---------	-----------	--

Clinical	Counselling	Educational	
----------	-------------	-------------	--

4. How many years' experience as a psychologist do you have? _____

5. What would you say is your primary theoretical orientation?

6. Describe your current work settings. (eg. hospital, university, private practice etc.)

7. What are your primary activities as a psychologist?

8. When did you first join this peer supervision group? Month: _____ Year: _____

9. Are you involved in individual supervision? Yes No

10. What would you say are your primary needs as a psychologist in practice?

11. What help were you hoping Peer Group Supervision would provide for you when you joined this current group?

12. What do you find most helpful about Peer Group Supervision?

13. What do you find least helpful about Peer Group Supervision?

14. Comment on the structure used for Peer Group Supervision.

15. If you were to join another Peer Supervision Group what would you hope would be different?

16. Overall, how useful do you find this Peer Supervision Group? (please circle)

1. Not useful 2. Marginally useful 3. Useful 4. Very useful 5. Extremely useful

APPENDIX C: Transcript coding table

(totals represent the number of passages coded)

Coding categories	Group Sessions					Totals
	A1	A2	A3	B1	B2	
Session Structure						
Group negotiates structure	-	-	2	-	-	2
Unfamiliarity with structure	2	-	-	-	1	3
Resisting structure	-	-	-	1	-	1
Lack of clear ending to session	-	-	-	-	1	1
Phases of model						
Presentation & RFA	1	1	1	1	1	5
Questioning period	1	1	1	4	4	11
RFA clarification	-	-	-	-	1	1
Case detail questions	13	14	18	10	13	68
Session detail questions	1	18	5	5	2	31
Opinion giving	-	1	2	5	8	16
Feedback & Discussion	2	1	1	4	3	11
Facilitator's summary	1	1	-	-	-	2
Presenter's response	1	1	1	1	1	5
Optional discussion	-	1	1	1	-	3
Break from structure	3	1	1	3	4	12
Apologetic	4	-	1	-	-	5
Requests permission	2	2	1	-	2	7
Informal discussion	1	-	-	-	-	1
Direct address to presenter	2	2	1	-	1	6
Presenter participation	6	-	1	3	2	12
Initial socialisation & discussion	-	-	1	1	1	3
CPD points discussion	-	-	-	-	1	1
Group admin issues	-	-	-	-	1	1
Ending Socialisation	-	-	-	-	1	1
Facilitation						
Timing						
Natural pause	2	1	3	1	-	7
Cuts off member	-	1	-	-	-	1
Functions of facilitator						
Educates group about structure	1	-	-	-	1	2
Initiates next phase	2	3	2	3	2	12
Enforces structure	1	3	-	-	-	4
Organises participation	1	6	1	-	-	8
Timekeeper	1	3	2	1	2	9
Directs feedback to RFA	-	1	-	-	-	1
Encourages participation	-	1	-	-	-	1
Summarises or clarifies RFA	-	-	-	-	1	1
Facilitator style						
Rigid	-	3	-	-	-	3
Directive	-	2	-	-	-	2
Flexible	-	-	2	-	-	2
Democratic	-	-	-	-	1	1
Formal	-	-	-	-	1	1
Recognition of role	2	3	3	-	-	8
Facilitator participation	4	1	16	-	6	27
Facilitator substitute	2	-	2	-	8	12

Utility						
Needs expressed						
Diagnostic assistance	1	-	-	-	1	2
Theoretical Diversity	-	1	-	-	4	5
Assistance with ethical dilemmas	1	1	1	-	-	3
Empathic support	-	2	-	1	-	3
Case management	1	-	1	1	-	3
Gaining CPD points	-	-	-	1	2	3
Assistance therapeutic intervention	-	-	-	1	-	1
Need for reassurance	-	-	-	1	-	1
Need for recognition	-	-	-	-	1	1
RFA	1	1	2	1	4	9
Assistance with programme development	-	-	-	-	4	4
Business admin assistance	-	-	-	1	-	1
Method of need expression						
Direct expression of need	3	1	2	1	4	11
Implied or indirect expression	-	2	-	1	1	4
Help provided						
Psychotherapeutic suggestions	2	3	4	1	2	12
Diagnostic assistance	2	-	-	-	-	2
Diversity of views	-	1	-	-	3	4
Assistance with assessment	-	-	-	5	-	5
Ethical review	1	7	2	-	-	10
Case management assistance	7	7	6	6	-	26
Programme development suggestions	-	-	-	-	4	4
Clarify issues - case conceptualisation	-	5	3	-	4	12
Sharing experiences	1	-	-	-	-	1
Empathetic support	1	11	1	1	-	14
Theoretical diversity	2	1	-	-	-	3
Recognition of gains achieved	-	4	3	-	-	7
Sharing information	-	-	-	1	-	1
Aspects reported as helpful by presenter						
Case management assistance	1	-	2	-	-	3
Diagnostic assistance	1	-	-	-	-	1
Provision of diverse perspectives	1	-	-	-	-	1
Ethical assistance	-	-	1	-	-	1
Programme development	-	-	-	-	1	1
Helpful - general comment	2	1	1	1	2	7
Clarify issues - case conceptualisation	1	1	-	-	-	2
Theoretical diversity	-	-	-	-	1	1
Manner in which help is provided						
Suggestive	5	13	3	1	9	31
Directive	5	5	7	10	-	27
Facilitative	1	2	-	-	3	6
Help not provided						
Lack of empathic support	-	2	-	-	-	2
Irrelevant to needs	4	-	-	-	-	4
Group orientation						
Case focused	2	-	1	-	2	5
Therapist focused	-	5	2	-	-	7
Group process	-	-	-	-	-	0

Interaction patterns						
Status						
Dominance	-	-	1	4	1	6
Submissive	-	1	-	-	1	2
Support vs. Criticism						
Defensive response	-	4	-	1	-	5
Threatening questioning	-	1	-	-	-	1
Pseudo agreement	-	2	-	-	2	4
Agreement	2	-	1	-	1	4
Disagreement	3	4	3	-	-	10
Roles						
Reflections	1	9	2	-	1	13
Task role	-	-	-	-	-	0
Expert role	-	1	1	1	1	4
Reluctance to take expert role	-	-	-	-	1	1
Rescues	-	-	-	-	3	3
Conflict						
Peacemaking	-	1	-	-	-	1
Resistance	-	3	-	-	-	3
Tension	-	6	-	-	-	6
Awkwardness	-	5	4	-	1	10
No response	-	1	-	-	-	1
Need for reassurance	-	4	2	-	4	10
Positive response	-	2	-	-	-	2
Spoken over	-	-	-	1	1	2
Evaluative-directive feedback	-	-	-	5	-	5
Parallel conversation	-	-	-	2	3	5
Subgroup discussion	-	-	-	2	-	2
Expresses difficulties	-	6	1	-	2	9
Does not understand	-	-	1	-	2	3
Saves face	-	-	-	-	1	1
Miscellaneous						
Commitment levels of group members						
Membership inconsistency	-	-	-	-	1	1
Reluctance to assume responsibility	-	-	-	-	1	1
Group size	-	-	1	-	-	1
Cellphone	2	-	1	-	2	5
Professional development	-	2	-	-	-	2
Taping inhibits group process	2	-	1	-	1	4

CONTRACT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

I, Dylan Jiva Evans, commit myself to uphold the standards of confidentiality as delineated in the Professional Board of Psychology's Ethical Code of Professional Conduct. Specifically, I undertake to protect the confidentiality of the group of psychologists who are participating in my research project, and also their clients. No details that may enable the identification of the research participants or their clients will be included in my thesis. Audiotapes and transcripts used in research will be safeguarded and access to them will be restricted to myself and my research supervisor, Dr. J. Akhurst. Any disclosure of confidential information will only be done with the consent of the relevant party.

Signed

Date

Witness

Date

APPENDIX E: Group session content summaries

GROUP A SESSION 1			
CASE PRESENTED	RFA / QUESTIONING	DISCUSSION & FEEDBACK	RESPONSE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Client: male, Student. Redoing one subject. Referral: 3 months of abnormal behaviour including religious grandiosity, delusional belief that he has special powers. Background: 6 siblings, parents: high SES, uninvolved. Client splits family: 1) Good, mother's side, Christian. 2) Evil, father's side, witchcraft. Views himself as saviour of family but hates being at home. Conflict with father. Career: want to become priest to gain special powers. Trigger: Failed university subject → God's punishment → extreme religious behaviour & grandiosity. Social functioning: withdrawn, others tend to avoid him Paranoia about traditional Healers, protective use of cross. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RFA: Diagnosis? Presence of auditory hallucinations? Referral source and behaviour? BSc and career plans? Transference? Good object? Clients understanding of therapy? Motivation? Client's attitude towards father? Relationship with mother? Premorbid social functioning? Onset of behaviour? Family problems? Religion and family? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diagnostic dilemma: symptoms & schizophrenia. Suggestion for psychiatric assessment & possible meds. Possible psychotherapy focus: family splitting. Need for psychiatric evaluation vs. concern about neg. impact on therapeutic relationship. Family reality vs. distorted perception? Need for more exploration of family relationships. Concern that psychiatric evaluation may harm therapeutic relationship because of client's paranoia. Need to negotiate diagnostic process. Suggestion to focus on family relationships esp. polarities in perception of parents, and client's relationship with father. Intimacy vs. isolation dev. stage Can you do psychotherapy with a psychotic client? Question about ethicality of not taking client to psychiatrist. Sharing about negative experiences with psychiatric evaluations. Discussion about possible positive role of antipsychotic meds. Possible redefining roles: psychologist → diagnosis; psychiatrist → prescription. Discussion about whether client is psychotic? Presenter asks whether she should phone client because he has not come back for app. → discussion about legal responsibility and client's needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reports that it is helpful to hear the discussion about issues in the case. Presenter reported that the discussion around the following issues was helpful: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Need to look at family issues esp. client's relationship with father and his siblings. 2. Client's isolation. 3. Distinguishing reality from client's distorted perception. 4. Issue of diagnosis and negotiating with client the possibility of antipsychotic meds. Need to be careful because of possible neg. implications for therapeutic relationship.

GROUP A SESSION 2			
CASE PRESENTED	RFA / QUESTIONING	DISCUSSION & FEEDBACK	RESPONSE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Female, 19 years, student: high achiever. Interests: music, art, animals Behaviourally & Emotionally immature. Voluntary mutism Ambivalent relationship with family: despises vs. dependant and needing affirmation Difficult relationship with mother. Feels that she does not meet mothers expectations. Brother is parent's favourite & can do no wrong. Client was sexually abused by family member as a child. Mother ignored abuse. Symptoms include self mutilation, withdrawal, suicidal ideation & depression. Resistant & unfocused, tends to dissociate, little eye contact. Huge issues with trust, guilt and shame. Use of artwork in therapy. Themes of persecution, death, being trapped and mutilated. Also some use of symbolic objects and music. Recently, self-mutilating behaviour deteriorated. Slitting wrists before session. Huge ethical dilemma around contacting parents vs. breaking her trust. Mother resistant to therapist, feels she has failed, perhaps threatened by therapy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RFA: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Alternative ways to conceptualise the case? What are the therapist's ethical & legal responsibilities? Number of sessions and type of contact? Time period of abuse and perpetrator? What prompted disclosure about abuse on phone today? Relationship with brother? Did therapist negotiate with the client the family contact and how did therapist deal with consequences? What is it like working with client? Relationship with brother and his involvement in therapy? Support systems? What is therapist's current conceptualisation of case? Use of art therapy? Ability of client to establish relationship of trust? Client's understanding of therapy? Suicidal potential? Course of mutilating behaviour and therapist understanding of? Clarification on issue of confidentiality? Contents on confidentiality contract? How has therapist coped with mutilating behaviour? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acknowledgement of the difficulty of the case. Major relationship issue: lack of trust. Suggestion: focus on developing relationships outside therapy so that therapist is not only support system. Confidentiality: client needs to know that all actions are being taken in her best interests. Relationship is one of trust. Purpose of notifying parents: cover therapists back or for client's good? Suggestion: notify parents to cover therapist but then therapist takes client to hospital. Attempt to develop other support bases such as nurse? Client's demands on therapist may be an attempt to test the therapists trustworthiness Trust has been built and by coming in bleeding client wants to work on pain, taking rel. to another level. Test to see whether she will be abandoned. Therapeutic relationship as remothering. Shadowy figure = brother. Technique suggestion: empty chair technique, express emotions towards the figure, visualisation. Ethical debate: Client's trust vs. legal responsibility. Difficulty with doing intense therapeutic work: lack of support structures & containment outside therapy. Possibly increase frequency of therapy. Need to translate therapeutic work to outside world. Possible family therapy by another therapist? Facilitator's Summary: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficult case Ethical dilemma: maintaining therapeutic relationship vs. taking care of oneself legally. Possibility of achieving both. Crucial stage of therapy: opportunity to work with issues. Client is testing therapist Need for professional support for therapist and client. Possible family therapy? Expression of support towards presenter by group members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tendency to justify what she has done. Seeing client biweekly, contacted parents as ethical responsibility suggested to mother to see therapist – resistant. Attempted to contact psychiatrist but no contact. Agreed that client is testing relationship. Tried techniques suggested but to no avail. Reports that discussion has been valuable despite the fact that she has tried much that has been suggested already without success. Remothering concept as really helpful. Frustration with case: others respond to with support, highlighting where she has made progress.

GROUP A SESSION 3			
CASE PRESENTED	RFA / QUESTIONING	DISCUSSION & FEEDBACK	RESPONSE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male, Grade 11. • 2 younger sisters • Presenting problem: inconsistent performance at school and concern about mood swings and suicide threats. • Problematic relationship with mother: very enmeshed, over-involved mother who tends to be invasive, does not allow privacy, jealous, will not allow girlfriend, does not trust him. • Self mutilating behaviour: cuts himself, punches doors, reports that he does not feel pain. • Conflict with mother about tattoo. • Girlfriend which he is over-invested in. She is weary of commitment because of his aggressive self mutilating behaviour. • Difficulties for therapist: Colluding with mother by containing suicide threat allowing her behaviour to continue? Ethical difficulties around confidentiality: maintain client's trust vs. disclose suicidality to parents in an attempt to get them to modify their behaviour & so prevent suicide? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RFA: 1. Case management? Concerns about colluding with parents 2. Ethical dilemma of confidentiality? maintain client's trust vs. disclose suicidality to parents in an attempt to get them to modify their behaviour & so prevent suicide? • Marital relationship? • Role of sisters in family life? • History of mother-son relationship? • Mother & father's occupation? • Relationship between son and father? • Spoken of suicide during sessions? • Suicidal plans or attempts? • Purpose of bush-knife? • Peer relationships? • Nature of relationship with girlfriend? • G/friends view of relationship? • Client's insight into parallels btw relationship with mother and relationship with g/friend? • Exploration of consequences if girlfriend does not want to commit? • Possibility of therapist playing same role as mother? • Able to discuss transference with him? • Have parents followed through with compromises they agreed on? • Was client willing to let therapist talk about his suicidal ideation? Reasons? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to define primary client & make them your primary concern. Suicidality an important issue and ethically parents need to be informed. • Two major issues: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Relationship with mother 2. Suicidality • Negotiate disclosure of suicidality to parents with client. Reframe suicidality as a way of expressing his pain & use it as a lever to bring about change in family system through parent counselling. • Important to think systemically: is client replacing father for mother? • Importance of contracting to focus intervention. Negotiate with client to discuss suicidality with parents and carefully plan for parent counselling. Possibility of him sitting in to ensure maintenance of trust. • Support for idea of negotiating disclosure of suicidality to parents. However client also needs individual therapy especially when there is a strong chance that family intervention may not be successful because of the strength of the dynamics and chance that suicidality may reinforce current family dynamics. • Intervention needs to occur on both individual & family level. Possibly encourage family to seek help. • Possibly sell family intervention by empathising with families difficulties and their need for support. • Affirmation of presenter's achievements with therapeutic relationship. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helpful feedback: the need to contract & be more up front about actual issues (ie. suicidality) in order to avoid colluding with parents. • Sessions are the only voice that client has. Only other form of communication is threats of violence to himself or others. Open discussion of suicidality may diffuse threats. • Sense that family therapy will not work because of mother's pathology (psychotic? Obsessive-compulsive?). Probable case management: Individual counselling with parent counselling around suicide issue (after negotiation). • Thanks group and reports that session has been useful.

GROUP B SESSION 1 (Very bad recording quality. Lots of missing data)			
CASE PRESENTED	RFA / QUESTIONING	DISCUSSION & FEEDBACK	RESPONSE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Female, 10 years Referral: from doctor, advised by teacher. Presenting problem: Poor school performance, troubled emotionally. Background history: Abusive father who beat mother during pregnancy. Beating related to financial difficulties. Mother stressed during pregnancy. Milestones normal. Early marriage father abused alcohol, very unstable period of parent's marriage. Current family relationships: Child closer to mother, uncomfortable with father. Father pressurises child about schoolwork. Very strict and hits child. Mother seems unhappy & is concerned about child's problems. School functioning: Struggles to understand concepts. Poor attention & concentration Child's current symptoms: Sleep difficulties, shy, isolated & fearful. Troubled & emotionally dependent. Intellectual assessment: poor performance on SSAIS subtests, very anxious. Presenter feels that occupational therapy may be beneficial, but unsure of how to continue with case. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RFA: Suggestions for appropriate case management and therapeutic intervention. Need for reassurance. Name? Family relationships? Is the child physically abused? Presenting problem? How was she referred? What school grade? Questions about case management. Role of performance anxiety in the child's assessment performance? Specific questions about the child's scores on various assessments and the presenter's method for obtaining the scores. Child's reading abilities? Drawing assessment? <p>Many other questions asked but they were inaudible on the tape recording.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very directive feedback about how the case "should" have been managed. Suggestion that a full neuropsych. & OT assessment is done. Problems at school & home are inter-related. Intervention strategy should include individual therapy, parental counselling and special schooling. Discussion around the role of performance anxiety. Directive feedback about how to test the limits. Again, very directive feedback about case management, specifically how to deal with giving feedback to school & parents. Discussion about the relative role of performance anxiety & neurological dysfunction in the child's poor performance. Speculation that the father may have spoken to child between sessions and increased child's anxiety. Hypothesis of minimal brain damage put forward Discussion about the parent's attitudes towards the assessment. Discussion about the family system, specifically the dynamics btw father, mother & child. Recycle to issue of the father's role in the child's performance anxiety. Recycle to family dynamics and the relationship btw father & son. Analysis of the child's drawings and suggestions that they indicate emotional problems and left hemispheric brain damage. Suggestion that child is referred for a neuropsychological assessment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thanks group, but is reluctant to give a response to the group. Reports that the group helped by pointing out the possibility of neurological damage which had not been previously thought of. Reports that the group's comments were helpful. Group responds by reassuring the presenter that it is a very difficult case.

GROUP B SESSION 2			
CASE PRESENTED	RFA / QUESTIONING	DISC & FEEDBACK	RESPONSE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Session begins with informal discussion about CPD points. • Reasons for selecting particular case: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Psychologists have responsibility in area of gambling. – Debate about the relationship btw the individual & community. – Need for discussion about intervention strategies especially on programme development. • A national programme to identify & treat people with pathological gambling disorders is described. Difficulties with the programme include the lack of a framework to conceptualise the programme & debate about the criteria for pathological gambling. • Presentation of individual case to illustrate the programme: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Female, married, 3 children. 8 yr history of gambling. Seen for 6 sessions. Husband abusive (emotionally & physically), restrictive & has had many affairs. She has low self esteem, as she cannot contribute financially to the family. – Gambling history: Has won substantial amounts on two occasions -> +ve reinforcement. Currently in debt and fits criteria for pathological gambling. • In the programme 4 major gambling incidents are explored in terms of the themes of consequences, loss of control, powerlessness, unmanageability & the denial pattern used. Details from individual case are used to illustrate the process. • Possible theoretical formulations of pathological gambling are described. They include environmental theories, behavioural theories & cognitive theories. • The debate about normality vs. pathology with gambling behaviours is discussed. A typology of 3 types of gamblers is described which includes the behavioural gambler, the depressed gambler & the antisocial gambler. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RFA: Help with the theoretical conceptualisation of gambling. Discussion about alternate intervention strategies in the context of programme. • Clarification of RFA statement? • Treatment strategy? (late group member) • How is the programme structured? • Clarification of the theoretical approach use by the programme? Has presenter used a more cog-beh approach? • What sort of treatment does the programme advocate? • What is the presenter's input into the programme? • Efficacy of the programme? • Group member presents understanding that theoretically the programme is eclectic & checks whether presenter agrees? • Moves on to discussion → • Repeat: What is the efficacy of the programme? • When does the relapse session occur? • Repeat: What research has been done on the programme's efficacy? Group member emphasises the need for research. • What long-term follow-up is there after the six sessions? • Is the insight provided by the programme sufficient to bring about change? What aspects are missing? Cog-beh? • Possibility of linking clients to gamblers anonymous? • Appropriateness of strategic methods of intervention for particular client? • Predisposing factors especially family influences? • Moves on to discussion → • Psychodynamic component? • Abuse before marriage? • Moves on to discussion → • Was the programme designed in South Africa? • Did referral come from Cape Town? • What are the criteria for pathological gambling? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion about the programme structure not being appropriate for all clients. Need for eclectic framework were the intervention is matched to the particular client's issues. • ← Moves back to questioning. • Gambling problem is only on the surface. • Disempowerment may be major issue & programme needs to empower her, perhaps through psycho-education. • ← Moves back to questioning. • Possible abusive background as a causative factor in the gambling. • Recycle to discussion around disempowerment being central issue. Importance of empowering client in other areas of her life and replacing the addiction. • Discussion about the merits of the programme given the limited resources available. • Importance of a relapse prevention programme to give client ongoing support. • ← Moves back to questioning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Battled with deciding what to focus on for the presentation. Psychosocial problem vs. programme design issues? • Group has helped with the conceptualisation of the programme design by raising questions & identifying possible weaknesses that can be strengthened. • Presenter believes there is a need for local development of a programme using local expertise and not relying on "experts" from Cape Town.