“Interesting phenomena occur when two or more rhythmic patterns are combined, and these phenomena illustrate very aptly the enrichment of information that occurs when one description is combined with another.”
Gregory Bateson

In 2008, whilst working at Mt Druitt District Office, I prepared the attached document, informed by a brief survey of my colleagues. I was encouraged by the amount of effort respondents made in addressing themselves to the questions. The responses have assisted us to come to some common understandings around the issue of significant supervision relationships.

There were three questions, and the responses fell into reasonably clear categories. For the purpose of clarity, I have grouped the responses by issue, and paraphrased them, rather than repeating them verbatim.

Since there were no names involved unless provided voluntarily, I am happy to make the actual response sheets available, should no-one object, so that the soundness of the paraphrasing may be reviewed.

Later, I have gleaned the principles and presuppositions which seem to inform our local practice, and compared them to the literature, mainly what’s come out of Harvard.

I have no doubt that you will be surprised and encouraged by these comparisons.

In addition to what the literature has to offer, it is hoped that by being explicit about our individual practice rationales we may better negotiate supervision issues with each other and offender’s and build on our individual skill sets by learning from each other’s experiences.

But first, the questions and paraphrased responses;

“What is meant by a significant relationship with a client?”

Some respondents challenged the term “client” indicating that it had unhelpful implications regarding the nature of the officer’s obligations to the offender.

Other respondents referred to the client as “offender” throughout. Those responses did not, however, go on to stigmatize the client, but rather spoke about the need for professional and respectful boundaries and to remain focused upon the offender and the officer’s legal and professional obligations.

Although using the words “significant relationship” in the same sentence as “client” raised some consternation; there seemed to be consensus on the principle that a relationship with a client is only significant when professional boundaries were clear, and when it helped to achieve legitimate supervision outcomes.

Within that professional relationship, respondents emphasized the importance of fairness, transparency and respectful engagement.

A clear distinction was made between the need for empathy and objectivity, as opposed to sympathy or advocacy.
Broadly, the responses to the first question seemed to focus on the **Role** of the Supervising officer, and responses (paraphrased) included the following:

“Such a relationship would be based on establishing clear understandings regarding order conditions, the legal obligations of the offender and the officer and the expectations each had of the other”

“A relationship would be considered ‘professionally significant’ if it had the power to encourage and support behavioral change”

“A professional relationship between officer and client would recognize the needs of other stakeholders, including the Court and wider community. Where victims were known or related to the offender, their safety and welfare would be a priority throughout supervision”

In general terms, these guidelines would define the terms of a significant relationship with a client/offender.

**“How do you develop such a relationship?”**

The bulk of the responses to the second question seemed to centre on the notion of **fair process**. Paraphrased responses included:

“It is important to listen patiently, respectfully and non-judgmentally.

“Being clear about our role, that we are not there to do everything ‘for’ them (advocate), or to do things ‘to’ them (authoritarian/ adversary), but to work ‘with’ them, to facilitate them meeting their supervision obligations.

The closest analogy I could come up with to describe the role as articulated by respondents would be one of a journeyman; To walk alongside the offender on an pre-agreed path (as defined by the order, perhaps), providing them with guidance, to challenge their thinking if they were making bad decisions, but not be led by them or enable them if they digressed.

Other responses included;

“Rapport comes from trustworthiness and respectful treatment from both sides”

“Challenge the behavior, but respect the person

“Clearly reiterate the guidelines originally established between the client and the officer throughout supervision as required.

“Supervision practices and objectives should be consistently applied by all officers involved with the offender.

Respondents referred to the need for officers to avoid rigid control of conversations, to give the offender room to tell their story, to draw them out, and to broaden the conversation away from the offender to related issues and regarding others who might be affected.

Several respondents referred to the usefulness of Motivational Interviewing and Restorative Justice techniques and questions.

Without advocating for any particular process, it seemed sound to conclude respondents were suggesting that asking effective questions is more useful in challenging thinking and behavior than moralizing, offering opinions, lecturing or threatening.

Several respondents variously articulated the importance of listening as an example of a practice that would help the offender to feel respected and to behave respectfully.

Interestingly, establishing clear boundaries early was seen as a practice that assists in the development of a relationship that
would be significant to achieving positive supervision outcomes because it was seen as fair and transparent.

"How does this type of relationship help the client to reflect, develop empathy, take responsibility and be accountable?"

The third question elicited the most complex responses, and seemed to involve respondents in addressing themselves to issue of Practice Rationale.

"Trust and rapport allow officers to strongly and respectfully challenge behavior."

"Where the officer is perceived as ‘firm but fair’, offenders are more likely to feel safe to take responsibility for their behavior, and engage in good faith."

"If offenders understand that officers share similar values and practices with each other around supervision, offenders are less likely to be able to avoid taking responsibility by playing officers off against each other."

"Where offenders feel respected, they are less likely to defend unacceptable behavior, and more likely to behave in ways which engender self-respect."

"Where offenders are engaged and involved in the process (working ‘with’, rather than having things done ‘to’ or ‘for’ them), they have a greater capacity to take ownership and responsibility for supervision outcomes."

A reference was made to how a significant professional relationship increased the capacity to challenge offenders to find ways to make things right with those affected by the offending behavior, for example by taking responsibility and changing their behavior or lifestyles.

An interesting paradox emerged around the way respondents phrased the connection between respectful engagement and the capacity to strongly challenge behaviour;

Respondents seemed to find that respectful engagement allowed for strong challenging, and strengthened the professional relationship.

Respectful, “firm but fair” engagement, respondents seemed to indicate, may thereby promote the likelihood of positive behavioural change and stronger relationships.

Common Principles found in the response

I never cease to be amazed by the wisdom which exists in the body of experience of my colleagues.

As many of you will have lived to regret, I never tire of conversations about our practice rationale.

This exercise, however, was designed to facilitate a sort of conversation between all of us about these things, so that we may learn off each other, improve our personal performance and job satisfaction, and importantly, to understand and be reassured that what we do intuitively, has a sound theoretical basis, even though we rarely express our practice rationale explicitly.

Nevertheless, because we engage with each other over clients as we do PSR’s, LSI-R’s, Case Plans, and importantly, Breaches and Revocations, we need to be singing off the same hymn sheet about what constitutes sound practice.

As I was going around collecting the questionnaires, many respondents commented that although they know implicitly what constitutes sound practice relationships on an intuitive level, and get satisfactory results, they found it difficult to express their beliefs in an explicit way.
Nevertheless, a review of the literature revealed many accepted principles that correlated well with those expressed in less precise terms in the responses.

**Literature Review**

**Fair Process**

I know I will always be treated “………………” by those I respect. (Insert the Word Which Best Describes Your Expectation)

Most say ‘fairly’

When is someone likely to accept an outcome she/he does not like?

‘….individuals are most likely to trust and co-operate freely with systems - whether they themselves win or lose by those systems - when fair process is observed.’ (Kim & Mauborgne, 1997)

**Fair Process Principles**

Regarding the issue of fair process, which was frequently referred to in the responses, the literature had this to say;

The three facets of Fair Process include

1. **Engagement** - Opportunity to have a say
2. **Explanation** - Understand the reasons for the decision
3. **Expectation Clarity** - Shared understanding on what is expected in terms of behaviour and rules

(Kim & Mauborgne, 1997)

It may be seen that Kim and Mauborgne reached almost identical conclusions as the respondents.

According to the literature, **What Fair Process Is Not:**

- Consensus or to seek harmony.
- Compromise to accommodate every individual’s opinions, needs or interest.
- Democracy in the workplace (or any group process)
- [Officers or others] forfeiting their prerogative to make decisions, or establish agreed [supervision] outcomes.

“We are not in the happiness business but we are in the fair process business” (Kim & Mauborgne 1997)

Responses correlated strongly with the literature on these points, condemning inconsistency, and emphasising the importance of clear, non-negotiable guidelines around behaviour and supervision outcomes, but within a frame of fair process.

**What Fair Process Achieves**

Fair process builds:

- trust
- commitment
- co-operation

**Achieving Behavioural Change through Fair Process**

Respondents universally spoke about establishing clear boundaries, and strongly challenging behaviour, but in respectful ways.

"Learning is enhanced by challenge and is impeded by threat."

In reconciling the concepts of clear boundaries and fair process, respondents appeared to be saying:

"Consequences are an important part of Supervision, but if learning is to occur, they need to involve dialogue and respectful challenge."

On the issue of Motivational Interviewing and/or Restorative Justice, the salient point seemed to lay in the power of a Socratic style of engagement - a particular questioning style.

Effective engagement according to Socrates relies upon questions.

What do we know about Socrates? Socrates was a Greek thinker and teacher.
He held no classes and gave no lectures and wrote no books. He simply asked questions. When he got his answer he asked more questions. Socrates asked questions in order to make people think about ideas they took for granted.

To Socrates, a good outcome looked pretty much like what we seek through supervision, including enhanced learning, creativity, moral development, improved judgement and integrity, and strong, healthy relationships.

Conclusions

There seemed to be several behaviours that respondents recognised as sound practice, in that they represented fair, respectful process, and helped to develop a solid professional relationship, where the capacity to influence behaviour change was maximised.

Some may be expressed as statements and others as questions:

I thought it might be helpful to make some suggestions that seemed consistent with what the respondents and the literature had in mind. In subtext I have placed the rationale behind the suggestions. Of course they can be either accepted, rejected or modified as thought best.

With a new client/offender, a good place to start might be with:

“As you know, we’ve been brought together by the Court, because the magistrate formed the view that you may benefit from supervision. That places us both under legal obligations, and we both need to be very clear about what those obligations are, because we do not have the prerogative to digress from them. We can talk more about that later.”

Fair process, transparency

“But before we discuss those things, I need to explain that supervision is not about whether you’re a good or a bad person, but about the behaviour, and what needs to happen to achieve outcomes that meet the Court’s requirements, and are beneficial to you in moving on with your life in healthier ways.”

Respectful - making the distinction between the behaviour and the person, the act and the actor

“In order for you to see supervision as meaningful, it is important for me to understand how you came to be here, and what would help you to look back on supervision as having been a positive experience.”

Engagement- the opportunity to have their say

Such questions as “What happened?” “How did you come to be involved in the offence?” “What were you thinking about at the time?”, “What have you thought about since?” etc

Socratic engagement style, characterised by questions, and the opportunity to tell their story

To listen attentively, draw the story out, until you understand their thinking, behaviour and experience in the matter, without judgement, but also without affirmation of their behaviour or thinking.

Consistent with empathy and objectivity, as opposed to sympathy or advocacy

Once the story is out, questions might include;

“Notwithstanding what you were thinking about at the time of the offence, what have you thought about since your arrest?”, or “Which bits do you feel able to accept responsibility for?”

Introducing issues of Personal responsibility, later to support commitment and ownership of supervision outcomes

“Thinking now about what might have made a difference to your involvement in the offence, what..."
Staff survey – Relationships for effective supervision

Where to from here?
I've really enjoyed examining and dissecting the responses to the three questions, finding common principles and comparing those to the literature.

It is apparent to me that what you do implicitly, when expressed explicitly, has been found to square solidly with the best to come out of Harvard.

I'd like to ask one more question;

**Why is it important for us to be able to explain our practice rationale to offenders, and to be able to discuss these things with each other and supervisors in explicit terms?**

References