

Transcript

# **Leadership and supervision: reflections from Iriss and SSSC**

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Iriss

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# Introduction

This transcript was taken from the recording **Leadership and supervision: reflections from Iriss and SSSC** which is part of the [Leadership stories: developing effective supervision](#)

## Transcript

**Michelle (Iriss):** How did this project come about then?

**Ellen (Iriss):** I think the start of it was a conversation between us and SSSC about doing more work on supervision - we'd already done a project on leading change in supervision and they had developed a learning resource around supervision and we thought it would be interesting to do something together and try and dig a bit deeper - we kicked off with an event in June last year.

**M:** And what did you hope to achieve working with SSSC working on this project?

**Stuart (Iriss):** When we had those initial discussion we seemed to be going in similar directions - we were hearing similar things from the workforce around their needs around supervision and we really wanted to get their perspective on that and we know they produce different guidance to their members and we perhaps have had a different take on that previously around supervision, which was taking cases from other organisations, quite small ones - while they seemed to be focussing more on training resources and guidance resources across the workforce so we thought that those two different approaches would really compliment each other for a project like this where we were going to do a little bit of both with partner organisations, so take them through a process, perhaps through some of the processes we have been through with other organisations and other projects, but use the

strength of SSSC's resources and guidance and things they have done before and input into some of that.

We got three partners, one from statutory, one from independent and one from third sector. For each of the workshops with organisations that we worked with was about half a dozen folk from those organisations (senior managers, house owners... all different depending on what sector they were from). Generally people who were doing supervision and receiving supervision in some way shape or form. As well as having them there, there was one of us from Iriss and one of us from SSSC, so we took it in those different turns to support them through that, across those workshops. We kept a continuity of people as much as we could across them so actually it was a good bit of a learning journey for those people so it wasn't new people from the organisation across every workshop

**E:** And we had support from CCPS and a couple of special speakers who contributed. So we had a speaker from Loretto come in and talk about their experience and we had support from the Village Storytelling Centre towards the end so we had a core group of each partner but where necessary we brought people in to kind of come and do short inputs of inspiration.

**M:** And would you say with the workshops you started with the premise of 'why do you do supervision?' Is that really simply what you were looking at, and exploring?

**E:** Definitely. That was the first, that was the place we started with the first workshops, was 'why do you do it?' Because I think, well we did some exercise to establish where they were, where the partners were, where they wanted to get to and try and use this asset-based, strength-based approach to look at what was already working. But we found what was really effective was to take them right back to the beginning of why do you do it. And that just really set them on a particular journey and a way of thinking about where they wanted to get to. And I don't think it was a question that they had spent

a tremendous amount of time thinking about and I think it can be quite hard when you are in the middle of wanting to change something and really wanting to do things differently and improve and not really knowing where to start with that and it can feel quite overwhelming so we were able to just by asking that simple question, really support them to reframe where they were with supervision. And I think they fed back that that was quite pivotal that they hadn't spent a lot of time thinking about that question.

**S:** I think when you start with them, asking 'why do you do supervision?' and then you ask them in that assets-based way 'what was your best experience?', 'what was revealed through sharing those best experiences?' and really get down to the nub of why they do supervision, was the types of things that were really important to them. So they were talking about support, relationships, they were talking about self-development and care and I think when you are in the mix of doing those things and the day-to-day all those types of things can easily be lost when you're turning up to a supervision session and you have to get through a certain amount of case or a certain amount of tick boxes, or you're just stuck in the challenges you have got in the moment and you are maybe firefighting a little bit. So I think from that starting point we removed them a little bit from that day-to-day and said 'what's really important to you, to your organisation?' And invariably, when they were talking about why they did it, the end point was always we want to make the lives better for the people we support, and to do that we need to be able to support each other, support ourselves, develop as a team, share visions, share where we want to go and it was really that and that only took half a day and they got to those types of realisations by the end of that half day that we did with them each in that first workshop. And then we built from there and I think, like you said, what they referenced at the final event we had was that turning point. Some of them were pulling their hair out going 'we didn't expect to be here, we thought we were doing things really well', but when you ask 'why' and you ask 'best' we see that we could do things better, differently. And then the following workshops after that they developed up how they could get to that, how they could strengthen that.

**E:** I think they all reported after the first workshop that they weren't where they thought they were going to be. I think the partners all thought they were going to come to the first workshop, we were going to go through their paperwork, look at their supervision policy and records, do some tweaks and that would be where we started. And the fact that we didn't do that and we asked them to tell us about their best experience and why they did it and some of those drivers and they weren't expecting that, and they found that quite an eye opening experience.

**M:** But they went with it?

**E:** Yeah, they really... they could answer the question but they just needed some space. Some time, some support, and some facilitation to really dig into that. I mean they knew why and they were very clear that it was about supporting staff to support outcomes and they wanted those real impact changes, they didn't want to tick a box any more. So they could do it, they just needed taking out of their environment and some facilitation around that made the difference. So they really went with it, really embraced it, even though it was uncomfortable. You know some of them said 'that was a difficult conversation, that was uncomfortable, it's not what we were expecting'. Some of them talking about leaving the first workshop quite raw , but they went with it, the really went with it and I think that's why they got out so much from the process.

**M:** So the final event then was held on the 7th of March. What would be the key messages or learning coming out of that event do you think?

**S:** The focus of that event was very much on getting the stories from those organisations who have taken part and put so much time, effort, thinking and reflection into those really meaningful questions that developed through the workshops. And they each came up with their own solutions to that, their own different actions. What a lot of them were taking about were coming down to things that go well beyond supervision. So, they are all seeing this as a start of a journey so even though SSSC and Iriss involvement directly with

them is coming to an end, they have seen this process as really changing what they think about how they gain views from others in the organisation, what is important to them and where they want to go with that. So it has actually led to some of them changing their vision, their strategy, various different contracts, so it's, it seems to have got strands everywhere after having had these conversations. Some of them, certainly two of the organisations, spoke really strongly about appreciating what they do really well already and building on some of that. I think after the first workshop with them they had a bit of a crisis of confidence, the 'oh no, we're not doing anything well, we need to throw all of this stuff out' but actually coming back and thinking we have some great stuff going on, let's build on some of it. So I was really pleased to get to that point with them and see how enthusiastic they are now to keep that momentum going because it's pretty meaningless if they only keep doing things when we're there. They've actually manage to push this forward.

**E:** Because I think one of the partners was doing something really effective but they were just not calling it group supervision and they were thinking we need to do group supervision, but when we kind of asked them to think about what was already in place, they realised what was already in place under a different name was really effective and the workers responded really positively, everybody was getting out what they needed to from it and it wa very supportive and they were able to let go of this adea that they should be doing group supervision or implementing something called group supervision and they were able to see what they already had in place was serving the same purpose and the same function. So it was moving away from that ' we're not doing anything right, we need to start again', to actually some of this is working really well, some of it's not so let's not throw the baby out with the bathwater. I think that was another thing they took away.

**S:** And a lot of that recognition of how that working and why it was working came from copying the process we did with their senior leadership team in

the workshop, and they took some of those appreciative-enquiry, asset-based questions and positive questions out and asked that and had days with the staff team and spoke to them about what was important to them, what was their best experiences and that revealed that the practice highlights at the end of the shift that they were talking about (that was similar to group supervision) worked really well for them and seemed to open in there, truthful and they just need to build on that and tweak that in able to be able to and fulfil the why of doing as opposed to having to reform a whole new group supervision policy. And having done that it also took them to the realisation that, that senior leadership team really understood that to get together why they did supervision, they drew all the golden threads of why they do it all the way through to actions to be taken to support and develop outcomes for young people. But they hadn't necessarily brought the staff team with them on that journey. And it hammered home to them that actually we need to do more of this stuff together, to share this with a staff team who are really dynamic but hadn't necessarily bought into what they thought they bought into. So there was a lot more sharing across the organisation and hopefully the way they're talking now that ethos is going to continue.

**E:** Because one of the other partners did the same thing, did some piloting of things that we'd developed with them in the workshop. They then took that back to their staff group and piloted some stuff so we obviously could just work with some core groups but it was really important that they felt able to then go back in their organisations and have some of those same conversations that they'd experienced with us and kind of model that with colleagues, but also pilot some of the tests of change they wanted to do around supervision and then the staff really felt part of it, even though we just worked with a core group of some of them. So the fact they were able to do that I think was really effective as well.

We did have the logic model to foreground some of this as well so that was really helpful in identifying the components to leadership really and where some of that would feed into supervision. I think initially we had a plan that we were going to look at leadership and management separately from supervision but actually we couldn't do that when it came to working with the partners as it was so integral and mixed up and ingrained that we decided to adapt the project to just look at leadership and management within supervision and just stop trying to create, or just not create a kind of false barrier between them and just realise that these partners need to look at this as a whole and the leadership logic model really helped us do that even though that model wasn't about supervision, it was about leadership. But you could really pull through a lot of the leadership elements, challenges, barriers and risks and it all applied in the context of supervision is so that was really helpful.

**M:** Could you just say what a logic model actually is?

**E:** Well, it's just a structure isn't it within which to think through different aspects of a thing. So the leadership logic model described various inputs right through to the different outcomes so again that was really useful for us as we were focussing on outcomes, we weren't looking at ticking the box of supervision is done every four weeks with all our staff, it was about what difference does it make so the logic model just highlighted the different input and activities and what various bits of leadership looked like and the impacts important and the kind of train of thought around that and it's framed around enablers and risks as well so it's just a structure in which to describe all those kind of mechanisms.

**S:** That one specifically is about what good leaders bring, what they do, and what that would result in, and for supervision that really helped us because if you are bringing lots of those elements in, doing those things with that approach, there was lots of really good words in there around courage and reflection and you could so how if those were being harnessed by supervisees to kinda take some of those elements and supervisors to take some of those



elements you could see how you could start to draw the outcomes you'd want from supervision around supporting people and improves lives. So it was a great framework and I found, even in the last workshops, we were coming back to what do good leaders bring and we were still able to identify one or two of those elements that weren't quite there for some of the organisations or they thought we need to work harder at that, we need to support our staff more to develop those elements of being a good leader because we feel as if that will strengthen them coming into supervisions sessions because part of the idea of the developing supervision sessions right across the groups we worked with were shred responsibility of the delivery of them, who recorded it and what you were bringing to the supervision, who set the agenda. I know SSSC colleagues, Lorna, would definitely talk about the adult-to-adult relationships so it wasn't 'I'm the senior manager here, I dictate what is being judged, what is being said, I write it all down, you go away and do it, I find you the solutions.' Instead, it's more an adult-to-adult, it's a two-way conversation that enables the person who is being supervised to contribute, to build, to come up with their own solutions and to go away owning that as opposed to it just being projected on them. And that then encourages not just the disciplinary side of supervision and the judging/measurement side of supervision but then starts to weigh it back to the supportive side of supervision that focuses more on development as opposed to 'you're doing this right, you're doing this wrong.'

**M:** Would you think the success of the project was due to the partnership with SSSC?

**E:** I think that is part of it and it's certainly been effective because we've both brought different things to the table, we've both done different work around supervision. So we had our Leading Change in Supervision project which worked with partners in detail to support them to change how they do supervision and that was a couple of years ago. While they (SSSC) had a very comprehensive workbook developed around supervision so we kind of had that experience of working with partners and they had these very strong resources and we brought that together. And we both had facilitation skills

and we both had experience of appreciative enquiry and strengths-based approaches and asset-based approaches so it worked really well so the partnership with our three partners was really why it worked well and their commitment to work with us and be quite raw and have quite uncomfortable conversation and to kinda dig into some of their difficulties and that willingness to be quite vulnerable and quite honest and I think the felt safe enough to do that with us and to go through that process with us so I think that was what really was fundamental to how that worked, that they were really open to getting into some of this stuff and not all of it was easy, but uncomfortable for them.

**S:** I really appreciated how Lorna and Susan from SSSC were similar to us in that once we had that first workshop, even during that first workshop, you could already see the flexibility in them to allow those partners to maybe go in different directions, or to leave silences, and let them start to open up a bit more and I think that feel resonated through and I think that help build trust and people recognised that this is an environment where I can say things that have made me uncomfortable or I've not been altogether happy with, or say things really meaningful to each other or share how they value working with each other. It worked both ways and because in our approach we had that flexibility to do that i think it then freed up the organisations to feel like they could go in different directions, so it wasn't about rewriting a supervision policy, it could go bigger than that, or they could go down different routes, or they could change their mind after reflecting a bit more or talking with other people. It was partly about them bringing, SSSC bringing, their resources and doing all of that but it was about the individuals Susan and Lorna who took part as well because they are quite different in the way that Ellen and I are quite different in how we run a workshop or what we have been involved in before but I think that overall feel we set up within the workshops resonated through and I don't think we would have got to the same... I don't think we would have got the organisations to the same point if we had stuck strictly to some of our workshop plans that we could have easily set up and taken it to the nth minute.

**E:** Absolutely, they were as open minded about it as we were. And also just as focused on answering the so what question, ‘what difference is this making?’, where do the organisations want to go with this and around outcomes and impact. You know we’re all focused around that. We were not focussed on sticking to a particular process or methodology or a particular timescale even. It was kind of this needs to make a difference so we were all on the same page about that which I think made it work.

**S:** In saying that, it didn’t mean that we didn’t nail them down to actions. So at the end of each workshop, what I found Lorna and Susan really good at was that they’d get a flip chart bit of paper up on the wall and they’d say ‘right, we’ve had those amazing discussions, you’ve come up with all those ideas, you’ve reflected on all of this, what are we going to do, who’s going to do it and when are you going to do it for, and what are you going to do between now and when we meet-up next time?’ So that we could then share those notes with them and we’d, for some of them we’d developed a mini logic model for them that should what are you doing, what action are you doing, where do you want it to get you to - which helped them with that thinking. So, as much as we say we had a real open approach we still brought rigour to keep making sure that the momentum was going, that things were ticking over, and we brought in different tools and thoughts and helps.

**E:** And then at the beginning of the next workshop we went back over, this is what you said you were going to do, this is where you said you were going to get to (and ask), what was that like, so we really did keep them on task well and Lorna and Susan were really good at that.

**Michelle: [Lorna and Susan from SSSC provide their reflections on the project]**

**Lorna (SSSC):** Looking back at the project now it has come to a close and thinking about the leadership logic model cause that’s what we were really trying to make the link with, I think what’s emerged most of all is those two columns in the middle about what good leaders do and what’s come out for

me is we just give people the time to reflect on their own behaviours and time to reflect what was going on in their wider organisations. And I think the conversations and the development that took place was around how managers motivate, develop and empower others, all those things that are listed in the column in the logic model. How does supervision add to building and sustaining relationships? And a much stronger role in how managers and how leaders understand what they do and learn from what they do. So I think for me that was really strong feature of the project. I think the second feature was about, certainly within supervision was about how supervision sits central to good leadership, is how do good leaders engage and what came through very strongly was a much greater appreciation of relationships and how important it is to develop those relationships. And I think Stuart and Ellen have already talked about the adult-to-adult relationship but I felt they were real lightbulb moments, certainly within the workshops that we had with the partners, and getting feedback from the partners through the project was that if they moved to a more adult-to-adult relationship then how that really improves the quality of the supervision.

**M:** Could you say a bit more about the adult-to-adult relationship and what that entails?

**L:** I think speaking with some of the managers that took part there was a reflective point, certainly within workshop one and moving into workshop two where managers were really taking on the role of fixing things, of having the answers, and staff members were coming to supervision with the expectation that managers were just going to tell them what to do and after supervision they would just go away and do what the managers told them to do. So there was a feeling that people were coming not very well prepared, almost like this childlike role - you're the adult, you're the parent, you'll tell me what to do and I'm happy to go away and do it. When that conversation changed to more a, to as a staff member, come prepared to supervision with an agenda, and as a manager come prepared, and we'll have a adult-to-adult conversation where we'll tease out the answers and solutions together and we'll work through it together. So using different ways of asking questions,

more open-ended than closed questions. And then, you know, to have to make those changes partners very quickly came to the idea that supervision has to be very effective and supervision is a very powerful tool as an organisation and it's a tool that leaders have to make workers more motivated and to feel skilled, and feel valued and trusted. I think as the project has come to an end, I think myself and Susan, and Ellen and Stuart, are aware that we need to look at the end columns of the leadership logic model, which are, having invested in this project and the partners having invested in this project, what difference is it making and what outcomes have been achieved. That's something that SSC and Iriss still need to work on. So what we would like to find out now, are people roles and responsibilities because of supervision, group supervision, individual supervision has been more effective. Are the managers telling us that they are more confident in providing better and more effective supervision. Are staff able to say that they feel more valued and supported and that their roles are being continuously improved through effective supervision. And are the people who are receiving support from the services and partners who were working with, are they actually seeing any improvements. And that's a hard measure but I think it's a very important measure that we have to do. And that's very much the end columns of the leadership logic model and I think we have to tease that out to see if we have come up with the difference it is making and the outcomes that have been achieved.

**M:** Tell me about the stand out moments then of the project?

**Susan (SSSC):** So, I've a very strong standout moment because the people that I was working with started talking about a piece of research that one of them had read about monkeys on people's backs and they took it through their whole project, it became their real thing. Because it became like a metaphor for them all, which is what it is anyway, 'that's not my monkey' is the catchphrase of it. But that real concept of saying it sits in two places, it sits in practice about how people communicate with each other and how they deal with conflict and difficult situations. But it also then transfers directly into how people treat supervision. So the concept being that people

are carrying something with them that is difficult or challenging, or that is stressing them out and in order to cope with it, they hand it to someone else. And the metaphor in there for the person who takes it, is quite similar to the reference that Lorna made about 'fixing', is that in order to fix for people rather than support them to do things themselves, that they take their monkey from them. So it started off as quite a humorous anecdote but it really built up in time about where you could see that behaviour within the likes of supervision. Where you come into supervision you are carrying these monkeys with you, how often the person who is delivering just takes those monkeys, doesn't support the person they are supervising to keep the monkey but change the monkey's control, or influence it so that one person walks out the room thinking I've had a successful supervision here because I've got rid of all my monkeys, and then the other person walks out thinking I'm really not enjoying this experience because I feel more weighed down, I feel more pressured, because all you're doing is accumulating other people's monkeys. So, I really liked the fact that they built a concept from something humorous and very accessible because they had an ability to transfer that learning to their staff and to their senior managers is massively simplistic in the best possible way. Because they're not going to try and explain the complicated concepts, they did come to our final event and visually represent how it worked and it was so brilliant because you could not miss at all the message that they were giving, and the ability to relate in your own head to the experiences, it was so visually represented that you couldn't miss it and it had loads of layers to it for people to attach experiences that they've had in various places and various forms, to attach it to that sense that there is actually a physical process taking place here, even though it doesn't feel like it because there is two people in a room, what's happening in that room? So I absolutely loved that because sometimes I worry that trying to support people to use complicated processes we miss the opportunity to visualise or explain it in a way that people can really get their head round and I thought, given the group was very small, and it was very different group from the other two in terms of what their expectation was of being there, they didn't come with a big plan, they weren't looking at service redesign, they weren't looking

at public policy redesign. The peer support that they found in that room was a real surprise to them from different services. They had no idea that what they were going to get was a sense of we're actually just three human beings in a room, it has absolutely no relevance whatsoever what service we're from because the stuff that we're picking out that's important to each other is exactly the same. So the brilliant thing that was there as well was that we've missed a whole opportunity to potentially get support and use good practice because we've only looked at our own services, adult services or children's services, when actually the human being element of this which is really crucial to us all is exactly the same. And again I think this concept of the monkeys is not relatable to one thing, it's hugely generic, it's about people so for me the thing about the monkeys, it really felt it gave them a voice to explain what they were struggling with, what their aspirations were and how things were potentially getting in the way of that happening and instead of being a kind of concept, they made it into a physical furry thing. It was brilliant.

**M:** So what do you think worked about the project then?

**L:** I think I would put the success of the project mainly down to cooperation and again going back to the leadership logic model and that first column of 'what do good leaders need?' and I think that every single person that was involved in that project, including SSSC and Iriss, and the three partners we worked with, and the other partners that supported us along the way, it was that need for support, that need to challenge one another, to take one another out of their comfort zones, and I think a really striking thing was giving people time and protected time to reflect and develop and I think that involved SSSC and Iriss as well as facilitators of the project. We needed to communicate clearly and I think it was a really enjoyable and rewarding experience for everyone and I think that was really down to acknowledging what people need in order to reflect and develop and address some of those barriers that the logic model identifies; lack of time for reflection, looking at do we really need to micromanage, because if we have that time to reflect

and develop then micromanagement is not necessary. Do we really need to look at what our poor system is and how can we improve that poor system.

**Su:** I think one of the things that really stood out for me about what worked well is that we walked into a room, potentially with a plan, and that plan became irrelevant in terms of what the people in the room needed. And I suppose that's one of the things that's really strong about SSSC and Iriss, is that there is a coaching approach within that and that really strong for me was that sense of saying to them 'this is your time' so we ended off script hugely with our group because we didn't know them and we didn't know what they were going to bring. And once they started to get a bit more confident about hearing their own voice and having that heard, they started to write their own script and they certainly fed that back to us, that one of the things they really appreciated was protected time, people who listened rather than directed, and also within that there was some challenge and we were able to positively challenge it in terms of saying 'how does that work and is that something you want to continue with?' So I suppose for me it's back again to how well all of us worked together because we did have a plan and we did have outcomes, and we had the whole project plan but we were really clear walking into those rooms that whatever fitted the people in that room was how it worked in that room. Not, it had to fit three people who all worked the same way and I think that flexibility, that protected time, and the right to make your own decisions and be a bit challenging is not something that certainly our group were used to. And it's a completely deskilling experience to go into work every day and wonder 'where's my voice?', so I think one of the things that worked well for me hugely was feeling that we had given them a completely different experience of how organisations, external organisations, can come in and deliver something that is really all about them, not about us. So I think that's massively important about longer term how they things like the SSSC and the role for them in the future, what they would potentially want to use for, because they've got a different opinion of us now as an organisation.





[www.iriss.org.uk](http://www.iriss.org.uk)

[enquiries@iriss.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@iriss.org.uk)

0141 559 5059

[@irissorg](https://twitter.com/irissorg) on Twitter