LEARNING TO SUPERVISE PROFESSIONAL STAFF IN STUDENT AFFAIRS

by

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The research around professional staff supervision training in student affairs is significantly lacking and outdated with most of the research on this topic area is at least ten years old. For many staff members, they enter new roles supervising professionals with little knowledge or training in this area and are expected to figure it out on their own. For others, there is a view that good supervisors do not need any additional training and that supervision is seen as quick updates instead of a developmental opportunity with staff members. This has led to a lack of formal training opportunities for supervisors as well as low demand for those types of experiences especially in relation to other occupational fields. Good and bad supervisory experiences can have an enormous impact on both the performance of staff and their retention in the field, especially among new professionals. To examine this area, five student affairs supervisors were interviewed for this research with a focus on both how they think about effective supervision and how they learned to supervise others. Participants were asked to identify formal and informal learning opportunities they have had on this subject and the impact those have had on their supervisory style. Three themes emerged from the interviews: a focus on communication, creating learning opportunities, and informal changes over time. Additionally, participants were asked about the Synergistic Supervision style developed by Winston and Creamer (1997) specifically for student affairs professionals. The findings of this study were also compared to that model. Professional staff supervision training research is critical to the field due to the large impact it can have on both individuals
and the organization. More awareness needs to brought to this topic area so that we improve how supervision is implemented in student affairs, which will impact the experiences for both staff and students.

The form and content of this abstract are approved. I recommend its publication.

Approved: Brent Wilson
DEDICATION

To my sons, Connor and Nolan, who provided endless breaks from writing and researching when I needed it most. To my dogs, Rocky and Teter, who were my companions through much of the writing process, sitting by my desk for hours upon hours. To the many mentors, colleagues, students, faculty, and staff that I gotten to work with in my years in student affairs who challenged and supported my growth and development. Lastly, to my wife Amy for her love and support. She has been my motivator, editor, cheer leader, and iced tea maker. I could not have done this without her.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

This research study examined how student affairs staff learn to supervise other professionals. The term “student affairs” includes the wide variety of staff members that support students and their co-curricular learning during their time in college (Long, 2012). Because professional staff supervision is a critical and neglected research area in higher education and student affairs, finding data has been difficult (Saunders, Cooper, Winston, & Chernow, 2000; Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003). Even though the ability to supervise and work with staff effectively is critical to the development of supervisees (Schwartz & Bryan, 1998), staffing practices are not well studied on college campuses (Carpenter, Torres, & Winston, 2001). As you can see, many of the most recent studies on this topic area are at least ten years old. While many other businesses and educational environments have examined supervision training, this type of training for student affairs professionals is severely lacking (Harned & Murphy, 1998). And while there is a model designed for student affairs professionals, Synergistic Supervision (Winston & Creamer, 1997), the literature review will highlight the lack of awareness in the field around this model.

The lack of research-based practices and training on professional staff supervision can have an enormous impact on college campuses. Effective supervision can impact staff performance, especially for entry-level professionals. Unfortunately, many staff members do not receive formal training in this area and instead, are expected to intuitively learn supervision on their own, like learning how to be a parent (Arminio & Creamer, 2001). Additionally, Harned and Murphy (1998) noted the disconnect between supervision training and promotions in higher education: “a common dynamic is that a star professional is
promoted into a managerial position with little or no true preparation, where the fallback to avoid failure is not better supervision, but harder work” (p. 45). Without this intentional training and support, these new managers are put into challenging situations that are difficult for everyone involved.

While there are many definitions of supervision, the most relevant to this research project is defined by Schuh and Carlisle (1991) as a relationship where one person provides direction, leadership, information and support to others. The purpose of this research study is to investigate how these staff members learn to supervise other professionals, which leads to the research questions:

1. How do student affairs staff think about effective professional staff supervision?
   - How does their thinking around effective supervision connect with elements of the Synergistic Supervision model?
   - How does this thinking connect with other concepts, skills, and values?

2. How do student affairs staff learn to supervise other professionals?
   - What formal learning opportunities exist?
   - What informal learning opportunities exist?
   - How do past and present supervision experiences impact learning?

I am hopeful that findings from this study can highlight how staff learn to supervise and find ways to help improve supervision training in student affairs in the future.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework presented in Figure 1 revolves around how student affairs staff learn to supervise other professionals and develop their supervision style.
Figure 1. Formal and informal contributions to the development of student affairs supervision style.

There are many formal and informal inputs impacting supervision style including but not limited to:

- Formal learning opportunities
  - Employer-led learning as a part of a professional position
  - Outside learning at a conference, webinar, workshop, etc. led by off-campus facilitators
Formalized learning in a master’s or doctoral degree program

- Informal learning opportunities
  - Experiences with previous supervisors
  - Discussions and observations with colleagues and mentors
  - Self-directed learning through reading books, articles, etc.
  - Learning and evolving from experience over time as one supervises staff

All of these experiences can impact a supervisor’s style positively or negatively. Shupp and Arminio (2012) found examples of supervisees learning how they would shape their own style in the future based on negative interactions they had with their own supervisor. Formal learning opportunities offer some advantages in that they are often intentional and taught by someone with expertise in the field. However, there is typically a cost associated with formal experiences and many individuals may not get the opportunity to participate in those experiences based on that cost. Informal opportunities typically have no cost associated with them, but the impact will vary wildly based on the individual’s experience. For example, if an individual has a number of bad supervisory experiences, those informal learning opportunities may have an impact on their supervision style in the future (Shupp & Arminio, 2012). In my experience, informal learning opportunities have a much larger impact on supervision style than formal ones based on the limited number of formal experiences student affairs professionals get the opportunity to participate in. These potential formal and informal influences will be targeted for study in the proposed research project.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Staff members think and learn about professional staff supervision in a variety of ways both formally and informally. Shupp and Arminio (2012) argued the demands of higher education require staff to be prepared to effectively supervise. As outlined in the introduction, professional staff supervision research and training is severely lacking in higher education and student affairs, with many of the most recent studies over ten years old, which has a big impact on how this thinking and learning occurs. The lack of staff supervision training and research has led to views of staff supervision that can be severely inaccurate; these factors can impact the supervisor and supervisee, as well as, the campus in both positive and negative ways as outlined in this chapter. Unfortunately, some experienced professionals are not always equipped to take on supervision (Winston & Creamer, 1997), which can be problematic for individual staff members, student affair’s divisions, and the entire campus as a whole. Arminio and Creamer (2001) argued “supervision is like learning to be a new parent” (p. 39) and Tull (2006) stated supervision can be a very complex process. Unfortunately, supervision is easily neglected when staff members get busy with other tasks (Winston & Creamer, 1997). When staff are placed in new positions requiring new skills and knowledge without adequate training, the effect can be massive. This literature review highlights the lack of research and training on this topic, how supervisors view professional staff supervision, positive and negative impacts supervision can have on a university especially entry level employees, and important characteristics of supervision with an emphasis on the Synergistic Supervision model.
Lack of Existing Research

An enormous challenge related to professional staff supervision is the lack of research that has been done in college environments. Despite the importance of supervision, several studies have shown that supervision gets very little attention in the literature (Saunders, Cooper, Winston, & Chernow, 2000; Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003). While there has been some research on this topic area, it is not nearly as well studied as other vocational areas (Harned & Murphy, 1998) and very little has been done recently. Specifically, Barham and Winston (2006) argued that there is a lack of literature on what new professionals need in their supervisory experience in student affairs. Sermersheim and Keim (2005) highlighted a key challenge of supervision studies in that many dissertations have been written on this subject, but most of those were not adapted and published into journal articles. This means that while there is some information available, there is very little peer reviewed research that exists for those who wish to learn more about this topic area.

Lack of Training

Related to the lack of research on supervision is a shortage of training for those who supervise other professionals. “There may be few organizations as deprived of traditional managerial and supervisory training as colleges and universities” (Harned & Murphy, 1998, p. 45). Furthermore, supervisors in student affairs often have limited formal training or expertise in management (Harned & Murphy, 1998) even though it can be a large portion of a practitioner’s role (Dalton, 1996). As shown above, supervisors are often moved into new roles where they supervise staff because they were good at their entry level position, which typically did not include staff supervision (Wood, Winston, & Polkosnik, 1985). Even though the literature highlighted above shows a lack of preparation among new supervisors,
many experienced professionals do not feel a need for additional information or guidance on staffing practices (Carpenter, Torres, & Winston, 2001). Many point to the impact this problem has on supervisees, but this lack of training can have an impact on the supervisor as well. Harned and Murphy (1998) argued when poorly trained supervisors are forced to work harder to compensate their lack of training, their outlook can become negative towards their staff. One of the key barriers to supervision training is there is not typically an immediate reward or benefit of enhanced supervision because positive impacts often take a long time to come to fruition (Harned & Murphy, 1998). Lastly, the lack of training can impact entry level professionals. Shupp and Arminio (2012) argued entry-level staff need experienced supervisors to help guide their learning. Many have argued that graduate programs, individual institutions, and professional associations must do a better job prepping students and staff for future staff supervision (Arminio & Creamer, 2001; Barham & Winston, 2006; Saunders, Cooper, Winston, & Chernow, 2000). Barham and Winston (2006) stated “supervision is also an area that seems to deserve concentrated, prolonged attention from the professional associations as they design and offer professional development activities, workshops, and convention programs” (p. 86).

The lack of research and training existing on professional staff supervision may cause supervisors to view their role as supervisors in a very limited way. Instead of challenging a strong staff member to continue to improve, there is often a feeling that good professionals do not need to be supervised (Shupp & Arminio, 2012; Winston & Creamer, 1998). Unfortunately, supervision is also often seen as a review of day-to-day tasks with little focus on the future and is only seen simply as a tool to complete a task with no inclusion of staff development (Saunders, Cooper, Winston, & Chernow, 2000). Instead of utilizing training
and research on this topic, Arminio and Creamer (2001) found supervision is learned through trial and error, not doing things bad supervisors did, and not learned in graduate school. Like Sanford’s (1962) model of challenge and support for students where they are pushed to grow and also provided with the proper support systems to keep them progressing, professional staff must be challenged to grow in new ways while supported by their supervisor through that process. Without adequate training, this type of growth-oriented relationship is often neglected. In training, staff must utilize a model to move away from the imitation supervision strategy that is typically used (Barham & Winston, 2006). Barham and Winston (2006) also found supervisors tend to supervise how they want to be supervised, which is often based on previous positive and negative experiences with no tailoring to specific staff needs, especially entry level needs.

Impact of Supervision

Despite a lack of research, studies have found clear benefits of better supervision for individuals and organizations. Roper (2011) found effective supervision can improve performance, professional development, and employee outlook for individuals. Stock-Ward and Javorek (2003) found supervision can positively impact a staff member’s growth and ultimately the field. The ability to supervise and work with staff effectively is critical to the development of staff (Schwartz & Bryan, 1998). Conversely, a lack of effective supervision can have a negative impact, causing burnout, and forcing staff members to leave their positions (Cilente, Skinner-Jackson, Kennedy, & Sloane, 2006; Saunders, Cooper, Winston, & Chernow, 2000). This is because supervisory relationships have an enormous impact on “self-image, career satisfaction, and professional development” (Harned & Murphy, 1998, p. 43). Additionally, divisional and campus wide goals can be impacted by supervision.
Barham and Winston, (2006) found student affairs goals can be negatively impacted by a lack of quality supervision. Lastly, Janosik and Creamer (2003) said supervision is important to the organization, a key to an effective staffing plan, and is very critical to new professionals.

The benefits and challenges in effective staff supervision are especially seen in work with entry level staff. Supervision is important to new professionals (Janosik & Creamer, 2003) and new professionals, in particular, need enhanced supervisory experiences (Shupp & Arminio, 2012). Additionally, the supervisory relationship can be the principle factor in a new professional’s attrition (Barham & Winston, 2006; Winston & Creamer, 1998). This is critical as Tull (2006) found attrition among new professionals in student affairs is a concern and is becoming a priority. Additionally, new professionals said supervisory guidance was lacking and that effective supervision was a top priority for this group (Cilente, Skinner-Jackson, Kennedy, & Sloane, 2006). Barham and Winston (2006) found all supervisors could still improve upon diagnosing needs of new professionals, which dispels the myth that good employees do not need supervision training. Barham and Winston (2006) found supervisors often do not tailor supervising style to the needs of new professionals, rarely connect needs of new professionals to professional development activities, and lack the ability to recognize the needs of new professionals.

**Synergistic Supervision**

Some have argued the lack of training and research could be attributed to the lack of supervision model’s specific to higher education (Saunders, Cooper, Winston, & Chernow, 2000). However, researchers have created one model designed for use in student affairs, the Synergistic Supervision model, which varies from previous models adapted from other fields.
Elements of Synergistic Supervision include: dual focus, joint effort, two-way communication, focus on competence, growth orientation, proactivity, goal based, systematic and ongoing, and holistic (Winston & Creamer, 1997). This supervision model can work with all staff, but has been found to be particularly useful in working with entry level staff (Tull, 2006). Tull (2006) found new professionals who were supervised by staff using this model had more positive experiences, improved communication skills, and had greater job satisfaction. Tull (2006) also argued the Synergistic Supervision model should be used to train supervisors in either graduate programs or by professional associations. Additional research beyond Synergistic Supervision (Winston & Creamer, 1997) confirms some of these findings as well. Arminio and Creamer (2001) found that quality supervision takes time and intentionality, should involve regular meetings and communication, includes a great deal of staff involvement, and goals that are congruent with the university and divisional goals. Additionally, good supervisors can recognize needs and concerns as well as focus on continued development of their staff members (Harned & Murphy, 1998). While this research was not specifically connected to Synergistic Supervision, the findings align with elements that make up that model.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY AND STUDY DESIGN

This study was a qualitative, cross-case study involving student affairs staff at selected higher-education institutions within Colorado. The study focused on the overall research questions of how student affairs staff think about effective professional staff supervision and how they learn to supervise other professionals. The goal of this study was to identify those who have supervised professional staff in student affairs to determine how they learned about supervising others. The participants in this study were all bounded by participation criteria related to years of experience and roles they have had in the past. Creswell (2007) stated a case study is a qualitative method designed to allow a researcher to examine a bounded system. The case within this type of study can be representative of a variety of elements including a program area or a group of individuals (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). In this case, the study centers on how a group of staff members learned about and think about professional staff supervision. All those who participated in the study met the following criteria:

- Supervise at least three full-time student affairs staff members
- Have supervised full time student affairs staff members for at least two years
- Currently supervise professional staff members
- Have worked as a professional in student affairs for at least five years. The American College Personal Association sets five years as lowest years of service to be considered a mid-level manager. Mid-level managers and those above them are the primary professional staff supervisors in student affairs.
- Work in Colorado
By establishing this criteria, this allowed me to study the experiences of those who have been in the field and supervising professional staff for a minimum number of years. This ensured that brand new supervisors, who may not have much experience with this topic, did not impact the results and findings. Yin (2003) stated case studies should be used when the focus is on the “how” and “why.” The focus of this research was on how professional staff learned to think about supervision. Merriam (1998) argued that case studies allow the researcher to gain a deep understanding of the meaning and context of the participant’s experience. Baxter and Jack (2008) said by looking across units within a case, cross-case analysis, the researcher has the opportunity for a rich analysis that can highlight the overall topic area; they went on to say that these types of studies allow researchers to look at complex issues in context. By looking at how a variety of professional staff members learned about professional staff supervision, I was able to connect similarities in the data related to the overall research question.

Data Collection

To examine the research question, each participant met with the lead researcher for one interview that lasted approximately sixty minutes. The questions for the interview (Appendix A) were developed with a focus on the overall research question and in conjunction with the conceptual framework. Participants were recruited through my own network in Colorado, which allowed all interviews to happen face to face (Appendix F). The research was done across several higher education institutions across Colorado. By using multiple institutions, we know that any findings will not be attributed to one particular location, which enhances transferability and trustworthiness. One benefit to the use of
purposeful sampling is the opportunity to obtain different perspectives on a problem (Creswell, 2007).

First, I identified the minimum criteria needed for a staff member to participate and then I began recruiting those that fit those qualifications. Merriam (2002) stated that it is critical to first identify what criteria will be used to select participants. The sample used for this study was a purposive, convenience sample based on location. This approach can help maximize identifying patterns in the data especially given the context (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1981). My goal was to talk with those who have experience and competence on staff supervision, which Merriam (1998) argued helps gain greater insight and understanding.

For this study, I was the primary data gathering tool; being completely objective in this study was not possible due to how close I am to the research and practice in the field. I have been supervising professional staff for over three years and have faced many of the challenges participants shared. Like many of them, I had very little formal training around staff supervision and instead, relied on my own informal experiences with mentors and previous supervisors that shaped me both positively and negatively. During the interviews, I used the pre-established interview questions to ensure each area of the conceptual framework was explored.

I reached out to participants via email explaining the research being conducted and the participation commitment. I also sent out a short, pre-interview questionnaire (Appendix D), which outlined the study one week prior to the interview. All participants signed the consent form (Appendix E) prior to the interview. This form detailed their commitment and outlined the use of a pseudonym to help protect their identity. I was able to gain enough
participation in my study with my first round of solicitation so no additional follow up was needed outside of my network. Once a participant agreed to be involved in this study, we worked together to find a time, date, and location that was available for the both of us. Most of the interviews took place within that staff member’s office. Once I had participants selected, they completed the simple questionnaire (Appendix D) which was designed to get some straight forward, closed ended questions answered (number of supervisees, years of professional experience, years of professional supervision, functional area, campus type, degree level, etc.) and then structured the interviews around the sample questions (Appendix A).

**Data Analysis Procedures**

Each of the interviews was recorded digitally and transcribed by a third party service. After receiving the transcriptions, I proofread them, made updates based on my notes, then sent to each participant for member checking. Along with the recordings, I took field notes throughout each interview (Appendix B). Lastly, I allowed time after each interview to reflect, synthesize, and refine the notes based on what was said shortly after the interview was completed.

During the member check phase, each participant received a copy of the entire interview to ensure accuracy through member checking adding to trustworthiness. This allowed them to change or clarify anything elements that came from the interview. Merriam (1998) said member checking can be a critical portion of analysis as it allows participants to confirm the researcher’s findings. During this timeframe, each participant was assigned a pseudonym to enhance confidentiality.
Analysis of qualitative data is a search for themes and relationships (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). During the data analysis phase, I looked for themes through emergent coding where I reviewed transcripts and field notes in a cyclical pattern to establish codes, categories, and ultimately themes emerging from the data as outlined by Saldana (2009). While proofreading the transcripts, I began to do initial coding and as I compared those themes to themes from the other interviews as well as my field notes, trends began to emerge. After arranging quotations next to each theme, I was able to identify the commonalities that stretched across each participant’s responses especially in contrasting formal and informal learning opportunities. I then printed those themes and connecting quotations and aligned them with the other interviews. From that process, three major themes emerged, which are outlined in Chapter 4. By using multiple data through a variety of participants, this allowed for a pattern data analysis (Creswell, 2007). Merriam (1998) stated that the data analysis phase is about consolidation, reduction, and interpretation to make meaning of the interviews. As I revisited codes and quotations, I looked for ways to consolidate thoughts into the overall themes that were found.

**Data Handling and Privacy Procedures**

Data collected was stored on a password protected online storage drives for which only I have access. Participants were given the consent form and at the beginning of the interview process which outlined the usage of a pseudonym to protect their identity in the study. No other personal information was stored. There were no foreseeable risks for this study that would be any greater than the day-to-day actions of a professional position in student affairs. I, along with the individual participants, will be the only ones to know the
true identity of the participants. For any presentations in the future, I will refer to participants as pseudonym names.
CHAPTER IV

NARRATIVES AND FINDINGS

The qualitative case study is constructed around five participants, all meeting the minimum qualifications as outlined in Chapter 3. Each narrative highlights the participant’s view about supervision both formally and informally. Three major themes emerged:

- The value of communication
- A focus on learning
- How supervision styles change over time primarily by informal experiences

The first two themes address the first research question: *How do student affairs staff think about effective professional staff supervision?* The third theme relates to question two: *How do student affairs staff learn to supervise other professionals?* None of the interviewees was familiar with the Synergistic Supervision model of staff supervision in student affairs (Winston & Creamer, 1997), so any connections between the themes was made in the data analysis phase. The limited connections between the Synergistic Supervision model (Winston & Creamer, 1997) as well as findings, are outlined at the end of this chapter after the narratives.

Throughout all interviews, participants often commented on how reflecting on their supervision was helpful yet not something they made time for often enough. For some, the interview and preparation for our time together was a good opportunity to think more about how they supervise. Multiple times interviewees made comments like Whitley, “I think as I was preparing for this, rarely do I really sit down and think about, ‘What is my supervision philosophy?’” Within each interview, some themes emerged more clearly than others or
answers went more deeply into one theme. There was also a lot of crossover between the themes; I have utilized quotations to show how all three themes could connect at times.

In this chapter, you will get to know Riley, Parker, Landry, Emerson, and Whitley. Each was asked some background information related to their experiences in student affairs focusing specifically on supervision. During the interview, I asked each participant to rate the level of impact formal and informal experiences have had on their supervision style. Additionally, I asked them to rate the importance of effective supervision on the success of their staff. For each of these scales, 1 was the lowest score with almost no impact and 10 as the highest score with an enormous impact.

Table 1

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of years in student affairs as a professional</th>
<th>Current number of professional staff they supervise</th>
<th>Number of years they have been supervising professional staff</th>
<th>Currently Supervises in role</th>
<th>Familiar with Synergistic Supervision Model</th>
<th>Impact of formal experiences: 1=Very low 10=Very high</th>
<th>Impact of informal experiences: 1=Very low 10=Very high</th>
<th>Importance of effective supervision to the success of professional staff: 1=Very low 10=Very high</th>
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<tr>
<td>Whitley</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>4</td>
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Riley was the first person I interviewed, which for me, required I be there at least two hours before the actual interview time slot. I arrived on campus, walked around, found a place to eat lunch, and reviewed my questions multiple times rather nervously. I tested my recording devices with a much higher level of paranoia than was necessary. About ten minutes before we were scheduled to meet, I packed my things and make my way to Riley’s office. Luckily, there was a very friendly student at the front desk who calmed some of my nervousness with some friendly banter about the building. Riley met me at the front, took me back to her office where we sit at a table and chairs in her spacious office. Her space is well
organized, very clean looking, and has books, pictures, and artwork that make it feel quite comfortable. After some small talk, I set up my recording device and off we went!

As we moved through the interview, Riley shared her experiences, background, and knowledge in a variety of contexts. Riley has been in the field for nine years (the smallest number of years of those I interviewed), supervises six full-time professional staff members and has been supervising staff a large part of her career, over seven of her nine years. Riley shared a very straightforward definition of effective supervision encapsulating the area really well, “You know, I think effective supervision is the ability to let someone do their job really well, and to help them become better.”

Riley also shared an interesting anecdote around equality versus equity when supervising professional staff members. Riley reluctantly admitted to watching the television show, *The Sister Wives*, a series about a polygamous family where there is one husband and multiple wives. Riley shared one of the plot lines of the show relating to how she views one aspect of staff supervision:

I watch the TV show "Sister Wives." Well, so like years ago, there was a conversation about like one of the wives was mad that the other wife was getting something that she wanted. Like she's like how come this other wife gets thing, that's not fair. It was like one of those supervisory light bulbs, too, because I was like having the same thing happen at work. Like how come this person got to go home early today ... Because they worked on Saturday, you didn't see. He explained it. He's like, you know, all my wives are getting what they need to be healthy, and to like have a really good relationship. They're giving me feedback, and I'm giving them feedback, and we're good. In my mind, I'm like oh my gosh, that's exactly like supervising people. When they see something, and you're like what. Like a polygamous husband at times. Which is totally ridiculous, I know.

While Riley does not view supervision in a paternal sense and issues of equity did not emerge as an explicit theme in other interviews, this story highlights an important challenge in supervising professional staff, how do we balance the needs of each of our staff members?
Value of Communication

In examining how student affairs staff think about effective professional staff supervision, communication was the first theme that emerged. The focus of Riley’s interview was on how valuable she finds communication to be in her daily work with staff. As we moved through the interview, she referenced communication multiple times and in a variety of ways. Early in the interview, she said:

I also am very direct. There's very few times that I'm going to ... That people are going to wonder what I'm thinking if they ask. It doesn't mean I'm going to go out and tell everyone all the time, but I'm going to be very clear and give them what they should hear at the right times.

Direct communication was a big part of Riley’s supervision style, especially in terms of providing feedback to her staff consistently so they always know where they stand with her. She said, “Then, like we talked about a little bit, no surprises. Giving that feedback, that two-way conversation, so that both parties can get what they need to make sure that they're successful.” I thought the framing of these conversations as a learning experience was particularly important, especially when communicating feedback to staff and highlighted some of the crossover between the themes.

Riley also discussed how her communication style has changed over time. When asked about how much of a factor effective supervision impacted the success of a team, she said, “I think I was told, and I think I like kind of generally knew like having clear expectations would be really great….I think also I didn't necessarily do that…..Or have a tough conversation.” This is another example of how two of the themes are connected, communication and informal changes over time, as Riley identified some of her style in communication has evolved since earlier in her career.
Lastly, Riley discussed what effective communication looks like in her day to day work. When talking about her supervision style and how her role connects to supervision of professional staff, she said, “I think it plays out for me that I'm in a lot of meetings, and having a lot of conversations, and having a lot of chances to check in with people and hear what they need, and kind of follow up.” Riley also discussed how important communication is across campus as an advocate for her area as well as a way to connect with other colleagues through informal learning.

**Learning Focused**

While Riley referenced communication multiple times in her interview, a focus on learning played an even larger role in how she supervises professional staff members. She pointed to her own learning experiences as examples of how she has tried to incorporate learning into how her staff views their relationship:

I like to take an angle of making things a learning experience as much as possible. I had a supervisor tell me once, we were talking about how I was getting a lot of really young, new professionals who were really energetic. He was like well, just make sure that everything you do is a learning experience. I was like well that's a really interesting perspective. I think I've thought that, but not always intentionally done that. I think there's been times, the past couple years in particular, where I've been able to say all right, take a breath. Let's talk to this person, but figure out how to spin it so it's a learning experience. As opposed to just an experience where they feel like okay, I had to have a talk.

This excerpt shows how all three themes can intersect at times. Through explaining an informal learning experience of her own, Riley outlined how she uses communication to examine experiences with her staff and make them learning opportunities.

She went on to explain how this impacts the staff member’s development:

Then they kind of then take that learning on their own instead of really making it a conversation on how to make it a learning experience. Then, even following up afterwards to make sure it was really a learning experience, or did I not cover something. Or did they need to have time to reflect.
Riley explained how communication continues to play a role in the learning experience through follow-up conversations with staff. Towards the end of the interview, Riley shared how she views supervision through her own experiences when she said, “And having grace, because let's be honest. People are going to make mistakes, including yourself.” Riley demonstrated she thinks about supervision in a way she would want to be viewed by her own supervisor, specifically focused on creating learning experiences fostering growth and development.

**Informal Changes**

In discussing the development of their individual supervision style, all participants noted the impact of informal experiences; this was definitely a theme for Riley, who shared a number of examples of how informal experiences have changed her supervision style over time. In her very straightforward way Riley observed: “My style has changed over time. I think part of it has to do with, you know, who I'm supervising ... But part of it has to do with just me changing over time also. I think it's been helpful to kind of continually reflect on who I am, and where I am with things.” Later in the interview, Riley went on and shared, “So I think it's evolved over time, and I think it's probably continually evolving. Which, in my opinion, I think it should because I have different people I work with all the time.” It was clear Riley could identify shifts in her supervision style over time and when asked about how those shifts happened, she pointed exclusively to informal experiences like supervisors, mentors, and colleagues.

When talking about learning how to supervise, she noted the importance of developmental conversations:
I think that a lot of my supervisors have been very helpful with talking through things with me, and working through what might be some good steps, not good steps, whatever. I think typically they've all approached it in ways of like really being more of a sounding board for me. Then probably a more Socratic method of them asking me, you know, is that the right way to do it, not ... You know, not necessarily telling me what to do.

In her objective ratings, Riley identified informal experiences as having a much larger impact on her development than formal ones. When sharing stories around how she learned to supervise, Riley did not highlight a single formalized experience that shaped her supervision style, which was common across all the interviews. Even when receiving direct advice, it was not in a formal training or a conversation in the moment, but after time had gone by and she had been able to reflect a bit. When Riley was asked whether she was just given the advice or taught how to implement these informal learning opportunities, she responded, “He told me that directly. It was after I stopped working for him. It was kind of interesting, because I think I could look back and see some of that, even though I might not have understood it then.” The learning did not happen in real time, but after reflection on experiences and further discussions with co-workers and colleagues. Riley shared, “I think sometimes lessons aren't always learned right in the moment.”

In addition to the informal learning that took place for Riley around supervision, one other interesting piece stuck out for her. Riley commented on how staff have impacted her in informal ways, “I think also, my direct reports can be really good like teachers, as well. I understand they're not exactly my peers. I'm not bringing them other issues with other staff necessarily, but I've been using it as a way to first off, kind of have a chance for me to learn more, but then also for me to help them learn.” It was very clear that Riley’s informal experiences have been enormously influential in how she learned to supervise and how she thinks about effective supervision.
Parker

As I got ready for my second interview, I already felt immensely more prepared based solely on my positive experience in my first interview. We met in Parker’s office and I noticed a lot of books and articles arranged through her office. It seemed clear Parker is someone who is always consuming new information and best practices especially around student affairs. Having completed one interview previously, I had a good feel for the timing of the questions, but as illustrated in the themes below, Parker’s focus was slightly different than Riley. I was a little worried we would run out of time as we conducted this interview at the end of the work day, but that did not seem to impact our conversation in anyway.

Parker has been a student affairs professional for thirteen years, has supervised eight full time staff members, and has been supervising professional staff for over nine years. Parker supervises staff in a wide variety of functional areas, which means she does not always have direct expertise in each area. She shared this when talking about challenges she identifies around supervision and training,

But it feels like it's, "I, Parker, should know this stuff. Come on. Get with it already." Again, they're not talking about egregious problems. If I had some sort of egregious problem, I feel like I would seek that out from my supervisor. Again, I feel like I'm probably a good supervisor, but I probably have the potential to be a phenomenal supervisor, but I need that guidance to kind of get me from ... What's that classic saying? Good to great.

During the interview, the focus seemed to be on communication, but during the analysis, I noticed Parker also talked a lot about informal experiences that changed her style over time.

Value of Communication

Parker identified early in the interview how much communication plays a role in how she works and supervises utilizing a variety of forms of communication. She said, “I really value communication. I think anyone that I know or knows me would say that. My supervision style, how that plays out is I communicate a lot. I talk to people, I call them, I send them lots of emails, I check in.” Parker was one of the only interviewees reporting that she had actively sought feedback from staff members on her role as a supervisor and
communication emerged there as well. Parker shared this example from an evaluation a staff member recently filled out:

One of the words that someone had used, which made me really happy was "transparent." That's a good one. I think that at least one person that I supervise would describe me as a transparent supervisor, which I think plays back to that communication piece. I think this issue of kind of transparency and communication and kind of realistic all kind of goes hand in hand.

Parker talked about how important communication can be as a supervisor, especially at larger colleges and universities. She stated, “I think of an institution of our size, the role of the supervisor becomes sort of this sort of important conduit of information and prioritization.”

Parker also highlighted a challenged related to informal learning over time, particularly around communication:

Another piece that I think ties into this effective supervision, and it goes back to the communication, and I've had good conversations with my staff about this is finding that appropriate balance. Me forwarding them every single email that I receive is not a good idea for anyone, but me not withholding information and only updating them every two weeks at a staff meeting is also not an appropriate mechanism. What is that sort of magical formula for effective communication? Does that need to be different for the different people that I supervise? Can I, Parker, just say, "Okay, this is how I communicate," and then apply that across the board? Or do I need to say, "Okay, in these cases with this person, given who they are with their style and the nature of their work, I do this. With this other person, that doesn't make sense." I struggle a lot with that piece, because I know I probably err a little bit more on the over-communication side. I know that that's challenging for some people, because then it becomes harder to discern what's really important and what's just kind of important.

Lastly, Parker talked about having challenging conversations with staff members in a way that becomes a learning experience, another crossover between the two themes:

I think the ability to have difficult conversations and kind of that accountability piece, the ability to hold people accountable without ... Not shying away from difficult conversations, but being able to have them in a way that either results in a change of employment or that results in someone saying, "Okay, gosh. I'm not meeting this expectation. How do I change my behavior to meet it?" That's probably one of the hardest parts of supervision.
Even when communication becomes extremely challenging, Parker recognized how important it is to have those conversations to ensure that staff and supervisor are on the same page.

**Learning Focused**

As the interview went on, Parker talked a lot about learning both in her own experience and in relating that to how she supervises staff. In her own work, Parker valued learning:

> Also I'm a learner. That's also my strength-finder strength, and input. I'm actually not a strength-finder guru, but I've been thinking about them lately. I think the learner piece is something I'll ... I share a lot of articles and I ask people to engage in interesting discussion and dialogue that may not necessarily be directly applicable for their job, like, "Therefore, I'm going to do this exact same thing," but it's more to make them aware and to kind of open their eyes to something new, perhaps, they're not considering.

Parker used her own personal learning style and looked for ways to incorporate it into the work others are doing, which was an interesting way to look at learning focused supervision. It was clear throughout the interview that Parker looked for new ways to challenge her staff to learn and grow.

To challenge the learning of her staff, Parker shared a story of a recent example of work with her staff:

> I have another good example of something I tried to inspire change. I'm not sure if it worked or not, because we're not done with it yet, but I found that some of my direct reports and myself are often times somewhat sort of disconnected from the day to day student experience. Again, this idea that I really value our direct work to serve students and support students in a really meaningful way. What I had each of my directors do is I said, "Take a day," and I actually cleared this with ... I had to go through this whole process with the academic deans on this, but I said, "Take a day off from work, not a vacation day. You're working. Go spend a day sort of as a student, like a day in the life of a student.
This highlighted how Parker looked for innovative ways to incorporate learning into how she supervised. While many supervisors may have their staff read an article, watch a webinar, or have a discussion on how students have evolved on college campuses, Parker pushed her staff to gain a new experience with the goal of furthering their opportunity to learn as professionals.

Lastly, in talking about what effective supervision looks like, Parker connected the definition directly to learning more than any of the other participants. She defined effective supervision as, “The ability to inspire people to evolve, or change, or continue doing the same thing, but with renewed gusto, if needed. That, to me, is what I'm constantly ... Maybe that's given our climate. I feel like there's a lot of necessary changes.” In looking at both how Parker supervised and how she would define effective supervision, learning is at the core.

**Informal Changes**

In all the interviews I conducted, Parker shared some of the most straight-to-the-point answers. When asked about formal training experiences around supervising professional staff, Parker said, “I didn't take any classes specifically in supervision.” Instead, she shared how informal experiences have impacted her: “It comes from me observing other people doing it and me thinking, ‘Oh, I probably should do that, too.’” Responding to the questions on impact of experiences on development of style, Parker, like all of the participants, placed a much higher score on informal experiences influencing her style than formal ones. She had the second highest difference between the two scores, highlighting the marginal impact of formalized training. As the literature outlines, learning through observation and experience is very common and can have both positive and negative impacts. Parker talked about how that has played out for her:
Yeah, I think it's primarily has been my supervisors, and then in one case, kind of a peer who was sort of watching and observing her with some things that she was doing with her staff. Sort of like classic case, I had a few good supervisors, I think one really good for me, in terms of fit early on in my career. Then I had a series of people ... I've never had a horrible supervisor or anything, but I've had enough people that I thought, I don't want to be that, or I don't want to do that. Sort of shaping my own sense of supervision from both my good experiences, but also rejecting the bad experiences, and "bad" is even probably a harsher word than necessary. Yeah, I would say that's been the case.

Even currently, Parker talked a great deal about positive experiences she had with her current supervisor, but these have not been formalized conversations directly related to improving as a supervisor.

Like Riley, Parker has been impacted much more by informal learning than even formalized, direct conversations about improvement. Parker reported:

Yeah, I feel like I should say more about my current supervisor, because I do think I look at her. She is a phenomenal role mode to me, not in a direct way with respect to supervision, but again, I don't see my supervision and my work style as being necessarily two completely separate things.

So even when someone identified on outstanding supervisory experience, it is not always explicit, direct, or formal in the way learning occurred. In addition to informal learning in the workplace, Parker identified some exterior influences, including her husband and father.

Yeah, I try to talk to my husband about it, but he teaches second graders, so he doesn't get it either. I talk to my dad about supervision quite a bit, actually. He just retired. He's a civil engineer, so not at all the same thing, but he and I have a lot of the same values and have a lot of the same work values. He's a horrible supervisor. He will say that. He's a wonderful engineer and was, and in the periods of his career where he had to supervise people, it was the worst. Again, it goes back to that value piece. He's a good kind of confidant. Although he's my dad, of course he's a good coach for me.

Clearly, supervisors do not rely on formalized experiences for their professional learning and development. Instead, like Parker does, they utilize all the potential resources that might exist and in most cases, those are informal ones.
Landry

By this interview I was probably a little too relaxed as I had conducted a few interviews already. We met in Landry’s office, which was bright with sunshine and as many would say, her personality. Landry and I had a lively discussion and her “woo” strength was clear in both how she works and in our interview. We sat at a table and chairs away from her desk and moved through the questions with plenty of laughter and stories.

Landry has worked in student affairs as a professional for twelve years with five years supervising professional staff members. She has supervised five full time staff members and while Parker does not identify as a strengths guru, Landry would say the quite opposite. As highlighted before, one of Landry’s strength’s is “woo” or winning others over, which means she is very personable and easy to talk with. Her personality traits, more than anyone else’s, came through during the interview very clearly. Landry discussed ways she tries to include her own knowledge and learning so she is as inclusive as possible, but as highlighted in Whitley’s quotation at the introduction to this chapter, supervision is not something she, or many others, thinks about often. Landry stated, “It makes me realize I don’t do much reflection about where I’ve learned things. Is that common?” As Landry discussed supervision, she focused very much on relationships that impact her ability to communicate with staff, help them learn, and her own informal learning over time.

Value of Communication

Landry discussed communication throughout her answers and it is obvious it plays a huge role in how she thinks about supervision. Landry talked about how she is a natural communicator,

I’ve always been a communicator in all ways, so generally, talker…… I do that, I think that’s just a quality that I have in general is I tend to be pretty personable, positive, upbeat, some of those things, so I draw people into a conversation… I am not one to keep a secret, so I communicate often and frequently. Communication is important to me.
Interestingly, Landry shared she does not have formal one on one meeting times with individual staff members. Instead, they meet as needed, which happens regularly. In my experience, supervisors typically have a regular meeting (weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, etc.) with the staff they directly supervise. Landry explained, “We do lots of informal conversations and supervisory conversations constantly.” While there was not a specific question on meeting formally with staff members, Landry was the only one who shared this style, which was a little different than supervision styles I have seen. When looking at communication, Landry discussed how she likes to receive information as a supervisee, which plays a role in her supervision style. Landry explained, “The other thing is that's what I so value is I like receiving the information. I don't like to necessarily receive too much that doesn't pertain to me, that's not of interest, but if it's relevant and if it's important to me in my work and my students, then yes, so that's why. I share it out. I try not to communicate unnecessarily, though.” It was clear Landry relies on communication as a heavy factor in how she thinks about and implements supervision for her professional staff.

**Learning Focused**

As Landry learned to supervise, it was not through a formal process. She learned through informal means and tended to connect with how she worked closely with her staff. Landry said, “I have very limited formal training on how to be a supervisor. My master’s program was in communications with an emphasis in PR (public relations), so it was certainly not something that was really ever focused on in any coursework.” For Landry, focusing on the unique traits of her staff is critical in her supervision style of other staff. She talked about how she works to adapt and change to each staff member to help challenge them to continue to improve in their own abilities. Specifically, Landry stated:
I will probably say this a lot, but my focus is all about the relationship building component. I will, first and foremost, focus on the individual and the task second. That's how I live my life every single minute of every single day. It is by far more important to me how you’re doing than what you’re doing, because I think that impacts the quality of work that you do and your desire to want to be here. I think that, first and foremost, my job as a supervisor is to create an environment of welcome, of comfort, and that you want to be in this space. First and foremost, that's how I would talk about my supervisory style. It's all about the individual.

Landry pointed to some specific examples of how she implements an approach that is both learning focused and individualized to each staff member, “I'm pretty adaptable as far as it's less about what I want and more about what they want. For some people it's all about the daily check ins and some of those things and that's fine. For other people that I've supervised, that's not as much of importance, so I'm pretty adaptable. Can meet people where they are.” Lastly, Landry also talked about the importance of learning and growing in effective supervision. She shared, “Effective supervision is having someone that's different than you, makes you grow continuously, makes you think things through in a different way, because the nature of our work is pretty fluid, and I feel like every year is different.” In explaining both her own style and in a definition of effective supervision, Landry incorporated key elements around staff learning and development.

**Informal Changes**

Landry talked a lot about how informal experiences shaped her supervision style especially over time. Landry, like many others, spent a long time supervising student staff members, which can be very different from supervising professional staff. “That took me a little while to figure out that I needed to supervise people differently in that manner. That would probably be, is how do I challenge people in an appropriate and effective way that prepares them for their next role? This highlights the intersection between the learning theme, which Landry experienced, and how learning happens informally over time with her
own staff. Landry talked more about the transition later in the interview and when asked how she learned to make that shift, Landry responded:

I don't know. I don't know. Maybe that's trial and error, also. Initially, especially, because I shifted from a colleague to a supervisor, I thought, "Oh. I need to do something about this. I'm their supervisor now. I need to figure this out." It's like, no. You can still have ... I think it's important to get things off your chest. Sometimes I'll just check in and say, "You want me to, what do you want me to do? Am I just? Then, I will vent away and I will listen and I will offer advice if you want." I ask lots of question.

Landry also shared some great examples of how other informal experiences have shaped her. One story included a past supervisor,

I have had supervisors in the past who have communicated coldly and I have a very strong reaction to that. …she would communicate via email and a statement that just came across like she was really upset and that is, I am very aware of how I communicate and how that's received because of past supervisors.

And while supervisors have influenced how she thinks about staff supervision, previous staff members have also influenced her style. Landry outlined that in saying,

The other example, I'll use NAME REDACTED, is he would try to get away with a lot and at the end of the day, I was the one that was answering the questions to those above me, not her, and I wasn't comfortable with it. His ask for forgiveness mentality did not work well with me. I think that was good, though, because it really taught me what my limit was.

Here is a clear example of how much of an impact experience has had on how Landry thinks about supervision and the way those experiences play a role in her style today. When asked further about other ways she learned some of her supervision skills, she said, “I have no idea. It's tricky for me, because I truly, I don't know where I came up with that that that's of such necessity” and “Probably just trial and error.” Lastly, Landry provided a clear example of how she will continue to change over time, “I think we're always evolving and trying to think about, figure all of that out. I am by no means, if we have this interview win a year, it will probably sound completely different. I think some things will remain the same, like the
relationship piece will always be important to me, but there might be something else.” For Landry, a great deal of how she thinks about supervision relates entirely to informal factors like her own experiences and personality.

**Emerson**

*I travelled a little further to see Emerson than most of my participants. To ensure I arrived on time, I left myself about twice as much travel time as I needed so I could get settled, see campus, and arrive a little early to his office. Instead, a major accident set my travel way back and I ran through the building to arrive in his office about thirty seconds before we were scheduled to begin leaving me feeling disorganized, out of breath, and sweaty. Luckily he was still wrapping up a meeting so I had a brief moment to gain my composure before our interview began.*

Emerson has worked in the field the longest of all the participants at over twenty-eight years as a professional staff member. He has supervised ten full time staff members and has been in a professional staff supervision role most of his career, twenty-six of the twenty-eight years. Of all the participants, it seemed Emerson had done the most thinking about this subject area, which could be attributed to his years of experience or other roles in coaching as well as teaching leadership development to others. While he never explicitly said it, I believe Emerson has had many similar conversations around supervision and leadership. Emerson talked about tenants of good supervision and leadership he has used for years. Emerson preferred to use the term “leadership” when talking about supervision so early on, so I used “supervision and leadership” when I asked questions. He appreciated that change in perspective, which probably lead to a better discussion than if I had stuck to a strict usage of “supervision.” His exact quotation was, “I love that you’re referring to it with supervision and leadership.”
Value of Communication

Early in my conversation with Emerson, he mentioned how listening is a key component in his ability to communicate as a supervisor. When asked about how he would describe his own supervision style, he shared one of the tenants of effective leadership/supervision, “The first one is the power of listening and it's about really understanding what the needs of a staff member are that when they come to you in order to be an effective supervisor I've got to really hear and understand what the deeper motivation is for them.” This was an aspect of communication most of the other participants did not explicitly talk about in their interview. Most other participants talked about sharing information rather than absorbing it as Emerson outlined. In the context of listening, Emerson shared a specific example of how he has seen communication at work in other roles, “Listen and learn. Yeah, and you hear that tenant. One of the best presidents I worked with, he was the best listener I also ever worked with and he was great. He was an incredible listener and could ... You knew he heard you when he could repeat back with some added insight about what you could be doing different but it wasn't telling you what you were doing.” This example highlights both how communication plays a role in how Emerson thinks about supervision and how it informally helped shaped his supervision style.

Emerson is also particularly intentional about how he shares information and the language he uses. This was highlighted by an example he gave around language for staff classifications. Emerson stated,

I will also add, there's one thing that's really important for me and it's my use of language. This is a good example, we have our classified staff and we have our administrative professional staff. Here it's AP, administrative professional, and the terminology that I use is career staff. I hate that separation and I do not use it with my staff. Part of that is because the communication and the expectations that I have relate to all staff that I work with whether you're AP or state classified. This is part
of your chosen career and you're a career staff member of the student center who is about creating that sense of community. Yeah, if I could just wipe away the designations I would love it. It's my best attempt to try to do that.

This demonstrates how both direct and indirect communication play a role in how Emerson thinks about supervision of professional staff. While Emerson talked about some different aspects of communication, it is clear that it plays a central role in his supervision and the tenant’s he uses daily.

**Learning Focused**

Another one of my favorite stories from my interviews was when Emerson discussed the importance of helping staff learn. My own staff give me a hard time about never answering their questions directly, which is my attempt to challenge them to think and find the answers within themselves. Emerson highlighted this approach with a pop culture connection to the Star Wars movie series, which he called the Jedi mind trick. Emerson explained,

I have a rule to that I never tell and I used to have a sign prior to our renovation that said, "No telling." Yet, to be quite honest with you I think sometimes ... I think if there's a frustration they call it this Jedi power where I won't tell them but I will lead them to a certain way. Certainly that's not my intent. I really want ... I'm looking for them to ... I want to bring out the best in them and if we arrive at a situation where they believe it's their idea, I don't care. Ultimately it works in the best interest of serving students that's what we want to do.

When confronted with staff questions and issues, Emerson’s approach is to help guide them to the answer through a learning process rather than provide them information directly, which leads to greater staff empowerment. Emerson also talked about the importance of a diverse team that provides learning and growth for supervisor and supervisee,

I think my staff would describe me as an optimist so the glass is half full and yet I'm going to surround myself with people who are different than I am. The person that I probably work with the closest who's the Director of Business Services is the complete opposite of me in every regard in the organization. I love that and he
knows I'm the guy who ... I'm going to take the student who's going to make it, they're going to grow, they're going to thrive. He's the pessimist, how much money is this one going to cost us? Somewhere that truth is in between and generally components of both of our ideas that are embedded in that. I just think that that's really important that we've got those diverse perspectives and that every single person in the organization can bring some value and growth, and what we're going to get from that person.

Instead of looking for those who are similar to his own style, Emerson builds a team of individuals who will challenge each other to grow, which is a clear part of how he thinks about supervision.

Lastly, Emerson emphasized the power of learning through his definition of effective supervision. Emerson explained what he believes to be effective supervision by saying,

I think it’s when a staff member can operate at their fullest potential. It may not be what I want that person to do and it may not be doing the work in the way that I would do it or the time frame that I would do it, or the same quality. But that I have understood the context of that person and what they’re capable of and challenge them to perform at their fullest potential. That they're satisfied and happy that they're learning and growing, that they're being challenged, and that they are enjoying what they're doing.

Emerson used both “learning” and “growing” in his definition of effective leadership, which is critical. There were many other examples that illustrate how much of a factor Emerson believes learning is in thinking about professional staff supervision, but these show a clear connection between learning and how Emerson connects that to supervision.

**Informal Changes**

Like the other participants, informal experiences really shaped how Emerson thinks about supervision. For Emerson, the informal training around supervising professional staff started early in his career as he explained,

I was thrown into the fire, so almost everything. I really was… I was this 24-year-old supervising 35-year-old coordinators. I had very little training and fortunately I had good people that I could go to and say, "Hey how do I deal with this?" I was dealing with tough stuff related to holding staff accountable who had not been held
accountable. I think had I had a little bit more patience and the ability to communicate more openly and just the maturity, I would have been a lot better than I was. I had 0 training.

Over time, Emerson stated he learned more and more about supervision in very informal, experiential ways like, “Yeah, so watching, learning, and then yet remaining true to those core values. I've taken that tenant and I will say to students, ‘This is a hard one to live by.’ That tenant of don't say it until you can say it to the person. Sometimes you need some coaching and you need practice.” The practice Emerson referenced was not in a formalized training, but instead, through real world experience, which can take time and effort. Emerson shared it took a long time for him to learn about effective staff supervision through informal processes. He referenced a relationship with a staff member in this thought, “I would say for the first, this was a long time, and it took 10 years for me to understand what drives and motivates him in that cultural aspect of leadership that I think is so important and what's important.” Of everyone I interviewed, I think Emerson has utilized literature and formal learning opportunities as much or more than others. At the same time, he contrasted the two ways to learn when he said, “There's a lot of literature out there but it's the watching and learning, and having a mentor that you can pick up the phone and call, and say, ‘Hey this is what I'm seeing and dealing with.’” And while the literature is important, Emerson explained what role it plays without experience when he talked about where he learned his supervision style, “Some coursework. Again, coursework around leadership as a part of my doctoral program. Again, I think without those life experiences and actually doing it, they were meaningless.” So while Emerson placed a higher value than everyone else on the formal experiences, by
looking at his stories and ratings from the table, it is clear he appreciates how large of a role informal experiences has played on his supervision style.

**Whitley**

*Whitley was the only interview that was done in a public location outside of the participant’s office, in a local coffee shop. I arrived in plenty of time to secure a space in a more secluded location of the coffee shop so the transcription wouldn’t be too challenging. Whitley was running a few minutes late and about five minutes after our scheduled meeting time, I started to panic and began digging for our confirmation email and was quickly relieved to see I was in fact in the right location on the right date/time. Shortly thereafter my panic state fully ended when Whitley arrived and the interview ran very smoothly with only one interruption from someone he knew.*

Whitley has worked in student affairs for over thirteen years and has supervised nine staff members although that number decreased due to some planned reorganization shortly after our interview. He has been supervising professional staff members for a large majority of his career, over nine years. While Whitley answered the questions around supervision pretty uniformly, he did identify that supervision does look different depending on the staff members and their level of responsibility. Whitley explained in his role, he supervises directors, assistant directors and other staff meaning, “My supervision looks a little bit different with one half of my direct reports versus the other half.” However, none of the data pointed to clear distinctions between the two styles of supervision when examining the themes from this study.

**Value of Communication**

Whitley discussed the importance of communication in a variety of contexts with his staff. First, he said sharing information is an important part of his supervision style and if asked, his staff would comment, “They would say I err on the side of providing them all the information than some and that I don't hide things from them, and that I use honest language with them in sharing processes, frustrations around those processes, and that there's really no
secrets of the organizational chart.” Whitley went on to talk about what that looks like in reality, “I always say we set expectations, set values, really talk about we're all aware of what we're trying to accomplish if showing up for work, attitude, behavior start to negatively impact or butt up against our values for our office.” In addition to these conversations, Whitley shared that a discussion around supervision of each staff member is important to him especially during the onboarding process, “Then, we talk about how they want to be supervised, how they supervise, and then what that means for their relationship me as their supervisor. That's that co-construction of that process. Do you want to do weekly’s? Do you want to do monthly’s? Do you need weekly’s?” That quotation points to the importance of communication in addition to the crossover with the importance of learning through building that knowledge together. Lastly, Whitley shared a unique aspect of communicating appreciation to staff members that did not come out in the other interviews. He shared,

Connecting with staff and communicating appreciation. For me, lots of one on one meetings, lots of quality contact time. We also, whenever I've got new staff do the Five Love Languages. I want to know how staff are appreciated. I think for me, from what I look for in a supervisor is if I'm doing what I need to be doing.

For Whitley, communication is a critical element in setting up the relationship with supervisees, continuing that relationship through one on one meetings, and looking for ways to communicate appreciation.

**Learning Focused**

Whitley also talked about how learning is an important piece of how he thinks about supervision. He shared a student development theory he uses with professional staff focusing on how the pair can work together to co-create knowledge through learning experiences. Instead of viewing supervision as an all knowing person at the top of the organizational chart who espouses knowledge and advice, he discussed learning together through the process.
When asked about how supervision looks for him, Whitley explained, “Really using Marsha Baxter-Magolda’s theory that validating learners is situated learning through their experience and co-construction of knowledge. That in terms of pedagogy and we're all creating this together.” In addition to creating knowledge together, Whitley talked about how learning opportunities are framed especially if there is a negative connotation attached to the experience. Whitley said this when discussing how some conversations with staff are framed, “The only reason you're being confronted by somebody else in this organization is because we care about you, we care about what we're doing in the students.” Finally, Whitley talked about how learning is one variable that is controllable in supervision, which makes it a focus area for him. Whitley described that in further detail, “A lot of times we'll say, I'll say this all the time, I can teach anything. I can't inspire. Or I can be inspirational, but if that person's not willing to be inspired then whatever.” In looking at supervision, Whitley’s view of supervision includes a focus of both time and energy on creating learning experiences for staff.

**Informal Changes**

Whitley was very direct in the responses around informal changes that have occurred for him over time in both good and bad situations. He said,

> Totally. I think that's where the bulk of mine would come from. I remember for years, early on in my professional career having this philosophy of, "Everything I will ever learn from a supervisor is what I would never ever do to somebody else. I was astounded when I first ... I was probably in my 30s before I had my first professional supervisor. I was like, "Oh, I want to be like you," and this ... Yeah. I remember this person said this out loud in the meeting and I remember looks on everybody else's faces and I will never do that.

Whitley also distinguished between learning something in a formalized setting and actually implementing it or experiencing it in the real world when he said, "There's a difference
between knowing the path and walking the path.” Additionally, Whitley talked about how other, informal life learning experiences can have an impact on supervision style.

I think, I guess at some level as I get older and priorities shift or change, I think certainly having kids was a huge thing. I was like, "What's really important in life?" I think I had a pretty good sense of that ahead of those time. I tell my staff all the time, "I don't ... My whole philosophy of why I do what I do, is truly our goal is to role model to students how to be good human beings."

Whitley was one of the few participants to highlight how changes outside of work can impact their supervision style informally. Lastly, Whitley talked about the challenge of balancing authenticity knowing people change over time. He said, “I think being honest and being authentic and being who you are, and not necessarily not being like, ‘This is who I am. Tough.’ But that there’s still learning and growth.” That type of honesty can help individuals grow and learn from situations, which based on the stories he shared, have been large pieces that have informed how he views supervision of professional staff.

**Comparing to the Synergistic Supervision Model**

One goal of this research was to evaluate how professional staff member’s views on supervision align with the Synergistic Supervision model. Unfortunately, none of the participants were familiar with the model prior to the study. Winston and Creamer (1997) outlined aspects of the model including: two-way communication, growth orientation, dual focus and joint effort, focus on competence and goals, systematic, ongoing, as well as holistic. At various times, participant’s views connected with various aspects of this model, but in looking at themes that emerged across all the interviews, only two-way communication and growth orientation connected well to the findings here. Two-way communication lined up with the value of communication theme and growth orientation related to a learning focus. The connections between those themes is pretty clear, but to find connections to the other
aspects of the model took more analysis. In looking at dual focus and joint effort, Winston and Creamer (1997) discussed the importance of supervisor and supervisee working together on goals that connect with the staff member’s development as well as the departmental mission. Whitley’s quotation illustrates this point well, but was an area that did not emerge from other interviews, “Really using Marsha Baxter-Magolda’s theory that validating learners is situated learning through their experience and co-construction of knowledge. That in terms of pedagogy and we're all creating this together.” While Whitley highlighted the value of building knowledge together through joint effort and a dual focus, he did not discuss that element in terms of individual or departmental goals.

Another portion of the Synergistic Supervision Model is a focus on competence that relates to knowledge, personal skills, and attitude (Winston & Creamer, 1997). While the participants all discussed helping their staff members learn and grow, none of them broke it down into the detail that Winston and Creamer (1997) have done. Instead, participants talked about meeting the needs of individual staff members without spending much detail on how exactly they do that outside of meeting with them individually. Winston and Creamer (1997) also argued that staff need consistent support through a systematic and ongoing process. This theme was not one that consistently emerged from the interviews either. While many of the participants did reference consistent one on one meetings with staff members, Landry’s style actually contrasts a bit with this element of the model. Even though she explained that one on one’s are something that she really values and enjoys, they are not held on a consistent basis. Instead, Landry works to connect with staff individually as they need it, which has some advantages including the ability to work through issues as they arise instead of waiting until a weekly one on one meet. Lastly, Winston and Creamer (1997) highlighted
the importance taking a holistic view, knowing staff members have lives outside of their role on campus and should be treated as such. Landry focused a great deal by talking about the value of the individual person on multiple occasions in his interview. Emerson talked about a holistic approach as well when he said,

It's knowing, it's having the patience to understand what the issues they may be dealing with. Maybe dealing with related to what’s going on at home or what they're struggling with in their personal life. I've had staff who've had depression or they're bipolar. It's working with them and understanding and getting to them to that point where they can perform to their very best.

Even though the Synergistic Supervision model is one that is has been around since the late 1990’s, it is clear from this research that it is still not well known in the field and while some aspects of it are applied really well, others that are not.

**Conclusion**

Based on the findings of this study, it is clear that student affairs staff members think about both effective supervision and how they learned to supervise in a variety of ways with a few commonalities:

- The value of communication
- A focus on learning
- How supervision styles changes over time primarily by informal experiences

These themes crossed over in a variety of contexts furthering the research that has already been around the complexity of supervision (Tull, 2006). In looking at the table at the beginning of the chapter and the stories each participant shared, it is clear that informal experiences have a fair greater impact than formal ones in supervision training. Additionally, all participants agreed effective supervision is important in the success of an organization. With all that said, some of them think about supervision more intentionally and more often
than others do. While none of the participants were familiar with Synergistic Supervision, two of the themes that emerged from this research connected well with elements of the model, which is a positive sign. However, the lack of familiarity with the model seems problematic as it is the only model that exists created for student affairs professionals.

Emerson shared an interesting quotation around supervising varying staff sizes that did not emerge from any of the other interviews. He talked about the importance of consistently following tenants of supervision so it is applicable in variety of contexts. More specifically, he said, “That supervision of that one person is no different than supervising hundreds.” All of this has implications for our field and provides for expanded research opportunities in the future.
CHAPTER V
IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The research in this study has added to a topic area that has been severely neglected for the last ten years. As I conducted the interviews, I heard over and over again that we do not reflect on or talk about this topic often enough in student affairs. The implications outlined below are those I believe will be most useful to other practitioners in the field and changing the way we view supervision experiences.

Value of Effective Supervision

One of the primary implications of this research is how much value supervisors place on effective supervision in relation to the success of their teams. As illustrated by the table at the beginning of Chapter 4, all of the participants placed a high level of importance on effective supervision and the impact it has on the success of staff members. When asked about this topic, Parker responded,

Your supervisor matters a lot. I think about those experiences where I've had a not great supervisor, just kind of a meh supervisor. I feel not as great about my job. I'm less apt to fully engage or engage in a meaningful way. I think it's really important.

Landry noted, “Your supervisor is really, make or break your work experience.” Emerson made similar comments when asked about effective supervision,

I think my effectiveness is incredibly important in their ability to be successful and motivated in the work that they put into the and on behalf of the organization…They may not always agree with my style and approach but if they understand it and know why I did something, and the reasoning behind it, I don't know if they would indicate that as ineffective. I think it's really important.

Emerson also highlighted an interesting piece that connects well to what previous research has shown, which is that some staff view the term “supervision” with a negative connotation.
These findings align with what I have found to be true around the impact supervision can have as well. When I have been asked about previous jobs, supervisors, both good and bad, immediately came to mind and the experience I had with them has a large impact on how I recall that position, either positively or negatively. Based on these findings and those from other studies, it is clear that there is a strong connection between effective supervision and both the productivity and satisfaction of professional staff.

However, as this study has also highlighted formalized, intentional training is severely lacking. All of the participants responded that even if they had a limited formalized training experience, it was not particularly impactful. Additionally, all participants ranked informal learning opportunities as much more valuable than formal ones. None of the participants talked about the impact of a specific formal training experience in the stories they told. Instead, they listed vague terms like “coursework” or “workshops” but did not reference any specific details related to how that experience informs their own supervisory style. When participants discussed detailed experiences that shaped how they learned to supervise, they were not formalized supervision training experiences. Instead, they pointed to a particular course or training on a topic they were able to connect into supervision like the leadership courses that Emerson referenced. These courses were not necessarily designed to be opportunities to learn about supervision, but Emerson was able to connect them to his work through informal experiences and discussions with others. With a clear connection between supervision and employee satisfaction, we cannot continue to ignore the lack of formal supervision training that exists in the field. Ultimately, we need to find a better way to formally train those who supervise professional staff in student affairs.
Future Training

Even though examining best practices on supervision training was not the focus of this research, in the action research model, it is imperative to find ways to apply the findings directly to the field. To this end, I asked each participant to share their ideal training model or framework on this topic. While there were not any clear themes that emerged from all participant responses, they did share some useful information to utilize in the future. Some participants had concrete ideas on what this could look like while others were less clear, but all of them recognized concepts they have found to be valuable in their past experiences that could translate into a training on this topic.

A question that has emerged from this research is, how do we create formal experiences that are more impactful and widely utilized across the field? I believe the first step in training staff on this topic area is increasing awareness of the Synergistic Supervision model (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Even though all respondents agreed that effective supervision has a huge impact on their staff’s experience, none of them were familiar with this model, which was published almost twenty years ago. Before starting this research, I was not familiar with this model either, which further points to a need to increase awareness. To do so would require work at both the local and national level by utilizing staff who are familiar with Synergistic Supervision (Winston & Creamer, 1997) and making a concerted effort to share it with others through webinars, conference presentations, published articles, reading groups, discussions on their own campus, and in conversations with colleagues across the country. Expanding awareness and utilizing this model could be done in a variety of other ways and could fit well into the ideas participants outlined below.
In looking at the type of training participants in this study said they would like to participate in, many of them mentioned they do not reflect on this topic area as often as they probably need to. Landry mentioned reflection when asked about types of training that could be effective, “Yeah. I'm not much of a thinker around that, so maybe that's something I could work on.” An important piece to come from this research is supervision reflection does not happen often enough and it should be incorporated into any type of training model utilized in the future. Based on the findings of this research, having staff reflect on their own style in comparison to the Synergistic Supervision model would be a good first step in this process. Supervisors could be asked to reflect on each component of the model and connect ways they have incorporated it or will incorporate it into their own work. Reflection could be utilized in a variety of other ways throughout the rest of the training as well. Other ideas the participants shared that could also incorporate reflection include a mentoring program, peer to peer connections, and graduate program curriculum.

Mentoring was an interesting piece that emerged from some of the participants’ experiences. As highlighted earlier, informal experiences like previous supervisors, have had an enormous impact on how staff learn to supervise. When asked the question on training, many responded they would like to be a part of a more formalized mentoring experience with those who could provide advice and expertise on the topic. Instead of relying on informal experiences we hope have a positive impact on how staff learn about supervision, we could create a system to connects more experienced supervisors to those with less experience and add some formalized components to it, including reflection. Essentially, we would utilize some of the informal experiences that are already happening and create an environment for those to be connected more formally. Riley talked about this idea when asked about what
type of training she would like to receive, “Also, a formalized mentoring relationship, so that there could be, I guess, more substance to that. Instead of just a conversation, it's also the idea of like what other learning am I doing with this. Like is there articles paired to that.” So instead of hoping staff have strong mentors in the field, we could create formal ways for supervisors to connect with someone through guided experiences, readings, and discussion prompts. As highlighted already, discussions around the Synergistic Supervision model and reflecting on their own style would be an important piece of this mentoring relationship as well.

In addition to a formal mentoring program, participants also discussed ideas around a peer to peer learning network. For me, conducting this research was extremely valuable in the work that I do in my professional role simply from learning about how others think about supervision. I believe additional one on one or small group discussions around this topic could be just as impactful in helping others continue to grow in this area. Whitley outlined what that could look like,

I wonder if there would be a cohort of folks who are in similar places in the organizational chart and through that probably experiencing similar challenges, frustrations, lack of direction. If that group were to go away, experience something together and then come back and be a support network to one another.

Whitley’s comment highlights challenges that these peers likely face as well as how that group could come together initially and then continue to connect in the future. Like formal mentorship, peer to peer connections could also be guided through self-reflection and readings around the Synergistic Supervision model. If this idea were combined with the mentorship piece, our supervisors could have powerful, formal learning opportunities in a variety of contexts.
The last piece that emerged from participant responses on supervision training was utilizing curriculum in graduate preparation programs in student affairs. Many of the participants responded they had not taken much or any coursework on supervising others, especially professional staff. Participants that did discuss coursework did not seem to be impacted much by that experience. This can be problematic as staff, like myself, may not start thinking about this area until they are in a new role where they are responsible for supervising others. Emerson discussed this challenge and his less than ideal experience as a brand new supervisor, “I was thrown into the fire.” Emerson also said this when talking about supervision training, “Yeah I really think it needs to be a part of the curriculum.” Even though most master’s degree students are likely thinking about supervising undergraduate students while they are in their program, including content on professional staff supervision would help expand awareness of this important topic area and highlight it is never too soon to start thinking about challenges they may face in future positions. Additionally, including professional staff supervision into the curriculum could also incorporate all of the training areas that have been discussed previously including reflection, readings on the Synergistic Supervision model, formal mentoring, and use of peer to peer connections.

Another small piece that came from the interviews was there appears to be a disconnect between how some of the participants defined their own supervision style in comparison to how they defined effective supervision. Some participants listed elements of effective supervision they never touched on in defining their own supervision style, which is problematic. If we do a better job of implementing formal training experiences in this area, we should see greater alignment between those two areas, improving supervision experiences. Many staff have likely had bad supervisors in the past who were not well
prepared for their new role and like many others, did not seek out training on effective supervision, which contributes to the negative association around the word “supervision.” By shifting the culture in student affairs so this topic area is something supervisors reflect on early in their career, discuss with mentors and peers, and is connected to the curriculum, I believe we can begin to change the negative connotation that exists by preparing staff through formal training so they are better prepared for this aspect their role, improving the experience for their teams.

**Aligning with the Conceptual Framework**

At the beginning of the study, the conceptual framework (Appendix C) was identified to help guide the research question and frame the study. The framework identified both formal and informal experiences that shape how staff learn to supervise others in student affairs. Additionally, these formal and informal experiences were then compared to the Synergistic Supervision model. Based on the findings outlined in Chapter Four, it is clear that informal experiences play a much larger role in how staff think about this topic. Participants discussed mentors, previous supervisors, and past experiences extensively when asked about how they learned to supervise. They shared informal anecdotes, highlights, and experiences that shaped their professional identity. While some mentioned coursework, employer led experiences, or conference presentations/webinars, they did not elaborate on them or talk in detail about how those impacted how they approach supervision. In looking at what had the greatest impact on their learning, informal experiences played a much larger role and for many, formal experiences played little or no role at all. Without a doubt, one of the clearest findings is there is very little formal training on professional staff supervision.
And, the formal training that does exist has very little impact on how supervisors operate in their daily work.

**Limitations**

Like all studies there are limitations that should be considered when looking at the results and implications of this research. The first limitation is participants were all employed within the state of Colorado. As a part of the methodology, the sample was a purposive, convenience sample based on location and some could argue that a broader set of perspectives needs to be sought out from a variety of regions in the country. This piece could impact future research discussed further in the next section. The second limitation is the limited experience in one functional area for all participants. Each participant in this study either worked in or is connected to Student Activities/Life in some way. Some of the participants currently work in a role directly within Student Activities/Life and others oversee that area along with other areas. While backgrounds were varied, participants also had relatively similar professional experiences in the types of work they have done. Looking at how professional staff supervision is impacted by functional area like Academic Advising, Career Services, or Residential Education/Housing is another possible research topic. A third limitation to this study is the lack of racial diversity among participants. With the limited number of staff members in positions that fit the research criteria and geographical location of the study as well as narrowing the list to those that responded to my call, it was challenging to add greater racial diversity to this study. Like geography, this is another area that could be utilized in future research.
**Future Research**

Even with this research, there is still more to be examined in looking at professional staff supervision in student affairs. As I was conducting my interviews, I consistently asked myself, how would supervisees respond to similar types of questions? Would they rate effective supervision higher or lower than their supervisors on how it impacts their own work? How much training and learning do they believe their supervisors have had on this topic? Looking at staff supervision from the supervisee perspective would be an interesting way to compare and contrast the findings here. Additionally, while the research participants in this study were primarily mid-level professionals, looking more broadly at how their learning compares to those at a senior level could be an interesting way to further explore this area. Do mid-level and senior level professionals view supervision training and style in the same ways? Are there additional training opportunities that exist for senior level staff? Examining that piece of this topic area could also add an interesting perspective to the research.

In addition to those ideas, a quantitative study, like a nationwide survey, could help gather further data related to this topic area across a broader section of professional staff, addressing the limitations identified above. By looking at this topic in a quantitative, national approach, this could mitigate the limitation around geography, race, and functional area. If additional quantitative data was gathered, researchers could also look at similarities and differences in learning around supervision as it relates to race, educational level, years of experience, gender, and functional area. Another area of research for the future could revolve around how often professional staff members reflect on their experiences. As I conducted my interviews, I heard numerous times this topic is not one they often reflect back
on. I would guess that might be true of other areas of their roles, so focusing on professional staff reflection could be an interesting research area to explore. Lastly, a research study that focused exclusively on the elements of Synergistic Supervision could be useful as well.

While my research looked at supervision learning and potentially connecting that information to the model through data analysis, a researcher could use each component of that model and structure questions around those elements more explicitly in either a quantitative or qualitative study. Any additional research on this topic area would be extremely valuable to student affairs professionals.

**Conclusion**

This experience was extremely valuable for me as both a scholar and practitioner. Conducting this research as a practitioner, I learned more about how others approach supervision than I have in my ten years working as a professional staff member. Hearing other professionals share their story, struggles, and successes was valuable for me and the results of this study should have a positive impact on how this topic is thought about across the field. While some interviews followed the questions pretty closely other participants talked about a wide variety of topic areas that connected to supervision. I heard interesting stories about interviewing for roles with the future supervisees, received a variety of reading recommendations (related and unrelated to the topic), and connected with colleagues either for the first time or more deeply than we had known each other before.

During my earlier years as a professional, I can remember seeing a limited number of conference presentations and webinars on the topic of staff supervision. I always assumed because that was not a part of my role at the time, I did not need to attend or begin to think about this topic. However, years later I can distinctly remember my first day in a new role as
a supervisor and leader to my first group of professional staff. My first thought was, “why didn’t I start thinking about this topic before I got into this role?” As this and other research has shown, this feeling is all too common in student affairs. Staff who are outstanding entry level professionals are often promoted into new roles that involve a new set of responsibilities and required skills. Instead of a streamlined onboarding process that sets up the staff member and their team for success, they are often thrown into the fire left to figure it out on our own. Some of the learning is good and some is bad, but it is all done primarily in informal ways. We know that effective supervision plays a significant role in both employee satisfaction and success, yet we continue to repeat the same cycle and hope that our supervisors figure it out as they go. This is extremely challenging and I hope this research, along with additional studies in the future, improves the ways we approach this topic.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX

A. SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. Describe your supervision style.
   a. How would your staff describe your supervision style?

2. What does effective supervision mean to you?
   a. Skills/knowledge/competencies?
   b. Outcomes?
   c. Relationships/commitment to others

3. How did you develop your supervision skills? Where did you learn to supervise?
   a. Formal learning: trainings, conferences, education, etc.?
   b. Informal learning: previous supervisors, mentors, colleagues, self-directed readings, etc.?
   c. Can you give me an example that demonstrates how you learned supervision skills?
   d. What experiences have influenced you to adapt your supervision style over time?

4. Of the formal and informal ways you learned to supervise, which has had the greatest impact on your supervision style?

5. What kinds of supports or guidance would you welcome in strengthening your supervision effective, now that you’re an active professional? For example, would you prefer a self-study resource or workshop from a professional organization, or direct peer-to-peer mentoring from someone in the area?

6. Are you familiar with the Synergistic Supervision model for student affairs? Tell me about your understanding and use of that model.

7. Is there anything else related to supervision that you’d like to share?
B. SAMPLE INTERVIEW NOTES TEMPLATE

Participant:
Location:
Time/Date:

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C. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Formal Learning

- Employer led learning opportunities
- Educational Learning: Master's or Doctorate

Informal Learning

- Previous Supervisors
- Colleagues
- Mentors
- Self-Directed Readings: books, articles, etc.
- Direct Experience Supervising Others

Outside Learning:
- Direct Experience Supervising Others
D. PRE-INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: 
Job Title: 
Institution: 

- How many years have you worked in student affairs?
- How many professional staff members do you currently supervise?
- How long have you been supervising professional staff members?
- Do you currently supervise professional staff members? Yes or No
- Are you familiar with the Synergistic Supervision Model? Yes or No
E. CONSENT FORM

Principal Investigator: Joseph Halter

COMIRB No: 16-0385

Version Date: 3.30.16

Study Title: Learning to Supervise Professional Staff in Student Affairs

You are being asked to be in a research study. This form provides you with information about the study. A member of the research team will describe this study to you and answer all of your questions. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you don’t understand before deciding whether or not to take part.

Why is this study being done?

This study plans to learn more about how staff in student affairs learn to supervise other professionals. There is a large gap in existing research on this topic area.

You are being asked to be in this research study because you:

- Have worked as a professional in student affairs for at least five years
- Supervise at least three full-time student affairs staff members
- Have supervised full time student affairs staff members for at least two years
- Currently supervise professional staff members
- Work in Colorado
- Up to 6 people will participate in the study.

What happens if I join this study?

If you join the study, you will have the opportunity to share your experience and contribute to research in student affairs.
You will be asked to complete a pre-interview questionnaire (10 minutes), participate in an interview (60 minutes), and potentially member check the interview the transcription or themes from the interview (15 minutes).

**What are the possible discomforts or risks?**

There are no anticipated risks to you if you participate in this study, beyond those encountered in everyday life.

**What are the possible benefits of the study?**

This study is designed for the researcher to learn more about how student affairs staff think about and learn to supervise other professionals. There are no benefits to participation other than satisfaction that may come with contributing to the research in this topic area.

**Will I be paid for being in the study? Will I have to pay for anything?**

You will not be paid to be in the study.

It will not cost you anything to be in the study.

**Is my participation voluntary?**

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You have the right to choose not to take part in this study. If you choose to take part, you have the right to stop at any time. If you refuse or decide to withdraw later, you will not lose any benefits or rights to which you are entitled.

**Who do I call if I have questions?**

The researcher carrying out this study is Joseph Halter. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may call Joseph Halter at 720.413.8648 or email joe.halter@ucdenver.edu
You may have questions about your rights as someone in this study. You can call Joseph Halter with questions. You can also call the Multiple Institutional Review Board (IRB). You can call them at 303-724-1055.

Who will see my research information?

We will do everything we can to keep your records a secret. It cannot be guaranteed.

Both the records that identify you and the consent form signed by you may be looked at by others.

These include:

- Federal agencies that monitor human subject research
- People at the Colorado Multiple Institutional Review Board (COMIRB)
- The group doing the study
- Regulatory officials from the institution where the research is being conducted who want to make sure the research is safe

The results from the research may be shared at a meeting. The results from the research may be in published articles. Your name will be kept private when information is presented.

Photography, Video, and Audio Recordings
- All data and audio recordings will be stored on a password protected online storage drives that only the lead researcher has access to. You will be given a pseudonym to protect your identity. Any report of this research that is made available to the public will not include your name or any other individual information by which you could be identified.

**Agreement to be in this study and use my data**

I have read this paper about the study or it was read to me. I understand the possible risks and benefits of this study. I understand and authorize the access, use and disclosure of my information as stated in this form. I know that being in this study is voluntary. I choose to be in this study: I will get a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

Signature: ___________________________ Date: _______

Print Name: ___________________________

Consent form explained by: ____________________ Date: __________

Print Name: ___________________________

Investigator: __________________________ Date: ______

Investigator

________________________________________ Date ______

Witness Signature if necessary

Print Name: ___________________________
Witness of Signature □

Witness of consent process □

Investigator ______________________________   Date ____________
F. RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear <Potential Participant Name>,

As someone who supervises professional staff in student affairs, your work has a tremendous impact on both your team and the campus as a whole. Research has shown a strong connection to supervisory skills and positive employee outcomes. Unfortunately, most research has shown there is little training related to supervising professional staff members in student affairs.

Based on our relationship and my knowledge of your position, I am inviting you to participate in dissertation research through the University of Colorado Denver’s School of Education, more specifically in the Doctorate of Education in Leadership for Educational Equity program. Findings from this study should help student affairs professionals understand how staff think about supervising other professionals as well as what formal and informal learning opportunities shape supervision style. I believe that your experience and insight will be influential to other professionals in higher education as well as contribute to an area previously underexplored in the research.

Your participation confirms your consent to be a part of this study. There will be no negative impacts if you choose to withdraw from the study at any time and there are not any known risks to you if you choose to participate. In reporting the data, pseudonyms will be used and your identity and institution will not be shared. All information collected will be coded for confidentiality and accessible only to the lead researcher. By participating, you would commit to completing a short, pre-interview questionnaire as well as a single, one hour interview at a time and location that are convenient for you. Once the data has been coded, I will ask for you to confirm what I have collected and synthesized is accurate through member checking. I would like to audio record each interview and may transcribe that recording if necessary.

Would you be willing to share your time and experience to help give back to student affairs? I will contact you in the next week to confirm if you are able to participate, answer any questions, and schedule an interview time. If you have any questions, you can contact me at joe.halter@ucdenver.edu or 720-413-8648

Sincerely,

Joe Halter
University of Colorado Denver Doctoral Student