Revista de cercetare și intervenție socială

Appreciative supervision in social work.
New opportunities for changing the social work practice.

Stefan COJOCARU

Appreciative supervision in social work. New opportunities for changing the social work practice

Stefan COJOCARU[*]

Abstract

The practice of social work focuses mainly on solving problems, on reducing dysfunctions, on diminishing deficiencies etc. More often then not, allocating resources for providing problem-centred social services does not solve the problems for which the services were designed. Our initiative consists in experimenting appreciative supervision and in identifying the potential differences between the two approaches, the one centred on problems and the appreciative one. The results we have obtained in the practice of social work through the application of appreciative supervision underscore the advantages of this approach, an approach which is capable to produce profound changes in the practice of social work. We chose a pair of similar cases in terms of the child's risk of abandonment and we managed each of them differently, according to opposing views on supervision; the results showed that the desired changes can be brought about more easily when using appreciative supervision.

Keywords: Appreciative supervision; Appreciative inquiry; Social work; Parallel process; Problem-centred supervision; Appreciative case management.

Foreword

By focussing on the administrative function of supervision, underpinned by a growing bureaucratisation process, "social workers begin to resemble industry workers" (Arches, 1991:202). The key person designated as activity organiser and decision-maker on behalf of the organisation is the supervisor, whose position

*Associate Professor, „Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University, Department of Sociology and Social Work, Iasi, Bd. Carol I no. 11, Tel. 0040.744788779, email: stefan.cojocaru@holtis.ro; director of Holt Romania – Iasi, Childhood and Parenting Research Center, Iasi, str. Bistrita nr. 7, bl. B13, sc. B, ap. 3.

is partly to manage and partly to support the social workers; this individual does not provide direct services to the clients, but instead coordinates the entire activity underpinning these services, promoting directions, rules and values through the coordination of employees. This position, hierarchically above the position of those providing direct services to the clients, has the purpose of ensuring quality services: "supervision is an administrative and educational process used in social work agencies in order to assist social workers in developing their skills and in providing quality services to their clients" (Barker, 1995: 371-372). "Supervision has been applied in social work and mentioned in the literature since the beginnings of the practice of specialised social work" (Brashears, 1995:692). Originally, at the end of the 19th century in the USA, this activity consisted mainly in the supervision of volunteers who were active in various organisations that assisted disadvantaged populations. Once social work developed on various segments, the need to develop supervision as a form of support and control for social workers became apparent.

The parallel process in supervision

The parallel process concept in supervision derives from the concepts of *transfer* and *countertransfer* developed in psychoanalysis. The *transfer* takes place when the social worker recreates in his/her relation with the supervisor the problem and the emotions experienced during client counselling. The *countertransfer* takes place when the supervisor responds to the social worker in the same manner in which the latter has responded to the client. Searles is the one to mention for the first time the *parallel process* taking place as part of supervision: "the processes established within the patient [client, A/N] - therapist [social worker, A/N] relationship often mirror the therapist [social worker, A/N] - supervisor relationship" (Searles, 1995:135). Gary Yontef describes the parallel process taking place in supervision as being a type of modelling occurring as a normal effect of the support function of supervision: "As an effect of the support activity on the part of the therapist, focussed on protecting the patient, there is often a parallel process taking place between the dynamics of the patient-therapist relationship and the supervised-supervisor relationship. The therapist often behaves towards the supervisor the way the client behaves towards the former, and vice versa, the therapist responds to the patient the way the supervisor responds to the former" (Yontef, 1997:160). The supervisors can create a stronger relationship based on support by highlighting the recent successes of those supervised rather than their questions, problems and frustrations. This is an *appreciative vision*, which underscores the strengths of the social workers' activity. Underscoring successes (expressed through invitations to talk about the social worker's most recent achievements) favour the creation of the conditions required for an

appreciative intervention or for an appreciative case management. The *appreciative perspective* in the supervision process can be developed through a parallel process in the social workers practice with their clients, under the guise of negotiated rules, because "the very formulation of a rule is already an inter-pretation of said rule" (Giddens, A., apud Thuderoy C., 2000, translation into Romanian, 2002:104). The social workers' interventions will be guided by these formalised expressions, assembled into a generalisable procedure, which can make the resolution of a case possible; however, in order to succeed it is necessary to create the context for its application. When those supervised describe their recent successes, the supervisor can guide the discussion towards an analysis of these successes and explore together with the social workers other situations and other cases, guiding the supervision towards the reconstruction of situations (Bradu, Sandu, 2008). The way this parallel process is led is important; it is necessary to facilitate the transition from *problem-centred supervision* to *appreciative super-vision* by steering those being supervised towards the strengths of the situation experienced by the client and by the social worker in the relationship with the client.

Problem-centred supervision

Intervention in social work is guided to a large extent by the accents placed in the supervision process, due to the *parallel process generated by supervision*. Too much weight given to the administrative side of supervision directs social workers excessively towards this aspect of intervention, and they risk turning into bureau-crats who gradually distance themselves from the clients, focus more on docu-mentation, case files, support documents, neglecting the intervention aspect itself. In these terms there are two main points of view concerning the intervention geared towards changing the client's situation, reflecting the supervision style: the *problem-centred supervision* and *appreciative supervision*.

Problem-centred supervision aims to identify the problems faced by the social worker when solving a case, diagnosing clients' problems, analysing the causes of the problems and finding solutions for eliminating them. If the supervisor and those supervised focus their work on the *causes of the problem*, and this translates both into the way supervision is carried out and into the way the intervention is carried out (based on the supervisor's expectations), the social worker's attention will be focused on the past, on the moments when the problem than now needs to be solved appeared and developed. The discussions between the supervisor and the social worker are guided by questions generating causal responses, that is responses aiming to identify the causes for which the client is in a particular situation, the causes that generated the problem, and the explanations concerning the ways in which the generating causes can be eliminated. In many situations in the practice of social work the causes are diverse and sometimes difficult to

identify; oftentimes these causes can no longer be changed and in this case supervision has the role of supporting the social worker in identifying solutions for the current situation (the elimination of causes being impossible, the solution is focused on alleviating the "symptoms"). From this point of view, supervision is directed at identifying the effects of the problem and the solutions for diminishing them. Even though supervision is *solution centred*, the starting point of analysis remains the problem. Therefore, irrespective of approach, "weaknesses, limitations, problems, shortcomings and failures continue to be the filters through which most practitioners in the social domain view the clients to whom they provide services" (Cohen, 1999:460).

What is appreciative supervision?

The *problem-based evaluation* encourages individualist-type explanations of the problems faced by the client, whilst the *appreciative evaluation* reconsiders the client's situation using social and environment explanations (Cojocaru, 2008). "When social circumstances such as poverty seem to limit the individuals' ability to organise their lives, the attention is focused often exclusively on the efforts to change the behaviour of those affected (Weick et al., 1989:351). Economic deprivations and other causes that limit opportunities can be overcome when the social worker proposes an appreciative intervention, by identifying and assessing the way problems were solved in the past, and the resources available for overcoming the current situation. The past is no longer seen as a sum of failures, problems and tragedies, but instead as a wide range of solutions found for overcoming the former at those particular moments. The appreciative intervention perspective, based on the client's strengths (Bunea, 2008), refuses top identify clients with their shortcomings, failures or pathological situations (Gugeanu, 2008). Every situation is rethought from the perspective of its positive aspects and of the client's potential. "The strengths perspective forces the social workers to understand that individuals in a *crisis situation* survive and even thrive. They often cope by using their own resources they identify during critical times [without requiring specialised intervention, A/N]. We must find out what they did, how they did it, what they learned from the difficult experience and what resources were used in order to overcome their troubles. People always act towards solving their own situations, even though oftentimes they merely decide to remain resigned in that particular situation. In our position as practitioners in the social domain we must approach this situation, clarify it and build solutions, starting from these possibilities" (Saleebey, 1992:171-172). From the point of view of the *appreciative intervention*, the individuals, families and communities professionals work for are *experts* in the problems they face, because they live the situation and they understand it best, and this is an important resource for solving the problems. The *appreciative perspective* turns the professional from a *lead actor* into a resource

made available to the clients, the latter becoming the protagonists. The practitioners are trained to see clients as intelligent human beings, using their strengths and resources in order to overcome difficult situations and to increase their chances to improve their own situation; thus, part of the intervention aims to transfer competences from the specialist to the client or to other actors in the proximity of the client (e.g. the family). "Starting with what the client is" (Saleebey, 1994:353) is an imperative that shifts the weight of the intervention from the client's problems to *what the client does* and *what the client is capable of doing* in his/her situation. When the client calls on the social worker, the first thing he/she presents is the "vulnerable perspective", expecting the social worker to empathise with him/her, with his/her troubles and suffering, to understand and share the suffering. "Identifying strengths is not relevant to the client in the first meetings, and a premature focus on strengths may be interpreted by the client as a lack of understanding and even as denial [of support] on the part of the social worker" (Mc Quaide and Ehrenreich, 1997: 209). Some authors favour guiding the clients in identifying their own strengths; the *appreciative intervention* and the *appreciative case management* do not ignore the problems faced by the client. However, the strengths perspective emphasizes the fact that we should not neglect the mechanisms used by the client in solving his/her problems and difficulties (Espedal, 2008; Fernando, 2010). The differences between the problem-based intervention and the appreciative intervention (built on strengths and on an appreciative interpretation of situations) can also be seen in the different manner in which the *classic supervision* and the *appreciative supervision* are viewed. In the appreciative supervision, the accent is placed on the *evaluation* of favourable situations, generating new opportunities for learning. In the cases where, during supervision meetings, the social workers present their own problems or weaknesses, the supervisor can encourage an *appreciative vision*, starting from the idea that these problems can be ignored, precisely in order to practise and learn, together with the social workers, how the analysis of the situation can be carried out starting from the *identification of successes*. Williams suggests that the supervisor must bear in mind "the state of the supervised" (Williams, 1995: 24). Of course those supervised may describe their state in terms of problems or limitations. The supervisor's role is to transfer the social worker's interest and attention onto the strengths of the situation and to re-evaluate the client's state from this perspective. This transfer provides an opportunity for reflecting on the personal growth of the social worker. Despite the fact that sometimes the actions are not successful, these instances may represent resources fir future challenges (Madrid, 2008; Töpfer, 2008; Sandu, Ponea, Cojocaru, 2010). *Learning from successes* is considered "a necessary condition for the generation of an innovative intervention through which the change of the client's situation can be facilitated" (Rosenfeld, 1997: 361-378). Rosenfeld recommends to the social workers and supervisors three techniques of learning from successes: 1) adopt a reflexive attitude, 2) pay additional attention to the clients who have developed a flexible

attitude, and 3) enter a genuine partnership with the client in order to learn from them. The appreciative supervision uses postmodern ideas, focussing on *strengths* rather than on *shortcomings and limitations*, on *potential* rather than on *constraints*, on *future possibilities* rather than on *past problems*, using *multiple perspectives* and abandoning *universal truths*. The appreciative supervision helps social workers cope with crisis situations and, due to the evaluation of long-term implications (as a part of personnel development strategy), it can build competences for the future challenges of the organisation. Sometimes the organisation management team does not accept appreciative supervision, because it entails a high degree of autonomy of practitioners and supervisors, and this autonomy is considered a factor that encourages employee independence and a decrease in loyalty for the organisation. Although this may be true, through the application of an *appreciative supervision*, an *appreciative intervention* can be carried out in parallel, and this results in better services for the clients and a high level of success for the organisation, due to the mobilisation of the practitioners' and the clients' strengths.

Stages of the appreciative supervision process

In order to explain the stages of appreciative supervision in this article, the models built by Rich (1993), Van Kessel and Haan (1993) were used, adapting them according to the principles of appreciative approach. From the analysis of these models, geared towards analysing problems and identifying the most appropriate solutions, we have directed supervision towards discovering, understanding and amplifying positive situations. The challenge to experiment with such a model came as an expression of the desire to identify new intervention strategies in social work. The model experimented with has four stages:

a) the knowledge stage – discovering the greatest successes of those supervised in their relationship with the clients, in similar situations encountered throughout their experience as social workers. It is an interesting fact that in this stage the supervisor focuses on the interpretations given by the social workers to the clients' situation, to the clients' life environment, to their own positive experience in the relationship with the clients, to the way they explain their own successes and the clients'. The supervision questions may be of this type: *What do you appreciate most about your client? What do you appreciate most about the client's family? What successes has your client had since you've started working with him/her? How do you explain these successes? Who else contributed to this success? What do you appreciate most in yourself as a case manager for the client's situation? What were your successes in connection with your client's situation? When have you felt best about in the relationship with your client? What is the most important thing you have contributed to changing your client's*

situation? What is the most important thing the organization has contributed to changing your client's situation? Which of the work procedures have been most useful to you? Which of your qualities have you used in order to change your client's situation?

b) the vision stage – the stage in which the supervisors and the social workers build a joint vision concerning the potential of those supervised and of their clients, by formulating "challenging phrases", stated in the present tense, as if this vision already were a fact. The meanings of the se challenging phrases are "negotiated" between the supervisor and those being supervised, through dialogue. Here are some suggested forms for organising the phrases during the supervision meeting, some of them encountered during the experiment in the implementation of appreciative supervision: *the client knows well his/her situation and resources, and copes with the situation; the client appreciates the support received form the organisation; the supervised social worker acts in cooperation with the client in order to change the situation; the supervised social worker is receptive to all the client's successes and appreciates them; the supervised social worker appreciates his/her client's successes; the supervisor is open, available and interested in the work of the supervised social worker; the supervisor recognises the efforts, successes and qualities of the supervised social worker; the client is the individual most interested in changing his/her own situation* etc.

c) the programming stage – the stage of establishing the specific plans needed in order for the vision to become reality. The supervision questions may be as follows: *What can we do to help the client know his/her resources in his/her situation and overcome it? What do we do to make this client appreciate the support he/she is getting from the organisation? What practices should we pro-mote to make the social worker act in cooperation with his client? What must be done so that the supervisor recognises the efforts, successes and qualities of the supervised social worker? What can the social worker do so that the client knows the social worker appreciates him/her?* etc.

d) the action stage – the stage in which the plan established by the supervised social worker and the supervisor is applied. An outline of the plan may look as follows: *a) The social worker meets with the client bi-monthly and encourages the client to discover his/her own resources and successes; b) The social worker is flexible when working with the client; c) The social worker appreciates the client's experience and lets the client know when such a success is identified; d) The social worker assists the client in understanding his/her situation and in appre-ciating successes; e) The social worker helps the client build in his/her own environment a vision of what he/she desires for himself/herself and supports him/her in drafting an action plan* etc.

Origins of appreciative inquiry

In 1987, Cooperrider and Srivatsva launched the concept of *appreciative inquiry* as a response to Lewin's *action research* developed in the '40s; the appreciative inquiry aimed to become an instrument for social change, and especially for organisational change. From the point of view of the authors, one of the failures of action research is due to its *focus on the problem*, an approach devoid of innovative potential. They believed that focussing on the problem inevitably leads to constraints on imagination and reduces the possibility of creating new theories. The appreciative inquiry vision turns upside down the problem-centred approach (Cojocaru, 2005), paying attention to what goes well in an organisation, its successes being identified by its own members. Researching the problems in an organisation results in their preservation, deepening and amplification; therefore, although in each organisation there are things that do not work well, in order to diminish their influence on development, the researcher must start from what works well in an organisation, from its successes, identified and interpreted as such by its own members. The appreciative inquiry does not deny the existence of problems in an organisation or a community; however, in order to diminish them, the positive aspects are identified, cultivated and promoted. Cooperrider and Srivastva built the appreciative approach based on Kenneth Gergen's constructionism (1985), which sees reality as a social construction and as a constant reconstruction in the interactions between individuals. In the constructionist perspective, any organisation is a human construction, generated by the interpretations given by the social actors to this entity and to themselves: "organisations are products of human interactions and a social construction rather than an anonymous expression subordinated to a natural order" (Cooperrider et al., 1995: 157). Some authors point categorically to the bases of the appreciative inquiry in social constructionism: "The appreciative inquiry is the way to think about change, built on the assumption of a social construction of the reality of an organisation" (Murrell et al. 2001: 92). In order to change an organisation, one must act on the way individuals interpret the organisation. "The appreciative inquiry aims to identify the best of 'what is' in order to help the eruption of imagination concerning of 'what could be'. The goal is to generate new knowledge that broaden the domain of the possible and helps partners create a vision which is collectively desired and the follow this vision by translating the most successful ways of action into reality…" (Cooperrider and Srivastva, 1994: 207).

The description given by the authors shows that, in order to broaden the domain of knowledge, we must find *'the best of what is'* in the organisation's experience and, based on these successes, to create *a collective vision with "what could be" and with "what we wish there was"*. *"What is"* does not mean only the present in the sense of a reality manifesting itself, but also current interpretations given by agents to past events. *'What is'* represents a social construction at the

time of analysis, but it can be a result of interpreting past events. From this perspective, the present is something people think at this moment about the organisation.

Other authors have viewed the appreciative inquiry as an instrument that may be used for leading change in an organisation or in the community. "The appreciative inquiry is an instrument of organisational change focussing on learning from success. Instead on focussing on deficiencies and problems, the appreciative inquiry focuses on discovering what works best, on why it works and on how could success be spread out within the organisation" (Johnson and Leavitt, 2001: 129-130); the authors stress categorically the need to learn from success and the need to abandon the orientation of the action research, which aims to identify *deficiencies, problems, shortcomings and constraints*.

In 1999, Bushe picks up again the concept of *appreciative inquiry,* building a definition that showcases the *constructionist perspective* on social reality, as a result of the process of creating a collective image about a desired future: "The appreciative inquiry, an organisational theory and a method for changing social systems, is one of the most significant innovations in action-research in the past decade. The appreciative inquiry as a method for changing social systems is an attempt at generating a shared image of a new and better future by exploring what is, or was, best…" (Bushe, 1999: 1-2). In this definition the author underscores the role of a shared vision, a *"shared reading"* of the organisation and its future, as Elliott (1999:76) states.

The appreciative inquiry perspective is a constructionist one, summed up in a few essential elements by Cooperrider and Srivatsva (1987). Social order is the result of negotiations or conventions between individuals and has an unstable character (it is in a perpetual dynamic equilibrium).

   1. Human actions are prescribed by ideas, beliefs, intentions, interests, purposes and means, values, habits and theories; the transformation of conventional human behaviours is achieved by *changing ideas, beliefs, intentions, interests, purposes and means, values, habits and conventional theories*; all these action generators are the result of social construction and have a strong effect in rebuilding the future frameworks of interpretation and action.

   2. Social action is interpreted differently by individuals, who instead of *actors* become *social constructors*; from this perspective, social change means a reconstruction of *social architecture*, through the negotiation of individual interpretations and through the construction of a shared vision.

   3. The actional models developed within the organisation take various forms, due to different individual interpretation, due to the permanent negotiation within the organisational framework and to the perpetual change of social contexts.

4. Profound changes in social practices can be generated by changes in linguistic practices. Language has a very important role in changing social practices, because it is the result of dialogue; thus, language becomes a "map" that precedes the "territory", and linguistic practices cause social changes.

5. Any theory is a language having a normative dimension (be it intentional or not) and a moral significance (the potential to affect and regulate inter-personal relations).

6. Social knowledge resides in *collective interaction*; the latter is created, maintained and used by people in interaction.

7. Constructionism may be applied in order to bring about change in the way an organisation, community or any other form of social structure is approached, by going beyond the *subject-object, true-false, good-bad* etc. dualisms.

Principles of the appreciative inquiry

Cooperrider and Whitney (2000: 3-27) consider that the appreciative enquiry is based on five principles, which form the foundation for viewing social inter-vention at the level of interpretations of reality. These principles help us establish the theoretic foundations for the way the appreciative inquiry is organised, bearing in mind the social constructionism vision.

a) The constructionist principle. This principle asserts that organisations are a result of human creation, or, better put, of the collective interaction among individuals and of the permanent reconstruction generated by our knowledge, beliefs and ideas. The organisation is a manifestation of the interactions between our mental models concerning it, constructed socially in a relational process. From this perspective, the organisation itself is a reality generated by multiple interpretations, and changing an organisation change through appreciative inquiry means, in fact, changing these interpretations and building a shared, collective and coherent image.

b) The principle of simultaneity. This principle concerns that fact that at all times research in the organisation and change in the same organisation are *simul-taneous*. Cooperrider considers that any organisation or social system changes in the direction towards which the researcher's attention is focused, calling this a "heliotropic process" (1990), because, "the same as the sunflower turns to follow the sun, so the organisation turns to follow its positive image" (Johnson and Leavitt, 2001: 130). Action research also considers that *the questions asked by research generate changes in the organisation* due to the presence of the re-searcher and of the imagination it activates (Miftode, 2003: 393). According to the simultaneity principle, "even the most innocent questions trigger changes"

(Cooperrider and Withney, apud. Cojocaru, D, 2003a: 206). This principle, formulated by Cooperrider (1999) cancels the myth according to which we first analyse the situation and then decide the change, because any community change in some situations without a clear decision being made about it, and when we inquire about certain aspects of the organisation, we effectively start a change process inside it.

c) The poetic principle refers to the fact that any organisation is a result of the multiple interpretations given by people, expressed through *language*, which, in its turn, has a formative character, being a part of the constructed world. Language is not only an image of the world, but truly a form of social action. Ideas, representations, images, histories, stories, metaphors, generate events, depending on their *emotional charge* and on the way they are interpreted. *The metaphors* describing the organisations are ways of social action for structuring these orga-nisations. In the meetings with the two experimental groups used in order to prove the influence of interpretations given by organisation members to the way the organisation operates, the participants were asked to write down a metaphor about the organisation they belonged to; the metaphor was then analysed in order to obtain a picture of the way the members of an organisation structure it. The organisation was viewed as an *organism*, as a *mechanism*, as a *tree with deep roots*, as a *giant*, as a *spring flower*, as an *umbrella*, as a *flowing water*, as a *body with a thousand eyes*, as a *family*, as a *locomotive*, as a *hive* etc. All these metaphors describe ways of organisation and operation, ways in which their members relate, and also avenues of intervention for change; for example, changing an orga-nisation structured as an *organism* makes us think about it as about a living being, which cannot be turned off in order to be changed, and all change must happen on the go; the interpretation of an organisation as a *mechanism* gives us a picture of programmed operation, of change that can be achieved by turning the mechanism off, dismantling and modifying it etc. Organisations are "like a poem" (Elliott, 1999: 14) or "can be thought as a text" (Elliott, 1999: 15) that can be interpreted permanently, and the beauty and the senses of this poem are given by the inter-preters.

d) The principle of anticipation states that the destiny of a community is the *positive future image* constructed through the individual creations that influence present events. One may say that *the best way of predicting the future is building it*, starting from the desired images, because *the map precedes reality*: "It is not the territory preceding the map, and it does not survive it, but the map preceding the territory also generates it..." (Wachowski, apud. Felluga, 2003: 84). Thomas formulates this principle, also known as "the self-fulfilling prophecy": "if people define a situation as real, then this situation *is real* [A/N] through the consequences of defining it as real" (apud. Ungureanu, 1990: 124). In order to argument this principle, Cooperrider uses the example of the placebo effect used in medicine and the Pygmalion effect, which prove that the image the teachers have about pupils is a strong predictor of the performances of these pupils.

e) The positive principle concerns the potential and the force appreciation has in organisational development, by discovering the positive aspects and by achieving innovative change in correlation with the anticipation of a positive future (Chapagain & Ojha, 2008). "The essence of positive change is one of the largest and broadest unknowns of change management today" (Cooperrider and Withney, 1999: 248), because classical change management focuses on the analysis and diagnosis of organisational problems and deficiencies. Because "the organisation and interpretation habits often omit the positive vision in favour of analysing obstacles, resistances and deficiencies (Withney, 1998: 5), management nowadays is tributary to the dysfunctional perspective. Formulating and asking the questions is one of the most impacting actions of the agent for change, because what we ask we shall later find in the organisation. In the research we carried out on the development of the rehabilitation system, based on a community of children with disabilities in the village of Fălciu, one of the questions posed to the employees involved in the programme concerned the existence of services offered to families in the village with disabled children who had not been institutionalised. At that moment of the research, no such services were identified, because the programme offered by the organisation only pursued the family integration and the deinstitutionalisation of the children in the placement centre. In less than three months however, in that particular village there were identified services for the families in the community, including support groups, which shows that the questions asked during the research directed the organisational change of that particular institution. The way we formulate the questions will direct attention to the various aspects of the organisation and, very likely, will direct change in the organisation.

Experimenting appreciative supervision. Case study

We have include here the presentation of an experiment carried out on a six-month period, during which time we verified the results obtained by applying two different supervision models, problem-oriented supervision and appreciative supervision. For this experiment we identified ten cases with various degrees of risk in child abandonment. We first applied the *Assessment Grid for Child Abandonment Risk* and, depending on the score, five pairs of social cases were determined, as follows:

Pair 1:
   Case 1, with a vulnerability score of 438 points
   Case 2, with a vulnerability score of 459 points

Pair 2:
   Case 3, with a vulnerability score of 812 points
   Case 4, with a vulnerability score of 826 points

Pair 3:

> Case 5, with a vulnerability score of 765 points
> Case 6, with a vulnerability score of 778 points

Pare 4:

> Case 7, with a vulnerability score of 652 points
> Case 8, with a vulnerability score of 671 points

Pair 5:

> Case 7, with a vulnerability score of 553 points
> Case 8, with a vulnerability score of 562 points

During the six months of the experiment, each pair of cases was managed by a social worker. the cases were selected from the social workers' list of active cases. In this period case supervision was provided to the five social workers managing the ten cases included in the experiment. Each social worker had one case that was supervised in the conventional manner and one case that was supervised appreciatively, but none of the social workers were informed about this. The idea was to check whether appreciative supervision has any influence on the effectiveness of case management and to what extent it can be applied. In pairing the cases, the main criterion was the similitude of the situations, quantified through the risk assessment grid, and the goal was to experiment this form of intervention management (appreciative supervision).

In order to check the way the situations of the ten clients had evolved, the assessment grid for child abandonment risk (the same instrument used originally) was applied every three months. The application of the same instrument at different moments and to all clients was a strong basis for the objective evaluation of the modifications that had occurred throughout the experiment.

The social workers were not informed about the different approach in supervision, in order to verify the validity of the parallel process theory in supervision; in other words, we tried to see whether changing the supervision approach at the supervisor's initiative can result in the change of the way the case management takes place. On the other hand, no other independent variables were introduced, such as additional material support for the managed cases, other types of activities etc.

Work hypotheses

> 1. The style in which supervision is organised influences the way case management takes place, due to the parallel process developing in supervision.
> 2. The parallel process in supervision can be directed by the supervisor at his initiative and influences the results of the intervention at client level.

3. The social worker's and the client's effectiveness and results depend on the style of supervision.

Research methodology

The following research methods were used for this case study:

a) The *Assessment Grid for Child Abandonment Risk,* structured around a questionnaire and applied for the initial assessment, for the interim assessment (after three months) and for the final assessment (after six months); The *Assessment Grid for Child Abandonment Risk* aims to quantify the child's risk of abandonment. The *Family assessment questionnaire* is a batch of 145 items, grouped according to variables constituting risk factors. This grid was applied in order to measure the degree of child abandonment risk for the ten cases included in the experiment at three different moments: at the beginning of the intervention, at three months after the start of the intervention and six months after work began on the case. The *Assessment Grid for Child Abandonment Risk,* can be used for any family for which the social worker considers there is a risk of child abandonment, or whenever a family requests a certain type of support from specialised social work institutions. The maximum value of the risk of abandonment, according to the grid, is 1500 points, and it can be applied at any moment during the intervention in order to measure the way the degree of risk has evolved. The grid may be applied at regular time intervals (for example every three months) in order to measure the evolution of the degree of risk in the family and to assess the effectiveness of the social work intervention. It may be used as an instrument for measuring the effectiveness of various social services provided to this category of disadvantaged population, and it may even be used for cost/benefit calculations. It is well-known that this kind of calculations are difficult to make, because effects are difficult to quantify in the social domain. Besides, the cost per beneficiary is, firstly, a process (or implementation) indicator rather than an impact indicator (the effects the intervention had on the beneficiaries' situation).

b) *The sociological experiment*, in order to highlight the way some independent variables introduced by the supervisor (supervision style) cause modifications at the level of the client's situation within the parallel process;

c) *The interview*, used by the supervisor during the supervision meetings with the social worker.

Analysis of data obtained during the experiment

As it can be seen in Table 1, after six months of intervention a drop in the level of abandonment risk was recorded in all the clients of the prevention service included in the study, irrespective of the type of supervision used. The evolution of the degree of abandonment risk for the five pairs of clients was different according to the type of supervision; the cases that were supervised appreciatively showed a more pronounced drop compared to the cases that were supervised according to the conventional method, despite the fact that the cases that were supervised appreciatively initially had a higher risk of abandonment.

Case pair	Case number	Initial assessment	Assessment after 3 months	Difference at 3 months from intervention start	Assessment after 6 months from the initial assessment	Difference at 6 months from intervention start	Supervision type
1	case 1	438	430	-8	416	-22	Classical
	case 2	459	426	-33	362	-97	Appreciative
2	case 3	812	790	-22	645	-167	Classical
	case 4	826	781	-45	516	-310	Appreciative
3	case 5	765	761	-4	683	-82	Classical
	case 6	778	759	-19	520	-258	Appreciative
4	case 7	652	683	31	601	-51	Classical
	case 8	671	664	-7	412	-259	Appreciative
5	case 9	553	553	0	519	-34	Classical
	case 10	562	549	-13	396	-166	Appreciative

Table 1: Evolution of level of abandonment risk within the studied group

The table shows that after three months from the start of the intervention, differences in the decrease of the degree of child abandonment risk (measurable through the score resulting from the application of the grid) appeared between the two categories of cases that were supervised differently; the higher the score, the higher the risk of child abandonment. For example, for case pair no. 3, the case the was *supervised classically* (case no. 5) showed a drop in the risk degree of four points compared to the initial score, while the case that was *supervised appreciatively* (case no. 6) showed a sharper drop in the risk degree (the value on the applied grid dropped by 19 points).

In order to assess the differences recorded in all the studied clients, we calculated the averages of the differences in risk degree at three months and at six months from the start of the intervention. the results are shown below:

	Classical supervision		Appreciative supervision	
	Difference in absolute values across the five cases	Average of difference	Difference in absolute values	Average of difference across the five cases
Assessment at three months	3	0.6	117	23.4
Assessment at six months	356	71.2	1090	218

Table 2: Evolution of the average of decrease in child abandonment risk degree

It can be noticed that in the case of *classical supervision*, at three months since the start of the intervention, for the beneficiaries included in this type of supervision (cases 1, 3, 5, 7 and 9), the intervention had almost no effect (the average decrease in the degree of abandonment risk is 0.6, which is practically a null result); the score average of the classically supervised cases in the initial evaluation was 644.

The cases that were *supervised appreciatively* (2, 4, 6, 8 and 10) showed an average decrease of the risk degree of 23.4 points at three months since the start of the intervention. Initially, the score average for the degree of abandonment risk in the cases supervised appreciatively was 659.2.

The average decrease of the risk degree after six months is lower for the cases that were supervised classically (the average is 71.2 points) than for the cases that were supervised appreciatively (the average is 218 points); however, table 2 shows that the risk degree for the cases that were supervised appreciatively dropped three times more than the risk degree of the cases that were supervised classically.

	General average of all the supervised cases (points)	Classical supervision	Appreciative supervision
		Score average according to the assessment grid (cases 1, 3, 5, 7, 9)	Score average according to the assessment grid (cases 2, 4, 6, 8, 10)
Initial assessment	651.6	644	659.2
Assessment at 3 months	639.6	643.4	635.8
Assessment at 6 months	507.0	572.8	441.2

Table 3: Evolution of the average reduction of child abandonment risk in the supervised cases

Table 3 shows that the score average for risk degree dropped after six months of intervention tin all cases, irrespective of the type of supervision used; in the case of the appreciative supervision, however, the drop is more noticeable;

although the initial score average of the cases that were supervised appreciatively had been higher (659.2 points) compared to the score average of the cases that were supervised classically (644 points), the appreciative supervision is more effective; the final score average for the two groups of five cases was significantly lower in the case of appreciative supervision (441.2 points) compared to the five cases where problem-centred supervision was applied (572.8 point).

The documents that accompany the case files show that the style of case management for the cases that were supervised appreciatively had changed; case management reproduced the way the supervised social worker was approached by the supervisor in the social worker's relationship with the client; without being explicitly aware of this fact, the social worker followed the steps of appreciative case management.

Conclusions

1. The principles of appreciative inquiry can be adapted and used in the process social work supervision and in the process of case management. The experiment demonstrates the usefulness and effectiveness of appreciative supervision by comparison to the problem-centred supervision.

2. When the appreciative supervision was applied, the studied cases showed better results compared to the cases that were supervised classically; in our opinion, this shows that appreciative supervision is more effective also due to the parallel process in supervision that influences case management. The characteristics of appreciative supervision were reproduced in case management.

3. The supervision model used for coordinating, supporting and training social workers directs case management and its results. The documents concerning the social worker's intervention, present in each case file, show essential modifications in terms of case approach; the meeting, visit and counselling reports reveal elements of appreciative intervention, noticeable in the way the clients' situations were approached and in the language used by the social worker when writing the documents.

4. The parallel process in supervision can be directed by the supervisor towards the social worker's and the client's actions. This process does not influence just the supervised social worker, but also, through diffusion, the client's situation. Awareness of this process in supervision helps the supervisor orient the social worker's actions and results in his/her direct work with the client.

5. The results of the social services offered by organisations also depend on the style of supervision being used. Supervision allows the improvement of social intervention, and implicitly of the quality of services. The lack of professional supervision inevitably results in a random and sometimes confused practice.

6. In the case of services aimed at preventing child abandonment, it can be seen that the classical intervention, lasting less than three months, has no positive effect on the clients' situation. This practically means that in such circumstances, the financial, human and material resources used for an intervention that lasts less than three months are wasted without significant results.

7. The classical intervention produces real results in the situation of the beneficiaries who use the services for the prevention of child abandonment after six months from the start of the intervention; this means that any intervention project aimed at preventing child abandonment and institutionalisation should be planned for at least six months.

8. The appreciative supervision produces, indirectly, tangible results after a shorter period of time by comparison to the classical supervision. This can be seen in the results obtained within the experiment, which are due to the use of the appreciative approach in intervention. Therefore, in order to have effective interventions, we must plan for at least six months in a problem-centred approach of the case (and of the supervision), and for a minimum of three months in the appreciative approach of the same case.

9. Focussing on problems in social work and the attempt to solve them may sometimes not result in their resolution; the orientation towards identifying deficiencies and dysfunctionalities yields poorer results than the appreciative intervention and preserves the problem.

References

Arches, J. (1991). Social structure, burnout and job satisfaction. *Social Work*, 36 (3), 202-206.

Barker, R.L. (1995). *The Social Work Dictionary*, SUA: NASW Press.

Cohen, B.Z. (1999). Intervention and supervision in strengths-based social work practice. *Family in society,* 80(5), 460-466.

Bradu, O.A., Sandu, A. (2009). Epistemic and axiological perspectives in appreciative supervision, *Revista de cercetare si interventie sociala*, 24, 95-102.

Brashears, F. (1995). Supervision as social work practice: a reconceptualization. *Social Work*, Sept, 40 (5), 692-699.

Bunea, O. (2009). Supervision as change factor of social intervention, *Revista de cercetare si interventie sociala*, 24, 127-144.

Bushe, G.R. (1999). Advances in appreciative inquiry as an organization development intervention*,* http://www.gervasebushe.com/aiodj.htm.

Chapagain, C.P., Ojha, G.P. (2008) Appreciative inquiry for enhancing individual and organization capacity, *Revista de cercetare si interventie sociala*, 20, 7-18.

Cojocaru, D. (2003). Ancheta apreciativă - formă a cercetarii - aciune in schimbarea sociala. Revista de cercetare si interventie sociala, 2, 203-208.

Cojocaru, S. (2008). Appreciative evaluation – a form of formative evaluation, *Revista de cercetare si interventie sociala*, 20, 42-48.

Cojocaru, S.(2005). *Metode apreciative in asistenta sociala. Ancheta, supervizarea si managementul de caz,* Iasi: Polirom.

Cooperrider DL, Withney, D. (2000). *Appreciative inquiry: rethinking human organization toward a positive theory of change*, Stipes: Champaign, IL.

Cooperrider, DL, Barett, F., Srivatsva, S. (1995). Social construction and appreciative inquiry: A journey in organizational theory. Hosking, D.M., Dachler, P.H. și Gergen, K.J., *Management and Organization: relational alternatives to individualism,* Avebury, Aldershot: 157-200.

Cooperrider, DL, Srivatsva, S. (1987). Appreciative Inquiry in Organization Life, *Research in Organizational Change and Development*, 1, 124-148.

Cooperrider, DL, Srivatsva, S. (1994). Appreciative inquiry: an alternative to problem solving. French, W., Bell, C., *Organizational development and transformation,* Ridge, Irwin, 207-208.

Copperider , D.L. (1990). Positive image, positive action: the affirmative basis of organizing. Srivastva, S., Cooperrider, D.L., *Appreciative Management and Leadership*, Jossey- Bass, San Francisco, pp. 91-125.

Elliott, C. (1999). Locating the Energy for Change: An Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry, Winnipeg, Monitoba, Canada, International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD).

Espedal, G. (2008). Creating growth and development in a coaching relation using appreciative inquiry and solution focused approach, *Revista de cercetare si interventie sociala*, 20, 16-41.

Felluga, D. (2003). Matrix: paradigma postmoderna sau impostura intelectuala?. Zeffeth, G., *Matrix. știinþă, Filozofie și Religie*, Bucuresti: Amaltea.

Fernando, M.S.C. (2010). Appreciative inquiry: a positive approach to organizational planning and learning, *Social Research Reports*, 10, 3-105.

Gergen, K.J. (1985). The social constructionism movement in modern psychology. *American Psychologist,* 40 (3), 266-275.

Gergen, K.J. (1994). *Realities and relationships: soundings in social construction,* Harvard University Press, Cambridge.

Gugeanu, M. (2009). Supervision: new domain of social work in Romania, *Revista de cercetare si interventie sociala*, 24, 145-156.

Johnson, G., Leavitt, W. (2001). Building on success: transforming organisations through an appreciative inquiry*, Public personnel management,* 30 (1): 129-136.

Madrid, F.V. (2008). Appreciative Inquiry: a new method to discover, create, share, and implement knowledge to change government and nongovernmental institutions, *Revista de cercetare si interventie sociala*, 20, 19-35.

Mc Quaide, S. and Ehrenreich J.H. (1997). Assessing client strengths. *Families in Society,* 78: 202- 210.

Miftode, V. (2003). *Tratat de metodologie sociologică*, Iași: Lumen.

Murrel, K.L, Watkins, J.M., Mohr, B. (2001). Book review of Appreciative Inquiry: change at the speed of imagination, *Organization Development Journal*, 19(3): 92-93.

Rich, P. (1993). The form, function and content of clinical supervision: an integrated model. *The Clinical Supervisor*, 11:137-178.

Rosenfeld, J.M. (1997). Learning from success: How to develop user-friendly social work. *Society Dr. Welfare*, 17:361-378.

Saleebey D. (1992). *The strengths perspective in social work practice*., New York: Longman.

Saleebey D. (1994). Culture, theory and narrative: The intersection of meaning in practice. *Social Work*, 39: 346-358.

Sandu, A., Cojocaru, S., Ponea, S. (2010). Appreciative evaluation of training programs. Case study: Lumen Consulting and Training Center, *Social Research Reports*, 9, 1-76.

Searles H.F. (1995). The informational values of the supervisor's emotional experience. *Psychiatry*, 18: 133-141.

Thuderoy C. (2000). *Negocierile. Eseu de sociologie despre liantul social*, (trad.rom: 2002, Olga Moraru), București, Știința.

Töpfer, J. (2008). Appreciative inquiry – changing perspectives in our perception of organisations, *Revista de cercetare si interventie sociala*, 20, 49-58.

Ungureanu, I.(1990). Paradigme ale cunoașterii societății, București: Humanitas.

Van Kessel, L., Haan, D. (1993). *The Intended Way of Learning in Supervision Seen as a Model*, New York: Haworth Press.

Weick, A., Rapp, C., Sullivan, W.P. and Kisthardt, W. (1989). A strengths perspective for social work practice. *Social Work*, 34: 347-355.

Williams, A. (1995). *Visual and active supervision: roles, focus, techniques*, New York: W.W. Norton.

Withney, D. (1998). Let's change the subject and change our organization: an appreciative to organizational change, *http://proquest.umi.com*.

Yontef, G. (1997). Supervision from a Gestalt therapy perspective. Watkins, Jr., *Handbook of psychotherapy supervision*, Wiley, New York.