

**Resilience-informed supervision:  
using current resilience theory to  
strengthen and sustain professional  
supervision practice**

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# Aims of the session

- Defining and locating resilience
- Tensions within the definition of supervision
- Key principles from resiliency theory/theories
  - The risk of normalisation
  - Resiliency and developmental perspectives
  - Complexity and reflection
  - The politics of resiliency

# Supervision is not politically innocent


Supervision is never a politically innocent process, therefore the theories we use to inform it need to be politically aware



Resiliency theories can support the professional drive towards supervision being a place for reflection and professional development whilst acknowledging political and managerial demands

# Locating resilience theory

- Historical trends and cultural synergies
- Resiliency theories



Individually focused,  
psychologically  
based

Ecological

Narrative/Strengths

Community  
development

“... theoretical emphasis has shifted from resilience as solely individual traits to notions of adaptation despite multiple and cumulative risks and to understanding protective factors for buffering or mediating effects of adversity.”

*Bottrell (2009:323)*

“... coping and competence despite adversity in which *identity work* and *cultural management* are central processes.”

# Supporting the use of resiliency theories

“Effective supervision [...] can delay or mitigate the effects of detrimental factors and can contribute to positive outcomes for workers in social service organizations.”

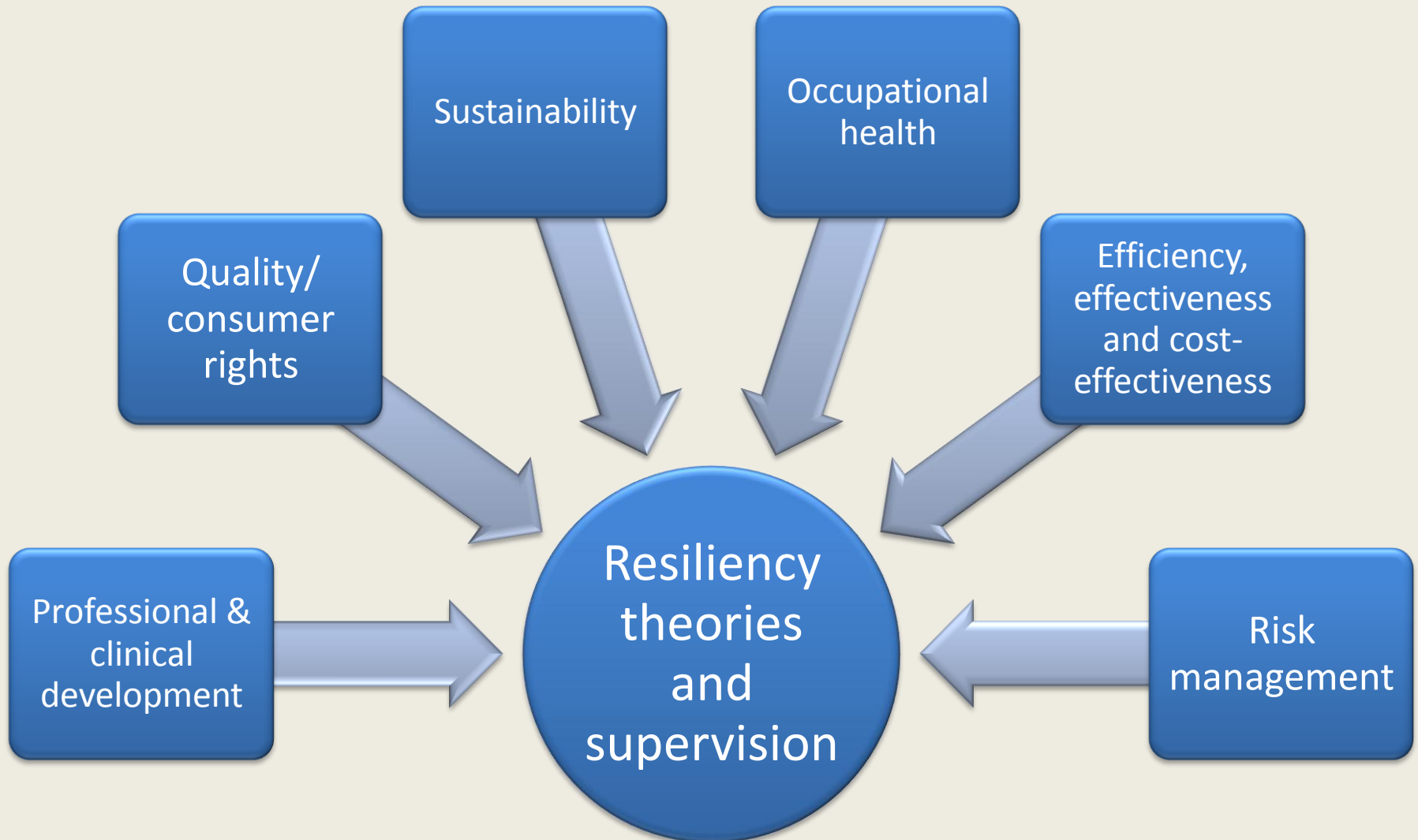
*Mor Barak et al (2009:25)*

Supervision as a site for facilitating reflection for individual development within a relational space – e.g. managing emotions and uncertainty, kindling hope

*Beddoe (2010)*

# Why focus on resilience?

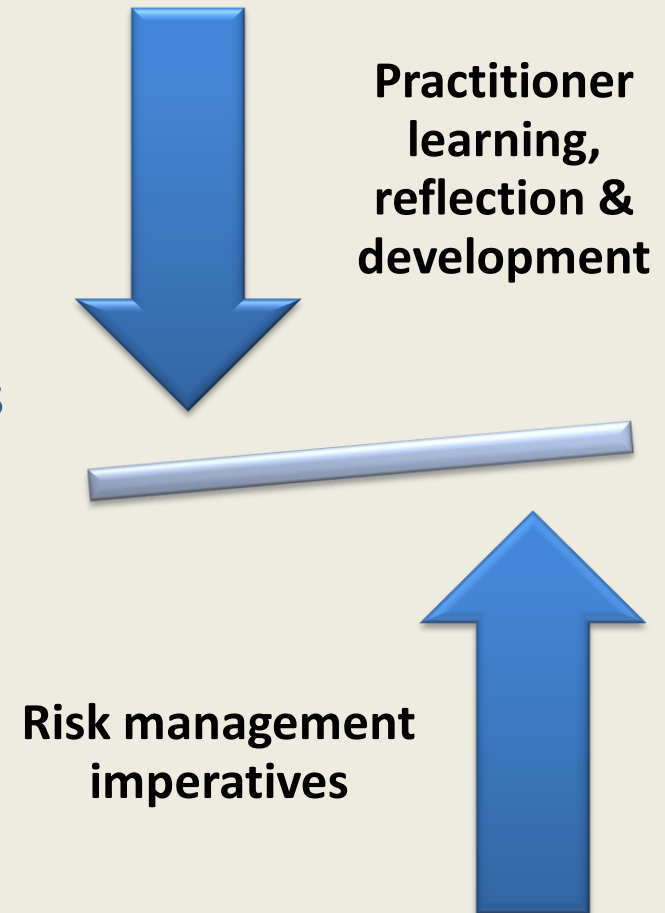
## Key perspectives on supervision



# Why focus on resilience?

## Competing perspectives on supervision (2)

- Supervision as a consumer-focused and professional activity
  - Emotional support & reflection
  - Clinical knowledge and competency
  - Professional development perspectives
  - Quality/consumer rights perspectives
  - Sustainability perspectives – good practice, good morale
- Supervision as a managerial tool
  - Occupational health perspectives- e.g. retention
  - Efficiency, effectiveness and cost-effectiveness perspectives
  - Risk management perspectives



# Key principle 1: constructing resilience, resisting normalisation

**Assessment of a person's resilience  
can only be made within a consideration of their  
own perceptions, interactions and context**

Conceptualisation of resilience has moved from a dichotomous position of 'resilience v. pathology' towards an acknowledgement of

- a) personal/local/cultural definitions of resilience (e.g. Bottrell, 2009; Ungar, 2004 & 2008)
- b) 'hidden' definitions of resilience (e.g. Ungar, 2004)

# Key principle 1: constructing resilience, resisting normalisation (2)

- The risk of normalisation – reading a person's resilience through external expectations of performance or expression, e.g. where someone should be in their development, what they should know, how they should be responding
- Potential clash with performance management role of supervision
- Case examples:
  - Maori cultural worker seen as avoidant and absent from the workplace
  - Social worker in child protection reluctant to take on new cases because they are working in a therapeutic/relationship-based manner within an outcomes-focused environment

# Key principle 2: developmental perspectives (1)

The assessment of a person's resilience  
will be dependent upon their developmental stage

Hawkins & Shohet (1989):

self centred → service user centred → process centred → process in  
context centred

Butler (1996):

novice → advanced beginner → competent → proficient → expert

Brown & Bourne (1996):

induction → connection → integration

## Key principle 2: developmental perspectives (2)

“... developmental outcomes may be unattainable because their conceptualisation does not take account of socially constructed barriers to their attainment.”

*Bottrell (2009:331)*

Case example: student on practicum seen as ‘not coping’ and work-shy because their induction has not introduced them to organisational systems

# Key principle 3: complexity and reflection

## Supervision enables resilience through reflection on complexity & uncertainty

- Parton (1998) and Lymbery (2003) describes the professional development of a social worker as moving from a competence to a creative stance, and from dealing with straightforward and certain situations to uncertainty and complexity.
- Burgess (2004) and Askeland & Fook (2009) stress the need to develop critically reflexive practitioners for what Butler et al (2007:285) term '*the messy complexities of practice*' that require as much emphasis on process as outcome.

# Complexity, reflection and resilience: distinguishing the wood from the trees



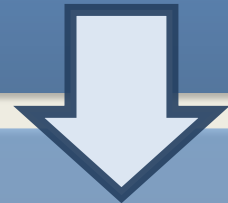
## Task one:

identifying the personal impact



## Task two:

separating what is me and  
what isn't



## Task three:

(re)integrating the person and  
environment

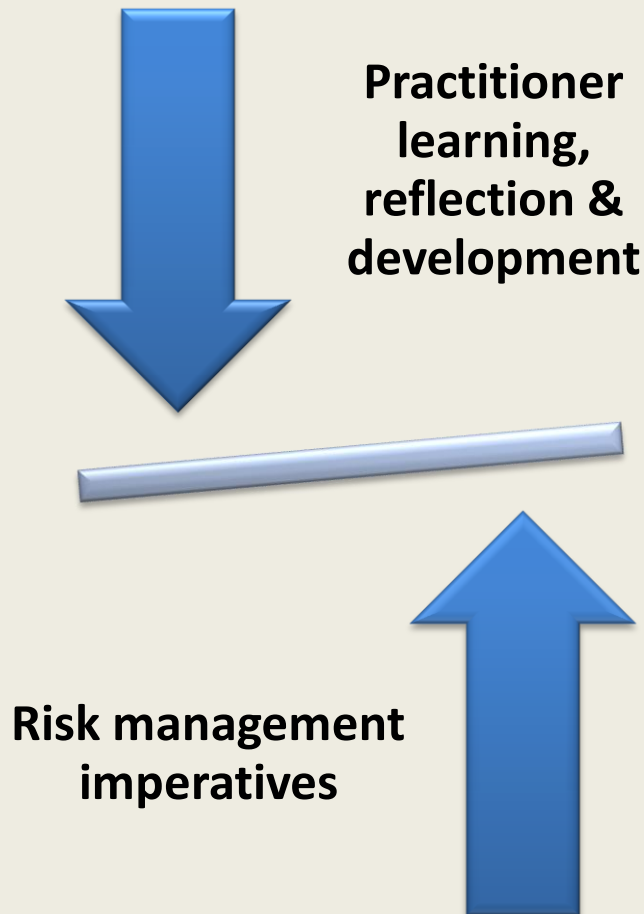
# Key principle 4: the political dimension of resiliency theory

**The application of resiliency theory to supervision processes has social and political dimensions**

Recognising the impact of the work on the worker involves the identification and attribution of stressors

“... placing resilience work in cultural and social contexts warrants attention to societal expectations, differentiated interests and the political and governance strategies that surround and infuse local conditions.”

# Risk management perspectives



## Risk-averse environments

- focus on damage limitation and performance management
- the 'monitoring agenda'

Resilience may be promoted not primarily as a learning and professional development tool but as a means of reducing organisational exposure to risk

# Resilience is about positive adaptation, right?

How much adversity should resilient individuals endure before social arrangements rather than individuals are targeted for intervention?

“Resilience building in a neoliberal framework may shift the emphasis from positive adaptation despite adversity to positive adaptation *to* adversity.”

*Bottrell (2009:334)*

Case example: the notion of a worker being a ‘coper’ and taking on a high workload

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