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DEVELOPING THE SKILLS FOR SUPERVISION⁹

A competence-based approach to supervision is predicated on supervisors having the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes regarding the provision of quality supervision and professional psychology models, theories and practices. Implicit in the concept of competence is also an awareness of, and attention to, one's interpersonal functioning and professionalism. In addition, supervisors must have knowledge, skills and values with respect to multiculturalism and diversity, legal and ethical parameters, as well as be able to manage supervisees who do not meet necessary performance criteria (APA, 2014).

Supervision is a distinct professional competence that requires specific training. A competent supervisor possesses, cultivates and maintains the various components of the supervisory competences, as well as those in relation to competence in the area of supervised practice.

For the supervisee, the supervised practice is a bridge between theoretical psychological knowledge and competence in the field of professional psychology.

Development of a Supervisory Relationship

The first and most important task of the supervisor is to establish and develop a good supervisory relationship. Openness and trust are prerequisites for success

⁹ The chapter is primarily based on the starting points and perspectives of the Norwegian program of supervision training and the APA Guidelines for clinical supervision (APA, 2015).

in the collaborative tasks of the supervisor and supervisee. From the first meeting the supervisor thus seeks to create a *collaborative relationship* that makes it safe for the supervisee to talk about any difficulties they have experienced, both in their own practice and the supervisory relationship. The supervisor promotes an interactive, safe and stimulating learning environment by showing interest and respect, by sharing experiences and thoughts, by giving feedback in a constructive and friendly manner, by asking the supervisee for their experiences and thoughts, and by encouraging their feedback.

Establishing a *supervised practice agreement* is an important first step in the building of a well-functioning supervisory relationship. It helps the parties to clarify expectations, needs and demands. The agreement (contract) needs to build on the principles of evidence-based practice, and on the ethical and legal requirements that regulate professional practice. More specifically, the supervised practice agreement needs to address the expectations, context and framework for the supervision process, and the goals and content of the supervised practice. Together the supervisor and supervisee should try to assess and evaluate what the supervisee has already mastered and what the key areas for development are. Other relevant topics for the agreement are the materials required for the supervision sessions (video recordings, session notes, etc.), the responsibilities shared between supervisor and supervisee, rights and obligations and how to prevent and meet difficulties in the supervision room. A focus on relational variables from the very start will also be helpful.

Because the aim of the supervisory relationship is to develop the professional competence of the supervisee, the assessment and evaluation of skills and competence must be discussed openly. It needs to be evident for the supervisee that his/her performance will be evaluated. The supervisor needs to reflect on questions such as: How do I make a fair, valid and reliable judgment? Do I know what “best performance” is, or what the best course of development may be? Where is the line between disagreement and disqualification? Addressing questions like this requires but also enhances trust and openness.

Methods of Supervision

Rather than communicating about theories of supervision, the literature discusses different models of supervision. There are three main types of models: those based on therapy theory, developmental models and social role models. A competence-based supervision approach is meta-theoretical, and can in principle incorporate any of these models.

Social role models describe the supervision process independent of content. They provide a language to describe and clarify the supervision process. These models

contribute to knowledge about what happens in supervision, and open up the possibility for more flexible use of the supervisor's attention and behaviours.

The methods of supervision are directed towards strengthening the supervisee's mastery of his/her professional tasks and simultaneously contributing to an adequate *sense of mastery*, and the ability to realistically self-evaluate. The supervisor seeks to identify the supervisee's resources and developmental tasks and provide regular and specific feedback based on his/her assessment of the learning process. To do this the supervisor needs to have a clear understanding of the competences needed in the supervisee's line of work, and sufficient insight into the supervisee's professional practice. The supervisor will communicate his/her thoughts to the supervisee in an empowering and directional way. The interactional behaviour of the supervisor should actively facilitate the supervisee in developing the understanding and skills relevant to his/her professional practice.

Many specific methods of supervision are available, with the use of a "reflecting team," role-play and watching recorded work sessions among the most useful.

The reflecting team is a collaborative approach to group supervision, and this involves all the group members while also generating new ideas and reflections for those not receiving direct supervision. This is a person-centred supervision approach, allowing and helping the supervisee to define his/her own developmental goals and pursue them. The supervisee is trained to make choices through carefully observing their own preferences and evaluating their own skills, while listening to a multitude of suggestions in a nonintrusive atmosphere. It has strong focus on developing the personal competences of the therapist, such as those of reflection, self-reflection, self-evaluation, decision-making, and autonomy.

Role play is based on our human "child skills," since we are born to learn from "acting as if" and from imitation. Playing roles creates engagement and brings the learning closer to practice. Role play is most relevant when "how to do it" is part of the question or problem. It is effective both in group and individual supervision. Role play is a teaching tool with three different functions: (i) *Exploration*: When exploration of a situation is needed in order to create better understanding, or to try out different alternatives of action. (ii) *Teaching by demonstrating*: When the supervisor wants to show "how to do it" or show "how to make a difference" in delivering an intervention. (iii) *Skill training*: When the supervisee needs to try out a new strategy or develop new skills.

Recorded work sessions give the supervisor a necessary base for giving evaluative feedback on the supervisee's work. The supervisor should observe how the supervisee interacts with his/her "clients," and give supportive and directive feedback. In this supervision method it is important that the supervisor has a good balance between supportive and corrective feedback; which probably means five supportive statements for each corrective one. Shared observations of the supervisee's

performance in the work sessions create opportunities for both multidirectional reflections and well-adjusted skill training.

The Role of the Supervisor and Areas of Focus in Supervision

Supervision consists of a lot of choices, and the supervisor needs concepts and maps to make appropriate, valid and reliable interventions.

The social role models have a specific focus on the different roles of the supervisor and focus of supervision. Bernard (1997), with her model, has given a useful contribution to the description of the roles of the supervisor and the kind of skills that supervision pays attention to. Bernard divides and defines the activities of the supervisor into three different roles: teacher, therapist and consultant. In each of these the supervisor must identify what kind of skills the psychologist seems to need in order to develop professionally: *process skills*, *conceptualizing skills* or *personal skills*. The concepts in Bernard's model help supervisors and researchers describe what the former are doing, enabling them to be flexible and conscious in the use of roles and focus – in accordance with the needs of the supervisees.

Dealing with Problems in Supervision

A competent supervisor seeks to identify and prevent the occurrence of relational obstacles to a *good supervision* process, and has access to helpful strategies in order to deal with difficult situations that may arise in supervision.

Supervision is in its nature problem solving. The supervisor and supervisee work together to solve the different kinds of problems psychologists meet in their professional work. These are sometimes serious and very difficult to solve, but when we talk about problems in supervision we talk about those that exist and arise between the supervisor and the supervisee.

The supervisor prevents many relational problems by putting effort into negotiating a *good supervised practice agreement* (contract), and by taking responsibility for regular and thorough evaluation of his/her collaborative work and progress with the supervisee. If how to detect, prevent and solve problems are talked about in the initial stage of the relationship, both parties will be better equipped for meeting and solving the interpersonal, relational problems that often occur in all long-lasting *collaborative*, close relationships. Such problems in supervision typically arise from:

- differences in theory preferences;
- differences in attitudes and values;
- differences in personal responses to challenges and problems;
- interpersonal attraction or dislikes;
- conflicts of interests.

Another main area of conflict is connected to the evaluative, gatekeeping responsibility of the supervisor.

The supervisor needs to be conscious of ethical dilemmas in supervision, related to the previously mentioned conflict areas, and behave in accordance with ethical guidelines. This also means that the supervisor must ensure they acquire the professional skills needed, or help the supervisee move in the appropriate direction, if a topic in which the supervisor is not competent is presented. It is an ethical obligation of the supervisor not to use his/her professional knowledge and authority to gain advantage at the expense of the supervisee, or to humiliate or suppress the supervisee. The supervisor should consistently act and communicate in a way that demonstrates respect for the supervisee and his/her personal integrity. The supervisor serves as a model for the supervisee with regard to professional behaviour and communication.

When serious problems disrupt the supervision, a third person should be contacted. This should be a trusted person or institution agreed upon and stated in the supervision contract. A well-functioning supervisory relationship is very well equipped to deal with challenges, disagreements and problems. It is the task of the supervisor to understand and act when a third person should be consulted. This could be because of a negative development in the supervisory relationship, or if the supervisor is unsure whether or not the supervisee is meeting their professional requirements.

The work of psychologists is challenging on many levels and in many ways. Adequately performing our work as professional psychologists will steadily push us outside our comfort zone. Successful professional development requires that we are willing and able to master our “normal” work challenges, working continuously to improve. Rønnestad and Skovholt (2013) investigate the phenomena influencing practitioner development over several decades. To better understand these processes they introduce the following models: (i) a “phase model” for the development of psychologists; (ii) a “thematic model” for specific areas/challenges that need to be addressed and mastered; and (iii) a “process model” for the development or the stagnation of the psychologist as a practitioner. They point out that an awareness of work complexity and an active reflecting attitude when facing work challenges are essential for continuous development.

Supervision is not only for beginners in the profession, as it is also of great value for experienced psychologists. It promotes growth and development, and counteracts burnout in the lifelong learning adventure of the professional psychologist.

Module 2 of the Training of Supervisors: Development of Supervision Competences¹⁰

The aims of Module 2

- To create a solid understanding of supervision as a distinct professional activity.
- To develop understanding of the role and responsibility of the supervisor.
- To develop clinical supervision skills.
- To increase awareness of ethical dilemmas in the professional work of the programme participants and in the supervision process.
- To foster the development of professional competences of the psychologist (the supervisee) with evaluative feedback on the described and observed professional conduct which facilitates learning, explorative problem solving, and opening of new perspectives in complex clinical situations.

Expected learning achievements

- The understanding of supervision as a developmental process.
- Knowledge of various supervision models.
- Ability to negotiate a supervision agreement.
- Recognition of fundamental factors required for establishing trustful relationships.
- Ability to adjust the supervisory relationship with the help of regular mutual evaluation.
- Creation of collaborative relationship which enables safe discussion of any difficulties experienced, both in the supervisee's practice and in the supervisory relationship.
- Ability to identify the resources and developmental tasks of the psychologist.
- Ability to assist the supervisees in their description of their needs and questions, understanding and resolution of difficulties at work.
- Application of role playing as a method for exploration and teaching.
- The knowledge of different supervision methods and the application of methods in a flexible and adjusted manner in supervision.
- Recognition of different roles and focuses of the supervisor.
- Giving regular evaluative feedback based on concrete descriptions of the observed behaviour and explicit evaluation criteria in a balanced and development-oriented manner.
- Ability to recognize and be aware of ethical dilemmas in professional performance and the supervised practice.
- Ability to recognize and reflect on a difficult situation in supervision.

10 The program was prepared by Mona Duckert and Bjarte Kyte. The training leaders within the SUPER PSYHOLOG project were: Mona Duckert and Bjarte Kyte, supervisor experts who lead a similar training of supervisors within the framework of the Norwegian Psychological Association, and supervisory groups' leaders Anita Kovačik, Jožica Možina, Julija Pelc, Vita Poštuvan, Andreja Rihter and Blanka Tacer, under the leadership of Mateja Štirn.

- Reflection on the influence of the behaviour and attitude of the supervisor on the collaboration in a supervisory relationship.
- Understanding when it is good to seek advice from a third person in cases when the supervisory relationship takes a negative turn.

Training is intended for prospective supervisors, i.e. for the qualified psychologists with work experience in different fields of psychology, and for supervisors of supervisors, i.e. psychologists with long term work experience and previous experience in supervision. The aim of training supervisors of supervisors is to obtain in-depth and more solid knowledge of supervision. Besides the above-mentioned learning achievements, they are expected to know how to lead supervisory groups consisting of supervisors, apply the reflecting team method, and offer individual and group supervision of supervision.

Module 2 scope

Two two-day workshops (eight hours per day; 32 hours altogether); additional learning activities: individual supervision or inclusion into a supervisory group led by the supervisor and where the participants receive supervision of their supervision (minimum of six meetings).

Teaching methods

Short lectures including demonstrations on video recordings, reflective activities (individual, group, or plenary), skill training in small groups, role playing, and the use of reflecting teams.

Contents

The first scope:

1. Definition and understanding of supervision (supervision models).
2. Establishment of the supervisory relationship – negotiations for concluding a supervisory agreement.
3. Establishment of the supervisory relationship – evaluation in supervision and evaluation of the supervision process.
4. Evaluative feedback on the conduct observed.
5. Reflecting team.
6. Role playing.
7. Group practicum: Application of supervision tools.

The second scope:

1. Frequent and recurring difficulties in supervision.
2. The supervisor role and areas of focus in supervision.
3. Assessment – evaluation – feedback on the supervisor's skills/qualities.
4. Question assessment.
5. When supervision becomes more difficult.

Assessment

No formal assessment is planned.

Recommended literature for participants:

APA. (2014). *Guidelines for Clinical Supervision in Health Service Psychology*. Accessible at: <https://www.apa.org/about/policy/guidelines-supervision.pdf>