Towards an Interactive Map of the Supervision Session

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Overview

• Aim of this webinar
• Literature
• Methodology
• Supervisees’ and Supervisors’ descriptions of their sessions
• Implications
• Conclusion
Aim of the Webinar

- To explore the supervision session from both sides of the interaction;
- To propose an interactional map of the supervision session; and
- To provide supervisors with a practical checklist for the interactional process of the session.
Literature about the inner workings of supervision session

- There is very little social work research and professional literature.
- The research details the length and frequency of sessions, and matters that are wrong and in need of improvement (e.g., lack of structure or poor practices within sessions).
- The literature describes the session from the perspective of the supervisor and outlines the structure of the session via phases or stages of the session.
Methodology

• 34 Individual interviews
  – (16 supervisees and 18 supervisors)

• Participants completed a pre-interview task
  – (i.e. a guided, self-administered reflection upon a recent supervision session).

• Participants were asked about the pre-interview task and sequentially taken through the session.

• Transcripts analysed using NVivo.
Supervisees’ and Supervisors’ descriptions of their sessions

• Five stages were common across all participants.

• These stages were:
  – a) preparation;
  – b) beginning;
  – c) planning;
  – d) working; and
  – e) ending.
Preparation for supervisees

• Continual consideration
As the week’s going on and something springs to mind and I think ‘I’m not quite sure about that’ … I’ll just flick over [the diary] to the day of supervision and write it in there. So by the time I … get to the day, I’ve actually got a small agenda of my own. (Cara)

• Session preparation
A few days beforehand I start getting a bit more refined about [diary notes such as] ‘I definitely want to be taking this client’ or ‘I’ve got this issue bubbling away with a colleague or that seems to be affecting my work.’ … So to a degree it depends on the acuity [of the issue]… So it wouldn’t be unusual for me to take maybe a situation with a client and a situation with a supervisee. (Abbey)
Preparation for supervisors

• Reviewing the records
  * Get out my supervision book …have a skim of what we talked about last time. I’ll check and see if there was anything that was highlighted as an action and if there’s anything that’s highlighted for me and for them…[as well as] if there was anything we noted to talk about next time. So, I note that down as an agenda item. (Becky).

• Thinking about the session
  – what the supervisor would be raising in the session;
  – what needed following up on from the previous session;
  – what the supervisee could be bringing to the session; and
  – the supervisee’s emotional state.

• Paying attention to the setting
  – E.g. checking the room, minimising interruptions and providing hospitality for the supervisee.
Beginning for supervisees

• Social engagement
  – Exchange of greetings
  – A brief catch up
  – Settling in

• Orientation
  – Checking-in
  – Focusing
Beginning Supervisees – Disorientation

• Difficulties in focusing occurred when the supervisor would:

> Just go off on this little tangent and … I’ll keep on trying to bring it back on track to what my agenda is, to what my items are. I might get a bit of an answer and then she’ll just go off on another little tangent… and sometimes … this can go on for an hour and a half. Sometimes I won’t even get through what I’ve brought … Because … my supervisor brings out her own issues and what’s going on for her. (Cara)

> Often I’m … supportive to my supervisor, which is fine at one level … and she’ll come back and say ‘Oh this is about your time. I’ll put that out now.’ But, it does … take away from my ability to … destress a little bit to get into a position where I can actually gain something. (Felicity)
Beginning supervisors

• **Starting – Diversity**
  
  *Some of the workers will go ‘Whew this is what’s happening to me. I’ve got this big case …and …I don’t know what I am doing here,’ so we go with that. [Yet at other times] I’ll ask where they’d like to start, and nine times out of ten it’s case load. … Or we might start with …‘How’s things going for you?’* (Ripeka)

• **Checking-in**
  
  – Inquiring about the supervisee’s emotional state
  – General well-being
  – Comfort and activities
Planning – Supervisees

• Establishment of the agenda
  I say what I want to cover in the supervision session and she [the supervisor] may have some things that she wants to discuss as well, and then there’s some discussion about the most important things. (Keri)

• Setting the order of priority
  I would tend to choose the one that I thought was most important to get through and sometimes I might choose it on the basis of I don’t want the worst or most difficult thing to come last. … Difficult meaning [items] that might make me feel a bit vulnerable… I want to walk out the door feeling ready to go, like I know that I’m a reasonable practitioner. (Abbey)
Planning – Supervisors

• Either joint process or supervisee focused

An open agenda that you’re both adding to… You’re saying ‘Well I’ve got some stuff that I need to talk about. You’ve got some stuff you need to talk about. This is the pie. How are we going to divide it? What’s the most important stuff? What can we leave if we don’t get to it?’ (Laura)

• Most supervisors took an active role in prioritising agenda items
  – exploring and discussing matters such as:
  – the supervisee’s wishes,
  – the urgency in terms of timeframe or safety, and
  – items were easiest or quickest to deal with
Working – Supervisees

• Telling the story or presenting the item
  For example Keisha would:
  *Start talking about the situation that they’re [the client family is] in with that issue and …relating it to that particular child in terms of the information gathered about their particular situation…*

• Interactive processing
  – Supervisor helped supervisees to:
  – Organise and make sense of an issue;
  – Explore it
  – Think about alternatives and make decisions
Working – Supervisors

• Clarifying and exploring the story or issue
  – Clarifying involved:
    • Listening, Asking questions; Teasing out, the supervisee in the story; the reason for telling it, their intention and purpose; and what outcomes they want.
  – Exploration involved
    • Questioning, whiteboard, diagrams and theory, positive and negatives, reframing etc…

• Working towards decisions and tasks
  • Decisions – ah hah moments, naming the decision and then action planning.
Ending – Supervisees

• Summarising and reviewing
  – For Harvey it was when his supervisor “clarified and summarised any problems” checked that he had “What [he] needed” and asked for feedback.

• Sorting out the practicalities
  – We talk about next time and when do I want to come again. What do I need in the meantime? Then what I often do is slip into a like ‘How’s your grandchild?’ kind of conversation… that kind of breaking away.
Ending – Supervisors

• Reviewing what has been covered
  – Summarising the discussion and reviewing the session

• Practicalities of finishing
  – E.g. making a time for the next session

“People like to end differently. I’ve some who want to end with just a moment of silence before we get up and bustle on. Others that want to get up and bustle on straight away… out the door. Others that want to end in prayer. So they kind of just … use [the] process that works for them to finish.” (Becky)

• Completion of notes
Session Processes

• Discussion
  – Interactive conversational exchange. Rima likened the process to a dance:
    ...
  that would be woven and ...
  it would interchange..., sometimes the one asking the questions would lead, and sometimes
  the response would lead... I see it as a changing dance but of equal input...

• Problem-Solving
  – interactive and included:
    – exploration, reflection, understanding and action planning, which were facilitated by the supervisor
      listening, questioning, challenging and summarising

• Overall, the session process paralleled the social work interview in terms of its format, and
  interactional exchanges
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Framework through which to review sessions

• How well have we prepared?
• How well have we engaged with each other?
• How well have we focused upon supervision?
• How well have we managed our agenda and priorities?
• How well have we worked through the items?
• How well have we made decisions and identified actions?
• How well have we concluded our sessions?
## Supervisory checklist for supervision sessions

<table>
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<th>Session stage</th>
<th>Key points</th>
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| **Before**    | - Preparation  
  a) Review notes – Identify items and actions for follow up.  
  b) Think about – The supervisee, how they are? And what they might bring?  
  c) Attend to setting- minimise interruptions, provide hospitality (hot drink or water).  |
| **During**    | - Beginning  
  d) Ask about how the supervisee wants to start?  
  e) Engage the supervisee – How has today been?  
  f) Check-in regarding their work generally, their feelings about their work, about being here with you in supervision and what’s currently on top for them.  
  
  - Planning  
  g) Review the lists (the supervisee’s and yours).  
  h) Prioritise the list. Agree on the agenda.  
  
  - Working  
  i) Listen to the supervisee’s story or presentation.  
  j) Ask clarifying questions, summarise and help them reflect and explore.  
  k) Use problem solving skills and strategies to assist the supervisee to process.  
  l) Facilitate the arrival at decision points and actions plans.  
  
  - End  
  m) Review what has been covered with supervisee.  
  n) Summarise the decisions and agreed actions  
  o) Arrange a date and time of next session.  
  p) Close off the session checking how they are? And where they will be going next?  |
| **After**     | - Write up the session notes and share with the supervisee.  
  - Note any reflections or learning for you to take to your own supervision.  |
Conclusion

• The session is an interactive discursive exchange with a ritualised format that is co-constructed by the participants.

• Metaphorically speaking another way to describe this, is maybe to see the session as a dance, wherein it is the dancing that produces the dance, with how well the dancers dance depending upon how well each does their part and how well they are in-sync with each other.

• Finally, perhaps the most significant challenge arising for supervisees and supervisors is for each person involved in supervision to become more mindful of this process and their contribution to it.
Main sources used in this webinar


