

Principles of Supervision

by Paul Baakman

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout my professional life, I have engaged in supervision. During my initial training as a residential social worker and later, in my training as a psychiatric nurse, I met a range of supervisors, some of whom I remember more vividly than others. Those supervisors who recognized my experience and encouraged me to think and use my imagination, made a lasting impact.

Within the context of ANZPA and its accredited training institutes supervision is regarded as an integral part of the training process. This is affirmed in the ANZPA Training and Standards Manual. Within the Christchurch Institute for Training in Psychodrama supervision may take place in a regular training group, in training workshops, or in individual, or group supervision sessions.

Trainees (mostly first or second year trainees) who are ready to begin applying aspects of the psychodrama method in their work, are expected to use supervision for preparation as well as evaluation and role-development. This is a time of daring and discovery, as new competencies begin to be developed. Third year trainees (and onward) continue making use of supervision. At this stage, supervision may be about the application of the method in a variety of settings, or about deepening the work, or the integration of an existing professional background with the identity of a psychodramatist. Supervision on writing tasks, such as the social and cultural atom paper or thesis, takes place with greater frequency.

In supervision, like in all human affiliations, the quality and depth of the relationship is central. I have come to appreciate the real value in committed

long-term relationships, personally and professionally. Commitment is demonstrated by valuing the intent and effort that has been invested over time, by both supervisee and supervisor, in the development of the supervisee's abilities. At the Christchurch Institute for Training in Psychodrama we noticed that quite a number of trainees were dipping in and out of training, and a number were becoming 'chronically advanced'. Trainers would 'get a handle' on someone's developmental edge, and then perhaps not see them for a year or more. Trainers would lose sight of where a trainee was at, and lose a warm-up to certain trainees. A stronger relating was called for. A move was made to no longer divide the training program into 'terms'. Whilst exceptional circumstances are taken into account, the overall expectation is now that trainees enroll for a whole year's program, and be 'hot' about training.

A commitment to the whole year's program has enabled greater continuity and group cohesion from one training event to another (trainees may of course enroll for additional training workshops at any time). Having trainees' enroll for the full year has contributed to stronger and more focused relationships, better planning, and a greater use being made of supervision. In writing this article I relate to the notion of 'development over time', by highlighting the relevance of gearing the supervision to a developmental perspective, and the importance of the notion of 'developmental levels'.

Supervision involves super-vision or over-seeing of professional functioning. It is about:

- Integration between thinking, feeling, willing, and doing (first level integration). This integration promotes congruency and

comes about through the resolution of inner conflict, and the development of new roles.

- Learning to attune personal functioning to the demands of a role, or occupation in a changing society (second level integration). This attunement promotes the development of any or all of the five aspects of spontaneity: flexibility, adequacy, vitality, creativity, and originality.

In some parts of the world supervision is seen as necessary only for those still in training, or for those who have transgressed their code of ethics or have violated an organisational code. The belief that underpins this idea is that 'once you are qualified you surely know enough'.

"Many cultures emphasise self-reliance and put a value on solving one's own problems. For a person to seek help and make herself temporarily dependent on another person is a de facto confession of weakness or failure, particularly in Western, competitive, individualistic societies." Edgar Schein (1999:31)

In New Zealand, there is a growing understanding and acceptance of the need for ongoing (lifetime) supervision. Within the New Zealand Association of Psychotherapists, a yearly practicing certificate is issued to those who supply evidence of ongoing supervision. An advantage of this is that it enables any 'consumer' or organisation to easily verify if a member is in regular supervision and this can help in establishing credibility and trust.

I believe lifetime supervision is of great value. Supervision is about much more than knowing facts and theories and following

procedures. Lifetime supervision is based on the premise that 'the more you know, the more you know what you don't know', and that it is possible, even desirable, to keep on developing, personally and professionally. Once basic training is finished the true value of supervision as a lifetime source of stimulation, challenge, and support, begins to emerge. These notions, in addition to my personal experience of the real benefits of supervision make me determined, if or when the time comes, to book a supervision session for when I cease to practice!

In this article, I highlight those principles of supervision I currently value highly in my work.

SUPERVISION ASSISTS THE SUPERVISEE IN THE COMPLETION OF TRAINING

Completion of training is achieved through the integration of a professional identity, and by developing, expanding and refining a professional role repertoire, which enables effective work with a client or group. The ANZPA Training and Standards Manual is an inspirational document which may be used by trainees to help evaluate progress. In Christchurch all new trainees receive a manual upon embarking in training.

Supervision requires trust. Therefore, it is essential that the supervisee enter into supervision voluntarily. When the supervisor is in a line management position with the supervisee, the supervisee is likely to be preoccupied with issues of performance and judgement and any adjustment is likely to be a pseudo-adjustment. When supervision is linked with a performance review, admission to membership of a professional body or teaching organization, or when there are concerns over maintenance of standards,

ethical or organisational issues, then the lines of communication and what may be communicated need to be clarified at the start.

Supervision is not friendship, counselling, or psychotherapy. Supervision centers on the development of professional roles. This specific purpose is well served by the supervisor and supervisee both taking responsibility for setting and maintaining clear boundaries between these different forms of operating.

Supervision may well involve friendliness, and may certainly have therapeutic benefits to the supervisee. After all, supervision involves the whole person of the supervisee, and includes a network of relationships (the social atom being the smallest unit of society that can be made sense of). However, keeping the distinctions between different forms of relating in mind assists the supervision to stay on track.

In the supervision of a psychodrama trainee, the psychodrama method is used. This can make for lively sessions in which the content as well as the process provides learning material. Events in a session can shake up a supervisee's worldview or sense of self. When this leads to the realisation that significant work needs to be done on aspects of the supervisee's personal life circumstances, then the supervisee may be encouraged to do this away from supervision. However, the supervisor need not be too rigid about this. Much of the work of supervision involves self-reflection and a focus on the supervisee's personal processes. Both supervision and psychotherapy are interpersonal processes that involve the examination of personal feelings. The main distinction is created by the difference in purpose. Anything that assists in the development of professional

roles is a legitimate activity in supervision, and this may at times involve working with the personal process of the supervisee. When this is done, it is important for the supervisor to be receptive to the supervisee's life experiences, and work with the influence these experiences have on professional role relationships. Gains made in personal work have a profound impact on professional functioning, and vice versa. The supervision stays on track if ultimately the focus is returned to current professional functioning.

Supervision may focus on any of the following relationships:

- Supervisee – Client (or Group)
- Supervisee – Employer or Agency
- Supervisee – Wider Community /Systems
- Supervisee – Supervisor

All of these elements have their roles, history, beliefs, values, and ways of doing things, (also known as 'cultural conserve'). All elements are inter-related and influence each other. In order to complete training any or all of these elements, and their relationships, may be addressed.

THE WARM-UP PROCESS IS ESSENTIAL FOR EFFECTIVE SUPERVISION

Warm-Up of the Supervisor

- **The supervisor warms-up to enjoying meeting and getting to know the supervisee**

An attitude of taking pleasure in meeting the supervisee assists the supervisor in

making generous assumptions about his or her functioning. Generous assumptions enhance the functioning of the supervisee. The supervisee feels accepted and a mutually positive tele may develop.

For example: Mary has arranged a supervision session. This will be her third session. From the time she walked in the front door, until she sits in her chair she has thanked me five times. She has thanked me for welcoming her, offering her a hot drink, opening a door, inviting her to the room, and in response to me saying ' please take a seat'. I ask her where she has learned to be so slavishly thankful. She responds by casting her eyes down and goes red in the face. The rest of the session Mary focuses on her weaknesses and self-doubt. The session feels like hard work. In the supervision on my own supervision, I reflect on the fact that I hardly know Mary and realize that I made a stingy and pathologising assumption. I become aware of the negative effect this had on the rest of the session.

A month later Mary books herself in for another session. I notice that she again expresses 'thank you' several times before the session begins, (evidence that my previous intervention had little effect). This time I say to her: "Mary, I notice that you express your gratitude for all the small things that come your way. Is this right; are you a person who is filled with thankfulness for all the numerous little blessings that come your way?" Mary responds with a big grin and nods: "That's me, that's right," she says, looking me in the eye. During the session, she shares some of her strengths and successes, and reflects critically, but not judgmentally, on her own functioning. This session feels like a breeze. I made a generous assumption, which helped Mary to warm up positively to the session.

- **The supervisor engages in supervision on supervision**

Professional supervision helps the supervisor to remain in touch with the experience of being supervised, stay sensitized to the supervisee, and what is required for effective supervision. The chance of the supervisor becoming isolated or grandiose in their functioning is reduced. This is a good example of being willing to 'swallow your own medicine', and 'practice what you preach'.

The word 'supervision' is used purposefully early on in the session to create a warm-up and focus. This reminds both that they are there for the purpose of professional development and not a counselling session or chitchat. In the case of an organisation paying for the supervision, both have an extra obligation to make the best possible use of time.

- **The supervisor expresses curiosity**

Active listening may involve asking open questions, following the supervisee's process, clarifying, and mirroring back what has been expressed. The supervisor's curiosity communicates interest and active involvement.

- **The supervisor has a positive relationship to time**

The supervisor allows the supervisee to work in his or her own time. Hurry communicates anxiety and is counter-productive. Certain things won't emerge in the supervisee's consciousness until the relationship is sufficiently developed. As in the process of psychotherapy, timing is of the essence. A premature intervention can have the effect of alienating the supervisee. Alternatively, when an intervention is delayed a golden moment may be missed. By not being in a hurry, the

supervisor is more likely to make a timely and appropriate intervention. I have found that when I take my time, and appreciate what is already expressed, this often results in me noticing more.

Warm-Up of the Supervisee

- **The supervisee prepares for the session**

The preparation may involve reading, writing, or thinking about a client or session.

- **The supervisee arrives at the session expressing a wish or desired outcome**

Arriving unprepared may be a sign of burnout, being overworked or of underdeveloped professional roles involving clear thinking, being organised and focused.

THE MODE OF SUPERVISION IS BASED ON A DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

The Supervisee

Supervision outcomes are enhanced if the type of supervision matches the developmental level and readiness of the supervisee. Factors that may influence the choice of type of supervision are:

- The nature of the work (individual-couple-group-therapy-counseling-consulting-teaching-training)
- The personality of the supervisee
- The quality of the supervisory relationship (for example, degree of openness and trust)

- The amount of personal exploration that has been done already. For example, to what extent has the supervisee been involved in personal growth processes?

As a general guideline supervisees who are new to their work need to start with focusing on the actual content of the work with the client or group. The focus is on the details of what actually happened. New supervisees are often anxious about their performance and need to be supported and encouraged in attending to what actually took place. While the uniqueness of the supervisee's relationship with their client or group must be respected, the supervisee can be helped to see how material from a session links to other aspects of the client's life; relates to progress over time; and can be linked to general principles of the 'change process'. This helps the supervisee to create an overview or larger picture.

The supervisee is respected as a 'creative genius'. Therefore supervisors generally avoid telling the supervisee what they

would have done instead; how another intervention would have been much better. Copious advice often leads to the supervisee ending up in a one-down position, and communicates lack of respect or trust in the ability of the supervisee.

With an experienced and competent supervisee, the supervisor focuses more on the unconscious aspects of the session. The supervisee is likely to have critically evaluated the conscious aspects of their functioning. Now the focus can be more on parallel processes and the emergence of frozen roles (also known as 'transference' and 'counter-transference'), both within the reported session as well as in the supervision session itself.

Blanchard and Johnson (1986) describe leadership styles that are appropriate for various developmental levels. They relate developmental levels to leadership styles as follows:

Developmental level	Appropriate leadership style
D1 Low Competence High Commitment	S1 DIRECTING Structure, control and supervise
D2 Some Competence Low Commitment	S2 COACHING Direct and support
D3 High Competence Variable Commitment	S3 SUPPORTING Praise, listen, and facilitate
D4 High Competence High Commitment	S4 DELEGATING Turn over responsibility for day-to-day decision-making

This model can be useful in managing staff or conducting 'administrative' or 'line management' supervision'.

Jonathan Fay (1993) offers a more detailed map which I find very useful. He describes four types of supervision:

- Line Management Supervision
- Performance Review
- Peer Supervision
- Professional (or Clinical) Supervision

The purpose of the first two types of supervision is the maintenance of professional standards and/or career development. The third type aims to support day-to-day practice. The fourth type is aimed at learning, professional role-development and the development of excellence. With the third and fourth type, confidentiality is the norm. The exception to this is when unethical matters become known that may affect the work.

This article focuses primarily on the fourth type: professional supervision. Fay goes on to describe four modes of professional supervision outlining the strengths and weaknesses of each :

- **Administrative Mode**

Interventions are prescriptive. The supervisor takes responsibility and initiative. They claim authority, define, direct, monitor practice, and evaluate the supervisee's competence.

- **Therapeutic Mode**

Interventions are supportive and

confrontative. The supervisor shares responsibility, initiative, and authority. They explore, contain, interpret practice, and help develop emotional competence.

- **Educational Mode**

Interventions are conceptual. The supervisor shares responsibility, initiative, and authority. They guide and assist practice and help develop knowledge and skills.

- **Consultative Mode**

Interventions are catalytic. The supervisor gives the supervisee responsibility, initiative, and authority. They witness, support, extend practice, and assume supervisee competence.

Whilst Fay clearly delineates the differences, these four modes are highly interrelated and the supervisor needs to stay flexible in switching between the different modes, as the situation requires.

The Supervisor

So far, there has been a focus on the developmental level of the supervisee. What about the development of the supervisor? The current life stage of the supervisor has an impact on what is noticed and attended to in the session. Anne Alonso states: "the supervisors' developmental tasks and supervisory work are complementary to each other." She makes a comprehensive description of different life stages in relation to the work of supervision (Alonso, 1985: 51-79). I found this invaluable reading, as it alerted me to my own life stage and made me conscious of the impact of this on my work.

THE SUPERVISORY PROCESS IS FOCUSED ON THE EXPERIENCE OF THE SUPERVISEE RATHER THAN ON SPECIFIC SOLUTIONS

For example, John is an experienced practitioner having his tenth supervision session with me. He wants to work on improving collegial relationships. He describes a number of difficult relationships with colleagues. He speaks in a tone that conveys complaint and blame. Rather than siding with him, challenging him, or going off in a daydream (moving toward, moving against or moving away, respectively), I direct him to set out a scene that involves him and his colleagues. Next, I invite him to take a close look and ask him: "what do you make of this?" At first, he seems frustrated and puzzled, and says, "Well, that's what I'm paying you to tell me". I burst out laughing and he laughs too. I say, "Let's look together". He looks again, and with surprising honesty, he shares about his contribution to the breakdown of relationships at work, and his anger with himself. It appears this anger was immobilising him. The rest of the session is productive. John leaves with a renewed appreciation of his colleagues. He has opened up to himself, and now is more receptive to the experiences others may have had in his company. At the end of this session I feel very awake.

Supervision aims to assist the supervisee to move past the point of impasse so that the client-system may be re-entered afresh. This is done through the creation of an environment that permits and stimulates the emergence of spontaneity and creativity.

Providing a supervisee with solutions will have the effect of creating or maintaining a dependence relationship. In this kind of

relationship, the supervisor is positioned as the omniscient expert with the supervisee as ignorant seeker. This role-relationship may be attractive to some. The supervisee never needs to grow up, learn to think independently, or assume personal responsibility for actions taken. The supervisor may bask in the ego-stroking glory of being seen to know it all. This can be seductive for inexperienced supervisors who may still be somewhat insecure in their role. But as Sheldon B. Kopp (1976) says: "The most important thing that a man must learn no one else can teach him. Once he accepts this disappointment, he will be able to stop depending on the therapist, the guru who turns out to be just another struggling human being".

The exception to this principle may take precedence in certain circumstances such as working with a novice, or in a situation involving significant danger or a breach of ethics. (For example, insisting that the supervisee belong to an association as opposed to working in isolation, or drawing a supervisee's attention to the existence of a code of ethics).

THERE IS RECIPROCITY IN THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE SUPERVISOR AND THE SUPERVISEE, IN WHICH EACH HAVE RESPONSIBILITIES

Responsibilities of the Supervisor

Supervisors are responsible for assisting the supervisee to reflect critically on their work. As Max Clayton (1993:99) states, "Supervision involves detailed scrutiny of leadership functioning. This scrutiny is assisted by role analysis". He goes on to describe the careful preparation of the supervisor and the required attention to detail.

The supervisor ensures that the outcomes of the supervision are in harmony with the code of ethics of the supervisee's professional association. It can be useful to refer to a code of ethics from time to time, especially with a beginning supervisee. Frank and open discussion of ethical principles may assist the supervisee in absorbing, processing, and integrating the spirit of the code. This integration can help to protect the client as well as the supervisee. The code of ethics is not to be treated as a book of rigid rules, but rather as a document that guides practice.

The supervisor displays respect toward the supervisee by maintaining confidentiality. Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that they do not make use of the supervision of trainees for the purpose of satisfying personal needs. Supervisors have a responsibility for being vigilant in monitoring their own processes in sessions and safeguarding against dependency, harassment, or abuse.

The supervisor safeguards against severe error by engaging in 'supervision of supervision' and participating in a regular peer-group. Supervisors need to be practicing practitioners themselves.

Responsibilities of the Supervisee

Supervisees are responsible for their work with a client or group, and for presenting that work as openly, fully and honestly as possible with the supervisor.

Supervisees are responsible for taking to supervision matters concerning their fitness to practice.

Shared Responsibilities

Both are responsible for making explicit their expectations and requirements at the outset.

Both are responsible for regularly reviewing the usefulness of existing arrangements.

THE SUPERVISOR'S PROFESSIONAL FUNCTIONING PROVIDES A ROLE MODEL FOR THE SUPERVISEE

Consciously or unconsciously, the supervisor will often be seen as a role model. Qualities I find important to model are: punctuality, respect (confidentiality), being purposeful, capacity to enjoy life, staying focused as well as flexible, and maintaining the framework established through the contract.

It is essential that the supervisor apply psychodrama theory and practice to the supervision. By doing this, the supervisor establishes credibility as a practitioner, and can model competence and enjoyment in the use of action methods. Supervisees learn, through experience, a great deal more about the application of the method and in turn are more likely to apply this in their own work.

Supervision of psychodramatists or psychodrama trainees needs to be based on psychodrama theories and values. Moreno saw human beings as actors. To have a purely verbal supervision of psychodrama practice would not fit, and would model incongruity to the trainee.

A major psychodrama technique that has immense value in supervision is concretization. This is emphasised by Antony Williams (1995:173): "the key to visual supervision is having an object represent some other thing - whether a person, a role, or a relationship - leading to the possibility of seeing many elements interconnected in a system".

HAVING CONCRETE TASKS TO CARRY OUT, FOCUSED ON THEIR ACTUAL WORK, ORGANISES AND READIES THE SUPERVISEE FOR THEIR PURPOSE AND PRACTICE IN THE WORLD

All roles consist of the three aspects: thinking, feeling and doing. For the outcome of the supervision to be integrated, the supervisee needs to practice. By practicing newly developing roles, these are tested and further developed. This provides the information needed for additional refinement.

'Practicing' can take many forms. This may include an intention to engage differently with a client, or homework such as writing or further reading.

CONCLUSION

I have described seven principles of supervision, and illustrated these with some personal experiences and practices. Prominence is given to the need for relating to a supervisee's developmental level, and a relationship of respect and reciprocity. The need for an adequate warm-up is highlighted. Emphasis is placed on the benefit to the trainee in being stimulated into developing their own knowing rather than being provided with solutions.

These principles represent an overview of the main ideas and values that currently underpin my philosophy and practice of supervision.

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