

rather than supervision there is normally a legitimate power imbalance in favour of the supervisor), although it is certainly one of partnership where collaborative investigation provides the basis for the work done. Inherent within this conceptualization of the supervision process as an interactive one is the notion that both supervisor and supervisee are open to challenge and feedback given in honest and constructive ways.

Stages of the supervision model

The supervision model has five main stages of Contract, Focus, Space, Bridge and Review, each of which subdivides into five further steps, as shown in Figure 3.1.

Although the stages and steps are presented here as a sequential process this is not meant to imply that the supervisor should insist on starting each supervision session at Stage 1 and have worked systematically through to Stage 5 by the end

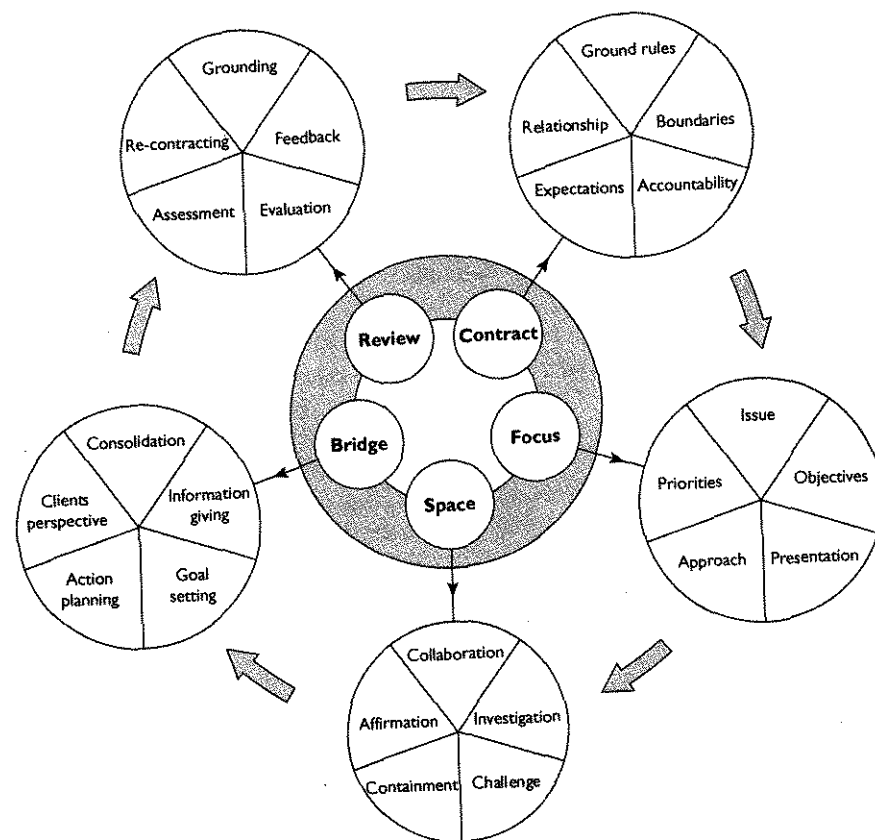


Figure 3.1 The Cyclical Model of supervision.

of the session. When a supervisor and supervisee first embark upon their work together, agreeing a working contract has to be addressed before client material can be safely explored, but beyond that the model is designed to be used with flexibility and pragmatism and can be entered at any stage. Similarly, in Figure 3.1 each stage is represented by a circle of equal size, but this is not intended to represent that the same amount of time that should be spent in each; over time we would expect that most time is spent in Stage 5: Space. The welfare of the client is always preeminent and this may well determine at which stage the model is entered, or which step of that stage is used as the access point. How this is likely to work in practice will become clearer as we move through the model stage by stage and step by step in the next five chapters.

Stage 1: Contract

Contracting in supervision, as in counselling and psychotherapy, performs a vital function in underpinning the entire process and relationship. A contract is an agreement entered into by both parties that contains, supports, gives structure, establishes informed participation by those involved, and provides direction and purpose to the work undertaken. A clear and specific contract sets the agenda for the task and process, reduces anxiety by helping to demystify the process and lays down the ground rules. Contracting should occur at the beginning of any supervisory relationship. It can also occur as re-contracting throughout the ongoing work, and the fact that re-contracting is occurring at various intervals is usually the sign of a healthy and growing relationship and a developing task.

Stage 2: Focus

The focus of a supervision session is the subject or material under consideration at that particular point or stage of the supervision process. Focusing normally starts with the supervisee presenting some aspect of their work for the supervisor and supervisee to explore together. The function of the focus is to ensure that supervision starts with a significant issue for the supervisee and is relevant to the client work. Focusing as a process develops the supervisee's responsibility for making the best use of the supervision opportunity. It encourages intentionality (direction and purpose) and reflection, and ensures that the supervisee has prepared for the supervision in advance of the meeting.

Stage 3: Space

Creating and holding a space is at the heart of the supervision process. It is the place where the therapist is held, supported, challenged and affirmed in his or her work. Space is where movement and insight can occur as a result of the exploratory work undertaken by the supervisor and supervisee. It is also the place where 'not knowing' and confusion are accepted and tolerated in the belief that

time and attention given to the client and to the supervisee are beneficial to the therapeutic endeavour, even when a comfortable resolution of issues may not be achieved. It is also where most supervision time is likely to be spent, for, as Scaife (2010:83) points out in discussing the Cyclical Model:

issues brought to supervision are sometimes given insufficient "air space", there being an apparent degree of urgency to reach a destination. This model emphasises the "space" as the part of the session that is likely to take up the most time. The space is the primary stage in which reflection can take place.

Stage 4: Bridge

The function of a bridge in supervision is to provide a way back into the work that the supervisee is undertaking with the client. It is a process that, at its best, ensures that learning and awareness from supervision are integrated and applied with caution and sensitivity in the therapeutic work. Just as the supervisee is asked to come to supervision with a focus to make sure that the supervision work is relevant to the client work, so too the supervisee is helped to go away from supervision with the recognition that the process will have made a difference, even if the difference is simply an awareness that nothing tangible needs to change.

Stage 5: Review

Review in supervision may take the form of evaluation or assessment of the supervisee's work. If this is so, it should not be the only review that is happening. Whether or not the supervisor has some formal assessment role to fulfil in relation to the supervisee's development, there should also be regular, ongoing mutual feedback taking place. At best this will happen to some extent in every session at a micro level. It should also occur at the macro level at regular intervals, where the supervisor and supervisee stand back from the immediate work to evaluate progress and the current state of their relationship and task. Building-in review as an integral part of the supervision process ensures that both partners actively reflect upon and monitor the standard and quality of their own professional practice and their mutual endeavour.

The context of supervision

It is important to give appropriate attention to the context within which supervision occurs (Copeland 2005); this is represented by the shaded area in Figure 3.1. The boundary between supervision and its context has an intrinsic degree of permeability: the context has influence upon supervision and supervision has influence upon the context in which it takes place. It is also the case that much of what takes place in supervision is rightly private, known only by the supervisor and supervisee(s) who participate.

Some contextual influences can have a direct impact upon supervision. Depending upon circumstances, these may include:

- the setting within which the supervisee works;
- the organization within which supervision takes place;
- the training institute within which the trainee supervisee is training;
- the training institute within which the trainee supervisor is training;
- requirements of professional organizations to which one or both belong;
- the impact of a professional complaint or dispute;
- the career or life stage of the supervisor or supervisee (e.g. just starting out or nearing retirement);
- the therapy that one or the other is undertaking;
- the personal matters of one or the other, such as family demands including caring commitments, medical conditions or changes in financial circumstances.

When one or more of these or similar contextual influences is having an impact it is important to acknowledge this in supervision and give some attention to any consequences, boundary issues or needs that arise as a result.

Alongside these direct influences there will be other, generally more diffuse, contextual influences that are likely to pervade the background of supervision, but occasionally make their presence felt. These may be more difficult to identify as their impact may be quite subtle, secondary or less easy to quantify. Examples of this second category might include:

- prevalent cultural, economic or political conditions;
- debates or shifts within the profession;
- media interests that overlap in some way with the work of the supervisee or supervisor.

It is important to be able to steer a course that avoids either exaggerating or minimizing the impact of such influencing factors upon supervisory work.

Assumptions underlying the model

The model is firmly grounded in a set of assumptions about supervision that govern and inform our practice. The most important of these for us are:

- 1 The primary purpose of supervision is to enhance the therapeutic value of the therapeutic process.
- 2 An important secondary function is to promote the growth of therapeutic competence in the supervisee.
- 3 Where the client's welfare may be at risk, addressing this should supersede any other task or function.

- 4 Supervision is primarily a containing and enabling process, rather than an educational or therapeutic process (although it can also be a transformative process for both supervisee and supervisor).
- 5 Supervision is a holistic process containing embodied, affective and cognitive elements.
- 6 Supervision should be supervisee-centred and take place within a relationship where the supervisor offers the core conditions of warmth, respect, genuineness and empathic understanding.
- 7 Good therapists do not necessarily make good supervisors, and a therapist requires training and a clear conceptualization of the practice and process of supervision in order to function effectively in the role of supervisor.
- 8 Supervisors require ongoing supervision of their supervision work in the same way that counsellors and psychotherapists require supervision of their client work.

In addition to these important assumptions are a number of guiding principles that govern our work as supervisors. These are:

- Both unconscious and dissociative processes can influence the process of supervision.
- We do not have to understand everything that is happening in supervision and can accept that 'not knowing' is a valuable and necessary part of the process.
- Supervision, to be effective, must be exploratory. It may also be action-oriented but this is not always necessary in order for it to be effective.
- The act of the supervisee and supervisor reflecting together upon the therapeutic process in supervision is, of itself, facilitative of that process.
- Sometimes the act of reflecting in supervision appears to move the client's process by itself – this is mysterious but observable.
- Supervision on the work with one client can free up the work with another.
- Aspects of the therapist's work with the client are often replayed in some form (normally outside of immediate awareness) in the supervision session.
- The supervisee will unconsciously both censor the material presented and also give clues as to what most needs addressing.
- Dealing with the dynamics of the relationship between supervisor and supervisee is an important aspect of the supervision process and will frequently throw light on the work with the client.
- Supervision can be experienced as more exposing for the supervisee than being a client in their own therapy.
- Supervision helps to maintain a 'field of learning' within which client, therapist and supervisor are all learning. The maintenance of this field somehow increases the potential for the client to grow. Thus the learning of the therapist can in itself facilitate growth in the client.

The assumptions and guiding principles summarized here are integrated within the model and will be explained more fully within the stages and steps to which they

particularly apply. We would suggest that it is important for any supervisor to examine their core values and beliefs about supervision in order to develop their own guiding principles and make explicit those assumptions that underlie their practice. It behoves every supervisor to reflect upon their own philosophy of supervision in order that they are able, when called upon, to explain and justify their chosen style and approach to their supervisees, in the same way that counsellors and psychotherapists should be able to explain the rationale for their therapeutic conceptualization and choice of strategies to their clients. One of our prime objectives in developing and disseminating a coherent and accessible model of supervision is to take one step further the important and necessary process of demystifying the supervision process in the same way that the counselling and psychotherapy process has become more open to scrutiny over the last decades.

In summary, two criteria have been important in the development of the model. Firstly, the model needed to be sufficiently complex to encompass the realities of the supervision process and its application, and secondly, it needed to be simple to understand and use (given the existence of requisite skills in the would-be supervisor). Building on these important criteria, we have produced a model that offers a framework for the practice of supervision at two levels – both within individual sessions and also from session to session. Harris and Brockbank (2011:168) have described this feature of the Cyclical Model as 'holographic' in that 'it may represent the shape of an individual supervision session, and it may also represent the shape of an entire supervision cycle, over a year or more'.

A final word of caution needs to be added about the application of this, or any, model of supervision. A model needs to be humanized if it is to be applied with care, flexibility and sensitivity. If this does not happen the practitioner merely operates as a technician and the supervisee may well feel devalued or treated as an object. As well as internalizing a useful process model, the truly competent supervisor will possess the personal qualities and interpersonal skills to bring that model alive, so that it is used within a caring and respectful relationship (Wosket 1999).

In the following five chapters the stages of the supervision model will be described and explained in some depth. Each chapter will provide a rationalization for that particular stage with an examination of the skills and processes pertaining to its application.