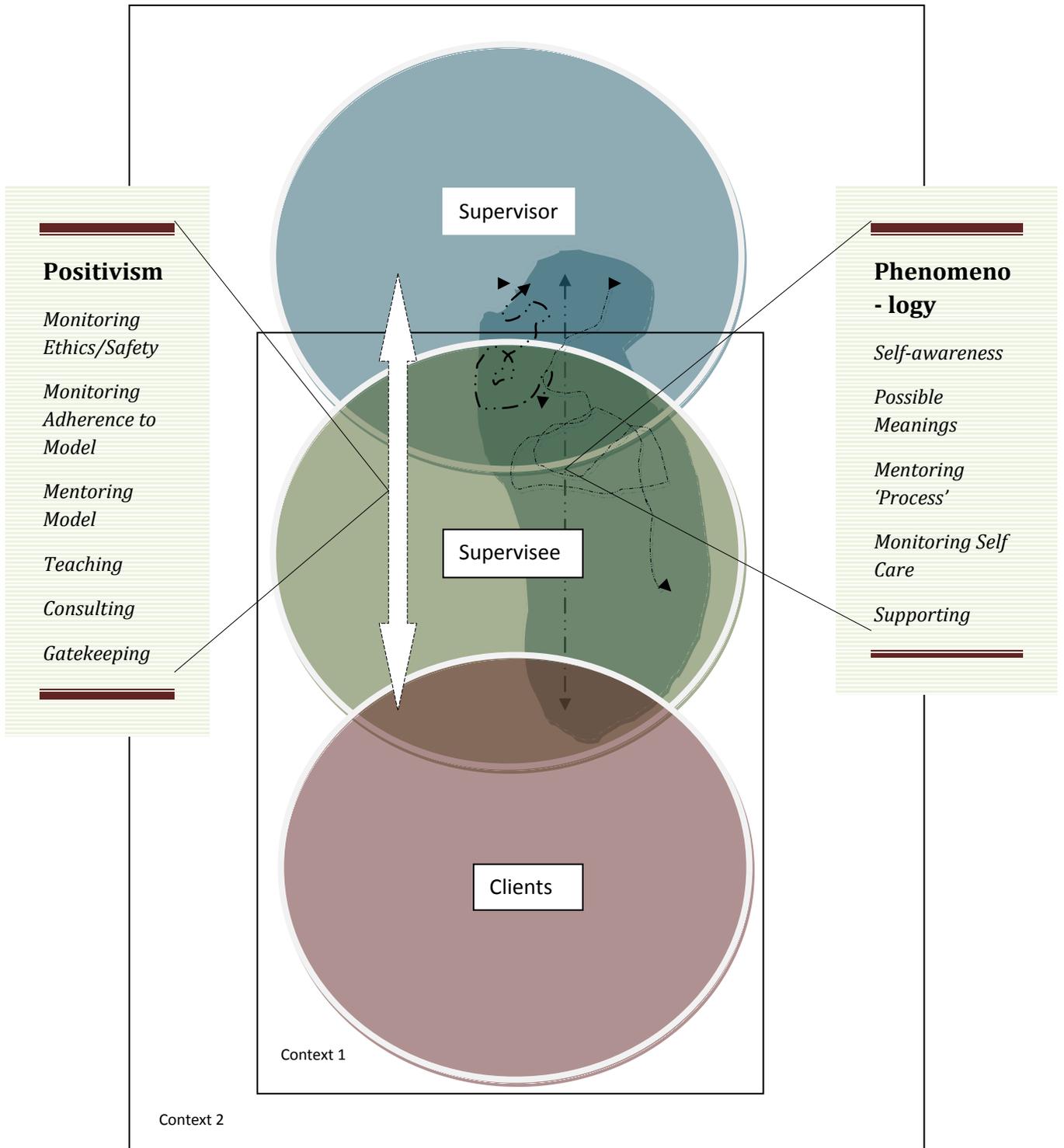


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A Supervision Model.

Figure 1



The starting point for the above model was a statement made by Watkins: 'A theory is a road map to help us better navigate the territory we need to cross'¹. At the core of the model there are various routes moving from supervisor towards the client passing through the supervisee.

Boxes

Before I discuss the core though, there are two rectangles. These are attempts to represent the context in which both counselling and supervision take place. This context has a significant impact on the work of supervision. In working with the supervisee, the supervisor needs to be aware of the both the context in which supervisee is working (Context 1), but also a much broader professional context (Context 2).

A counsellor working mainly in a prison would have an very different context to one working in private practice, for example, not only in terms of caseload and type or (or perhaps complexity) of problem, but also in terms of different pressures on their work, and different contextual problems – clients being prevented from coming to regular sessions because of security lockdowns, or clients suddenly finishing because of not being able to afford to continue. Different contexts can present different ethical dilemmas, and the ground rules for each context need to be clearly understood by both supervisee and supervisor.²

The supervisor also has to be aware of the need of the broader professional context. Is a counsellor being asked to compromise a generally accepted broader ethical stance in the context of his or her work because of a particular management policy, for example? How are national changes likely to impact the work of a particular therapist or agency.

Circles

Within the boxes are the circles – the key players in the supervision process – though technically only the supervisor and supervisee actually 'play' during supervision. When reflecting on the circles, two key points should be borne in mind. There are issues both about validity and quantity.

Think for a moment about the 'distance' between the supervisor and the client. In a sense the supervisor never really knows the client(s). A client only reveals to a counsellor what she or he wishes the counsellor to know. Similarly the supervisee only reveals to the supervisor what he or she wishes the supervisor to know. At worst, the experience of working with a guarded client is misrepresented to a supervisor by an insecure counsellor. As Feltham³ has argued, the abusive counsellor is hardly likely to reveal that abuse in supervision. At best the supervisor sees a version of partially revealed truth mediated through the lens of a fallible counsellor. In my representation there is very deliberately no direct overlap between client(s) and supervisor.

This potential 'distance' has at least two implications for the supervisor. As with counselling, some of the best work takes place once a relationship of trust has been established and the client feels less guarded and more open. The supervisor needs to create a climate of safety for the supervisee. Webb and Wheeler⁴ found that there was a positive correlation between the quality of the supervisory working alliance, as experienced by the supervisee, and the

extent of his or her self-disclosure. As Efan and Lukens⁵ observed (paraphrasing the epistemologist Humberto Maturana): ‘You do not change organisms – you design an environment in which organisms thrive, reason, and change themselves.’

And just as a good counsellor is not naïve about what a client presents and often waits for further information or gently probes to clarify the meaning behind the spoken words, so too the good supervisor may need to more actively seek greater truth about what is presented.

The overlapping circles are also an attempt to represent issues to do with quantity as well as quality. Despite regularly having one and a half hours supervision a month, and despite having worked with the same supervisor for nearly five years, it recently struck me how little of my counselling work my supervisor actually knows. She may of course, infer, from what I take to her, and she may know a lot about a few clients, but there is a considerable amount that she never gets to see. In my diagrammatic representation above, perhaps the overlap between counsellor and client (the part mediated to the supervisor) may be larger than is actually the case.

The arrows and dotted lines (discussed below) imply that the supervision has some impact on counselling practice and hence, on the clients. While there may be anecdotal and qualitative evidence to support this, I would be interested to read any qualitative research on the size of any impact.

Arrows and Dotted Lines

The arrows and dotted lines are an attempt to represent what actually takes place in supervision, and I have categorized that interaction as falling into two distinct camps, with the left hand side representing positivism, and the right hand side phenomenology. They are distinct (but often contemporary and overlapping) routes through the supervision fifty-minute hour.

Both sets of arrows flow in both directions, implying interaction between supervisee and supervisor and a degree of mutuality of respect and status. This mutuality sits more comfortably on the right hand phenomenological arrows where there is more uncertainty and an attempt to discover any meaning. The upward arrow head needs to be fainter on the left hand side where the movement in one direction (downward) is sometimes more pronounced, particularly with very inexperienced counsellors (even if that downward movement is expressed in an apparently non-directive and conciliatory way).

Positivism postulates cause and effect relationships and often implies a ‘rightness’ and ‘wrongness’. The left hand arrow is bigger because it sometimes feels stronger and more certain. The left hand arrow is where a large part of the four of the five functions of supervision that Beinhart⁶ has identified (monitoring and evaluation, instructing and advising, modelling, consulting, and supporting) takes place.

When walking along this route with the supervisee, the supervisor often has a definite route to follow. This is when ethics are discussed. (The application of principles may be difficult and uncertain, but there is an agreed set of standards that need to be applied.) When on this road the supervisor is assessing (however gently, or indirectly) a supervisee’s adherence to a particular model, or when the supervisor is mentoring a particular model because of a belief that a set of interventions might cause a particular effect in the best interests of the client. This is the road where negotiated growth and learning about theory and technique takes place. It is here where potential crossings of the boundaries to the therapeutic frame⁷ are monitored. It is also in this road where the supervisee agrees to

accept supervisory authority while maintaining independence and self-esteem, and the supervisor learns to have authority without being authoritarian.⁸ This road also has rare stops where the supervisor has to negotiate a halt and act as gatekeeper. This is the road where travellers predict that counsellors become more competent if encouraged to see professional truth.

Bruner⁹ wrote that 'life experience is richer than discourse. Narrative structures organize and give meaning to experience, but there is always feelings and lived experiences not fully encompassed by the dominant narrative.' If positivism is concerned with the dominant narrative and its truth, phenomenology is concerned with the feelings and lived experiences not fully encompassed by the search for objective truth.

The right hand phenomenological routes are less certain and harder to see. Sometimes they only appear briefly before disappearing. I suspect that a supervisor's ability to identify these routes and to consciously encourage supervisees to travel down them with her/him is one of the more difficult skills a supervisor has to learn.

On these routes there is an attempt to discover, not objective truth as such, but personal meaning. On these routes the relationship between supervisor and supervisee is brought into focus and how the dynamics and patterns of that relationship are reflective of what may be happening with clients, and may be helping or hindering supervisee and client development. The clear focus here is often interpersonal process and what it may mean.

On these routes there is a standing back from technique to ask about thought and feeling during the transaction and about what was left unsaid and why. Both supervisor and supervisee are struggling to hypothesise about what might be happening. It is on these routes that the counsellor's temptation to become the client in the supervision and to turn the supervisor into the therapist² is made conscious and discussed. The short-term aim is increased self-awareness, but the longer term goal is a more self-aware and more reflective practitioner who is constantly learning through reflection.^{10,11} In the process of gentle probing and reflection (and silence) the supervisor is also mentoring important aspects of the therapeutic process to the supervisee. It is also on these roads that negotiations and reflections about practitioner self-care take place.

The dotted phenomenological arrows are best drawn as rambling swirls rather than as straight lines. Human interaction is usually 'interesting' and rarely straightforward. These are the roads where travellers predict that counsellors become more competent if they are more able to hypothesise about the meaning of interpersonal interaction.

Weaknesses

The above model has many weaknesses. At a simplistic level it is too rigid and too certain. For example, the Context rectangles imply stasis and clarity. They might be better hand drawn with fainter lines and irregular shapes. Both contexts are constantly changing, sometimes are quite short notice. A cloud rather than a rectangle might be a better metaphor for them both. Similarly the positions of the circles and the extent of their overlap must not be seen as fixed, but will vary considerably with different clients, and even when discussing a single client.

A major weakness of the model is that it fails to account for two important variables in the supervision process. The model tends to imply certain invariability, when in practice, there is often quite a lot of variability.

The positivism road can be quite strong where both supervisee and supervisor share the same therapeutic model. However, this isn't always the case, and the growth of eclectic training courses suggests that it may become even less so in future. Bernard and

Goodyear¹² have pointed out that when the supervisee and supervisor share the same orientation, modelling is maximized and theory is more integrated into supervision. When orientations clash, conflict or parallel process issues may predominate. In some cases, before a left hand route across the supervision country is clear, it may first have to be constructed by both parties, with both parties agreeing what templates can be used for assessment and mentoring practice. Clear contracting is always important,^{2,13} but even more so when models clash. This is another argument for making the left hand arrow fainter than it is (especially at the beginning of a supervisory relationship). When the arrow is stronger, the implications is that both parties are accepting (in part, at least) an orientation paradigm for supervision.

Another big variable in the supervisory relationship is the developmental stage of the supervisee. While both right and left hand roads will both always need to be present, it could be hypothesised (from the work of Stoltenberg & Delworth,¹⁴ and Wosket & Page,¹³ for example) that the left hand road will be used more often with an inexperienced therapist, and will be used less often once that therapist has matured and is able to work with more independence and less anxiety. Perhaps the key point is that in reality, the size of the lines, and their respective importance, varies considerably not only within each session and between clients, but also in accordance to the stage of development of the supervisee. This reflects the fluctuation on the continua between unilateral-bilateral, direct-indirect, supervisee-supervisor, goal directed-not goal directed (adapted from Best and Rose¹⁵).

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