

COMPETENCES OF A SUPERVISOR

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SUMMARY

When it comes to characteristics important for a supervisor, we can talk about personal and professional qualities. Every competent practitioner in the field of helping professions should develop most of these qualities, but there are also some specifically important for supervisors. This paper gives a brief overview of a number of ideas of various authors (Hawkins and Shohet, Carroll, Kugler etc.) about professional competences which are essential for qualified supervisory work. Supervision researchers have also established different stages through which supervisors pass in the process of their professional development. The paper describes some common characteristics which make up four typical developmental stages that supervisors go through.

Keywords:

supervisor, supervisor competences, stages of supervisor development

INTRODUCTION

According to Hawkins and Shohet (2000.:35), "the first prerequisite for being a good supervisor is being able to actively arrange good supervision for yourself". Good professional knowledge, competences and experiences in supervision are not enough; supervisors should also set up supervision of their

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supervisory work ('supervision-on-supervision'), which enables continuous professional and personal development.

This paper will look at the supervisor's development process and the specific stages s/he goes through. We will also examine several authors' ideas concerning the competences and qualities that a supervisor should have to be a good supervisor.

STAGES OF SUPERVISOR DEVELOPMENT

The developmental approach to supervision focuses on the role and tasks of supervisors and on the learning stages of supervisees. Carroll (1996.) claims that developmental models function on the presupposition similar to developmental psychology models, because they describe the movement of the supervisee, supervisor and the supervision relationship along perceivable and predictable stages, each of them exhibiting themes and tasks characteristic of each stage.

Similarly to developmental psychology, supervision researchers have established various numbers of stages through which supervisors and supervisees pass in the process of their development. Although researchers' descriptions of stages vary, they nevertheless include certain common characteristics, forming four typical developmental stages through which a supervisor passes in the process of supervision (Kadushin, 1985.; Stoltenberg & Delworth, 1987.; Stoltenberg, McNeill & Delworth, 1998.; Watkins, 1990.; Hess, 1986., 1987. cited in Blair and Peake, 1995.; and others).

In the first stage, which is marked by the transition from the role of the supervisee as practitioner into the role of the supervisor, the latter oscillates between the role of a professional worker and that of a person who is only just learning the role of supervisor. S/he feels very insecure and critical of him/herself in this new role. S/he often experiences feelings of confusion, helplessness and incompetence, and is asking him/herself how good s/he is and if the supervisees can benefit from him/her as supervisor at all. The beginning supervisor can tolerate unclear situations only with great difficulty, and therefore s/he tries to dwell with greater intensity on the definition of supervision, tries mainly to set its borders, establish its rules and procedures, and develop methods and techniques that can be applied in leading the supervision process. S/he is not as yet aware of the full complexities of supervision and of all the factors influencing its structuring and implementation, and cannot as yet direct his/her full attention to the process. Due to the marked self-centredness and his/her manner of work, the supervisor, just as their supervisees, has difficulties in projecting him/herself to the supervisee and understanding his/her point of view. S/he takes a mechanistic position and focuses primarily on the techniques the supervisee could use in his/her work and on the supervisee's client; s/he tries to adjust the supervisee's views to his/her own theoretical orientation. Because of all

the described features, the supervisor is at the first stage of his/her development as supervisor when s/he is competent enough to supervise primarily beginning supervisees.

The second stage of the supervisor's development is characterised by a deeper knowledge and understanding of supervision and his/her own role in it. The supervisor becomes increasingly aware of his/her own power, his/her weaknesses and deficiencies, and the influence s/he exercises on the supervisees. S/he feels more self-confident in his/her role, although s/he might still be somehow unsure and tense. The supervisor is willing to take risks and expose him/herself. At the same time his/her tolerance for unclear situations in supervision is increasing. S/he sees supervision as an independent professional activity, and begins to study professional literature from the field. In his/her work s/he is able to focus on supervisees, their skills and needs, and is able to adapt his/her leadership of supervision appropriately. S/he is becoming increasingly aware of the importance of the process, which takes place during supervision, but is not as yet able to make use of it. This stage also marks an oscillation in motivation for supervision. Stoltenberg and Delworth (1987) believe this to be the stage where some supervisors might become angry about supervision; they might lose motivation and discontinue their work, especially if they come from an environment favourable to supervision.

The third stage is characterised by longer-lasting motivation for supervision. Both the supervisor and the supervisee are internally motivated for supervision. The former is mainly directed at the learning process of the latter and at his/her progress, thus regarding the supervision process as an important factor of supervision. At this stage the supervisor is capable of harmonising with the supervisee's needs and with the work requirements. S/he exhibits an increased congruence in his/her way of thinking and functioning in supervision, is aware of his/her strong and weak points, of the preferences s/he might have with regard to the type of supervisee, and can recognise the influence s/he might have on the supervisee. His/Her knowledge of supervision is broader and deeper, his/her self-confidence and trust in one's own competences as a supervisor is greater. Supervision becomes an important part of his/her professional identity, strengthening even further in subsequent development.

As the process of development continues, the supervisor reaches the stage of "mastery", which is considered to be the independent, fourth stage of development by certain authors (Stoltenberg and Delworth, 1987.; Watkins, 1990.). Here the supervisor does not exhibit any preferences with regard to the specific type of supervisee, and works equally well with supervisees at different stages of their development. S/he is capable of managing all matters in the supervision process, and is not embarrassed by any mistakes s/he might make in the process. His/Her knowledge and experiences are integrated into a clear and useful supervisor's work style, which enables supervisees to feel autonomy, security and support in their learning.

Supervisors (or supervisees) can of course be located at different stages of development with regard to different areas of functioning. While they might have reached a high degree of mastery in the use of interventions or in interpersonal communication, they can still be at the beginning or at some intermediate stage with regard to the conceptualisation of their supervisory work, professional ethics or in the setting of objectives and planning. We must bear in mind that this is the reason why specific developmental pathways do not always have stable stages that are universal for all participants of certain sociocultural practices, but are rather characterized by dynamic social processes specific for particular circumstances.

QUALITIES AND COMPETENCES NECESSARY TO BE A GOOD SUPERVISOR

In general, we could say that professional work refers to working *with* a client and not for a client. In this context, Cohen and Laufer (1999., in Poljak, 2003.) state that competent functioning of professionals in the helping professions includes the following three basic areas: (1) perception - ability to observe the client, (2) interpretation - ability to explain the observed and (3) intervention - ability to intervene effectively. This is also important for a supervisor as a professional in the field of the helping professions.

When it comes to characteristics important for a supervisor, we can distinguish person-bound and profession-bound qualities. According to Van Kessel (2000.), the personal and professional are dimensions of professional competence and they have to be integrated. Carifio and Hess (1987.:244, in Hawkins & Shohet, 2000.:42) believe that person-bound qualities of the "ideal" supervisor are similar to the qualities of the "ideal" psychotherapist, but are employed differently. These qualities include empathy, understanding, unconditional positive regard, congruence, genuineness, warmth, self-disclosure, flexibility, concern, attention, investment, curiosity, and openness (Rogers, 1975.; Coche, 1977.; Albot, 1984.; Aldridge, 1982.; Hess, 1980; Gittermann & Miller, 1977.; all in *ibid*).

According to Hawkins and Shohet (2000.), most of these qualities are developed by every competent practitioner. Although they are valuable in any relationship, these descriptors focus almost entirely on the intra- and interpersonal characteristics of an individual and they implicitly suggest that supervisors are born and not made (Holloway & Carroll, 1999.). In the SAS-model of supervision, empirically and conceptually described by Holloway (1995.), five factors were identified as relevant to the supervisor's performance. According to Holloway and Carroll (1999.), these are:

- professional experience (the amount of experiences in counselling and supervision),

- theoretical orientation (supervisors rely on their own knowledge base to determine what to teach and how to teach the supervisee),
- roles (the most frequently recognised roles are those of teacher, counsellor and consultant, but the roles of evaluator, lecturer and model of professional practice are also important),
- cultural characteristics (gender, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, religious beliefs and personal values strongly influence an individual's social and moral judgements),
- self-presentation (refers to the interpersonal presentation of self or the personal style of relating, which is sometimes the primary factor in the course of communication).

Hawkins and Shohet (2000.:42-44) also stress some other professional competences necessary for qualified supervisory work. They mention good counselling skills as a prerequisite for a competent supervisor. In addition to this, they list the following:

- the ability to help supervisees feel received, valued, understood (on the assumption that only then will they feel safe and open enough to review and challenge themselves),
- experiences as a practitioner,
- understanding the boundaries of supervision and being able to make clear and mutually negotiated contracts,
- focusing some of the supervisor's attention on the dynamics of the supervisee; but this must always arise from work-related issues and in the service of understanding and being able to manage work better,
- developing one's own framework for supervising, which is appropriate to the setting in which one is working; it should be clear enough to be explainable to the supervisees, but also flexible enough to be adapted to meet the changing needs and demands of different types of supervisees,
- the so-called "helicopter ability" - the ability to switch perspectives. In order to be able to do this, it is important to be aware of all the possible levels and perspectives (the focus on the client, on the supervisees and their process, on one's own process and the here-and-now relationship with the supervisees, on the supervisees' client within their wider context and on the work of the supervisees within the wider context of the organization and inter-organizational issues) and then gradually to expand one's focus within the session.

The supervisor performs many different roles in the supervision process. One of the major skills of supervisors is their ability to be flexible across roles, adopting them and switching from one role to another in accordance with the desired situation. This means that the supervisor has to be able to combine the roles of teacher, counsellor, evaluator, consultant, monitor or informer in accordance with a particular situation. The supervisor

can be a guide, mentor, questioner, "mirror", listener, supporter, animator or model, if needed. Moreover, supervisors can vary their style to fit in with the learning of supervisees.

The characteristics of good or "ideal" supervisors, which are in part defined by the roles which they perform, are the following (Pettes, 1979.:4-7, in Milošević Arnold, 1999.):

- knowledge and experiences in guidance
- experiences in directing towards learning
- ability to qualify someone for practical work
- ability to offer the support desired
- communication experiences
- ability to use at once all knowledge and experiences of the profession.

Carroll (1996.) also lists some possible differences between effective and ineffective supervisors, in his case supervisors of counsellors (Table 1).

Table 1.

Overview of possible differences between effective and ineffective supervisors (Carroll, 1996.:28-29)

Effective supervisors	Ineffective supervisors
Structure supervision appropriately	Over- or under-structure supervision
Use the counselling role	Substitute counselling for supervision
Help trainees find their way of being counsellors	Insist their way of counselling is the only way
Are good teachers	Are poor teachers
Are flexible across roles	Lock into specific roles
Contract clearly	Are poor negotiators
Evaluate fairly and according to agreed criteria	Have few clear criteria for evaluation
Adapt to individual differences in supervisees	Supervise all supervisees in exactly the same way
Train as supervisor	See no reason why they should train as supervisors
Have access to a variety of supervisory interventions	Have a limited number of supervisory interventions
Give feedback clearly, directly, and constructively	Give no feedback, vague feedback, or come across as punitive with feedback

The English therapist and professor Gaie Houston (1990.) is convinced that there is no single way to become a good supervisor. She believes that there are almost as many different ways to do therapy or supervision as there are practitioners who perform it. This is why the way in which we do supervision is a unique mixture of what we have learned, what we are able to do by nature and (the most formative) what our convictions are.

Kugler (1995.) points out some characteristics which are important for future supervisors:

- personal and professional maturity
- ability to analyse their work in depth
- ability to reflect their work
- ability to tolerate uncertainty in their work without replacing it with "quasi certainty"
- ability to reflect and work with interpersonal dynamics in the relationship with their clients and in the relationship with the supervisor
- ability to integrate their knowledge into the practice
- ability to learn
- permanent additional education.

Stanners (1995.) stresses that it is important for a supervisor to be aware of his/her own needs in the supervisory relationship. Studying a group of students, she found that supervision can be destructive if the supervisor undermines the supervisee's confidence and self-esteem, makes supervisees too dependent, wants to teach rather than facilitate the supervisee's learning, needs to control or to feel important and is experienced by supervisees as restrained or critical. Therefore supervision is an essential requirement for the supervisor.

CONCLUSION: THE PERFECT VS. "GOOD ENOUGH" SUPERVISOR

Hawkins and Shohet (2000.:48) state that being a supervisor is both a complex and enriching task. It is deceptively similar to and uses the same sort of skills as in working as a practitioner. However, the supervisor must be clear about how supervision is different in content, focus and boundaries. These authors claim (2000.:3) that being a perfect professional is a myth, just like a perfect mother. This myth is frustrating for professionals, because it can never be reached. This is why it is better to talk about a "good enough" supervisor, who is a reflective practitioner. Reflection enables him/her to know him/herself and others, and to learn. A good enough expert has a vision as to what kind of supervisor s/he would like to be and what s/he would like to change. S/he is aware of the fact that working on him/herself will never end. Watkins (1990.) emphasizes that (super-

visory) experiences do not assure a supervisor's professional development. In his opinion, the key characteristic of people who learn and grow professionally is self-criticism. He understands self-criticism as a constructive and evaluative stance of an individual, who thinks regularly about what s/he is doing and who undergoes regular training.

These notions and the notions implicated in the developmental models of supervision are a helpful guide for supervisors. They show supervisors where they are and which direction they are supposed to aim for in their process of further development.

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KOMPETENCIJE SUPERVIZORA

SAŽETAK

Kad je riječ o osobinama koje bi supervizor trebao imati, valja spomenuti njegove osobne i stručne karakteristike. Svaki bi praktičar u području pomagačkih zanimanja trebao imati većinu tih osobina, ali neke od njih osobito su važne u zanimanju supervizora. U članku se daje kratak prikaz onoga što različiti autori (Hawkins i Shoet, Carroll, Kugler, itd.) govore o stručnim kompetencijama nužnim za kvalitetan supervizijski rad. Istraživači u području supervizije utvrdili su da postoje različite faze kroz koje supervizor prolazi u procesu svog stručnog razvoja. U članku se opisuju obilježja takve četiri uobičajene razvojne faze.

Ključne riječi: supervizor, supervizorove kompetencije, faze supervizorova razvoja

