

Glamcevski M. (2007) What are the necessary and sufficient elements of the counselling supervision relationship?, *Counselling, Psychotherapy, and Health*, 3(1), 104-114, May 2007.



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### **What are the necessary and sufficient elements of the counselling supervision relationship?**

#### **Abstract:**

The supervision relationship is a dynamic process in which the supervisor and supervisee negotiate a personal way of using a structure of power and involvement that accommodates the supervisee's progression in learning. This structure becomes the basis for the process by which the supervisee acquires knowledge and skills ultimately for the empowerment of the supervisee, and to the benefit of the clients and supervisor. I propose that careful consideration of the fundamental principles within the supervision of counselling is required, regardless of theoretical, organisational or situational context. This requirement extends from a notion in the supervision literature, that a therapeutic relationship is the basis of development in supervision. Based on the Holloway's early work, empirical evidence and personal reflection, the fundamental elements in a supervision relationship are as follows: power and interpersonal structures, three identifiable phases (beginning, maturation and termination) and the need for a supervisory contract. Supervision is a formal relationship in which the supervisor's task includes imparting expert knowledge and making judgments of the supervisee's performance. Formal power, or power attributed to the position, rests with the supervisor, therefore the supervisory relationship is a relationship in which reciprocal power dynamics have a fundamental role. The supervision relationship develops through identifiable stages. After initial interactions, participants come to know one another better and are thus more accurate in their predictions about the other person's reactions to their messages. With decreased uncertainty, control strategies and communicative modes are utilised to reduce the level of conflict in the relationship, which in turn drives the progress through the stages of the relationship. Each supervisor and supervisee has expectations about the roles and functions in supervision. These expectations are idiosyncratic and organisational, some result from experience, while others are more personal and cultural characteristics. Thus there is a need for a supervisory contract to clarify expectations.

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## **Introduction**

The exploration of the fundamental elements of supervision leads to the supposition that there are power dynamics within the supervision relationship. Literature pertaining to the models of supervision, and the trends in supervision research, demonstrate that significant changes occur within this relationship. Careful consideration of the fundamental principles within the supervision of counseling is required, regardless of theoretical, organisational or situational constraints. Based on the empirical evidence and personal reflection, the fundamental elements are as follows: power and interpersonal structures, three identifiable phases (beginning, maturation and termination) and the need for a supervisory contract.

Each supervisor and supervisee brings to the supervision relationship his or her own expectations about how the process will unfold. Some of these expectations result from previous encounters of supervision, including formal and informal relationships, as well as knowledge of supervision gained through anecdotal materials and literature (Carroll & Holloway, 1999). These experiences shape the process of supervision and provide a foundation for the development of the supervision relationship. The relationship structure subsequently influences participants' engagement in the process of supervision (Carroll & Holloway, 1999; Hawkins & Shohet, 2000).

The supervision relationship is a dynamic process in which the supervisor and supervisee negotiate a personal way of using a structure of power and involvement that accommodates the supervisee's progression in learning (Holloway, 1995). This structure becomes the basis for the process by which the supervisee acquires knowledge and skills, and ultimately for the empowerment of the supervisee. Both the supervisor and the supervisee are responsible for establishing a relational structure that is flexible enough to accommodate the supervisee's particular professional needs in an intense, collaborative learning alliance (Page & Wosket, 1994). However, the supervisor and supervisee roles differ. Within the structure of this professional relationship, the supervisor has the guiding role with respect to evaluation and support (Samuels, 1993).

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## SETTING THE SCENE

### Models in Supervision

Since the introduction of counselling to mainstream European (Western) societies in the 1950's, supervision has been the focus of considerable attention. Ekstein and Wallerstein (1958) produced one of the first texts to distinguish between the *practice* of counselling and the problem of *teaching* and *learning* counselling. In their seminal text, they focused on how to transmit these skills of counselling to another counsellor, unique in that they reviewed ways of supervising rather than counselling.

Much discussion on supervision was generated throughout the 1960's, 1970's and 1980's. At first, supervision models mirrored theories of counselling. The names of these models reflect counselling theories, such as client-centered supervision (Patterson, 1983), the social learning approach to supervision (Hosford & Barmann, 1983) and supervision in rational-emotive therapy (Wessler & Ellis, 1983). Although models are intended to aid in interpreting complex phenomena and in learning complex skills, the "counselling-bound" models of supervision provided few directions for either research or practice (Russell et al., 1984). Important knowledge from relevant disciplines, such as developmental educational and social psychology, were excluded due to the insular approach of such models.

Counselling-bound models have continued to be replaced by models that incorporate knowledge from related psychological sub-disciplines and that provide frameworks for empirical inquiry (Carroll & Holloway, 1999; Jacobs, 1996). Research on the process of supervision has revealed that supervisors do not practise supervision and counselling in the same way; a supervision interview has features distinct from a counselling interview (Hawkins, & Shohet, 2000; Carroll & Holloway, 1999; Russell, et al., 1984).

Recognition that supervision (teaching & training) of counselling is different from conducting counselling is reflected in cross-theoretical models of supervision that incorporate aspects of individual difference, social role theory, and instructional psychology (Page & Wosket, 1994).

### Supervision Research Trends

In early seminal studies of supervision, researchers were interested in ascertaining whether the supervision relationship and supervisory process were distinct from the counselling relationship. Many analytical studies pertaining to supervision have focused on the relationship and process, using content analysis of the interactions within educational settings. The purpose of these studies has been to determine whether supervisors use different types, or different proportions of the same messages, in supervision interactions as opposed to counselling (Holloway & Wolleat, 1981; Lambert, 1974; Richards, 1984; Wedeking & Scott, 1976).

A comparison of supervisors' behaviour in supervision as opposed to counselling interviews demonstrates the different types of messages, or proportions of the same messages, found in supervision and counselling dialogues (Lambert, 1974; Wedeking & Scott, 1976). Verbal behaviours of both supervisor and supervisee have been described by researchers such as Holloway and Wolleat (1981), and Richards (1984). The combined results of these studies indicate that within the supervisory relationship the supervisor spends significantly more time providing information, opinions and suggestions than when counselling. Further, these research studies demonstrated that within the supervisory relationship, task oriented behaviour is utilised

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more than emotional support, or attending to the supervisee's emotional state. Studies have examined patterns of verbal behaviour across the span of the supervision relationship from conception to termination (Wedeking and Scott, 1976; Feltham, 1999), supervisor messages changed between the beginning and final stages of the relationship.

Analytical studies of interactional processes in supervision have contributed to our understanding of the sequence of events in supervision and the characteristics of the relationship as reflected in the verbal messages of the participants. The primary conclusions that can be drawn from the content analysis research are that (a) supervision and counselling processes are distinct; (b) there are significant changes in discourse during the relationship; (c) there is a predominant pattern of verbal behaviors that is analogous to teacher-student interactions and (d) the relationship structure of supervision has hierarchical characteristics (Holloway & Poulin, 1995).

### **THE FUNDAMENTAL ELEMENTS OF THE SUPERVISORY RELATIONSHIP**

There has been considerable research on the relationship and process of supervision (Holloway, & Carroll, 1999; Russell et al., 1984). From empirically based literature, articles relating to philosophy and personal knowledge of practice, three fundamental elements in the supervisory relationship have been identified:

1. The power and interpersonal structure of the relationship.
2. The phases of the relationship and how these relate to the development of the participants.
3. The supervisory contract to establish a set of expectations for the tasks and functions of supervision.

#### **Power and Interpersonal Structure**

Supervision is a formal relationship in which the supervisor's task includes imparting expert knowledge, making judgments of the supervisee's performance and acting as a gatekeeper to the profession (Holloway, 1999; Page & Wosket, 1994). Formal power, or power attributed to the position, rests with the supervisor, therefore the supervisory relationship is a hierarchical one (King & Wheeler, 1999).

Hinde (1979) comments that power is in fact rarely absolute. Power is inevitably limited by the capacities of both individuals. It usually involves a limited influence of one partner on the finite probabilities of actions by the other. The controlled party usually limits the exercise of power (for example the worker can strike, or seek employment elsewhere). Additionally, one partner often has power in some contexts and not in others, as the power distribution is resultant of mutual negotiation. This factor indicates that power is a property of the relationship.

Hinde has suggested that power may take very different forms, depending on the personal and institutional resources available and the type of involvement of the individuals, which is not always given due consideration.

From an institutional structured perspective, power has been viewed as a vehicle of control and dominance. To be powerful is to wield influence and control resources and information (Dunlap & Goldman, 1991). In the helping professions, power has often been viewed negatively because the concept of control and dominance has seemingly been in opposition to the concept of mutuality and unconditional positive regard (Hawkins & Shohet, 2000). Early work of Follett

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(1924, 1951) however, introduced the idea of "power with," a concept that is pluralistic and representative of an ever-evolving process of human interaction (Holloway, 1995). This perception of power offers an alternative based on involvement and mutual influence. This "power" is more consistent with counselling and supervision, where the intent is to empower, rather than control, individuals.

Both participants determine the distribution of power or the degree of attachment to one another. Mutual perception, along with acceptance of the degree and distribution of influence potential in the relationship, are major determiners for the nature of the power dynamics in the relationship (Morton, Alexander, & Altman, 1996; King & Wheeler, 1999).

Although the relationship takes on a unique character that can be partially defined by power and involvement, the participants contribute their own history of interpersonal relationships. These interpersonal histories influence how the supervisor and supervisee ultimately present themselves in forming their new relationship. The power of influence is reflected by the action and thinking of the participants during the supervision process.

### **Phases of the Relationship**

Research on the supervision process has described the structural characteristics of dialogue between the supervisor and supervisee. However, it has not examined the underlying evolution of the relationship. Process research has often overlooked the evolution of the relationship across time, despite considerable attention from social-psychological literature regarding the development of non-interpersonal to interpersonal relationships over time. Social-psychological literature has continually demonstrated that relationships, including super ordinate-subordinate and supervision, develop through identifiable stages (Bandura, 1986; Dodenhoff, 1981).

Certain factors have consistently been observed within developing relationships (Miller, 1976, Wiley & Ray 1986; King and Wheeler 1999). As a relationship evolves, the participants rely less on general cultural and social information and more on idiosyncratic information particular to the participant. Predictions regarding the other person's behaviors come from information that differentiates the person from other members of his or her corresponding social group. The other becomes unique in the eyes of the perceiver, and the relationship is said to have moved from a non-interpersonal to an interpersonal one (Miller, 1976).

As the relationship develops into an interpersonal one, uncertainty is reduced. After initial interactions, participants come to know one another better and are thus more accurate in their predictions about the other person's reactions to their messages. With decreased uncertainty, control strategies and communicative modes are utilised to reduce the level of conflict in the relationship.

Three principles identified by Morton, et al. (1996) have consistently been presented in literature, regarding the progression toward a more intimate relationship:

1. Change in the relationship occurs because of the need to increase or decrease the likelihood of attaining a reward;
2. The definition of relational change assumes a decision that change can be made by one or both persons in the relationship and

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3. Changes in the relationship are caused by changes in the content of communications between relational partners. People can escalate their relationship by providing information about themselves or seeking more information about the other.

Although some observations pertaining to supervisory relationships have been interpreted as reflecting a developmental shift in the supervisee, they might also be viewed as indicating a natural development in a relationship. Alternatively, they may be seen as an attempt to reduce uncertainty as interactional patterns become established i.e. a shift from one phase of the relationship to the next.

Despite the importance of being aware of phases in the relationship, it is equally important to note that a phase within the relationship does not itself determine the level of involvement of participants in the relationship. Individual differences have a major role.

**Table 1.1** : Phases of the Relationship adapted from Holloway

<b>Beginning phase</b>	Clarifying relationship with supervisor Establishing of supervision contract Supporting teaching interventions Developing competencies Developing treatment plans
<b>Mature phase</b>	Increasing individual nature of relationship, becoming less role bound Increasing social bonding and influence potential Developing skills of case conceptualization Increasing self-confidence and self-efficacy in counselling Confronting personal issues as they relate to professional performance
<b>Terminating phase</b>	Understanding connections between theory and practice in relation to particular supervisees Decreasing need for direction from supervisor

Initially, supervision provides a general consistency for certain interactive behaviors. However, as the relationship develops it is individualised around the learning needs of the supervisee and the supervision approaches of the supervisor. Participants need to learn idiosyncratic, reciprocal rules within the this interactive process (Miller & Rogers, 1987). Rabinowitz's et al. (1986) found that regardless of the supervisee's level of experience, a constant need for support at the beginning of any new supervisory relationship. This is consistent with the view that uncertainty about role expectations is a part of the initial learning in a relationship. Thus, the beginning of a supervisory relationship is likely to involve clarifying and defining expectations for the participants

Empirical research provides strong evidence of phases in the supervision relationship, as summarised in Table 1.1. This representation of the relationship phases of supervision reflects the convergence of research findings of phases in supervision relationships (Carroll & Holloway, 1999; Hawkins & Shohet, 2000; Mueller & Kell, 1972; Rabinowitz et al., 1986). Mueller and Kell's

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(1972) conceptualisation of the beginning, mature and termination phases of the supervisory relationship provide the framework.

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### **The Supervisory Contract**

Each supervisor and supervisee has expectations about the roles and functions in supervision. These expectations are idiosyncratic and organisational. Some result from previous experiences in supervision, while others are more directly related to the personal and cultural characteristics of both participants. Others may include characteristics of the professional group or organisation (Baker, Exum, Tyler, 2002; Hensley, Smith, Thompson, 2002). As with any working relationship, the clarity of these expectations directly affects the relationship and the establishment of specific goals (Baker, Exum, Tyler, 2002; Hensley, Smith, Thompson, 2002).

The supervisee generally has less evaluative or expert power, whilst the supervisor has a responsibility to ensure that the supervisee is clearly informed of the evaluative structure of the relationship. A supervisor must also identify the expectations and goals, the criteria for evaluation and the limits of confidentiality in supervision (British Association for Counselling, 1988; American Psychological Association, 1996). The supervisee is expected to clearly articulate his or her needs and expectations. Supervision contracts have been identified as decisive in establishing mutual understanding in the supervisory relationship.

Inskipp and Proctor (1989) have identified the contract as critical when establishing a way of being together in the supervisory relationship. Not only do the participants negotiate specific tasks, but they define the parameters of the relationship. The negotiation of norms, rules and commitments at the beginning of any relationship can reduce uncertainty and encourage involvement to a level of trust that will promote a higher quality relationship.

This confirmation of the supervisory contract sets up both content and relational expectations in the relationship and establishes the types of interactions in which the supervisor and supervisee will engage (Miller & Rogers, 1987). The supervisor, by initiating the contract, is dealing directly with the inherent uncertainty of the system, and the supervisee will receive an opportunity to participate in the construction of the relationship from the very beginning.

The supervisor must be alert to the dynamic character of the supervisory relationship and initiate discussion on renewing the goals and expectations. The supervisee's learning needs change as his or her experiences increase. Additionally, improved skills and interpersonal confidence will influence issues. Ongoing negotiation of topics and processes are built into the initial contract of supervision in conjunction with the quality of the relationship that is established by participants (Carroll & Holloway, 1999).

### **CONCLUSION**

When defining supervision, it is imperative to consider the ongoing relationship between supervisor and supervisee, particularly the supervisee's acquisition of a professional role identity and the supervisor's evaluation of the supervisee's performance (Bernard & Goodyear, 1992; Bradley, 1989). It appears the relationship is inherent within the supervisory process. The supervision relationship appears to have fundamental elements that can be described in terms of contract, phases (beginning, mature & terminating), power and interpersonal structure within the relationship.

The supervisor is predominantly in the super ordinate position and the supervisee is subordinate i.e. there is a power imbalance. Due to the responsibilities, situational, organisational, theoretical



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and ethical constraints, the supervisory relationship is always a formal one in which the supervisor will have a greater share of the power.

The supervision relationship is partially defined by power and involvement, however the participants contribute to the uniqueness of the interpersonal relationship. These unique influences, ultimately effect how the supervisor and supervisee form their new relationship. As the relationship evolves, the participants use more idiosyncratic information and the other person becomes unique in the eyes of the perceiver. Consequently, the relationship shifts from being non-interpersonal to an interpersonal relationship, consisting of many individualised elements. This development occurs as the participants move through a series of phases.

Supervision is often seen as a developmental process because of the imparting of knowledge and skills acquisition. It focuses on an agreement about the goals of the supervisee, known as the contract, for each stage of professional development. The relationship is likely to develop into a peer exchange as the professional maturity of the supervisee evolves.

In working relationships, both the supervisor and supervisee are responsible for establishing a relational structure that leads to a collaborative learning alliance in which the supervisee acquires knowledge, skill and ultimately empowerment as a counsellor. The elements that appear to be fundamental in achieving this relationship include a contract that defines roles, expectations and goals. Phases enable the relationship to evolve from one level to another, whilst power dynamics allow interpersonal structures to develop within the supervision relationship, as well as protecting the ethical, structural, theoretical and professional elements of the supervisee's professional development.

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