Effective Supervision

for the Helping Professions

Three
Managing the Supervisory Process

Chapter summary

This chapter offers a chronological journey through the supervision arrangements looking at the practical elements involved in each of five stages. The core of administrative supervision is not the day-to-day details of what happens but how the supervisory relationship can be set up, contracted for, monitored and serviced and how it can be clearly and cleanly ended. Within that relationship feedback and assessments take place and the chapter offers a way of connecting this to on-going development and learning.
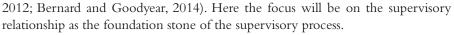
When I first wrote this chapter in 1996, I built it around a five-stage chronological model of supervision: assessment, contracting, engaging, evaluation and termination. Two of these stages took place before supervision began (assessment and contracting), two stages took place during supervision (engaging and evaluation), and the final stage took place when the supervision was brought to a formal closure (termination). Each of those five steps was considered in some detail, with concentration on the nuts and bolts of what happened at each stage. Looking back on it now I am struck by how much my counselling orientation has influenced my supervision, and how much getting the administrative side of supervision right was foremost in my thinking. In this revised chapter, where the theme is the same, I want to move back behind the nuts and bolts of managing the supervisory process (these are still relevant and not to be ignored) to the more important relationship behind the tasks and roles. I also want to move away from a *counselling* approach to supervision and consider supervision as an educational endeavour and as a profession in its own right.

In the original chapter I got the emphasis wrong; it now seems a bit like a married couple allocating individual tasks to one another, and ignoring what they will *be* for each other, and how they will take care of their relationship. Both relationships and tasks are needed, but one is clearly of much more importance than the other. There are many excellent texts to support supervisors and supervisees to initiate, engage in, manage, service and terminate supervision (Hawkins and Shohet,

2012; Bernard and Goodyear, 2014). Here the focus will be on the supervisory relationship as the foundation stone of the supervisory process.

The five stages I will now look at are:

Stage 1: Starting the supervisory relationship
Stage 2: Consolidating the supervisory relationship
Stage 3: Engaging in the supervisory relationship
Stage 4: Servicing the supervisory relationship
Stage 5: Ending the supervisory relationship

Stage 1: Starting the supervisory relationship – the first meeting

Starting the supervisory relationship involves: getting to know each other (the first meeting), sharing supervision histories (if appropriate), understanding contexts, defining roles and responsibilities, sharing necessary information (e.g., criteria for evaluation) and practicalities (when to meet, where to meet, fees etc.).

The first meeting (getting to know each other)

The first meeting in supervision is vital: it sets the tone and the texture for the relationship that will unfold. In these early moments the foundations of what will happen are already being cemented. Negotiations are taking place long before formal negotiations even begin, and implicit psychological contracts are being fashioned beneath consciousness almost before the first words are spoken. Huge amounts of information are being exchanged intentionally and unintentionally in the first stages of supervision relationships. As the two strangers begin their relationship issues of power, trust, equality, respect, safety and vulnerability are already in the air and being worked out. New relationships are entered with a mixture of feelings; there is cautiousness, reserve and tentativeness, along with excitement and wonder; there can be defensiveness, and even attack. Relationship dynamics are being formed and expectations are being met or destroyed from the start. The first meeting is a highly charged, emotional encounter even if it doesn't appear to be so.

The first meeting can be experienced very differently for supervisor and supervisee. Supervisors become experienced at beginnings and can often take them for granted. Supervisees, usually in a less powerful and less experienced position, can bring to their first meetings lots of worries and anxieties. They have as yet many unanswered questions, such as:

How safe am I in this relationship?
What am I feeling about my first contact with this person?

Who does the supervisor remind me of and what connections am I making with relationships from the past?

Can I trust the other/the others in this group?

What risks will I take, and what level of vulnerability can I show here?

What early impressions am I picking up and giving?

What assumptions am I making about this person, this relationship, the context we are in?

Supervisors and supervisees circle each other; they probe, they test, they wonder, they feel, they think, they act.

Example

Agatha comes for her first meeting with her new supervisor. She had found it difficult to find a parking space near her supervisor's home but with a few minutes to go had discovered some shops with a high-rise car park close-by. She arrived a bit breathless. Her new supervisor, Joan, opened the door still talking on her mobile. She smiled warmly and gestured to Agatha to go into her sitting/consulting room. Agatha went in and was about to sit down when Joan's dog came in to greet her with tail wagging. Joan arrived a few moments later, ushered the dog out of the room and invited Agatha to take off her coat and sit down. Joan apologised for the chaotic reception and told Agatha that her daughter had to stay off school with a sore throat and she had been setting up a doctor's appointment. However, she assured Agatha that all was now well and they would have no interruptions for the next hour.

Already Agatha is getting a sense of who Joan is and how organised she is. She is feeling a bit neglected in not being told about the car park, and then being met with some chaos as the door opens. She wonders how safe she will be with Joan after these first few experiences in her home.

Speedy conclusions are drawn from the initial contact. Supervisees are asking themselves three key questions, even if they don't articulate them clearly:

How safe am I here – physically, emotionally, and psychologically?

Can this person provide me with the safe space where I can be vulnerable?

Can I trust this person with myself, my work and my learning?

Agatha, in the example above, will have come to some tentative conclusions to all three of those issues. While she may not have come to a definitive conclusion, she will have already worked her way towards a possible decision. She has used her senses and her connecting limbic brain to suss out who Joan is and how she works.

The relationship is the key

Two years ago I joined a group of managers who spent a day 'working with horses' as part of their leadership/management development. It was a fascinating experience, very different from other learning contexts which tended to be rational and cognitive. This experience was quite the opposite. Working with horses enabled the participants to test themselves on how well they could establish trust with and lead their individual horse. At the beginning of the day the leader of the programme pointed out why this exercise was taking place. 'These horses don't speak English,' I remember him saying, 'or any language. They are not the least impressed by your qualifications. They are only interested in two things: how safe you are to be around, and how well you will lead them if they follow you.' The horses introduced themselves warily with lots of sniffing, looking and testing these newcomers. They waited patiently, all senses alert for signs of lack of confidence, uncertainty and untrustworthiness. Eventually, when they learned to trust, they allowed themselves to be led. If trust and safety were not established, they held back, stood still and withdrew. When I asked if the trainer would give us feedback at the end of the day he said he wouldn't, but the horses would! And they did.

Humans do much the same in those first minutes of meeting new people. Like the horses, their safety and trust antennae are out and actively reading the verbal and non-verbal behaviour signs that come from the other. In particular, individuals are looking for signs that they might be in danger.

So it is while supervisors and supervisees are setting up their arrangements. Alongside the protocols, rituals, contacts, appointments, looking at requirements and demands around reports, evaluations, references and so on, another conversation is taking place. This conversation is implicit and more important than the words being exchanged. These sub-textual supervision conversations revolve around:

How will power be used in this relationship?
How will we engage with each other?
Is there anything I need to be wary about?
What will characterise our particular relationship?
What is negotiable in this relationship, and what do I sense is non-negotiable?
What do I have permission to be and do in this relationship?
Will this person be able to hold, contain and manage what I bring here, especially if I bring my shame, vulnerability and weaknesses?
Do I need to protect this person in front of me or is he/she strong enough and resilient enough to look after themselves?
Am I picking up any areas of vulnerability from this other person that it is best to avoid talking about?
What would I like to know about this person that would help me take some appropriate risks?
Will we be able to deal with conflict between us if it arises?
Will this new person allow and accompany me to go into areas that I/they have not been in before?

> ### Example
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> Agatha comes for her first meeting with Joan, her new supervisor. Joan has already emailed Agatha an information sheet sharing some background about herself and outlining how she sees supervision. She included a sample contract they could discuss at their first meeting and helped with some practicalities – directions to her place, car-parking and so on. When Agatha arrives, Joan meets her at the door and shows her into her consulting room. Agatha notices the fresh flowers on the table and the glow from the electric fire. Joan takes her coat and indicates where she should sit. She asks Agatha if she is ready to start. Agatha already feels 'cared for' and begins to relax.

There are some aspects of initial meetings that cannot be arranged. Sending information in advance and preparing a suitable environment for supervision and learning can be done. Being safe to be with, creating trustworthy relationships and dependability all come with *being who you are*.

In an essay exploring his experiences in the early stages of setting up supervisory relationships with three new supervisees, Rob Watling (2012) concluded that there are certain things we should pay particular attention to:

- Being prepared intellectually, emotionally, physically and contractually.
- Arriving early into a well-prepared environment.
- Establishing rapport quickly and flexibly.
- Assuming and generating trust.
- Reinforcing this trust through an honest exchange of expectations and vulnerabilities.
- Noticing the early impressions we are making on each other and the possibility that they may include transference, counter-transference and projection on both sides.

Getting the first meeting with supervisees right, beginning as one wants to continue and creating the physical, emotional and psychological space that welcomes, contains and helps supervisees feel safe; all these take time and sensitivity. It is worth spending that time for the sake of the future relationship.

Stage 2: Consolidating the supervisory relationship

Implicit and explicit *contracts* underpin the new relationship. There are three main types of contract: relational, practical and psychological.

Contracting

When I first started supervision, I did so without any formal contracts. We met, we talked and we worked out some practical arrangements verbally that suited us both, and then we got on with supervision. Later I began to be more formal so that I devised and used formal written contracts with almost all my supervisees. Now I am more open around contracts; sometimes I use them and sometimes not. Sometimes talking together is enough for us to agree what is needed. So my present take on contracts is to have them if needed and not to worry about them if not needed. I don't have a 'one size fits all' approach to contracts anymore but try to be flexible about what will help in each specific supervisory relationship. Some supervisory relationships need a lot of contractual detail; others need little; others work themselves out as we go along.

Often when an organisation is involved it is helpful for all parties to have a contract to guide them, otherwise problems can arise.

Example

Hubert was a trainee counsellor who had to set up individual supervision for himself as part of his training programme. He arranged this with Elisabeth, who was on his list of recommended supervisors. He also got permission from his placement in a GP surgery to bring his clients for supervision. It was only after supervision had begun that Elisabeth learned that she was expected to do bi-annual reports on Hubert which would be accessible to both the training programme and the Practice Manager in the GP surgery. She had worked on the assumption that she would only report back to the training programme or the GP surgery if she was seriously worried about the quality of Hubert's counselling work. She was now confused about what this meant, and whether or not she could charge for it.

This is an instance when a clear contract outlining the responsibilities of all parties would have helped clarify Elisabeth's roles and tasks. At times like this, when not clear, the unfortunate supervisees can get caught in the crossfire of different interest groups.

For me contracting is about watchfulness and sensitivity to the relational aspect of supervision in the first instance. Sills emphasises this side of the contract too: 'A contract is an agreement between two or more people concerning the type of activity or relationship they will have with each other' (2012: 94). I find that an interesting place to start – so often my contractual time with supervisors has been more on what we *do* together, about tasks and roles and responsibilities. This focus goes deeper and looks at the actual relationship as the contract. Contracts

are about relationships even as they clarify what we do and what roles we adopt within those relations. What we will *be* for each other is as important as what we will *do* together.

The nuts and bolts of what a supervisory contract is, what should go into it and how it should be geared to different contexts is well documented. Proctor (2008) and Sills (2012) both have valuable models on contracts in general. Proctor uses the example of Russian dolls to illustrate how different types of contracts interweave to make up the full contract. Sills brings those five contracts together: wider world, organisational, client, sessional and moment to moment. Behind all of these is the relationship between the various parties involved.

Contracts are about promises, engagements, predictability and faithfulness. They are about 'caring for the relationship'. It's relatively easy to promise to be on time, or to keep confidentiality; it is more difficult to look at how I can be faithful and trustworthy in my supervisory relationships. That, in a sense, is the whole purpose of a contract – it's a promise of the future built on trust and reliability. What am I promising when I say I want to be faithful in my relationship with supervisees?

The supervisor's promise centres on a number of areas:

> I will do what is best for my supervisee and make supervisee learning the centre of supervision.
> I will be honest and direct in giving feedback.
> I will be consistent and predictable in so far as I can.
> I will spend time building and monitoring our relationship.
> I will keep an eye on possible ruptures in our relationship and work to repair them.
> I will try as best I can to set up a learning-friendly environment.

What might supervisee promises to supervision look like?

> I will promise to engage in supervision as best I can.
> I will prepare, turn up, and reflect on our supervision sessions together.
> I will tell you honestly how I am finding supervision with you; I will give you honest feedback on you as supervisor.
> I will be open to learning and try very hard not to be defensive when I hear what I don't like.
> I will take responsibility for my own learning in supervision.
> I too will monitor our relationships and take steps to ensure it is healthy.

It would be challenging to spend as much time on this side of our supervisory relationship as we do on the practical side, which is very important, but not the full picture.

Contracts are based on trust and make explicit what we agree to in a relationship of trust. Sometimes contracts are needed because there is no trust; when I

cannot trust you to keep your side of the bargain or fulfil your roles then there is need to draw up a formal contract as a way of keeping us both honest. Should anything go wrong I wave the contract under your nose and suggest you are, wittingly or unwittingly, neglecting it. Legal contracts often stipulate that there are sanctions, including punishments, should the contract be broken. This is usually unnecessary in supervision arrangements where the ideal is that our contract is built on a committed, adult relationship of trust and fidelity to one another, and to the task at hand.

In supervision, we consider ourselves responsible for and trustworthy in the relationship, and the contract is a relational endeavour rather than a catalogue of duties. Bond talks about an ethics of trust in the helping professions which applies in supervision. He defines this type of relational stance: 'Trust is a relationship of sufficient quality and resilience to withstand the challenges arising from difference, inequality, risk and uncertainty' (2007: 436). With that kind of robust relationship, supervisors and supervisees can face the challenges of supervision no matter where they come from.

The psychological contract

> ### Example
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> Joel was disappointed with his supervisor. He liked him, but he was disappointed. As he looked back on their six sessions together he realised he was not getting from supervision what he wanted. He had hoped for a stronger, more didactic style from this experienced supervisor – he knew he was a leader in the field of executive coaching, and he wanted more of his wisdom. He had expected that he would be more available outside their appointed meeting times, but his supervisor was quite strict that unless it was an emergency he expected Joel to deal with things himself. Joel had also hoped that his supervisor would help more with the academic side of his training programme – maybe read a first draft of an essay and give him feedback, or help him design his research proposal and so on.

This example highlights the psychological contract at work; Joel had a range of expectations of his supervisor that he had not shared with him, nor indeed had the supervisor asked him to. Had he expressed them then he and the supervisor would have reached a clear understanding about what was to take place in supervision and what was not to be expected. The supervisor saw supervision as focused directly on client work and not there to help Joel academically.

Psychological contracts are the hidden, unspoken sets of expectations (and therefore contracts) brought to all relationships. It just happens – we all bring

hopes, desires, wishes and expectations to our relationships. That is as it should be. Problems arise when others don't know about these expectations and therefore become unwitting partners to them. The psychological contract is often broken when the recipient knows nothing about them and therefore has no basis for meeting them.

Psychological contracts in supervision arise from supervisees, supervisors and from other stakeholders in the supervisory arrangement. They need to be dealt with and managed, otherwise they can become problematic. It is understandable that we disappoint each other: it is part of life. Normally, the result is a more realistic approach to the person and to the business at hand. Realising I had hoped for more time from my supervisor helps me change that expectation to a more reasonable one. At their worst, broken psychological contracts can lead to complaints to professional bodies and serious breakdowns in professional and personal relationships.

Uncovering hidden psychological contacts is helped by asking:

- What are you hoping for from supervision? Ideally? Realistically?
- What do you want from me?
- What is reasonable to ask for and what are your unreasonable demands?
- Can I allow myself to get in touch with all the expectations I have of supervision no matter how reasonable or not?

We don't always realise that as supervisors we contract for certain qualities and values in supervision without even raising the terms integrity, beneficence, respect, attention and so on. In a sense, all relationships do.

Stage 3: Engaging in the supervisory relationship

The relationship is up and running, we are aware of implicit and explicit contracts, we have a sense of our individual roles and responsibilities in supervision and now we begin the conversation. What is needed from us when we are engaged in supervision?

- Maintaining the relationship (reviews).
- Creating reflexive dialogue (see Chapter 10).
- Monitoring how power is used and abused.
- Using time.
- Presenting in the appropriate manner.
- Developing the needs of supervisors and supervisees.
- Managing parallel processes.
- Watching for external influences on both parties.

Engaging in supervision, like the first two stages, centres on the quality of the relationship. The relationship now settles into a pattern and a way of working that is unique to the people involved. We co-create the relational space to which we both subscribe and we form a collective, a relationship with its own particular DNA and reality maps. We slot into each other to create a third entity made up of us both. This relationship will become the foundation stone from which we will work together – it will give flavour to what happens between us. And while there is one relationship, there are still two people, each with their own personality, background and experiences.

We engage with that relationship mostly intuitively. We start off and get set in our ways. We establish our relational dance and often forget to change it even when it's not working well for us.

Example

Ben and Christina had been in a supervision arrangement for over 10 years. They meet once a month for one and a half hours. The format they follow has been much the same for all their supervisor sessions. Both pastoral ministers, they start supervision with a prayer for guidance and then Ben outlines his agenda. He then presents a problem he is facing. Christina gives her opinion on what she understands to be some ways ahead, and often connecting these to some Gospel incidences. She and Ben talk these through and generally he comes away with some insights and some strategies for moving things forward. They end their sessions with a final prayer for guidance and for the future.

Many supervisor couples and groups can get into supervision 'ruts' where each session is the same and the relationship follows well-worn pathways of interaction and individual roles and responsibilities. This is not necessarily bad, but can sometimes become a mindless relational routine with little creativity or passion.

It is helpful at times to review the supervisory relationship, especially around issues of power and engagement (Holloway, 1995). I have been amazed how much power supervisees give me, and indeed how much of my power I have given to supervisors. It's almost automatic, as if the very roles themselves dictate the power dynamics. Poole puts this well: 'In traditional supervision models, the dynamic of supervisor as dominant and supervisee as subordinate is not only expected, it may be reinforced by practices that reiterate the superiority of knowledge held by the supervisor' (2010: 61). Donning the mantle of supervisor can imperceptibly bring with it a feeling of power, a deference and compliance from supervisees, and an expectation that the supervisor is the one who manages and controls the supervisory details. If

we think of power as relational, then it might help to stop and reflect on how super–vision arrangements distribute and use power.

Example

Elena is very attentive and dedicated to her learning. In supervision she takes copious notes, especially while her supervisor is speaking. She asks for his advice continually and her feedback is that she feels privileged to have such an experienced practitioner as a supervisor. He wonders how he can help Elena be less dependent on him and take back some of the power she has given him.

While supervisors cannot give up their power, they can support their supervisees to gain power and move towards 'power within', where they become authors of their own lives. This is a learning process which may involve any or all of the following:

- Stepping back and allowing supervisees more say and direction.
- Allowing alternative views into the supervision room.
- Being aware how power is exercised between supervisors and supervisees (see Chapter 2 on voice in supervision).

One way in which we engage with the relationship in supervision is through what has been called 'parallel or reflective processes'. Briefly, parallel process is what happens when supervisees play out or act out what happened to them in their work with their clients within the supervisory relationship. They usually do this unconsciously.

Example

Pat presented her client in supervision. She read from her notes holding them close to her face. Julia, her supervisor, interrupted to ask for clarifica-tion. Pat looked irritated by the interruption but gave the information and went back to reading her notes. When Julia interrupted again, Pat looked distinctly annoyed. At this stage, Julia stopped the supervision and asked Pat to look at what was happening between them: her hiding behind her notes; her feeling irritated by Julia's questions. Pat suddenly realised she was doing to Julia what her client had done to her. He was very reluctant to allow her any access to his life and he was angry with her that she was not providing him with the easy answers he wanted to his quite complex prob-lems. Pat and Julia realised that the client had subtly entered the room in Pat's way of relating to Julia.

What actually happens between supervisees and clients is not really the stuff of supervision. In supervision, supervisees tell the *stories* of what happened, which may or may not be similar to what *actually* took place; in supervision we get the supervisee's version of what transpired. Ellis is quite strong in interpreting the research data on this: 'Supervisees often miss, are unaware of, misinterpret, or inaccurately recall that which transpires in the therapy session …. Supervisees' perceptions (what they report, what they identify) do not reflect accurately that which transpires in a session' (2010: 105). This is where the parallel process can be helpful in monitoring the relationship between supervisor and supervisee. In the supervisory conversation we discover the hidden client and what really happened in the relationship between practitioner and client. As with Pat above, she had been unaware of how slippery her client was and how both of them were angry with each other until she acted out the parts with Julia. The supervisor recognised that Pat's unusual behaviour pointed to a problem elsewhere.

Stage 4: Servicing the relationship (evaluation)

Stage 4 in the supervisory chronology centres around evaluation and feedback as ways of learning. It has constantly been seen as the most difficult task in supervision and one that potentially can lead to the most conflict and dissatisfaction. Here we will treat it not as a task to be performed, but as part of an on-going relationship where review is central to growth.

The areas covered here are giving feedback to each other and reviewing the supervisory relationship, dealing with emotional issues such as shame and fear, and dealing with critical moments in the relationship.

We are generally good at looking after the things in our lives – servicing our cars, insuring our houses and their contents, going to dentists and doctors when needed. Often we forget to service our relationships, with the result that they become dysfunctional through neglect.

Example

Albert and Charlotte had been in supervision for six months. 'Can we take some time out,' suggested Albert in their sixth session, 'to look at our relationship and how it's going in this context?' 'Happy to do so,' Charlotte replied. She continued, 'While I acknowledge the obvious power difference between us, and think it's appropriate here, I have noticed that you very quickly give me ideas and suggestions for ways forward. I like that and I particularly like when you share your own work with me – especially when

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you are struggling for a way forward. You are fast cognitively, and way ahead of me in reaching conclusions. I wonder, would you mind holding back a bit and letting me come to my own conclusions? I would find that better for my learning overall.' Albert smiled. 'Thank you for that feedback,' he said. 'That makes sense to me; I get involved and interested in your work, and forget to pause and let you think it through to its conclusions. I will certainly try to hold back and give you more time and space to reach your conclusions. I would like to monitor this with you over time to ensure that we have the right balance for your learning.'

Albert is facilitating their scrutiny of their supervisory relationship and Charlotte has sufficient trust in it, and in Albert, to be able to be honest with him.

Asking for and giving feedback is an essential component of supervision. It is one of our best ways of learning. There are times when others know us better than we know ourselves (Wilson, 2002). We all have blind, deaf and dumb spots. Listening to another speak into our lives through feedback, when done in the right way and with the right intention, is invaluable as a source of, and springboard for, new learning.

Relationships that are not reviewed, reflected on and examined can get into ruts and develop into unhealthy psychological games (see Ladany and Bradley, 2010: 41, 42). Supervision relationships are no different. When particular supervisory relationships are not held up to the light and examined openly and honestly, they can descend into meaningless routines.

I believe it is the responsibility of supervisors to patrol the relational boundaries and be alert to any areas that may militate against the health of the relationship. Outside influences need to be monitored too; they can assist learning and development and they can import toxic dynamics.
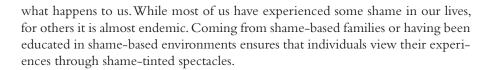
Issues of shame and fear

In a TED lecture (2010), Brené Brown talks of shame as the fear of disconnection. Our shame-infused eyes see ourselves as not good enough and results in what she calls *excruciating vulnerability*. At the end of the day we are *not worthy of connection*. Cavicchia (2012: 159) presents shame as a rupture in relationships where we feel unaccepted by others, and indeed by ourselves. When we are seen as inadequate, and told we are so as children, we inherit that viewpoint and internalise it. If guilt is about *what we do*, then shame is about *who we are* as persons: just not good enough. Our shame is activated when we or others find us wanting. Shame can be activated in relationships when we feel humiliated, put-down or betrayed. Cavicchia (2012) talks of a shame-template which we use at times to interpret

what happens to us. While most of us have experienced some shame in our lives, for others it is almost endemic. Coming from shame-based families or having been educated in shame-based environments ensures that individuals view their experiences through shame-tinted spectacles.

Example

Jody looked down at her feet when Phyllis, her supervisor, gave her some feedback on her tendency to rescue others. She was embarrassed, hurt and felt like a fraud. She wondered why she thought she could be a nurse in palliative care – clearly she wasn't cut out for it! She didn't hear Phyllis say how amazingly good she was in her reaching out and relationships; all she heard was her mother's voice criticising her, telling her she was no good. Plunged back into her shame-based past, she once more began to 'beat herself up'.

It is so easy to unwittingly activate shame in ourselves and others. Feedback is one of the most powerful arenas in which it can happen. Listening to others tell us about ourselves, especially our weaknesses and limitations, can spiral us into shame. Once there we either attack ourselves, or we attack others who we believe have shamed us. Shame is one of the major blocks to learning. Learning depends on taking risks and making ourselves vulnerable – both difficult stances to take for those who have experienced shame.

There is good shame. Whitehead and Whitehead call this 'that healthy sensitivity we feel as we come close to others' (1994; 104). Shyness and modesty can be signs of healthy shame. Shame is often accompanied by fear, and just as there is good shame, there is also good fear – the fear that keeps us safe. But then there is the fear that terrorises us, that holds us back, that refuses to take risks. So many of our fears are manufactured, made-up fears that, once faced, lose their power.

Example

Judith was always on guard. She lived with the fear of intimacy – that those who got close to her would find out what she was really like and would reject her. She was terrified of sharing her thoughts and her fantasies. Her supervisor, Miriam, was very open about herself and her vulnerabilities and had a gift of laughing at herself and her mistakes, yet without trivialising them. Judith was intrigued that this woman could reveal herself so much without worrying about rejection. Tentatively she began to open up, slowly at first. She shared her fear of rejection and intimacy, and found an acceptance and

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understanding from Miriam. Her worst fears were not realised. She could allow someone to know her and rather than reject her, that someone came closer. As she looked back she wondered why fear of intimacy had been allowed to rule her life for so long. She also realised that fear, like most bullies, when faced down, usually turns and runs.

In a chapter called 'Fear and Love In and Beyond Supervision', Robin Shohet (2008) has two headings: *What are you afraid to Tell?* and *Bringing It Out*. These headings could well be adopted in supervision. Many years ago I joined a supervision group led by an experienced psychotherapist. He interviewed all potential members of the group individually and his question to me was: 'Tell me everything about you and your life that you would be afraid of coming out in the group.' I gulped and began. First of all it didn't take as long as I imagined it would, and secondly I watched intently for his negative reactions to my recounting all I was ashamed of. When I had finished, he smiled and said, 'I am delighted to tell you I would love to have you in the group. There is one person in the group who knows your secrets and your fears – you really don't have anything to worry about.' He reminded me how much our hidden fears which 'cluster around shame, fear of being judged, feeling a fraud, not being good enough' (Shohet, 2008: 203) hold us back from being vulnerable and taking risks in order to learn.

Shame and fear are common in supervision and both affect our ability to learn, remain open and move forwards.

Critical moments in the supervisory relationship

Example

Ruby is incensed. Her supervisor, Errol, has given her very direct feedback on her boundaries. He has expressed surprise that she had called round to see a suicidal client who had not appeared for their counselling session. Ruby works on placement in a university counselling centre and is still in her first year of a counselling psychology degree. It wasn't difficult for her to walk over to the accommodation hall when she realised her client was not going to appear. No one answered the door. Ruby later got a message saying her client had got her dates mixed up, and would like to rearrange their session. Now with Errol they are reviewing what happened. She feels Errol doesn't understand the seriousness of the situation, and her concern for her client; Errol feels she had not been able to contain her anxieties around

her client's safety. He acknowledges that this is her first placement and the kind of mistake a beginner might make. Towards the end of the session, with Ruby feeling deskilled and ashamed, Errol asks how she feels about what he has said. Both know that this is a critical moment in their relationship and what happens next might make or break the supervisory relationship.

Supervisory relationships are the same as other relationships: they face challenging and critical moments that create relationship crossroads and tensions. These events arise from personalities, from events outside supervision, from within the supervisory relationship itself, and sometimes from the evaluation aspects of supervision. They inevitably heighten emotions, and if not dealt with constructively can lead to the end of the relationship, or serious lack of trust within it. Worked with well, they can strengthen, refresh and deepen the bonds between the parties.

Research on these critical moments in supervisory relationships suggest that they are unforeseen and creep up on us, that they evoke heightened emotions, or that they give rise to tensions within the relationship which engender anxiety (De Haan et al., 2010; Hitchings, 2012).

Some hints from Nelson et al. (2008) and Hitchings (2012) on how to manage such moments are:

- Realise that relationship problems and dilemmas are part and parcel of supervision – expect them.
- Do not apologise too quickly. Do not attack or defend positions.
- Deal with all parties' feelings.
- Believe in and want resolution, and say so.
- See if this is a parallel process, unique to the supervision relationship, or both.
- Be patient, flexible and work together to resolve the issue.
- Look at how both can learn from this event.

Appropriate humour can also help. Seeing ruptures or difficult moments in supervisory relationships as challenges to meet rather than obstacles to avoid helps both supervisors and supervisees to learn. Staying with these moments, talking about them and learning from them not only models what supervision is about, but also reminds us that relationships are never static – they are continually pushing us to new depths and fresh challenges.

Stage 5: Ending the supervisory relationship

Some of the areas that help make endings complete and clean are: reviewing the relationship and learning; reviewing the work and learning objectives; looking ahead; identifying appreciations; and writing references.

'Endings are hell,' one client exclaimed during our final session together. For him they certainly were: ending supervision activated a gunpowder trail into his childhood which raised agonising issues of loss, abandonment, isolation and rejection. If not quite hell, endings can certainly be difficult for many people, and if not handled clearly and cleanly can result in unfinished business, unclear expectations, confusion and other negative emotions.

Example

Harold and Edna worked right up to their final supervision session together. They had had a good supervisory relationship for two years, meeting once a month. Edna was moving home and city and had already made arrangements for her future supervision. At the door, as they shook hands, Harold wished Edna all the best for her new job and new supervision. 'I have enjoyed working with you,' he said as she stepped across the door. 'Me too,' she replied. 'Do give me a call if you ever need supervision in the future,' was his final comment as she headed down the path towards her car.

This ending feels somewhat unsatisfactory. There has been no review of the work together, no feedback to each other, no articulation of learning from supervision, no formal goodbyes or clarity about the future. The relationship has drifted into oblivion rather than coming to a clear and clean closure.

Endings in human relationships activate different issues for different people – growing up, growing apart, separation, abandonment, loneliness, dependency, self-worth, choice – and most of them raise issues of loss. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why we are reluctant to address termination in too much detail. Ending a supervisory relationship (one-to-one or group) brings with it a number of losses, especially if the supervisory experience has been a facilitative one. A trusted mentor is no longer there; the members of the group have disbanded.

Wall (1994) suggests that supervisees will reflect their problems with client termination in the supervisory relationship – a parallel process. He has offered some hints on what to watch out for when the parallel process is at work around termination: how termination issues are introduced into supervision and reported by supervisees; whether there are any inconsistencies or unusual behaviour by supervisees when working with termination; what timing is used to talk about termination, as in *door-handling* (when the supervisee raises the topic at the very end of the supervisory session, when it cannot be worked with sufficiently). Wall puts it succinctly:

If supervisors refrain from participating in the same dynamics as trainees and clients, but instead assist interns in recognizing the parallel process occurring in supervision, students can explore their own feelings and conflicts about terminating with clients as well as ending the field placements and supervisory relationship. (1994: 32)

And, of course, the parallel process will work both ways. When supervisor and supervisee do not deal effectively with termination in supervision, then it is highly possible that endings with clients will be affected.

Practicalities often determine termination in supervision: the training course is coming to an end, a placement in an agency is finishing, a supervision group is breaking up. Termination can be a result of the time-limited contract between supervisor and supervisee. Usually, a termination time is built into the supervisory contract and most supervisees are aware that the supervisory relationship will end at a specified time.

Process of termination

It makes sense to build some form of evaluation of supervisees into the termination stage of supervision. This provides an opportunity to review what has happened, what learning has taken place, and whether and how learning aims and objectives have been met. It also gives the chance to acknowledge the strengths and weaknesses of the supervision arrangement – what seems to have worked, what could have been handled differently/better. Termination time can be a valuable time for evaluation of supervisors as well as of supervisees; coming to the end of the relationship is always a good time to take stock.

Part of the evaluation process is looking forwards with supervisees to their next stage of development. Termination in supervision is a golden chance to anticipate the future by considering the past. With the help of an effective supervisor, supervisees can summarise their learning and, using that as a springboard, anticipate their future learning, whether that is within a training ambience, or within supervision, or in counselling employment.

The final session is an opportunity for an appropriate form of closure to end the relationship. This can be done in a number of ways: as a celebration of the time together; as an appreciation time, when individuals recount what they have appreciated about being together and about each other; or as a goodbye gesture, a handshake, a group hug.

Whatever method is used, it is important that the ending is clear and clean, and not avoided. It is certainly worthwhile to talk about the ending of the supervisory arrangement and what that ending means to all participants.

Particular endings

Not all endings in supervision take place by mutual agreement, and not all endings are the result of positive feelings about supervision. There are times when the supervisory relationship breaks down. Sometimes it is a result of just being the wrong people at the wrong time. It may have something to do with chemistry between the teaching style of the supervisor and the learning needs of the supervisee. Training courses should not be hasty in blaming supervisees if their supervisory arrangements

do not work out and they wish to change supervisors. Nor should they be naïve in just accepting it as a fait accompli. Sometimes a three-way meeting between the training course, the supervisor and the supervisee can help resolve whatever issues are causing concern. Whatever the reason, if supervision is not working, then the participants need to talk about it, and honestly face why it is not working. Generally, it is the task of the supervisor to provide this forum and initiate this conversation. It is a wasted opportunity for learning if both supervisor and supervisee deny what is happening: sometimes relationships that do not work teach us more about relationships than ones that work well. And unsatisfactory relationships, as much as satisfactory ones, need formal closure.

Another scenario arises when a supervisor decides that they no longer wish to engage in a particular supervisory relationship because they feel that the supervisee in question should not be seeing clients. This is obviously a situation for concern, especially if there is disagreement between supervisor and supervisee. Supervisors need to be very clear about their reasons for discontinuing to supervise a particular supervisee, and should make those reasons known to supervisees. It is important that supervisees have a forum where the whole issues can be discussed.

Occasionally the unexpected/unanticipated ends the relationship, for example the death of either participant, or one member moving away. Where death ends a supervisory relationship it is essential that the remaining member of the partnership has the opportunity of dealing with this either within another supervisory relationship or within personal counselling. Within a group setting, the remaining group need to process their feelings and loss within the group. Where one party moves away, time must be set aside to deal with the reactions and issues emerging from this premature ending.

Conclusion

Like all professional relationships, supervision has its beginning, middle and ending phases, each of which has its own characteristics. This model provides a systematic process approach to the various stages, with emphasis on how the supervisory relationship is set up, engaged in and ended well. Taking care of management, maintenance and administration issues mindfully and sensitively may be yet another way of showing care ethically, personally and professionally.