

# Supervision as a Metamodality and a Multiarea Activity

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## Abstract

**Supervision has a place in both organizations and with individuals. This article explores the current reshaping of the field, especially with regard to the interface between organizational consulting and supervision. Supervision is considered as a metatheoretical activity; this leaves space for different approaches, which are differentiated from various models of supervision. Four approaches to supervision are described, ranging from the contractual model of supervision in transactional analysis to more analytic models.**

## Supervision

Historically, there have been a number of ways to understand supervision. In the management field, supervision has meant to control staff in such a way that they perform best in their jobs. In academic training and research, a teacher supervises the work of a student. In psychotherapy and counseling training, supervision has been part of a control system meant to assure that trainees work adequately with the modality in which they are training.

All these approaches have now been developed to the point where the issue of control has, for the most part, become outdated. The focus has moved to ongoing support for learning about oneself in the work one does, be it as a manager, student, or counselor/psychotherapist. In fact, supervision has grown into an important procedure and resource for promoting professionalism in many fields, especially those that have a high degree of independent responsibility and in which creativity is more important than following learned procedures, communication is essential, and a complex context (social, organizational, interpersonal, and intrapsychic) must be taken into account.

Contemporary supervision involves a process of continued oscillation between practice and

metareflection. At its best, it leads to “a mental and emotional education that can guide the practical work . . . [freeing the individual] from fixed patterns of experience and behavior and . . . [promoting] the willingness as well as the ability to act suitably, carefully and courageously” (Koster, 2002/2003, p. 1).

As part of this development within the field of supervision, early transactional analysis publications on supervision (Barnes, 1977; Erskine, 1982) focused on (self) assessment and the role of supervision in the ongoing training and development of psychotherapists. Similarly, inspired by in-depth theoretical and methodological teaching developed at London’s Metanoia Institute (Clarkson, 1992; Clarkson & Gilbert, 1991), the Training and Certification Council (T&CC)—the service provider for the International Transactional Analysis Association (ITAA) in matters of training and certification—in conjunction with the professional training and standards committee (PTSC) of the European Association for Transactional Analysis (EATA) and the training standards committee of the Western Pacific Association of Transactional Analysis (WPATA) expanded the criteria for checking on the quality of supervision for those who put themselves to the test as supervising transactional analysts. Starting with the philosophy of supervision, these criteria include: working contractually, identifying key issues, reducing the probability of harm, increasing the direction of development, modeling the process in an equal relationship, and understanding ethical issues (Training and Certification Council, 2004).

The writings of Schmid (1986) on systemic transactional analysis and Hawkins and Shohet’s (1989) later groundbreaking article added a systemic dimension to supervision, which was later elaborated (Carroll, 1996; Carroll & Holloway, 1999; Holloway, 1995) and further extended into other related modalities and

approaches (Campbell & Mason, 2002; DeYoung, 2003; Gilbert & Evans, 2000; Tudor & Worrall, 2004). Tudor's (2002) comprehensive overview of transactional analysis supervision explores the question of "whether there is such a thing as transactional analysis supervision, or whether supervision is a meta-theoretical . . . activity" (p. 39).

Given these developments, supervision is certainly a metamodality activity. That is, although supervision is, within each modality, an important part of training and quality control, at the same time it can be viewed as bigger than and standing above each modality. It can even be argued that in supervision one needs to be able to stand outside of a modality to have a real metaperspective. Since modalities are connected with different theoretical frames of reference, supervision is metatheoretical as well. It stands above any single modality, while it is part of each system of training within a modality.

Supervision is also a multiarea activity because it supersedes the areas of psychotherapy and counseling; for example, supervision is a resource for developing professionalism in much more than the field of clinical psychotherapy and counseling. In Europe, supervision associations such as the European Association for Supervision (EAS) and the Association of National Supervision Associations in Europe (ANSE) represent thousands of supervisors who are not working as clinicians but who focus on teams, on individuals and their roles in organizations, and even on organizations as a whole. In this respect, supervision is linked with "neighboring professions" such as coaching, mentoring, and consulting. The Association for Supervision, Coaching and Consulting in Australia and New Zealand (ASCCANZ) (2002) has taken the position that where "supervision is the mother tongue of the profession, coaching and consulting are some of its dialects."

### **Supervision in Consultancy and Psychotherapy**

In discussing the differences between supervision in consultancy and in counseling/psychotherapy, it is interesting to consider where to place supervision in relation to these professional

activities. For our understanding here, it is helpful to think of levels of intervention on a continuum that runs from the most organizational and systemic to the most individual and personal. Figure 1 shows how supervision is needed at a different level in an organization than with an individual; for example, in an organization, a collective and shared awareness in a team may be more effective than curing one individual. It is not unusual for counselors/psychotherapists who begin working with organizations to discover that they cannot simply rely on applying concepts designed for individual pathology, case management, and treatment to organizations or teams (Vansina-Cobbaert, 2002)—and vice versa.

On the most organizational level of this continuum, we see interventions related to an organization's vision and mission because these provide the drive behind the organization as a whole. An organization can become stuck when it holds on too long to an idea that was once relevant but is no longer useful. Normally, the market—that is, the outside world—will teach such an organization that it needs to reinvent itself and reformulate what it stands for. Only then can the organization develop realistic new goals that are in contact with the outside world and develop internal structures and functions that work toward the realization of those goals.

The whole area from mission statements to organizational design (its structure and function) is the arena in which consultants work. Significantly, at this point on the continuum, no people are involved yet. However, procedures relating to production, communication, and internal process do involve and affect human beings. When consultants intervene on this level, they help to create the "coat" of the organization, they help to set the parameters of its "Cultural Parent," that is, its Etiquette, Technicality, and Character (Drego, 1993, 1994).

Once the organization knows what structures and functions it needs to realize its goals, the fine-tuning of integrating people into this structure starts and the link is created between organizational needs and personal possibilities. The overlap of these needs and possibilities is the organizational role—the interface between the person and the organization. From there it

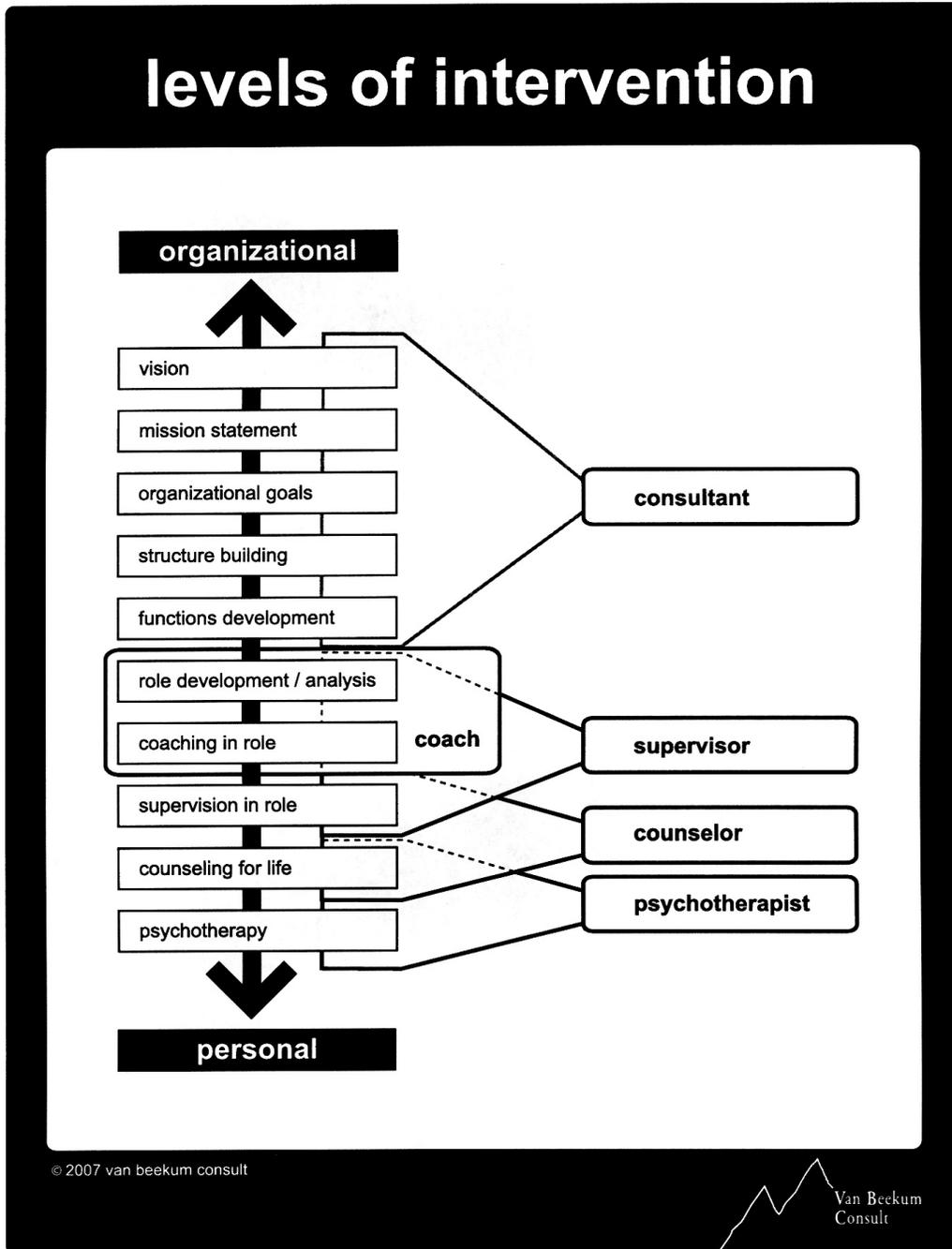


Figure 1  
Levels of Intervention

is possible to begin thinking about how to improve the match between the person and the organization by role development and role analysis in combination with coaching the person into the role and into role performance. This is a directive approach: measurable, research based, and focused on outcome, behavioral change, and crisis management.

The step from coaching to supervision involves a broadening and deepening of the focus of attention. As in coaching, supervision is work related, but with supervision comes a greater emphasis on working with manifestations of repetition compulsion so as to gain insight into patterns of steps and events and awareness of transference. In Loomis's (1982) terms, this involves the step from level two to level three in contracting. In coaching one works with the presented crisis and looks for behavioral change and options: how to do things differently. In supervision one explores the dynamics behind the presented crisis in order to understand the pull to the repetitive pattern from unconscious transference resources. In coaching the focus is on finding another way of behaving without exploring the deeper dynamics, whereas in supervision it is essential to understand the deeper dynamics before beginning to think about another way of behaving. Phelps (2002) uses the metaphor of redecorating one's bedroom. In supervision and counseling, one would take off the old wallpaper and fill up the scratches underneath; "coaching is being ready to redecorate over the old wallpaper" (p. 49). The focus on behavioral outcomes fits for coaching and training, but in supervision that focus might prevent deeper reflection about patterns behind the behavior and could thus lead to foreclosing the learning process.

Once the exploration of patterns is extended beyond work to other areas of the person's life (e.g., family and family history, friends and social life in general, etc.), the step is made from supervision to counseling. Methodologically, supervision and counseling are the same, yet the area of working differs: supervision focuses on work issues, counseling on life issues (where work is just one aspect of life). In fact, if we are truthful, the recent phenomenon known

as life coaching is actually a trendy name for counseling, one that is sexier and easier to sell in the corporate world (Carroll, 2003; Pointon, 2003).

Through counseling and supervision, clients gain insight into the patterns that create their current problems in life (counseling) or in the workplace (supervision). The next and most individual personal step is psychotherapy, in which the key issues behind patterns are explored, regression may be allowed (depending on the psychotherapy philosophy held by the therapist), healing of former traumatic relationships is sought, and redecisions on an early child level are stimulated. Loomis (1982) referred to this sequence as the fourth level of contracting.

### **Boundaries, Overlaps, and Developments**

As shown in Figure 1, various professional activities have boundaries between them and yet they overlap; for example, psychotherapists apply counseling in their work and counseling often overlaps into supervision. However, supervision is clearly separate from psychotherapy, with counseling or life coaching between them. The boundary between supervision and psychotherapy is thus well defined (Carroll, 1996; Training and Certification Council, 2004). We will not explore that relationship further here.

What we will focus on is the boundary between supervision, coaching, and consulting, an area in which the boundaries are changing dramatically because of a crisis in consultancy. Historically, consultants in big consulting firms (e.g., Ernst & Young, Deloitte, PriceWaterhouseCoopers, etc.) focused on organizational design and architecture and the work was mostly financially driven. Consultants suggested structural changes on behalf of board and shareholder interests and left the organization at the time of implementation, often handing over a chaotic and anxious organizations to other consultants, trainers, and supervisors. An interesting case study of this phenomenon is described by Herr (2000).

The collapse of Enron in 2001 was a crisis of earthshaking proportions in the corporate world. The collapse of Arthur Anderson, a firm that consulted to Enron, was a crisis of similar

proportions in the world of consulting firms. Arthur Anderson left the field, shamed for its collusion with the interests of greed and opportunism of their client Enron. Arthur Anderson lacked independence and, most of all, integrity and ethics. Competing consulting firms rubbed their hands together and grabbed the opportunity by quickly filling the gaps that the disgraced Anderson consultants left. Ironically, they often hired the fired Anderson consultants to do the work. This, of course, did not go unnoticed by customers, thus dealing another blow to the credibility of consultants (van Beekum, 2006).

### **Accountable and Human**

The collapse of Arthur Anderson coincided with two other developments in the consultancy world. Customer organizations began (1) demanding more accountability from consultants and (2) feeling uncomfortable with the neglect of people issues that inevitably arise in organizational restructuring.

1. *Accountability.* There was once a time (and sometime there still is) when company executives would pay an outside consultant a substantial fee so that they themselves did not have to deal with their issues. In doing so, expertise regarding internal financial management or change processes was projected onto outside experts. Beyond the formal questions and contracts, consultants were, on a psychological level, actually hired as heroes, rescuers, guiding angels, problem solvers, troubleshooters, or shields to protect the organization from the tax office and public opinion. Consultants appeared to collude with those projections, often happily walking away with large payouts. The collapse of Enron spoiled the party. While the effects of consultant approaches became increasingly questionable, the call for transparent accountability grew louder. Many consultants could not deliver; when confronted with demands for transparency and reflection, they were not up to them.

A side effect of this development is that more companies have become aware that they need to be responsible for their own change processes. As a result, there has been a shift in the way companies are approaching consultants

and in the kinds of questions they are asking. Nowadays, organizations do their homework better: They organize internal brainstorming sessions, they think about strategy, and they prepare questions before contacting consultants. As a result, not only have the questions for consultants changed, the projected dependency onto consultants has changed as well. Companies can do their own counting; their real questions have become much more sophisticated.

2. *Human Factor.* The well-known “balanced scorecard” model (Kaplan & Norton, 1992) reduces the issues that companies deal with into four areas: finance, markets and customers, internal processes, and people issues. It is understandable that different consultants specialize in different areas, each of which deserves attention. When company directors and managers reflect on their company’s performance, doing so reveals that they each have their specific area of interest as well. Some are more interested in financial matters, others in customer relations, others in internal process. The place of the human factor seems to float with economic trends and with the government of the day.

In over 100 interviews based on the balanced scorecard with CEOs and senior managers conducted from 2000-2003 in Australia (van Beekum, 2006), the human factor was rated lowest. It received the least attention and was considered the least important of all four areas. Recent changes in the industrial relations laws in Australia mirrors this neglect of the human factor in business life here and actually returns human relations in companies to the state it was in 150 years ago.

Elsewhere in the world (although more so in Europe than the United States) there is more respect for and acknowledgement of the importance of the people factor. One can sometimes hear managers say that their most important capital in the company is the employees. And they mean it.

In Europe, the four areas of the balanced scorecard are brought together into a much more holistic approach to doing business, one that includes social engagement of companies in so-called corporate social responsibility

(CSR) (see [www.csrwire.com](http://www.csrwire.com)). Recently, in Switzerland (perhaps not the most progressive European nation), the entire board and top management of Swissair—19 top managers in total—were brought to justice for mismanagement that caused the breakdown of Swissair in 2001 and the loss of 5000 jobs. They did not commit classical criminal acts as did the managers in the One-Tel or HIH affairs in Australia or Enron in the United States. In the Swissair case, the board and directors were brought to justice for not being socially responsible, that is, for ignoring the effect of their actions on their employees.

Such developments have affected the demands made on consultants. Having a bright analytic company diagnosis, a restructuring plan, and a strategy for implementation is not enough anymore. Hiding one's head in the sand regarding the social consequences of restructuring or colluding with ethical mismanagement is no longer acceptable. The effects of business development on people working for the company—on their job satisfaction, their roles and responsibilities, their relationships within the company, and their career perspectives—need to be taken into account. Consultants who cannot deliver in this area are out.

### **The Rise of Supervision and Coaching and the Fall of Consulting**

Where consultants are the losers, supervisors and coaches are the winners. In corporate dynamics, supervision and coaching are taking over where consulting has seemingly failed. The “agent of change” has become more personal. Supervision and coaching are increasingly moving into the field of consulting and bringing with them a more human accent. Issues that managers explore in coaching and supervision—in the context of the company's financial, legal, and administrative life—include the following:

- Personal issues in a manager's life
- Family and relational history that may offer insight into patterns of difficulties managers have at work
- Effects of decisions on employees
- Finding ways to communicate well
- Group dynamics in teams and project groups

- Ethical implications

Supervision of senior management and executive coaching offer the personal and human touch that consultants often missed. Accountability is expected of supervisors and coaches, and time will show how much this involves an idealizing transference projected onto a new trend. In transactional analysis, we are familiar with being projected upon and how trends are short-lived when not rooted in a solid theoretical base that is shared and discussed among peers. The unchecked growth of coaching in the past few years does not necessarily parallel high professional standards. The major supervision and coaching associations (EAS, ANSE, ASCCANZ) have found that many who call themselves coaches do not meet minimum professional standards and thus are not able to be accredited by those associations. Even the *Harvard Business Review* has its worries: “I believe that in an alarming number of situations, executive coaches who lack rigorous psychological training do more harm than good” (Berglas, 2002) (p. 90).

Supervisors are thus in the driver's seat: They are often well trained and accredited by international associations, they are bound by ethical guidelines, and they often have broader professional relationships with clinical supervisors. Consultants, on the other hand, seem doomed to have to reinvent themselves and to find a new and meaningful focus for their work at the organizational level. However, because this article focuses on supervision, we will not explore this issue further here.

### **Models and Approaches**

What we will explore here, however, is how supervisors and coaches work now that they are expanding the areas in which they engage with clients. Over time it has become apparent that supervisors and coaches often use different approaches. Before exploring these, we need to separate approaches from models. Many practitioners in the fields of supervision and coaching are fond of models because they have a practical touch: They provide a conceptual road map and structure that facilitate understanding the reality of the clients within the parameters of the model. This only works,

however, when a client's problem fits into the model, which is often not the case. A coach or a supervisor needs to be able to select from a variety of models and apply one only after carefully listening to the client. When supervisors are stuck with one specific model, they are forced to squeeze the client's reality into it. This brings to mind Procrustes, who had one standard bed to which he adapted everyone, either by stretching their bodies or chopping off their feet. We may wonder how much single modality training—even in transactional analysis—actually serves as a Procrustean bed. The best a model can provide is a map, and we should always be aware that, as Korzybski (1933) said, "The map is not the territory."

An approach—which is different from a model—is a broader concept. It refers to a philosophy of human interaction in combination with a methodology of how to think about the issues presented by the client, that is, how to reflect on them, assess them, see them in context, and (maybe) decide what to do about them. This deals with the content of what the client presents. For the process, an approach also includes parameters regarding how to think about and reflect on the relationship between oneself and the client and how this relationship is co-created and thus represents important elements for both client and supervisor. An approach is the higher level of abstraction and allows different models to be used.

### **A Basis for Approaches**

The roots of the choice of approach made by a coach or supervisor can be found in the basics of social science. Briefly, when Freud (1901/1914) provided the (medical) world with new ways of thinking about mental instability, as a child of his time and within his professional context he basically used the approach of "the doctor knows best." The client was diagnosed, the symptoms were assessed, and a specific therapy was described. Even in the realm of the unconscious, it was the analyst who was supposed to know (McLaughlin, 2005). Behavioral scientists and practitioners from the 1920s on did not think much differently. Although they left out the analysis of the black box of the unconscious in order to cut straight to the

desired outcomes, they also profiled themselves as "experts who have the answers." This is called an expert approach.

The humanistic psychology approaches that developed in the middle of the last century—championed by thinkers such as Maslow (1962) and Rogers (1969)—offered a new approach. The humanistic practitioner became engaged in the relationship with the client, and the relationship itself became a vehicle for reflection for the benefit of the client. The new philosophy became "the power is in the patient" (Goulding & Goulding, 1978), which not only empowered clients but also forced them to take responsibility for healing their problems instead of passively and patiently waiting for the expert to tell them how. In transactional analysis, this was effectively translated into the concepts of OKness and contracting. This clearly represents much more of a client-centered approach.

In the later part of the twentieth century, other approaches gained popularity. I will leave out here the financially driven upgrading of cognitive behavioral approaches, with their solution-focused and evidence-based variations, because I do not consider the cognitive-behavioral therapy approach—although highly favored in psychology training at universities—to be theoretically and methodologically of interest for the field of supervision. Of much more value are systemic and psychodynamic approaches to thinking about clients' issues. These focus on the interrelatedness of presenting issues with other layers and aspects of social life, both on conscious and unconscious levels. They see the individual and the context or, even better, the individual-in-context. Many authors ascribe to this approach, which might be described as "everything is interrelated" or "no one is to blame, however, everybody is responsible" (Campbell, Draper, & Huffington, 1991; Kim, 1989; Schmid, 1986; Senge, 1990).

Relational thinking adds to this the notion that the "self-with-other view" (DeYoung, 2003) is not restricted to presenting issues outside the consulting room but is there within the working relationship and can serve as a resource to work with. The focus for the practitioner is more to implement a holistic relational approach to

clients in which doors stay open for further learning and reflection.

### **Current Approaches in Supervision**

Building on the history just described, the practice of supervision has developed four major approaches. Each of them includes a way of thinking about the helping relationship, the strength and potential of the client and the supervisor, and the role of the context.

1. *The Contractual Approach.* This is probably the best known and applied approach in the helping professions. It basically comes down to paying attention to the outcome of the supervision and gives both client and practitioner a voice in—and responsibility for—that outcome. This approach is good for crisis management and is content and outcome driven. It is used primarily in one-on-one supervision. Solution-focused coaching has adopted most of the principles of this approach, which is rooted in the humanistic tradition and was developed by Berne's (1961) transactional analysis in the 1950s and 1960s. It is like showering with a centered jet: Each drop will reach the target.

2. *The Open Space Approach.* This is based on a broad contract regarding exploration in a group setting. However, contracts about outcomes are avoided in this approach because a focus on outcomes detracts from curiosity and limits broader reflection that may be important for the issues at hand. In an open space approach, both client and practitioner use the space to reflect, associate, interpret, and reinterpret using several levels of the client's system: personal, interpersonal, group, and society. The critical incident method, developed long ago (Flanagan, 1954), is an open space model with some structure for the process of the reflection. The roots of this method lie in an analytical tradition of exploring through association and interpretation—and giving the client a voice too. Within a group setting, the client presents a question. The case is presented and the whole group is active in the reflection. It is like showering under a wide jet in a large bathroom: Not all the drops will reach the target.

3. *The Role Analysis Approach.* This approach integrates group dynamics and systems thinking, and its main focus is the client's role

in a specific social context (e.g., work). It is not about individual character but about how to look at person, role, and system simultaneously. In this approach the role is the intermediary between the person and the organization. The approach is effective in both individual sessions and group supervision. Reed (1976) is credited as one of the early authors about this method, and Newton, Long, and Sievers (2006) describe it in depth along with its historic roots and a great variety of applications. Often the methodology stimulates supervisees to express their understanding and interpretation of their role through drawing and including all details that may or may not be important in this visualization. The drawing is used as a stimulus for associations and interpretations offered to the supervisee. It is like showering under a wide jet in a contained, smaller bathroom.

4. *The Relational Approach.* Both psychoanalytic and humanistic approaches have explored and studied the nature of relationship in the helping professions. Transference from the client to the supervisor is an important phenomenon to work with in supervision, but countertransference from the supervisor to the client is equally important (see Gilbert & Evans, 2000). The relational approach challenges supervisors to come out of their ivory towers and honestly reflect on their countertransference with their clients (i.e., supervisees), not only in the supervision they have afterward but also in the session with the client. As the supervisor models this approach, a reverse parallel process is reinforced for the benefit of the supervisee and the supervisee's client. To continue the showering metaphor, this approach is rather like showering while sitting in the bathtub and reusing the water.

These different approaches to supervision can be used for different sorts of supervision questions. The classical clinical case supervision, which focuses on diagnostic questions and next treatment steps for the supervisee's client, is probably best served by a clear contractual method. Supervision focusing on what happens in the parallel process between client, supervisee, and supervisor will benefit most from using a relational approach. When supervision is directed toward broader systems, a

more open-ended approach is probably the first choice.

When the supervisor—independent of whether his or her clients are psychotherapists or managers—is able to choose his or her approach carefully and in tune with the client's needs, then supervision will be, as I quoted earlier, “a mental and emotional education that can guide the practical work, . . . [freeing the individual] from fixed patterns of experience and behavior and . . . [promoting] the willingness as well as the ability to act suitably, carefully and courageously” (Koster, 2002/2003, p. 1).

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