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The domain of learning goals in professional supervision

ALF LIZZIO AND KEITHIA WILSON

Overview

It is a statement of the obvious that professional supervision is concerned with achieving learning outcomes. However supervision is a diverse and often ambiguous learning enterprise, the goals of which are often implicit or embedded in more general espoused purposes, such as professional development and client accountability. We propose that a capacity to formulate and set explicit and meaningful goals is not only a key part of a contracting process but also the foundation for a mutually empowering and systematic learning process for both supervisor and supervisee.

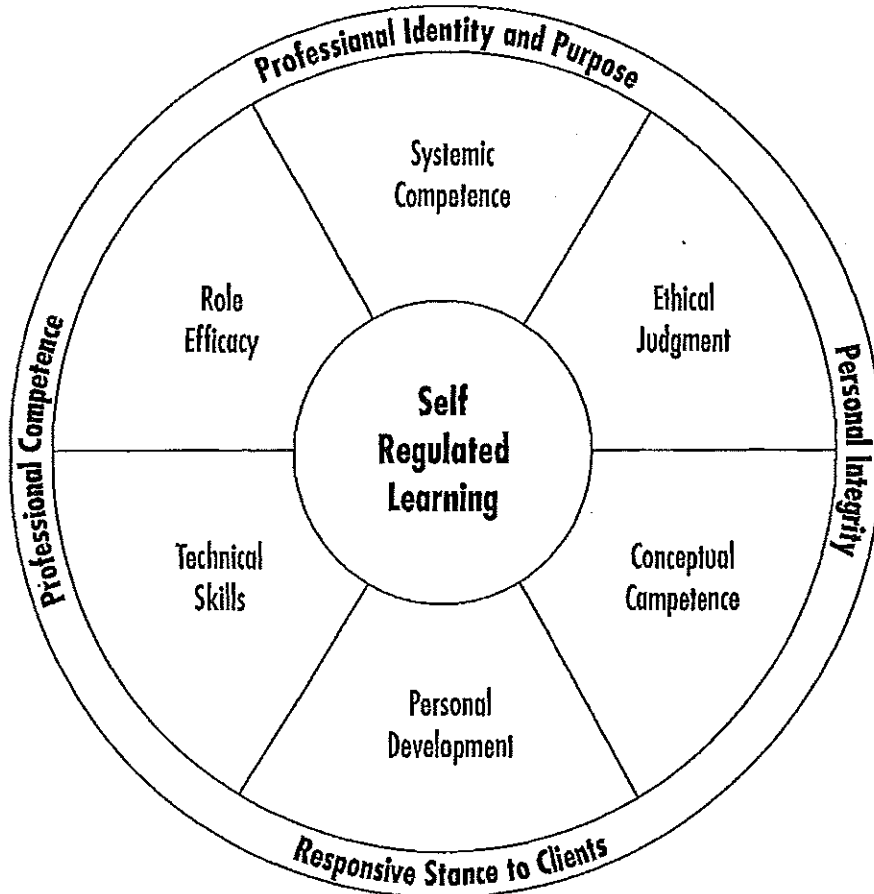
This chapter has three aims:

1. To develop a systematic map of the domain of potential goals of professional supervision.
2. To summarise some of the recurring themes and considerations for learning in each goal area.
3. To propose ways that a model of supervisory goals could be used to enhance supervisory practice.

The overall model

We propose that at the most general level supervision is concerned with a set of core purposes (see Figure 3.1). These include, most fundamentally, the development of the professional competence of the supervisee, and a responsive stance towards the clients they serve. In parallel, and complementary to this, is the supervisee's development of a coherent sense of professional identity and purpose,

Figure 3.1 The domain of learning goals in professional supervision



and a considered crystallisation of their notion of personal integrity. These higher order purposes are achieved by explicit learning activities in six specific goal areas:

- the context of professional practice (systemic competence and role efficacy);
- the conceptualisation of strategy (conceptual competence and ethical judgment);
- the competent response to expressed client need (technical skills); and
- critical self awareness (personal development).

The core learning goal or capability which enables a professional to continue to develop and direct themselves outside the context of supervision is proposed as

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a capacity for self-management and self-regulated learning—a set of meta-skills which enable more specific skills to be appropriately and strategically applied. The model summarises the capabilities that comprise or contribute to professional effectiveness and thus, by definition, the domain of learning for the supervision of professionals. In the remainder of this chapter we elaborate the specific goals and supervisory learning processes in each of these areas. At the conclusion of each section we encourage the reader to make use of a brief reflective device—a self-test of learning outcomes.

Self-regulated learning

The developmental perspective in its various forms (e.g. Stoltenberg's (1981) Complexity Model) is arguably the most influential approach to conceptualising supervisory practice. The focal goal of the developmental approach is the supervisee's progression towards autonomous mastery. Clearly, however, people vary in both their ability and willingness to engage in the process of self-management.

If one accepts and attempts a developmental agenda, then how does one enable a supervisee to be increasingly self-regulated across the various domains of professional practice (e.g. ethical judgment, technical competence)? Put another way, what is the program of planned redundancy for the 'external supervisor', and increasing employment of the supervisee's 'internal supervisor'? One way to put a developmental agenda into practice is to focus on the supervisee's use of meta or higher-order skills in the supervisory process. The specific skills involved in the process of self-regulation have been well documented (Wilson, 1998; Zimmerman, 1990). These include self-organisation, self-evaluation, information seeking, goal setting and planning, and self-monitoring of actions. These are also the component skills of successful experiential learning and self-managed change.

While there is much that can be usefully said about how educational theories (e.g. reflective practice, learning to learn, learning styles) can be used to help a supervisee strengthen their capacity to self-regulate, we find these can be reduced to a single simplifying guiding principle. We think of self-regulation as the process of being able to make 'quality choices' in response to environmental demands. Our aim is to 'start in supervision' what we hope the supervisee will 'continue in practice'. That is, the way to learn to make quality choices in practice is to be given the safe opportunity to do this in supervision—continual task related opportunities to self-evaluate, propose options, identify goals and reflect on results; and personally related opportunities to both challenge and support oneself. Thus facilitating self-regulation primarily involves the supervisor in looking not for opportunities to contribute ideas (content), but for opportunities to help the

supervisee develop capability (process). We propose the following touchstone question as a basis for evaluating supervisory interventions or contributions:

'Is there a missed opportunity here? How is what I am about to say or do going to impact on this person's capacity to self-regulate when they are left to their own resources?'

Table 3.1 Self-regulated learning: Supervisee self-test

As a result of professional supervision:

1. I have developed strategies and procedures that allow me to independently self-reflect on my practice.
2. I have developed strategies for gathering ongoing feedback from my clients and colleagues.
3. I have learnt a set of strategies for effectively supervising myself and my own practice.
4. I have a better understanding of how I personally learn from experience.
5. I am better able to set meaningful goals for my ongoing professional development.

Systemic competence

Systemic competence is the capability to understand and manage the organisational context of our professional activities. The increasing recognition afforded to this domain of competence derives from two sources. First, there is a substantial body of evidence which links burn-out and stress, particularly in early career professionals, with an inability or unwillingness to actively manage the systems of which they are members (Siefert, Jayaratne, & Chess, 1991). Secondly, contemporary models of service delivery conceptualise professional effectiveness in systemic terms. Traditional, insulated and individually based models of 'clinical practice' have been expanded by broader notions of capability based on systemic thinking.

The importance of locating practice as part of a wider context suggests a specific set of learning agendas for the supervision process:

- understanding and managing contextual factors which influence the effective or efficient delivery of professional services;

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- maintaining functional working relationships both horizontally (e.g. with colleagues) and vertically (e.g. with superiors or subordinates);
- enhancing the 'quality of working life' and the capacity for self-care; and
- contributing in role appropriate ways to improving the system of a host organisation.

There are a number of core organisational processes that relate to these systemic agendas which can usefully be considered in the supervision of professionals:

Cultural analysis: (Schein, 1992; Trice & Beyer, 1993) helping a supervisee understand and work with the basic assumptions, values and practices around which a system is organised.

Identity management: helping a supervisee appreciate the preconceptions that others may have of them as a result of their membership of a referent group (e.g. psychologist) or cultural group (e.g. race, gender) and the implications of this for miscommunication (Porter & Samovar, 1992).

Socialisation and inclusion: helping a supervisee develop the capacity to 'belong' and 'be included' and better appreciate the factors which enhance/inhibit productive and trusting working relationships.

Table 3.2 Systemic competence: Supervisee self-test

As a result of professional supervision:

1. I have developed a better understanding of the dynamics of organisational 'power and politics' in relation to my work.
2. I am better able to understand and work within/around the 'rules of the game' in my workplace.
3. I have learnt strategies for influencing my managers'/colleagues' thinking on issues, or for overcoming organisational obstacles affecting my practice.
4. I have a clearer understanding of issues and factors related to people's perceptions of me and my 'professional image' in the organisation.
5. I am better able to understand and manage interpersonal or inter-group conflicts and tensions at work.

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Organisational communication: helping a supervisee become more aware of organisational networks and patterns of information flow.

Power and influence: helping a supervisee develop a mature repertoire of influence strategies (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Yuki, 1994).

Role efficacy

Related to the broader notion of systemic competence is that of role efficacy—competence in managing the expectations or requirements of one's formal organisational role or position. Key to a role-based analysis is helping a supervisee identify their 'role set'—those individuals and groups with whom she or he does or should interact to achieve work outcomes. These people, or other roles with whom one is interdependent, can be construed as 'role senders' (e.g. colleagues, supervisors, clients, partners etc.) who have a 'stake' in what work is done or how it is done. Importantly however, the content and processes of these role relationships (the role messages or expectations) are often implicit and unarticulated and it is when roles are constructed on untested assumptions that difficulties arise. Thus a productive task for professional supervision is helping workers address the tasks of role clarification (clarifying their own and others' expectations; Dayal & Thomas, 1968) and, if necessary, processing this information to a point of working agreement (role negotiation; Harrison, 1973). The desired outcome is a sense of role efficacy—a sense of clear and agreed understanding of the purposes, style and practices of the focal role.

We have developed a structured workbook process (Lizzio & Wilson, 1996), based on sociometric principles, which guides supervisees in the process of developing and analysing a visual map of their role environment and role relationships. A key part of the process is the identification of sources of role stress—in particular, role ambiguity (uncertainty regarding expectations) and role conflict (conflicting or incompatible roles or expectations). Role conflict and ambiguity have been shown to contribute to worker burnout and emotional exhaustion in particular (Bedini, Williams, & Thompson, 1995; Barber & Meiko, 1996) and anxiety and dissatisfaction with work in general (Decker & Borgen, 1993).

Conceptual competence

The task of helping people conceptualise or theorise about their practice has been aided considerably by the useful distinctions made by cognitive theorists (e.g. Anderson, 1983) regarding types of knowledge. In particular, the distinctions between declarative knowledge (knowing about something), procedural knowledge (knowing how to do something), and strategic knowledge (knowing when and why

Table 3.3 Role efficacy: Supervisee self-test

As a result of professional supervision:

1. I have been better able to set appropriate priorities and standards for my work performance.
2. I have established more efficient and effective work practices or management procedures.
3. I have been better able to clarify my accountabilities and responsibilities in my professional role.
4. I am better able to identify and manage sources of work stress.
5. I am better able to identify and make use of sources of support (e.g. resources, networks) on the job.

something is done). At a basic level, these facets of knowing provide a framework for understanding the 'knowledge base' a supervisee may have in relation to a specific practice issue (e.g. knowing about something theoretically but not how to respond, knowing how to do something but not fully why it is done, or knowing why but not how, etc.). The challenge for supervisors is to approach the conceptualisation of practice in a way that helps supervisees integrate these aspects of knowing. Clearly supervision must not only address the task of assimilation (of applying existing theory to practice) but also of accommodation (developing new theory or personal theory from practice).

Two metacognitive strategies, consistent with the goal of self-regulation, are offered to guide the otherwise somewhat general goals of reflective practice and integration of knowledge: choice point analysis and propositional thinking. Current research (Biggs, 1999) suggests that learning processes which aim to develop, explicate or test professionals' practice schemas or propositional thinking may go a fair way to providing useful linkages of theory and practice. Within this approach, practice situations are analysed to reveal tacit practice principles or propositions (viz. In situation *a*, if you want outcome *b*, then consider activities such as *c* and *d*. The reasons these work is because of *e* and *f*. Unless *g* is happening). It is evident from the above that this schematic approach to reflection can be used both in planning for interventions (reflection before action) or for analysing situations (reflection after action).

A second related approach to reflection, based on Schön's (1983) notion of 'design moves', is choice point analysis. This approach involves a supervisee in the

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process of framing their practice as a series or web of choices—a piece of work can then be mapped as a 'choice tree' or 'design web' of explicit and implicit choices which have been made in a variety of ways (unilaterally/bilaterally, intuitively/rationally), at various levels of practice (strategic/tactical), with a range of binding implications (for self/others and future choices). A moment of practice can be deconstructed and understood as a present response (action) to a chain of perceived antecedent conditions (cause), and with future consequences for action (effect).

From a developmental perspective, supervisory efforts in the domain of conceptual competence are perhaps most richly framed as a focus on the development of judgment and wisdom (Smith & Baltes, 1990). The supervisor who seeks to facilitate 'wise practice' more so than just 'clever practice' will be necessarily concerned with a supervisee's ways of 'being' as well as their 'doing'—a coming together of right thought, right feeling and right action (Birren & Fisher, 1990).

Table 3.4 Conceptual competence: Supervisee self-test

As a result of professional supervision:

1. I am better able to conceptualise specific cases and projects.
2. I have enhanced my competence in effectively planning intervention strategies.
3. I am better able to select the specific intervention strategies which are appropriate to particular clients/situations.
4. I am clearer about the principles and frameworks that I want to underpin my practice.
5. I am better able to explain 'how I work' in a theoretically consistent and integrated way.

Ethical judgment

Ethical judgment refers to a professional's capacity to address the issues and dilemmas stimulated by practice in a way that meets the dual goals of personal and collective accountability. We suggest that facilitating self-regulated ethical decision-making requires understanding of four types of frameworks. First, a framework is required to help the supervisee identify the domain of considerations that are relevant to an ethical question. That is, a map of the 'reference points' that will inform their judgment and action. Gilbert and Evans (2000) usefully summarise

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this in the form of a stakeholder model which invites professionals to consider the stance or imperatives of a range of 'voices' (e.g. moral values, community standards, ethical codes, and the law).

The second useful framework is a linear protocol for systematically 'moving through' the stages of ethical decision making (viz. problem identification, analysis, provisional resolution, testing of ideas, action and follow-up) (Forester-Miller & Davis, 1995; Keith-Spiegel & Koocher, 1985). The value of process models is that they offer, by virtue of their explicit steps, a discipline for analysis and clarification that informal conversational processes may lack.

Supervisees also seek to clarify for themselves the basis of their personal integrity (i.e. their self-imposed standards of personal and professional behaviour). The key distinction here is between principle and virtue ethics (Meara, Schmidt & Day, 1996). Principle ethics refer, as the term suggests, to the frameworks and principles used for solving ethical dilemmas. Virtue ethics are aspirational and non-obligatory goals and derive from the continuing focal question, *'Am I doing what is best for my client?'*. In the helping professions, in particular, such a question typically raises issues of levels of compassion, degrees of effort, and involvement with clients.

Table 3.5 Ethical judgment: Supervisee self-test

As a result of professional supervision:

1. I have been better able to work through value conflicts or ethical dilemmas that have been stimulated by my work.
2. I am better able to analyse complex problems/situations in terms of their ethical or moral implications.
3. I have developed my capacity to make considered professional judgments in situations with competing interests.
4. I am more aware of the 'value choices' or 'implicit assumptions' that I make in my work.
5. I am better able to distinguish the ways in which my preferred interventions may meet my own versus my clients' needs.

While there is a significant literature in relation to ethical issues arising in the professional-client relationship, there is significantly less guidance available with regard to broader ethical concerns and justice-related issues (viz. distributive, procedural or interactional) (Greenberg, 1987) that are part of everyday

organisational life. Such issues often centre on the supervisee struggling with issues of expressing their integrity (Carter, 1996). Courage and consequences clearly exist in a dialectical tension and, in our experience, ethical problem solving at the group or organisational level involves political dimensions and trade-offs regarding 'escalating conflict' (Argyris, 1990) that present the greatest challenges for professional supervision.

Personal awareness and development

There is a fair degree of consensus that working as a professional in the 'people game' is not simply a matter of technical competence—qualities of character, personal history, and style are central to considerations of effectiveness. By definition, personal processes are professional processes. As Hawkins and Shohet (1989) so elegantly put it, it is not personal needs that are problematic in helping, but their denial.

Given that we frame supervision as a learning relationship and adopt primarily an educational supervisory orientation (Carroll, 1996), we are particularly sensitive that supervision not become just another form of counselling. However, while there are a number of complex ethical conflicts (e.g. dual relationship boundary issues) and practical challenges, in including personal development as an explicit goal of supervision, the bottom line is that a supervisor has a responsibility to help a supervisee consider how their personal process may impact on their client's and their own effectiveness. As a general rule of thumb, we propose that a focus on personal process is legitimate if two conditions are met: it has direct relevance to client outcomes or supervisee effectiveness in the context of practice, and there is explicit agreement between supervisee and supervisor as to its appropriateness. Referral to another professional for 'personal work' in parallel to supervision can also be a productive process.

We have found the following process to be useful in the task of raising self-awareness but many others would be relevant depending on preferences or ideology.

1. An understanding of transference and counter-transference processes between supervisees and clients, and supervisors and supervisees. In particular, sensitivity to how professional practice can 'hook' or 'trigger' feelings of guilt, resentment, anger, control and inflation.
2. An understanding of how people professionals can become impaired, both personally and professionally, as a result of the type or style of their work. Impairment can be described in a number of ways (e.g. stress, burn-out, vicarious traumatisation, apathy and depression), and evidenced by themes

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of self-preoccupation and denial (Benningfield, 1994), or exaggerated responsibility for clients or role involvement (Deutsch, 1984).

3. An understanding of how personal history can impact on professional practice. For example, family of origin frameworks (Weinberg & Mauksch, 1991), models of marital or family systems (e.g. circumplex model; Olson, 1993) or attachment theory (Feeney & Noller, 1996) can provide useful insights as to how patterns a supervisee may have learnt in their 'original system' are maintained, often less productively, in their style of interaction in their 'current system'.

Perhaps most importantly, the supervisor needs an understanding of how to create a climate of trust for personal work, and how to focus personal development in supervision clearly on capability and competence. As Bernard (1993) so clearly put it, one of the implications of a psychotherapeutic stance in supervision, regardless of intention, is an emphasis on supervisee 'vulnerabilities' at the potential expense of their strengths.

Table 3.6 Personal development: Supervisee self-test

As a result of professional supervision:

1. I have developed/grown as a person.
2. I have had the opportunity to express negative feelings and frustrations without judgment.
3. I have a better understanding of how my background or personal motivations influence the way I approach my work.
4. I am better able to accurately self-identify my strengths and weaknesses as a practitioner.
5. I have become more open to and comfortable with my feelings.

Technical competence

At the most fundamental level, professionals need to be able to 'do their job' and clients routinely make this assumption. Not surprisingly, early career professionals in particular value the skill development aspects of supervision most highly, and their initial conceptions of competence focus on the notion of a 'sufficiency of skills' (Bernard & Goodyear, 1998).

The way in which one understands or conceives of professional practice directly informs how one thinks about skills and the process of their development. Most commonly, professionals differ in the extent to which they construct practice as technical rationalism or artistry, to use Schön's (1983) terms. Such assumptions inform both supervisees' and supervisors' expectations of the way 'skills' should be 'learnt' in the supervision process. Putnam (1991) and Harris (1993) provide useful analyses of how such conceptions of practice can be applied to help novice practitioners distinguish recipe based, and more complex repertoire based, expectations of learning in supervision.

In addition to developing a shared language regarding conceptions of skill and practices, supervisors seeking to enhance technical competence may benefit from a broad understanding of the range of learning agenda necessary for sound skills formation (*viz.* unlearning, learning and re-learning skills and behaviours) and an appreciation of the affective dimensions of skill development (e.g. supervisees' feelings of failure or shame about not being able to do something they should be able to do).

Table 3.7 Technical competence: Supervisee self-test

As a result of professional supervision:

1. I have learnt specific techniques/methods of diagnosis and assessment.
2. I have learnt specific strategies and techniques for intervention.
3. I have developed my facilitation and process skills.
4. I have developed my ability to document/report my cases or work assignments.
5. I have developed my skills in negotiating and contracting interventions and services.

Processes for application

This chapter has outlined a descriptive model of the domain of learning goals that can be achieved through professional supervision. We hope that this is a practical document—a tool that can be used to enhance supervisory practice. In conclusion, we offer a couple of suggestions for moving this theory into practice. If you are a supervisor, you might use this framework as a stimulus for private reflection. You

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might analyse the extent to which you address the potential domain of supervisory outcomes—paying particular attention to those areas which may be under or overdeveloped in your practice. You might also consider the learning processes that you currently employ in each domain—looking for ways to enhance your approach. At a more general level, you might reflect on the extent to which you currently achieve a 'sense of coherence' or integration in the way you supervise across all the domains and the emphasis on self-regulation in your approach to supervision. If you are a supervisee, you might use this framework to become a more informed consumer of, and active partner in, your supervision. You might reflect on the goals that are important to you and the extent to which these are currently being addressed in supervision. You might also productively consider those domains that seem less relevant to you at the moment and the reasons (both personal and situational) for this. Importantly, you might consider the extent to which you are self-regulatory in your approach to learning in supervision.

Finally, and most ideally, we hope that both supervisors and supervisees will use this framework as a 'shared map' or 'common language' of the range of outcomes they might achieve together. We encourage supervision partners to use this, or their own models, for systematic and conjoint goal setting or review of progress.

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