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*periodical for professional exchange and networking*

## European Journal for Supervision and Coaching

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# Training of supervisors

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## Introduction

In this article some relevant themes for the training of supervisors are discussed. They concern some guiding basic rules and principles, which can improve the effectiveness of education for supervisors. An example of this is the basic rule for the trainer, to train supervision science in a way, that is in line with the required core qualifications of the supervisor-in-training (abbreviated to SIT in single or plural form). Next, the added value of focusing on experiential learning, a powerful learning environment, stimulating self-management and meta supervision is described. In conclusion, the importance of the professional association from an international perspective and the strong link with trainers is emphasized.

## Methodology

An important starting point when training supervisors is the competence profile as described in a European Competence Framework of Supervision and Coaching in ECVision. Supervision and Coaching in Europe: Concepts and Competences (2015). The editors concern supervision and coaching in a way to develop a collective frame of comparability. This competency profile contains all aspects that describe the core qualities of a supervisor and coach that SIT have to acquire during their training process.

What a supervisor will address in a specific supervision situation, depends highly on the supervisee, his question and context. Within competency learning, the trainer of supervisors essentially is doing many of the same tasks that the SIT has to acquire in relation to his supervisees.

Such as guiding learning in an experiential way, steering on self-management, with an eye for context and processes. Always try to “see what is needed” and to have “the skill and the courage” (Zier, 1988) to address these aspects concrete and carefully in the training context. (As a translation of aspects of the concept of competence). The nature of the interaction with SIT is also determined by the methodology of supervision to ensure that the trainer demonstrates what the SIT have to learn becomes: “practice what you preach”.

Basic to every training vision are wishes e.g. to leave everyone in his or her value, to show understanding and respect for each other’s ideas and orientation. Learning the profession is an important learning area in supervision for a supervisor, which is characterized, among other things, by learning about professional handling of the interaction of persons, professional tasks and organizations (ECVision Glossary, 2015). The interaction in supervision is as transparent as possible and not without obligation. During the training this form of interaction will also be experienced at many moments. This requires trainers to have a transparent attitude in the way they interact with each other. From here, a trainer will ‘subtitle’ many of his interventions and often ‘submit’ something instead of making a decision. occurrence of “communicative action”, so that “the art can be copied”. This invites STIs to an open and (self) critical climate in which opinions can be exchanged, investigated, possibly adjusted and adjusted again. In this way, growth of insight and understanding is possible to successfully supervise individuals Development of a professional identity is for a supervisee an important learning area in supervision. This can (among other things) be characterized by learning about professionally dealing with interaction between person, work and organization. The interaction in supervision is as transparent as possible. During training this type of inter-

action can also be experienced in many moments. This requires a transparent trainers attitude in the way they interact with each other and with SIT. A trainer will “clarify” many of his interventions and often “submit” something instead of making a decision, i.e.: “Act communicatively” so that “the art of supervision can be copied”. This invites SIT to an open and (self) critical attitude, to create a climate in which opinions can be exchanged, researched, possibly adjusted and adjusted again. In this way growth of insight and deeper understanding is possible to successfully supervise individuals and groups. Learning in supervision is an iterative process in which a supervisee develops self-awareness by using self-reflective skills. An integral vision focuses on learning and guiding personal development processes: learning with head, heart and hands. Learning through experience is an important learning principle in supervision. At moments of knowledge transfer, the trainer provides substantive knowledge and expertise to the SIO. As much as possible will be linked up with the experience that SIT already have gained in practice. It is therefore preferred that SIT during their supervision training provide supervision in various settings. This means that the SIT mainly learns by connecting experience and reflection to the supervision concepts offered in the training (Bolhuis, 2009; Siegers, 2002; Kessels in Rigter, 1989). Acquisition of all aspects of the competence profile makes it possible that a SIT, aware of one’s own professional identity (consciously) and from a professional conduct (systematic), can lead to ideas about what his or her supervisees can learn (learning hypotheses, in connection with purposeful learning) in an iterative process (process-based). Supervision, as a counseling method, focuses on self-directed experiential learning ensuring that supervisees are capable to reflect on their own performance and to take

responsibility for what he / she discovers in a reflective way. And, like a supervisor methodically should intervene in the supervisee’s learning process, the trainer should do the same, supporting the learning process of the SIT. Many SIT also make a huge step in personal development, which is regularly a welcome side effect of this type of training.

### **Creating a powerful learning environment**

The concept of a powerful learning environment comes from Social Constructivism (Valcke, 2010). In this educational concept it is important to create a learning environment in which SIT are challenged to actively work together in a application-oriented way of learning. This requires a clear view of the functionality of the knowledge base and its application. The most important notion however, is that the SIT actively constructs his own knowledge. This means that we indicate what we observe in our own way and construct our own meaning based on new ideas or experiences. For learning new skills it is therefore important to pay attention to getting acquainted with the new subject matter. In this case: all aspects of supervision, processing these and personal anchoring. In learning new skills we can distinguish two phases: the accommodation phase (introduction) and assimilation phase (familiarize with) (Piaget as quoted in Valcke, 2010). When the SIT is active, he or she learns the best. This requests alignment with (differences in) prior knowledge and interests. This means that trainers construct meaning and learning in the context of a concrete reality of practical supervision (Bolhuis, 2009; Simons, 2000). Acknowledgment of the learning environment is there for important. By addressing subjective and personal experiences behavior in the (learning) situation of SIT can be influenced. This requires self-awareness, knowledge and acceptance of oneself, to be able to work with what

“is” in the learning relationship. In this way STIs learn to anchor their personality in their professional identity as a supervisor.

Another important notion in this concept is that social interaction leads to significant learning. This requires as much as possible to work together in dialogue. This means STIs gradually develop their own perspectives and understanding comes about step by step. This creates a learning environment in which development of intended competences is central (Simons, 2000a). Among other things, independent management and control of their own learning process by the SIT is important. The development of self-management: Self-directed learning emphasizes on learning from experience in concrete work situations rather than on traditional transfer of knowledge and skills.

Important in addition to self-management is providing control: applying structure in the subject matter and thus in the learning process. With the use of methodologies address the personal learning questions that a SIT has. This offers opportunities for insights, gained through experiential learning and self-management. To continuously use your own personal professional practice develops and deepens sustainable learning. To learn from experience is closest to in-depth learning: discovering the deeper meaning of things.

Facilitating self-directed learning is a difficult but at the same time fascinating paradox. Finding ways of adjusting the degree of external control to the degree of self-management of the SIT. In the end, the SIT is responsible for managing the own learning process. At the same time there is the professional task to ensure competence development of a SIT. Self-directed learning processes are never identical and always differentiate in time, pace

or theme. Development questions, for example, can be strongly age-related. A 30-year old SIT simply has other learning questions compared to the one that faces the last decade of his professional career. And often the ages of the supervisor group in-training vary in this age bracket. Learning questions can be highly dependent from how people relate to the past, present and future. The one SIT considers the past as a heavy load, while another would rather focus on the future. Some basic existential themes always play more or less a role in self-directed learning. E.g. recognition, fear, permission to exist or loneliness. It is therefore recommended that processes within the training programs are as much parallel with a regular supervision process. For example, that could mean that you have one lecturer teacher for the group, just like you have a permanent supervisor.

It is important to realize that the learning of skills must go further than “knowing how it should be done”. To make the learning of skills effective expired, it is actually necessary to use a strict instruction schedule. By being involved in small groups together with the subject material - the so-called cooperative learning based on collaboration - SIT are encouraged to actively participate. However, learning in supervision is an iterative process that requires an iterative approach when learning to become a supervisor. This means that during these lessons, concrete situations with as much as possible context authenticity should be imitated. Also the topics and assignments in the supervision training will run as much as possible in parallel with the reality that SIT encounter in their own practice. This is how e.g. contracting fits in the initial phase and evaluation techniques at the end. Thus SIT can focus in a safe “laboratory setting” mainly on learning from intrinsic motivation. Leading them step by step and use their own progressive insights into the next phase of their learning

process. By understanding how everyone’s way of learning can differ, friction and prejudices are being investigated. This offers opportunities to verbalize different experiences, knowledge, interests, actions and thinking. This allows interventions to be more custom made (Ruijters, Simons & Wallenaar, 2014).

In short, exploiting the diversity of SIT makes participatory and meaningful learning possible. This is a powerful tool to enhance the talents and develop the skills of all SIT. Creating a powerful learning environment leads to meaningful-oriented learning, provided that a lifelike context is shaped. The SIO participates and thus self-management becomes possible leading to a higher learning efficiency.

### Implications for instructional design

As mentioned before supervision has an experiential methodology and therefore requires an experiential approach from the trainer. It leads itself to the model of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984). For example, to get started every lesson day begins from the same routine: a group conversation. Every SIT can experience what it’s like to be transparent about what occupies you. The purpose of this is to learn to share the inner world with each other and be completely open. This is important for the SIT because he or she can actively experiment with self-disclosure in a safe learning environment, namely the lesson group. SIT can also compare their own opinions and assumptions with those of others. This stimulates connecting new knowledge to what they already know. From this experience the transfer is made to mental models and literature prepared by the SIT. Hereby it is especially recommended to search for additional sources from their own initial profession and field of work. The idea behind this is the SIT can opt for enrichment literature processed at their

own pace.

It will be clear that the trainer must be familiar with the objectives of the subject, as with prior knowledge, experience, motivation and the likes and dislikes of the SIT. Learning outcomes or performance indicators are set for every course describing what behavior of the SIT is expected about a specific subject. Starting from here first is sought for learning behavior that is most effective for SIT and examined which teaching behavior fits best (Aerts, 2002).

A role play or exercise to try out theoretical notions is an important part of a powerful learning environment. SIT do this by alternating experience in the role of supervisor, supervisee and observer. Hereby the role of observer about a particular methodology component should be guided based on literature. The primary task is group safety to ensure that every SIT dares to show his or her role as a supervisor. For this, it is important, for example, to properly organize the classroom environment. Everyone must be able to see the role-players well. At the same time it is necessary to create distance, so the observers will not be invited to be part of it. In the follow-up discussion, safety to take position and to ask each other critical questions should be guaranteed.

Recurring elements are to exercise methodical skills and reflection on one’s own personal development. To start with the own experiences awareness of behavior will be created. This must prevent the SIT from learning something in the wrong way, which results in proper acting in their own practice. The SIO then can be responsible for his own learning by choosing the proper professional behavior. Everyone has distinguishing personality characteristics which steers his own learning in a way that is familiar to him or her. That’s why it stays important to link new knowledge to existing knowledge. This will

prevent the isolation of new knowledge in the memory where it will have little effect on a person's behavior. For trainers this does not mean that they will repeat theory again, because that would mean the accommodation phase (introduction) is renewed. By asking questions or giving examples in line with previous experiences, it can be checked whether the content is understood. This can provoke discussion or opinions which can be summarized. Thus forming the assimilation phase, or the processing of the subject matter. Of course SIT have to study the subject matter in advance.

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## *Learning through experience is an important learning principle in supervision*

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Building the structure of the class days in the same way and continuing to start experiences in the group conversation, connects as much as possible with experiential learning in supervision. This allows the methodology to "ground" better and learns using their experiences. As a trainer you therefore need a transparent attitude in an open and (self) critical environment. You are role-modelling the way a supervisor should act in supervision, remember? "Practice what you preach"?

### **The surplus value of meta-supervision**

Of course it is important how professional socialization takes place including training as prerequisite for professional competence. Characteristic however in this training is the interaction between theory and practice. The SIT

therefore also serves as an executive supervisor during training. In this way he can gain experiences in "real-life" setting under supervision. Meta or control-supervision is a form of supervision - by a meta or control-supervisor - about this learning practice. It shapes an active relationship between education and professional practice. This is in line with the opinion that learning in supervision is an iterative and cyclical process with an ongoing interaction between reflection and practice. The input of the SIT are experiences and related (complex) action issues. In this way own cases or, in a group those of fellow SIT, are analyzed and discussed and used for their own development as a supervisor. The meta-supervisor can also to some extent "model" the art of supervising. Learning from copying this style can be a powerful learning resource. So SIT develop enthusiasm, because they understand how things can be applied in practice. Because of this method, the hierarchy is lacking in the organization of learning (Clark, 2008), since the required competences are developed on the basis of that professional practice. SIT themselves select their learning tools, depending on of their individual learning needs. The power of having yourself come up with interventions lies in the fact that SIT, as it were, in this way become obliged to test their own reflections against the meta-supervisor or each other. This is how they get it view of multiple interventions and their effects. Visual material helps to literally represent interventions of the SIT in his role as a supervisor. It is a challenge for the SIT to put himself in the here-and-now situation in a supervisor role. This however will create an experience which can trigger reflection in action. For the meta-supervisor, this is an opportunity to assess to what extent aspects of the competences of a supervisor have been acquired. Because also in meta-supervision part of the reflection on and accountability for the quality of supervisory interventions by the SIT become very clear.

The ultimate craftsmanship is determined by finding your own references. Important experiential knowledge that contributes to tailoring supervision to demand and context.

Registration with the national association of supervisors and coaches is an important certification and confirmation of the professionalism of the supervisor. It is therefore of great importance that supervisors keep each other informed about matters that are important to trainers, the national association and ANSE.

### **Conclusion**

In this article I wanted to provide some clarity about instructional design for training of supervisors. Hockney, a very influential English artist, has become famous for spatiality in his paintings. He tried not to make just a single image, but painting the background just as sharp as the foreground. That is also what ANSE did by organizing the first European ANSE Network-Conference for providers of supervision training in 2018. This helps us trainers looking at the world of supervision and coaching from multiple-sided perspective. In this way we try to do justice as much as possible to the rich variety of different forms of counselling. This requires an open and healthy critical attitude to partners and developments. Professional supervision is in line with the supervision question that differs per situation. Supervision has its own specific characteristics. ANSE stands for a world of knowledge and experience to offer possibilities to lifelong personal and professional development. ■

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