

The 6th International Conference Edu World 2014 “Education Facing Contemporary World Issues”, 7th - 9th November 2014

## Supervision in Career Counseling – theoretical framework and practical benefits

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### Abstract

In both training and continuous development of support professionals, such as counselor, psychologist, social worker etc., the supervision process plays a key role. As far as the career counseling is concerned, the issue related to the training of counselors emphasizes the need of approaching supervision and work under supervision as a normal and necessary stage for practitioners' completion training in the field. However, in the Romanian system - where we have no tradition in applying supervision process in the field of career counseling, we firstly need to define the general framework of specific theories and models, setting the stages for supervision process, and finally legitimate the interventions by establishing accreditations bodies for training of the counselors.

This paper is aimed to present relevant aspects of the supervision process in order to facilitate the understanding of its specific stages and practical benefits.

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Peer-review under responsibility of The Association “Education for tomorrow” / [Asociatia “Educatie pentru maine”].

Keywords: supervision process, career counseling, supervision's models, discrimination model, supervisor, supervisee

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### 1. Paper Rationale

In both training and continuous development of support professionals, such as counselor, psychologist, social worker etc., the supervision process plays a key role. According to the most important social and educational standards of practice and the professional codes of ethics, the eligibility for licensure and credentials in the above

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mentioned professions is depending on the completion of practice stages under supervision. As far as the career counseling is concerned, the issue related to the training of counselors emphasizes the need of approaching supervision and work under supervision as a normal and necessary stage for practitioners' completion training in the field. However, in the Romanian system - where we have no tradition in applying supervision process in the field of career counseling - different from other professions which have already validated the standards of practice (i.e. the psychologists), we firstly need to define the general framework of specific theories and models, setting the stages for supervision process, and finally legitimate the interventions by establishing accreditations bodies for training of the counselors.

This paper is aimed to present the most important supervision's models and theories in order to facilitate the understanding of supervision process structure and its practical benefits. Basically, in the supervision process are involved two main actors: the supervisor and the supervisee. During the process, the supervisee is mainly trained by the supervisor in terms of content. Moreover, the entire activity of the supervisee concerning the process and interventions is filtered and interpreted according to the supervisor's experience as well as her/his theoretical orientation and supervision model she/he is influenced by or subscribed to. This is the reason for the theoretical framework outlined above to be considered a building block for the appropriate foundation of developing specific skills and competencies in supervisors' training.

However, the supervision process is necessary for both the supervisor and the supervisee in order for them to become better professionals and, consequently, have better opportunities to carry out successful interventions in counseling. If the benefits are obvious for the supervisee along the practice and experience acquired, from the supervisor point of view the achievement of this process is essential for the understanding and organization of the information furnished by the supervisee. Moreover, these help the supervisor to select the appropriate interventions in order to respond the supervisee's needs and to protect the welfare of her/his clients. There is no doubt that supervision training is part of better professionals' process.

## **2. Paper theoretical foundation and related literature**

A large body of literature identifies supervision as a distinct domain of knowledge and skills in counseling field. J. Bernard, L. Bradley, L. Borders, L. Brown, Watkins, R. Goodyear, E. Holloway, P. Hawkins, R. Shohet, A. Hess, A. Davys and L. Beddoe are just a few of the authors of the last decades whose contributions at the domain's theoretical and practical development have critical significance. Despite the various definitions of supervision, conceptualized as a process, intervention, activity or relationship, there are some common elements which describe the essence of this.

According to J. Bernard and R. Goodyear (2004) "supervision is an intervention provided by a more senior member of a profession to a more junior member or members of that same profession". In fact, we could consider supervision as a triadic relationship involving, not only a senior member (the supervisor) and a junior member (the supervisee), but also the supervisee's client (s), who indirectly is affected by the quality of supervision process. Moreover, as I already mentioned above, the supervisor is focused on the protection of the best interest and welfare of supervisee's client, because, explicitly or implicitly stated, the client plays a key role in supervision process. Hess (1987) indicates that socio-economic status of the client, for example, or his/her area of residence can have implications on setting up the strategies or the type of interventions during the supervision process. It is not the only influence supported by the supervision process. J. Bernard and R. Goodyear (2004) note that, in a similar way, the working style or theoretical affiliation of supervisor or the supervisee level of experience, for instance, could influence the supervision relationship, as well.

On the other hand, the supervision specific context involves only the relationship between supervisor and supervisee. As L. Bradley (2010) describes the process, referring strictly to the supervision process in counseling, "counselor supervision is a didactic and interpersonal activity whereby the supervisor facilitates the provision of feedback to one or more supervisee. This feedback can pertain to the work in supervision, the supervisee(s), the

supervisees' clients, or the supervisor". From this perspective, the Bradley's point of view meets the Bernard and Goodyear's approach, emphasizing the three important characteristics of supervision process, namely: is evaluative, hierarchical and extends over time (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004).

The functions of supervision generally accepted in counseling field are to support the professional development of the supervisee and to protect the welfare of the client. When we are referring to the supervisee's professional development support, we mainly take into consideration several aspects, as following:

- The goals of the supervision process – clarity and specificity in setting them, based on supervisee's needs and expectations for his/her own development and on the supervisor's theoretical affiliation. The supervisor is responsible for designing these specific goals.
- The supervisee's level of competency – in terms of knowledge and skills, the supervisee's competencies should be improved during the supervision process in order to meet the requirements of professional certification (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004). Moreover, beyond the concepts and skills, the sense of self-awareness is, maybe, the most important attribute gained by the supervisee at the same time to his/her competencies' improvement.
- The personal development – even the subject is still under debate in terms of the extent of supervisor's influence, the both theoreticians and practitioners of the counseling domain agree that personal and professional development is strongly connected.

Not the last, the affective dimension of supervision holds a central role in setting the stages of supervision process. Once identified, supervisors need to process these emotions prior to any other interventions, trying to normalizing and validating the anxiety and frustrations of novice supervisee. In this way, supervisors help supervisees to manage the emotional context and to improve their ability to focus on their clients' problems. There are strong feelings that might occur in the counseling context, working with clients with different backgrounds and needs, and these feelings may be addressed quickly, as much as possible, in order to prevent burn outs, even we are talking about counsellors or clients.

Supervision models and theories set up the general framework based on which the process of supervision is structured. They can help supervisors to conceptualize the supervision interventions and provide necessary grounding for making appropriate decisions, taking into consideration not only the whole picture of process, but also the each aspect involved in this process. The content of the supervision session, as well as the process itself, are the both significant references for the supervisor in terms of useful information provided, referring to the developmental level of the supervisee, the outline of needed intervention, the risk level of the case etc. In order for the supervisor to act for protecting the welfare of the supervisee's client, he/she should be very careful about what supervisee says, how says it, why chose a technique of intervention or another. In other words, the supervisor filters the information the supervisee offered to him/her, using it according to the models and theories he/she values most, trying to support the professional growth of the supervisee.

Bernard and Goodyear note that supervision models could be classified into three important categories, as follows: psychotherapy –based models; developmental models; socio-role models (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004).

The discrimination model, developed by J. Bernard in the 1970's, is probably the most popular supervision model. The discrimination model is integrated in Social Role models of supervision, which are focused on the idea that the supervision process is major influenced by supervisor's experience gained in his/her previous roles as teacher, counselor or consultant. This model can be used by any supervisor in any stage of counselor/supervisee development.

As J. Bernard (1997) herself declared, "the discrimination model was conceived as a teaching tool. In the mid-1970s when I joined the Counselor Education faculty at Purdue University, I was asked to assume primary responsibility for the supervision course. Having recently received my doctorate, I was close enough to the experience of assuming the role of supervisor for the first time to understand my students' need for an aid to organize their initial supervision interventions. My intent was to present them with the simplest of maps to direct their activities as supervisors-in-training. As I attempted to reduce supervision to its simplest components, it

seemed to me that supervisors must decide what to address with the trainee and find the most functional style to do so. These two axes became the basis for the discrimination model". Her supervision model is based on a large body of evidences, being comprehensive and systemic. The central idea is the need of supervisor to discriminate between possible roles he/she takes over during the supervision session. In this way, J. Bernard directly relates the supervision to the supervisee's activity, focusing on the supervisee in action. This is the reason why, she considered that there are three focus areas of the model: process/intervention skills, conceptualization skills and personalization skills, in order to make the discrimination model functional for practitioners. These categories of skills are related to the supervisee's areas of expertise in counseling, each category describing a particular set of skills, from those indicating basic attending skills or posture etc. – interventions skills, to those which support the supervisee's ability to be open to self-introspection and self-awareness – personalization skills.

Beyond these categories of skills, Bernard identified three roles of supervisor during the supervision process: teacher, counselor and consultant.

"When the supervisor assumes the teacher role, he or she takes responsibility for determining what is necessary for the trainee to learn in order to become more competent." (Bernard, 1997). Moreover, in this role, the supervisor teaches to the supervisee new skills and techniques by playing roles, explores supervisee's learning style, recommends readings, offers feedback, and not the last, he or she evaluates the supervisee's level of performance. "When the supervisor assumes the counselor role, he or she is typically addressing the interpersonal or intrapersonal reality of the trainee." (Bernard, 1997). This role, which is considered the most challenging, implies the use of specific counseling knowledge and skills. The supervisor becomes a model for supervisee in demonstrating different techniques used in counseling sessions. "When assuming the consultant role, the supervisor becomes a resource for the trainee but encourages the trainee to trust his or her own thoughts, insights, and feelings about the work with the client. The consultant role can be the most difficult to implement because of the autonomy it requires of the trainee." (Bernard, 1997). This role emphasizes the collaborative nature of the relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee (Borders & Brown, 2005).

All these roles integrated in the Discrimination Model are important to be discussed and analyzed by the supervisors and supervisees in their common sessions, in order for each of them, supervisor and supervisee, to be aware of those roles power. Supervisors, generally, have preferences for a certain role, but in practice they apply a whole range of roles' combined characteristics in conducting the supervision sessions.

In Romanian career counseling system, where the number of supervisors is very small and the supervision training programs should be the starting point for the expected change in counseling status as profession, using the Discrimination Model is a big step forward in order to increase the counselors' professional development.

Complementary to the Discrimination Model, the Developmental Models of supervision use various criteria for classifying stages of counselors' general level of development. The number of developmental stages varies from a model to another and the criteria for their classification, as well. The most common criteria take into consideration (Szilagyi & Stanciu, 2011):

- the autonomy and awareness/self-awareness;
- competence, emotional awareness, respect for individual differences; personal motivation and professional ethics;
- reflectivity on skills, personal issues and conceptualization etc.

However, it is important that any supervisor has a clear understanding of the main aspects of these models. It is also important for the supervisor to be aware of idea that the process of development starts in early stages of training and continues across the professional career. During this continuum of professional development, the supervisee/counselor gains experience and pass from the initial stage of development to the intermediate and final stage, moving slowly from a stage to another, step by step, reaching gradually more advanced levels of development.

The supervisee' characteristics for the Initial stage of development are related to a limited training and experience balanced by a high motivation, a high level of anxiety regarding the professional specific issues

balanced by enthusiasm and a big amount of time dedicated to research and professional readings. Validation and feedback are needed in this stage for growing self-confidence and self-awareness of supervisee. In the Intermediate stage of development, the main feature describing the situation is the conflict: conflict between being dependent on supervisor and being autonomous. The supervisees are more confident in their abilities, including empathy for their clients. In the Final stage of development, the supervisees are confident in their own professional analysis and decisions, demonstrate initiative and responsibility, self-awareness for their approach to practice, using a good understanding of learning concept related to the supervision process.

Based on the supervisees' attributes described above, the whole process of their professional and personal development becomes a strong working alliance between supervisor, counselor and client, which extends over time, reinforcing with an increased authenticity and consistency reflected in practice.

Supervision's theories and models have significant relevance for supervisor in the first stage of the process, when the information collected from the supervisee needs to be organized and analyzed appropriately. For the general understanding of the supervisee's case, this information influences the intervention's choice, the theoretical pattern approached in order to satisfy the supervisee's needs for validation and feedback. By knowing the characteristics of the supervisee, in different stages of development described above, the supervisor's mission is facilitated and his/her roles are more emphasized.

### **3. Author's contribution on the existing theory and practice in educational field**

As I have already mentioned, in Romania, the career counseling system has no long tradition in terms of standardization or applying a code of ethics. We are still debating, still discussing about most appropriate approach for professionalization the career counseling, trying to impose a structure, a general framework, a national professional association addressed mainly to the practitioners of the domain. From this perspective, the most important thing remains the training of counsellors, and after all, the training of supervisors.

From my point of view, for development of the career counseling's domain, we need to have its representatives involved and engaged in this process of construction. Theoreticians of the field, as well as, the most experienced practitioners play a central role in conceptualizing the system and designing the monitoring and evaluation procedures for training the professionals. We, as career counseling professionals, need commitment, enthusiasm and time for convince each person working in the educational system to become aware of career counseling benefits and fight against skepticism about the worth of career counseling goals and objectives.

On the one hand, we have a tremendous need for training of career counselors. In this process of delivering specific training programs are involved mainly universities, ONG's and local teachers houses, each of them at different extents of professionalism and quality of services. The duration of training programs varies from several days/weeks to several months. Obviously, the depth of contents' approach varies accordingly, as well as, the consistency of the training program, which might be a simple and focused training course or integrated into a specific bachelor or master program, correlated with other subjects, relevant for the general understanding of the domain.

On the other hand, at the same level of awareness the need of training, we notice the need of supervisors' training, in order for them to train as many as possible counselors, trying to normalize the existing situation in the counseling system, where the lack of validation and feedback on the conducted interventions influences directly, not only the quality of the counseling process, but also the confidence/self-confidence of the counselor.

As a trainer involved in the both, career counseling and supervision processes, working in the largest technical university in Romania – University Politehnica of Bucharest, and coordinating the university's career counseling center, I have attended or coordinated numerous seminars, workshops and training programs specific to the career counseling domain. Not the last, as practitioner, I have conducted many individual or group counseling sessions, having now the maturity to share my professional experiences in the field. In the next paper's paragraphs, I will

describe two such experiences, one related to the counselors' training issue and another to the supervisors' training.

First experience refers to one of the most consistent career counselors' training programs, in terms of the content and assumed objectives, developed in many countries worldwide, namely the Global Career Facilitator Development (GCDF) program. This program is developed by the Center for Credentialing and Education (CCE) from United States of America and is aimed to offer country-specific standardization and recognition to career development professionals from 16 countries worldwide, including Romania. The program is customized to respond different nations' characteristics, taking into consideration their specific needs to approach different topics according to the different countries' reality.

In Romania, the authorized GCDF training provider is NBCC-Romania (National Board of Certified Counselors – Romania), which is part of the European network run by EBCC (European Board for Certified Counselor, Lisbon), having a consultative and educational/training role in supporting career counsellors' professional development.

The GCDF program is not only a training program, but also, more important, a certification program. The career consultant is the graduate of the GCDF program. The duration is 120 training hours and the program is based on a manual approved by the CCE – Europe. The career consultant's twelve areas of expertise covers, in terms of knowledge and skills, the following major topics (Szilagyi, 2008):

- Career Development Models, referring to the general understanding of career development theories, models and techniques, and their application to the specific national background;
- Helping skills – basic skills of communication in order to facilitate career development processes;
- Diversity in Counseling – skills for adapting specialized counseling services to the diversity of human nature, to the special needs of various groups of population;
- Assessment skills – how to use under supervision, informal assessments in order to help clients involved in career development interventions, to make their own decisions, informed and appropriate;
- Technical/digital skills – understanding and use of computer applications, related to the career development field;
- Labour market – how to approach the labour market, globally and nationally, according to the specific resources, opportunities and trends in the occupational domains;
- Employability skills – how to prepare a portfolio for job searching, strategies and specific techniques for different vulnerable groups on the labour market, as women or universities' graduates, for instance;
- Training clients and peers – design and implementation of specific training programs;
- Promotion and Public relations – design and implementation of specific strategies for promoting career counseling services;
- Management skills – program/project management, communication management, time management, stress management;
- Supervision – be aware the situations when supervision is needed and how to proceed it;
- Ethical and Legal issues – be informed about the regulations and act according to the GCDF Code of Ethics.

As one of the master trainers of the GCDF training program I try in practice to keep the balance among these areas of expertise, reinforcing the need of basic knowledge and skills for every counselor. At the same time, based on these twelve areas of competencies, counselors develop and consolidate a reflexive, systemic way of thinking, well oriented in situations and self-confident in interventions.

The second experience is related to the supervision process and to the training programs on supervision specifically. As I already mentioned, in Romanian career counseling system there are very few people working as supervisors, because of the low level of interest about the supervision process and the low level of awareness as far as the need and the practical benefits of supervision are concerned, as well. In this context, the initiative of organizing a training program on supervision process represents a big step forward in order to train supervisors working in career counseling. I was one of these supervisors, contributing in this way to the gradually



development of the career counseling domain. The supervision training program, entitled “Basic of supervision in helping professions”, is delivered by the same Romanian private provider as GCDF program, NBCC-Romania, in collaboration with the EBCC. The training program covered the following topics: models and types of supervisions, roles and relationships in supervision, legal and ethical issues in supervision, multicultural issues and interventions in supervision, professional development of supervisee. This is an introductory course, which combines the theoretical framework and practice, a valuable instrument for any counselor, who searches for answers or for clarifying specific contents or for validating experiences in the field. The both training program mentioned above are, at the same time, certification programs, offering to the attendants the possibility to practice as career counsellor/consultant or career supervisor, immediately after the graduation. My belief as supervisor and trainer in career counseling training programs is that supervision is a core competence that should be included in the education and training of all the future helping professionals, including the career counsellors.

#### **4. Author's contribution on the topic**

At this section I propose to analyze an useful tool for any counselor or supervisor, at the beginning of a counseling or supervision process, namely the professional disclosure statement. In our system, no matter if you are practitioner of counseling or supervision domain, this procedure is usually ignored. In fact, this statement is not more than an informal contract between counselor or supervisor and the client, respectively, the supervisee. In this way, the counselor or the supervisor is stimulated to inform the client/supervisee about some key aspects referring to:

- his/her professional training in the field,
- theoretical background, training and experience;
- approaches, orientation and models used in interventions;
- counseling/supervisory relationship;
- confidentiality;
- schedule and fees;
- emergency contact;
- professional code of ethics to which he or she adheres.

Starting from this outline, I encourage my students I work with in the GCDF certification program or under supervision in career counseling to use this professional disclosure statement, adapting the format to the specific need of the process engaged. As supervisor, I also use this kind of statement, trying to normalize the relationship with the supervisee, in order to make themselves in charge with their own learning/supervision experiences. But, the most important part is to use this statement as a guarantee of the professionalism of the services provided, as counselor or supervisor.

An example of the adaptation of the statement's general structure to the counselor's need, in order to keep the procedures as simple and as transparent as possible, we present below: general description of the competencies' area; brief presentation of the supervision process, from the administrative issues to the theories and concepts; confidentiality's issues and keeping the records form; fees; general information about the schedule, contact and emergency situations. A special remark is about the specific procedure for the situation when the client is not satisfied by the counselor's services. In this final section of general information I have added the link for a possible contact to the supervisor or another professional, preferable member of a recognized professional body – organization or association, who practices under a Code of Ethics' stipulations.

In the supervision process, the professional disclosure statement should include, additionally, a special section about the feedback and evaluation specific procedures.

To my opinion, using in practice such instruments as the professional disclosure statement and a specific layout and structure for the record's forms is for the benefit of all parties involved in counseling or supervision process, counselor, supervisor, client or supervisee. Each of them learns or validates experiences, but obviously,

gains confidence, competencies, awareness, autonomy and reflectivity. And that means the educational and motivational goals are achieved.

## 5. Conclusion

Borders and Brown (2005) underline the importance of supervision saying that “Supervision is a place where a living profession breathes and learns. Supervision can be a very important part of taking care of oneself, staying open to new learning and an indispensable part of ongoing self-development, self-awareness and commitment to learning”. The importance of supervision is also reflected by its recognition as a distinct domain, founded mainly on a consistent amount of empirical and conceptual work. At the same time, there is a formative dimension of this process, perceived as a pedagogical tool, which holds a central role in all helping professions mentioned (i.e. psychologist, counselor, social worker etc.). From this perspective, supervision has often been associated with prevention of burn out or a better professional performance.

The developmental approach of supervision in career counseling and the Discrimination Model (J. Bernard in the 70's), presented in this paper, are only two major dimensions of the theoretical framework which focus mainly on reflexivity, self-awareness, competence and autonomy, respect for individual differences and continuous reflection etc. From the practical benefits perspective, understanding the importance of supervision process - with specific reference to the career counseling area - is the key issue for the improvement of competences developed of practitioners in this field.

However, the question remains: are the major models of supervision mutually exclusive, or do they share common ground? Obviously, the models act complementary and attend systematically to: a safe supervisory relationship, task-directed structure, methods addressing a variety of learning styles, multiple supervisory roles, and communication skills enhancing listening, analyzing, and elaboration. As with any model, the personal model of supervision of each counselor will continue to grow, change, and transform as you gain experience and insight.

There are no doubts, in the countries where the helping professions are well regulated, supervision is one of the most frequent activities of the helping professionals. In Romania, these issues are still under debate, and the professional and certification recognized bodies are in their progress of development. Step by step, practice of supervision in career counseling becomes a guarantee of professionalism, motivating the counselors to develop a higher level of expertise.

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