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Abstract: This article focuses on group supervision, inviting readers to take an interest in two ongoing processes: the group process, i.e., the stages of group development, and the integration of the learning process. These processes occur as the group is reflecting on issues brought to it. Supervisees do not realize that they encounter, and are even often affected by, the intertwining of these two processes; however, supervisors should be aware of this in their desire to guide their supervisees skilfully.

In addition to presenting an explanation of these processes, this article highlights conditions of success for group supervision: clarification of the institution's mandate and the status of the supervisor, elements to be considered when setting up group supervision, the importance of negotiating the contract, and the characteristics of the group at work. Although no existing theory integrates the entirety of the practice of group supervision, we have attempted to demonstrate links between these two processes by drawing on both our own experience and a conceptual framework. We believe that our conception of group supervision is worth validating through future research.

Sommaire Le présent article illustre comment les processus d'intégration des apprentissages et les phases d'un développement d'un groupe s'entrecroisent et s'interinfluencent dans un groupe de supervision. Après avoir traité desdits processus, les auteurs décrivent les principaux phénomènes issus de cet amalgame. L'article se termine en décrivant les conditions de réussite d'une supervision de groupe.

Keywords: Integration, group supervision, learning process, stages of group of development

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Address for correspondence: School of Social Work, University of Quebec, 455, Blvd, René-Lévesque-E., C.P. 8888, Montréal, Québec H3C 3P8. berteau.ginette@uqam.ca It is our many years of experience as social workers, field supervisors, group leaders, and professors that have led to our involvement in group supervision. Inspired by both the richness and the limitations of this modality of supervision, we present here a theoretical reflection that draws upon our two main areas of expertise: social work in groups and field supervision. We hope this analysis will bring to light commonalities between the stages of group development and the learning process.

Introduction

The pertinence of group supervision is widely recognised (Bernard & Goodyear, 1992; Gagnier & Bigras, 2000; Arvidsson et al, 2001; Bogo et al, 2004; Lindsay, 2005). Group supervision creates a natural environment for peer learning. It allows supervisees to develop their skills and reflect on their actions, increase their self-awareness, enhance their sense of security, and improve their interpersonal functioning. Participating in group supervision also helps them to consolidate their professional identity, creates a heightened sense of professional solidarity, and contributes to improved client services.

Nonetheless, individual or dyadic supervision has in general continued to be the privileged modality in the field of social work. Kadushin (2002) believes this is due to the fact that dyadic supervision most closely resembles how professionals usually work, especially social workers, nurses, and so on. Group supervision has long been perceived as a complement to or a variant of dyadic supervision (Glikauf-Hughes & Campbell, 1991; Bernard & Goodyear, 1992).

Brandford and McVicker's (1999) studies on group supervision revealed that it is an under-utilised modality for training students and professionals. In general, group supervision has failed to catch the attention of researchers (Wise & Lowery, 1989; Bernard & Goodyear, 1992; Gagnier & Bigras, 2000; Bogo et al, 2004; Lindsay, 2005). To further add to this picture, no specific theoretical framework has been developed. Group supervision practices are thus often based on intuitive and common sense approaches. As a result, group supervision and its modalities remain poorly used and badly done (Glickauf-Hughes & Campbell, 1991; Holloway & Johnston, 1985; Prieto, 1996;

Bogo et al., 2004). Few studies have been conducted that could help us get a better grasp of the complexity and the specific characteristics of the group process, particularly as linked to the developmental stages of supervision groups (Bogo et al, 2004).

The past few years in Quebec, however, have seen a resurgence of interest in the utilisation of group supervision for both the practical training of social work students and the supervision of workers in practice. This momentum has spurred us to think about theoretical foundations that could maximise the contribution of group supervision.

In this spirit, this article aims to provide some of the missing theoretical support by combining two processes present in group supervision: the stages of group development and the integration of the learning process. First, we will describe our conceptual framework and define its key concepts. Then, we will illustrate how the two processes are interwined, by elaborating on the power and control stage of the group process and the exposition phase of the integration of the learning process. Finally, we will address the conditions of success for group supervision.

Definitions

We shall start with definitions of the terms and concepts used in this article: group supervision, group process, learning process, supervisor, and supervisee.

We define group supervision as

a process of ongoing dialogue for the purpose of reflecting upon professional practices. The goals, the experiences, the resources of both supervisees and supervisor, indeed the group process itself -- all make their contribution toward the goal of providing quality services as well as meeting the needs for skills development in this learning community. (Berteau & Villeneuve, 2005)

Supervision is a process of ongoing dialogue in the sense that it occurs on a regular basis and provides continuity in the pursuit of goals¹. Distinctive to group supervision is how each member participates by using his or her knowledge, skills, and experiences in reflecting on the topic at hand. With its multiple interrelationships, the group becomes an additional medium to facilitate learning. Supervision thus ensures that supervisees receive support in bridging the gap between their current skills and the demands of the job. At the same time, it takes place in the context of an organisation responsible for providing quality services with an ethically-based approach.

The primary participants in supervision are students in field placement or professionals who come together to reflect on their practice. They benefit from each others' experiences and questions, as well as from each others' responses and varied points of view. These are all sources of learning and enrichment for a group whose members are either in training or in professional practice.

The *supervisor* is a person placed in an organisational context and who is assigned to support student trainees or professionals. The supervisor's responsibilities are to plan meetings, facilitate group and learning processes, support supervisees in linking theory and practice, serve as an intermediary between supervisees and the organisation, and, in some cases, evaluate their skills.

The *group process* as an essential aspect of group supervision is a rather overused notion. Perhaps the following definition can help us to understand why this is so.

Movement, change, experience – that is, it takes in everything going on within the group, everything that is coming to life and evolving. This therefore refers to everything that participants go through, feel, experience both within themselves and within the group during the session, as they work or discuss its content and the job. The notion of process responds to the how and why of group behaviours. (Richard, 1995, p. 12)

In short, the supervisor keeps track of not only what is going on among group members during supervisory sessions (members' roles, their communication, etc.), but also the task to be accomplished and what they need to learn to develop the requisite skills for their professional practice.

Finally, the *integration of the learning process* is defined as a progressive and interactive flow between the subject matter to be learned, the learner, and the supervisor, which allows a person to develop skills

and gain knowledge, particularly in the group supervision setting. The integration of the learning process would thus be the set of methods used to change what we know and what we are in order to become more differentiated, more ordered, and better organised. The aim is to help the person in their search for meaning, to discern and be aware of the work to be done (Noiseux, 1998; Legendre, 2000; Villeneuve, 1991).

Conceptual framework

As previously mentioned, the group supervision literature draws its inspiration primarily from individual and dyadic supervision methods. Commonly-used perspectives in the human sciences and education, such as systemic, constructivist, and cooperative learning approaches (Howden & Kopiec, 2000) enable us to see how individuals, through a process of reflecting upon their practice and problem-solving (Poirier Proulx, 1999), build on their current experience, systematise their knowledge, and develop new skills.

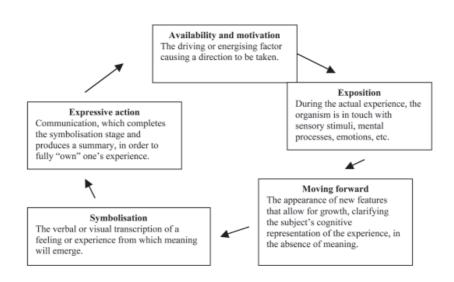
These are the perspectives that will guide our theoretical discussion. Here, the aim is to maximise the potential of group supervision as a place of learning and mutual support for the development and provision of quality services. We will begin by laying out Villeneuve's (1991) phases of the learning process and Anderson's (1997) stages of group development, followed by an illustration of how these phases and stages intermingle in group supervision.

The learning process and the group development process

The learning process

The integration of the learning process occurs in a sequence of five phases, as illustrated in Figure 1 (overleaf.

Group meetings depend on a quality presence and involvement on the part of supervisees, in presenting issues of their own as well as taking part in discussions of someone else's experience. For this to occur, their availability -- mental, physical, and time -- must be taken into account. Supervisees have to be intrinsically motivated, so that Figure 1. The integation of the learning process (Villeneuve, 1991)



they feel they have a stake in the experience and will want to apply what they have learned when they are back on the job (*availability and motivation phase*).

Reflecting upon practices is at the core of the supervision activity. In the *exposition phase*, supervisees share their issues, are attentive to their physical and emotional reactions with regard to the desired objective as well as to what they are experiencing at that moment, e.g., differences in perception or points of view. This phase quite often arouses feelings of discomfort in participants, mainly because they are facing the unknown and are inexperienced.

Supervisees actively continue to process their cognitive representations using information from the preceding phase. It is by staying in touch with the content to be learned that a representation is constructed or modified. The supervisor's role is to encourage this process of exploration, as well as the expression of ideas or new representations, in spite of the temporary confusion of supervisees (moving forward phase). Meaning-making and conceptualisation (*symbolisation phase*) come gradually as long as the meaning of the experience is not lost. When meaning emerges, it produces an 'aha!' experience; something meaningful is now understood. The supervisee experiences a lowering of physiological tension, even if the issue has not been completely resolved. The supervisor's feedback helps supervisees to make links between these discoveries and certain theories.

Expressive action, the fifth phase, permits supervisees to consolidate, articulate, and even generalise the sum total of what they have learned. Putting it into words or dialogue encourages supervisees to take a step back from the experience. It also allows one of the goals of group supervision to be met: 'to induce (beginning with an issue brought by the supervisee) a similar experience among (or with) others, to transmit that which has been learned' (Clouzot & Bloch, 2001).

The stages of group development².

Among the varied phenomena that make up the group process, we find the developmental stages of a supervision group to be of particular interest. Also known as developmental steps or a maturation process, the stages of group development are defined as 'periods where we are able to differentiate or perceive stages of a process of development, growth, and change within the group' (Northen, 1969, quoted in Leblond 1996, p. 10). Various typologies of these stages have been developed, from which we have chosen to use Anderson's (1984, 1997) five stages of group development. Even though this appears to be a somewhat linear typology, it can aid us in interpreting the group process and helps the supervisor to see where the group is in its development. One merit of this typology is that it was especially designed for social work with groups. The five stages will occur in a supervision group inasmuch as the number of participants is limited (4 to 8 persons), membership is fairly stable, and the group meets regularly. Each stage is characterised by certain anticipated behaviours, and these are experienced in a unique manner by each group and each group member.

The *trust stage* corresponds to the beginning of the group. It is characterised by attachment to and appropriation of common goals and an agreement to begin the experience. The trust stage is marked by hesitation and ambivalence. Members are cautious about their behaviour, evaluate themselves on external elements, seek the approval of others, and try to find their place in the group. They find it difficult to recognise the commonalities in their collective experiences. They are also dependent on the supervisor and wait for her or him to decide on the objectives, the program of activities, or the actions to be undertaken.

Autonomy, also known as the power and control stage, is a crucial period where the group becomes structured as such. This second stage is distinguished by power and control issues both among the members and between them and the supervisor. They are trying to figure out their status, their role, and their power of influence. A network of interpersonal affinities is taking shape. Subgroups form and it is easy to see who the isolated members are. Also on hand are defensive reactions against possible attacks by the group and a fear of intimacy. A win-lose model is used in decision-making and conflict resolution. The group's culture becomes defined by established values and behaviour patterns to be affirmed within the group. Supervisors are often challenged on: their expertise, the coherence of what they say and what they do, their loyalty both to the group and the organisation, their sense of fairness, their ability to set and maintain boundaries, and how flexible they are regarding the initial contract made with the group.

The third stage, *Autonomy closeness*, is characterised by an intensified interpersonal commitment, a growing sense of belonging, and cohesion. Trust is established and each member acquires importance in the eyes of the group, which is becoming a reference group for all of them. Individuation is put aside in favour of a strong identification with the group. A system of mutual aid emerges. This is the stage where the supervision group's resources and the forces of change are most clearly manifested.

During *interdependence*, members realise the importance of the group's contribution to their development and the importance of their participation in the group's development. They each have their personal learning objectives and they know that the group is able to help them reach these objectives. At this stage, the group is characterised by spontaneity and creativity as well as ongoing mutual assistance and problem solving. The group provides an opportunity for behaviour rehearsal with peers; individuals are able to test changes in behaviours and apply new knowledge both within and outside the group.

The fifth stage is *separation*, a period of assessment and evaluation, as well as of mourning. During this stage, a variety of reactions occurs: regressing into behaviours that had been resolved during supervision; sadness and anger because an enriching experience is ending, watching their network break up, and denial about the termination of the group. There are also positive feelings at this stage, such as a desire to get involved elsewhere, to progress further, to create other kinds of networks, and pride and joy at their growth during the period of supervision.

Intertwined processes

To illustrate how these two group supervision processes are combined, we have chosen the second stage of group development (autonomy) and the second phase of the learning process (exposition). This stage and phase were specifically selected because they represent the most crucial period for most people involved. We have given some examples to describe the intertwining of the two processes, but because each group is unique, these are not intended to be generalisations. They are provided for the purpose of identifying and illustrating some of the situations we have come across.

In taking a closer look at both the *autonomy, power, and control* stage of group development and the *exposition* phase of the integration process (which we consider to be the stage and phase closest to each other), we see that one of the primary characteristics of the autonomy stage is members' assertion of their differences. Supervisees may feel the need to show others that they are different, both as individuals and in their learning needs. To set themselves apart, some may adopt an attitude of: 'I already know the answer, so what am I doing here?' while others might say: 'Why should I comment on my situation since it's different?'

Getting involved, sharing experiences, expressing their points of view, and being confronted with disparate ideas invariably engenders in members a need to maintain their professional self-image or a desire to protect themselves from having to change. In a supervision context, as people share situations in which they feel more or less effective, they may fear being judged or evaluated. This reaction is

quite 'normal', since it is a way to protect one's vulnerability within the group.

Their awareness of the disconnect between what they wish to do and what they actually do can cause members to swing like a pendulum between dependence on both the supervisor and the group ('We need to hear from everyone before we can take action') and independence ('We did it on our own before we were supervised' or 'I'll do it my own way, and after that we'll see...').

During this stage of the group process, power is a dominant theme. In some cases, supervisees may question the supervisor's authority by putting all that the supervisor says or does under a magnifying glass or by discussing what the supervisor says or does, or by waiting for the supervisor to dictate the steps to take: 'Tell me what to do' or 'I tried what you suggested and it doesn't work.' So for some supervisees, reaching autonomy means that they have exceeded the standards.

This group dynamic may also be found again during the exposition phase. Some supervisees may seek to conceal their discomfort when they experience a gap between what they had set out to do and what they actually did. To protect their vulnerability, they may try to shift the blame either onto the supervisor or the presumed irrelevance of the supervision and its activities.

The power games played among supervisees, though essential to the structuring process of the group, may detract from the learning objectives. In some groups, competition may be present among group members, reflecting their feelings of insecurity. A fair amount is at stake with this dynamic, because the group climate can determine whether or not supervisees find their place within the group. This could also affect the group's progression to future stages. Change creates discomfort and yet it is this discomfort that leads to change.

Supervisors do not have an easy task at this point, especially if they are just starting out with group supervision. It would be to their advantage if they could understand and recognize these dynamics, decode them as normal reactions, and assist the group in appropriating its own functioning. It is expected that supervisors will be firm regarding the established rules yet at the same time be open to questioning these rules. If they find themselves with a group that challenges their authority, they will have to deal with this group by

avoiding over-exerting their power or abdicating their authority. If needed, they can renegotiate the contract with the group. Regardless of the group dynamics at this stage, supervisors remain the guardians of security and harmony. They have the responsibility to protect group members against possible attack from other members by creating a safe space where individuals can express themselves freely.

The supervisor also is called upon to objectify the situation, which facilitates the supervision task. Among others, it allows the supervisor to bear in mind what belongs to the normal progression of the learning and group processes. It allows him or her to take advantage of the opportunity to learn about groupwork and also to transfer knowledge concerning day-to-day work. Furthermore, being objective helps the supervisor to confront and overcome resistance in the group. Observation of oscillations within the group, power dynamics, and the clash of ideas will guide the supervisor's opinions and actions.

Table 1 (overleaf) provides an overview of the intertwining of the two processes.

Conditions for success

Drawing this parallel between the two processes sheds light on the kinds of dynamics encountered in group supervision. Our illustration can help the supervisor to better understand what is happening in a group and to help the group and supervisees to overcome impasses. However, it is not enough just to have an understanding of the group processes. If group supervision is going to be more optimally used, certain conditions must be present.

We will elaborate briefly on those conditions that we believe to be most important in the evolving experience of the supervision group. Our discussion of the specifics will focus on stage 2 and phase 2. The tools for achieving the conditions of success are: a clear institutional mandate, a well-defined status for the supervisor, setting the scene for group supervision, negotiating the contract, and the characteristics of the working phase.

	Phases	ses		Internal and external learning process
Trust	Confusion between personal and group goals People sound out the group, seek a place, want to influence the group's	Availab-ility and	••	Identification of needs and objectives Temporal availability and openness to the experience (exploration of
•	 Group is hesitant and is dependent on the facilitator 'Is this going to bring me anything?' 		•	activities) Trust relationship and a conducive climate "This interests me and I feel like I'm available for'
Autonomy	Tentative commitment and relationships Tentative commitment and relationships Group's concerns turn towards power, control, domination Satus, roles and hierarchy are being defined Possibility of renegotiating the contract Where is my power (role, leadership) and what is the power (standards, leadership vs. authority) of the group?"	Exposition		Participation in learning with one's entire being (mind, body, emotion Willing to commit oneself, although the learner feels there is a gap between what holeshe wants to do and what he/she is able to do Presence of an authority-trust polarity Affective and cognitive dimensions present themselves 'To what am I committing myself?'
Closenessor •	Impression that the group is becoming an entity Deemend commitment	Moving	•	Growth and clarification of the representation of the experience and having access to internal images
	experiences and feelings dlegiality ence		••	Accessibility to referential materials Collection and synthesising of the information 'It's as though'
Interdep-		Symboli-		Seeking the meaning of one's own experience
• •	 Concerned with linking what has been experienced in the group with the goals to be reached on and problem-solving 'I'm making a difference in this group and this group is making a difference in my work.' 	sation	••	Emergence of new meaning and the need to share it Feedback allows for corroboration 1 understand and it was so simple!'
Separation	Feelings of competence if Possible regression or expressions of anger, depression, denial 'I'm satisfied with myself, but it's sad, it's too bad that our collaboration is ending here.'	Expressive action		Communicating the experience Summarising one's experience Consolidating and generalising the experience 'Now, I can say or do'

able 1: Stages of group development and phases of the learning p

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Institutional mandate

If it is to succeed, group supervision has to take place within a clear framework. For example, any organisational issues as well as the administrative and professional reasons for establishing the group must be identified. Gowdy and Freeman (1993) suggest involving future supervisees in the creation of the supervision group and ensuring that supervisees' goals are compatible with organisational objectives.

Along these lines, we encourage supervisees to remain conscious of their commitment, as much to themselves as to their institutionemployer. By so doing, they are contributing to the quality of services provided by the institution. Furthermore, a clear mandate can facilitate the group's work, particularly during stage 2 and phase 2 as described earlier. It allows the group to appropriate the supervision group's goals for itself right from the start. Should the participants end up questioning and challenging everything, the mandate provides a base on which one can negotiate.

Status of the supervisor

The supervisor's status and roles must be clarified. Lack of clarity in this area can create confusion and place the supervisor in a precarious situation. Furthermore, the supervisor's supervisory abilities must be recognised by the group with which she or he will be working. The supervisor's objectives also need to be compatible with those of the group (Gowdy & Freeman, 1993). We can readily imagine that the challenges that are always possible at stage 2 and phase 2 do not occur, which is the major advantage of having clarified the supervisor's role and status. Our experience has shown us, oddly enough, that some groups at this point can forget that they had already entered into agreements.

The establishment of supervision

The establishment of supervision must be done in a rigorous manner to avoid potential pitfalls that could undermine the support, dialogue, and mutual aid supervisees bring to each other. This crucial step thereby requires an astute analysis of supervisees' needs. All potential supervisees must attend a pre-group meeting to identify their needs and concerns. According to Toseland and Rivas (1998), this is an important meeting and it is the first step in the creation of a learning contract (Berteau & Villeneuve, 2005).

It is also important to pay attention to the composition of the group as it is being established. On the one hand, beginners' groups should be homogenous with respect to skill levels and experience. On the other hand, it is recommended that groups of experienced participants be heterogeneous in experience (diversity) and skills. Getzel and Salmon (1985) suggest that too much homogeneity in groups of experienced participants can stifle spontaneity. At the same time, too much heterogeneity can dilute the objectives. We can grasp the importance of this issue at the point where the group wants both to differentiate themselves as individuals and get rid of the supervisor so they can have more autonomy.

In terms of numbers, the group should be neither too small nor too large. A group of two or three members will not generate enough interaction for group processes to be established, while a group larger than eight would not be likely to give group members enough space to do in-depth work on their individual objectives.

Given that participants' trust and commitment levels are essential factors for a well-functioning supervision group, we believe it is best when group members participate on a voluntary basis.

Negotiation of the contract

As with individual supervision, the negotiation of the contract constitutes a condition for success in group supervision. Shulman (1999) spoke of this as the cornerstone step in the development of mutual aid. Therefore, this step should be carried out with a great deal of care. For example, the supervisor should make the objectives of all the stakeholders known (organisation, supervisor, supervisees). The supervisor is also responsible for addressing any ambiguities in this area and to make supervisees realise what they have in common. This is also the time when the group should establish its operating standards and clarify its expectations with regard to the supervision.

Since all parties are involved in the formulation and signing of the

contract, it can provide a basis for any subsequent questioning or renegotiation of agreements if these need to be modified by the group. The contract is modifiable insofar as the parties discover, for example, that they have achieved the original objectives or that the objectives are not achievable due to organisational changes.

Working phase

To maximise the benefits of this kind of supervision the supervisor must be trained in both the learning process and the use of group process in a learning environment. We have observed that supervisors may tend to do individual supervision in group situations, thereby minimising the group's contribution to what is being learned.

Conclusion

Through our experience with group supervision and the theoretical elements presented, we have attempted to demonstrate the connections existing between two processes: the integration of the learning and the stages of group development. We are aware of the model's limitations, particularly the limited number of typologies we used to create our description of the intertwined processes. Solar (2001) stated that no theory integrates everything -- and so we also note that each of the two areas from which group supervision draws (integration of the learning process and group process) sheds only partial light on the dynamics occurring in a supervision group.

To be able to improve the proposed model, we believe it is important to develop a learning community made up of group supervisors interested in theorising the practice of group supervision in general and the integration of the two processes based on concrete experiences in particular.

All that's left to do is everything, let's make the most of it!

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Notes

- Consultation differs from supervision in that consultation is on an ad hoc, time-limited basis. A party solicits consultation to obtain an opinion or advice for the purpose of getting help in making a decision (Villeneuve, 1994, p. 34).
- Drawn from: Berteau, G. (2003). La perception des facteurs de mise en oeuvre d'habiletés spécifiques à l'intervention de groupe chez des intervenants sociaux. Montréal: Doctoral thesis, Université de Montréal, Facultés des Sciences de l'éducation, pp. 51-63.

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