

Existential Research on Supervision
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+ Young's Perspective

Givens of Supervision: A Cross-Theoretical Framework

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Introduction

Becoming a psychotherapist is a personal journey. Identifying the philosophical and theoretical direction for this journey is where our supervisor and our experience of supervision are so important. Supervision is a vital part of the learning cycle – one in which the supervisor should be able to match their supervisee's needs by creating an environment that is supportive, facilitative and evaluative. Growth and learning comes about through the encouragement of personal awareness and critical contemplation which is all part of the 'reflection on practice' that lies at the heart of supervision.

Becoming a supervisor is also a journey that demands a quantum leap from that of working as a therapist. It requires a different framework, additional skills, a broader knowledge and the willingness to take up another level of responsibility. Although supervision is now advisable for psychotherapists and counsellors in most countries, what actually constitutes supervision, or rather how we develop our own model of supervision has been less clearly defined.

As an existential psychotherapist and supervisor it is important to develop a framework and a professional identity that is congruent with existential thinking. This means abandoning a strict developmental model and focusing more on the supervisee's individual and personal expectations. Since existential phenomenology is steeped in the relationship realms, any framework needs to allow for the multi-faceted aspects that emerge between supervisor, supervisee, client and the situational context. An educational component is often required by both the supervisee and the contracting organisation, and as supervision is often conducted in groups, the skills of a group facilitator are also essential. It is usual for a training programme for supervisors to be cross-theoretical and all encompassing.

This chapter is the outcome of my own journey. It involved the completion of a professional doctorate during which I developed a framework: 'The

Wheel of Supervision'. The concept of the wheel emerged from *Existential Time Limited Therapy* (Strasser & Strasser, 1997) and is a diagrammatic representation of the givens of existence. In *Existential Time-Limited Therapy* we proposed that the wheel aids therapists address client issues and simultaneously allows them to remain cognisant of the interconnected nature of human existence. In a similar fashion the 'Wheel of Supervision' provides a framework for both supervisors and supervisees to examine and explore all aspects of supervision relevant to their particular working contexts. In this chapter I will describe how each of the wheel segments is a 'given' to all practice of supervision and also illustrate how it can be used specifically within an existential frame. This overview of the 'wheel of supervision' only highlights some of the key points to demonstrate how it may be used as a cross-theoretical framework.

The givens described are as follows (see Figure 14.1) the relationship between:

- supervisor and supervisee
- supervisee and client
- self of the supervisee/supervisor
- supervisee/supervisor and outside agencies
- the significance of emotions and self-esteem
- the identification of theories, values and assumptions
- the awareness of choices and meaning
- the setting up of the frame and contract

At the centre of the wheel is the worldview, that aspect connecting all the givens. In the outer circle are the givens which encompass existence:

- Uncertainty
- Time
- Anxiety
- Choice
- Safety
- Interpersonal Relationship

Use of the Wheel

The wheel is used as a backdrop for both the supervisor and supervisee to explore all aspects of supervision, bearing in mind that all segments are interconnected. Since these segments are described as being universal to all theoretical paradigms, the wheel allows for each person to work within their own modality and to develop their own relationship alliance as suited to their theoretical approach.

The phenomenological method of enquiry is fundamental to existential supervision and therapy. It is imperative to 'tune in', to suspend personal

on effect on all the other segments, giving the wheel a systemic flavour. For example the frame co-exists with all the other givens in the sense that it is shaped by the relationship between the supervisor, supervisee, client and the context of the supervision. In turn the theories, values, and assumptions of each of the parties will influence the relationship and approach to supervision. How each reacts to these givens is part and parcel of their emotional attitude, self-concept and general approach to supervision.

A fundamental concept of existential philosophy is that of the ontological 'givens' of existence: these being aspects of living which are universally true and inescapable. For example we cannot choose where and to whom we are born and none of us can choose to live forever. However, where we do have choice is how we each respond to these givens. In other words we each have the capacity to create our own individual meaning in relation to living and to dying.

In the outer circle of the wheel are some of these existential givens or paradoxes of existence, those aspects of living that lie in the background of our everyday being. For instance, we all live within the paradoxical realm of trying to create certainty (or safety) in an uncertain world; of creating meaning to living within our time-limited existence; of being born in a world of relationship and yet seeking to illuminate our own sense of identity. Attempting to live within these paradoxes is anxiety provoking. To cope with this abundance of unease we create a certain sense of safety by choosing to live within certain beliefs, assumptions and attitudes thus providing a cushion against the world. This is our worldview.

Worldview

At the centre of the wheel is the worldview or 'the expression of the sum total of our particular way of being with or engaging in the world' (Strasser, 1999: 11). In other words our worldview, whether this is that of the supervisor, supervisee or client is intrinsic to the supervision process. It encompasses all the segments of the wheel and seeks the connections between all these aspects.

Our worldview is not static. It is in constant change as we confront the uncertainty of living in the world. Sometimes we see everything as a limitation and we lose meaning while at other times the world becomes one of possibilities and new meanings. This is concurrent with the way we might see supervision, our work with supervisees and our work with clients. Our worldview is a current expression of who we believe we are; how we make sense of the world at this particular moment and is all embracing of our values, beliefs, attitudes, emotions, self-esteem and so on. It includes the four worlds (physical, public, private and spiritual) as initially described by Binswanger and elaborated by van Deurzen (2002).

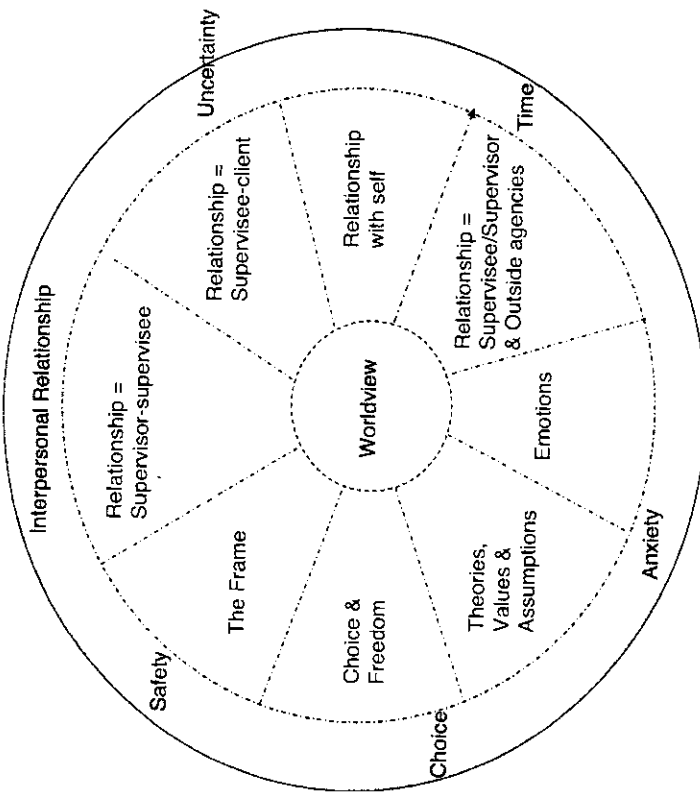


Figure 14.1 The Wheel of Supervision

assumptions and judgements as much as possible in order to expand understanding of the client's world. It is the same process when working in supervision. In other words the supervisor attempts to get as close as possible to experiencing and describing the phenomena as lived by the supervisee in their world (including the context in which they work), and to understand their sense of being with their client. In agreement with Mitchell's remarks in the previous chapter, only when the supervisee feels supported by the supervisor, is it appropriate to challenge or ask the harder more didactic, thought provoking questions that bring about the 'reflection-on-action, or indeed, reflection-in-action to result in reflection-for-action' (Carroll, 2007: 36).

Existential Givens

The inner circle of the wheel is built up of segments (or givens) that are the characteristics of supervision and are intrinsic and fundamental to the process, regardless of theoretical model, developmental stage, situational context or type of supervision. Each of the segments of the wheel is interconnected, allowing for fluidity and change. A change in one segment will have a knock-

The Frame

A noted, one of the existential givens that human beings continually face is that of uncertainty and in supervision, as in therapy, we need to establish a secure frame. This is equally important within the supervisory setting in order to reduce the level of uncertainty and anxiety for both the supervisor and supervisee. Although, it is inevitable that anxiety will still exist.

The frame is essentially the contract made between the supervisor and supervisee or supervisees in a group setting, but may well include third parties such as an educational institution, manager, agency and other external parties. Additionally the theoretical style of the supervisor will inform these parameters. Hence, the agreement will vary according to the setting and nature of the supervision but will include the frequency of meetings, the fee (or not), the purpose, nature and style of presentations of clients, confidentiality and other aspects that might arise determined by the individuals concerned. The frame will include any potential dual relations and how these are best handled.

As in therapy, the supervisory contract will have explicit (sometimes implicit) expectations or goals, dependent on the nature and context of the supervision. It has been cogently argued that:

bringing the supervisee's goals into the supervision spotlight provides a coherent structure within which other aspects of supervision, such as supervision effectiveness, the supervision alliance, and the experience of the supervisee can be more clearly understood (Lewis & Carey, 2007).

Although the concept of goals is often seen as anathema to working existentially, exploring expectations allows for fluidity and change. Starting with an exploration of expectations allows both supervisor and supervisee to reveal their worldview and what is important for them, thereby introducing more transparency into the relationship. Additionally unrealistic expectations can be discussed and put into the context of the wheel. For example, Joanna had just begun working with clients and in her opening statement said her role was to help others, even though she knew from her training that this was not the purpose. This led us to examine her definition of helping, why it was so important to her and leading ultimately to the realisation of her own particular fear of being stuck and feelings of being trapped.

The Relationship Realms

In the 'wheel of supervision' I have identified four levels of relationship: that established between the supervisor and supervisee; that between the supervisee and client; the relationships that the supervisor and supervisee have privately with themselves (self-to-self) and the relationship they have with the

outside world. In addition, if supervision is conducted in a group, there are the multiple levels of relationship between all participants.

Relationship between supervisor and supervisee

The degree to which the multiple levels of relationship are discussed in supervision will depend in part on the model of supervision, but also on the individual participants and their willingness to participate in self-disclosure. Developmental models of supervision might argue that new therapists will need to focus on their skills rather than on the interpersonal levels of enquiry. Other models believe that the self of the therapist remains in the domain of personal therapy and not supervision.

From the existential perspective, supervision has a predominant focus on the relationship for: 'people are seen as existing in relationship with themselves, with others and with the world. Each individual and his or her world are said to co-constitute one another' (Valle & Halling, 1989: 7). I explore the relationship realms of 'I focus, You focus, We focus and They focus' (Spinelli, 2007) which allows for the exploration of the interconnections in all their complexity. In practical terms this entails gaining an understanding of the worldview of the supervisee and the client and what is happening in the supervisory relationship. For instance, I am curious about how the client presents in the session and what impact this mode of being has on the supervisee. Does the supervisee like or dislike their client and how does this impact on or have any resonance with the issues being presented?

Unsurprisingly all the supervisees I interviewed talked about the significance of the relationship or the lack of a meaningful one. Trust appeared to be the linking feature at all levels of relationship but obviously how each person develops trust and what they mean by trust is unique and personal. For instance one supervisee talked about the relationship with his supervisor as: 'like a meeting of two souls'; yet in another supervisory relationship in which honesty, trust, and safety were absent, he felt disempowered and angry, resulting in his withdrawal. Another therapist described the supervisory relationship as trusting in the sense of it being safe to hold different opinions; another used the metaphor of a policeman to describe the inherent power dynamics which may be used at certain times to ensure ethical practice.

The issue of power between supervisor and supervisee is another area to be explored from each participant's perspective. Supervision starts when a student is in training and integral to this type of supervision is a formal assessment process – hence this awareness will influence the supervision process. It can also be argued that some form of assessment process is intrinsic to all supervisory relationships. This would be particularly so if the supervision is a requirement of working within an agency.

However part of the supervisor's responsibility is to be a guardian of the legal and ethical codes under which we all work and as such the supervisor remains in a position of power. It is a fine line between allowing the

supervisee to explore and assume responsibility and when and how the supervisor might become accountable. The previous chapter provides a fuller discussion of these issues of responsibility within the supervisory relationship.

How both the supervisor and supervisee respond to each other's status is part of the supervisory journey. Indeed Lawton (2000) noted that most supervisees needed to imbue their supervisor with more experience and status. This could be for a variety of different reasons including that of wish-fulfilment where supervisees: 'need to regard the supervisor as a dependable expert who contains their anxieties and proves infallible when they felt vulnerable' (Lawton, 2000: 34). It would appear to be part of our cultural indoctrination that both the word and the institution of supervision have an element of the teacher-pupil relationship ingrained within. This refers back to the problematic nature of the term supervision already discussed in Chapters 12 and 13.

Relationship with self

When a trusting relationship occurs, then the supervision is more likely to include personal issues as they relate to the client. Again, how this aspect of the private world is explored, or whether it is indeed part of the contract, is dependent on the mode of therapy. The question of where supervision stops and therapy begins is one that is continually asked. It would seem largely a personal decision and one that is negotiated in the contract. Sometimes supervisors will suggest that a personal issue that emerges for the supervisee in supervision should be 'taken to therapy'. Though of course from the existential perspective there is no clear dividing line between the 'personal' and the 'professional' since everything always involves what is personal.

For existential supervisors, and for many from different orientations, self-awareness is an essential component of supervision. Beatte talked passionately about how in supervision: 'she met herself for the first time' and described how she used her self-awareness to work with her clients. Kristie would arrive for supervision knowing that the two or three clients she presented with whom she felt stuck or blocked would, when further examined, be linked to her personal 'stuckness'. Once, we were able to establish this self-connection, Kristie would acknowledge greater clarity and would often report that the issue discussed in supervision disappeared with the clients. In other words, as expected, personal awareness appears to have a direct effect on work with clients.

Additionally, if a supervisee feels stuck with a client or feels that they cannot find any means for tuning into their worldview, it can be useful to find a situation or a feeling within the supervisee that may draw parallels with the client's being-in-the-world. Margaret talked about Rupert who, at the beginning and end of each session, demanded solutions, thereby giving the impression he was not pleased with the way the therapy was proceeding. Yet, during the session itself, it appeared that he gained clarity and awareness and was

beginning to make changes in his life. In supervision, I asked Margaret to imagine she was Rupert and as I continued to ask her questions, she realised that she felt the fear of losing control. Initially, she had felt a connection with me but as the end came closer, it dawned on her that the potential ending and subsequent loss of this connection made her panic and feel totally alone. In the following session with Rupert, Margaret explored their relationship where he revealed issues around intimacy.

Relationship between supervisee and client

This section has its own separate segment on the wheel to acknowledge its paramount importance. In my view the primary function of supervision is the commitment to the development and well-being of both the supervisee and client. Once again, there are the interconnections between all aspects of the wheel such as the contract and the assessment process between the supervisee and client.

From an existential perspective the relationship which emerges between the therapist and client is often reflective of other relationships that the client holds in their wider world, sometimes described as the 'other-construct' (Spinelli, 2007). For example Jane presented her client as angry and continually testing their relationship by either walking out of sessions or by writing letters explaining how she felt abused by statements that Jane had made. This was mirrored in the client's world of work where she described how she felt undervalued by her manager and reacted by ignoring the rules, until she was eventually sacked. Jane began to explore the similarities in attitude with the client who over time revealed her self-loathing, realising that she needed to prove this repeatedly by getting others to dismiss her. The dilemma for the client was that Jane refused to be dismissed, resulting in a different kind of relationship for the client, one in which she was able to talk about her fear of abandonment and rejection.

Although perceived differently by existential therapists, most practitioners would be working with the therapeutic relationship, though not referring to this, as discussed in Chapter 1, as 'transference' or 'countertransference' but rather simply in terms of relationship issues between the client and their therapist and in terms of their bias. However described, this relationship realm is an important component to explore in supervision and can offer valuable insights into the multiple levels of parallel relationships as discussed above.

Relationship between supervisee/supervisor and outside agencies

Obviously supervision does not occur in isolation but always within a set of different contexts including the setting, such as in a training institution, an agency, a business or a government organisation. This segment includes external controls such as the legal requirements of reporting, the professional code of ethics and the organisation's vision and mission. Included in this context

are the specific codes of practice the supervisor and supervisee will have to abide by which are a component of the frame, such as boundaries, dual relationships and specific rules about contacting clients. Working within an organisational setting may entail the necessity of working with a specific model, the limitations and with a specified supervisor. It is therefore paramount that the supervisor understands the particular context and rules so that the supervision can reflect these dimensions.

The relationship with outside agencies is inclusive of the broader context of the various professional bodies that the therapist belongs to as well as the legal constitutions of the particular state or country. It covers the dimension of ethical practice and the necessity of working through scenarios of 'what is right' and 'what is good' in relation to the client, for society, self protection, the profession as a whole and any organisation involved. Though clearly there is often no certainty around right and wrong, it is not surprising my research highlighted this as an area where both supervisors and supervisees felt vulnerable and open to scrutiny. Supervisees felt very strongly that it was important their supervisors were cognisant of the legal parameters and the ability to ensure that they were working within an ethical framework.

Theories, Values and Assumptions

In supervision both the supervisor and supervisee will bring to the relationship their own particular theories about life, therapy and supervision that they perceive as integral to their work as a therapist. Under this segment or given, are included each person's values in relation to their morals, ethics and their attitude towards their code of ethics and legal entities.

These theories, values and assumptions are both the espoused theoretical framework of the supervisor and supervisee and the personal worldview that they both bring into the multiple relationships embodied in the supervisory process. Usually, the psychotherapeutic theoretical model of the supervisor will be the guiding basis for the direction and purpose of supervision in terms of the setting of the frame; the theory behind their understanding of client work; the interpretation of what the relationship constitutes and how this is worked with both between the supervisor and supervisee and between the supervisee and client. It is one of the tasks of the supervisor to explore and, to the extent that this is possible, understand each supervisee's perspective. Indeed, it is often the case that a supervisor works with a supervisee from another modality: the challenge being to accept difference and still allow for the reflective learning to take place.

Within the existential field there are as many ways of interpreting the philosophy and theory as there are therapists and each will have their own particular ways of working and exploring with their supervisees (Cooper, 2003). Some may focus on the four worlds; some may explore the philosophy; while

others will emphasise the dimensions of relationship. Similarly, as is highlighted in the Existential Time-Limited Therapy wheel, exploring and gaining an understanding of our worldview in terms of our beliefs, values and assumptions, with regard to how they affect our sense of self, behaviours and coping mechanisms is fundamental to our work. The same examination and understanding is used in supervision to explore the beliefs of the client, those of the supervisee and supervisor, how they intersect and what, if any, impact this may have at all the levels of relationship.

In supervision, Penny spoke about a client who worked in risk management. After six sessions he unexpectedly revealed that this would be the last session. In supervision we explored how Penny had reacted to this client, how he had related to her and how he might relate to others in his world. The overall theme that emerged was about his need to control his environment. I suggested to Penny that in their next (and last) session she attempt to stay more attuned with the client, to say less and trust that the issue of 'controlled' or 'not in control' would emerge. In the next supervision Penny voiced her surprise when, during the silences of the last session, the client remembered that as a boy he would have sleepless nights fearing that his father was going to kill him. Controlling his environment, including the therapy, became his way of shielding against his anxiety around lack of safety. Interestingly, Penny recognised that her own assumptions included the belief that creating a safe environment was an essential part of therapy. Penny's sense of safety and that of her client were quite different.

Emotions

We are never without emotion and 'in emotion ... we can rediscover the whole of human reality, for emotion is the human reality assuming itself and emotionally – directing itself towards the world' (Sartre, 2002: 10). Emotions are inherent in all aspects of our being such as our values, our behaviours and ultimately our sense of self or self-esteem. Emotions do not exist in isolation, they are linked; so for instance anger may be associated to sadness or the feeling of joy may relate to jealousy. Concurrently, emotions are always directed towards something, such as love of another person or love of food.

Other people's opinions are interwoven into how we view ourselves which in turn affects how we value ourselves and how we relate to others. From an existential viewpoint anxiety is intrinsic to our self-concept and self-esteem. These emotions can manifest themselves in supervision around feelings of self-worth, self-expression, validation, support, evaluation, personal and professional competency and so on.

The supervisor needs to understand how each supervisee experiences the relationship between self and other in terms of their view of themselves, the supervisor, the client, and at the organisational level. As previously

mentioned since most, if not all, supervisory relationships have some element of formal or informal assessment, it is important to explore the emotional impact this has on the supervisory relationship. While one supervisee might perceive a question as judgemental, another may recognise the same question as life enhancing. Naturally, the supervisor also needs to be aware of these aspects in terms of their own reactions to criticism and how they affect their self-esteem.

As with all these concepts, each therapeutic tradition has their own understanding of how emotions assimilate into their working methodology. For example cognitive behavioural therapists believe that changing our thought processes will transform our emotional state while many therapists in the humanistic tradition will focus on emotions believing that until these are expressed, understood and assimilated, a true sense of self will remain elusive.

Regardless of our position, emotions reveal our worldview which in turn helps to clarify the intention in our emotion. In supervision this can bring a richer sense of what is occurring for the client, therapist and supervisor. Jason discussed how for personal reasons he had to cancel a client at the last minute and how this made him feel guilty for being 'unprofessional' in disappointing the client. On further reflection, he realised that the same client was prone to cancelling and for a moment felt a sense of vindication until we explored what might be keeping the client away from therapy. At that point he understood that a few months before the client had come to an acute realisation and had undertaken to do things differently. Now he was living in shame for not sticking to these promises. In relation to the therapy this client did not want to disappoint the therapist, the same emotional sense that the therapist had felt in the cancellation process. Disappointment, commitment and the fear of the client letting herself and others down emerged as the theme for further exploration.

Identifying Choices and Meaning

Although choice and meaning are broad concepts, they are an important dimension when thinking about supervision. Firstly, they allow an exploration into the way we choose to view supervision. One supervisee might embrace supervision as a way to learn skills and theory, another as an insurance against bad practice, another as a means of self-reflection, yet another as a mandatory requirement and so forth. Understanding the position of the supervisee highlights the feelings and attitudes towards their supervision and supervisor. From an existential position we all have, whatever the limitations, a choice of attitude. So even when supervision is viewed as limiting we are choosing to behave in a certain way. Hence this theme is linked to responsibility for self, others and the organisation.

Laura was one of the supervisees in group supervision as part of a Masters' programme. From the first week she was sullen, making it very clear that she had no wish to be a member of that group. In the third week, answering a challenge by another group member, Laura admitted she was only doing the Masters for the 'piece of paper' and did not expect to learn anything new. Although her essential attitude did not change over the course of the programme, she admitted to the group that she felt excluded. Her way of coping with her vulnerability was to appear as if she did not care. In remaining separate to the others in the group she was not taking responsibility for herself and her negative attitude impacted on each of the supervisees in different ways.

Such attitudes can be extended to all types of supervision. David, for example, talked about revealing different aspects of his work depending on the agency he was working with, while Ian decided to join a peer supervision group as he was unable to find a supervisor who matched his expectations of a spiritual leader. In essence, this theme includes the supervisee's attitude towards the role of supervision and their relationship between other supervisees, supervisor and outside agency. It is closely tied with the notion of responsibility towards self and others already discussed in the previous chapter.

The supervisor too is also included under this given, in the sense that he or she will strike a particular attitude about their role at all levels of the relationship – between themselves as supervisors, the supervisee, the agency as well as the broader ideas of ethics and professional responsibility.

Conclusion

Although the wheel of supervision was conceived as a cross-theoretical framework for training supervisors in the counselling and psychotherapy field, it is intrinsically flexible and can be adapted to any context. I have modified it to train supervisors specifically from an existential perspective and have used it as a way of teaching supervisees the art of supervision. Working as a supervisor, I retain the wheel in my awareness to ensure that all the segments are covered in an interrelational way.

Supervision is establishing itself as a distinct profession. Hence a supervisor can supervise across a range of professions, be it psychotherapy, counselling, coaching or mediation; in different spheres as in the medical world or social work as well as across the breadth of theories. The wheel of supervision is an all inclusive and flexible means of embracing the complexities of supervision permitting supervisor and supervisee to advance their journey in their unique way.

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Evocative Supervision: A Non-Clinical Approach

Greg Madison

Introduction

As an existential supervisor, I try to create an environment that sustains the 'humanity' and mutuality of the supervisory relationship, combining respectful collegial rapport with moments of profound experiential depth similar to therapy itself. Alongside a sensitivity to power dynamics, existential supervisors exhibit a general willingness to question much of what passes unquestioned in contemporary therapeutic practice. As has been stated in earlier chapters, the humility of un-knowing is not sacrificed in order to claim authority based solely upon years of experience or psychological 'evidence'. Although such attributes pose the existential supervisor with certain professional dilemmas, I believe that they are increasingly important traits as the profession and the species as a whole hurtles towards technological, and increasingly biotechnological and cybernetic, solutions to human problems.¹

Contrasting this existential stance with current trends in the psychological professions will highlight 'the evocative' as an essential though unexplicated aspect of existential supervision. 'Evocative' supervision connotes an *experiential-existential* stance that prioritises *implicit* experiencing and by its nature is not quantifiable. *Anything I say is not 'it' but only an attempt to point towards 'it'*. The Canadian phenomenologist Max van Manen (2002), describes his phenomenological research as 'evocative', deriving the term from *evocare*, 'to call forth, to call out, and refers to the act of bringing to mind or recollection, recreating imaginatively through word or image, fastening a hold on nearness ...'. Similarly, evocative supervision requires us to attend patiently to the depth of *now* by following the bodily flow of experiencing as it arises in shared understandings that are never solidified by explanation. I want to distinguish this form of encounter from what is typically called 'clinical' supervision.

¹See Madison (2008a).