

**Complexity and Contradictions in the supervisory context  
from the supervisors' position**

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## **Abstract**

I have written about *Complexity* and *Contradictions* in the supervisory context.

I explore and reflect on the two concepts and the different levels of context connected to supervision.

Using examples from my supervisory and training practice I show ways to co-create developing contexts. I use different theories and methods to analyze the processes and find ways to engage in emerging new meaning and ways forward. The main theories I refer to are Cronen and Pearce CMM theory, Coordinated Management of Meaning and the Chaos and Order Theory, Maturanas' Domain Theory, Learning theories and concepts about Reflexivity.

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## 1. Introduction

In the process of formulating my focus, I reflected back on my experiences of working as a supervisor and trainer and tried to find the key issues and expressions of what I experienced as confusing and sometimes annoying in my practice. It was not so easy to find a focus that captured my experiences and when I thought; why? I got the answer: because it is so *complex*. Regarding the supervisor mission and the supervisor position I have had periods of thinking; it is impossible..., no one can live up to- and relate to the great variety of wishes and preferences supervisees and different groups have around supervision. I find all the expressed thoughts according to what and how the supervisor should be and what supervisees expect to be delivered are sometimes *contradictory*.

In formulating the words **Complexity** and **Contradictions**, I sensed; this is my focus and there was my curiosity. The process had started.

From experiences I have in my supervisory and training practice, I was occupied and curious by some thoughts and questions that have arose in my practice and in point of inflection with my supervisor training, its' theories and methods. In other words; getting the map and terrain to match each other.

I want to further explore primary the supervisory position, also connect to the trainer position. My focus will be parts which I have experienced were sometimes hard to deal with. And when I have reflected around these matters I see them as parts of a *complex* context and *contradictions* in for instance expectations on the supervision and on the supervisor.

To widen my views around my questions for the dissertation, I wanted to bring in voices from the field of practice around supervision and training. And reflect my stories in their stories and begin to co-create new meaning and understanding. In this process, ideas about future practice can emerge which hopefully will clarify parts around AMT, Approach, Method and Technique (Burnham,1993), which supervisees and trainees can benefit from. I made interviews, which were actually more like conversations with supervisees, a supervisor and a leader. They became a sort of reference group. We discussed themes like: history and traditions around supervision, what activities take place in supervision and what is important, why do people engage in the activities, why do leaders provide space and time and economical support for

supervision, what are their hopes and wishes. What makes a good supervisor and how would they like to improve the supervisory context.

The stories will be interwoven in the parts about complexity and contradictions and connected to theory and examples from my practice. These examples illustrate situations which reflect dilemmas connected to my themes, and learning in and from the process in the situations.

I will connect to relevant theory and look at ideas and methods that have been useful to handle the complexity and contradictions in my examples.

I want to stress here that it is not a question of finding **the** solution, solving a problem once for all, but to explore ways to facilitate orientating in complexity and with contradictions.

## **1.1 The aim of the dissertation**

- *Explore and describe dilemmas connected to complexity and contradictions in the supervisory context from the supervisor position and explore ways to analyze and approach those dilemmas.*
- *Reflect on use and possibilities in future practice.*

## **1.2 Supervisory experiences**

I have been working with supervision in different contexts since I completed my family-therapy course at GCK/KCC in 2000. During this time I have worked in parallel with other tasks in the therapeutic and counselling field. The groups I have seen over the years have been from different professions and areas like: preschool teams, social-workers, teachers and special-pedagogues, staff at treatment-centres, nurses and home-support-staff. These all represent different professional cultures, which has influenced the supervision, and accordingly has become quite different in design.

My main occupation is in a community resource-team where I work with three different missions: therapy and counselling with individuals and families, supervision and training/method development with staff working with children in my organisation. Thus I am an inmate consultant which places special demands on both me and the

staff in our organisation, managing to be both colleagues and supervisor-supervisees. In that context a matter that becomes part of a complex situation.

All the time I have had access to supervision myself. This has helped me in my practice and also to develop different perspectives on supervision. The supervisors I had were different in their theories and methods and personal style, which I view as useful experiences to reflect on in my own practice.

A learning supervisee experience I had from a session with my team at work at a time when we recently had changed supervisor; after some sessions we felt that we lost energy; that there was *confusion* around positions between us and the supervisor and that we did not know what our task was. For instance when the supervisor interviewed someone in the group around a case and the rest of the group listened, we felt there was un-clarity about expectations on how to participate. When we paused for reflexions, it was like she reflected and came to a strategy and we listened. We experienced that our competence and ideas were not important. Her ideas were what counted. We talked about the situation in the group between the sessions. I found it a bit hard to deal with. I wanted a change, but I liked the supervisor and did not want her to feel criticized or feel bad. Especially since I am a supervisor myself and did not want to appear as if I think I know better. We decided to talk about it in the next session and did so. It turned out well and we had a positive change where we clarified positions and I think it was helpful for both us and our supervisor. When I reflected on this example I think I can more easily understand the doubts people have before they speak out and give negative feedback. It is not so easy, yet at the same time how helpful it can be for the supervisor. It is an important part to point out in the contracting process.

To make a connection here to Scott Miller (2010), this is one of the most important matters in the development in the process, an important factor in the alliance between the professional and client. Part of creating good alliances is getting clients to give you negative feedback. Miller found this as a result in using his evaluation questionnaire/follow-up survey. It is a matter of both the process in doing this, how it affects the relation and co-work between client and clinician, and also that here is a developing potential. If you get feedback on the parts that the client does not like or feel comfortable about and you can adjust your work together with the client, there is a bigger chance he stays in treatment. Millers work and grate amount of research

include clinical work in the therapeutic and counselling field amongst different professional activities, like institutions for treatment of drug abuse, Social services and psychiatric wards. Millers' studies do not include supervision, but I think the results are interesting and can also have an impact on those activities. The relation between supervisor and supervisee has similarities with the relation of clinician and client.

### **1.3 Outline and method**

After the Introduction I give a brief picture of *changes and development in the supervision context over time* from different perspectives.

I continue with a theory section, where I present the key concepts I use to analyze my practice and to orient in joint activities with others in supervision and training contexts.

After theory follows a part where I describe and discuss my two key words *complexity* and *contradictions*. I explore and reflect on my experiences and meaning of these concepts. I connect to- and weave in different voices from the field. To follow after this part are examples from my practice with analyses and reflections, then a discussion and thoughts about future practice. Finally a short conclusion.

I have asked supervisees and students for permission to use examples from our supervision and training contexts. I do not use their real names.

In the text I use "she" instead of "he or she".



## 2. Changes-development in the supervision contexts over time

The history of supervision in Sweden is quite young, about 30 years old, according to Bernler and Johnsson (1988). The tradition first developed in the areas of psychotherapy and then it was as supervision in the training context, as part of the students learning. And the supervisor also had the mission of judging the students achievements in the education. This position for the supervisor continued to form the Anglo-Saxon supervision when group supervision started to develop under the late seventies and eighties. In Sweden this model has changed. The administrative and educational part began to separate from a more consultative, to where the supervisor would be more of an enabler and facilitator. In 1982 the first supervisor training started in the Social Science department at the University of Gothenburg.

From the beginning there was a distinction between *process-supervision* and *method-supervision* in the field of practice. As supervisor you made an agreement with the supervision group about what form to engage in. Now most people involved regard those different aspects as connected and interwoven. There is an ongoing change, a move from that old division to openness for different wishes from the supervisees, as long as it is agreed in the group and it is not considered unethical in any way.

New groups of professionals have had access to supervision. In pre-school and school contexts, supervision is a quite new phenomenon. For some professionals in the school context, their approach and tasks have changed. For special pedagogues: from working as “expert pedagogues” to supervising and consulting teachers to do **their** job. And for the social-workers in school; from having direct counselling work with children and their parents in school, to increasing the part about supporting and supervising the teachers to get more skilled in doing **their** job.

The supervisor position has changed over time, from an expert, universe, in the positivistic tradition with methods from psychodynamic and analytic theory to a more “heterarchical” position, multiverse (Maturana, 1988) in the post modern tradition with methods from systemic, social-constructionist, narrative, salutogenic such as AI (Appreciative Inquiry) method and solution focused.

I have also experienced other changes which are related to how certain circumstances today affect professionals; the situation in society and in organizations, with tight budgets, demands on high efficiency, high tempo and quick results, less administrative staff support and the increasing amount of information, with less time for reflexion at work and in the daily job. I.e. a tough climate for professionals with stress and burn out syndromes as a result. Due to those aspects, has the use and needs in supervision changed? Is this one of the few things professionals still can expect to receive... and do they need it to get an open, free zone, for themselves, which they can control, where they are untouchable, where they can not be reached by demands, stress or leaders.

I have thought that maybe the stories you tell about supervision, about the use and meaning of it, are from existing old notions and traditions.

I have also thought that it is kind of an unspoken rule: “don’t touch our supervision”, and that there might be a need for developing new ways in the supervision context.

### 3. Theory

Of all the theoretical connections I use in the dissertation, here I present more thoroughly the main theoretical concepts that I relate to and use in exploring, analyzing and guiding the supervision process forward.

#### 3.1 CMM

There are many parts in CMM. Here I present the ones I use in the dissertation. Others like for instance *Deontic Logic*, I will not present.

CMM stands for: Coordinated Management of Meaning.

The CMM -theory is a way to analyze and understand how different levels of context interact, which makes a situation/a conversation develop in a certain way, (Cronen, 1994). Cronen and Pearce ideas developed from the beginning, inspired by the Finnish philosopher von Wright's "deontic logic" (1951) (quoted in Crone & Pearce, 1985).

They went back to Aristotle's thoughts on "The Arts of practice" and "The Arts of theory" and combined the terms practice and theory and called it a *practical theory*.

Cronen (1994, Chapter 10, p. 189) gives the following definition:

"practical theory describe those features of a discourse that provide a general method for the study of social practice and action, internally consistent and defensible in light of data, that generate useful interpretation, explanation and critique of situated human action."

Cronen continues saying that "It is a communication theory, not a theory about communication based on psychology perspective or any other discipline." It is an emerging theory, used and developed by those who use it all the time.

Pearce (1994, chap., p. 114) gave the following background to the development of CMM:

"Wittgensteins' ideas focused social theorists' attention on the continuous, reflexive process by which speech acts make the contexts that give them meaning and contexts make the speech acts that occur in them."

CMM is a method to understand/analyze what happens in communication and a method to guide the communications that may be used practically in therapy, supervision, research and other contexts.

### 3.1.1 Context-levels

One of the basic ideas of the CMM theory is that every person has a variety of stories about who you are and would like to be, about their relationships to others, about specific situations and the like (Cronen, 1994). CMM theory believes that when we are in a conversation or in a situation, we are simultaneously in a variety of conversations or contexts. One can also describe it as Westerström (2000), that each person brings memories into the meeting with another individual that affect the interaction. He also believes that these memories in CMM terms can be described as individual levels of context, i.e. memories of different contexts you have been part of before (from seconds to a lifetime). The word *context* is originally Latin and means *to weave together*, which is a good metaphor for understanding the meaning of a context. It can be understood as a weave, interwoven by different threads, which consists of the above described *memories, situations, conversations*.

The context levels in CMM are of two types, first the historical: *culture* and *life script*, which can also be projected into the future, and present: *relation, episode* and *speech act*.

Examples of context-levels that can affect the communication are:

<i>Overall culture:</i>	Social norms/values
<i>Local culture:</i>	Norms specific for the local community, e.g. the mothers in the area of north west-coast of Sweden previously had a strong position in the family.
<i>Family culture:</i>	The Family's rules and habits.
<i>Personal life-script:</i>	Physical existence, Knowledge, My opinion about other people's opinion of me, (Lang, 1999).
<i>Personal Professional life script:</i>	Same as above, but connected to my professional role, also includes e.g. ethical stances.
<i>Definition of relationship:</i>	How and under what terms two or more people interact.

<i>Episode:</i>	The event/The specific social meeting.
<i>Speech ac:</i>	The communicated message/The act, verbal or nonverbal.

The CMM-theory says that all contexts are socially constructed. Patterns which connect between stories always emerge in situated activity with others. CMM offers a way to explore how different stories fit together in everyday life. It suggests that there are hierarchical relationships between the stories. This means that *one story is the context for the exploration and understanding of other stories*. What ever level of context can at the moment be predicting how a particular speech act should be understood. There is a variety of contexts interwoven in every speech act. In every situation when I for instance speak as a supervisor, I speak also as a parent to four children, a daughter of two parents who were health-care professions and the youngest sibling of five. Before every speech act (verbal or nonverbal) I make a choice, consciously or unconsciously, regarding which will be the highest level of context in that particular moment, which exert a contextual force on the context.

### 3.1.2 Loops

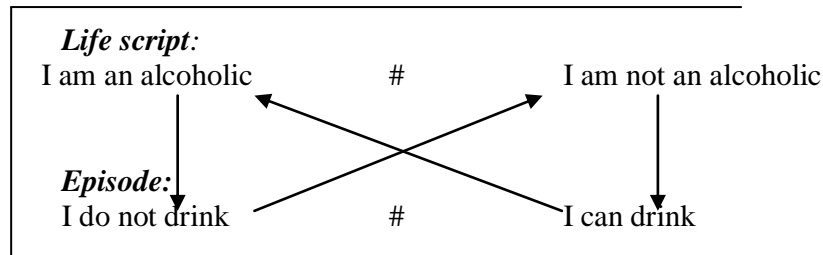
Bateson described the "*Double bind*" concept as conflicting messages on two or more different levels and that these were not allowed to comment on (Bateson, 1972). And you can not leave the context. Cronen and Pearce (1985) have developed this idea further in the CMM theory through the concept of *strange loops*. They describe how two levels of context, both forms the context for and is understood in the context of the other. At each level of the loop two opposing stories coexist. The loop exists/is held in place by a meaning on a higher level of context. If this meaning would be changed, the loop would brake.

As an example, I describe the, known by many, alcoholic loop, which Bateson (1972) initially developed, than in terms of the double-bind theory. It can be briefly described as Westerström did (2000): If you drink uncontrolled you will eventually be considered an alcoholic. The consequence if you see yourself as an alcoholic is that you must stop drinking. If you do this during some time, you might think: "I can control my drinking, I am not an alcoholic" and then you start drinking and lose control and so on. For this loop to continue requires that the family/society has an idea

about that "control of drinking is a moral issue". This loop as described in CMM terms may look like the following:

The Alcoholic loop according to CMM:

**Family myth (Culture):** Control of drinking is a moral issue.



# means exclude

┌ means in the context of

To stop the loop, the meaning on the context level **Family myth (Culture)** needs to change to e.g. *alcoholism is an illness*.

### 3.2 Social GRRACCEESS

John Burnham developed the concept of Social GRRACCEESS which refers to *Gender, Race, Religion, Age, Abilities, Class, Culture, Ethnicity, Ethics, Sexuality and Spirituality*. It is a frame to explore and reflect on social differences like for instance in therapy, supervision and training.

I have had difficulties in relating to this concept and to create meaning of it. It was not so easy to adjust it to a Swedish context and incorporate it in my professional repertoire. Now I connect the ideas with CMM which I more easily relate to and I see the different aspects of the concept of GRRACCEESS as *stories/experiences* from different episodes in life, which form and inform how we act together with others and co-create our relations and contexts today.

When I use the concept I make my own interpretations of the parts in the concept, and choose some aspects that fit for the specific issue or case, even if I do not cover all parts.

### 3.3 Domains

In the article “The systemic professional, Domains of action and the question of neutrality” Peter Lang et al (1990) describes Maturanas’ Domain theory. In the professional conversations we are involved, we act in different domains. They describe three domains; The *Domain of Production* where we act for instance according to laws and superior rule systems. It includes for example law, authority in the social services and assessments of students, also other, like advice giving. In this domain we think and act linear. In the *Domain of Explanation* (also named *The Domain of Reflexion*) we join in activities like reflecting conversations and therapy. Here we act and think more circularly and from a multiverse perspective. The *Domain of Aesthetics* is always the superior to the others. Here the aim is to put ethical perspective on what we do and do our job as respectful and gallant as possible regardless to which of the other two domains we are acting in. In most situations we act in all the domains. We move in and out of the different domains and they can change from minute to minute.

### 3.4 Chaos and order theory

Cronen and Perace (1985) have described that there is a dialectical relationship between chaos and order in social systems, as a loop (see picture). If one envisages a social system such as a family or a social service agency in balance, there are clear links between structure and action. The participants are aware of and abide by the rules (which can be both explicit and implicit) of what is appropriate to do and not do. If a system is affected by a change; - in a family as: divorce, death or that a child drops out of school, - in an organization as: the introduction of new methods, mergers or changes of managers, a situation arises where the rules are not adequate anymore. Irregularities are common. The relationship between structure and action changes, becomes unclear and chaotic. In this situation, conflicting ways of understanding the world and acting co-exist. After a period of time people get tired of the mess and begin to work on creating structure again and new clear connections between structure and action are re-created. As a manager, parent or supervisor, one can, in principle, act in two ways. If one experiences that there is a chaos, one tries to provide structure, to the contrary exists (family or organization may have solidified, the development has slowed) you ask deconstructing questions. Those undermine and loose up an

established idea and thereby open up space for new meaning, it might well be hypothetical future questions (Tomm, 2000). Then a healthy confusion is created that allows new development. It happens in families and in organizations, that both chaos and compulsive, rigid, structures may become prevalent. Than someone in the system often asks for help from outside.

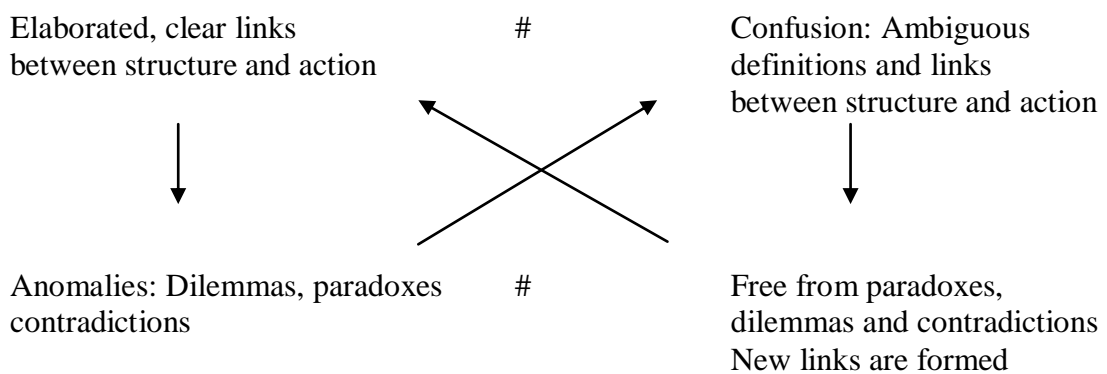
In chaotic systems appears that participants mutual double bind each other. Then they avoid defining their relationships and create a clear structure. There may be a fear among the participants of dependency and closeness. In this so-called second order confusion the definition of different concepts are all the time questioned, (Cronen and Pearce, 1985, Tomm, 1989).

The therapist or supervisor often experience increasing confusion and can respond with own symptoms.

In family therapy, one can propose a ritual. This type of intervention is used to create order, for instance distinguish different conflicting messages from parents over in time. When it comes to groups a supervisor can contribute and help the group find solutions with more structure and connect to their practice and daily work and find out which acts will create more structure.

Picture

Evolution of social systems (order – chaos loop), (Cronen and Pearce, 1985)



# Can not co-exist.

### 3.4 Reflexivity - Self reflexivity and Relational reflexivity

Burnham, (2008) describes reflexivity as the ability to consider something in the context of it self, for instance reflect on your reflections or think about your thinking.

The essential reflexive abilities relevant here are *self-reflexivity* and *relational*



*reflexivity*. Self-reflexivity is about taking a position where you observe yourself in practice and reflect on how you act in relation to others. You get a possibility to consider and reconsider your actions. Relational reflexivity is about meta-communication, for instance talk about your talking. Participants in a relationship, between a pair or in a group, uses the process to explore, consider and elaborate how they relate.

The whole concept of reflexivity is actually a concept of *second order cybernetics*. Those ideas described by Watzlavic (1974) are essential in order to be self-reflexive. You position yourself as someone who is part of the system. You affect and get affected. You are curious in exploring together with the participants, through relational reflexivity, in what way and how this influences the supervision.

I find similar thoughts in Swedish literature about supervision. In the book “Explore together” Supervising approach, the author Björn Wrangsjö (2004), presents different supervisors perspectives on supervision. In one chapter Hofsten and Sundberg describe how they increasingly have come to use a reflective approach and approach the client/patient as a co researcher in their clinical everyday work. They incorporate evaluative questions in the conversations, which I connect to relational reflexivity (Burnham, 2005). They have explored how they can use the same approach in supervision and engaged as supervisors with supervisees’ in what they called “co researching conversations”. For instance they asked questions like: “What thoughts did you have before the first session?”, “What do you think today when you reflect back on those thoughts?”, “Is there anything you wish was different? If that is the case, what would have made it possible?” and “What are your thoughts about the cooperation?”.

### **3.5 Adult learning**

There are several learning theories useful in supervision; here I refer to the ideas of Donald Schön and Lev Vygotsky. I will also shortly describe the concept of AI, *Appreciative Inquiry*. I regard AI and *Ability Spotting* as useful methods in connection to adult learning. They provide the means for people to expand their competent professional identity and get into a competent “incompetent” learning position.

### 3.5.1 Shöns' theory of Reflecting methods

The roots on Schöns' work we can find in the American pragmatism, foremost within Dewey's work. He emphasizes the promises of learning and claims that the university's knowledge tradition is based on technical rationality, in the positivistic tradition of science and its institutionalized relation with education and practice. And it overrides *competence in practice and professional artistry*. When it comes to problem solving, Schön talks about *problem-setting*, which is not a technical issue, but an interactive process in dialogue with the situation. Its features are two aspects: *naming* and *framing*, which enables questions and answers. The insight that situations are *given* meaning and that problems are *created*, that they are not given of themselves, is important, as well as the notion that that *meaning giving* and *problem-setting* is in itself a field of knowledge. Schön talks about *competence in practice and professional artistry*, where the professional's acts as *the reflective practitioner* and his actions characterized by *knowledge-in-action*, *reflection-on-action* and *reflection-in-action*. The last named can on its highest level enclose *artistic knowhow*.

Burnham connects the concepts *self reflexivity* and *relational reflexivity* to Donald Schöns (1987) reflecting theory and means that when you are self-reflexive and use relational reflexivity, you *reflect in and on action*.

### 3.5.2 Zone of proximal development

Vygotskys' theories (Holzman, 2002) are based on the ideas of socialness of human beings. His idea about learning is to make it possible for all people to learn actively, creatively and growth-fully, no matter age or circumstances. He was part of creating a new *psychology of activity*. He saw human growth as something that we create, a cultural activity that people engage in together. It does not happen *to us*. He presented a new methodology: learning and teaching as collaborative, creative, cultural activities of continuous transformation. The key concept is *dialectical unity*. He reacted on the established notion of a relationship between learning and development that he thought was too linear. He thought that learning was both the source and the product of development as well as development was both the source and the product of learning. In a reflexive way, learning and development are inseparably, inter-wined and emergent, understood as a unity. In practice we use this idea and talk about it as the

concept of the *ZPD, zone of proximal development*. Due to this idea we are at every moment both *being and becoming*.

When we create what Vygotsky calls *ZPD-like contexts* where learning and development are jointly created by peoples activities we enable people to *do things we don't yet know how to do*, we do things in advance of ourselves. Vygotsky talks about this capacity as the essence of human growth.

### **3.5.3 AI-Appreciative Inquiry, Ability-Spotting and Labelling**

In the book “THE THIN BOOK OF Appreciative Inquiry”, Sue Annis Hammond (1996) describes that one of the fundamentals of AI is that you learn from your successes and from what works. In any organization (or group or family) there are things that work and change can be made possible by identifying what works and by analyzing how to apply these. Positive talk creates good emotions and in a reflexive way, good emotions can facilitate progress.

For instance in using AI, interviewing about a piece of work, there is a way to bring out and co-create stories of competence which provides a good starting point in the process of adult learning and in supervision. The interview could be about a moment or an episode where the person felt proud and pleased, felt she really did a good job.

You can combine this activity with the method of Ability-spotting and Labelling (McAdam, 2003, Lang, 2006). The participants who listen to the interview in a reflecting position write down abilities they identify on post-it stickers and put them on the person who is interviewed. The idea is; identify abilities, name them, so that they can be remembered and applied, thus they become part of your identity. Bring out and point out what is happening **now**, so it is genuine, based on episodes of action (McAdam, 2003).

## 4. Complexity and Contradictions

### 4.1 Complexity

From my point of view complexity has to do with different levels of context and expectations and demands which are involved in the communication and supervision process. In my work and from conversations with people in the field I found different themes that are parts of the experience of complexity in supervision.

#### 4.1.1 Circumstances connected to the local culture at a workplace

I meet groups with different professional cultures, for instance from the school culture, healthcare and social services. There are differences like in paradigms and in explanatory models. The school context which I consider have a more positivistic tradition which is reflected in a more hierarchical structure, where the teacher has precedence and in the view of knowledge, which is more universe. There is one truth to be found and there is right and wrong. Similar in health-care, also with a positivistic hierarchical tradition, where the doctor knows best and people act out of a context with more linear thinking. When it comes to problem-solving one often refers to the medical model: first problem/symptom, then diagnose and last treatment. As if there is one right solution or cure and the doctor or nurse provides it in a neutral way and is not affecting the process. I as a supervisor come from another culture within the postmodern paradigm with social-constructionist approach, circular thinking and a multiverse notion on knowledge. When I meet with for instance a group of special-pedagogues, they can describe cases where they are supposed to supervise teachers, and their approach in those missions are more it the positivistic tradition. They are the “experts” who are expected to know better and tell the teachers the right way to perform their work. When we discuss those matters our both cultures meet and sometimes it creates complex situations with different levels of context involved; **Professional life script:** for both of us, me who want to be neutral and circular in consulting the special-pedagogues and help them to be the same to the teachers. They who know the best method to help children and want to get teachers to do it *the right way*. **Relation:** The special-pedagogues and the teachers, where the teachers feel criticised by the special-pedagogues and in our relation where there is a risk that the same thing can happen. Another matter which makes it even more complex is that I am an inmate consult and a colleague to my supervisees. **Episode:** supervision with

colleagues about supervision of a teacher. **Culture:** the school culture meeting the supervision culture.

In many areas solo work dominates; people sit alone with the red light on and have a race during the week. Their time and meetings are always very tight and structured. Colleagues do not even meet for breaks; have their lunch-boxes a quarter after each other. People want to get away from loneliness, do something together, sit down and spend some time with colleagues. Martin Söderkvist (2002) writes about systemic supervision from many perspectives and mentions the Irish therapists' the "*fifth province*" (McCarthy and O'Reilly Byrne, 1988), a metaphor from history on Ireland where different rival groups fought. They could not talk to each other and negotiate on the battle field, so they went to church, laid down their weapons in the fore room, entered the next room and created what we call the *fifth province* and provided a neutral creative room. Here it was possible to reflect, negotiate and open up for new views. Professionals need a room like the fifth province, a good metaphor for supervision. We create a space with time and possibilities for reflexion. Professionals can leave their every day work with ingrained explanation models and patterns where the Domain of Production often dominates. Together we enter a creative neutral space in the Domain of Explanation where we can create Zones of Proximate Development. People can meet and try out new positions in the forms we co-create. Acting and responding, reflecting, learning and development are jointly co-created and shared in the supervision process. New experiences emerge which can reflect back on the daily work and open up new ways forward.

As a result of the lack of time many experience in their daily work, there are questions in supervision about parts that one could consider should be taken care of in the organizations, like *method guidance* which usually is a task for e.g. the social-workers boss. And staff welfare which I consider especially important for staff in human services organizations. Part of those two matters is for staff to be confirmed and encouraged in the good daily work they perform. Many leaders do not prioritize this, maybe due to lack of time or they might have other preferences in their leader approach. Thus supervisees often express that they do not feel seen and confirmed in all their efforts in their daily work and there is a lack of follow up and feedback.

Hofsten and Sundberg (Wrangsjö, 2004) talk about opportunities for professionals to deal with different aspects of their professional context, like organisational dilemmas and other circumstances in their working context. They highlight the importance of supervisors to be responsive to such matters, but still be clear about the limitations in her position and in the supervisory context, where there is no mandate in taking actions or solving things concrete. In supervision we have a possibility to deal with such matters in the Domain of Explanation, but no possibilities to act in the Domain of Production,

In some organizations leaders connect supervision to competence-development for their employees. They buy a course in some method. And since they do not provide method- guidance, they buy supervision to integrate the new method. Sometimes the employees can not have both; they have to choose between further training and supervision.

Most people seem to regard one part in supervision as learning and professional competence-development. They also talk about personal development. Some stress that it is the *process*, not the *result* that is important. Still some people seem to want a result, to end up with something concrete to bring from the session. I regard this as one of the contradictions and I connect it to adult learning and Kolbs'(1984) concept of peoples' different preferred learning styles: - concrete experience, - reflective observation, - abstract conceptualisation and – active experimentation. Burnham (2009) suggests extending Kolbs' ideas ' through the systemic tradition. He suggests a distinction between a) Kolbs' "classification" of supervisee learning styles (personal coherence) as a "first order tool" and b) as a "second order" process in which, supervisee and supervisor compare their narratives of supervision and learning, and their preferred practices of supervision.

How to design the process according to different wishes and preferred styles is a question of contracting and re-contracting, an interpersonal coordination through relational reflexivity. Because among all those different expectations you as the supervisor are responsible for creating clarity about what the supervisor and supervisees shall engage in and what to expect from each other.

I also find Maturanas' *Theory of Domains of action* (Lang et al, 1990) useful when it comes to managing the different wishes and the position you take in order to provide a

supervision-context with clarity. The different wishes the supervisees express can be referred to the different domains. As to the stressful situation for professionals with lack of time and space to reflect on their work and expand ideas together with colleagues, you act in the *Domain of Explanation*. When they want input about method, sometimes advice and even help in what is right or wrong, duties and obligations, it is in the *Domain of Production*. In supervision you move in and out of the *Domain of Production* and the *Domain of Explanation*. It is helpful and ethical to be clear about when you change, in your own mind or in dialogue with the supervisees and sometimes you need to negotiate before the change. In a situation where you as a supervisor are interviewing a person, you might get the idea that you want to give a piece of theory or an advice. In such cases you can use a context-mark to be clear about the change in domains. In a course where I was a trainer a trainee suggested the technique of *changing chairs* in a situation like that. She gave an example where she was the supervisor. In an interview in a session she got the idea to jump into the position of her ground profession, which is a special-pedagogue, and give some advice. She negotiated with the group and made a clear context-mark by changing chairs saying “now I talk as special-pedagogue Eve”, after giving the advice she changed chairs again and clarified “now I talk as supervisor Eve again”. When she negotiated she used *relational reflexivity* (Burnham, 2005) to discuss her thought and reflect on the idea with the group. Otherwise it might turn out as *uninvited teaching*, which can create reactions and confusion and contribute to the complexity. I relate here to the educationalist Holt, he talks about *uninvited teaching* (Burnham, 1993). He said: “Not only is the case that uninvited teaching does not make learning, but – and this was even harder for me – for the most part such teaching prevents learning” (Holt, 1989:128). He suggests that this should be agreed about by supervisor and supervisees in the contracting process or by using relational reflexivity in the situation.

If the supervisor experience there is a need for advice or suggestions more in the Domain of Production and it is negotiated, it can be helpful and ethical.

The question of ethics is often treated as a general declaration about principles for instance in an organisation. But as I see it, through social constructionist eyes, you live the ethic in your actions and in your language in every episode. You negotiate and renegotiate around respect and other ethical issues, within an on-going process. As Dewey put it, “There are no rules in peoples’ heads; it is the way we live with each other” (Lang, 1998).

Penman (1995) said: "we act into our morality". Moral knowing does not exist regardless/undependable from a social situation, it is brought about within.

#### **4.1.2 Activities and Meaning, form and content on different levels of context**

The complexity I experience sometimes in supervision is connected to confusion around what *Domain* you are acting in, and about form and content in matters concerning quite different levels of work. There is a wide range of variety in activities in supervision. To mention some; to deal with- and express difficult and different emotions concerning the clinical work and about the group, issues about the department, the whole organization and also society and political matters. Like a manager said:

"a forum to address the complexity associated with the different contexts that influence supervision such as politics at national and local levels and gaps between the goals. The local conditions are not designed to achieve the national goals. There are greater national demands, but it has not resulted in increased local resources. It is stressful, not least economically in society and in organizations. Due to those circumstances which also affects peoples living conditions, clients has increased their vulnerability. "

As to the matter of form and different methods, I have come across many different preferences; solution-focused methods such as counselling with problem-solving and advising around how to perform in the daily work with clients, discussions, sharing ideas and thoughts with each other and exchange experiences in for instance the form of reflecting team, playing theatre or role-play, live-supervision with clients and alter conversations with other creative forms and different practical elements, like painting, singing, using video. It could also be activities like reading and discussing a book in the group. A supervisor said she sometimes uses a kind of mind-exercise, in the form "walk and talk". For instance if a group tells that they are going to be involved with a case conference the whole afternoon, it could be a signal that they need to move.

Groups have different needs in different phases, if necessary to broaden when it is too narrow and vice versa.

According to meaning and use, *re-contracting* and *relational reflexivity* (Burnham, 2005) it is useful to check this through the process in a session and over time. You can ask questions like: "are we talking about the right things? How can this be useful?" At the end of conversation: "who will benefit from this conversation? What will you



bring back (to own practice)? What effects will it have? Who will notice? Who will you tell?" Asking circular questions (Cecchin, 1987) facilitate reflecting and open up ideas forward.

Leaders can have other expectations than the participants on the supervision; for instance that supervision will improve the quality and also efficiency in the work. They might want a competent group and they might also want to have some control through the supervisor on how the work is performed. It could even be a message from the leader to the supervisor; "fix this"! It connects to supervision as *quality assurance* for professionals, which is another function people point out. A transparency, someone qualified outside the organisation. For instance in complex and controversial cases around which there has been publicity in media, for social-workers to get help in supervision in such cases could prevent mistakes in the handling. It gives professionals an opportunity to be aware of and discuss their prejudices for the benefit of alliance (Miller, 2010) through curiosity and collaborative work. In a seminar with Scott Miller (2010) he presented results from several studies showing that the most important factor in achieving good results in therapy and client-work is the degree of alliance in the relation client-professional.

The issue about different missions in supervisory agreement is a question about responsibility for the leader and the supervisor. The supervisors are employed by the employer. They have made a contract.

It is important to be clear about those matters, to get the mission clear from the beginning, from the leader and from the group. Clarify rights and duties, like the obligation to act in the Domain of Production if you as a supervisor react to something as unethical or inappropriate. Sometimes the leader can join at the first occasion and be part of creating the context.

I have experiences from groups where the most important part in supervision is for the group to get some relaxation together. Have a space outside work, sit down have coffee, a quiet time and be social for a while. The leader than could ask a question about efficiency, for what use?

Wrangsjö (2004) talks about *Role conflict* and *Double bind* in supervision. He means that the supervisors' role of assessor and controller gets in conflict with the role of an equal conversation partner in a conversation. These two roles respond to rule systems which are mutually incompatible.

## 4.2 Contradictions

I consider contradictions part of the complexity and vice versa. I think of the different wishes and expectations supervisees and also supervisors themselves have in mind and express concerning the supervisor.

To mention some examples of contradictions, to be: *competent- but not too competent*, *Humble- challenging*, *governing-co creating*, *knowing-not knowing* and *expert-multiverse*. Below I describe those more thoroughly.

### 4.2.1 Theory and method.

Most people seem to think that it is important for the supervisor to have a broad knowledge with many perspectives, what Maturana would call multiverse (1988). In this case to have an allowing approach and flexibility for different theories and methods and not judge what is right or wrong. Use methods in supervision that facilitate different voices to be heard and many ideas to be expressed. In one case it might be useful to refer to different theories and there might be a need for different methods. I connect to Lars Westerströms' ideas about the need of multi-perspective in theories and methods as he describes in the article *Systemic-theory for doctors*, (2010). It is written and addressed primary for doctors in the child-psychiatric field, but I consider it as applicable in other areas like in pedagogic work and in supervision. He highlights that some cases are extremely complex and requires an analytical ability beyond the ordinary and to the best of models from the three areas of biology, individual psychology and society/networks combined (synthesis).

It is of importance *how* the supervisor uses her knowledge. Ingegerd Wirtberg (Söderkvist, 2002) has interviewed supervisees about what they do not want in supervision, many stressed that they do not want a supervisor who give prominence to herself and tells of her own successful work performance or who emphasizes only one

approach. Supervisors who are happy to take over and lecture are not desired, many people point out that it often makes them feel less competent and that their resources diminish instead of develop.

Mårtenson–Blom (Wrangsjö, 2004) talks about supervision as learning processes and knowledge development. She highlights the supervisors' contribution to the supervisees' development of "connected" and "constructed" knowing. Connected knowing requires that the supervisor has a trusting approach and tries to think from the position of the supervisee. Constructed knowing requires that the supervisor conveys that knowledge and ideas, for instance about cases in supervision, is not absolute, but emerging/co-constructed in the conversation they have with each other. Knowledge about how we connect relationally and interact is basic for both connected- and constructed knowledge. Supervisor and supervisee develop "relational knowledge", knowledge about how we interact. Mårtenson-Blom describes those moments when the content (what we talk about) harmonize with meeting and touching in our interactions. Suddenly, the situation is "sounding", harmonized. I associate this to what Shotter (2004) talks about as a *chiasmic moment*. You do not know which comes first the touch or the emotional respond. It is like it happens at the same time, like a magic moment.

Some think that in supervision one should have the possibility to experiment and try out different ideas and methods. Other stress that the supervision should be creative, solution-focused, based on systemic and social-constructionist ideas. Because psychodynamic and analytic approaches carry more inward than forward.

The basic approach for the supervisor is enabling supervisees themselves to find **their** solutions or ways forward. Still preserve openness for different wishes, for instance sometimes people ask for guidance and tips.

In the English word **super vision** lays the hierarchical position imbedded. It is as if the supervisor, like super-man, has a power and access to a greater and better vision than the supervisees.

There has been a change in the supervisor role, from being the expert to a more collaborative position and we co-create the supervision. As someone expressed; a good supervisor does not take place and should not run her own theses. But warms the context and have an enabling function, with good knowledge of following up and following the process and the group. Mårtensson-Blom means that the supervisor is more experienced and has more knowledge than the ones she supervises. At least she is paid for this. Experience and knowledge gives power. Mårtensson-Blom refers to Michael Foucault who talks about that the notion of power is given meaning only if you see the power in relation. Due to this she means that power and powerlessness always co-exists in a circular interaction between people. We ought not talk about one without the other, or feel one without the other. We need always to be in contact with both positions. The relation in supervision is important and touching and in the process there are always risks and possibilities. As a supervisor one needs to strike a tone where cooperation is significant for what we do, here the supervisor has a certain responsibility.

The issue about how the supervisor is expected to perform her knowledge is part of the contradictions. Some expect the supervisor acting as **the expert** who is providing answers, as someone to look up to. Others again want a more restrained supervisor to benefit for their own competence. Sometimes those different preferences are represented in the same group. They can also be represented in different ideas or stories the supervisor her self has about how to act. For instance in her *personal life-script* and from *family culture* she might have the experience that to be someone who matters it is important to be seen as competent. In her *professional life-script* might be the idea of acting from a "heterarchical" and collaborative stance.

The change over time in approach from a hierarchical position and relation supervisor-supervisees, to a more "heterarchical", has provided another kind of ethical stance. Where we open up space for another kind of participation, a more collaborative, co-created approach and thus more opportunities for learning and development according to what circumstances provide adult learning. You need to be aware though of the risk of confusion around responsibility and mandate, which creates un-clarity and become part of the complexity.

When it comes to the supervisors approach and style, I find Per Jenssens' (2007) research done on therapists interesting and I see parallels between the two positions of

therapist and supervisor. He found that regarding to the notion of *evidence based work*; the traditional assumption is that therapy works as medicine. The doctor diagnoses and prescribes the right medicine. It is the active substance in the medicine that works. The same in therapy, it is the intervention that works. The therapists' task is to deliver it. Little or non consideration is made to the therapists' personal and private background.

Also in earlier research on how psycho-therapy works Hubble et.al (1999) described the relation between four general change factors: 1. Events outside of therapy (40%), 2. the alliance (30%), 3. the belief in the treatment (15%) and 4. the effectiveness of the treatment it self (15%). Thus one must believe in ones method, be well trained (and continuously have supervision and further training), an ability to form alliances with clients/systems, use methods that have as good evidence-mode as possible and be available when needed. These results are interesting to connect to the supervision and training field, there are similarities in the relations supervisor - supervisees and in the relation of therapist and client.

#### **4.2.2 The supervisors position and responsibilities**

My own experiences from being a supervisor and what supervisees wish for and expect from the supervisor is that it differs from being a lecturer to an entertainer.

This is what one supervisee expressed about what is important for the supervisor:

“Very respectful and responsive. Even if she can and knows, not show off, because then I lose my own knowledge. Asking questions that opens up for reflection. Can also provide advice sometimes and share their knowledge and theory. Not only have one style, but different, for example: reflecting teams, open dialogue, talking stick or something spontaneously, colour-creativity like painting can be fun. Need to be incredibly respectful and humble, like we meet our clients, otherwise it is a risk that it will be an imbalance/mismatch. For example, a risk to put the supervisor on a pedestal. Should not point your whole hand, but can add to and complement, but do not state that something is better for the rest of my own knowledge from the game, that's why this is so important.”

I experience this view representative for many supervisees, but also you meet persons who want to be challenged and even questioned and criticised. Which I consider to be one of the contradictions, to be both humble and challenging, to act competent, but not in a way that makes others feel incompetent. What ever differences there might be in a group according to this, learning and professional development seems important.

A ground for a creative learning position, is to start from own experiences. To use ideas about collaborative, interactional learning (Kolb, 1984) and from Dewey's (Cronen, Lang, 1994) learning by doing. You grow your professional identity by naming experiences and abilities (McAdam, 2003). From an *already competent* learning position supervisees can get into a position where they get curious and can challenge their own ideas. In supervision we can create what Vygotsky (Holzman, 2002) called ZPD, zones of proximate development.

It seems to be a general idea that the starting point is that it is the groups' responsibility to bring issues to the session. But the supervisor may have something on hand, just in case. For example, an educational part, something the supervisor considers the group might find useful.

One of my supervisees, a professional from a school context told about a supervision experience in a group where session after session passed and they just sat off the time and nobody brought a subject to discuss. She expressed that it was a strange experience and thought the supervisor should have done more to get something started. Most supervisors bring ideas, exercises and different methods to start up with. They should find a form and be the facilitators and the supervisees should act. She also had thoughts around the school culture, where she meant that teachers are not that used to supervision. It is something you might use when things does not work. If they do not have a problem, they get stuck and do not know what to talk about.

It differs a lot from group to group what the participants show and express.

Sometimes you come to a group and they express that they have no issues to work around and no idea of how to use the time. Or they want you as the supervisor to propose a theme or an exercise. I have experienced contradictory stories about this in groups. Often in the beginning of the process in the contracting phase, supervisees express and seem clear about their responsibility to bring issues to the sessions. But later on they act in a contrary way. They say they have no theme for the session and sometimes underlying, expectations on the supervisor to come up with something. You can see it as *stories lived* and *stories told* (Pearce, 1994).

I have experienced confusing situations in supervision, with an unusual atmosphere, e.g. people do not talk or some people are more quiet than others, where you can feel something is underlying, something which is hard to put your finger on and hard to

talk about. I understood later on that there were always matters like conflicts in the group, relationships that needed to be defined (Lang et.al, 1994) or difficulties in relation to organisation and leadership. Peter Lang said in a management course I attended (2008) ask yourself: “are we clear about the definition of the relationship? When people get emotional or get into defending themselves, there is always something which is not clear about the relationship.

### **4.2.3 The positions of practitioner and supervisor**

I find it fundamental as the supervisors’ responsibility to have strategies and to keep in mind the differences in the two positions and how to use them. It is difficult at times because supervisees in a group sometimes have contradictory expectations. Some want you to speak as the experienced social-worker who knows the work, others expect you to be neutral and a good process leader and than it is not so important what your ground profession is.

If you change positions and it is not agreed, it creates confusion and this becomes part of the complexity.

As a supervisor I easily connect with the supervisee’s roles as practitioners. Especially when I meet with supervision groups in social-services, since I have worked in this area as a social-worker for many years. Thus I have many ideas about how they can perform their work. Along with practicing as a supervisor I developed ways to keep my task and position, and stay in the supervisor position. In order to remind myself about my commission and responsibility as supervisor, I think about how I position myself, using second order cybernetics (Bateson, 1972, Burnham, 2008). And keep reminding myself that my task is not primarily to work around *the supervisees’* actions, first order cybernetic, as long as they are not considered unethical or harmful in a client perspective (Scaife, 2001), but to focus on what *they think that others think of their actions and the effects*. To help in this matter I keep reminding myself of John Burnham’s (2008) demonstration of an example on the same issue. In a role-play he showed how a supervisor supervising a therapist became engaged and lost his position and instead of helping the therapist in her role, became the expert/super therapist in his approach and figuratively spoken pushed the therapist aside and placed himself in the therapeutic role. This illustration has become a symbolic picture that I often recall

as a reminder and guardian angel (McAdam, 2003), not to lose my role as a supervisor and instead become the **expert** on the issue.

#### **4.2.4 Thoughts about use and forms**

In my supervision groups and also from my own experience of being supervised, I have heard participants express that sometimes in supervision, patterns are created that become a bit rigid. You perform in the same way over and over again and the process becomes too predictable and in a way that limits the creativity. My sense is that what we co-create is not always the answer to what we need and would like. I have taken the opportunity to talk to colleagues and supervisees about those matters. A supervisor I had a conversation with had some thoughts regarding the high paced of development in society with a high tempo, efficiency and economic thinking, she talked about “the artistic thought” ; the simpler it is, the better. She suggested: “Don’t be so pretentious and impose techniques. Rest in the now. Provide some easy chairs and have an ongoing conversation.”

There is a risk that you use a higher tempo than the group, imposing techniques, occupied by saying the right things. People need some time together. There should be a word as experience-based supervision. Where you get input through other kinds of experiences together in the group. It could be watching a play, listening to music, visit an art-exhibition and also doing creative activities like painting and writing together. The idea is then to use those experiences in the supervision in what we call “self development”.

As a supervisor, you can not go on too long in the supervision, as you can easily become predictable. People will recognize the exercises. They want to be a bit surprised. Maybe invite people to seminars, do some larger activities together. A model could be to run supervision for three years, then pause for a period with other activities, training, maybe a course in mindfulness.

Other expressed similar thoughts, like running supervision in other environments. For instance in the nature, which opens up for creativity, development and learning. They also talked about more transparency through inviting clients to supervision, both in direct supervision, to theme discussions and in activities like the ones described



above. One suggested inviting clients to listen to our supervision, like in *outside witness* groups (White, 2007).

My experience from own supervision and from the position of being the supervisor is that; it is important to have an open mind for finding forms that suits people and that open up for creativity. Still there is also the matter of personal style and the supervisors' preferences. You do not have to provide everything. It is important to be grounded in something where you can be comfortable in the position to find your own inspiration and energy, which than can create good emotions, for yourself as well as for others. Again I want to point out the risk of being unclear or uncertain if you go into performing in ways you do not feel comfortable in. I have also noticed a contradiction between demands on utility and efficiency on one hand and on the other hand the wish for a free zone for primarily being social with your colleagues and getting some relaxation.

### **4.3 Connections and distinctions in the supervisor- and trainer -position**

When I reflect on my performance in the two positions in connection to my focus, *complexity* and *contradictions*, I find distinctions which I experience as facilitating in the trainer-position. In the frame of training contexts I provide a structure - planned in beforehand- which facilitates clarity in the different parts. In the structure we co-create in process and move between domains. Like there can be parts with input from theory, by lecturing or by literature-studies, reading and discussing and there are other parts with practicing and reflecting. There are also moments and parts about reflexions on how to co-create even the structure, but it is still **in** the frame of the main structure. The difference in supervision is that it is more of an open space with many parts to consider and decide on, **in** the moment, like what to talk about and how, what positions to take for both participants and the supervisor, which opens up for complex processes with a risk of un-clarity between- and in different levels of context.

## 5. Examples from practice

I will present four cases concerning complexity and contradictions in the supervision process. They are from different professional contexts. Nr 1 is from a group in social services, nr 2 is from a group of professionals in a school context, nr 3 is from a supervision/training group in my organisation and nr 4 is from another group in social services. The examples show the use of different theoretical concepts; *CMM*, *The Domain theory*, *Chaos and Order theory*, ideas about *reflexivity* and *learning theories*, to help in analyzing and orienting *in* and *after* a situation and ideas about how to move *forward*.

### 5.1 Case 1 - Co-creating the process

This example illustrates complexity in the supervision context and contradictions in the position. I will use Cronen and Pearce Chaos and Order theory (Cronen and Pearce, 1985) and CMM (Cronen, 1994) to reflect on how the session developed.

In this supervision group there seemed to be an imbalance with regards to competence and incompetence in the group. Some of the professionals showed a position of feeling *competent* and skilful and also seemed to be seen in this way, e.g. from the leader, which can seem to put some of the others in a *less competent* position.

Sometimes when I tried to co-create a clear structure in the sessions by for instance using the form of interviewing and a reflecting team, I noticed that the group did not respond or responded by talking in a “crisscrossing” manner, creating confusion in the conversation. My hypothesis is that when I asked those questions it was perceived as acting from a position of power and placed me in the powerful group. Accordingly I addressed and asked for competent answers and addressed expectations of performance.

In one session a member had an issue she wanted to focus on. In the mini-contracting *she* suggested to do an *internalized other interview* (though she did not address it in that term) (Burnham, 2008) where she would be the client and be interviewed by someone in the group. As soon as I began to organize the interview the members continued to talk, ask questions about the case and talk amongst themselves. The pattern I have noticed over time- and of course been part of co-creating is that when I

begin to structure the conversation, the group responds in a confusing manner. I reflected in action and decided not to push the process but instead let the “free talk” around the case continue, with some inputs; repeating and confirming their questions and add some reflections in a confirming way. After a while I felt it was time to check if they wanted to continue with the *internalized interview* and they said “yes”. I asked who (I or somebody else) wanted to be the interviewer and when no one offered to do it, I suggested that one member whom seemed curious and had been active in asking questions to do it. The structure we decided was that she started the interview and after a while others could add questions and so did I. At last we reflected together on action about form and content. I experience it came out in a useful way.

### **Reflexion**

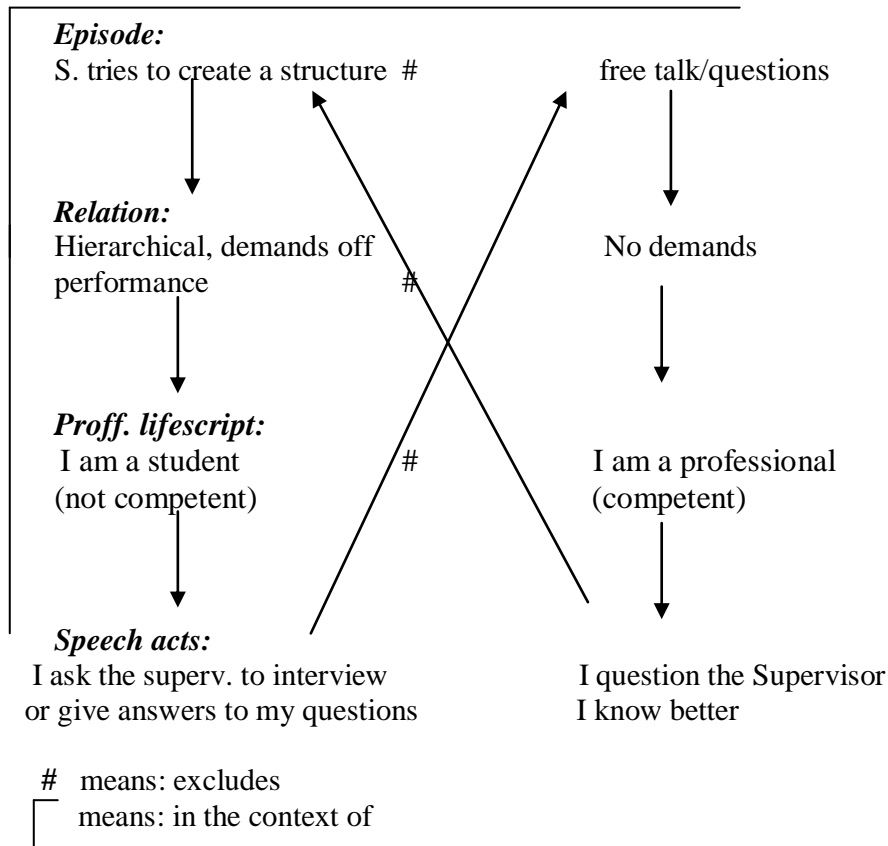
My first reflection on this case is that one could say that there is always a kind of a *double bind* (Bateson, 1972) situation in supervision. The supervisor is in a way in a power position. In her mission lies the responsibility for leading the process and using her competence. When doing so the supervisees can respond from a position of “student” which can make them feel less competent with less access to their knowledge, or from a competent position with the risk of challenging the supervisor who than might lose her position. The same for the supervisor, who has expectations on being competent, but when acting from that position the supervisees may feel less competent. If the supervisor takes an unobtrusive position there is a risk of mistrust from the group.

In this situation, through a sense of timing, we altered between loose and tight structure. I used the idea of widening through the loose structure in the start and in that phase allowed the participants to get into a *competent learning position*. The group was than ready to leave their comfort zone (Burnham, 2008). Together we then created a ZPD, zone of proximate development, (Holzman, 2002) where a creative supervision and learning situation could take place.

The situation and pattern created, illustrated by the loop below.

**Local supervision group culture:**

The supervisor is an expert on process and knows when to ask questions (creative chaos) and when to suggest order.



**Figure 2: Strange loop, an illustration of the hypothesis above.**

## 5.2 Case 2 - The school example

Here is another example on the same theme but from a school context.

Last year I met every second week in school with a group of three professionals for supervision concerning one child. The child had difficulties in social activities with other children and in the interaction with his teachers in the classroom. He often reacted with anger and sometimes displayed violent behaviour in stressful situations. The mother, a single parent was against consulting child psychiatry. I used different systemic ideas like AI-Appreciative Inquiry, circular interviewing and solution-focused questions to look for exceptions when things work out well and explore what we can learn from those. This resulted in small differences and by the time the school staff started describing worse situations. When I also had met with the boy on some occasions and saw more of his behaviour and noticed needs which he

showed. I got the hypothesis that the chaotic situation in the class needed no more widening supervision but clear advice about methods and structure. In the next session I told the staff that from meeting the boy I think the best way to treat him is *as if* he has a diagnosis. Let him have his own seat, help him and the other children to see his need of structure and predictability etc. In other words the chaos needed for the professionals to get clear instructions about how to make sense of the boys' behaviour and how to act. There were no needs for more exploration and questions.

### **Reflexion**

I used the *chaos and order theory* in analyses of the situation and in the session to create a change in the chaotic situation. In the supervision conversation, I moved from the Domain of Explanation to the Domain of Production, by giving advice and instructions.

## **5.3 Case 3 – The special-pedagogue example**

This example shows complexity connected to confusion; between domains, in positions and on different levels of context.

The example is from a group of special-pedagogues and social-workers. We have met since last autumn once a month in a context we call *supervision-professional development* group. It is a continuation of a training group in supervision methods, where I was the trainer last year. When we had finished the training the participants experienced that they wanted more support with regards to practising. They wanted the group to continue in some way. We decided to meet in three-hour settings. In the first half we supervise each other in small groups or in one group with a reflecting team, what ever we decide. The second half we share our experiences, reflect on action (Shön, 1987) and learning together. Together we co-created the structure and decided I would have a position of being responsible for the process and adding bits of theory if requested.

On one occasion two of the participants wanted to discuss a commission where they were going to lecture and lead a development process with their colleagues in the special-pedagogue group, on a specific theme. They wanted input around how to design the process. We decided that one member in our group interviewed them and the rest became a reflecting team, where I also joined in. In the reflecting team was a

colleague of theirs whom is part of the context they wanted to discuss and she also new about their commission. In the mini-contracting (Scaife, 2001) they said they wanted ideas and also advice from this colleague. Our process became intense in the room and at times a bit tense and emotional.

After the consultation part when we *reflected on action* (Schön, 1987) about the process and our learning, it became obvious that it was a *complex* context and that certain things had contributed to create un-clarity and contradictions. In my supervisor position there was contradictory missions about being a team-member/colleague and being in the position of trainer, responsible for the process. There was confusion on many levels:

- When the two members who wanted supervision presented their issue, it became clear that they and other members of **their** context (some of them were in our training-supervision group) had different understanding of their commission and also they stressed that there were many different definitions of the concepts they were going to lecture on and work around in their commission. Those un-clarities created some kind of parallel confusion in the room.
- Things happened on a relational level between participants when the advising part started and there was a change in positions. It appeared as if there was a matter of questioning and defence.
- There was confusions in positions and responsibility in our context. I did not change between the domains, from the *Domain of Explanation* when I was a part of the reflecting team to *the Domain of Production* where I should have taken responsibility for leading the process and act for clarifying positions and the context.

## **Reflexion**

The structure we have created provides good opportunities for learning. By self-reflexivity and relational reflexivity (Burnham, 1993) we analysed what happened and why. We reflected on learning and consequences. And as a result we made an even clearer structure about positions and responsibility for the rest of our sessions. We decided that there is a great learning potential in changing positions and altering the responsibility for the whole process. We made a list of who is in charge every occasion and clarified the expectations. During the weeks between this occasion and

the following session the persons who were most involved had reflected together and had learned more about themselves. They shared those learning points with the rest of us and together we reflected on the whole process. This example also highlights the supervisors' responsibility to act in the *Domain of Production* if the process turns out strange, un-constructive or unethical in some way.

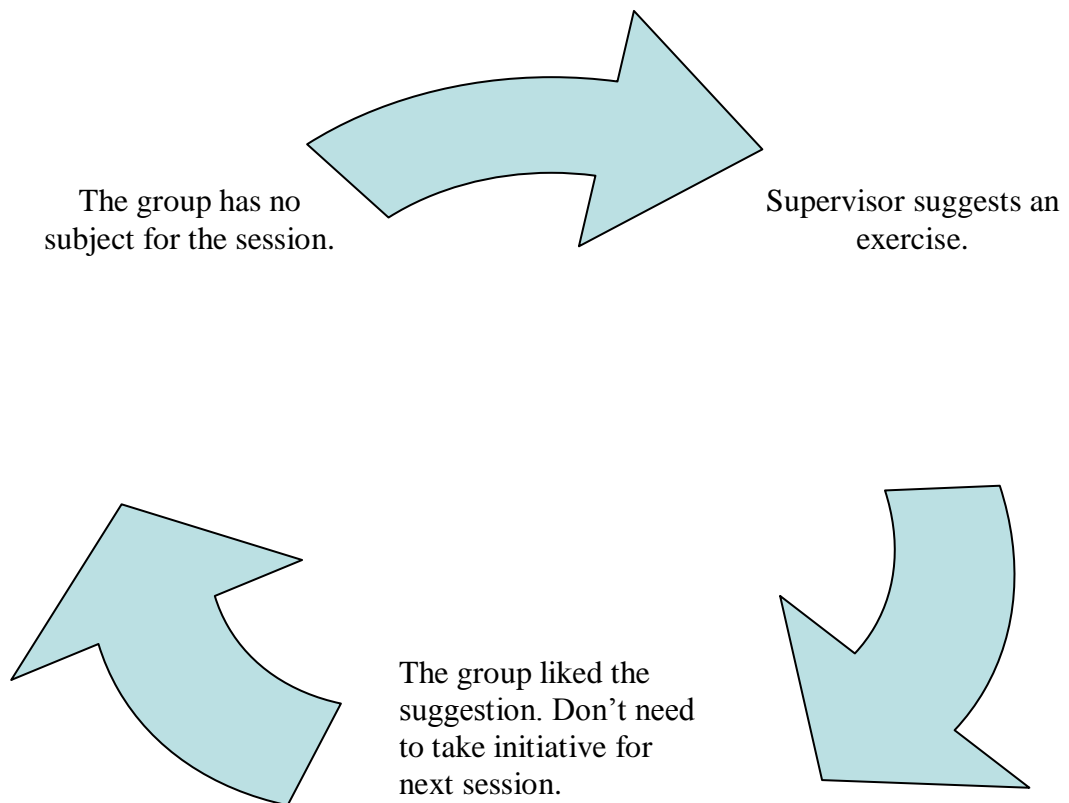
The form we have co-created a mix of supervision and training I found optimal for professional development. We started with three occasions of training on methods and then continued in the form of *supervision and professional development*.

#### **5.4 Case 4 - Stuck in supervision-Using CMM to move forward**

This example shows confusion; complexity and contradictions in the supervision context and in positions, about taking responsibility for the content. It is an example from one of my previous supervision groups about taking responsibility for creating good supervision and agendas for the supervision sessions. It also has to do with my ambitions to be a competent and useful supervisor. It happened in one session in this group that no one had brought an issue. I then suggested some exercise or a theme. In the next session the same thing happened again. When the group was quiet, I became concerned, "Is something wrong, why don't they want to bring something, am I not doing a good job"?

I started to prepare for experiencing the same situation next time, and thus tried to be helpful and competent by always having an exercise or an agenda prepared, in case of... As a consequence they became more passive in taking responsibility for the content, relaying on me to serve them and even at times, entertain them. I became worried about them finding me and the supervision inadequate.

A negative pattern was co-created. One can illustrate what happened like this:



**Figure 1: Illustration of co-created pattern between supervisor and supervisees**

I used CMM to reflect and understand what happened on different levels of context in the process.

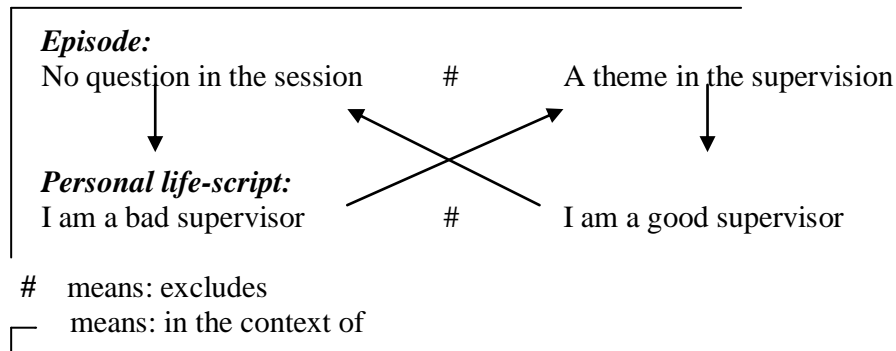
The pattern we created can be described in the CMM term of *a strange loop*, (Cronen and Pearce, 1994). It describes how two levels of context both make the context for and is understood in the context of the other. On the episode- and personal life-script level of the loop two contradicting stories are existing. The loop exists and is kept in place by content on a higher level of context. If this content would change, the loop could be stopped.

I made this hypothesize about the pattern: The system, supervisor and group, have a story on the context level *group culture* that says *“It is the supervisors responsibility*



to create a good supervision” and it affects the members of the group on different levels of context.

**Local group culture:** “It is the supervisor’s responsibility to create a good supervision”.



**Figure 2: Strange loop, an illustration of the hypothesis above.**

In order to try the hypothesis and question of responsibility I could discuss with the group, take a meta perspective, move into the Domain of Explanation (Lang et al, 1990) and relational reflexivity (Burnham, 1993) and talk about the process. And maybe share the strange loop with them.

To end the loop, the meaning on the context level *local group culture* needs to change for example to: “ *It is a shared responsibility to create a good supervision (and a focus for the sessions)* ”.

For me this understanding made sense and helped me to develop my way of thinking about it. A useful way to negotiate around expectations and responsibilities like this. In the contracting process with a new group or when there is a need in an on-going supervision group.

If you feel stuck in a strange, complex process and experience issues connected to contradictions, CMM could be a helpful method to analyse and understand and find new ways to move forward.

**Reflexion**

This example shows a common theme around which I have experienced there can be different contradicting expectations and thoughts around. Both the supervisor and the group can feel demands on providing interesting themes and questions for the sessions and confusion around whose responsibility it is. This can happen if you do not name it and discuss it together. In the beginning of the supervision process, in

the contracting process, there is often an agreement around this issue. Later on in the process though, there can be confusion and a lack of coherence between stories told and stories lived. There might be a need for renegotiating and re-contracting around these matters.

## **5.5 Summary of strategies**

Below I summarise the fundamental matters regarding AMT, Approach, Method and Technique, to orient in the complex landscape of supervision and find ways in relation to contradictions in the position as illustrated in the examples above.

The methods and strategies are as useful for the supervisees in their clinical work. In order to provide opportunities to achieve new skills this is a question about coherence in the process and providing opportunities and forms for learning in supervision through reflexions and connections to the supervisees' professional experiences.

### **CMM:**

The way I use CMM is to get hypothesis when I reflect in action about what is going on in an episode and in the communication. I try this hypothesis by using *relational reflexivity* in *reflexion in - and on action*. I also reflect between sessions and sometimes in an externalizing way (White, 1991) and illustrate it as in the examples above, for instance creating a figure in the strange loop model to understand patterns about how things fit together and find ways to go on.

CMM is functioning like a structure or a code to understand and use communication, like the alphabet is a structure and code to understand and use written language.

### **Domain Theory:**

The Domain theory is a way to clarify for me and be clear to the group about; what Domain we are acting in and what position we take. And as a guide in the process with regards to different expectations and wishes from the participants in the supervision and also to those concerned and affected outside the supervision; clients, other colleagues and managers.

It is also useful in the contracting process to clarify responsibilities, rights and duties.

A mark here is for the supervisor and supervisees to also define any preferences and limits due to expectations. It is a kind of matching process, where a risk of contradictions and confusion can be avoided.

### **Chaos and Order theory:**

As I reflect back on practice, I think a new awareness of the importance of analyzing what a system would benefit from in terms of type of input will help to find ways in complex situations. I experience now that sometimes when supervisees do not respond as to what you intended, it has to do with contra-productive acts (interventions). Like you widen in a chaotic system by for instance asking too many questions instead of providing ways to create more tight structure or vice versa. In stiff and rigid systems you need to widen and if you give instructions in this type of situation there is a risk of just getting the situation worse.

### **Reflexivity:**

Reflexive abilities, *self reflexivity* and *relational reflexivity* is a way to become more aware of the pitfalls and blind spots. For instance the risk of falling into the position of the practitioner; social-worker or therapist, without reflecting negotiating, and lose my position as supervisor. It is also a matter of reflexion on what is guiding me in my interviewing, like prejudices.

The awareness of position which is an effect of reflexivity and in a reflexive way; enables reflexivity, opens up for “heterarchical” relations and structures instead of the hierarchical. I.e. a change from feelings of demands on positioning myself as an expert to a more collaborative position in benefit for the alliance building, creating a developing space of trust and engagement. In a sense though, the supervisor has a superior role, because she is responsible for the process.

### **Educational Theories:**

Adult learning in theory and practice, applying learning theories in the field of supervision and training made me aware of the importance of how you position

yourself as a supervisee and adult student, how we can co-create and open up space for proximal possibilities for reflexive processes and learning.

Adult learning, starts from a competent “incompetent” position, for instance by having conversations with people in the frame of Appreciative Inquiry and using Ability spotting. These are methods to co-create a *conscious competent identity*.

Applying learning theories in supervision helped me to change my position as a supervisor and trainer according to responsibility. Thinking and working in a more collaborative manner helps to create a shared responsibility for the process. The reflexive methods used in complex situation is a way to create clarity.

## **5.6 Reflexions in the frame of Social GRRAACCEESS**

I have chosen to reflect on GRRAACCEESS in an overall context, in connection to my examples and to my focus. I concentrate on the parts of the concept that I find adequate for my purpose.

Ethics:

A common theme from the four cases is about how I position me as a supervisor with regards to responses and reactions from supervisees. I like to see it as feedback and information and expressed emotions as an *invitation to act* (Lang, 2006). What I mean is that if one does not get the desired or expected response from the supervisees, you might place the responsibility and explanation on the supervisee, which I regard as un-ethical. But as a systemic supervisor with a wish to act in the Domain of Aesthetics as the highest context, it is essential to be curious and reflect from a *second order position*. By using Relational Reflexivity you can explore your own part in the co-created process and see how you might have effected the relation and the work you have engaged in together.

In the supervisor and trainer positions lies an issue about power. In a way these missions give you a privileged position in mandate of directing and guiding the process. I regard counter strategies and tools to avoid violating people are represented by the ideas and approaches we use as; the ideas about collaborative interaction and learning, creating space for reflecting in- and on action through

relational reflexivity in order to check and adjust how the cooperative work develops. The multiverse approach enables valuing and respecting the experiences and the competence of all participants and gives dignity to all voices.

#### Culture:

When people act, they live their culture, they act in and out of their culture and if we want to understand peoples' actions we need to be curious and explore their culture. Sometimes confusion and complexity is about differences about certain meanings in peoples cultures. As shown in my examples, part of complexity and thus confusion is often a matter of differences in culture amongst participants. My supervisory context meeting other professional cultures where I prefer engaging with professionals in a co-created "heterarchical" structure, but people I meet sometimes expects the supervisory context to be more hierarchical. There are also other aspects of different cultures affecting the process, which for instance can be reflected in the theories, methods and the professional language we use. One example from my cases is the difference between the school culture and my supervisory culture which has been part of creating the complexity in situations. It is sometimes shown in what I mean and intend might get a different meaning and understanding by the receiver due to different cultural references. As seen in the case example 1, where there was an issue about competence which seemed to be connected to power. In their professional culture the preferences regarding competence were about "*common sense*" and *the doing*. They did not seem so attracted of the competence grounded in theory and methods.

#### Ability:

I showed in the examples how abilities are co-created in action and in reflection in- and on action. For instance the reflexive abilities which are created through the "heterarchical" structure, and in a reflexive way creates this structure, where we use relational reflexivity to interact and provide learning on different levels amongst the supervisor and supervisees. In the special-pedagogue example through the opportunities we created by using the participants reflexive abilities, self reflexivity

and relational reflexivity, in- and after the process, there was learning and further development on a personal, personal-professional level, relational level and on a group cultural level.

According to above hopefully we will co-create a climate in supervision and training where we open up space for all involved to be able to use their abilities as well as develop new through a safe and experimental ZPD like space. Then people feel they are competent and secure in the supervision in order to leave their comfort zones when desired to, for the benefit of exploring new ideas and expand their professional repertoire. In providing those opportunities, our clients or patients will benefit and also be able to get empowered and expand **their** abilities.

The essential abilities for supervisor and participants are the reflexive abilities, self reflexivity and relational reflexivity. And the ability to connect to own practice in supervision and explore how we can use those reflexive abilities in the clinical work in benefit for the people we work for.

#### Gender and Appearance:

I have experienced in supervision groups over time examples of ; that amongst women there can be difficulties in appreciating when a colleague advances and becomes successful. It is like this creates competition. A “jante reaction” (Sandemose,1933), i.e. *you should not think that you are anything special and you should not brag*. Like in example one, where there was an issue about showing competence. Similar in example three where the participants got into a situation of challenge and defence in the “advising part”.

Another A lately added to GRRAACCEESS is *Appearance*. An aspect I have become more aware of lately. For instance I reflect more about how people might experience the supervisor, for instance regarding the language used, which is part of the personal- and personal/professional life script and grammar and therefore difficult to see and reflect on, nevertheless important in order to create clarity in interacting with other people. I experience this was part of the situation in case one. Where I intended to be useful in my supervisory position, using my systemic skills

and knowledge without reflecting about how it might appear and be experienced of the supervisees.

## 6. Discussion

My first aim was; *Explore and describe dilemmas connected to complexity and contradictions in the supervisory context from the supervisory position and explore ways to analyze and approach those dilemmas.*

The overall understanding and meaning I give the two concepts now is that they are closely connected. I regard them as parts on different levels of the same phenomena. If the contradictions are not approached in a constructive way, they easily become part of a complexity. By a constructive way I mean for instance the different strategies I have used in exploring, analyzing and guiding the way forward in the cases I use as examples.

The second aim was; *Reflect on use and possibilities in future practice.* I have changed the way I approach the dilemma. If I experience for instance a situation or a case as complex with many contradictions, I will now first of all regard the experience as information to me and then *an invitation to act.* I have found useful and helpful methods for guiding me in the processes of understanding and finding new ways for all involved in the supervision process to interact in new ways forward.

The underlying circumstances of the experiences of complexity and contradictions are co-created thought-constructions. It is not something concrete **that is**, it is a *meaning* I have given some experienced phenomena. The supervisor is part of creating those circumstances and processes as well as can be part of finding ways to prevent and respond to them. For instance in the contracting and mini contracting phases when you ask about peoples wishes, hopes and expectations around the supervision, there is a risk to open up and widen too much. As if anything is possible, instead of the supervisor and supervisees to both be clear about the preferences, resources and limitations and give almost like a “product declaration”. It is actually a matter of defining the relations and positions. A frame for doing that is provided by Burnhams’ ideas about extending the concept of Kolbs’ classification of learning styles and regard it as a) a first order “tool”; “classification” of supervisee learning styles (personal coherence) and b) as a “second order” process



in which, supervisee and supervisor compare their narratives of supervision and learning, and their preferred practices of supervision.

Besides the strategies described, I believe now is the time to develop the supervision context further by exploring new forms.

## 7. Future practice

In addition to the ideas about AMT, strategies to use in practice, I will point out some possibilities for variation in forms in order to match what a supervision or training group asks for and the supervisor can provide. It could be a matter of providing a tight or a loose structure due to chaos and order. In doing this we are better prepared in meeting the complexity in professionals' wishes in different domains and thus avoiding confusion. An exploration of wishes and better pairing can also prevent creating contradictory expectations.

I give three examples in different directions depending on what a group wishes for under a specific period, which can vary in regards to what the circumstances are in their professional contexts.

- **A structured supervision** form with in advance planned co-created themes for each occasion. In the supervising activity you connect the theme to supervisees' experiences and practice and develop new ideas about how to perform in their daily work with regards to those themes.
- **Integrated supervision and training** concept about different- or a specific method. Based on methods and ideas about: adult learning methods in a process with different elements of input about theory and method, practising and supervising, reflecting and connecting to supervisees' clinical practice.
- A third form could for instance, be if a group wants to add more creativity and use more of an experimental approach, one could form an **experienced based supervision**. Like having sessions in different places, with creative elements, for instance visiting a museum or watching a play. Afterwards participants discuss and reflect together within the group about what you experienced and how you connect it to your daily clinical work to make use of the ideas.

## 8. Concluding remarks

In the process of exploring *complexity* and *contradictions*; expanding the stories by presenting and analyzing examples, connecting to theory, reflecting and discussing, I have come to new understanding and meaning of the different positions in supervision and training. I experience these dilemmas can be creatively challenged by participants in new forms of experimental supervision-training activities. Where co-created learning experiences take place in joint action where we move between and in the different Domains. Defining relations and creating clarity around positions helps all involved in interacting. As guidance and orientation tools in the process we use the concepts and ideas of CMM, Chaos and Order theory, learning theories, relational reflexivity and other useful ideas in Approach, Method and Technique. Both positions, supervisor and supervisees will benefit from this and it provides better opportunities in navigating in the complex “heterarchical” structures we create.

For all involved in the exiting activities of supervision and training we need to develop the *competence of being competent*.

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