

Supra-Vision

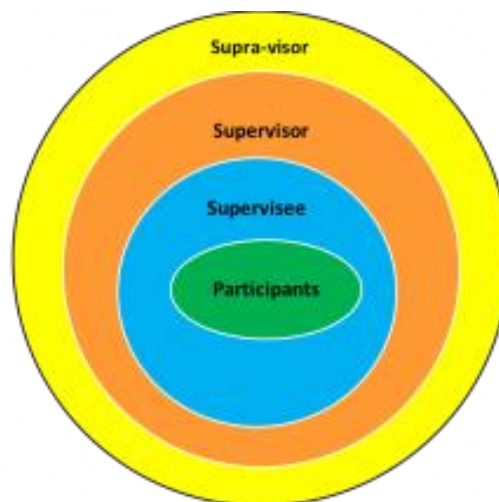


The history of supra-vision at the Mindfulness Network

A small group of supervisors within the Mindfulness Network decided to meet as a working party to explore aspects of supra-vision as a common area of interest. The information on this page outlines the working party's thinking about around the concept and application of supra-vision.

What is supra-vision?

In many ways, supra-vision is very similar to supervision. The principal difference is that supra-vision holds a *meta perspective*, i.e. looking at the responsibilities and tasks of the supervisor across the breadth of their work with their supervisees, rather than having the teacher and their participants as the focus. This is illustrated in the diagram below.



The *supra-visor – supervisor* relationship is also likely to be highly collegial given that the supervisor will already be an experienced mindfulness-based teacher. In supra-vision, the supervisor brings in aspects of their work with one or a range of supervisees, e.g. building up trust in the relationship with supervisees, working with a supervisee who is questioning of the need for personal practice, working with a supervisee who is experiencing a lot of stress, how to give feedback to a supervisee, working with supervisees in challenging contexts, helping supervisees to adhere to curricula, etc.

Key Features of Supra-vision:

Like with mindfulness-based supervision, supra-vision has supportive, educational and ethical functions and includes a specific emphasis on supporting the supervisor's supervisory skills, experience and development.

When our supra-vision working party first sat together to discuss these functions, we found them to be somewhat dry. Over time, though, we began to speak the words that we felt described the intentions behind supra-vision and came up with the following concepts:

- supra-vision is a **co-creative process of deepening understanding** about how to apply the principles and perspectives of MBAs to different teaching situations and contexts, and helps us keep the teaching of MBI's fresh and alive.
- supra-vision **provides supportive and collaborative context** for sharing the responsibilities of supervising including ethical and educational issues.
- supra-vision **helps the supervisor find support and encouragement** to be more courageous in raising potentially challenging issues with new supervisees.
- supra-vision **helps develop and maintain a breadth and depth of perspective** in relation to the teaching of MBI's.
- supra-vision **helps to give supervisors reminders about threads, themes and issues** that may have been forgotten – to rekindle a curiosity and learning.
- supra-vision **provides live and interactive teaching** regarding how to supervise, whilst acknowledging different styles.

Supra-vision can help supervisors, particularly newer supervisors to develop their skills in this role. As of yet, there is little known or written about supra-vision which makes it more challenging to find ways of developing and knowing if you are heading in useful directions or getting lost. Developmental needs may be highlighted – further training, seeing of habits and tendencies, finding new ways of supervising. When any role, including supervision is new there are stages of learning and different needs at each stage. It cannot be assumed that one just knows what to do and how to do it.

Supra-vision also involves:

Trust. Trust is an important part of the relationship to allow supervisors to bring their own vulnerabilities around supervising in an atmosphere of openness and allowing.

Relational inquiry and dialogue. As is the case mindfulness-based supervision, supra-vision also uses relational inquiry as a way of dialoguing with another(s) about mindfulness-based supervision. Through dialogue, reflective processes are enhanced and different ways of seeing situations can emerge that may not have been apparent if one simply does this by oneself. New ways forward can be illuminated.

Embodiment. The supra-vision is embodied. Both supervisor and supra-visor are experienced practitioners who can bring the attitudes and qualities of embodied presence to the session, and support each other to maintain this presence.

Knowledge and experience. Supra-visors will inevitably have a high-degree of knowledge and experience. In many ways, this is what supervisors will be hoping for: to find the possibility of meeting with another who has trodden similar paths and has something useful to share about it. This feels different from an expert telling another what to and how to do something and feels more akin to the notion of an 'Elder', who has had some time in this role and this world and maybe even some words of wisdom.

Holding. There is a strong holding of an ethical space within supra-vision. Supervisors may be bringing a number of supervisees that they in turn are holding. There is a need for integrity and professionalism to be held at all levels. The supra-visor supports the supervisor in finding this space for themselves and in their role as supervisor.

Nourishment. Part of the supportive nature of the relationship will be a sense of nourishment. Often, this involves simply having another who has similar values and ways of working, as well as more explicit ways of encouraging supervisors to take care of themselves.

Connection. There may be an implicit sense of others in this wider field of work as the supra-visor connects with other supervisors and, in turn, their supervisees and participants. This is a helpful reminder that we are not alone in our work as supervisors.

Different ways of receiving supra-vision:

Supra-vision might take various forms:

- supra-visor and supervisor are the same person
- separate supra-visor and supervisor – ongoing
- separate supra-visor for an initial period to closely guide new supervisors
- formal peer supra-vision in dyads or triads with experienced supervisors
- group supra-vision
- a number of supervisees – having one-to-one supervision from the same person – form a group for supra-vision of their supervision work

Supra-vision for small groups

We offer supra-vision for small groups via video link. If you are interested in this option, please email us at supervision@mindfulness-network.org.

Can I have the same supervisor and supra-visor?

In principle, an existing supervisor can become a supra-visor if the supervisee becomes a supervisor themselves. There might be considerable advantages, too, in being supra-vised by someone with whom trust and understanding has already been established.

However, factors to bear in mind would be:

- Does the supervisor have sufficient experience in order to be a supra-visor?
- Does the supra-visor have sufficient understanding of the teaching contexts of the supervisor's new supervisees?

There would need to be clear contractual boundaries and sufficient time allocation to make sure that neither supervision nor supra-vision are *squeezed out*.