

## CHAPTER 4

# Building the Supervisory Relationship from the Perspective of Supervisors and Supervisees in Social Work

**ERIK ŠATARA**

### *Introduction*

The development of technology and the digitalization of the work environment, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, have led to a significant shift of supervision processes into the online environment (Connel, 2023). This shift brought numerous changes and challenges related to technological equipment, nonverbal communication, and the need to adapt to new ways of establishing contact and the supervisory relationship (Mo et al., 2021). The relationship between the supervisor and the supervisees is considered a key determinant of a successful supervisory process. Building a supervisory relationship in an online environment may be influenced by several aspects – from the digital competencies of participants, through their personal aspirations, to the technical background and sense of safety. The aim of this chapter is to explore the aspects of building a supervisory relationship in the context of online supervision (including “tele-supervision”) from the perspectives of both supervisors and supervisees. This also opens up space for proposing strategies and procedures that can help overcome challenges related to technological, communication, psychological, and other barriers affecting the establishment of supervisory relationships in online environments.

### *Definition of the Supervisory Relationship*

Building the relationship between supervisor and supervisee is a crucial part of the entire supervision process. A high-quality supervisory relationship supports the supervisee in facing challenges encountered in daily practice, and it is also fundamental for supporting their professional growth (Mo et al., 2021). Supervision can be understood as a transformative process that enhances the professional and personal development of social

workers, with the supervisory relationship being regarded as its cardinal component (Rankine, 2012; Vişcu & Rad, 2024). A quality supervisory relationship is characterized by open communication, empathy, and engagement in the development of the supervisee, which together contribute to the effectiveness of the supervision process (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019). Establishing a strong supervisory relationship allows both parties to conduct an open dialog about the course of the sessions and the nature of their cooperation (Hawkins & McMahon, 2020; London & Chester, 2000).

Supervision is understood as a cooperative process in which the supervisor and supervisees jointly participate in achieving clearly defined goals. A necessary prerequisite for success in building the relationship is the creation of a safe and confidential environment that allows both parties to communicate authentically and reflect on practical experiences (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019). In social work, it is essential to emphasize that the supervisory relationship extends beyond the formal and individual framework of supervision and encompasses various physical, emotional, and cognitive processes (Gregory, 2024).

According to the interaction supervision model developed by Shulman (2021), building a positive supervisory relationship is a key means of establishing supervisory influence. This approach directly emphasizes the importance of relationship-based supervision between the supervisor and supervisees. The communication skills, ability to build relationships, and problem-solving strategies applied by the supervisor can significantly contribute to developing a positive supervisory relationship, through which the supervisor can shape and influence the supervisee (Shulman, 2006).

Analyzing the development of the supervisory relationship in the online environment may also draw upon other theoretical concepts, such as the working alliance concept developed by E. Bordin (1983). The working alliance includes not only the emotional connection between participants in supervision but also emphasizes the agreement on common goals and specific tasks. It consists of three fundamental components: mutually agreed-upon goals, tasks, and the relational bond between the supervisor and supervisees, which are essential for achieving goals effectively. An important aspect of building a supervisory relationship is the occurrence and repair of ruptures, which contribute to the development and maintenance of the working alliance. This process is considered a fundamental prerequisite for successful supervision (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019).

The development of the supervisory alliance represents one of the first steps in the supervision process. White and Queener (2003) identified sev-

eral variables that may affect the development and nature of the supervisory alliance. These include trust, transference and countertransference, parallel process, self-disclosure, diversity, personal values, boundaries, power and authority, evaluation, personality characteristics of the supervisor and supervisee, and, for example, attachment style. With advances in technology, various formats of supervision, including online supervision, have been increasingly utilized. Recent studies confirm that the working alliance can be built and maintained in the digital environment (Simpson et al., 2021; Tarlow et al., 2020), meaning that an effective relationship between supervisor and supervisee can also be created and developed online (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019). Regardless of the setting in which supervision takes place, the importance of a functioning supervisory relationship is unquestionable and remains a key predictor of its effectiveness (Basa, 2017; Ladany et al., 2012).

In practice, we traditionally encounter in-person supervision, in which, according to Vaccaro and Lambie (2007), the supervisory relationship is more easily established due to the personal contact between the supervisor and supervisees. However, current developments increasingly lead to the use of information and communication technologies that enable supervision to be conducted without the physical presence of the participants (Reamer, 2019).

### *Building the Supervisory Relationship in the Online Environment*

The topic of building supervisory relationships in online settings has recently become a subject of interest for various disciplines such as medicine, psychology, social work, and others (e.g., Kang et al., 2024; Martin et al., 2022; Mo et al., 2021; Pote, 2025). This increased interest stems from the digitalization of the performance of helping professions.

A major impetus for these changes was the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, which significantly impacted not only the implementation of supervision but also social work itself. It became necessary to quickly introduce alternative forms of supervision (primarily online supervision) to minimize personal contact (Connell, 2023). The implementation of information and communication technologies created new online relationship models (Borcsa & Pomini, 2017). Connell (2023) noted in this context that social workers' responses to online supervision were predominantly positive.

Building a supervisory relationship in virtual platforms is influenced by many factors. International literature highlights several aspects that affect the development of an effective supervisory relationship in virtual environments:

- digital literacy and access to technology (Sherbersky et al., 2021);
- careful consideration of ethical aspects and building a confidential supervisory relationship (Mishna et al., 2021);
- communication skills with an emphasis on active listening, clear expression, and the ability to demonstrate empathy even in the absence of nonverbal cues (Aviram & Nadan, 2022);
- prior in-person meetings (Amanvermez et al., 2020).

The research revealed that building a supervisory relationship in an online environment includes many key components similar to the standard process of building a supervisory relationship during in-person meeting (face-to-face supervision). The perception of the supervisory relationship and its development in an online environment helped us identify several frequently mentioned aspects of its formation from the perspectives of both supervisors and supervisees (see Table 1). These aspects included: *prior (non)experience, trust and safety, the absence of physical contact and nonverbal cues* (i.e., technological limitations of the online environment), and others, which shall be addressed in detail. These aspects were most often mentioned in the context of building a supervisory relationship online. Most supervisory meetings during the pandemic were conducted remotely, exclusively online (via various platforms) or, in some cases, by phone. Social workers (supervisees) with this experience declared the need to meet remotely because, at that time, physical meetings with a supervisor were not possible due to anti-epidemic measures. At the same time, this was a period associated with crisis interventions, which highlighted the need for supervision. For many participants, this was their first experience with remote supervision, whether in individual, team, or group form. Each form has its specificities in the context of building a supervisory relationship, which shall be discussed further.

Regarding the establishment of online supervision in their practice, three groups of opinions emerged among participants. The first group were so-called “skeptics,” who prefer face-to-face contact and who, before the COVID-19 pandemic, had successfully avoided use of online platforms for supervision. They considered face-to-face contact a fundamental component of building a successful supervisory relationship. However, cir-

cumstances forced them to enter the online environment or begin using information and communication technologies for supervision purposes (Miljkovic, 2023). The second group comprises individuals who welcomed the possibility of remote communication, most frequently due to the temporal flexibility it offers and the opportunity to engage in supervision essential for their further professional development and for addressing practice-based challenges. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that all supervisees eventually returned to in-person supervision. However, among certain supervisors, there is a discernible effort to establish online supervision as a regular and accepted component of their professional practice.

*Table 1: Aspects of Building the Supervisory Relationship*

<b>Aspects shaping the supervisory relationship from the supervisee's perspective</b>	<b>Aspects shaping the supervisory relationship from the supervisor's perspective</b>
Previous <b>face-to-face</b> experience Socio-spatial aspects (safe environment) Type of supervision Flexibility of online supervision (possibility to voluntarily choose a supervisor) Provision of technology and personal data protection Absence of face-to-face contact Mutual trust Professional competence of the supervisor Challenges in perceiving non-verbal cues Digital fatigue Technical barriers	Previous <b>face-to-face</b> experience Cybersecurity and technological safety Absence of face-to-face contact Challenges in perceiving non-verbal cues Distorted perception of the environment Digital competencies of supervisees and supervisors Mutual trust Supervisor's approach to building the supervisory relationship

*Source: Author's own elaboration.*

*Prior (Non-)Experience, Personal Contact, and the Development of a Trust-Based Supervisory Relationship*

In the current discourse on building supervisory relationships within an online environment, prior (non-)experience between supervisor and supervisee emerges as a crucial factor. Face-to-face meetings before transitioning to the online setting may serve as an important precondition for the establishment of a functional and effective supervisory alliance. Several scholars contend that such prior experience contributes to a higher quality of the supervisory relationship in digital contexts, particularly in the initial stages of the supervision process. Robson and Whelan (2006), as well as Wright and Griffiths (2010), emphasize the significance of previous in-person contact in the formation of a supervisory alliance. From their perspective, meeting in person before shifting to a remote format is not only beneficial but often desirable. Although the current literature does not offer an extensive number of studies systematically examining prior personal contact as a necessary prerequisite for successful online supervision, there are important indications of its influence on the development of the supervisory relationship and the supervision process as a whole (Miljkovic, 2023). Research conducted by Conn et al. (2009), Chamberlain and Smith (2018), and Mo et al. (2021) does not rely on empirically proven necessity for a prior in-person meeting before online supervision. However, these authors recommend incorporating it as a reinforcing element to strengthen subsequent interactions in the digital environment. Their findings suggest that an in-person meeting may help to establish a stronger foundation for engagement in a digital environment, particularly in cases where the supervisory alliance is being developed from the outset.

In the post-COVID-19 pandemic context, this area of research requires reconsideration. As noted earlier, the pandemic compelled many professionals – including those previously skeptical about the online supervision format – to work exclusively in the digital space. Miljkovic's (2023) research demonstrates that, despite initial skepticism, many supervisees adapted to new modes of working, with some even reporting a higher level of perceived comfort in online supervision.

Supervisees were categorized into two groups based on the experiences conveyed. The first group consisted of those who transitioned from in-person to remote supervision together with their supervisor. The second group consisted of novice practitioners whose first supervision experience occurred exclusively in an online setting. It became evident that one of

the key aspects of building the supervisory relationship is the supervisee's prior personal experience (or lack thereof) with the supervisor. However, it cannot be explicitly stated that this is a determinant of the overall success of the supervision process; rather, it should be seen as an attribute that is closely associated with the process of relationship-building. Some of the experiences related to prior personal contact are not tied exclusively to the online environment but apply generally to the development of a supervisory relationship in any form (in-person or remote).

In the following section, the author will address the perspectives of supervisees and their experiences in building a supervisory relationship in an online environment, considering whether or not they had prior contact with the supervisor (see Figure 1). The diagram below (Figure 1) outlines the aspects of building the supervisory relationship in an online environment from the perspective of supervisees. A key aspect (see the primary branching in the diagram) is the presence or absence of prior experience with the supervisor, which significantly shapes the way in which the supervisory relationship develops. Supervisees with previous and stable experience with their supervisor described the transition to the online format as seamless. The relationship in such cases was already underpinned by trust, which was successfully transferred into the digital environment. Interactions between the parties retained a professional character, and supervision was perceived as a natural continuation of prior collaboration. In contrast, supervisees without previous experience with the supervisor reported that the initial online meetings were characterized by uncertainty and a lower degree of trust. In these cases, the relationship was only beginning to form, often in the context of limited information about the structure, process, and objectives of supervision. These aspects led to unclear expectations and a lower subjective assessment of the benefits of the supervision process. A specific situation arises when the supervisee selects the supervisor independently, based on their own needs. In such cases, the initial trust in the supervisory relationship tends to stem from the perceived professional competence of the supervisor – trust is thus built from the outset on the basis of professionalism and expertise, rather than on prior personal contact. A more detailed analysis of the individual categories is presented beneath the diagram.

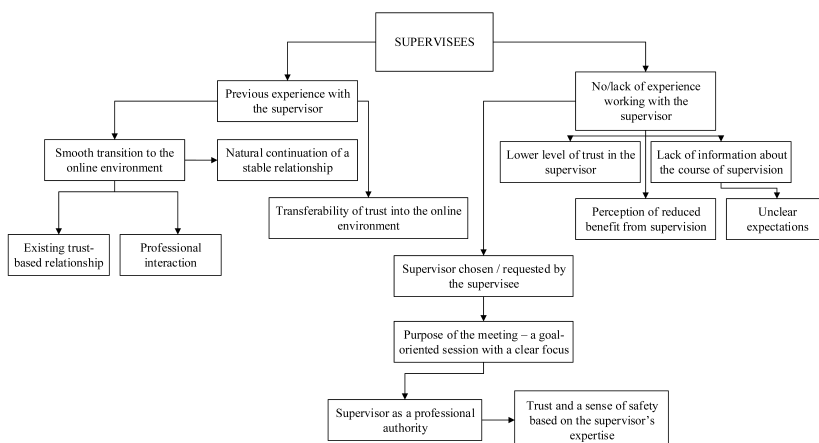


Figure 1: Aspects Shaping the Development of the Supervisory Relationship from the Perspective of Supervisees

Source: Author's own elaboration.

*Supervisees with prior in-person supervision experience:* The first group of participants consisted of supervisees who, prior to transitioning to online formats, had already established personal contact with their supervisor. This prior experience (interactions) significantly shaped their perception of the supervisory relationship in the new, digital setting. Their accounts indicate that the existence of established trust and professional continuity enabled a smooth transition to online supervision without a perceived decline in the quality of the relationship:

*“Since we already knew each other, I can’t really evaluate it objectively. I didn’t feel it was any different from when we met in person.” (P2)*

*“With the supervisor, I don’t see any changes or differences in the relationship – whether in-person or online – because the trust was already there. We knew what to expect...” (P1)*

The analysis suggests that for this group, remote supervision was perceived as a natural continuation of a stable, personally established relationship. The process retained not only its professional character but also its emotional value. Individuals who reported positive experiences with their supervisor and with the supervision process itself often emphasized that their interactions were professional (a topic explored in the next section) and

valuable. This had a significant impact on their ability to adapt to the new format in the online environment. Supervisees' experiences suggest that even after transitioning to remote formats, the supervisory relationship they had built during prior face-to-face meetings remained largely unchanged, or at least was not diminished:

*"...in terms of content or the key points, supervision didn't seem to lose its meaning." (P15)*

*"With her in particular, the one I experienced online supervision with, we had a very good relationship – we still message each other today to ask how we're doing – so it was very natural from the first meeting." (P10)*

It appears that the trust and openness developed jointly by supervisee and supervisor were more easily transferable to the online environment, provided that the professional norms established during face-to-face supervision were maintained. These findings highlight that the effectiveness and quality of remote supervision do not lie solely in its technical feasibility, but also in the quality of the pre-existing relationship.

*"For me, it would probably be more difficult to build a relationship solely online if I hadn't had prior experience with that person. For me, it is very important to have a sense of the person and to have prior experience with them. I probably would not go online with someone I have no prior experience with." (P17)*

*Supervisees without previous personal experience:* their first supervisory meeting took place exclusively in a remote form. In this group, it was shown that their experiences with the online environment were different, often associated with lower trust and less benefit from the supervision itself, especially in cases where visual connection was not provided:

*"The first time you hear someone ... with whom you are supposed to talk about work matters. It brought me no benefit." (P1)*

This statement suggests that the absence of prior contact can make it more difficult to form a functional supervisory relationship in an online environment, especially if the form of communication does not provide enough space to build and establish a relationship (e.g., merely a conversation without visual contact). The participant described that the absence of personal contact combined with the supervisor's unprofessionalism led to a negative experience and her decision not to participate in online supervision further:

*"I had never seen her before... Then I said that the first time had no meaning for me, so I refused to participate in such supervision and waited until it could be in person." (P1)*

In this group of supervisees, it was found that an important aspect of building the supervisory relationship is also providing information about the supervision itself and its goals. Lack of information and unclear expectations can lead to feelings of uncertainty, which can negatively affect the emergence of the supervisory alliance. As stated by one of the participants:

*"I couldn't imagine it at first, because for me it was something completely new. I had information about what supervision is, but since I had never experienced it personally before, I didn't know what I could expect or what it would be like. And there were also some technical problems, as I basically couldn't see the supervisor..." (P6)*

Similar findings are also reported by Wright & Griffiths (2010) in their study, where they emphasize that supervisees without previous experience may not immediately perceive the benefits of online supervision. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to the choice of form and the content of communication itself when building an effective supervisory relationship. The results suggest that a functional supervisory relationship in the online environment can also arise in situations where there is no previous personal contact or experience between the supervisor and supervisee. A crucial aspect here is the perception of the supervisor as a professional authority (an expert in the area that is the subject of supervision), along with clearly defined goals and rules of the supervision process:

*"...I had one individual session where I was exclusively in online contact with the supervisor. And for me, it was fine because I was dealing with very difficult topics. And I actually realized that it was also pleasant that the person was a bit more distant from me. So, I went into that supervision with the mindset that I was going to deal with these difficult topics, and the person on the other side was an expert. And actually... they weren't right next to me, they didn't know me personally, so I felt comfortable confiding in such a person and hearing their opinion. But I went there with intention, that I was going to deal with my issues and needed to process them under professional supervision and with professional help. So, I connected very quickly there." (P5)*

These data confirm the conclusions of foreign authors who point out that prior personal contact is not always a necessary condition for effective supervision. Such statements, that previous personal experience is essential for online supervision, are even considered misleading (Jordan & Shearer, 2019; Martin et al., 2018). Jordan & Shearer (2019) add that supervisors and supervisees in their study, who had no previous personal contact, were able to create and maintain a productive supervisory relationship. In some cases, this may even be a requirement on the part of supervisees, where the supervisor was sought out for their professionalism and the supervisee's effort to gain an impartial view of the issue they were currently dealing with.

Given the facts described, it can be concluded that although prior experience with the supervisor significantly facilitates the transition to the online environment, it is not the only aspect of the success of the supervision process. We shall address another aspect in the next section of the chapter.

*Perspective of supervisors in the context of previous (non)experience:* the transition to the online environment also brought new challenges for the supervisors themselves (see Figure 2). The diagram illustrates building the supervisory relationship from the perspective of supervisors, distinguishing two basic key categories based on the existence or absence of prior personal experience with supervision. Prior personal experience, as with supervisees, represents a decisive determinant in building the supervisory relationship, which also creates a stable foundation for the continuous development of the relationship. This foundation is characterized by mutual understanding, clearly defined expectations, and a preference for returning to direct supervision, which leads to a sense of safety, trust, and the ability to anticipate processes, thus facilitating adaptation and transition to the online environment. On the other hand, the absence of personal experience can lead to increased uncertainty, which can subsequently lead to mutual distancing between the supervisor and supervisee. In these cases, supervisors perceive the first contact without physical presence as a potentially limiting factor, which often leads to the conscious postponement of supervision goals with an emphasis on the process of getting to know each other and building the relationship. The diagram also reflects reduced control over the supervisee's space and environment, which represents another challenge in the relationship dynamics. A more detailed analysis of the individual categories is presented beneath the diagram.

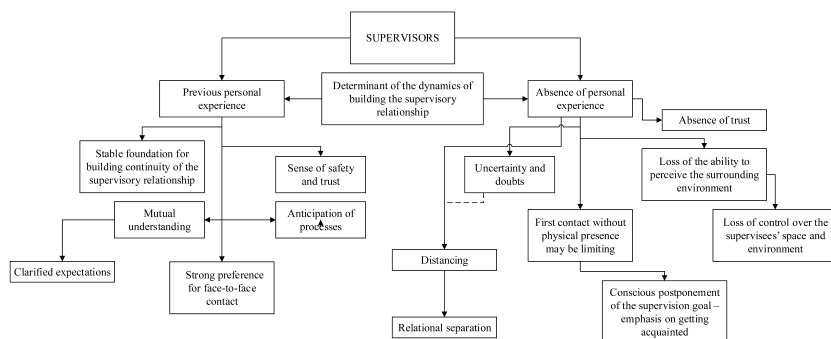


Figure 2: Aspects of Building the Supervisory Relationship from the Perspective of Supervisors

Source: Author's own elaboration.

As with supervisees, supervisors also find that previous personal experience with supervision participants can significantly influence the dynamics of building the supervisory relationship. This aspect proved to be very important in the research for building trust, expectations, and quality participation in the online environment. Supervisors who continued to work with already familiar supervisees perceived this continuity as a key advantage:

*"...since it was a supervisee who had already had previous supervision with me, we had, let's say, a relationship based on trust." (S1)*

The basis of this experience is mutual understanding and knowledge of the expectations of both parties, which facilitates the transition to the online space:

*"...from my side, what was great about this was that I knew what to expect. I think the supervisee also knew what to expect." (S1)*

This already established relationship makes it possible to build on previous cooperation and ensure the continuity of supervision even when physical contact is not possible:

*"Perhaps I'll give another example here, that supervision, the one I've been talking about so far, whether group or individual, was with people whom I had already supervised face to face before..." (S5)*

The findings show that previous experience and interactions between the supervisor and supervisees create a stable foundation for building mutual trust, which subsequently facilitates further cooperation. It also allows both parties to better understand and anticipate the course of the supervisory meeting and individual processes, which leads to the creation of a safe and confidential space (Hawkins & McMahon, 2020). Although previous experience is an important aspect of building the supervisory relationship, as we can also see with supervisors, there remains a strong preference for personal contact between the supervisor and supervisee. Although online supervision brings flexibility to the process, there is still a strong preference for personal contact on both sides. This is especially true in situations where building mutual trust and sharing sensitive information is important (Miljkovic, 2023):

*"I can't even really explain exactly why I'm so against it. Maybe it's just the feeling that supervision – and the relationship and trust that come with it – should be face to face..." (S6)*

On the other hand, the online environment can also provide new opportunities to strengthen existing relationships, especially in cases where a personal meeting isn't possible.

*"When it came to building the relationship, I'd say it actually strengthened it. We couldn't meet in person, but I needed to deal with certain things..." (S1)*

From the supervisors' perspective, the challenge arises when there is no prior experience with the supervisee, and the first contact takes place exclusively online. Prior experience is often seen as something to build on when forming a supervisory relationship.

*"There were some people I didn't know, and that's an important factor. If it had been someone I'd already supervised before, it definitely would have been easier, and we'd have something to build on..." (S8)*

One of the main issues supervisors identified is the lack of trust in the online space, which stems from the absence of personal contact or prior experience. Supervisors described how the physical distance and sense of anonymity online can undermine the feeling of safety that is essential for open communication and a functional supervisory relationship:

*"On the other hand, I honestly can't imagine building a supervisory relationship with someone new entirely online – meeting me for the first time.*

*They don't know if I have someone else in the room, I don't know if they do...I just can't quite imagine starting an individual supervision with a complete stranger online right from the start." (S1)*

*"I feel the same in therapy as I do in supervision – I prefer the beginning to be in person, so we can really get a feel for each other..." (S3)*

In this case, it is obvious that the first online contact without prior experience can trigger uncertainty and doubts for the supervisor, which may stem from different aspects (e.g., lack of non-verbal communication, inability to see the supervisee's environment, etc.) that usually help to create a safe and trusting environment in face-to-face supervision. This essentially means that the supervisor has no control over the supervisee's environment, which can call their authenticity and trustworthiness into question – key elements of the supervisory relationship. Supervisors also highlighted the challenge of overcoming **distance**, which can negatively affect relationship building if they haven't met the supervisee in person before:

*"These were people I didn't know, so it was honestly harder for me to overcome that distance." (S8)*

This experience shows that the absence of previous personal contact can also lead supervisors to feel a sense of distance. This *distance* isn't just physical but also *psychological and relational*, and in the early stages of building the supervisory alliance, it must be actively addressed and overcome. These aspects place additional demands on supervisors, especially when preparing for the first contact with a supervisee. One supervisor explained how this preparation is a crucial part of building the relationship and needs to be adapted to create space for trust to develop:

*"So, when I'm building a relationship with a supervisee, especially in the first sessions, I pay close attention to self-awareness activities. I've had a similar experience with first online sessions. There were people I met for the very first time, and I used the same approach with them." (S4)*

This shows that the supervisor doesn't take the relationship for granted or assume it will automatically work but is aware that it needs to be intentionally built – especially in the online environment, which has its own specifics. One way to do this is by *deliberately postponing the supervision work itself* (focusing on the problem, goals) and instead first focusing on simply getting to know one another.

*Building a Trusting Relationship and a Sense of Safety in Online Supervision: Technological, Contextual, and Ethical Framework*

In the context of online supervision – just as in therapeutic and counseling interventions – ensuring trust is one of the fundamental challenges of the online environment. Trust is a key prerequisite for the success of the supervisory process – not only regarding the case information supervisees work with but also in relation to information about the supervisee themselves and the dynamics of their interaction with the supervisor (Bacigalupe, 2010). This means that these aspects can either support or hinder the creation and further development of the supervisory relationship. The online form of supervision places increased demands on the supervisor – requiring flexibility, creativity, and initiative in designing and adapting procedures, as well as finding safe and functional ways to connect with supervisees (e.g., dealing with connection issues; ensuring sensitive data can be shared securely) (Borcsa & Pomini, 2017). As Hawking & McMahon (2020) note, a trusting relationship is the foundation of any supervisory process, regardless of whether it takes place in person or remotely. It is a fundamental element of any professional interaction, not just supervision (Simon & Swerdlik, 2022).

*Building a trusting supervisory relationship in the online environment from the supervisees' perspective:* In the context of supervision in social work, trust is the foundation upon which openness, sharing personal experiences, and the ability to reflect on one's own professional practices are built. In the online environment, however, the process of building trust is even more challenging than in face-to-face supervision. One reason for this is the absence of non-verbal cues, which play an important role in establishing interpersonal connection.

Empirical findings show that the quality of the supervisory relationship online is not determined solely by technical aspects (e.g., connection quality or device functionality) but also by the *social and spatial conditions* (safety of the environment) in which supervision takes place. These aspects are closely linked to trust, the feeling of safety, and the overall comfort of supervisees. Technological problems can create barriers that may be perceived as contextual obstacles affecting perceptions of trust and safety in the supervisory relationship. The study conducted by Mo et al. (2021) identified aspects such as misunderstandings in communication and technical problems that can negatively impact the supervisory relationship. Some supervisees stressed that one of the most disruptive elements for them

was the *lack of privacy during online supervision sessions*, especially when they were held at home. The presence of other people (e.g., household members), movement in the room, or even background noises created a sense of breached privacy, directly conflicting with the need for openness and confidentiality within the supervisory relationship:

*"During one session, the supervisor's husband was walking around, then the kids... so it didn't feel private at all. It wasn't really just between the two of us – I always felt like someone else was there, so honestly, I don't think it worked." (P7)*

These socio-spatial aspects created *technological barriers* that complicated building a sense of trust between the supervisor and the supervisee, even when the technical conditions (e.g., internet connection, camera) were formally in place. As a result, some supervisees reported being less willing to share sensitive information or expressed doubts about whether they were truly alone during the supervision session (especially during individual supervision): *"Privacy can be disrupted even in the online setting. Someone might knock or walk into the room where the supervisee or the supervisor is connected." (P17)*

Special attention should be given to *how openness and confidentiality are perceived in individual versus group online supervision*. Although these aspects are important regardless of the supervision form, the online context brings certain specifics that can influence how the supervisory relationship is built. From the supervisees' accounts, *individual online supervision* can, in some cases, encourage greater openness. They reported feeling safer and more comfortable when they were in a familiar environment (e.g., at home or in a designated private room at work), where they were not exposed to colleagues or other people. This sense of privacy, trust, and control over the environment allowed some to share personal and sensitive topics more openly:

*"...during the individual supervision, because it was just me and the supervisor, I could openly talk about the issue." (P2)*

*"...the online setting meant I could actually sit at home, and compared to sitting in some designated supervision space, it felt like a more private environment." (P9)*

By contrast, in the case of *group supervision*, there were often concerns about sharing personal experiences (problems or sensitive topics). These concerns, however, were not tied exclusively to the online format but more

to the very nature of group settings, which involve interacting with other supervisees. In such situations, supervisees more frequently described barriers that prevented them from deeply reflecting on their practice and the problems they faced:

*"With group supervision, you really can't do that. We're all in one group, and none of us dared to really open up about the problem in detail." (P2)*

In some cases, group supervision was even perceived as a "formality" without much personal benefit:

*"...it was group supervision online, so it was more like, okay, let's just get over with it." (P4)*

This finding can also be interpreted as a potential risk, where the formal meeting takes place, but the deeper process of confidential sharing is missing. In this case, supervision can be perceived as an administrative obligation rather than a space for professional growth and reflection.

One supervisee pointed out that the online environment actually allowed her to *intentionally choose a supervisor* who specialized in the area she needed help with at the time. This ability to choose – along with the physical "distance" from the supervisor – contributed to a stronger sense of trust and openness (as mentioned earlier when discussing prior experience). The participant's statement (P5) ("*...the person is just a bit more distant...*") highlights a possible paradox that can occur in online supervision. Physical distance, which is often perceived as a barrier, can in some cases serve as a protective factor, allowing some supervisees to be more authentic and open. At the same time, the ability to intentionally *choose* a supervisor based on their expertise was seen as a key factor that strengthened trust and readiness to address challenging topics in supervision. The online environment thus offers opportunities that, for some supervisees, can remove barriers to building the supervisory relationship.

The concept of trust in the supervisory process is closely connected to creating a *safe space for open and confidential communication*. However, in online supervision, specific complications can arise that may disrupt the sharing of sensitive information. In addition to the technological stability and disruptive socio-spatial factors mentioned above (e.g., someone else being present in the room), there is also the issue of *technological security and data protection*. It became clear that supervisees are aware of the risks that may arise from using inadequately secured platforms. Research showed that supervisees prefer settings where they feel protected from external

influences and where their privacy is guaranteed. Supervisors must be very careful in creating this safe space so that participants do not feel that their personal information is at risk or could be misused. As Stokes (2018) points out, data protection and confidentiality are areas of heightened risk in online supervision. The need to address these concerns about privacy breaches and technological unreliability, which can be amplified in the online environment, are similarly, emphasized by Carlo et al. (2020). Clearly agreed-upon rules regarding the supervision process (e.g., how to handle interruptions, how to ensure privacy, how data will be handled) contribute to a sense of security and certainty:

*"I can really feel the safety the supervisor creates. They really make sure I know where the supervision is happening, what kind of space they're in, whether someone might walk in, and if so, how that would be handled. Also, if we need a break, we have agreed on how to signal that." (P17)*

Transferring the supervisory process to an online environment isn't just about the technological setup but also involves the *supervisor's professional and ethical responsibility*. In online supervision, the supervisor is expected not only to lead the supervisory process but also to actively ensure the conditions that support trust and safety (e.g., Stokes, 2018). The participant's statement (P17) expresses that participants place trust in the supervisor to create a safe and functional environment (*"I can really feel the safety the supervisor creates..."*). This suggests that a safe online environment doesn't just happen on its own but is the result of the supervisor's systematic and deliberate efforts. Ethical responsibility thus extends not only to the data and information shared during supervision but to the entire supervision session.

### *The Role of the Supervisor in Building Trust and Creating a Safe Online Environment*

Building trust and ensuring a safe environment is one of the key tasks of supervisors. Trust is an essential prerequisite for effective supervision, which is built on a functional supervisory relationship (Egan et al., 2017). It became clear that for supervisors, ensuring a sense of *safety* is crucial for building a trusting relationship:

"I'm really a relational supervisor – I build safety on the principle of the relationship, and in the online environment that's a challenge for the supervisor, but it can be done." (S9) (S9)

Supervisors emphasized the need to create and guarantee that supervisees feel safe, knowing that their privacy and the topics they share will remain protected. This aspect also applies to supervisors themselves, who need to be sure they are working in a secure and confidential environment:

*"I was worried because I realized I was missing that intimate space. When I can see the space in person, I know what's going on. But online, I don't know if someone might walk in or how it's secured."* (S4)

*"I clearly remember a supervision session where I didn't feel good because the woman with the issue was talking to me, and there were people around her. It was hard for me to gage how they were dealing with the topic. For me, that's part of the technical conditions of online supervision – which is why I prefer to do it in person."* (S9)

Many supervisors highlighted the importance of creating an environment where participants feel safe and able to openly share their thoughts, feelings, and problems – something also underscored by recent research (Mo et al., 2021).

*"...someone walked in, someone knocked. That's why now I always start supervision by making sure the room is secure and that there's no one else around. At home, I also had to make sure my husband didn't walk in. So we had to set ground rules at home too, since it was from the home environment..."* (S4) (S4)

This statement also points to the need to create a secure online environment, which can be achieved by setting clear rules and expectations.

The issue of *cybersecurity in selected* platforms also resonates strongly here, as it is one of the most discussed topics in current research (e.g., Egan et al., 2017; Mo et al., 2021; Rushton et al., 2017). We can also see this in supervisors' experiences, particularly with changing platforms when security standards were not met:

*"We really had to deal with security – cybersecurity."* (S2)

*"I also share how I handle it myself. When it comes to platform security, I know some are more secure than others. I use Zoom – it's not the most secure, but I'm open to adapting if a client doesn't want to use Zoom and prefers Webex or another platform... I'm not a fan of purely chat-based*

*ones like Messenger – I don't work with those. I try to use platforms designed for this purpose." (S3)*

Supervisors clearly take on the role of guarantors who must consider not only technological possibilities but also *values* such as respect for and protection of privacy:

*"It's also about making sure this is a confidential process, that nothing gets leaked, recorded, or shared elsewhere right away. Even in mediation work I do, this is one of the biggest land mines, I would call it – maintaining confidentiality. Because I believe that if a relationship – any relationship, whether supervisee–supervisor, mediator–clients, or as a social advisor – isn't built on trust, then there's no real relationship at all. For me, trust is absolutely the most important thing. And honestly, I'd be afraid that in the online environment, the issue of trust could very easily and quickly be misused." (S1)*

### *The Limitations of the Online Environment in Building the Supervisory Relationship*

Although online supervision has brought many benefits in terms of accessibility and flexibility – benefits that still outweigh the potential drawbacks (Inman et al., 2019) – in the area of building the supervisory relationship, there are several limitations that need to be taken seriously. Supervisors and supervisees can meet asynchronously via email and other communication tools or synchronously through videoconferencing (Inman et al., 2019). In the Slovak context, we managed to capture experiences of supervisors and supervisees who met synchronously.

### *Perceptions of the Limitations of Online Supervision – the Supervisees' Perspective*

In their experiences with online supervision, supervisees emphasized the absence of elements such as informal interactions, nonverbal cues, and personal contact – all of which are present in traditional supervision and help foster mutual understanding and a safe atmosphere. This aligns with findings from international studies (Duan et al., 2018; Mo et al., 2021).

The lack of personal contact is frequently cited as a major issue in remote supervision (Duan et al., 2018). Many supervisees described online

meetings as more formal and less personal because online settings lack the elements of sharing a common physical space they were used to before the transition to online supervision. Specifically, they noted the absence of ordinary informal interactions (e.g., conversations before or after the meeting, making coffee or tea, and other small rituals) that directly support the building of the supervisory relationship.

Supervisees repeatedly highlighted limitations tied to reading nonverbal cues – facial expressions, gestures, body language, and other forms of non-verbal communication:

*"In-person contact is irreplaceable. I always say that you pick up emotions differently, you can reflect on the other person better. It's not just about being physically present – it's about facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice, the way they talk. Those are supportive elements, and with online supervision, it's different. You just don't see the emotion or the feeling as much." (P9)*

While the online space can overcome time and distance barriers, it can also create obstacles when it comes to building a supervisory relationship and emotional closeness. Supervisees described *greater difficulty dealing with sensitive and emotionally charged topics or situation* when the supervisor was not physically present. In such situations, the online environment could lead to a sense of “disconnection” and emotional distance:

*"Having that person physically there really matters, especially when it's about emotional connection. When tough issues come up and it's all online, it's much harder for me to bear it than when I'm sitting in the same room with the person. Even though they might be supporting me in the same way, that physical presence is key for me." (P17)*

This aligns with current research into “mediated presence” (e.g., Nash, 2018; Miljkovic, 2023), which suggests that technology cannot fully convey emotional presence and empathy. As a result, supervisees may perceive the supervisory relationship at a distance – in the virtual space – as “incomplete.”

From the supervisees' accounts, it is clear that the lack of nonverbal cues is one of the most significant limits in building the supervisory relationship. Nonverbal communication – facial expressions, gestures, posture, silence, and feedback signals (e.g., nodding or eye contact) – plays a crucial role in deepening understanding and connection in supervision. As Duan et al. (2018) and Vaccaro & Lambie (2007) highlight, reducing nonverbal

cues in the online environment can significantly weaken the authenticity of communication and disrupt the relationship between supervisor and supervisee. This reduction in visible facial expressions, posture, and other cues (Carlo et al., 2020) can make communication feel incomplete.

A specific case is telephone supervision (*tele-supervision*), which was also a common alternative during the pandemic. Tele-supervision eliminates all visual contact. Supervisees reported that this form of interaction created a lower sense of the other person's "presence," which negatively affected their perception of support, empathy, and understanding:

*"...with the phone, you don't see them, you don't see their expression. You don't feel the same support – like maybe they would hold your hand, or just that personal presence. When you're really struggling, it can be enough just to see a compassionate look or a nod. Those facial expressions, that sense of touch – I really missed that." (P11)*

In connection with tele-supervision, Bohannon et al. (2013) note that people prefer videoconferencing systems that allow for maintaining eye contact. Even so, the camera can't capture the whole body and can distort nonverbal cues because of video quality. As a result, nonverbal signals can be difficult to read.

*"I couldn't really see how she looked like, her facial expressions, her gestures. I really missed that because I just couldn't read from her face what she meant. In-person supervision is completely different from online." (P7)*

In addition to these limitations, which are important to consider when building a supervisory relationship, we must also mention the issue of *digitally exhausted* helping professionals. Given that they already handle many interventions over the phone, the transition to online supervision was described as draining, with in-person supervision perceived as more enriching.

*"...I already have to deal with so many things over the phone, so for me, the in-person meetings are just much more enriching." (P2)*

In group or team supervision, there was also *discomfort* associated with the physical closeness of colleagues when sharing one device, which could undermine the intimacy of sharing during supervision:

*"We were three staff members in the community center at the time, and we all had to crowd into the camera so she could see us. I don't really mind*

*being close to someone, but they were only my colleagues, so... yeah, it just wasn't ideal." (P10)*

Another important factor was *technological obstacles*, which affected the quality of interaction – especially unstable internet connections, differences in digital skills, and the use of less suitable platforms. These aspects led to interruptions, disrupted the flow of conversation, and made supervision feel less valuable. One of the most commonly mentioned issues was *unstable connections*:

*"...sometimes the voice would cut out, and I didn't know if they could hear me or not, or if they could see me properly. So yeah, it was... different. I have to admit, I didn't really take it as seriously – I didn't give it the same weight." (P4)*

Among other obstacles related to building a supervisory relationship in the online environment, we can include *digital competences* themselves and the use of various platforms, which we have already mentioned above in the context of digital security. It appears that different digital skills between supervisors and supervisees can influence the dynamics of the supervisory relationship as well as the duration of the supervisory session.

*"It was actually difficult to carry it out at all. Even the supervisor didn't have much possibility through email or functions like Teams, Meet and the like. So, in the end we did it via Messenger, video chat. It didn't disrupt the quality, but I don't know, it was also quicker. So the supervision ended more quickly than it used to in person." (P10)*

An important finding in the context of building the relationship and supervisory alliance is *cognitive overload*. The online environment places high demands on maintaining attention. This phenomenon is closely linked to the absence of *personal contact* and the difficulty of perceiving *nonverbal elements in communication*. It turned out that this, together with external influences (such as attending to work responsibilities), can distract supervisees. It seems that in the online environment it is important to pay attention to facilitation and concentration so that the contact does not lose its content and authenticity – which is crucial for building an effective relationship.

*"At the same time then... I often lost attention at that time, because something was happening that I didn't understand. For example, they started*

*laughing and my colleague and I didn't know why, so this was the worst form.” (P5)*

### *Limitations of Online Supervision from the Perspective of Supervisors*

In the case of supervisors, many findings overlap with the perceptions of supervisees. The technological limitations of the online environment affect the quality of interpersonal communication and the relational potential of the supervisory meeting. Several supervisors pointed out that in the online environment the overall relational potential is limited – the relationship may even seem more formal, less natural:

*“It seems to me that the whole communication or relational potential is not being used, that the relationship is simply somewhat limited. ...basically, we know each other more personally, more friendly, and in the online setting it seemed to me that it took on a more formalistic character.” (S8)*

One of the most frequent challenges of the online environment, also from the supervisors' perspective, is the absence of physical presence (personal contact). It is difficult to respond even to emotionally demanding situations.

*“Direct contact is irreplaceable for me and can only be somewhat substituted by online. Everything else, I would say, also happens online. And by human, I mean... if the supervisee is going through a difficult situation, I feel that in direct physical space I can express my understanding and support through body language. And it doesn't have to be by touching them, not at all – but by leaning toward them or something similar. In online space, this is absent. Because even if I lean in, it's still just behind the camera. And maybe you know this – when someone starts talking about something difficult, you lean closer to them within the relationship, or in a group you lean in more.” (S2)*

Supervisors emphasized that in-person meetings provide better conditions for authentic contact, better expression of empathy, and building trust through nonverbal signals. In the online environment, these options are very difficult to capture, as the screen often shows only the upper part of the body, making it harder to perceive other nonverbal elements such as body posture or hand movements:

*“Yes, it can work, but so far, I perceive that in individual sessions it's possible, the barriers dropped quickly. Also from the other side, because*

*at least we could see each other from the waist up. What I miss is the nonverbal communication, because you only see from the head to the chest, and you don't see below. But we know that in supervision we perceive the whole body of the person – gestures, how they cross their legs, or when they shift in their chair. If we only see part of the body... but still, it can be done.” (S4)*

The same problem applies to capturing para-communicative elements such as eye contact between group members or emotional shifts. This makes it difficult for the supervisor to respond flexibly to the supervisees' experiences:

*“...when we basically lose those means of perceiving the environment, I think the whole interpersonal communication is narrowed, and thus it can be more focused. But as a supervisor I cannot pick up all the elements of atmosphere, all the para-communication cues, because I can't see if one colleague looked at another colleague.” (S9)*

This can lead to reduced attention among participants, both supervisees and supervisors, which complicates the maintenance of the supervision process and the building of a strong supervisory relationship:

*“And body language for sure... and full attention. I think it's not possible to have absolute full attention in the online space, because there are many distractions around the person, whereas in face-to-face supervision I can imagine that full attention is present. I can also imagine that as a supervisor I can anchor the supervisee back, redirect them when I see their thoughts wandering elsewhere, I can bring them back to the topic, like: now we are here.” (S1)*

Another important limitation of the online environment is the restricted perception of the setting, which in in-person meetings provides the supervisor with valuable information about the work environment – from the visual impression of the room to the atmosphere in the workplace. In the online environment, this information is lost, as the camera interface does not provide a complete picture of the participant's surroundings, which reduces the supervisor's ability to capture the broader context in which the supervisee is situated. As one supervisor explained:

*“...there aren't things when I arrive for supervision, because I also do supervisions elsewhere, like – you don't see tidiness, disorder, those kinds of things that I call scanning of the environment I am entering. Here it's ex-*

*cluded, because someone can even blur the background, and you don't see what kind of environment the person lives in. Otherwise, everything else works completely the same for me online as in direct physical supervisions.”* (S2)

In this context, one supervisor stated that he does not perceive online supervision as an equivalent part of in-person supervision, but rather as its complement. It is particularly useful in crisis situations and in cases where the supervisor's physical presence is not necessary:

*“If I can do both, I always prefer direct supervisions – by direct I mean physical, in a shared space – over online ones. I see online as an excellent complement, when someone needs to solve something quickly, like crisis, fast supervisions. I use online a lot for that today. And also, for planned ones, when the person is overloaded, I give them the option to meet online, so they don't have to travel. But I still perceive it as a supplement.”* (S2)

When speaking of the technical aspects of online supervision, the *digital skills of supervisees* can also be limiting for building the supervisory relationship. Not all participants may have sufficient technological competences to take part in online supervision smoothly. As one supervisor pointed out:

*“And it was really a way to vent, or supportive for them to talk it out. In social services it was a big dilemma for them, and a huge unpreparedness of social workers and the organizations for the online world. They didn't know how to work with it, or their IT skills were really minimal, like truly minimal. It really had to be step by step, like: you have to click the red icon or the green one. And there was also the language barrier, because all these Zooms and so on are primarily in English. So the language barrier as well.”* (S2)

This shows that in addition to digital literacy, the language barrier was a problem for supervisees, as most online platforms are primarily in English. Insufficient technical skills can delay the supervision process, reduce its quality, and ultimately interfere with building the supervisory relationship. Another separate topic is conducting *group supervisions in the online environment*. Several participants expressed directly negative experiences with this form of distance supervision. One supervisor openly stated:

*“I work better with groups. That means I primarily do group supervision, and I cannot imagine group supervision online. It would be very, very*

*interesting – whether the supervisees would sit in a circle somewhere and I would only be on the monitor, or all of us would be online.” (S1)*

Technical issues such as sound failures, lack of cameras, or unstable connections can weaken the overall character and dynamics of the supervisory relationship in the group. They also significantly undermine the supervisor’s ability to adequately respond to supervision processes, perceive atmosphere, tension, or nonverbal elements in communication between participants – aspects that are crucial in group work (see Bordin, 1983; Hawkins & McMahon, 2020). This was also reflected in one supervisor’s experience:

*“I have to admit, group supervisions were very difficult at the beginning. Sometimes the voice dropped out, then there were several people in the room, we couldn’t hear each other, there was noise. Labor offices had no cameras, so sometimes it was without cameras, but we had to manage...” (S4)*

The findings we arrived at point to the fact that the technological limitations of online supervision are not just a matter of technology or platform, but a complex set of challenges that include digital competences, nonverbal communication, group dynamics (in group supervision), and the quality of the supervisory relationship. Therefore, online supervision requires not only a solid technical framework (secure platform, etc.), but also a sensitive adaptation of methodology and procedures that address the limitations this environment brings.

### *Professional Competence of the Supervisor*

A professional approach places high demands on the role of the supervisor, particularly in observing the supervision process, active listening, time coordination, and effective communication. Inappropriate reactions from the supervisor may negatively affect the supervisory relationship from the perspective of supervisees and ultimately disrupt the quality of the entire process, with misunderstandings and delays in communication further contributing to this (Ellis, 2010).

For effectively building a trusting supervisory relationship, it is essential that communication in the online environment takes place in a safe setting for both parties – supervisor and supervisee. For this reason, some workplaces created special rooms adapted for online supervision, providing privacy and confidentiality. In their research, Mo et al. (2021) found

that online supervision posed challenges such as misunderstandings, misinterpretations of the communicated content, and issues related to trust. The implementation of tele-supervision or online supervision placed high demands on the supervisor, and according to Augusterfer et al. (2020), shortcomings in their competences caused supervisees to feel anxious.

Based on previous findings, we can see that the professionalism of the supervisor is a factor that significantly shapes the supervisory alliance and the relationship between the parties involved. Although this chapter focuses on online supervision, this aspect cannot be restricted only to the online environment. Professionalism of the supervisor is essential in all forms of supervision, regardless of its form or the nature of the meeting. In the online environment, however, it acquires specific dimensions, particularly in relation to the limited possibilities of nonverbal communication and personal interaction. Even in this section, we distinguished supervisees' experiences depending on their prior experience with the supervisor in face-to-face settings.

It was found that some supervisees who had previous in-person experiences with the supervisor noticed changes in the supervisor's behavior during online meetings, which in some cases led to negative reactions. These changes were perceived as disruptive and undermined the continuity of the supervisory relationship:

*“Since I had already known the supervisor before, I had several face-to-face supervisions or direct contacts with him, he was somewhat different, a bit different. I don't know, he paid less attention. He was doing something else at the same time, even turned away from the camera, didn't always look at the screen, also did something on the table. So he was a bit distracted, which bothered me. Because when it was a face-to-face meeting, he focused only on the supervision, he focused on us, we looked at each other, we spoke to each other – and this distracted me. He was unfocused, I don't even know if he was prepared, because the questions or something... It wasn't the same. Even when we answered something, I felt he didn't listen to it fully, he didn't pay attention, he turned away or something, you know.”*  
(P4)

This shows that a previous positive experience with a supervisor during in-person meetings may lead to frustration if the online interaction does not match that prior experience. Therefore, in the online environment, consistent professional behavior of the supervisor is very important to avoid negative impacts on the supervisory relationship.

For supervisees without prior experience, who met the supervisor for the first time online, the first impression was particularly important. If the supervisor's behavior appeared unprofessional, this could significantly affect the nature of further cooperation and the building of the supervisory relationship:

*“For me, it was a strange situation, since at that time I started working as a social work assistant, and until then I had no supervision, only a subject in school. So it was something new for me. It didn't go as I imagined, or as we were taught. It was different, because the supervisor wasn't physically present, we only saw each other through a tablet, and we dealt with the problem I had at the time. So we just talked, there was no interaction, no tasks, it wasn't personal. It was just the problem solved, and that was it.”* (P7)

*“It was like talking to a stranger, and basically, she didn't put any effort into solving the problems... She basically just brushed it off with a short phone call.”* (P1)

On the other hand, an example of good practice confirmed that professionalism in the online environment can significantly affect further cooperation. A supervisee appreciated the supervisor's ability to promptly respond to technical issues, clearly guide the supervision, and be sensitive to the supervisee's emotional experience online. These elements contributed to building a trusting relationship and valuing professionalism:

*“At first, it was strange, I don't know how to describe it, but she basically had a... Because I told her I couldn't see her, that we had this problem. But she could see me, so she responded even to my possible feelings. And basically, we talked completely normally. She knew how to build that relationship with me, even though I couldn't see her. So the whole hour-long supervision went perfectly fine.”* (P6)

### *The Supervisor's Approach as a Prerequisite for Building a Supervisory Relationship*

The shift to online supervision brought various reactions among supervisors. Some perceived the process as smooth, without major changes in their approach or content:

*“Basically, there were no fundamental differences in the process and content. I can’t say there was some long process of getting used to it, and suddenly it was super. It was okay very quickly.” (S5)*

On the other hand, we also encountered supervisors who went through a more difficult period of adaptation, some of whom reported initial discomfort. This discomfort could stem from the unfamiliar online environment, especially among those who preferred approaches such as PCA (Person-Centered Approach), which emphasizes personal interaction:

*“Well, you know, the classic questions came up, but because it turned out really well... I don’t know if objectively really well, or really well just in my fear and tension (laughs) when I started. But I felt it went well, and we were pleasantly surprised, both me and the supervisees, that it was possible, and that supervision fulfilled the purpose we had gathered for.” (S5)*

Despite initial concerns and technical challenges, the online form of supervision, under the influence of the pandemic, became a common alternative and is now perceived as an integral part of professional practice. This shift is relevant in the context of building a quality supervisory relationship. In the online environment, some supervisors moved to a more directive style than in face-to-face meetings, which sometimes caused them discomfort, especially when they had to call out supervisees and create space for them to express themselves:

*“And I always agreed somehow that I would minimize the use of silence and instead call them out more, which was more directive. And in this I was uncomfortable – that on the screen, when you see people there, you suddenly have to name them and pull them in, call them out.” (S2)*

Special attention needs to be paid to group supervision in the context of building a supervisory relationship. It places increased demands on the supervisor to create a safe and confidential environment (see above). Group dynamics in the online environment allowed supervisees to use the “raise hand” function, which proved to be ineffective and impersonal. Some supervisors therefore chose to promote a more interactive approach, allowing interruptions and overlaps in conversation:

*“I didn’t like the hand-raising function that online applications created, so in supervisions I said: let’s not use it, let’s just interrupt each other, let’s skip the rule of not interrupting. On the contrary, let’s be more human in the online setting.” (S2)*

These findings show that building a supervisory relationship is inseparably linked to the professionalism of the supervisor, their ability to adapt to new conditions, their digital competences, and their personal predispositions. Entering the online environment often posed a challenge for supervisors, especially regarding technical aspects. One supervisor – thanks to the shift online – began to develop and improve her digital competences in order to be able to conduct supervision in the online environment:

*“When I first tried it, the technology was quite a challenge for me. I had not lectured online before, since as the director of the institution I had not even led meetings online until then. For me, it was all new, I had to learn everything from scratch – for example, how to download Zoom. How to download even the most basic things.” (S4)*

Supervisors who had no prior intensive experience with the online environment were forced to start developing their digital competences and learn how to function in this environment – not only in terms of using technology. Subsequently, we could observe that functioning online eventually motivated this group of people, without prior experience, to further develop their digital skills:

*“...toward the end I started recording, but with the supervisee's consent, because I wanted to learn from it.” (S4)*

In the context of supervisory meetings in the online environment, new approaches and techniques emerged that allowed the modification of the supervision process and improved interactions between supervisor and supervisees. A significant aspect of successfully building a supervisory relationship is setting goals, establishing rules, the ability to create contact, and maintaining interactive communication, even online:

*“I suggested that we could do it online, and their reaction was almost resistant – like, online, that will be strange. There was one particular social worker with whom I had a very good personal experience, but for her it was absolutely unacceptable. Nevertheless, she joined the group, and we did the first round where everyone shared what they wanted and what they were bringing to the supervision. I am not entirely sure whether the group had agreed beforehand to focus on her case, but in the end her case was given space. During the first 5 minutes, it was clear that she was in great discomfort. So I tried to make it comfortable for her and kept offering the option that if it was completely unacceptable for her, we could stop*

*and do it individually instead. She said no, that she wanted to try it, that it was a challenge for her. After about five minutes, it was clear that she had completely calmed down and was engaging – you could see her eyes moving across the screen, making connections with the others. And at the end, she said she would never have believed she could forget about the circumstances of the supervision.” (S7)*

### *Discussion*

The ongoing digital transformation, which is reshaping the nature of many professions, has in recent years – particularly under the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic – also affected the functioning of social work, specifically the implementation of supervision. Supervision plays a crucial role in the professional development and support of social workers. In international contexts, this process of digital transformation has been somewhat more dynamic than in Slovakia. In this chapter, the author focused primarily on building the supervisory relationship in an online environment. It became evident that several factors may ultimately shape the development of such relationships in a digital context. The most significant topics identified include: prior (non-)experience with supervision, the establishment of a trust-based and safe relationship, the limitations of the online setting, and the issue of professionalism. These aspects were analyzed from the perspectives of both supervisors and supervisees, with their experiences overlapping in several respects. Based on the findings, several implications can be formulated for future practice in the field of online supervision, as well as for further academic inquiry into supervisory relationship-building in digital settings. From the supervisors' perspective, it will be important in the future to focus on creating trust and safety within the supervisory environment. This can be achieved through clearly defined rules and by creating a setting in which the supervisee feels able to openly share experiences and the challenges they face. Adherence to cybersecurity principles and the selection of platforms that meet security criteria are essential, as supervision involves working with sensitive data concerning both supervisees and their clients. From our perspective, the future of online supervision lies in a hybrid model, combining in-person and remote meetings. Such a model allows supervisees to meet their supervisor in person while still offering flexibility in cases of crisis, when immediate access to supervision is necessary. The online supervision model places demand on thorough

preparation by the supervisor, who must be able to create conditions for reflection and manage interactions in the online space. This includes the ability to respond promptly to situations related to technical issues, as well as maintaining a high level of digital competence. All these attributes can, from the supervisee's perspective, be seen as factors shaping their perception of the supervisor's professionalism and their ability to respond to the specific challenges of online supervision. For supervisees, it is equally important to maintain the principle of a confidential supervisory relationship, to inform them about available options, and to strengthen their digital skills and competences. This will enable them to make effective use of alternative forms of supervision in support of their professional growth.

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