CHAPTER 7
Differences in Supervision: Online versus Face-to-Face Supervision

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Introduction

Supervision represents a key tool of support and professional development for practitioners in helping professions. Traditionally, it has been conducted primarily through in-person (face-to-face) meetings, which enable immediate interaction, full use of nonverbal communication, and the creation of a safe relational space. In recent years – particularly with technological progress and the growing availability of digital platforms – there has been a significant rise in online supervision, delivered remotely through video calls or other virtual tools.

The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated this trend, and in many organizations, the online format became not only a temporary solution but also a stable alternative to face-to-face supervision. This shift to digital environments has also raised new questions concerning the quality of contact, emotional experience, focus, and the professional mindset of both sides of the supervisory process – the supervisor and the supervisee. Practical experience shows that online supervision is not merely a technical relocation of in-person meetings to the screen; rather, it changes the very dynamics of the supervisory process, particularly in terms of communication, relational interaction, and the experience of support (Parker-Barnes et al., 2023).

Professional literature emphasizes that the move to digital supervision affects not only the technical mode of communication but also the psychological and relational dynamics of the supervisory process. In online settings, there is a different form of presence, attention, and emotional responsiveness, as the interaction is mediated by technology – through the screen, camera, signal, or visual constraints. These factors can influence the degree of trust, depth of self-disclosure, and emotional attunement between participants (Bambling et al., 2008; Miljkovic, 2023).

Current research also highlights the increased cognitive and emotional load associated with online communication compared to in-person inter-

action (Bailenson, 2021). Factors such as "*Zoom fatigue*," multitasking, or heightened visual pressure may reduce the ability to maintain focus and may lead to a loss of attentiveness during supervisory conversations (Parker-Barnes et al., 2023). Consequently, there is a need to reconsider supervisory competencies and to adjust processes to ensure that online supervision remains effective, safe, and professionally grounded.

Interest in comparing online and face-to-face supervision thus stems from the need to better understand how these differing conditions affect the supervisory relationship, the level of trust between supervisor and supervisee, emotional engagement, and capacity for reflection. At the same time, this topic is highly relevant given the growing demand for flexible forms of education and professional support in helping professions – especially where geographical or organizational limitations may hinder regular in-person meetings.

The aim of this chapter is to *analyze the differences between online and face-to-face supervision* and to examine how varying conditions of mediated contact affect the quality of the supervisory process. The intention is to highlight the specific features of both forms of supervision from the perspectives of supervisors and supervisees and to identify areas of overlap. The comparison of online and face-to-face supervision is not understood as a question of superiority of one form over the other, but rather as an exploration of how these forms differ, what they require from both supervisor and supervisee, and what benefits or limitations they entail. The topic is equally relevant for the future direction of professional development in social work, education, and other helping disciplines, where supervision is becoming a key condition for quality practice.

Perspectives of supervisors

The statements of supervisors (S) reveal seven main thematic areas:

1. Technical limitations
2. Creative limitations
3. Communication and nonverbal aspects
4. Temporal and geographical efficiency
5. Ethical and safety risks
6. Emotional aspects
7. Risk of insufficient focus

Technical Limitations

Technical limitations represent one of the most significant differences in online supervision, which depends on technology such as internet connection, cameras, and the functionality of the software used. Supervisors perceive technical barriers as an important constraint. S1 explicitly stated that: "*in face-to-face supervision, the signal usually doesn't fail*," adding, "*for me, the essential thing is that I cannot control these aspects. Or, to some extent, I can – by making sure I have a reliable laptop, antivirus software, those basic technical things…*" This statement points to the frustration caused by unexpected interruptions that disrupt the flow of the supervision process. S14 attempts to mitigate the risk of connection failure and ensuring an alternative way to continue the supervision session: *"I also make sure to have a phone contact for the person. I always create a plan B in advance – I send them the link for the online meeting, but I also include my phone number in case of any technical issues, so they can reach me. That's my plan B, and people actually use it. When we connect and, for example, the sound doesn't work but we can still see each other on the screen, sometimes it's easier to just switch to that alternative instead of wasting too much time on technical fixes.*" S12 mentioned additional technical requirements, such as "*the obligation to take a screenshot of the screen,*" which can increase administrative workload in practice. While face-to-face supervision is determined mainly by the interpersonal dynamics between participants and the physical environment, online supervision depends on signal quality, connection stability, and the technical proficiency of all involved (Rasool et al., 2022). This factor introduces a new level of uncertainty into the process, which S11 perceived as a potential risk and loss of control: *"I'm always a bit afraid that during a difficult situation, when we're discussing something intense, the connection might suddenly fail. It hasn't happened yet, but it's a fear I have – that suddenly, the internet fails, and you can't log in for an hour. These are the things that make me anxious… I would even say, I lose control as a supervisor.*"

Creative Limitations

In the online environment, it is often necessary to plan the structure of the session, set a time frame, and ensure technical preparation in advance. As a result, creative freedom may become more limited, leaving less room for

spontaneity and experimentation. It is therefore more difficult to use the full repertoire of creative techniques that rely on physical space, movement, gestures, or tangible objects. Mallen, Vogel, and Rochlen (2005) note that nonverbal signals, which in face-to-face settings help supervisors respond intuitively, are lost or significantly reduced in online contexts. This can make creative methods more challenging to apply or require significant adaptation. Although various digital tools such as shared boards or documents can be used, many supervisors view working with physical materials as an essential part of supervision. Supervisors pointed out that "*the online environment limits the possibility of using those techniques we discussed – I don't claim they are worse or of lower quality, but they are limited, because what you can use online you can always use face-to-face, but not vice versa.*" (S3), restricts the use of creative techniques and aids: *"I usually use props, and in online supervision, that simply wasn't possible. The best I could do was write or draw something and show it on camera or ask the person to write it down themselves…* (S1). Similarly, S4 mentioned the impossibility of "*applying standard forms of creative methods*". Supervisors emphasized in their statements that online supervision restricts methodological flexibility, particularly in the use of aids and materials such as: *"sticky notes, a flipchart, or anything I can hand over to the supervisee to take home."* (S6).

Communication and Nonverbal Aspects

In face-to-face supervision, the full range of nonverbal expressions – such as facial expressions, gestures, posture, eye contact, and ultimately physical presence – enhances the authenticity of communication. These elements enable the supervisor to perceive the supervisee's emotional reactions sensitively and to respond appropriately. In contrast, online supervision is mediated by technology and confined to the visual frame of the screen. A portion of nonverbal communication is lost, which may lead to inaccurate interpretation of feelings and attitudes.

Bender and Dykeman (2016) note that nonverbal cues such as facial expressions and gestures are significantly more prominent in face-to-face supervision, thereby strengthening the reflective process between both parties. The analysis of interviews revealed that supervisors repeatedly referred to the limited visual frame, which reduces peripheral perception: *"I couldn't see the whole person; I couldn't see their face. I didn't see their facial expressions. You know, when we look at each other, we also perceive*

things peripherally." (S1) In group supervision, the importance of group dynamics was particularly emphasized, as this aspect is restricted in online settings: "*You can sense the atmosphere of the group; you can see who doesn't want to participate or when things aren't as they're being said. You can sense that in person, but not online.*" (S2) While face-to-face supervision allows supervisors to form an emotional connection with the supervisee and to "*express understanding and empathy through body language*" (S11), online supervision provides only a partial image of the other person, reducing the ability to capture body language: *"Also body language – when I can see the whole person – and in the online space, that's simply not the case…"* (S6)

Temporal and Geographical Efficiency

Online supervision is perceived by supervisors as time – and geographically efficient, yet at the same time somewhat limiting in terms of process depth and the use of various creative tools or methods previously discussed. The advantages of online supervision are therefore viewed primarily as logistical. The online setting offers greater flexibility by eliminating time losses associated with commuting and scheduling, as it is easier to coordinate calendars among all participants. It also provides space for quick, intervention-oriented consultations in urgent or unforeseen situations that require immediate support (Ierardi et al., 2022).

Supervisors confirmed in their statements that saving time and travel costs, as well as the possibility of rapid contact (e.g., in crisis situations), are among the main benefits of online supervision. They particularly appreciated the time efficiency: *"Time constraints related to commuting – whether for the supervisor or the supervisee – are eliminated. Depending on how the supervisor has it set up. It's a great benefit that you can just connect and be in touch within 5 minutes*" (S4). *"There is greater time efficiency because there's no need to travel.*" (S13) They also highlighted the geographical accessibility: *"The fact that I can get in touch with my supervisee even from the other side of the world is a huge advantage, because we can connect when it's needed, not only when we can physically meet.*" (S7) At the same time, supervisors emphasized the potential of online supervision in crisis situations: *"The speed is really an advantage – for example, in the case of crisis supervision, it's great.*" (S4) *"I've even done an SOS supervision... it worked exceptionally well.*" (S7)

Ethical and Safety Risks

Ethical and safety risks represent a significant issue in online supervision. In the increasingly common practice of online supervision, specific ethical and safety requirements arise in connection with technology, digital communication, and the protection of personal data. Supervisors consistently expressed general concerns regarding these risks:

> S1: *"There are definitely risks – well, everything can be misused."*
> S12: *"...the ethics, right? It means someone could record it, and that brings uncertainty, whereas in face-to-face supervision, I can see everything and keep it under control."*

The Best Practice Standards in Social Work Supervision (NASW & ASWB, 2013) provide guidance for supervisors and supervisees in the main areas related to ethical and safety risks:

1. Confidentiality

Supervisors must ensure the confidentiality of all information shared during supervision – particularly information concerning clients. In online settings, this includes the use of secure platforms (e.g., Zoom for Healthcare, Microsoft Teams with HIPAA certification), password protection, encryption, and secure data storage. Supervisees should be clearly instructed that shared information must not be recorded or forwarded to unauthorized persons.

2. Informed consent

Prior to beginning telesupervision, the supervisor shall obtain informed consent, confirming that the supervisee understands the format of supervision, its risks, and data protection rules. The consent shall specify the platform used, whether audio or video recordings will be made, and the conditions for data storage.

3. Digital security

The supervisor should be technologically competent and ensure that data leakage risks are minimized (e.g., using strong passwords, antivirus soft-

ware, and encrypted cloud storage). Supervisees should be encouraged not to connect personal devices to unsecured networks and to avoid using personal e-mail accounts for professional communication (NASW & ASWB, 2013).

Emotional Aspects

Emotional aspects of supervision are among the key factors influencing experience, trust, and the overall quality of the supervisory relationship. Relational psychology as well as supervision models emphasize that emotional attunement, shared experiencing, and the "perception of the other" arise primarily within the interpersonal field, which is most intense in the context of physical presence. In face-to-face supervision, a broader range of nonverbal signals (facial expressions, gestures, body posture, micro-movements) is present, supporting emotional attunement and relational trust (Sørlie et al., 2006).

Research shows that face-to-face contact possesses a specific emotional quality that contributes to a sense of safety and "human closeness" (Miljkovic, 2023). The online environment can convey the rational part of communication; however, the emotional component is weakened precisely by the absence of shared space and mutual interactions. Emotional experiencing is therefore not merely a complement to the supervisory process but a condition of its depth – it enables the supervisee to move from describing a situation to experiencing and understanding it. As the statements of supervisors indicate, personal presence and sharing in a common physical space strengthen the sense of human connectedness, which represents, for some supervisors and supervisees, an important element of psychological support.

Statement S10: *"there is even a physiological aspect – a much more intense interpersonal contact in that field, in that intersubjective space"* highlights that emotional attunement is not merely psychological but also deeply embodied and grounded in physical presence. It can be concluded that the quality of relational contact is grounded not only in verbal communication but also in the physically and nonverbally mediated presence of the supervisor. Hawkins and Shohet (2012), within the Seven-Eyed Model, emphasize the importance of the use of self – the supervisor's ability to be fully present, not only cognitively within the online environment but also relationally and nonverbally through shared physical presence. The

supervisor is not only an observer but also an instrument of understanding, using the self (own reactions, feelings, intuitions) as information about the dynamics occurring in the process. This concept is further elaborated in the professional literature under the term "Embodied Presence" (Evans et al., 2014), which emphasizes that presence is mediated "through the body" and is based on a shared intersubjective field that emerges precisely in the jointly experienced physical space. Statement S11, describing face-to-face contact as "*irreplaceable*," signals the belief that the online format cannot provide the same emotional quality of relationship and thus, for some supervisors, represents a limitation in relational depth. Similarly, statement S3: *"on a human level, I missed meeting some of those people... I longed to return to reality*" points to an emotional deficit that arises when the relationship is maintained in the online mode over a longer period. The longing to "*return to reality*" reflects the need for physical sharing as a source of interpersonal grounding.

Overall, it can be stated that the online form of supervision is, from the perspective of supervisors, evaluated as time- and organizationally efficient, yet it is simultaneously perceived as, in some ways, deprived of certain aspects of relational contact – especially nonverbal signals and the shared physical presence, which the digital environment cannot fully convey.

Risk of Insufficient Focus

A comparison of online and face-to-face supervision shows that, alongside the advantages of flexibility, the online environment brings increased cognitive demands and greater requirements for sustained attention. While in face-to-face supervision the presence of the body and the shared physical space naturally support concentration and emotional regulation, in online settings attention must be maintained actively and consciously (Bailenson, 2021; Bambling et al., 2008). Digital communication also narrows the range of nonverbal cues and forces participants to focus primarily on the face and image on the screen, which leads to visual strain and cognitive load that are more demanding for the brain than natural interaction in a shared physical space (Bailenson, 2021).

This phenomenon is referred to in the literature as "Zoom fatigue" – a form of exhaustion resulting from the combination of intense eye contact, lack of movement variability, signal delay, and constant self-presentation (Wiederhold, 2020). Professor Bailenson (2021) from Stanford University

described this phenomenon in detail, noting that online communication places significantly greater demands on the brain than ordinary in-person contact. All the factors mentioned above can contribute to mental fatigue, decreased attention, and a reduced capacity for empathy.

Whereas in face-to-face supervision attention is naturally regulated through alternating gaze, freer breathing, and the ability to involve the whole body in communication, the online format often leads to a more focused and narrowed attention. This increases the risk of cognitive fatigue and reduces attentional reserves for longer supervisory sessions (Grames et al., 2022).

The statements of supervisors S7 and S13 clearly reflect this difference in cognitive load and confirm theoretical findings regarding the increased attentional demands of online supervision.

> *"From the supervisor's point of view, I definitely think that online supervision is more demanding, because I must stay more alert. I basically can't allow myself to look away for a moment during online supervision. In face-to-face supervision, that's possible – when I'm talking, my eyes may wander a bit, but online I just don't let that happen. As a supervisor, I'm definitely more tired after an online session than after a face-to-face one." (S7)*
>
> *"During online supervision, one really has to be more concentrated in the sense that you only have that screen to look at, and that's where you focus all your visual attention on the other person…" (S17)*
>
> *"…it seems to me that online supervision requires much greater concentration, a kind of stronger visual focus on the other person." (S17)*

The interpretation of these statements confirms that the online format is not "weaker" in terms of content, but more demanding in terms of energy investment. The supervisor must sustain attention consciously and continuously, which leads to fatigue and reduces the capacity for long-term reflection. This also explains why some supervisors report feeling "more exhausted" after online sessions than after face-to-face supervision. Online supervision therefore requires a higher level of mental engagement to achieve the same degree of presence and attentional focus.

Perspectives of supervisees

The perspectives of supervisees confirm several of the supervisors' findings while also emphasizing an additional dimension. The statements of supervisees (P) reflect five core thematic areas:

1. The supervisor's personality and trust
2. Technical limitations
3. Communication and nonverbal aspects
4. Temporal and geographical efficiency
5. Emotional aspects

The Supervisor's Personality and Trust

Professional literature has long emphasized that the quality of supervision is primarily grounded in the relationship between supervisor and supervisee, with trust being the key prerequisite for deep reflection and professional growth. The supervisor is not merely a bearer of professional knowledge, but above all a "relational instrument" of supervision (Hawkins & Shohet, 2012), making their personal qualities a decisive factor in the effectiveness of the process. Supervisees place the greatest emphasis on the supervisor's sense of safety, authenticity, and psychological presence. These characteristics enable the open articulation of problems or situations arising in practice.

Reamer (2018) points out that in online supervision or education, quality depends not only on the environment but also on the ability to build a relationship, ensure trust, presence, and interaction. When trust is strong, the form of supervision is perceived as secondary. Conversely, when trust is absent, even a face-to-face meeting does not guarantee an effective supervisory process (Miljkovic, 2023).

The statements of supervisees confirm these theoretical premises, showing that the supervisor's personality is perceived as the primary determinant of supervision quality, while the format (online or face-to-face) plays only a secondary role.

The statement made by P1: *"I think it was the supervisor's personality"* demonstrates that the supervisee attributes the quality of the supervision process to the supervisor's personal characteristics rather than to technical or organizational arrangements. This corresponds with Hawkins and

Shohet's (2012) findings that the most crucial aspect of supervision lies in the supervisor's relational competence.

The statement made by P12: *"If it had been the original supervisor, I think face-to-face meetings would have been better and maybe would have had a different effect. But I also had a supervision where I thought I couldn't trust the supervisor. So in that case, I definitely wouldn't have talked about things related to my feelings toward a particular client or supervisor."* adds an important context – the format begins to play a significant role only when trust and the relationship are not optimally established. The supervisee suggests that with another supervisor (one in whom they have greater trust), the online format would not pose a problem, while with a weaker relational bond, face-to-face contact could serve as a compensatory element.

Technical Limitations

Supervisees share similar experiences of frustration with technical difficulties as supervisors do. Their statements indicate that technical equipment plays a key role in online supervision. Their reflections show that the problem did not lie in the online format itself but in the quality of its technical mediation. Insufficient internet connection, camera failures, or outdated computers disrupted the continuity of the process and reduced its quality, which in turn affected attention, emotional attunement, and the subjective sense of effectiveness.

The statement made by P6: *"it was the technology that failed… the devices simply weren't powerful enough"* signals a primary technical obstacle, where the supervisee clearly distinguishes between technological deficiencies and the concept of online supervision itself, suggesting that under adequate conditions, the format would have been equally functional. This view aligns with Reese et al. (2009), who state that participants' satisfaction is not determined by "online vs. in-person," but by the quality of connection and audiovisual stability.

The statement made by P7: *"technical problems were very distracting"* captures the emotional consequence of technical failures – frustration and disruption of attention. The presence of a technical stressor interferes with the ability to remain "in the process" and shifts concentration from the content toward managing the conditions of communication. In the supervisory context, this can undermine the sense of safety and smooth progression of the work. Notably, P6 later in the interview also expresses a sense of future

potential: *"if the devices were on a higher level… it would only be better,"* suggests that supervisees do not perceive online supervision as ineffective but rather as conditionally effective – its quality depends on adequate technical support.

Communication and Nonverbal Aspects

The statements of supervisees confirm that the irreducibility of nonverbal communication represents one of the most significant differences between online and face-to-face supervision. Supervisees point out that face-to-face supervision creates a richer interaction space where nonverbal experience is present, whereas online supervision narrows this space and thereby diminishes the quality of contact.

The statement made by P13: *"we have more space to perceive each other"* indicates that in face-to-face supervision, supervisees perceive not only the content of words but also the other person's way of being in the space. This reflects a relational understanding characterized by intersubjective attunement.

The statement made by P5: *"it's easier to sense people's attunement precisely through nonverbal communication"* specifies that nonverbal cues facilitate relational contact, helping the supervisee assess whether the other person is attuned, close, withdrawn, or available. Nonverbal signals thus serve not merely as a supplement but as a key source of information for orientation within the process.

The statement made by P10: *"in a real meeting we also see that nonverbal communication"* again underscores the difference between genuine personal interaction and its mediated image. The supervisee identifies nonverbal communication as something "real," contrasting it with the visually impersonal nature of online encounters.

A critical reflection among supervisees also emerges in their descriptions of the limitations of online supervision. The statement made by P8: *"…I only see a segment, let's say just the face"* points to the reduction of contact that prevents reading body movements, gestures, or postural changes. The statement made by P11: *"that facial expression, that touch, I miss it"* clearly delineates a sense of closeness and shared space that technology cannot replicate. The absence of nonverbal cues diminishes the ability to "tune in" to the other person and weakens the feeling of mutual closeness.

Temporal and Geographical Efficiency

Similar to supervisors' accounts, the statements of supervisees confirm that one of the main advantages of online supervision lies in saving time, reducing travel expenses, and enabling more flexible organization of sessions. Supervisees tend to evaluate the online format pragmatically. When the content of supervision is of high quality, the subjective sense of efficiency increases due to the elimination of commuting, waiting, and other organizational aspects that typically accompany face-to-face supervision.

The statement made by P16: *"it's about the time and maybe some travel costs"* indicates that the online format is perceived as more practically accessible and less burdensome. The supervisee assesses efficiency in terms of time, which may be particularly significant in an overloaded work context.

This is echoed by P5: *"it's more efficient in terms of time use"* where efficiency is understood not merely as saving time but as a qualitatively different rhythm of work – a quicker transition to the topic and less room for organizational 'noise.' By adding, *"I can actually track my time and work with it,"* P5 also highlights greater autonomy on the part of the supervisee in the online format, making it easier to organize and regulate the pace of the process. P5 also comments on the flexibility of location: *"a person can connect from anywhere…"* which expresses the dimension of geographical accessibility. This aspect is particularly important where supervision is geographically difficult to access.

An interesting statement comes from P6: *"it is good when it is off-site"* which indicates not only flexibility but also the advantage of a space outside the workplace. Online supervision thus appears as a tool that can reduce professional stress precisely because it does not have to take place in the work environment. P5 further notes that the online format is more efficient "*also in terms of content*" because "*we can enter the topic immediately.*" This statement suggests that the online format eliminates the social "pre-space" characteristic of face-to-face meetings, enabling the work to begin more promptly.

Emotional Aspects

The supervisees' reflections corroborate the theoretical claims raised by the supervisors and underscore the emotional weight attached to physical presence within the supervisory relationship. The statement made by P4:

"I always prefer physical contact. It doesn't matter whether it's business – physical contact – I speak from my own experience. And for me it is very important that when I talk to someone, they are next to me. Being physically present allows us to truly listen and remain fully attuned – I perceive every word, nothing slips away, unlike on a screen, where I can drift away…" points to the need for bodily co-presence as a component of relational assurance. Physical presence is perceived not merely as a technical modality but as a source of emotional support. The statement made by P6: *"...but the only thing missing was a direct contact..."* reflects an awareness of the authenticity of interpersonal connection. Here, "directness" emerges as a metaphor for irreplaceable interpersonal closeness, which is more difficult to achieve in an online setting where interaction is mediated through technology.

The interpretation of these statements indicates that the supervisees do not perceive the difference between the forms of supervision primarily in terms of content, but rather in the quality of emotional experience. For them, face-to-face supervision represents a more authentic form of human contact – one that the digital format cannot convey with the same intensity.

Shared dimensions of the supervisory process

Analytically, the overlap between supervisors' and supervisees' themes converges into four key categories:

1. Technical limitations
2. Communication and nonverbal aspects
3. Temporal and geographical efficiency
4. Emotional aspects

The figure 1 summarizes the thematic categories derived from the statements of both groups.

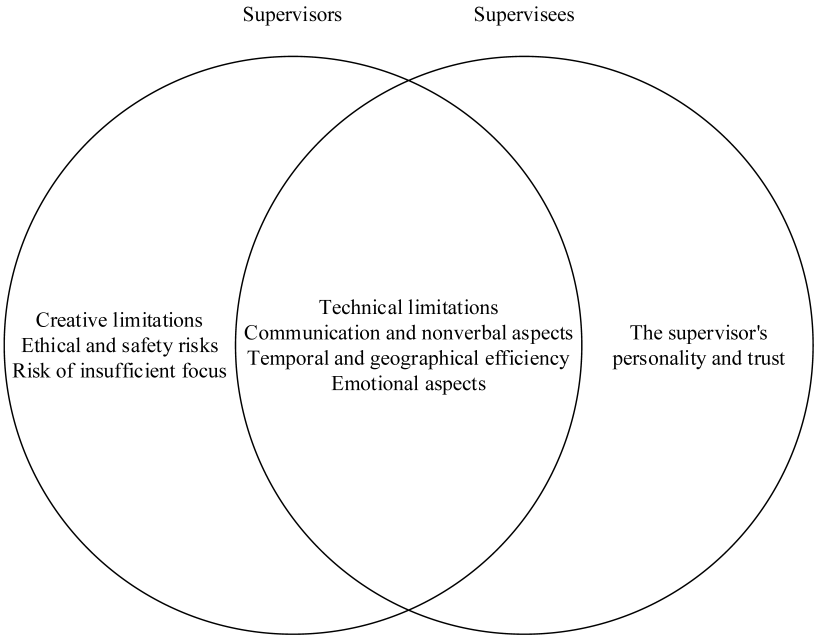

Figure 1: Online vs. Face-to-Face Supervision. Shared and Distinct Categories

Source: Author's own elaboration.

The results of the qualitative analysis demonstrate that supervisors and supervisees share a common conceptual framework reflecting the core assumptions of effective supervision. These shared categories constitute the very essence of the supervisory process and show that both groups hold a similar understanding of what needs to be present for supervision to function effectively. Within this shared ground, we identified four overlapping dimensions: *technical limitations, communicative and nonverbal aspects, temporal and geographical efficiency, and emotional aspects***.** Together, these categories anchor supervision as a process that is not only methodological but, above all, relational and experiential. Therefore, for both groups, it is essential that the conditions of contact foster a sense of stability and trust.

The category of *technical limitations* is reflected in this shared core as a factor that may disrupt the smooth flow of the supervisory process and, at the same time, undermine the sense of safety. Supervision represents

a professional form of working with emotional experience, and when the technical conditions are compromised, trust in the process – and in the reflective space itself – may also be affected.

Communication and nonverbal aspects constitute another shared dimension. Both groups regard nonverbal cues and the quality of presence as integral to professional interaction rather than merely as expressions of personal impression. Supervision requires openness, empathy, and sensitivity to emotional, relational, and subtle unspoken signals – key prerequisites for reflection (Regan, 2012).

Finally, *temporal and geographical efficiency* appears as a shared benefit that supports regularity, accessibility, and continuity in the supervisory process. Grames et al. (2022) point out that supervision significantly broadens the possibilities for organizing the supervisory process. Due to its reduced dependence on a specific place and time, it becomes easier to coordinate schedules, maintain regularity, and ensure the continuity of the work. The authors also emphasize that this spatial and temporal flexibility allows supervision to take place even in situations where face-to-face meetings would not be possible, thereby supporting the long-term stability and consistency of the supervisory relationship.

Emotional aspects reflect the fact that supervision is not merely an exchange of content but a lived relational experience. Both groups need supervision to create an emotionally safe space –

supervisors do so through guiding the process, while supervisees experience it through emotional engagement. The content of supervision itself – such as client cases, intervention procedures, or applied techniques – is not in itself a sufficient indicator of quality or effectiveness. The essential factor lies in the quality of the relationship between supervisor and supervisee and the extent to which both can attune to each other emotionally, communicatively, and relationally. It is the supervisor's ability to remain psychologically present, to perceive what is left unspoken, to reflect on the atmosphere, and to respond to needs as they emerge here and now. It is precisely this relational dimension that provides supervision with a sense of safety and trust, allowing participants to open up and engage in deeper reflection. When it is missing, supervision remains a technical analysis; when it is present, it transforms into a truly developmental and empowering experience (Regan, 2012).

Beyond these shared categories, however, three additional thematic areas emerged in the supervisors' perspective that were absent in the supervisees' accounts: *creative limitations, the risk of insufficient concentration, and ethi-*

cal and safety concerns. Their presence indicates that the supervisor, as the carrier of the process, is attuned not only to the conditions of supervision but also to the quality of its methodological and mental guidance. The category of *creative limitations* points to the fact that supervisors need a broader facilitative space for their work. Bellinger and Carone (2021) emphasize that creativity is not merely an aesthetic or methodological enrichment of supervision but a key component of professional maturation. Creative techniques enable both supervisors and supervisees to perceive supervision as a professional process – one that engages with process, symbolics, experiential, and relational dynamics. When the supervisory context is so constraining that these elements cannot be present, it directly affects professional identity and the subjective experience of one's own competence.

The category of *risk of insufficient concentration* reflects supervisors' awareness of their responsibility to maintain continuity of attention, regulate the process dynamics, and hold appropriate boundaries. Supervisors thus express that the quality of supervision is not endangered when they fail to understand the content, but rather when they experience fatigue and cannot sustain full concentration. This category did not appear among supervisees precisely because they bear less responsibility for the process; their role is to be present in supervision, not to lead it.

The category of *ethical and safety risks* revealed that supervisors perceive the online environment not merely as a technical or organizational change but as a shift in the very framework of professional responsibility. In supervision, this responsibility extends beyond guiding the process to ensuring confidentiality, protecting shared content, and guaranteeing a safe space for reflection. While supervisees tend to perceive these risks only marginally (only one supervisee referred explicitly to security concerns – P17: *"And then there's the issue of cybersecurity – I feel completely lost. To what extent... It can be hacked, although I don't name clients in supervision..."*) supervisors see them as an active professional duty, integral to their role performance. Ethical and safety risks emerged in the data only on the supervisors' side, as they hold primary responsibility for creating a safe framework and handling supervisory content confidentially. Supervisees usually do not create this framework; they enter it. Therefore, they do not identify it as a risk, but rather as a natural assumption – something that belongs to the supervisor's role. Supervisors point out that the online format may compromise environmental control – it is not always possible to know who is physically present in the room on the other side, whether adequate privacy

is ensured, or whether unintended recording or eavesdropping may occur. They also draw attention to cybersecurity risks, especially the potential leakage or misuse of sensitive information about clients, organizations, or internal processes. For supervisors, therefore, the online format represents not merely a technical relocation of meetings to the digital space but an expansion of ethical boundaries that must be consciously managed.

Conversely, on the side of supervisees, an additional category emerged – *the personality of the supervisor and trust* – indicating that they perceive supervision primarily through its relational dimension. For this group, what matters most is not the technical form of supervision, but who the supervisor is and what kind of environment they are able to create. This category did not appear among supervisors, as they do not conceptualize it as a distinct element of the process but rather as part of their own professional competence – something implicit rather than explicit in their perspective.

Analytical comparison of these three areas – shared categories, supervisor-specific categories, and supervisee-specific categories – shows that differences between the groups do not stem from differing understandings of supervision, but from their respective positions within the process. Supervisors reflect on the quality of supervision through the lens of guiding and holding the supervisory process itself, whereas supervisees perceive it primarily through trust and their experiential engagement. The shared categories confirm that both groups agree on what constitutes the essence of supervision: technical reliability, accessibility, confidentiality, clear communication, and emotional safety. This indicates that the core of supervision remains the same for all participants, regardless of role. At the same time, the distinct categories complement this shared core by adding two perspectives – supervisors contribute methodological and procedural oversight, while supervisees bring relational and experiential depth.

In the context of the difference between online and face-to-face supervision, it can be concluded that form does not determine the meaning of the categories, but the intensity of their experience. The online environment amplifies the importance of technical reliability and efficiency, while face-to-face settings enhance nonverbal and emotional factors. In both settings, however, the essential value core remains unchanged – safety, trust, and reflective presence. This confirms that form is secondary to relational quality and procedural grounding. Supervision functions as a space that integrates two complementary perspectives: supervisors provide the conditions, while supervisees fill them with lived experience. The shared categories articulate

what is essential for supervision to function, while the differing ones show what each group contributes to it. It is precisely this mutual complementarity that leads to an effective and meaningful supervisory process.

Discussion

In the context of supervision as a professionally grounded relational and process-oriented space, the results of the qualitative analysis indicate that the core of the supervisory process is shared by both supervisors and supervisees. Both groups agree that the quality of supervision depends on the stability of contact, the reliability of the communicative environment, confidentiality, and emotional safety. These shared categories demonstrate that supervision is built upon the assumption of a safe framework that enables open sharing and reflection. This confirms that the fundamental expectations of supervision are similar for both groups, even though they are experienced from different role positions.

The differences between supervisors and supervisees do not reflect different needs, but rather different understandings of responsibility within the process. Supervisors tend to perceive supervision primarily through the lens of process facilitation, whereas supervisees, in contrast, emphasize its relational dimension – with trust and the supervisor's personal competence as key elements. This shows that supervision is not a one-directional transfer of expertise, but a dialog between process guidance and personal experience.

The findings also suggest that the format of supervision (online vs. face-to-face) does not change its essence but affects the intensity of its individual aspects. Technical and organizational dimensions are more pronounced in the online environment, while relational and emotional elements are stronger in personal, face-to-face contact.

In conclusion, supervision can be understood as a space of mutual complementarity between those who lead the process and those who undergo it. Supervisors bring structure; supervisees bring authenticity of experience. The shared categories reveal what is universally necessary in supervision, while the differing ones explain how these needs are realized from two distinct positions. The effectiveness of supervision rests on the dynamic in which one party creates safe and supportive conditions, and the other is able to mature, reflect on themselves and their work, and move forward within these conditions. Supervision is thus a joint endeavor in which a

professional, with the support of the supervisor, focuses on their clients, on themselves as part of the client-professional relationship, and on the wider systemic context – thereby enhancing the quality of their work, transforming client relationships, and continuously developing and refining their practice and professional functioning (Hawkins & Shohet, 2012). In light of the above, the true value of supervision emerges when professional guidance is combined with human experience – when the relationship becomes a shared effort that fosters the professional and personal growth it is designed to support.

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