



## Life Staging®- a collaborative and co-creative model enriching and uniting us as human beings (Riga SU 2022)

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### Abstract

Supervision can be performed, described, and named in many ways and words. I see supervision as its own subject, an artistic one, and the supervisor thereby more like an "artistic leader". The one who creates and maintains a safe place and structure inviting supervisees to

collaborate and activate each one's unique "artistry". The supervision models and methods I offer vary (drawing, philosophical café, village council and more) while the overall ideas are the same: systemic, narrative, and artistic. In congruence with this approach, believing creative and collaborative models and processes are best understood in practice, I chose to do a "try out workshop" and demonstration of one of my models: Life Staging® su-

perision, which I demonstrated at my workshop in Riga this last summer. For ethical reasons and confidentiality, I will give no details about what the participants chose to cover during the workshops. Instead, I will concentrate this article on my supervision approach in general, and more specifically on Life Staging® supervision and the steps in this process. Handouts, to read more about the model, were available for the participants at the workshop afterwards.

### My supervision approach

#### Supervision practices

All clinical work is guided by some theories from which we draw conclusions, including how to interpret and explain problems, personal characteristics, and phenomena. What we bring with us to our professional life determines what we see, don't see, what we pay attention to, ways of speaking and acting, how we meet with others, i.e., how we perform our profession. Starting off with some core values and overall perspectives, followed by more specific theories, models, and languages, serving as guidelines and an ethical stance. A preference and filter/perspective, we never can avoid. We are also influenced by the broader, preferred societal "storytelling" existing in the specific culture at a given time, such as which theories, models, values and norms gets validated by those in power to formulate them. Like for example, what is to be considered professional or unprofessional, skillful or ignorant within the framework of e.g. therapy, social work and supervision in a particular context and time.

I believe many *different* arenas and arrangements in supervision are needed. Not "one kind," or more of the same kind – as is often the case in contemporary dominated supervision and teaching formats offering mostly verbally oriented models and methods reflecting a similar "understanding" in the specific professional culture. I

want to add supervision formats where the non-verbal is given more space, training in improvisation and interactions skills: enhancing the ability to be more present in the moment and grounded.

Why have I chosen this view on supervision? Because I personally trust more in congruent, transparent, present and personal professionals who can improvise, speak different “languages” and have a sense of humor. And having fun together is a great act of resilience too!

### **What is my supervision approach suggesting?**

The aim of my supervision approach is to liberate, empower and bring to life each person’s unique personality, richness of color and co-creative ability. By the same time, I want to focus on the universal of us all as human beings: Grasp the “magical”, artistic and aesthetic in the clinical work (and life). Working with images, systemic and dynamic sculptures in action opens to experience something different. I will invite group members to take physical action in co-creating series of visual and dynamic three-dimensional scenes/pictures of e.g., a “dilemma”, accompanied by voices from the participants on their experiences partaking in the different changing scenes. The focus is on the here-and-now; the seeing, hearing and body sensations and experience of spatiality. Everyone’s contribution counts, there is no way to do or be either right or wrong.

From an (initially) ignorant position we can challenge our perspectives and prejudices, thereby embracing more of the complexity of human life. The format can be described as a journey from a “one perspective statement” to an organic movement holding more dimensions, leading to richer stories and descriptions of people and phenomena. The approach challenges norms and values not in concordance with the person’s own intentions in life. It invites to a joyful and emotional exploration in a

collaborative and dynamic way adding new perspectives, experiences, and stories to the scene (life) of each other. Accordingly, it avoids explanatory models that too fast directs towards some already taken-for-granted knowledge that is kidnapping us in wanting something fit to our (or someone else’s) already prescribed model.

The process is transformative, and is activating knowledge, emotions and skills that were always there - but often silenced. “When the words are not in the way”, what’s there to see, feel and hear? – And thereby, to know?

### **How to do Life Staging@?**

The instructions are few and simple. Implementing the approach though, is about courage, daring to challenge what’s taken for granted, choosing the inner stance of “not-knowing” and being willing to change and being transformed ... and immersing oneself in play!

### **The position of the supervisor**

The role of the supervisor is to secure, structure and activate, providing a “safe place,” lead the group through the process by repeating the simple questions and instructions’, and making clear what is expected of the supervisees. The structure has a predictable frame, but is free in relation to the content. Since no one knows what will be presented, how participants will react or what will come out of the process, the supervisor must be confident in the face of the unpredictable. The supervisor also needs to remain quite indifferent to what’s happening, and thereby contributing to the process being performance- and prestige-free, and as minimally judgmental as possible. The primary task is to “activate”, e.g., by challenging and stimulating, and to remain in the narrative and artistic language (usage).

### **The supervision process**

The model has three phases: *The Staging, The Narrative interview and Resonance/Transport*.

To avoid the *habitual seeing and thinking* that we “know what’s there”, the sculpting process starts up without *any verbal* information from the one who wants to work. The one who wants to do a staging process, is here called “the stager”.

The stager might be a group leader looking at a group, with focus on a special moment or e.g., a conflict, a family- or couple therapist staging an earlier or upcoming meeting, a boss staging a situation with the staff etc. More abstract can the staging explore an inner or outer dilemma, ambivalence around taking certain steps, different aspects of a value conflict, or investigate how guilt intervenes with a special relation etc.

1. “*The Staging*” starts with the stager creating a physical “sculpture/image” choosing the other participants as representatives of persons, feelings etc. and placing them in relation to each other in the scene, including one representing the stager. Without words, the stager shows what the representatives shall look like, gestures, mimic, position etc.

I then back off with the stager and ask the stager to have a look from a distance. –Is this ok, or do you want to correct something? Which is often the case. When done, the stager says, “I’m ready”. Thereafter instructions to the figures in the scene comes from me:

- Remain in the picture for 5-6 seconds and whoever wants to do something after that, does it – without words!

The representatives then move, act, or remain in the same position while the stager and I are watching. This is the “challenge” to the stager’s perspective, the starting point to a possible “richer storytelling”.

After some seconds I interrupt and tell the representatives to stop their actions, and I ask:

- **Voices!**

(Verbal expressions)

The representatives in the scene share what they experience when being in the scene, in an everyday language, and I ask them to avoid interpreting or analyzing the situation in psychological terms. The utterings can e.g., be like: “I got scared when you looked at me”, “I felt I wanted out of this room but couldn’t move”, “I wanted to hug that person (pointing)” etc.

The stager can add a new act by rearranging the scene, ask representatives for more comments, ask somebody in the scene to do the next act/scene, or maybe the stager is satisfied and want to stop. Here, it can continue in different directions. Usually 1-3 scenes will follow with the same instructions from the supervisor.

It is optional if the stager wants to tell the story and what the figures represents. An important choice for the stager is to avoid the risk of being removed from their (emotional) here- and-now state, before formulating the experience for themselves. If okay for the stager, the representatives can tell what they felt, heard, and saw from their perspectives and positions: emotions, thoughts etc.

After this, all involved in the scene must be “unrolled” from the figures they represented and sit in the circle again.

2. “*The narrative interview*”. I sit a little bit outside the ring with the stager and ask:

- What happened with you during the process?
- What did you see? Hear? Feel?
- Something that surprised you?
- Something you were drawn to especially?
- What does this say to you about you?

I try to keep the stager in the “here- and-now”, concentrated on the feelings and body sensations from which the staging has made an impact, all in a sculpting language. The stager develops his/her own story in a free manner, without interruptions from me or the other participants.

3. “*Resonance and transportation*”

I then ask if the stager wants some resonance from the representatives. Thoughts, reflections, and advices to the stager are forbidden, unless the stager openly asks for it – in which seldom is the case. The question to the representatives and other participants in the supervision is: – “what were you drawn to that connects to something in your own life”? – What was it like to be the “mother”, to be “anxiety”, or “a young child” etc.?

An opportunity is given to all in the group to formulate the impact of the process on them, and if, and how, they have been transformed by this. The gift of this *resonance* and *transport* to the stager is encouraged to verbalize.

### Summary

Life Staging supervision wants to show how supervision can be carried out and formulated in a more artistic way and in a different language (usage). When using this approach, we need to be skilled in “reading” situations by being more aware in seeing and hearing; and thus, being good at grasping “what is going on and what to

do”. Starting with a sketch, which is progressively filled out with all the colors, experiences, and perspectives that the participants bring to the table, there will be produced dynamic images that sometimes need to be blurred, re-painted, or challenged. But most of the time, this process results in real “pieces of art”! ■



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