

Humanistic Professionals' Perceptions on Workplace Mentoring to Support Professional and Personal Wellbeing: A Narrative Inquiry Study

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Abstract: This research explores workplace challenges as experienced by four Maltese professionals in the management, education, health, social welfare and law fields, and their perceptions on how mentoring arising through understanding of compulsory supervision in therapeutic practices might impact their professional and personal wellbeing. Informed by collating the narratives of these professionals, I analyse the beneficence of mentoring support practices if implemented in these humanistic fields. Supervision is an inherent part of being a practitioner in the talking therapies and supports the practitioners' personal and professional wellbeing since, according to Spagnuolo Lobb (2019), individual and organisational wellbeing cannot be separated. This rationale can be applied to mentoring in other humanistic professions. In fact, mentoring developed in diverse humanistic fields, encompassing the notion that the support of a mentor to the mentee is not limited to career aspirations but also includes support for the enhancement of personal wellbeing (Dutton 2003). Narrative inquiry is the chosen research methodology, generating a transformative philosophical approach. Purposive sampling was used and the data was collected through in-depth narrative interviewing (Bernard 2002; Lewis and Sheppard 2006). Thematic narrative analysis was utilised as an analytic tool to gain access to the narrator's world (Polkinghorne 1995) and MAXQDA was used to proficiently aid the analytic process. Quality in this research was ensured by considering procedural, situational, and relational ethical dimensions (Tracy 2010). Following the analytic process, a model is depicted, followed by recommendations, amongst which are: informing humanistic fields about the benefits of mentoring provision; making supportive mentoring accessible for all humanistic professionals; offering formal, informal, internal, and external forms of mentoring; and ensuring that the mentor is trained and supported.

Keywords: personal and professional wellbeing; humanistic fields; narrative inquiry; mentoring

Introduction

This narrative study explores workplace challenges as experienced by four Maltese professionals in the management, education, health, social welfare, and law fields, and their perceptions on how mentoring arising through the understanding of compulsory supervision in therapeutic practices might impact their professional and personal wellbeing. In turn, informed by collating the narratives of these professionals, I analyse the beneficence of such mentoring support practices if implemented in these humanistic fields.

Supervision is an inherent part of being a practitioner in the fields of the talking therapies and supports the practitioners' personal and professional wellbeing. Mentoring also developed in diverse humanistic fields and encompasses the notion that the support of a mentor to the mentee is not limited to career aspirations but also includes support for the enhancement of personal wellbeing (Dutton 2003).

Nascent Trajectory: Personal, Practical and Social Justifications



Figure 1: *Personal, Practical and Social Justifications*

The inception of this study, its research theme, rationale, and objectives stem from narrative inquiry justifications, comprising personal, practical, and social justifications (Clandinin 2013). This study's personal justifications are based on the reflexivity of my own professional experiences particularly in therapy, supervision, lecturing, and management. Practical justifications reflect the practices within these diverse fields where I encountered many practitioners who go through solitary experiences, compassion fatigue, burnout and diverse psychological, emotional, and physiological repercussions, interchangeably permeating their personal and professional lives, without the possibility of supervision that therapeutic professionals are privy to, in the therapeutic domain. Subsequently, motivation, creativity, and effectivity in their field, as well as being a mentoring presence to others, significantly diminish. Even more so, in higher-end jobs, one may easily get inundated not just with the quantity but also with the intensity of work, together with the isolation experienced. Social justifications focus on the possibility of social, theoretical, or policy change of implementing mentoring within the humanistic fields of practice.

Supervision and Mentoring

Humanistic field professions make considerable demands on practitioners, both professionally and personally, as the former serve as primary tools through their professional contact. Consequently, in the talking therapies, supervision is an inherent part of being a practitioner, serving as a continuous reflective stance encompassing the process and content of the therapeutic sessions. Unfortunately, this is not the case in several other humanistic professions. Nevertheless, the need for support for such professionals is greatly felt and, as a result, mentoring was introduced in diverse fields, comprising support for the mentee in terms of professional experiences and of personal wellbeing.

Research Question and Rationale

The main objective of this study is primarily to evaluate in depth narratives and experiences of four seasoned humanistic professionals and in turn analyse if such accompaniment through mentoring can enhance the personal wellbeing and professional domain of professionals.

To attain this objective, I aimed to:

- Gain meaning from the shared narratives and experiences;
- Acquire understanding through the narratives and experiences shared by professionals within diverse humanistic fields;
- Comprehend how supervision informed mentoring may support or be implemented within other humanistic professions

Accordingly, my research question is: From the narratives and experiences encountered, how can mentoring impact the personal and professional wellbeing within diverse humanistic fields?

The Choice of Research Methodology

This research endeavour is made possible through narrative inquiry, as the latter accentuates the voice of the respondents, together with the reflexivity of the researcher. In turn, it generates a transformative philosophical approach and a methodology with a clear rationale that is reflexive, thorough, and rigorous. As the researcher, I immersed myself in the participants' experiences, without becoming enmeshed, aided by theoretical sensitivity and an ongoing reflexive process while addressing relational ethics arising in the research trajectory (Etherington 2004).

Literature Review

In this literature review, I mainly discuss the context in which this research is embedded, as well as the mentoring and supervision literature main texts that I referred to and how such literature contributes to the topic in question. A visual outline of existing literature is depicted below in a literature map.

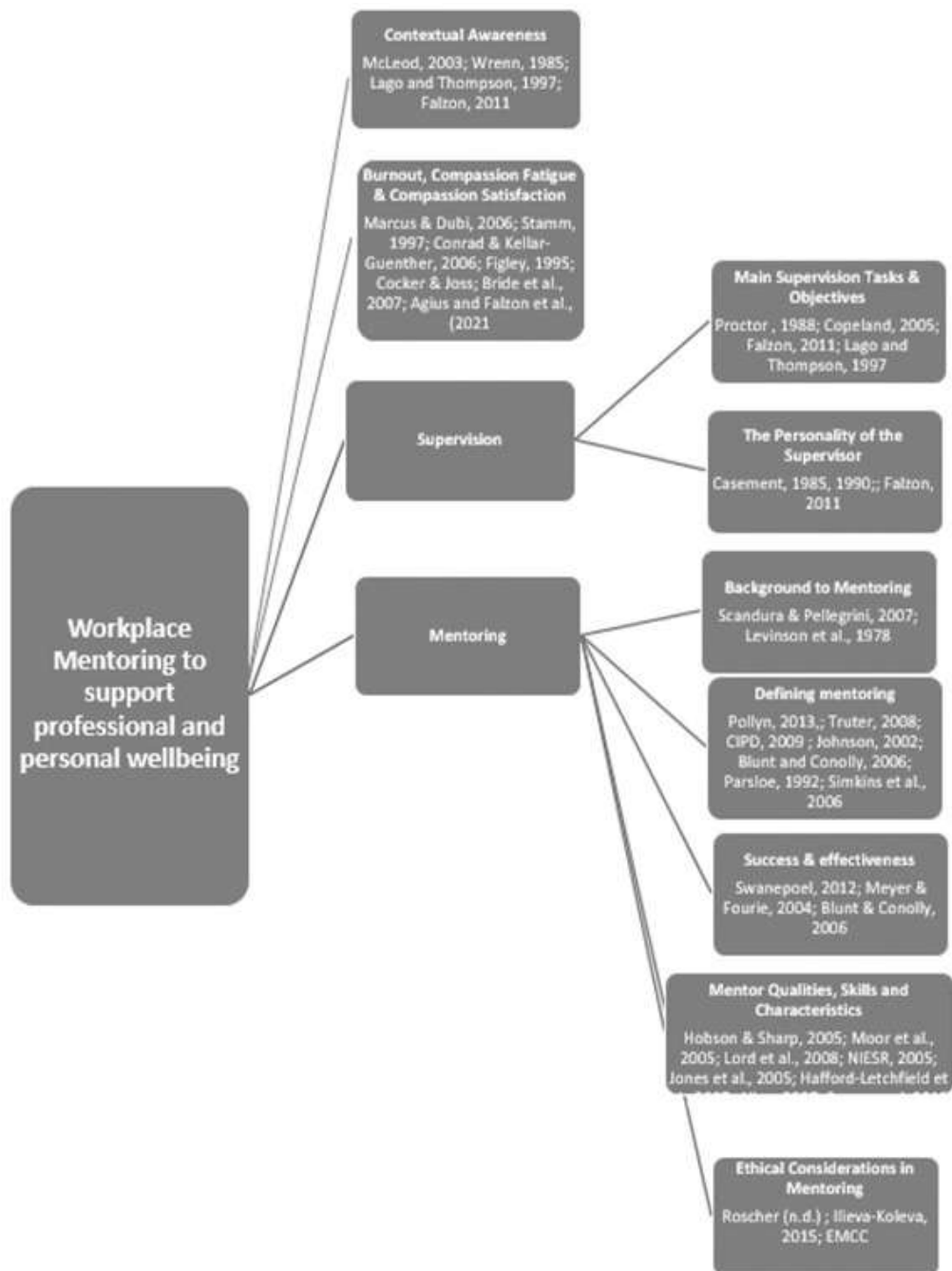


Figure 2: Literature map

Malta and its Contextual Ambience

The supervision/mentoring discussed in this research is set in a distinctly Maltese socio-cultural domain, and particular aspects need to be taken into consideration to provide *contextual awareness* (McLeod 2003). Wrenn (1985) reminds practitioners that ignoring their own or their clients' cultural context through encapsulation results in monochromatic thinking, thus resisting relevant adjustments or adaptations to the milieu of practice. Lago and Thompson (1997) reiterate that a false view can be given of clients' difficulties if the cultural context is not taken into consideration.

Particular cultural aspects which might permeate the mentoring field in the Maltese context will be discussed, as they emerge from Falzon's 2011's study.

Interconnected Relational Context

Due to the local interconnected relational context, many professionals know each other through connections, past or present work affiliations, friends, the community network, by repute or through the public professional domain. Practitioners need to be careful about any detrimental conflicting boundaries and ramifications through former relational knowledge (Falzon 2011).

Multiple Relationships

Through interrelated social dynamics, multiple relationships are very common in the professional arena. Past, present, and possible future connections may be perceived as inconsequential by a professional who is not embedded in this cultural context. However, when a professional is constantly immersed in this backdrop, dissociating oneself from multiple relationships or a semblance of disconnection is unrealistic. Vigorous attainable boundaries need to be upheld, so that if these multiple relationships cannot be avoided, arising ethical dilemmas are processed with utmost integrity and professionalism (Falzon 2011).

Public and Private Domains

In such a socio-cultural domain, stories generate other stories, people are highly networked and news travels fast, until the resulting story is sometimes severely distorted and has an impact beyond the immediate present. Information in the private domain may effortlessly permeate the public domain, creating an intricate field of data. In this private-public domain interaction, diffusion of a situation that arises may be difficult and intensification is fast (Falzon 2011). Thus, a mentor must be attentive, perceptive, and vigilant to pick up any developing intensification of possible ethical dilemmas or adverse situations, as once the wave surge is in motion, the ripple effects are very difficult to avert.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is very pertinent to the Maltese context. Merely changing a name and a few characteristics of a story does not generate adequate confidential parameters, as an identity can still be easily deciphered, even over time. In such an environment, constructive boundaries, confidentiality parameters, the virtue ethic of respect for what another wants to discuss or refrain from and how one goes about this information, whether it is in the public domain or not, is imperative (Falzon 2011).

Burnout, Compassion Fatigue (CF) and Compassion Satisfaction (CS)

Burnout is “a syndrome of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion” (Marcus and Dubi 2006: 223). It may be experienced in any occupation and is depicted by gradual mental and physical exhaustion, together with a malfunction in professional performance (Stamm 1997). Burnout may occur “when an individual cannot achieve his or her goals” (Cocker and Joss 2016: 2), thus leading to feelings of loss of control, frustration, and a lack of confidence. Burnout is also associated with other mental health conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression (Conrad and Kellar-Guenther 2006).

Figley (1995) conceptualised the term *compassion fatigue* (CF), which is particularly characterised by the instant diminishing of a professional's empathy towards clients (Figley 2002), mainly due to the personal and professional impact which is left on the practitioner by the clients' own traumatic experiences (Berzoff and Kita 2010). Also referred to by some as secondary traumatic stress (Collins and Long 2003), CF is defined as the “cost of caring for those who suffer” (Figley 1995: 9). It is a consequence of the practitioner's overexposure to clients' suffering and trauma (Cocker and Joss 2016).

Figley's model also explains that practitioners may restrict the likelihood of suffering from compassion stress by developing means of enhancing satisfaction. (Figley 2002). In this regard, compassion satisfaction (CS) refers to professionals' “feelings of increased motivation and satisfaction gained from helping those who suffer” (Anderson and Papazoglou 2015: 661). CS is also associated with increased professional commitment and performance and a high level of personal life quality (Stamm 1997).

CF and CS may be experienced by a care-giving professional at the same time (Stamm 1997). However, an increased level of CF may restrict CS (Bride et al. 2007). Literature shows that engaging in supervision (Linley and Joseph 2007) and a process of self-monitoring (Bride et al. 2007) are key to help prevent CF.

In a local research study conducted by Agius and Falzon et al. (2021), it was established that Gestalt therapists tend to have higher levels of CS and lower levels of burnout and CF, particularly due to the innate self and external support systems. In this respect, supervision, which acts as a means for self-care, wherein the supervisor provides support and affirmation, both personally and professionally, is a key contributing factor that is necessary for the effectiveness of such helping professions (Gilbert and Evans 2000; Hawkins and Shohet 2007; Scaife 2010).

Professional Supervision

Supervision Objectives

Supervision is an inherent mandatory part of being a therapeutic practitioner, as an on-going reflective stance encompassing the process and content of the therapy sessions. As practitioners, no matter how much experience one has, process reflexivity in supervision is a continuous embedded need (Falzon 2011). Supervision can be done one-to-one or in a group.

The purpose of supervision in the therapeutic field is multidimensional, including for the supervisor to: support the supervisee to effectively understand one's client, at both the content and process levels; facilitate the awareness process; reflect on interactions, reactions, perceptions, feelings and countertransference issues, and understand the dynamics of how the therapist/supervisee and the client are interacting; look at the supervisee's interventions and the ensuing outcomes and/or consequences of such

interventions; support the supervisee to become an agent of growth, self-efficacy and empowerment; explore and enhance other possibilities of working, and challenge the enhancement of practice; and validate, support, and implement the restorative measures needed for the supervisee to continue being an effective practitioner.

Main Supervision Tasks

The main supervisory tasks, which were made prevalent by Proctor (1988), affirm the professional supervision function to be formative, restorative, and normative. Furthermore, Copeland (2005) asserted the organisational facet of supervision. *Normative* refers to the maintaining and adhering of professional ethics in order to safeguard the client's rights, upholding the country's laws and maintaining the respected values in one's community context. *Formative* refers to the development in the therapist's practice and competency maintenance at the level that the practitioner is in. *Restorative* reflects the recreating aspect in the supervisory relationship, where the practitioner can rest and ventilate frustrations, anxieties, and concerns. *Organisational* refers to being answerable to the organisation's policies and regulations and being accountable to the organisation's quality of service. Each organisational setting has its own identity, culture, influences, beliefs, modus operandi, underlying agendas, understanding, and meaning making. Organisations may have a significant impact on employees, as practitioners absorb and emulate the aura, culture, beliefs, and underlying characteristics of the organisation. Therefore, in supervision, grasping the organisational nuances is essential, while also understanding the different voices at play and the dynamics in force (Falzon 2011).

The contextual facet is also important in supervision since the latter does not take place in a vacuum, but within a cultural context (Lago and Thompson 1997).

The Supervisor

The personality of the supervisor is substantially referred to, in most supervision literature, as one of the keys to aid the supervisory relationship and process.

As succinctly taken from Falzon (2011), supervisor characteristics that may support the supervision domain are, amongst others: prudence and respect; the supervisor's own self-awareness; integrity in the supervision relational standpoints; sound and informed discernment and decision-making; and knowledge and experience.

The collaborative and relational stance in supervision is an important formative and restorative task to additionally support the development of the *internal supervisor* (Casement 1985; 1990), where the practitioner is encouraged to become reflexive and involve oneself in this reflective process. (Falzon 2011).

Mentoring

Background to Mentoring

In traditional mentoring theory, much of the focus was on the role of the mentor and the functions which the latter can provide to the mentee (Scandura and Pellegrini, 2007). In the late 1970s, the term entered the business domain to refer to a person who inspires growth and development (Levinson et al. 1978). Mentoring developed in diverse humanistic fields, encompassing the notion that the support of a mentor to the mentee is not limited to career aspirations but also includes support for the enhancement of personal wellbeing (Dutton 2003). Gibson et al. (2000: PAGE NUMBER) depict this process as a "dance of learning".

Defining mentoring

Mentoring is a “powerful developmental and empowerment tool” (Pollyn 2013: 29). Truter (2008) defines the mentor as a person who essentially provides guidance, support, and nurturing to the latter.

The 2009 Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) factsheet on mentoring highlights its long-term benefits through its focus on the supportive development of the individual, mentoring aims to achieve both individual, and organisational goals.

According to Johnson (2002), “mentoring facilitates, guides, and encourages continuous innovation, learning and growth” (41), while Blunt and Conolly (2006) add that “mentoring provides psychological guidance and support to influence or inspire” (199). Other authors focus on the *process* aspect of mentoring, through which mentees are given help and support “to manage their own learning in order to maximise their potential, develop their skills, improve their performance, and become the person they want to be” (Parsloe 1992 as cited in Simkins et al. 2006: 323). According to Renshaw (2008), mentoring is

...a development process, including elements of coaching, facilitating and counselling, aimed at sharing knowledge and encouraging individual development. It has a longer-term focus [than coaching] designed to foster personal growth and to help an individual place their creative, personal and professional development in a wider cultural, social and educational context... (11)

Throughout this research, I refer to mentoring in humanistic professions as including the same aspects alluded to in the above quote, while integrating the same aspects of supervision, namely the normative, formative, restorative, organisational, and contextual facets.

Successful and Effective Mentoring

When it comes to successful and effective mentoring, Swanepoel (2012) directly quotes Charles Gordon’s account on mentoring: “Wise mentoring speeds up people’s growth to maturity, increases their desire to learn and excel, and assists them to correctly recognise and develop their gifts and talents” (6). Swanepoel (2012) lists a number of factors that are essential for a successful mentoring relationship starting with *commitment* from all those concerned towards the mentoring process. Another important factor is the *matching* of the appropriate mentor with the correct mentee. Thus, the mentor and the mentee need to work well together in order for the mentoring relationship to be successful, productive, and effective (Blunt and Conolly 2006 as cited in Swanepoel 2012; Meyer and Fourie 2004).

According to Barnett (1995), the reflective process in mentorship is key to its effectiveness. Hart (1990) states that reflective practitioners combine theoretical, empirical, and experiential knowledge, while Renshaw (2008) points out reflectivity as an essential characteristic of “effective co-mentors, as the ability to be self-reflective and self-aware can help to nurture these qualities in others” (52).

Qualities, Skills and Characteristics of the Mentor

A variety of characteristics, qualities, and skills are crucial for the effectiveness of the mentor’s role. Apart from highlighting the fact that an effective mentor is “knowledgeable, experienced, and a successful practitioner” (39), Lord et al. (2008) provide a list of qualities and skills that are vital, some of which are the following:

- Supportive (Hobson and Sharp 2005);
- Knowledgeable and experienced (Moor et al. 2005);
- Competent in subject skills and practices: (Lord et al. 2008);
- Trustworthy and respectful (Lord et al. 2008);
- Good listening skills (NIESR 2005);
- Friendly/approachable (Jones et al. 2005);
- Empathetic (Hafford-Letchfield et al. 2007);
- Non-judgmental (Allan 2007);
- Good communication/interpersonal skills (Hobson and Sharp 2005);
- Self-aware/focused on their own learning: (Hafford-Letchfield et al. 2007), (Lord et al. 2008);

Apart from the above, Swanepoel (2012) adds that a workplace mentor should have, amongst others: organisational knowledge, contextual knowledge, and experience outside the organisation.

Ethical Considerations in Mentoring

Ethical dilemmas are common in mentoring and diverse models are followed in relation to ethical considerations. Roscher (n.d.) refers to the *Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of the Psychology of Coaching and Mentoring*, wherein a number of principles are listed to be followed: “1. Competence; 2. Do no harm; 3. Integrity; 4. Informed consent; 5. Avoiding or effectively managing multiple relationships (e.g. coach – friendship – romantic relationship); 6. Confidentiality; 7. Conflicts of interest; 8. Being multiculturally and internationally competent” (para. 18). The European Mentoring Coaching Council (EMCC) Code of Ethics obliges the mentor to act “from a position of dignity, autonomy and personal responsibility” (Ilieva-Koleva 2015: 82). According to the American Psychological Association (APA), the mentoring relationship is mutual and, therefore, responsibility should be shared by both the mentor and the mentee.

Research Methodology, Methods, and Ethical Considerations

Philosophical Research Positioning

A research framework comprises the interaction between three important elements, namely: the philosophical worldview focusing on the researcher’s philosophical assumptions; the research design delineating the procedures of inquiry; and the research methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Creswell and Creswell 2018). Research philosophies encompass three major postulations, depicted in the table below:

Ontological	Delineating the nature of the research and reality as perceived.
Epistemological	Concerning all aspects of the validity of what constitutes acceptable knowledge, scope, and methods of acquiring knowledge.
Axiological	Defining the value and ethical assumptions underlying the study, encompassing the effect of one’s own values on the research process.

Table 1: *Research Philosophical Positioning*

Applying Saunders et al.'s (2019) research onion, in this research I adopted a philosophical worldview which is based on relativist ontology and subjectivist epistemology, both of which are prevalent in the interpretivist, social constructivist, and transformative philosophy of research. A relativist ontology assumes multiple and sometimes conflicting social realities, while a subjectivist epistemology assumes that the researcher and the reality being investigated are interactively linked so that the findings are literally created as the research proceeds (Guba and Lincoln 1994). In this research, I also incorporated a transformative worldview, as it supports change-oriented practices, giving central importance to the study of lives and experiences, where the researcher, in collaboration with the research participants, becomes an agent of change and translates the research approach into practice (Creswell and Creswell 2018).

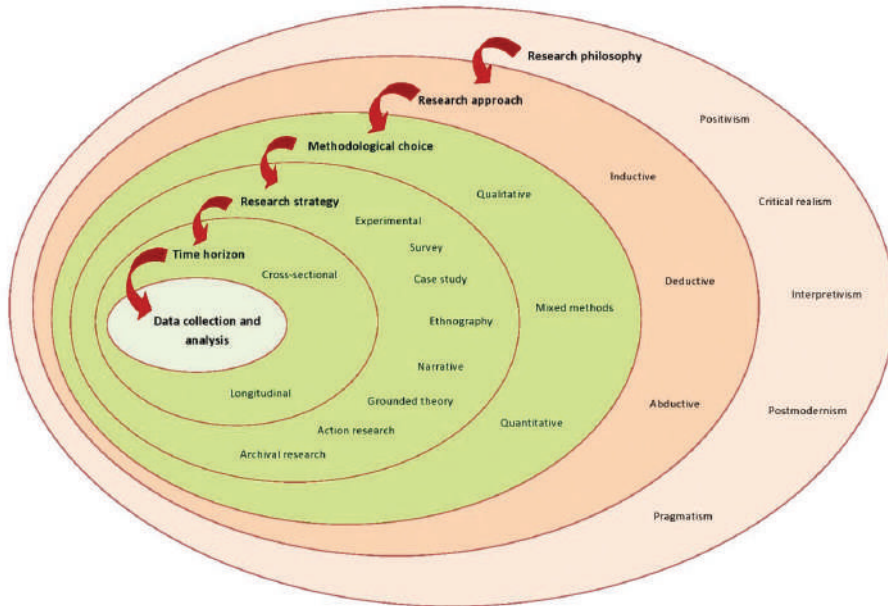


Figure 3: Research onion

I chose a qualitative approach elucidating complex richness, dimensionality, in-depth evaluation, and comprehensive phenomena and viewing the complexity of a situation as an important aspect of the research which must be reported (Creswell 2008). The role of the researcher in qualitative research is of utmost importance as the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection (Creswell and Creswell 2018). Furthermore, this research uses a longitudinal time horizon since the interviews were carried over a period of time and the respondents discussed narratives and experiences that were longitudinal in their nature.

Narrative Inquiry and Additional Methodological Standpoints

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative Inquiry enables the researcher to *write from the inside* (Ellis 1995). It is inspired by Dewey's Theory of Experience (1938) and incorporates two criteria of experience, namely "interaction and continuity enacted in situations" (Clandinin 2016: 12), both of which are often recognised as the philosophical underpinnings of narrative inquiry. Hence, this methodology is not a means to collect stories but a collaborative process that attends to the participants' embedded experiences and to "seeing lives in motion" (Clandinin 2016: 204).

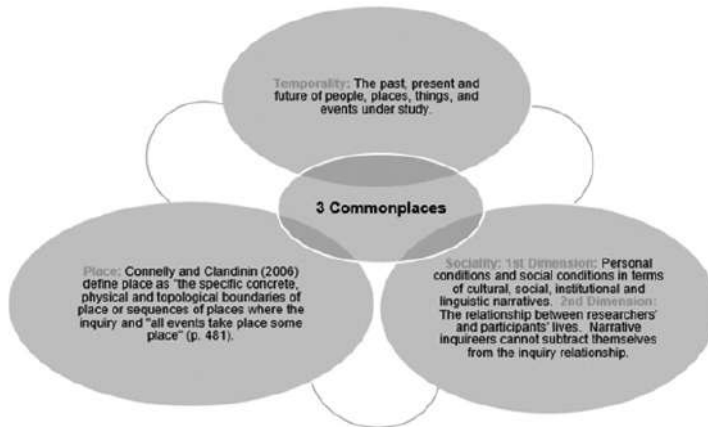


Figure 4: Narrative Inquiry Commonplaces

In this study, three-dimensional narrative inquiry common spaces of temporality, place, and sociality (Connelly and Clandinin 2006) were utilised as indicated in the figure above.

I understood the meaning of lived experiences through the practitioner researchers' shared narratives about their lives and the phenomena experienced (Riessmann 2008), not solely on an individual dimension but also on the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which these experiences are constituted and enacted (Clandinin 2013). MacIntyre (1981) asserts that "it is because we all live out narratives in our lives and because we understand our own lives in terms of the narratives we live out, that the form of narratives is appropriate for understanding the actions of others" (197). The research participants' accounts may be both unique to the individual participants themselves, as well as collective in their shared elements. Narrative inquiries are context reliant and, in this study, research participants come from diverse professional contexts.

Etherington's statement (2000) encapsulates my stance towards this practitioner, contextual and narrative based research: "I am not setting out to prove or disprove hypotheses, to collect data across large numbers of people, to collect standard deviation statistics representing units of variability, or to verify the presence of cause and effect relationships between variables" (252). With such new narratives encountered in this research, useful insights were generated (McLeod 2001).

Through the narrative inquiry methodology, I adopt the following standpoints:

- **Practitioner Researcher**, as I am personally a supervisor and supervisee in the Maltese context, researching with other supervisors and practitioners. I am not agentive on my own but in relationship with my research participants (Drewery 2005), with whom I can collaborate in negotiating meaning to effective relational supervision and mentoring.
- A **reflexive stance**, as McLeod (2001) states that *reflexive knowledge* can enhance understanding and innovative outlooks of knowing, as researchers also focus on their own reflexive process. Critical reflexivity encourages the researcher to be mindful while requiring awareness, processing, and becoming an active agent in their processes (Wosket 1999), thus leading to further insight, while also acknowledging tacit knowledge (Polanyi 1966). Reflexivity is an active, ongoing process at every stage of the research and supports awareness of potential research influences, where the researcher is able to step back and take a critical look at their own role in the research process (Falzon 2011).

Mindfulness in the research process was also supported through compiling a reflexive journal.

- An **autoethnographic stance** portrayed in the narratives' experience as narratives are all situated in relation to the socio-cultural and political environment in which I, as the researcher, as well as the research respondents, live and practice. The autobiographical narratives thus connect to wider cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings. Narratives in this research were considered as "profoundly situational, contingent on the changing fabric of a person's entire social experiences, as well as their interactions with others and the organisation" (Vickers 2007: 225).

Sampling Method

Purposive sampling was adopted for this research. As Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explain, such a technique is based on the "assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (96). My aim was to get a sample that is as representative as possible of the target population (Mouton 1996) through the seasoned participants' experiences.

Narrative Interviewing

The interview adopted for this research was a discursive and collaborative in-depth practice, giving space to conversation where interviewees developed narrative accounts and entailed deep interest to discover the emergent meaning being created. In narrative interviewing, the time of the interview is flexible according to the developing process and more than one interview or communication is done with the same participant. The background is the informed knowledge in the field and the foreground is the collaborative discursive and dialogic relationship created. The goal of narrative interviewing was to generate detailed accounts of experiences and phenomena, collaborative understanding, and meaning.

Semi-Structured Narrative Interviewing

Constructed on the degree of structuring, interviews can be divided into three categories: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews (Fontana and Frey 2005). Semi-structured interviews were used, solely adopting interview guides for the purpose of capturing in-depth data, and at the same time allowing the space for further interaction and new insight to emerge, while permitting opportunities for clarification so that the relevant comprehensive data is captured. Such interviews "emphasize the importance of giving the interviewee voice" (Mouton 2000: 196).

Ethical Considerations in Qualitative Research

For this research study, I took into consideration the three ethical dimensions, which are procedural ethics, situational ethics, and relational ethics (Tracy 2010).

Procedural ethics included providing the prospective participants with an *information letter* that discloses the objectives of the study, as well as providing an explanation of what their role would entail; attaining a signed *consent form* from the research participants, as well as seeking approval from the relevant ethics board if and where necessary. The participants were informed about the voluntary nature of their participation and their right to withdraw from the study until the presentation or publication of the final text without the need for providing a reason for their withdrawal.

Situational ethics comprised the awareness of any moments during the interviews which might cause the participants emotional discomfort. Throughout the research process I was aware of the importance of confidentiality, not only in relation to the participants themselves but also when participants referred to other persons or entities that could be identified through the participants' narratives.

Relational ethics involve sustaining and supporting an ethical relationship that can be sustained beyond the temporality of the research. I was mindful of sensitive data, of the research participants, and the data that the respondents themselves wanted to be kept confidential. During the interview and ensuing collaborative discussions, the use of pseudonyms and the possibility of changing any details that may identify the person were discussed. I also asked research participants to tell me if there was any information that they feel is too sensitive to write or allude to.

Narrative Analysis and Thematic Narrative Analysis

Polkinghorne (1995) differentiates between two methods of analysis when using narratives: narrative analysis and analysis of narrative. In both these methodologies, the stories are considered as true representations of the person's reality. Narrative analysis treats stories as actually constituting the social reality of the narrator (Bruner 1990; Frank 1995; Ochberg 1994; Riessman 1993) rather than as a mere tool to transmit a set of facts. From the four methods of analysing narratives mentioned by Riessmann (2008), I found thematic narrative analysis an apt analytic tool for this research as it enabled me to "keep each story 'intact' by theorising from the case rather than from component themes across cases" (Riessman 2008: 53). According to Riessman (2008), thematic narrative analysis focuses on the told and, therefore, excerpts of the collaborative narrative are written for each emerging theme, encompassing the underlying nuances and meanings or, as Clandinin (2016) calls them, *threads or resonances*. The participants were then invited to edit, comment, and/or add more to the narratives as they deemed fit. Following this process, I was then able to analyse the research outcomes by producing reliable arguments that are supported by literature and the participants' experiences. In order to facilitate the above process, I used the MAXQDA software.

Process to Narrative Inquiry and Analysis

The interviewing and data analysis stages were a very dynamic and reflexive process. The following figure depicts the stages involved.



Figure 5: *Research Narrative Inquiry Process*

Key Components to Ensure Quality in the Research Process

The issues of qualitative validity and reliability were addressed through the adopted ethical procedures, the sound sampling and data collection methods, the transparent and cohesive method of data analysis, the level of clarity in the discussion and final analysis, and additionally through credibility, dependability, and confirmability throughout the research process.

Guba and Lincoln (1989, as cited in Martens 2018) identified criteria for the ethical conduct of qualitative research that are linked to increased research quality, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I also adhered to Tracy's (2010) eight key markers of quality in qualitative research, including: researching a worthy topic; rich rigour used throughout the research progression, data collection, and analytic process; sincerity in the research process, encompassing reflexivity throughout the research process, including any subjective values and my research positioning; credibility achieved through thick description, concrete details in the narratives, and the multivocality through the diverse respondents' endorsed narratives; resonance through the research influences for readers; sound ethical considerations and application; and meaningful coherence through aesthetic evocative representation of the narratives and discussion.

Succinct Narrated Experiences

Narratives are a collaborative process of the research participants' experiences and the reflexivity of the researcher. Due to the limitation of the word count, hereunder I have only alluded to a succinct version of the narratives still leaving each account authentic so as to reflect the narrative voice of the research participants and the contextual considerations of their respective professional domains. All narratives gained the endorsement from the respective participants and encompass any changes that the same participants deemed necessary. The table below succinctly depicts the humanistic respondents' pseudonyms and their respective professional domains.

Participant Pseudonym	Professional Domain
Linda	Professional in the Education field
Nathalie	Professional in the Medical field
Cheryl	Professional in the Legal field
Anna	Professional in the Management field

Table 2: Research Participants

Narrative 1

Introducing Linda: A humanistic professional in the educational field

Linda's current role is that of an educator. Linda has largely worked in the education sector as a PSCD and guidance teacher, as well as in counselling. She has also worked on cases related to child protection and victims of domestic violence in a residential shelter and practitioner supervision in diverse domains.

Narrative Themes Emerging from the Collaborative Narrative with Linda

The Need for Supervision

Many times, I greatly felt the need for supervision, which was not being provided at my workplace. My experience in diverse contexts showed me how a lack of such professional support burns out the professional or leads the latter to become less effective in one's work. The supervisor needs to have good insight of the local contextual and organisation setting, and what the employees experience. Sometimes, the right type of supervision/mentoring is not provided as the setting and the employees' situation are misunderstood.

Linda's Experience of Supervision/Mentoring

When I worked in the main educational field, we had supervision which was then terminated. Thereafter, I really felt the difference, not just in myself but also in other professionals. Accountability, growth levels, support and professionalism were all impacted. In supervision/mentoring, one has the opportunity of receiving feedback, share, reach out for support or clarification, and check if one's practices are beneficial to the service user.

The Importance of Mentoring in the Educational Field

I am currently an educator with support duties in another education entity. Many of the staff seek mentoring, and during challenging meetings, I am also supporting the educators and

management personnel. The complexity of the student situations that we are now facing in the education domain as well as the demands of policies, curriculum, and procedures, have become so prevalent, that we are seeing a lot of professionals who are leaving to escape the hardships encountered without the adequate mentoring support. When educators reach out to speak to me because they are overburdened by a student's story, this is done before or after school hours, or during breaks as no time is directly allocated for such meetings.

I saw many educators going through burnout, compassion fatigue, and secondary traumatisation. In fact, something that I work on in the school setting that I am currently in is supporting educators in creating the right boundaries and referring students to the support team so as not to become traumatised themselves.

The Adverse Effects of a Lack of Workplace Support and Mentoring

I encountered professionals from many fields, mainly from humanistic jobs such as the police force, army, management, health, education, and law fields, who have been effected negatively by what they experienced in their work domain and in turn being effected in their personal life. It is a struggle for all humanistic professional to keep the narratives encountered in their work from getting entangled in one's personal life and vice versa. If such professionals are given a safe mentoring space at work regularly, they would give better services and their mental wellbeing would be safeguarded in the long term.

The Benefits of Mentoring for the Different Involved Parties

Mentoring can be experienced as creating a safe barrier because no matter what job one does and how many years of experience one has in the field, compassion fatigue, insecurities, and the need to vent and question, do arise. Mentoring supports the professional to process and being open to new ideas and perspectives and obtain internal support. Mentoring also considers the ethical responsibilities of the profession and how one's positioning can jeopardise the safeguarding of their clients/patients.

Characteristics of a Mentor

I search for a person with experience, ideally in my particular field, and someone who can provide different ideas and perspectives. I would also seek someone who can build a safe and trusting relationship, can be challenging and holding at the same time, is deep and has the ability to support me to seek inner resources that may be under the rubble of negative experiences, so as to develop and explore further skills to cope with emerging situations. I need a mentor to be gentle and understanding and, at the same time, assertive. It is also important that such a person is knowledgeable so as to receive new insights and understanding.

Concluding Reflections

Mentoring needs to become part of the workplace culture. Sometimes, it takes time for mentoring to become an interwoven part of the particular field. The negative work ethic and burnout in some fields and the benefits of more nurtured and supported professionals is evident. The mentors themselves also need to seek support, training, and personal and professional development so that one remains informed and strong to, in turn, continue supporting the professionals in the field.

Narrative 2

Introducing Nathalie: A Humanistic Professional in the Medical Field

Nathalie is a trained seasoned nurse working in the nursing field for over 30 years.

Narrative Themes Emerging from the Collaborative Narrative with Nathalie

Nathalie's Experience of her Workplace

I work in a very emotionally and physically intense and exhausting health department where acute care and death are prevalent. At present, there is a psychological and emotional support void in the department. We do not ourselves realise the need to be sustained. Success stories and the optimal support given at the end of one's life alleviate some of the sadness experienced. As staff, we have learnt how to cope between ourselves and have a tight-knit friendship. The managers are people who I really look up to as I could occasionally go to them to have a chat, both on the personal effects of the work being done and the care needed by the patient. However, they are also inundated with work.

The Adverse Effects of a Lack of Provision of Workplace Support

With lack of support, people get more tired and snappy. When overwhelmed with work demands, sometimes there is no other way than to cut corners, leading to less optimal work done. The patients' relatives look up to us as their support system but sometimes our own tank is empty. I notice that personnel are affected in their personal lives. I have seen colleagues who are facing difficulties in their personal relationships due to the overload at work. We sometimes discuss that even staying with our children is difficult due to the tiredness and heaviness of the narratives we encounter.

The Potential Benefits of Mentoring in Intensive Care

One of the first adverse effects of lack of mentoring support is the distancing of oneself to ease the encountered pain. Presently, I am mentoring the new nurses and they really appreciate it. I noticed they have become better professionals themselves within a few months. So, even that little bit of assistance, be it psychological, emotional or technical, helped them become better nurses. There are also personal situations one goes through. When I lost a close loved one, I was trying to avoid caring too much at my workplace and going about in a robotic way, as the loss hurt me significantly. I believe that if I was mentored and psychologically supported, I would have been able to continue giving in more holistic ways. Our personal life touches upon our professional life and vice versa.

Aspects that are Important in Mentoring

I feel the need for at least one person with whom I can confidentially confide in, therefore, a solid, trustful containing relationship with a mentor would be very much valued. The medical field is very much affected by our emotions, our worries, the stress that arises from death itself or the devastation of the sickness, and thus mentoring is vital. In mentoring, the practitioner needs to learn how to differentiate between one's pain and the other person's. As frontliners, we need to be supported so that we do not embody all that pain and still give service with care.

The Mentor

The mentor has to be a person who understands the gravity of such medical situations, the weight of our responsibility, and the long-term effects on us. I would look for a person

who understands what it means to work resiliently with a patient for very long hours, or a person who spends time amongst us to understand the field. The mentor needs to be trained in the humanistic field and is seasoned through life experiences to understand the grounding and resilience needed to work in such a domain. Solely being academically trained is not enough. I would definitely seek a person who is there to listen and would need to be someone who I can truly build a positive relationship with, respectful and respects confidentiality and boundaries particularly in the small Maltese context. The mentor needs to understand the pain involved in this work and can offer support to contain the pain in a more effective manner.

Concluding Remarks

I went through a couple of rough narratives in my life, particularly in the last years, and I resorted to out-of-work support. There, I presented all aspects, both personal and professional, and I firmly believe that if I was not personally supported, I would have been neither personally well nor a good professional at that point in time.

Narrative 3

Introducing Cheryl: A Humanistic Professional in the Migrant, Law, and Probation Field

Cheryl is a qualified practitioner working in the law field.

Narrative Themes Emerging from the Collaborative Narrative with Cheryl

Experience of Attending Supervision

In previous work roles, I was provided with external individual supervision, and also group supervision which was periodically organised in-house. If we encountered any issues, we could discuss these with our immediate manager. The external supervisor provided a space for reflection, as she was a seasoned practitioner with an open and informed perspective. This was extremely needed as the work I was doing with for instance, asylum seekers and in detention centres was very taxing

The Adverse Effects of a Lack of Mentoring Provision in the Migration Domain

I worked with vulnerable adults and unaccompanied minors who were, themselves and their families, predominantly victims of human trafficking, sexual abuse, rape, violence, and torture. Hearing all these intense narratives, practitioners were also experiencing vicarious traumatisation. Some practitioners who did not receive mentoring support were going through burnout, anxiety, and were also experiencing personal problems as the work domain was effecting their personal life.

The Adverse Effects of a Lack of Effective Support/Mentoring in the Probation/Legal Field

In the legal fields I work in, we do not have individual supervision but have had occasional internal group supervision with one of the internal trained personnel. However, many times the session is cancelled due to us practitioners contending with a crisis or another. In this field, we encounter a lot of heavy cases and carry substantial legal responsibility. I decided to have my own paid supervision because I do need the containment, fresh insight, and growth. Part of our work is also encountering victims or their families and they vent to us. I understand their feelings and I know that the verbal attacks are not directed at me, but this still leaves its negative impact.

Professionals in the field become more hardened so as not to allow themselves to be affected to a point where they would not be able to do the job or end up burnt out. So, the lack of mentoring is detrimental to the service users. Especially in this legal field, many people do not want to show their emotions or how much they are affected, as many times it is frowned upon. However, regularly I encounter personnel who lose their tempers and many times with the wrong people! Still, other people's lives depend very much on such people's professional work and if the person is not self-aware, this affects the beneficence of the work and decisions being done. Personnel also share how their personal and family relationships are affected unless they also prioritise their wellbeing, manage boundaries well, or compartmentalise everything. I also know many who seek help privately, without their colleagues or subordinates being aware.

The Importance of the Provision of Workplace Mentoring

Mentoring at work can be a place where one can go and confidentially be supported as a normalised part of the work domain. Mentoring needs to be mandatory because sometimes professionals do not feel the need even though they are burnt out, and others experience pride or lack of information and would not attend. I think that once a professional gets used to this service, they would not work without it. I cannot imagine not going to supervision! Professionals also go through very difficult narratives in their personal lives, such as illness, separation or death, and they are expected to keep on working as if nothing is happening.

Aspects that are Deemed Necessary to be Applied to Mentoring

Building a relationship in mentoring is very vital as this will support trust and validation. Furthermore, mentoring needs to be consistent, as some issues that emerge need to be processed with immediacy in the here and now. The depth of processing and awareness are also vital aspects, as these bring about transformative personal and professional insight, change, and growth.

The Mentor

A beneficial mentor would be a person who is available through consistent appointments and also for the rare crisis just to touch base, as between sessions things can crop up. The mentor needs to be very trustworthy, authentic, and operates in strict boundaries of confidentiality as the fields that I work in are highly sensitive. Rather than just discussing cases, the mentor needs to have a holistic outlook, as professionals need to vent out about how they feel in their job, the effects on their personality and personal life and the sometimes senseless demands of the job. I would definitely choose someone who is highly trained in the humanistic field and in supervision/ mentoring, and who is also experienced. Knowledge, training, and experience are vital. In such fields, apart from in-house mentoring, I see the need for external mentoring as well in order to have fresh outlooks and not be under the remit of the organisation.

Concluding Comments

Through supervision and mentoring, I work on awareness, processing, growth, and restoration. It is vital that in other kindred humanistic professions, mentoring becomes a must and a professional requirement. Otherwise, a professional would stop developing holistically, to the personal detriment and to the disservice of clients in the respective field of practice.

Narrative 4

Introducing Anna: A Humanistic Professional in the Management Field

Anna has worked in the care and education sectors for more than 25 years. She has now served in management roles for many years.

Narrative Themes Emerging from the Collaborative Narrative with Anna

Supervision/Mentoring for Senior Management

On the one hand, management gives you the opportunity to try to implement change, even though with a lot of adversities. However, senior management is often a difficult role that leaves one feeling isolated as I cannot discuss certain decisions with others. That is why I find supervision and spiritual coaching supportive. Collectively dealing with the demands from higher management, with the pressures from the people I manage, and demands of the service users, becomes unsustainable sometimes.

The Adverse Effects of the Lack of Workplace Supervision/Mentoring for Managerial Posts

Relentless difficult work situations adversely affect me and my life, health, relationships, decisions, and wellbeing. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic situation, once every two/three months, I used to meet with the other senior managers and it was beneficial, as at least I did not feel completely isolated and everyone was journeying in the same boat. Due to the COVID-19 situation and the extreme consequent demands, even these meetings were not held. Sometimes, a decision needs to be taken immediately, without any foreseen planning. I yearn for some form of mentoring support where I can stop to reflect and process with another. The management in my sector feels like being constantly pulled by different forces and having to wear different hats at the same time. Many demands are created without consultation and with no extra help provided, and a lack of adequate resources for the implementation of these demands. In the years that I have been in the senior management post, I saw people completely resigning from work, not because they do not love their role, but because they were burnt out.

Mentoring in other Humanistic Professions, Particularly Management, that may Support Professionals as in the Support from Supervision

Therapists and such professionals attend supervision because it is part of their professional requirement, but when working in humanistic fields that face a lot of very disturbing and painful situations like I do, we are not given much support. I meet other professionals in my personal and professional life, particularly those who work in humanistic fields such as education, care, mental health, health, law, civil protection, correctional facilities, and such fields where a lot of heavy stories are encountered. I pay for mentoring myself, but many such professionals do not. It would tremendously help if mentoring can be provided, as most of these professionals are not trained to carry such issues. Consistent mentoring blending both professional and personal aspects will support personnel with more resilience, rather than failing to do their job beneficially, experience burn out or without holistic wellbeing. Difficult life situations also happen and the person still needs to continue working optimally in such responsible positions.

The Mentor

The mentor needs to have years of experience, if possible, in a similar field. If we had to take management, having experience in a managerial role is important because once you are in it, even your perspective changes. I found management positions to be a shock to the system. I did not know that I needed to multitask insanely before I held a post in senior management, I had no idea about dealing with harsh negotiations, or how to mediate difficult situations without seeming partial to one side or the other. Apart from that, the mentor must have some kind of therapeutic, mentoring, mental health, or psychology background. The mentor's personality and the relational aspect is the foundation in mentoring, while the skills and experience are at the foreground. Personally, I would not go to a very young person, as no matter how much academic training one has had, one's experiences make a difference, especially experiences in a managerial post.

Concluding Comments

Some professionals do not embrace the culture of professional supervision or mentoring as this may look as something extra without enough benefits. Management can become a very dark place and one may end up suffering in silence or leave the job. If the top management can understand the benefits of workplace mentoring, managers would also accept to tap into such support. I know that some managers also think that reaching out for such support makes one look weak and vulnerable. I see a lot of people in my sector who are working mechanically and their flame has died out, not because they are people who do not work but because of the way the organisation is and because of work toxicity. It is sad to see a good manager lose the vibrancy and energy for one's post, and in turn also see the disservice done to the people around that manager. We can only give from what we have. If our sack is empty, we can only give from the negative overdraft. So, I sincerely hope that mentoring is provided, as otherwise we will continue to lose very valid, experienced, and professional people.

Analysis and Discussion

The full narratives succinctly represented above were further analysed to capture the resonances and divergencies. Literature was also referred to so as to consolidate the analysis. In order to be rigorous in this process, MAXQDA, a software for qualitative and mixed methods data analysis was used.

Emergent Themes from the Interviews with Humanistic Respondents

Below is a model depicting main narrative themes emerging from the interviews conducted with humanistic respondents.

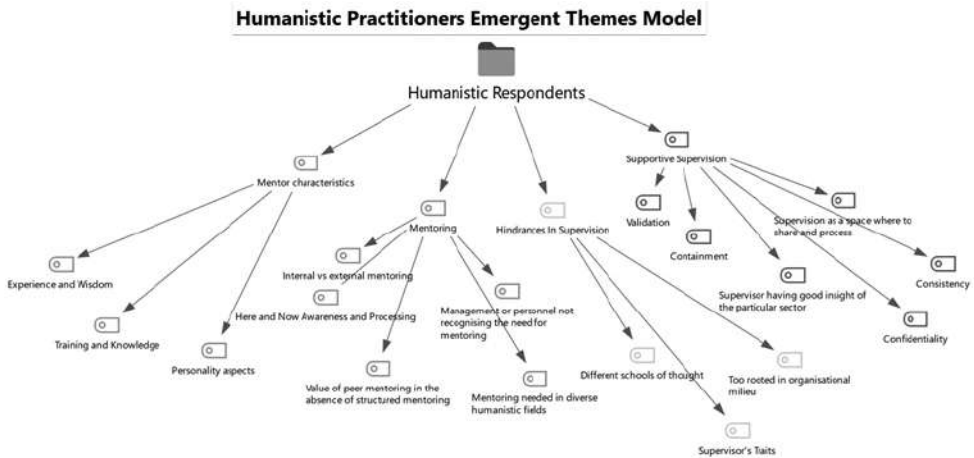


Figure 6: Humanistic practitioners emergent themes model

Discussion of Main Emerging Themes

Some of the main emergent themes are discussed hereunder referring also to literature.

Supportive and Hindering Aspects to Supervision/Mentoring

Supervision/Mentoring Offering a Supportive and Safe Space

One of the main themes that was incessantly accentuated by the research participants relates to supervision/mentoring providing supportive containment and validation, as highlighted by Page and Wosket (1994). Furthermore, the 2009 CIPD Factsheet on mentoring shows that this supportive accompaniment may be provided by mentoring through its focus on the practitioner's development, and is also underlined by literature specifically relating to diverse professional fields.

Supervision/Mentoring as a Space where to Share and Process

Supervision/mentoring is also valued by research participants as a space where to share and process and this strongly resonates with literature. In fact, it was listed as one of the valuable factors for successful mentoring in Swanepoel's 2012 research study, wherein the mentor and mentee have mutual willingness to share and learn and process.

Supervision/Mentoring as a Reflective Process

The respondents consider supervision/mentoring as a reflective process, encompassing awareness, receiving feedback, sharing, reaching out and processing what develops in the field and beyond. In turn, the respondents claimed that such practices enhance both the practitioner's personal and professional wellbeing. In their developmental model of supervision, Stoltenberg and Delworth (1987) go on to distinguish between three levels of supervisees in the beginning, middle, or advanced stages of their practice. They noted how a practitioner develops processing in supervision from a rigid, surface, and imitative way, towards processing that is more based on competence, self-competence, and self-containment.

Restorative and Formative Aspects of Supervision/Mentoring

Supervision/mentoring also deal with a fine line between personal and professional support. In fact, literature attests to the personal and professional benefits of mentoring for both mentees and mentors (Roscher n.d.). Restorative practitioner support was highlighted by the research participants to prevent burnout and compassion fatigue and in turn, enhancing compassion satisfaction as stated in Agius and Falzon (et.al. 2021). The respondents emphasised that the practitioner's life cannot be paused while at the same time the professional is expected to continue working optimally. Respondents highlighted the struggle that many practitioners experience to prevent narratives they encounter in their professional domain getting entangled with aspects of their personal life and vice versa. Literature (e.g. Johnson 2002; Renshaw 2008) validates this relationship between supervision/mentoring and professional and personal growth and formation.

Trust and Genuine contact Provided in Supervision/Mentoring

Trust is a fundamental in supervision/mentoring as it provides understanding, holding, and compassion as the practitioner does not feel restricted on what to share. In fact, apart from listing mutual trust as one of the main success factors for mentoring, Swanepoel's (2012) study also mentions mutual honesty and mutual willingness to share and learn as other valuable factors of individual importance. Additionally, in this regard, Simon (2009) claims that "anyone who has been engaged on either side of a psychotherapeutic relationship can attest to importance of trust and safety in achieving ultimate success" (233) thus enhancing holistic and collaborative practices in supervision/mentoring.

Supervision/Mentoring Lessening Isolation

Supervision/mentoring is seen by respondents as a beneficial means to lessen isolation, highlighting feeling bereft in the absence of such support, particularly in higher professional roles but also in other professions in which practitioners work in isolation. Indeed, lessening isolation was highlighted as one of the benefits of peer mentoring for physicians by Herring et al. (2016). Scott (2010) also adds that mentoring can reduce feelings of isolation that are associated with new leaders. Respondents claimed that in supervision/mentoring, the professional can discuss and work on aspects of oneself that arise in the journey with clients.

Relationship with Supervisor/Mentor

The relationship with the supervisor/mentor was one of the strongest elements brought forward by all respondents. Participants maintained that a good supervisor/mentor would be one who can sustain a beneficial, safe and trusting relationship. This is because, first and foremost, the quality of the mentor/supervisor-client relationship determines the effectiveness of a rich, lively, and contactful professional relationship (Simon 2009). Communication was another highlighted element emphasised by respondents for successful supervision/mentoring. It also features as one of the necessary qualities of an effective mentor listed by Lord et al. (2008). Another quality that was emphasised by respondents is the need for relational trust, particularly in the Maltese context. Literature shows that being trustworthy is deemed as one of the vital qualities that are necessary for an effective mentor (Lord et al. 2008; Swanepoel 2012).

Supports and Hindrances in Supervision/Mentoring

Given the delicate nature of humanistic fields, a professional in such fields cannot simply talk about cases with anyone. Due to the high sensitivity of humanistic fields, respondents

stressed the importance of confidentiality in the supervision/mentoring domain. This is one of the diverse challenges presented by the distinct Maltese socio-cultural setting. Confidentiality in supervision/mentoring is referred to by Roscher (n.d.), with confidentiality being the sixth listed principle. Furthermore, mentors are obliged by the European Mentoring Coaching Council (EMCC) to act “from a position of dignity, autonomy and personal responsibility” (Ilieva-Koleva 2015: 82).

Respondents linked positive experiences to instances where option is given to choose who their supervisor/mentor is rather than imposing a supervisor/mentor who the supervisee/mentee might not like. In the case of not having the option to choose/accept/reject an internal supervisor/mentor, good pairing and matching of mentors and mentees is considered as a valuable factor (Blunt and Conolly 2006 as cited in Swanepoel 2012; Meyer and Fourie 2004).

Variations of Supervision/Mentoring

Individual Versus Group Supervision/Mentoring

Individual versus group approaches of supervision/mentoring is one way in which supervision/mentoring may vary (Lord et al. 2008). Respondents further claimed that in group supervision/mentoring, the supervisor/mentor needs to pay due attention to the group members' individual traits and group dynamics as otherwise the process may be deterred. Nevertheless, respondents also shared their experiences of the collaborative, supportive, holding, and containing space created in group supervision/mentoring, where one can also share good practices and difficulties.

Formal vs Informal Supervision/Mentoring

Humanistic respondents spoke highly of both formal and informal supervision/mentoring, particularly when a combination of both is provided, wherein a professional may be supported by colleagues but at the same time have a dedicated, reflexive, and supportive space at the place of work, given that in the former there are still boundaries to be respected. According to Baker (2002), formal mentoring should supplement other forms of mentoring, such as informal mentoring, instead of replacing them (Baker 2002).

Peer Supervision/Mentoring

Peer mentoring, where the parties are considered as equal and alternate between roles of mentor and mentee (Roscher n.d.) sits on a spectrum of various forms of mentoring and is considered as the opposite of “expert-novice support” (Lord et al. 2008: iii). Humanistic respondents highlighted the significance of such peer supervision/mentoring support in environments where structured and formal supervision/mentoring is absent. Nevertheless, the same respondents also claimed that such a form of mentoring cannot replace formal supervision (Robinson 2013).

Supervisor/Mentor Characteristics

The supervisor/mentor's personality traits, qualities, skills, and characteristics were significantly mentioned as creating the utmost difference for the supervisee/mentee by all research respondents. The latter qualities mentioned encompassed, amongst others, having a good relational approach, genuineness, knowledge, good listening skills, good principles, integrity, compassionate, the ability to provide holding, safety, a listening space, respect, trust, support, encouragement, understanding, nourishment, empathy and trust, and the ability to collaborate with the supervisee/mentee. The respondents added that a

good supervisor/mentor has the ability to be holding and understanding but challenging and assertive at the same time. Similarly, the personality of the supervisor/mentor is substantially referred to in literature as one of the keys to aid the supervisory/mentoring relationship and process (Falzon 2011). A collaborative stance in supervision is an important formative and restorative task in the development of the *internal supervisor* (Casement 1985; 1990).

Commitment and Consistency

Commitment and consistency, from both the supervisor's/mentor's and the supervisee's/mentee's part are deemed as important by the respondents. In a list of essential factors for successful mentoring relationships, Swanepoel (2012) starts with commitment from all parties towards the mentoring process. According to the research participants, supervision/mentoring must be consistent, given that particular delicate issues are to be immediately tackled. In fact, literature shows that a demonstrated commitment is considered as an enabling factor for the success of mentoring relationships (Kochan et al. 2015).

Knowledge and Training

Renshaw (2008) maintains that one of the aims of mentoring is the sharing of knowledge and, according to Hart (1990), reflective practitioners synchronise theoretical, empirical, and experiential knowledge. Similarly, the participants attested an effective blend of training, academic background, and experience on the supervisor/mentor's part as imperative. In fact, respondents claimed that supervisors/mentors must constantly reach out for knowledge through the academic domain, training and also through one's experience. Moreover, Swanepoel (2012) considers organisational and contextual knowledge as an important characteristic to be possessed by workplace mentors.

Hafford-Letchfield et al. (2007) consider the mentor's commitment to one's own learning as one of the most vital skills, also ensuring a two-way learning process between the mentor and the mentee (Lord et al. 2008). Respondents asserted that having a supervisor/mentor who comes from a different school of thought is beneficial as long as the mentor deeply understands the mentee's professional field.

Experience

Truter (2008) maintains that a mentor is specifically more experienced than the mentee. Together with awareness, insight and personal reflexivity, experience was a recurrent crucial element that was mentioned by the respondents for a successful supervisor/mentor. This reverberates Lord et al.'s (2008) account on experience being one of the main qualities for the effectiveness of a mentor. Respondents maintained that, apart from being experienced in the particular field, the supervisor/mentor should also be a seasoned practitioner themselves, experienced in the field of practice and as a supervisor/mentor. The participants stressed that even though academic background is important, the supervisor/mentor's maturity and experience in humanistic fields is at the foreground.

The Benefits of Mentoring/Supervision Provision in Diverse Professional Fields

Asked about mentoring in diverse professional fields, the respondents spoke favourably about its potential benefits and also about the adverse effects of a lack of such mentoring. In fact, respondents recounted how a number of clients in diverse professional fields narrate their experiences of building strong boundaries between them and their own clients as defence mechanisms, at their own and their clients' detriment. Furthermore, some practitioners are not trained to process particular issues, and take the unprocessed issues back home, thus having detrimental effects in their personal relationships. Literature

confirms this particularly since wellbeing at the workplace enhances the workers' sense of belonging and, thus, the individual and the professional domains cannot be separated (Spagnuolo Lobb 2019). Respondents claimed that they are concerned over the disconnection from the human process experienced by professionals coming from diverse humanistic fields, such as the health, mental health, education, law, addiction, management, social welfare, health and safety, police, army, civil protection, together with the public sector. The respondents continued that mentoring/ supervision in humanistic fields has the potential to enable professionals in maintaining the human element despite the incessant trauma and pain they experience through their clients.

The respondents' arguments in favour of the potential benefits of supervision/mentoring echo literature in a number of fields, such as healthcare (Herring et al. 2016; Roscher n.d.), NGOs working with refugees (Robinson 2013), leadership roles (Moore and Wang 2017; Rhodes and Fletcher 2013; Scott 2010), adult learning (Lim 2009), and higher education (Baker 2002).

The research participants concurred that supervision/mentoring should be made obligatory and possibly made available at the place of work as some professionals would otherwise not seek support due to the lack of awareness and appreciation for how beneficial supervision/mentoring can be for the professional and the organisation.

Respondents also focused on the effects of the spillover of humanistic professionals' professional life in their personal life. As a result, it was highlighted that several clients in various humanistic roles suffer from burnout and compassion fatigue (Figley 1995), partly due to the lack of mentoring/supervision. Compassion fatigue is characterised by the instant diminishing of a professional's empathy towards clients (Figley 2002), mainly due to the personal and professional impact which is left on the practitioner by the clients' own traumatic experiences (Berzoff and Kita 2010). Literature shows that engaging in supervision (Linley and Joseph 2007) and in a process of self-monitoring (Bride et al. 2007) is key to help prevent compassion fatigue and enhance compassion satisfaction.

Conclusion

Main Findings

A succinct depiction of this article's findings is presented under four main headings below:

Supportive and Hindering Aspects in Supervision/Mentoring

Many supportive and hindering aspects were mentioned by all respondents. Such aspects also concurred with literature, amongst which are for supervision/mentoring to act as a:

- Supportive and positive space for practitioners to lessen the professional isolation, burnout, and compassion fatigue, while enhancing professional satisfaction and personal support;
- Positive accompaniment alleviating professional heaviness and difficult narratives encountered;
- Containing and validating space ;
- Safe and genuine space where to share and process, considering the normative, formative, restorative, organisational, and contextual aspects;
- Space for a reflective process to aid the practitioner become an agent of professional growth and formation;
- Space for continuous professional growth and formation.

The Need for Beneficial and Professional Mentoring in Diverse Humanistic Fields

All respondents focused on the effects of the spillover of their professional fields in their personal life. As a result, the participants highlighted that they, and several clients in various humanistic roles, suffer from burnout and compassion fatigue, partly due to the lack of mentoring/supervision. In turn, diverse sectors would benefit from supervision/mentoring, such as through employee retainment, better service provision, and improved relational issues.

All respondents mentioned the importance of having the option to choose/accept/reject an internal supervisor/mentor, and the combination of individual and group supervision/mentoring, formal and informal supervision/mentoring, and peer mentoring in many humanistic and service provision fields where direct contact with clients may subject the service provider to secondary trauma due to the experiences shared.

Mentor Characteristics Needed for Constructive Supervision/Mentoring

The relationship with the supervisor/mentor was one of the strongest elements discussed by research respondents, where the beneficial relationship between the supervisor/mentor and the supervisee/mentee is at the foreground of constructive and beneficial supervision/mentoring. Some of the mentioned supervisor/mentor characteristics needed for positive supervision/mentoring were:

- The ability to create healthy ethical boundaries but at the same time a positive and genuine supervision/mentoring relationship;
- Relational mindfulness and the ability to include open dialogue in a collaborative approach;
- Trust and genuine reciprocal care and relational contact;
- Positive personality traits of the supervisor/mentor;
- The need for the mentor to have experience and wisdom, being knowledgeable, and well-trained.

In this regard, this study gives a strong indication to humanistic therapies that well-designed training, including aspects of personal and professional formation, is needed in supervision and mentoring, rather than merely attending a short course, or solely having experience in the field of practice.

Recommendations and Implications for Future Practice

Succinct recommendations emerging from the narrative themes and analysis are the following. To:

1. Make supportive mentoring mandatory and possible for all humanistic professionals reflecting the contextual and respective professional needs.
2. Provide training in supervision and mentoring, incorporating both personal and professional formation.
3. Give humanistic professionals the option to choose their mentor or to accept/decline mentoring from a designated mentor.
4. Identify and match mentors and mentees according to their levels of experience and wisdom.
5. Inform organisations about the diverse mentoring approaches according to the need and requirements of the particular profession and entity.
6. Inform humanistic organisations and/or fields about the benefits of mentoring provision for employees. Such organisations and/or fields are to be made aware of long-term, not only short-term, benefits for their employees and for the organisation/field.
7. Ensure that the mentor, in turn, is supported by continuous professional development and supervision themselves.

- Offer mentoring comprising of normative, formative, supportive, organisational, and contextual considerations. In turn, this mentoring will have the ripple effect of better organisation relationships, employee retention, and the provision of a more beneficial and compassionate service to service users.

Model Emerging from the Collaborative Narratives and Consequent Analysis

From the narratives and consequent analysis compared also with the literature read, the following model for the implementation of mentoring at the workplace emerged.

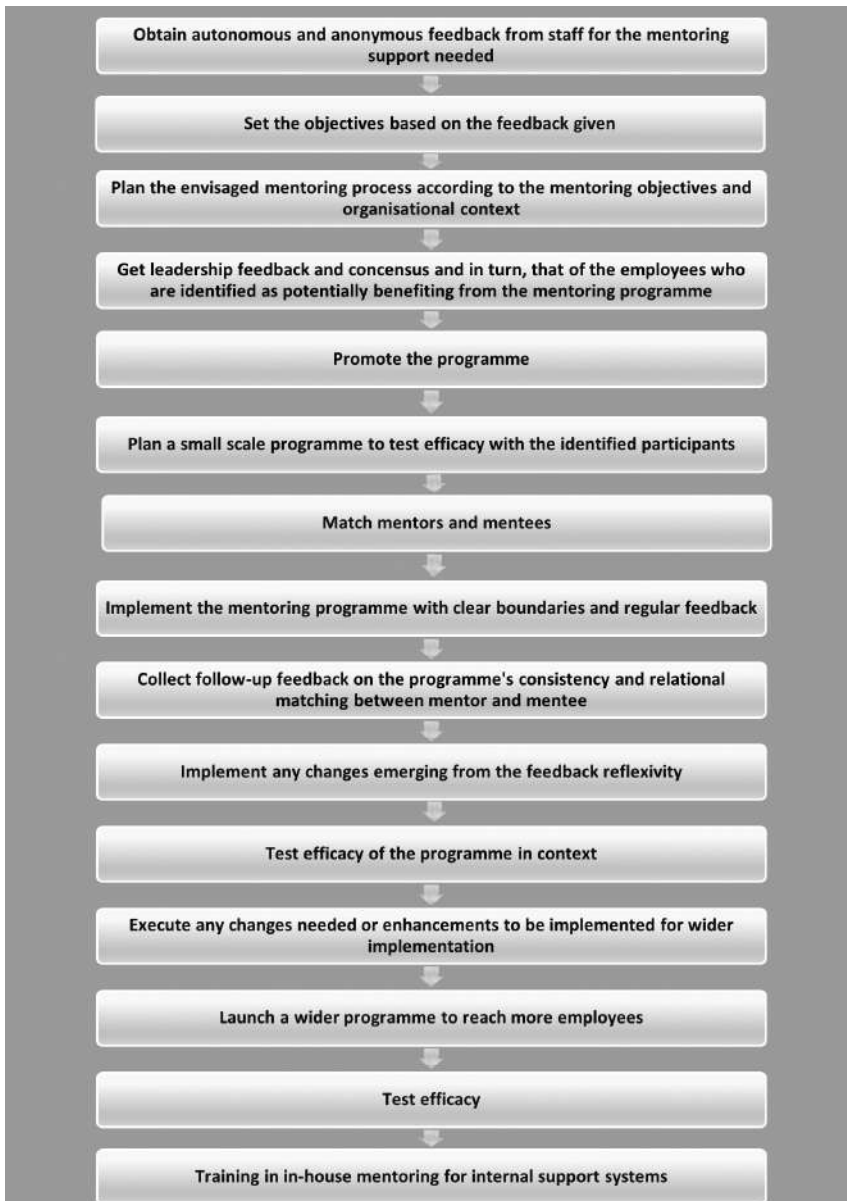


Figure 7: *The Mentoring Implementation Process Model*

Strengths and Limitations

Strengths

Through this narrative inquiry, as a researcher, my respect for narrative research continued to grow. In collaborating with the participants, I could understand the human experience (Clandinin 2013) and enhanced my reflexivity on the subject researched, gaining more meaning, understanding, and the possibility for transformative change in the field. This research clearly voices the practitioners' mentoring needs in diverse humanistic fields, in order for enhanced professional practices and compassion satisfaction and decreasing the risk of burnout and compassion fatigue. This study also emerged with resonances experienced by the practitioners in diverse professional fields, a model for mentoring implementation, recommendations, and implications within the field of practice.

Limitations

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, the discussions and interviews with respondents were conducted online and even though this did not seem to impact the data collected, the relational field with the respondents had to develop only through online interactions. Furthermore, it would have been a richer study if it encompassed more voices from further humanistic fields. However, this was not possible due to word count limitations.

Recommendations for Further Research and Implications for Further Scholarship

Further scholarship could develop from this study, amongst which are the following:

- To enhance this study by incorporating increased numbers of respondents and other humanistic fields;
- To deepen the study in particular humanistic sectors to research the needs in that particular domain.

Final Conclusion

Through evidence based on the respondents' narratives, consequent analysis, and previous literature, this research strongly attests to the applicability of mentoring implemented in diverse humanistic fields as supporting the professional and personal experiences of practitioners. Thus, training in supervision and mentoring is necessary. Furthermore, in view of the benefits seen in this study, the implementation of mentoring practices, though understandably laborious, is worth being given serious consideration.

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