

Developing supervision of social work supervisors and their practice in Singapore: A cross-national collaboration

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Abstract

This article reflects upon an international collaboration between supervision experts from South Africa, Hong Kong and New Zealand with the Singapore Association of Social Workers. This collaboration was focused on developing the supervision of supervisory practice. An overview of social work supervision in Singapore is discussed, followed by the process of developing the programme content, delivering training and providing consultation on creating a curriculum. The outcomes include supervision guidelines, curriculum development and further cross-national collaborations. The article concludes by discussing the learning from this international collaboration.

Keywords

International collaboration, Singapore, social work supervision, supervision guidelines, supervision of supervisory practice, supervisor training

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Introduction

International collaborations between social work supervision scholars have increased this century. This has mostly occurred through research and publication collaborations (O'Donoghue and Engelbrecht, 2021). This article reflects upon an international collaboration concerned with creating a curriculum for the training of supervision of supervisory practice (SOSp) in Singapore involving colleagues from South Africa, Hong Kong, New Zealand and members of the Singapore Association of Social Workers (SASW). The collaboration aimed to advance SOSp through developing a training curriculum. The article also adds to the limited literature on the supervision of supervisors (Ellis and Douce, 1994; Patterson, 2019). The background and context of social work supervision in Singapore will be outlined first. Next, the rationale for an international approach will be discussed. This is followed by a reflective discussion about the process followed in the collaboration. The article concludes by identifying the outcomes and learning for international social work.

Social work supervision in Singapore

Social work supervision in Singapore is embedded and shaped by the context of Singaporean society and the social work profession. Singapore is a unique multicultural and multilingual society that values cultural and religious pluralism (Ow, 1999). The main island is situated just north of the equator in Southeast Asia. Singapore has been an independent city-state and republic since 1965 and an international hub and commercial meeting place between the East and West (Barr, 2019). Singapore is an authentic multicultural and multilingual society. Its official languages of Malay, Mandarin, Tamil and English reflect its history, geographical situation and population. English is the medium of instruction in higher education (Bolton and Botha, 2017). In Singaporean society, individuals are part of a circle of interdependence that includes self, family, community and state, contributing to the collective social goals of a caring, prosperous and harmonious society (Ow, 2014).

The origins of social work in Singapore are attributed to the arrival of almoners from Britain in 1949 (Ow, 1999). Formal social work education commenced at the University of Singapore 3 years later. In 1971, SASW was formed (Ow, 2014). Over time, social work in Singapore moved beyond its British colonial roots and evolved to reflect the independent multicultural society of the country. As a result, it extends beyond the provision of clinical and therapeutic services 'to contributing to nation-building by participating in the development of human potential and building communities through the professional tasks of engaging and mobilizing human, economic, social, and political resources for the common good' (Ow, 2014: 136).

An important milestone for the profession was the establishment of professional social worker accreditation in 2009. The accreditation system is overseen by the Social Work Accreditation and Advisory Board (SWAAB). Accreditation is not mandatory. The accreditation system was established to enhance professionalism, promote continuing professional education, and develop and guide future social work leaders. All registered social workers are expected to participate in supervision, which is considered an essential professional and ethical responsibility (Singapore Association of Social Workers (SASW), 2021a). For a social worker to become accredited, they must complete an approved social work qualification and 1000 hours of supervised practice. At the end of 2022, there were 377 Registered Social Workers–Provisional (RSW-P) and 2087 Registered Social Workers (RSW) (SASW, 2021b).

The context is central to the international collaboration discussed in this article because it was the SASW that commissioned it in order to advance the development of SOSp for the benefit of

all involved in social work in Singapore (Wong et al., 2022). Like social work practice, supervision is seen as a collaborative process that contributes to the collective good of society. Supervision aims to improve social work practice and provide support and development for social workers (Ow, 2014; Wong, 2021). Before 1995, supervision was primarily managerial with a task focus. Over the next decade (1996–2005), this changed to a focus on education due to the influence of family therapy training courses and the use of ‘live’ supervision to enhance practice. From 2005 to 2015, a more balanced and interactional approach developed, supported by increased supervisor training with a Certificate in Supervision Training for Social Services organized by SASW and the Counselling and Care Centre (CCC) providing a Diploma in Clinical Supervision (Wong, 2021). Since 2015, there is a greater recognition and an involvement of a more professional supervision culture, through greater involvement of supervisors, as well as collaboration with international colleagues to advance the development of social work supervision in Singapore. One example of this is the biennial social work supervision seminars conducted by SWAAB and SASW, which included local and international keynote/plenary speakers from Hong Kong, New Zealand, South Africa and the United Kingdom. The connections established at these seminars have developed into ongoing relationships and contributed to supervision knowledge and practice in Singapore (Wong, 2021). They also contributed to the development of the Social Work Supervision Guidelines (SWAAB, 2017, 2021a). The group that developed the guidelines consulted with visiting international colleagues and reviewed the supervision guidelines and standards of several countries, namely, Hong Kong (Social Workers Registration Board, Hong Kong, 2009), New Zealand (Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers [ANZASW], 2009), the United Kingdom (British Association of Social Workers, 2011), the United States (National Association of Social Workers, 2013) and Australia (Australian Association of Social Workers, 2014). The first iteration of the Social Work Supervision Guidelines, published in 2017, articulated the definition, function, scope and value of supervision. It also included templates and forms for use during supervision (SWAAB, 2017). However, they provided little guidance and direction for the supervision of supervisors beyond encouraging them to receive supervision (SWAAB, 2017). It later became apparent that supervisors needed both training and supervision of their supervisory practice. This was reinforced by the findings of a pilot SOSp training programme for Family Service Centres (Wong et al., 2022). Family Service Centres are community-based social services in neighbourhoods across Singapore that provide casework, referral services and connect clients with community support (Ow, 2014). The training occurred between January and August 2016 and involved 12 supervisors from 9 of the 48 Family Service Centres. The participants had variable levels of training in supervision and were not well equipped for the transition from practitioner to supervisor. The evaluation found that further development of SOSp was essential and that training for supervisors, along with the refinement of social work supervision guidelines, were a priority (Wong, 2021; Wong et al., 2022). In an effort to systematically document the supervisory competencies for social supervisors with varying years of supervisory experience, the Social Work Supervision Guidelines (SWAAB, 2021a) included the supervisory competency domains for supervisors at various levels, namely, foundation, intermediate, advance and expert. The expert supervisory level is targeted at supervisors with more than 10 years of supervisory practice; hence, they are expected to be able to supervise supervisors. Concurrently, a working group was established by SASW to develop a curriculum and competencies for SOSp in 2019. This working group, which comprised leaders in the social work supervision field in Singapore, identified the need for an international perspective on SOSp. They identified three international experts in social work supervision to assist with the development of SOSp.

International collaborations

Global knowledge exchanges over the past century owe much to international collaborations. In the past 20 years, the supervision of social workers has benefitted from international collaborations in the form of conferences, publications and research (O'Donoghue and Engelbrecht, 2021). Through the worldwide sharing of intellectual and practice wisdom regarding social work supervision, the notion of reciprocity (as opposed to past professional imperialism from the global North to South) is now much more widely understood and respected in contemporary social work (Engelbrecht et al., 2016). This was also an outcome of the comparative analyses of the different countries' supervision policies by SWAAB (2017, 2021a). This analysis revealed that the core of social work supervision, which was the focus on the social worker's practice, the impact of the work on the professional practitioner, their continuous learning and job management, was based within the supervisory relationship and was similar across different country contexts (Khosa and Engelbrecht, 2021). An international Delphi study of social work supervision experts stated that 'the concept of supervision might be understood and indeed utilized in many different ways, even in similar countries with diverse communities' (Beddoe et al., 2015: 1583). In other words, rather than one concept of social work supervision, there are many supervisions which in turn are shaped by the national, organizational and professional cultures. Nonetheless, when the roles of supervisors in any country context are no longer aligned with the value-culture of an organization in a specific context, a separation between the objectives and practices in organizations can manifest, resulting in confusion and ineffective supervision, as well as conflict between professional and managerial values (Ng, 2016; Ornellas and Engelbrecht, 2021). Therefore, although multiple challenges may arise in the supervision of social workers owing to global and resultant local neoliberal tenets, this may be potentially addressed by an international approach towards building and transferring of knowledge in supervision. This can be done by drawing on the observations, experiences and expertise of international collaborators as independent experts with an 'outsider' perspective from diverse contexts, to critically assess, engage, reflect and extend the conceptualization of supervision and broaden the conversation on a particular country's supervision practices (Borders, 2022; Khosa and Engelbrecht, 2021). The benefits of international collaboration are many, including new insights and a deepened understanding of global issues (National Research Council, 2001). This is important for social work supervision, given that supervisory practice is a professional concern at both the local and international fronts. International collaborations in social work have primarily occurred through the international organizations, namely, the International Federation of Social Workers and the International Association of Schools of Social Work, and have led to the development of the global definition, global statements on ethical principles, and work on global issues such as climate change, inequality and social justice (Sewpaul and Henrickson, 2019; Sewpaul and Jones, 2004; Truell, 2020). Other international collaborations were concerned with development of social work in specific countries or regions (Hines et al., 2010). Successful collaborations were ones where partners were responsive to the cultural context and committed to collaborative partnership and an ongoing relationship (Hines et al., 2010). The third area of international collaborations has been in social work research, where Engelbrecht et al. (2016) developed a process model for international research collaborations. In the field of supervision over the last decade, there have been several international collaborations which have included work towards an international consensus on a research agenda for social work supervision (Beddoe et al., 2015); a review of 40 years of international social work supervision research (O'Donoghue and Tsui, 2015); culturally competent and diversity-sensitive supervision (Tsui et al., 2014); and the construction of an evidence-informed model (O'Donoghue et al., 2018). In the related interdisciplinary field of clinical supervision, Falender et al. (2021) detailed

the valuable lessons they learned concerning the need to understand specific discipline codes of ethics, professional regulation requirements, cultural conceptualizations of the nature relationship and subtle differences in language from their international collaborations. They also emphasized the importance of reciprocal dialogue together with the application of cultural humility and attention to cultural conventions.

The notion of reciprocal dialogue informed SASW to seek collaborators who could establish a working alliance in developing a SOSp curriculum through having a shared understanding of purpose, goals and tasks by extending group conversations from different angles and perspectives. To some degree, the collaboration process mirrored the relational elements of the working alliance and the interactional process of supervision as expounded by Shulman (2006, 2010, 2021) in terms of the preliminary, beginning, middle and transition phases.

Preliminary stage

The preliminary stage began when the SOSp working group started to identify international collaborators to work with SASW towards strengthening SOSp. The SASW contacted three international supervision experts, who they believed could advance the development of SOSp. Beyond the focus of administrative, supportive and educational functions of supervision, supervisors who supervise their supervisees (who are supervisors) are required to be competent in synthesizing clinical and administrative roles. This competency for SOSp goes beyond clinical supervision to encompass the education and management tasks (Long, 2020). The international partners were selected on their expertise in supervision and knowledge of management, clinical supervision and education/training of supervisors. For example, the partner from South Africa comes from a context where supervision is a mandatory management function in social work, supervisors are middle managers and supervisors' supervisors are regarded as top-level managers in private or public social service organizations and institutions (Engelbrecht, 2021). In South Africa, there is a high level of stress involved in the daily tasks of supervisors, and it is necessary to provide special support systems for supervisors. Supervisors act as a linchpin between the disparate realities of the needs and perceptions of social workers and the demands and constraints of the external environment. They need to create a work environment and organization that recognizes the importance of line supervisors and their needs and supports supervisors in supervising social workers to be a force for positive change in organizations, practitioner well-being and client outcomes (Bradley et al., 2010; Engelbrecht, 2021). For supervision to be a force for change, it needs to include critical reflection upon social work's broader structural, political and global contexts. The partner from Hong Kong came from a context where most of the population is Chinese, and supervision is influenced by the Chinese culture and language. In Hong Kong, supervision is a complex combination of hierarchical, collegial and familial relationships and was based on function, relationship and interaction. The Social Welfare Department of Hong Kong made a significant investment in supervision through a Supportive Supervision Scheme (SSS), which trained supervisors in clinical supervision. Each supervisor who undertook this training also received clinical supervision (Ng et al., 2021). The context of the partner from New Zealand was one where supervision and management were part of social work practice and supervision is mandated for all social workers. Those who supervise supervisors in New Zealand are managers, professional peers or external contractors (O'Donoghue, 2021). In New Zealand universities, there have been postgraduate supervision qualifications for almost a quarter of a century (O'Donoghue, 2021).

The three international partners were sent an initial brief to collaborate with SASW in developing a package of training geared towards advanced social work practitioners and supervisors on SOSp and to work with SASW towards developing a curriculum and competencies for SOSp.

Through online discussions, the scope of the relationship and work together was clarified. The international collaborators corresponded with each other and the SASW working group via email and video conferencing about the programme content and training process. These interactions clarified (a) the focus of the training (e.g. was it about training supervisors to train other supervisors in the supervision of supervision practice, or was it concerned with training supervisors in SOSp); (b) the level and learning outcomes of the training; and (c) provided an opportunity to share ideas and plans about presentations and group workshops. In the end, it was agreed that the training would focus on training supervisors to train other supervisors and on training supervisors in SOSp. The learning outcomes were pitched at the postgraduate level. The international colleagues continued sharing ideas and plans via email until a few weeks before meeting in Singapore. The communication between the international partners and SASW acknowledged that all engaged from different positions and were aware of their cultural differences and that while all spoke and communicated in the English language, there were subtle differences in the use of words and sometimes meaning. The international colleagues were mindful when engaging with colleagues from SASW that it was important to understand their collective goals for the profession, to recognize their expertise about social work and supervision in Singapore and to work towards consensus building. Among the three international colleagues, there was an acknowledgement of diversity and social differences and an emphasis on giving face, maintaining harmony and sincerity in the relationships and respecting the individual strengths and differences in our interactions (Ng et al., 2021). Each trainer was mindful of their contextual experiences and sought to appreciate the cultural diversity of participants in terms of their experiences and ideas, thereby mirroring the application of cultural humility. This preliminary phase ended when SASW invited 45 social work supervision leaders to attend the SOSp workshop. Each of the 45 participants was to have at least 10 years of supervisory experience and to be engaged in some form of SOSp, with specialization in one of the three areas, namely, managerial, clinical and education/training. Overall, the working alliance established was multifaceted and involved the SASW working group, the three international colleagues and the social work leaders from Singapore who participated in both the workshop and group work.

Beginning phase

The beginning phase commenced when the SASW working group, the three international partners and the 45 social work leaders from Singapore met in person in Singapore. The welcome and introduction from the President of SASW acknowledged all and the role of each international collaborator and the significance of the work. The morning seminar involved each international colleague presenting on the supervision of supervision in their country. The purpose of these presentations was to expand everyone's thinking about SOSp by looking at how it is conceptualized and practised in South Africa, New Zealand and Hong Kong. The first presentation was an overview of the supervision of managers in South Africa. This presentation highlighted the decolonization journey and the efforts made towards authentic supervision of social workers and managers in South Africa. The South African definition of social work supervision was presented and discussed. This definition consisted of a brief involving detailed directives, a description of how supervision is operationalized and the scope of supervision:

The brief of supervision of social workers is a mandated, formal arrangement by an agency supervision policy, which entails the execution of supportive, educational, and administrative functions by a designated authoritative and trained supervisor, with the ultimate goal to render the best possible services to the user system. Supervision is operationalized by means of structured, interactional supervision sessions; directed

by adult education principles in a cyclical process with associated tasks, methods, and activities according to a predetermined time-span; based on appropriate theories, perspectives, and practice models; and guided by distinct values and ethical conduct. The scope of supervision is determined by a professional, constructive supervisor-supervisee relationship, context of the work environment, and resultant roles, which the supervisor has to fulfil. (Engelbrecht, 2019: 318)

The South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP) stipulated that supervision is mandatory for social workers in South Africa (Engelbrecht, 2021). However, because supervisors are managers, the supervision of supervisors is viewed as a management function. In addition, the impact of neoliberalism and managerialism on the South African social development context has also resulted in supervision being more managerial than clinical (Engelbrecht, 2021).

The second presentation was a review of the research on supervision of supervision in New Zealand (O'Donoghue, 2010, 2019a, 2019b). This review indicated that most supervisors in New Zealand have individual, professional and managerial supervision within their organization. Their supervisors are mostly either peers or managers, with a minority supervised by an external consultant. On average, the supervisors have two supervisors, one for professional supervision and the other for managerial supervision. Their supervision sessions occur monthly. The methods, processes and approaches mirror supervisors' supervision of front-line practitioners. Their overall satisfaction and evaluation of the supervision they receive are good (O'Donoghue, 2019b). There are, however, distinct differences in the supervisors' experiences of their supervision. Supervisors who are managers and team leaders are more likely to be supervised by a manager, and their supervisor may emphasize the managerial function. These supervisors highlight the impact of their organizational culture and their need to advocate for their staff while being mindful of the impressions their managers may gain about them from what they report to them. In short, their supervision focuses on accessing support and resources for front-line practitioners. In contrast, the supervisors who are also front-line practitioners and provide supervision as part of their practice are more likely to be supervised by a peer or external consultant and have a more developmentally and supportive supervision experience (O'Donoghue, 2010). The presentation concluded with the following definition of the supervision of social work supervisors in New Zealand:

The supervision of social work supervision is an interactive professional relationship and reflective process that focuses on the supervisee's supervisory practice, professional development and well-being, with the objectives of improving, developing, supporting and providing safety for the supervisor, the practitioners they supervise and their social work practice. It is distinct and different from counselling/therapy, direct practice and consultation. The supervision of social work supervision may occur through a traditional internal hierarchical or peer arrangement or an external professional arrangement which focuses on all of the areas and objectives, or a mix of internal and external arrangements, which focus on particular areas and objectives. The assigned or designated supervisors may be a line manager, colleague or external consultant/contractor or a combination of these where there is a mixed arrangement. (O'Donoghue, 2019c)

The next presentation was an overview of research conducted in Hong Kong on the supervisory working alliance relationship and emphasized how supervision relationships in Hong Kong are collaborative, co-constructed and influenced by Chinese cultural values of harmony and consensus, as well as the complex interactions between duties within authority relationships, collegial connections and familial obligations (Ng, 2016). The SSS was presented. The Scheme required trainee supervisors to undertake 20 hours of supervised practice under the guidance of a consultant supervisor. The assessment was ongoing during the training period and included theoretical and practical elements. For the theoretical part, the trainees were required to write a journal on the theory and practice of supervision for the six training sessions. The practical part involved an

assessment of supervision competence and was conducted through reviewing a recording of a supervision session with the supervisee. In the evaluation of the programme, the trainee supervisors noted that they valued the support and sharing of experiences by the consultant supervisors as a key part of their learning journey (Ng et al., 2021).

Middle phase

The middle phase started, when the participants joined one of three group workshops. Each group had 15 participants and was facilitated by one of the three international partners. Initial discussions in each group centred on international theoretical perspectives on supervision, the global and local context of supervision and identifying the realities of country-specific structures, legislation and documents. These discussions generated a common understanding of the contexts for each group. Each group then worked towards moving from an individual experiential understanding to shared understanding of SOSp. The sharing of individual members' tacit knowledge (using practice examples) and internalizing of both well-known and newly acquired knowledge (with references to the work of specific authors in the field of supervision) facilitated collective reflective thinking and resulted in the participants' readiness for knowledge construction and collaborative knowledge building (Singh et al., 2007). These synergistic moments of grounding terminology, theories and perspectives on SOSp by developing a shared language were a vital part of the group work as each group worked towards developing SOSp from its specific perspective (Stahl, 2000).

The focus in the management group was on the supervision of social work managers, with the participants being introduced to the scope and practices of supervision for administrative heads of social work organizations. The curriculum was focused on the competencies (knowledge, skills and attitudes) needed by social workers in administrative and leadership positions. The curriculum and the process of training supervisors of managers and the relationship between coaching, mentoring, consultation and leadership training were also covered.

The clinical supervision workshop started by exploring the participants' conceptualizations and definitions of clinical supervision and the skills and competencies required for effective clinical supervision in professional and inter-professional service settings. This was followed by an examination of clinical supervision theories, knowledge and skills that were transferable to SOSp, with the participants practicing their clinical skills through exercises. On the second day, this group examined the ethics of the SOSp, the measurement and assessment of clinical supervision competence, and the evaluation of clinical supervision. This workshop culminated in the group developing a training curriculum for supervisors of clinical supervisors and identifying competencies.

The educators and trainers workshop used a flipped-classroom approach with a supporting workbook (Gómez-Poyato et al., 2020). The group explored the following three focus areas: (1) ensuring a positive and safe environment for supervision training, (2) the elements of a SOSp curriculum and (3) teaching and training supervisors of supervisors. The first area involved engaging the group, clarifying their expectations, goals, and questions, and establishing a working agreement. The elements of a SOSp curriculum involved a range of activities that explored the purpose and definition of SOSp, the range of types of supervision, contracting and establishing agreements, ethics, theories, practice approaches, developmental approaches, contexts and attending to specialist areas. The third part of the workshop comprised activities and content related to adult and reflective learning approaches, facilitating links between theory, practice and research, developing case-study and scenario exercises, using role-play and simulation exercises, using live or video observation, and a collaborative feedback model (O'Donoghue, 2019c).

Transition phase

The transition phase began with the end of the 2-day workshops, when all the small groups transitioned back into the larger group. Each small group shared their learning experiences about SOSp for managers, clinical supervisors and as educators and trainers of supervisors. This was followed by a discussion facilitated by the three international collaborators. This discussion emphasized key competencies, ideas and processes that would be important for the working group members to take up in their curriculum and content development discussions the next day. The next phase saw the international partners' role change from leading and facilitating to contributors and advisors as the colleagues from SASW worked to identify competencies and curriculum content for a future training programme. For the international partners, this shift from leading to participating in the SASW process involved taking a step back and waiting to be invited to contribute rather than proffering advice and ideas as was done previously in their facilitation role. Part of this stepping back was recognizing that their primary contribution had been in extending and expanding the conversation through their presentations and facilitation of the focused group workshops and that the Singapore colleagues would be taking the work forward. In late November 2019, the international colleagues departed Singapore to return home to South Africa, Hong Kong and New Zealand.

Outcomes

In January 2020, the first case of Covid-19 was identified in Singapore (Wong et al., 2020). Social workers in Singapore were an essential service throughout the pandemic and had stringent guidelines about their work with clients (Seng et al., 2021). While resilient, they experienced high levels of psychological distress and disruption through this period. SASW provided essential organizational support to the public and social work community from April 2020 through a Crisis Response Team, which supported the National CARE Hotline. The team took up duties to staff the 24-hour helpline, support the distressed with psychological first aid and link callers up with Social Service Agencies and specialized services (SASW, 2021c). The focus of SASW on supporting the public and social workers during the pandemic meant that progress on SOSp slowed in 2020. Nonetheless, there are positive outcomes. The first was the contribution to and inclusion of guidelines and competencies on the supervision of supervision in the revised second edition of the Singapore Social Work Supervision Guidelines (SWAAB, 2021a), together with ongoing work in developing a SOSp curriculum. The expert level articulated in the competency domains of the Social Work Supervision Guidelines was informed by the SOSp competencies. The curriculum work has been advanced to the point that the SOSp training programme was piloted in 2023 with managers, clinical supervisors and supervision educators and trainers. The SOSp trainers were the participants of the workshops conducted by the experts and they have respectively taken on the management, clinical, educators and trainers tracks, training a new group of social work leaders keen on understanding SOSp. Another outcome was that the supervision community of practice continued to advance its knowledge. This was demonstrated in the Singapore Social Work Supervision seminar in 2021, where there was a workshop on SOSp (SWAAB, 2021b).

Other outcomes were those pertaining to the maintenance of international collaborative relationships. For example, two international collaborators were invited to contribute presentations to Singapore Social Work Supervision Seminar in 2021. There have also been writing collaborations with the chair of the SASW working group and the Hong Kong partner contributing chapters to the *Routledge International Handbook of Social Work Supervision* (O'Donoghue and Engelbrecht, 2021). Another relationship outcome was that the international partners and Singaporean SASW leaders have remained in contact with each other as the Covid-19 pandemic spread worldwide and

shared our work and family experiences of lockdown and the impact of the pandemic on our respective countries. This continued connection and our enduring relationships have been crucial in writing this article.

Discussion

The experience of collaboratively working with colleagues from other countries has been a valuable exercise for all involved. The strengths of the collaboration were due to work done behind the scenes by SASW, who ensured that the resources and support for the training were well catered for. The host organization's role in commissioning, supporting and resourcing international collaboration is fundamental to their success, because it sets the organizational climate and culture for the collaboration. The second strength resided in the quality of the working alliance between the international partners, the SASW working group and the participants. This alliance was characterized by respect, genuine care, a shared purpose and openness to learning from participants and trainers (Ng, 2016). The third strength was the interactional process, wherein there was a genuine attempt to understand each other's context and perspective throughout the collaboration. This interactional process was undoubtedly assisted by the participants and trainers having a common language and perhaps by everybody having highly developed interactional skills as advanced practitioners, supervisors and leaders in their organizations. The fourth strength was the cultural and professional humility of the trainers, who recognized that they were cultural outsiders visiting Singapore and were also learning about social work supervision in Singapore through their interactions with the participants.

In addition to these strengths, several learnings were gained for future international collaborations. The first was that international collaboration was arguably a parallel process of the supervision working alliance and that the stages and interactions that occurred mirrored those in a supervision relationship (Shulman, 2006). In this process, all learnt about each other's professional regulation requirements, cultural conceptualizations of the nature relationship, and the subtle differences in language and the importance of reciprocal dialogue that mutually influences all parties together with the application of cultural humility and attention to cultural conventions (Falender et al., 2021). Another learning was that the working alliance becomes strengthened by taking time together socially to create a sense of community and by sharing professional experiences. The experiences of shared meals and discussions over morning break, lunch and afternoon break, and in the car going to and from the event between the international partners and the SASW working group members increased the mutual appreciation and understanding of each other's perspectives and experiences. The third learning suggests that while institutional and national contexts of social work supervision may differ, the core aspects of human relational and interactive processes transcend borders and nations. A specific learning that each of the international collaborators took away was to reconsider the role of SOSp in their home countries and how they might implement a more cohesive national approach to SOSp in their context.

Conclusion


The international collaboration discussed in this article illustrates that when the host country establishes a common goal with its international partners and selects colleagues that commit and contribute to that goal in a respectful and cultural appropriate way, there is both a constructive process and progress towards the desired outcome. The process detailed above in this reflection is replicable and may contribute to enriching supervision in other contexts in the development of national approaches to supervision challenges, especially the development of SOSp. Engaging in intense

international collaborations also enabled the parties involved to be more objective and aware of the qualities of supervision in their respective countries and to learn and appreciate useful qualities of supervision in other countries. While in a supervision context, one cannot compare ‘like with like’ (Bradley et al., 2010: 384), international collaborations in supervision are a robust platform to add value and to propel the evolution of the global body of knowledge in social work supervision. The international engagement between supervision thought leaders from Singapore, South Africa, New Zealand and Hong Kong and the resultant pilot curriculum as an outcome of the international collaborations will assist supervisors in Singapore to reflect critically on their practice in the wider structural, political and global context. This may be regarded as a best practice on how to act both individually and collectively towards innovation when specific needs are identified in a country’s supervision practices (Wong et al., 2022). Nonetheless, no one solution addresses challenges in a country’s supervision practices, and national contexts inform innovations in supervision; however, it is likely to help supervisors, in whatever context, to execute their professional voice by receiving legitimate support. Hence, the crux of this international supervision collaboration was that although the institutional and national contexts of social work supervision differ, the parallel process of this international supervision collaboration and the relational supervision elements of a working alliance and constructive interaction process transcended both borders and nations.

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