Fredrike Bannink

Handbook of
Positive
Supervision

for Supervisors,
Facilitators, and Peer Groups

HOGREFE

Handbook of Positive Supervision

About the Author

Fredrike Bannink is a clinical psychologist. She has a therapy, training, coaching, and mediation practice in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. She is a trainer/supervisor with the Dutch Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Therapies (VGCt) and cofounder and Chair of the Association's Solution-Focused Cognitive Behavioural Therapy Section. She is a lecturer and supervisor at various postgraduate institutes. In addition, she provides numerous in-company training courses in solution-focused brief therapy and positive psychology at mental health care institutions; for companies, she organizes solution-focused coaching and leadership trajectories. She is also a Mental Health Trainer for Doctors Without Borders.

Fredrike Bannink is a Master of Dispute Resolution and an International Full Certified ADR Mediator. She is an international author, keynote speaker, and trainer.

Since 2005 she has been writing and presenting worldwide on the topic of bridging traditional models with positive psychology and the solution focus. Not surprisingly, her signature strength (according to the Values in Action [VIA] Survey) is *curiosity and interest in the world*.

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Preface

Suppose you are hungry and decide to go eat at a restaurant. After you have waited awhile, you are invited to take a seat. The waiter introduces himself and starts asking you questions about your hunger. How severe is your hunger; where does the appetite stem from, how long have you been hungry and have you been hungry before? What role has your hunger played in your life and your family or relationships. What disadvantages and perhaps advantages does it have for you?

After getting even hungrier the waiter wants you to fill out some questionnaires about hunger (and other issues the waiter considers important). And after all this you are served a dinner that you did not choose yourself, but rather one that the waiter claims is good for you and has helped other hungry visitors to satisfy their appetite. What do you suppose the chances are that you will leave this restaurant satisfied?

Research shows that monkeys learn more from their successes than their mistakes (Histed, Pasupathy, & Miller, 2009; Bannink, 2012c). This is due to the fact that a monkey's brain constructs new neural networks when monkeys perform tasks in which they are successful. We call this neuroplasticity. In case of failures no new networks are being built. The biologists who have studied these monkeys assume that the same mechanism applies to humans. The idea that you learn the most from your mistakes is probably out-dated.

Compare this with the preparation of food. How will you ensure that, when friends or family come over for dinner, you will come up with a meal everybody will feast upon? Are you going to use the knowledge of previous failed dishes (assuming that we have all sometimes failed in preparing a dinner)? Of course you may use your knowledge: "I put too many red peppers in that dish," or "I did not put the dish in the oven long enough." But you will most probably use your knowledge about your previous successful meals, "How did I make that gorgeous dish last time? What were the ingredients that made it so successful? You may repeat this successful recipe or build upon this success and come up with some new culinary creations.

Do you find successful or unsuccessful recipes in cookbooks or on the Internet? There are some stories about how unsuccessful dishes can be repaired, but the chance that a failed result, even after repairing it, turns into a tasty dish is rather small. The conclusion is that you probably learn more from your own and others' successes than from your own and others' failures.

In traditional supervision the focus is often on unsuccessful dishes: problems, bottlenecks, failures, stagnation, and deficits and rarely or never on successes. The problem-solving paradigm is used: what is the problem (what doesn't work), what are its causes, and how may it be repaired? In positive supervision this model is replaced by the solution-building paradigm with a focus on successful dishes: what works, how does it work, and how may you build on what works?

The role of supervisors is also different: instead of being problem-solvers or trouble-shooters who are the only experts in the room, supervisors become solutions-builders; instead of giving advice supervisors ask their supervisees questions inviting them to discover their own expertise and amplify it. From a positive psychology (PP) standpoint the question is not: "What's wrong with you?" but rather: "What's right with you?" What are your values, positive character strengths, and resources? From a solution-focused (SF) viewpoint the question is not: "What doesn't work?" but rather: "What works?" An additional benefit of this model is that supervisees may also use this paradigm in working with their own clients. Positive supervision focuses on competence: notice the parallel between finding competence and working on progress, and finding and applying successful recipes as described above.

The reason for writing this book stems from my wish to improve supervision and to make it better, more meaningful, and more enjoyable for both supervisees and their supervisors, not just in the setting of training therapists, but in many other instances as well. I think supervisees should be able to look forward to their supervision, rather than fear or endure supervision sessions, as is sometimes the case. In peer supervision colleagues should be able to enjoy their sessions and each other, rather than fear criticism or feel unsafe. At the end of each session they should leave cheerfully and with a growing sense of competence, rather than an increasing feeling of uncertainty.

The job satisfaction of both supervisors and supervisees can be increased by the positive focus described in this book. Research showing that the solution-building paradigm reduces burnout among professionals may also be relevant for supervisees and supervisors (Visser, 2012; Medina & Beijebach, 2014).

> "Assuming that you are learning a profession where your passion lies, supervision is also a place to share enthusiasm for the profession. In this way supervision becomes a fun part of the training, and experiencing a shared passion creates more meaning in your work. I literally felt the urge to run to the supervision sessions to share new developments and my growth with my supervisor. After enthusiastically sharing an applied technique she once remarked: 'Who do you think was more surprised that it worked out so well, you or your client?'"

What can you find in this book? The theoretical background and practical applications of positive supervision are outlined. There is an extensive discussion about the theory of the four pillars of positive supervision: goal formulation, finding competencies, working on progress, and reflection. The working relationship between supervisors and supervisees is also examined. Practical matters are discussed and there is a chapter containing 22 frequently asked questions and answers. In the book are also dozens of case studies, exercises, and stories. Moreover five supervisees speak out and share their experiences with positive supervision.

This book is intended for everyone who holds the role of supervisor in business or in government, for example, a senior who provides supervision to a junior colleague or trainee. This book is written for everyone in the field of psychotherapy, coaching, and conflict management who provides supervision to colleagues. It is intended for everyone who provides supervision in education or in sports, for example, a teacher who helps a student or a coach who supervises a pupil. This book is also intended for supervisees who may surprise their supervisors by giving them this book as a present, saying: "Look, there is now positive supervision!" All colleagues in peer supervision may use this book to increase their capacities and job satisfaction.

This book is intended for everyone who is dissatisfied with the current state of the art of supervision. And finally it is written for everyone who is curious enough to investigate where the concept of positive supervision may lead.

This book aims to inspire you to expand your existing proficiency and optimally deploy your creative powers to help your supervisees and colleagues to help their clients. I hope you enjoy this book and invite you to share your comments at solutions@fredrikebannink.com or through my website at www.fredrikebannink.com.

Fredrike Bannink
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An author never writes a book alone. It is always a product of many people who work together and ultimately ensure that the name of the author appears on the cover.

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No need to say I did not invent all practical applications mentioned in this book: many of them come from my colleagues and students. Because it is impossible to thank everyone personally, I would like to thank them in this way.

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Part I
Theory

Chapter 1
Supervision

Never do for learners what they can do
themselves or for themselves
Anonymous

In this chapter some definitions of traditional supervision models are described. These models are all based on the problem-solving paradigm, with the purpose of first analyzing what is wrong and then solving it (mostly about the problems supervisees have with their clients). The supervisees will usually get advice from their supervisors who position themselves as experts and teachers.

In the new vision of *positive supervision* the problem-solving paradigm is replaced by the solution-building paradigm. The supervisors usually don't give advice, but ask questions to invite their supervisees to discover and use their own expertise. This positive vision can be used both in individual and group supervision, as well as in peer supervision. Moreover, in this way supervisees may become familiar with this positive paradigm, which they may use in working with their own clients. Differences between the questions used in traditional and positive supervision are discussed, as well as a questionnaire for supervisors. Advantages and disadvantages of individual and group supervision are outlined and arguments are given to better listen to the wishes of supervisees than has hitherto been the case.

Traditional Supervision: Definition and Role of the Supervisor

Bernard and Goodyear (2009, p. 7) provide a common neutral definition of supervision. The term *neutral* means that they are not clear whether supervision is about solving problems or building solutions. Their definition reads:

Supervision is an intervention provided by a more senior member of a profession to a more junior member or members of that same profession. This relationship:

- is evaluative and hierarchical;
- extends over time;
- has the simultaneous purpose of enhancing the professional functioning of the more junior person(s), monitoring the quality of the professional services offered to the clients that she, he, or they see; and serving as a gatekeeper for those who are to enter the particular profession.

According to Bernard and Goodyear, there are major similarities between the process of psychotherapy and supervision. They state that the centrality and the role of the interpersonal relationship are similar in both processes. The outcome of psychotherapy seems to me, however, to be different from that of supervision. In psychotherapy the relationship is terminated when the clients are functioning better, while in supervision the relationship as colleagues remains.

Below I list some other definitions of supervision I found on the Internet, sometimes problem-focused, sometimes neutral. Problem-focused means that supervision is about analyzing what is wrong and then fixing those problems:

- Systematic guidance: learning from the problems the supervisee is faced with in his work (problem-focused).
- Steering, managerial superintendence (neutral).
- Reflection on (own) work experiences to achieve better functioning (neutral).

The most quoted definition of professional counseling supervision is that of Inskipp and Proctor (1995):

> A working alliance between a supervisor and a counselor in which the counselor can offer an account or recording of her work; reflect on it; receive feedback, and where appropriate, guidance. The object of this alliance is to enable the counselor to gain in ethical competence, confidence and creativity so as to give her best possible service to her clients. (p. 11)

Inskipp and Proctor (1993) suggest that supervision has three main roles; the normative, i.e., a review of supervisee practice in line with professional and ethical norms; the formative, i.e., a learning component designed to stretch the supervisee's boundaries; and the restorative, i.e., a supportive element designed to monitor and maintain supervisee self-care.

These definitions also clarify the difference between supervision and peer supervision: in supervision there is a more experienced professional who guides and supports the supervisee, creating insights; in peer supervision participants are all equals. In the above definitions supervision is a learning experience under the guidance of a supervisor (one is supposed to learn from practical problems), which methodically discusses the personal learning questions that one has with regard to his or her work. It gives insight

into which situations may cause problems, what causes are involved, how to deal with the situation, and what the alternatives are. Supervisees explore and recognize patterns and search for deeper motives and beliefs that influence their actions.

According to Beunderman and Van der Maas (2011, p. 23) the supervisor is – at least in mental health care – a:

- *teacher*: teaching the profession and method to the supervisees, building on their knowledge and skills;
- *didactic person*: knowing how to transfer knowledge so that the supervisees can put it into practice;
- *expert*: having knowledge of "the state of the art" of the profession and its methods, keeps practical, scientific, and theoretical knowledge up to date, and carries out the professional standards;
- *theorist*: explaining the background of the method or the profession, has greater breadth and depth of understanding of the subject matter, and can devise links between different fields as well as between theory and practice;
- *personal coach*: discussing with the supervisees their strong points and weaknesses, personal traits and skills that have an influence on the execution of the profession, the use of the method, and the relationship with the client;
- *assessor*: assessing the performance of the supervisees with regard to the technical and methodological aspects of their field.

Watkins (1997) also indicates that the supervisor has different roles and that the success of the supervision depends primarily on the supervisor's correct estimation of when and how to apply the changing roles of mentor, teacher, and colleague.

The *problem-solving paradigm* has become popular in the medical and mechanical world and in business, government, education, psychotherapy, coaching, and (conflict) management. The focus is on what's wrong, on pathology. Diagnosis of the problem is the first step. The next step is finding the causes of the problem, using the cause-effect model (the so-called *medical model* or *mechanical model*). The problem-solving model is very straightforward: identify the cause and remove it. And indeed analyze the problem, find the cause and put it right, is a simple and attractive idiom. It makes sense and it is action-oriented. But unfortunately is it inadequate for a number of reasons:

- In a complex interactive situation we may never be able to isolate one cause;
- There is a danger in fastening on to a particular cause, because it is easy to identify, ignoring the rest of the situation;
- We may identify the cause, but cannot remove it;

- The sometimes false notion that once the cause is removed the problem will be solved and things will be back to normal, which is not usually the case.

Problem-solving certainly has a place in psychotherapy, supervision, and other areas. The main limitation, however, is that we may put much too definite a view on what we believe the solution should be before we have really done our thinking about the matter. As soon as we say "this is the problem" we have defined the sort of solution we expect.

The solution-building paradigm goes beyond reducing or repairing a problem, it is about *designing a positive outcome* that was not there before. De Bono, probably best known for his term *thinking outside the box*, states:

> With design there is a sense of purpose and a sense of fit. Problem analysis is always looking back at what is already there; design is always looking forward at what might be created. We need to design outcomes. I do not even like saying design 'solutions' because this implies that there is a problem. Even when we cannot find a cause, or, after finding it, cannot remove it, we can always attempt to design an outcome. (de Bono, 1985, p. 42)

> ❝ **In problem-focused supervision I learned from the 'sharp minds' of my supervisors; in positive supervision I learned to use my own 'sharp mind.' This helps me to become more independent and more effective in creating and supporting change.** ❞

Positive Supervision: Definition and Role of the Supervisor

In problem-focused supervision the supervisors adapt the role of *troubleshooters*, with the task as experts and teachers to give advice about the problems supervisees encounter (with their clients). Not all supervisors find this a pleasant way of supervising, especially as the responsibility is put mainly on their shoulders: after all they are the experts who have to come up with the right analyses, hypotheses, and advice.

There is a growing interest in a different view of psychotherapy and education, which is also applicable in supervision. In this view, the focus is not on what is not working and needs to be repaired, but is on what works and can be further built upon. The focus is on the strengths of supervisees instead of on their weaknesses and on their competencies instead of their deficits. The attitude of the supervisors is as follows: instead of being the only experts in

the room they invite their supervisees to become coexperts and discover their own ideas and competences for optimal functioning.

In positive supervision supervisors have a stance of *not-knowing* (asking questions instead of giving advice) and *leading from one step behind*. So supervisors are in effect leading, but they stay so to speak always one step behind their supervisees. By asking questions supervisors invite their supervisees to look for their preferred future (at work) and what works to get there. Being curious about how supervisees work instead of holding a position of self-assurance, in which supervisors bring forward their own ideas, supervisors facilitate their supervisees to increase their competence. Therefore, supervisors have a more facilitating than advisory role (see Table 1). In Chapter 2 information on this new and radically different approach to health care and supervision is described in more detail.

> **Case 1 Well Done**
>
> A supervisor in a company explains what he is doing differently now when his employees submit an incomplete report. "I make sure to start commenting on what the employee has done well and only then I ask what further information (s)he needs to improve the report even more."
> This supervisor now sends out a different message about the competencies and capabilities of his employees to make a valuable contribution to the organization than the traditional method of supervision, which focuses on mistakes or failures and how to avoid or repair them.

The following example demonstrates the philosophy and process of positive supervision. A documentary was made about how American Indians make traditional flutes from the branch of a tree. The Indian said: "The branch tells me how to cut the flute … every piece of wood has its own form, which you should respect. In each branch a flute is hidden, and it's my job to find it."

De Jong and Berg (2002, p. 268) stress that the role of supervisors is one of solutions-builders rather than problem-solvers. They base their ideas on the following set of assumptions to teach their supervisees, act as their mentor, and to feed and inspire them.

"Until proven otherwise, we assume that all supervisees:
- want to feel that their work makes *a difference* in someone's life;
- want to learn the skills needed to achieve this motivation and commitment;
- want to be accepted and valued by the organization they work in;

- want to identify with the organization's mission and objectives;
- already possess problem-solving skills to some degree; thus the task of supervision is to add solution-building skills;
- will when they feel respected and supported by the organization and their superiors, naturally deal with their clients in the same respectful manner."

Although some of the details of supervision may vary from setting to setting based on practice matters specific to those settings, the core element of any supervision is the task of the supervisors to lead their supervisees toward greater competence and enhanced skills. De Jong and Berg believe this is best accomplished through solution-building conversations that lead both supervisors and supervisees to discoveries about how they are using, and can further draw upon, their particular strengths and resources to most effectively do the work.

The most important task of supervision is to teach supervisees to listen to the clients' view of how useful the service is to them. Conversations are organized around inviting supervisees to see clients through the clients' own eyes, rather than theirs. This touches on the question whose perspective is most important in the working relationship with their clients: the perspective of the supervisees or the perspective of their clients?

In positive supervision the answer to this question is the perspective of the clients: "What would your client say her goal is?" or 'What will your clients say has been most helpful so far?" (see Chapter 6 and 8).

Analogous to this view, it is equally important for supervisors to listen to their supervisees: "What would your supervisee say her goal is?" or "What will your supervisees say has been most helpful in their supervision?"

Colleagues or institutions should not only do the assessment of supervisors, but first and foremost supervisees themselves. Supervisors and fellow reviewers should judge the performance of the supervisors more often from the perspective of their supervisees than is the case in most assessments today.

Here you find a questionnaire for assessing supervisors based on the supervisees' perspective (see Appendix 7).

1. What would your supervisees say about what you do to help them to function optimally?
2. What else would they say? And what else?
3. What difference do your supervisees say you make for them?
4. What would your supervisees say about how useful the sessions have been so far on a scale from 10–0 (10 is the most useful and 0 is the opposite)?
5. What would they say about where they are on the scale (and not lower)?
6. What would they say will be different and what would they say you will be doing differently at one or two points higher on that scale?

7. How can you get higher on the scale according to them?
8. What would they say has been most useful and helpful in your work with them?

Exercise 1   Positive Opening

Always start an individual or group supervision with a positive opening. Invite supervisees to briefly mention a recent (small) success or an accomplishment of which they are proud. Another form is a short round with the question: "What are you pleased about (at work or at home)?" This increases the chance that the rest of the session will develop in a positive atmosphere. Don't make judgments: everything is accepted and is given compliments by the other participants.

Sometimes the question is put forward whether positive supervision can be integrated with problem-focused supervision. The answer depends on what is meant by integration. The answer is negative when one tries to fit the positive vision in the problem-focused vision. The answer is positive when one uses positive vision next to the problem-focused vision (see Chapter 10 and Appendix 8).

Problem-Focused and Solution-Focused Questions

Grant and O'Connor (2010) did research on the differences between problem-focused and solution-focused questions in a coaching context. Their research shows that both types of questions are helpful in bringing the client's goal closer, with solution-focused questions having a significantly larger effect than problem-focused questions. Problem-focused questions reduce negative affect and increase self-efficacy, however, they do not increase understanding of the nature of the problem or enhance positive affect. Solution-focused questions increase positive affect, decrease negative affect, increase self-efficacy as well as increase participants' insight and understanding of the nature of the problem. Grant and O'Connor conclude that solution-focused questions in coaching are more effective than problem-focused questions.

During the French Revolution an attorney, a physician, and an engineer were sentenced to death. When the day of their execution arrived, the attorney was first onto the platform that supported the guillotine. "Blindfold or no blindfold?" asked the executioner. The attorney, not wanting

to be seen as fearful or cowardly in the face of death, held his head high and answered: "No blindfold." "Head up or head down?" continued the executioner. "Head up," said the attorney proudly. The executioner swung his ax, severing the rope that held the razor-sharp blade at the top of the scaffold. The blade dropped swiftly between the shafts and stopped just half an inch above the attorney's neck. "I am sorry' said the executioner. "I checked it just this morning. This should not have happened."

The attorney seized on the opportunity. "I think'"he addressed the executioner, "if you check The Procedural Manual For Execution By Guillotine, you will find there is a clause that states that if the guillotine malfunctions, the condemned is permitted to walk free." The executioner checked his manual, found the attorney to be correct, and set him free.

The doctor was the next to be led to the platform. "Blindfold or no blindfold?" asked the executioner. "No blindfold' said the doctor as proudly as the attorney. "Head up or head down?" asked the executioner. "Head up" said the doctor standing tall and defiant. The executioner swung his ax, cutting the rope cleanly. Once again the blade stopped just half an inch above the doctor's neck. "I can't believe this' exclaimed the executioner. "Twice in a row! I checked it out thoroughly this morning, but rules are rules and I have to abide by them. Like the attorney, your life has been spared and you may go."

The engineer was the third to mount the stand. By this time, the executioner had double-checked the guillotine and everything looked operational. "Blindfold or no blindfold?" he asked the engineer. "No blindfold"came the reply. "Head up or head down?" asked the executioner. "Head up"said the engineer. For the third time, the executioner swung back his ax to slash the rope. Just as he was about to bring the blow forward and severe the line, the engineer called out "Stop! I think I see the problem." He paid dearly for analyzing the problem.

Source: Unknown

Table 1. Differences in questions in traditional and positive supervision

Traditional supervision	Positive supervision
What went wrong?	What went right (even just a little bit)?
What is the problem?	How is this a problem (for you, for others)?
What is the cause of the problem?	Who/what can help to solve the problem?
What is wrong here (problem analysis)?	What would you like to have instead of the problem (goal analysis)?
When is the problem there and what are the consequences (functional behavior analysis of problems)?	When are/were there exceptions to the problem and what are the consequences (positive functional behavior analysis)?
What do you want to get away from?	Where do you want to go to?
Who is to blame?	Who has a solution?
What is the worst aspect of this situation?	What should be different in the future?
What is the worst that can happen?	What is the best that can happen?
Why did you do that?	How did you know you had to do that?
How did you end up in this situation?	How can you get out of this situation?
What is your explanation for your behavior?	You must have a good reason for your behavior, please tell me more?
What should you have done?	What could you do differently next time?
Can you do that more often?	How can you ensure this happens more often?
What did you try before?	What did you do before that was helpful (even just a little bit)?
Did you do something helpful?	What did you do that was helpful?
Are you committed enough?	How can you commit yourself enough?
What do you find difficult?	What do you see as a challenge?
Which obstacles do you meet?	What can you do so it may happen again?
What is stopping you?	Which (small) signals will tell you that you are on the right track?
What do you want to learn?	What do you want to become better at?
Did you ever succeed in doing better?	When did you do better?
Anything else?	What else?
Was this useful for you?	How was this useful for you?

Exercise 2 Asking Questions

Do the following exercise with another person/colleague to experience the differences between problem-focused and solution-focused questions. For 5 minutes talk to the other person about a problem, worry, or annoyance you experience. Ask the other person to respond in a problem-focused way. This involves questions such as: "How long have you experienced this?"; "How severe is it?"; "How much does it bother you?"; "What else is troubling you?"; "In what other areas of your life does this problem affect you?"; "Did you experience this before?"

Then talk to the same person for another 5 minutes about the same problem, worry, or annoyance and ask the other person to respond in a solution-focused way. This involves questions such as: "How does this present a problem for you?"; "What have you already done about it that was helpful?"; "When is the problem absent or less?"; "How do you manage that?"; "What are you doing differently then?"; "If you experienced a similar problem in the past, how did you solve it at the time?"; "What do you know about how others would address this problem?" You may also ask a question about goal formulation: "What would you like to have accomplished by the end of this (brief) conversation so that you would be able to say that it has been of use to you and that it was meaningful?"

With the other person note the differences between the two conversations. You may sense a lighter tone and be in a more optimistic mood when you talk about the more positive experiences, whereas a certain heaviness often accompanies problem-focused conversations. It is also possible that you have already solved your problem or that you know what to do in order to reach your goal.

Then reverse roles: now you listen while the other person talks about a problem, worry, or annoyance. For the first 5 minutes, respond in a problem-focused way, and then for the next 5 minutes in a solution-focused way. With the other person, note the differences again.

> **I am pleased that positive supervision complimented my heavy problem-oriented approach. The result is that I now have a multi-colored palette of approaches available to me. And if nowadays I want to unravel problems again, I focus much more on analyzing situations where the problem doesn't exist. I noticed that this is a pleasant way of working for my clients. I do hope that other supervisees will experience the same as I did through this book.**