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COMPETENCE-BASED APPROACH TO THE SUPERVISED PRACTICE

Competence is the “capacity, skill, or ability to do something correctly or efficiently” (Colman, 2015, p. 151), i.e. in compliance with the related standards. Not only does a competent psychologist have adequate knowledge and skills, he/she also exhibits a proper attitude towards the profession and his/her clients.

Suitable, safe and effective performance demands proper attitudes, evaluations, critical thinking and decision making, and this has to be carried out in compliance with the professional standards, ethical principles and values of the profession (Rodolfa et al., 2005). Competences are clusters of knowledge, skills, abilities and other traits which enable individuals’ effective conduct in professional situations in compliance with defined standards (International Declaration on Core Competences in Professional Psychology, 2016).

There are different conceptualizations of psychologist competences. For instance, the APA has accepted the Cube model for competence development (Fouad et al., 2009; Rodolfa, 2005), while the International Association for Analytical Psychology (IAAP) and the International Union of Psychological Science (IUPsyS) developed as part of a collaborative project (The International Project on Competence in Psychology – IPCP) a competence model which has gained international recognition as a suitable one, and these organizations also presented an international declaration on fundamental competences in psychology (International Declaration on Core Competences in Professional Psychology, 2016). In Europe, however, the competences model developed within the framework of the *EuroPsy* Certificate has already been widely used, and this is introduced as follows.

The *EuroPsy* Competences Model

The *EuroPsy* competences model divides the competences of psychologists into primary and enabling competences (Bartram & Roe, 2005; EFPA, 2015). Primary competences are specific for the professional work of psychologists, and cover details of the psychological content that occurs in the course of providing professional services. Enabling competences are general competences required for effective implementation of psychological services, and provide support for the primary competences. Moreover, it should be noted that the same competences could be present in certain other professional profiles.

The conceptualization of primary competences in the *EuroPsy* model follows the course of psychological treatment. There are six categories of primary competences (EFPA, 2015), which encompass a total of 20 competences (hereafter marked with numbers in brackets): goal specification, assessment, development, intervention, evaluation, and communication. The specification of goals of psychological treatment includes the process of needs analysis (1), which encompasses gathering of detailed information about the client's need for psychological treatment, and goal setting (2), i.e. proposing and negotiating acceptable and attainable goals with the client. What follows is the assessment of individuals (3), groups (4), organizations (5) and the situation (6) with the use of suitable methods for doing this. Sometimes, when standard approaches cannot be applied, the intervention method used in a particular case first needs to be developed. Developmental competences here include definitions of the purpose of the intervention, services, or product (7), and their design (8), testing (9) and evaluation (10). The intervention needs to be properly defined and planned (11) and then applied. The psychologist has to be competent enough to implement interventions oriented directly towards the focal individual (12) and the situation (13), and to implement indirect interventions when needed (14). Psychologists have to be able to properly use psychological products and implement services (15), and pay attention to their appropriate use by others. They have to be able to evaluate the suitability of their interventions and plan the related evaluation (16), measure the effects of interventions (17) and analyse these effects (18). They then have to be able to transfer the findings in the form of feedback to clients (19) or written reports (20).

Besides these primary competences psychologists are required to demonstrate enabling competences. As such, psychologists need a proper professional strategy (1), which means that they have to be able to assess their competences and choose corresponding methods of problem solving. They are required to participate in continuing professional development (2), and should establish professional relations with other professionals and relevant organizations (3). They have to be able to develop new services and products (4) and apply a proper marketing strategy to their psychological services (5). Account management (6) and practice management (7) are

also important. They have to establish a system to ensure the quality of the services provided (8), and perform critical self-reflection on their own practice and competence (9). Detailed information regarding the categories of primary and enabling competences can be found in the EFPA Regulations on *EuroPsy* (EFPA, 2015) or on the *EuroPsy* webpage <http://www.europsy-efpa.eu/regulations>.

Although each psychologist is required to develop the competences outlined above, they differ in their level of development. Each psychologist exhibits his/her specific profile of competence development linked to previous experiences in psychological services, i.e. to the field of his/her practice. Workplaces differ with regard to their types of clients, co-workers, purposes, tools and applicable methods, and thus the competences of individual psychologists will also differ. An individual who is competent in one domain of psychological practice, or one workplace, or with a specific group of clients, does not necessarily show adequate competence in another domain of practice, workplace, or with another group of clients. A change in the field of practice thus requires additional training (Bartram & Roe, 2005), or a new inclusion into supervision.

Competences can be improved with education and development (Lucia & Lepsinger, 1999), and should be developed and upgraded through-out a person's career. As such, it cannot be expected that individuals in different phases of their education, training and career will have equally developed competences. It is thus important to adapt the assigned work tasks to the level of an individual's development. Moreover, the educational and training programmes that are offered have to be gradual; at the beginning the tasks are simpler, and then they gradually become more complex and sophisticated with regard to their content and methods for competence development (Kaslow, 2004). Primary competences for practicing psychology are developed during studies when students gain specific theoretical and procedural knowledge within different subjects, or during practicum when they practice how to apply different approaches and develop various skills. Such knowledge and skills are upgraded and integrated during the period of internship and supervised practice, when the acquired knowledge, skills, and understanding are applied in real workplaces, where individuals meet clients with real problems, and so need to establish good professional relationships with both clients and co-workers. During the internship, and while under supervision, students perform the first steps in their psychological practice, learn about practical approaches, reflect on their performance and discuss it with others, and so start to establish relationships with professional colleagues. Due to the limited duration of any internship and the focus on a few elements of psychological practice, students develop only selected competences during this period. However, in the one year of supervised practice that takes place after the completion of academic study it can be expected that students will practice all the elements of the psychological services they will be offering and work to develop all the related competences. This happens first under supervision and then more and

more independently, until the novice psychologists develop all the relevant competences to a level which enables them to implement work tasks without supervision.

At the end of supervision, the supervisor's task is to assess, based on the performance shown through the year by the novice psychologist under supervision, whether or not the new psychologist has adequately developed all the primary and enabling competences. The supervisor assesses the psychologist's competences by means of a four-level assessment scale (see Table 3). Level 1 means that basic knowledge and skills are present, but competence has not been sufficiently developed yet. Such a level can be expected after an individual has completed the first cycle of the psychology study programme with regard to a certain subject (if practicum is a part of the subject). Level 2 means that competence for task performance has been developed, but guidance and supervision are required. Such a level can be expected when a student enters supervised practice, i.e. after the completion of academic study. Level 3 means that competence for performing basic tasks without guidance or supervision has been developed, while Level 4 means that competence for performing complex tasks without guidance or supervision has been developed. A person has to achieve at least Level 3 in order to carry out independent performance of psychological services. In order for the psychologist to be eligible to obtain the *EuroPsy* certificate, his/her supervisor has to provide a summary on a special form stating whether or not the related competences have been sufficiently developed in all seven categories (six categories of primary competences and one category of enabling competences), and confirm the assessment with his/her signature. The supervisor thus expresses judgment as to whether or not the psychologist is "competent" or "not yet competent" for independent psychological practice.

Table 3. *Competence assessment scale on the EuroPsy assessment form*

1	2	3	4
Basic knowledge and skills present, but competence insufficiently developed	Competence for performing tasks but requiring guidance and supervision	Competence for performing basic tasks without guidance or supervision	Competence for performing complex tasks without guidance or supervision

Applicability of the Competence Model in Supervision

The supervisor's role as gatekeeper to the profession is new in Slovenia and many other European states, in particular in fields of practice where the professional work assessment exam has not been a prerequisite for practicing psychology. In comparison with the professional work assessment exam, the supervisor's assessment of the supervised practice gives more emphasis to the systematic assessment of all competences and accurate insights into the novice psychologist's

qualifications. The competences model assists the supervisor in evaluating the supervisee with regard to various different elements of performance, and ensures that no element is overlooked.

Based on the experiences gained in the training of supervisors for the application of the *EuroPsy* competence model, and on the supervisors' related reports, it can be concluded that supervisors find the competence model rather abstract when they learn about it for the first time. The definitions of individual competences are so general that they find it difficult to envision specific behaviours which are expressed by a psychologist who has mastered a competence. It is also challenging for them to understand and define the competences with regard to concrete work tasks and situations. This is why a minimum of eight hours was devoted to the training and presentation of the *EuroPsy* competence model to the supervisors in past trainings. During this, the supervisors gathered in domain-related groups and discussed how competences are expressed in the performance of different work tasks. They tried to explicitly write down how each competence was expressed, and a few examples of this can be found in Zabukovec and Podlesek (2010).

With the exchange of opinions and discussion of actual cases of competence expression, the participants gain a clearer image of individual competences and start to better understand the competence model. However, it is only after they have supervised an internship or supervised practice, and so practiced defining, planning and developing the supervisee competences, and reflecting on their development, that they thoroughly comprehend it. When they accept a supervisee into an internship and plan with him/her how the competences will be developed and then finally assess the supervisee's performance, they recognize the model as very useful and effective for planning and leading the internship and supervised practice. Inclusion of practical work into the training of supervisors is thus essential. Overall, the structuring of the training programme, in which practicing supervision with the use of the *EuroPsy* competence model is followed by yet another organized meeting of the participants, has been shown to be useful and beneficial for those who take part, as they are given another opportunity to reconsider their understanding of the competence model and upgrade it as needed.

The *EuroPsy* competence model follows the sequence of activities that occur in psychological treatment. After the psychologists are able to comprehend the model, it is easier for them to envision and remember the related competences. The model assists the psychologists-in-training in monitoring their qualifications and planning their own development, and also help supervisors in their monitoring of the development of the supervisee's competences. When supervisors apply the model in real life, both at work and in supervision, they tend to see it as very useful. Not only does it help them structure the internship and supervised practice, but it also helps them define their professional identity, and distinguish psychologist competences from those of other practitioners. The *EuroPsy* competence model thus helps

psychologists articulate what they know and what they can do, and inform the public, policy-makers and (prospective) employers about their abilities. For this reason, the supervisees also recognize the benefits of using this model.

The supervisor's knowledge and comprehension of the competence model enables the effective internship and supervised practice of a student and early career psychologist, respectively. It is important that the supervisor recognizes which competences are developed and which need more attention in order for the supervisee to become a competent practitioner. The supervisor has to know how to guide the supervised practice so that the situations which the supervisee encounters are suitable for his/her level of development, while also providing new knowledge to the supervisee. The supervisor has to be able to assist the supervisee in his/her planning of work tasks, as well as reflecting on and evaluating the practice. Upon conclusion of the supervised practice the supervisor needs to assess the competence of the supervisee with regard to independent performance of the work tasks. If the supervised practice is to be effective and useful, it is equally important that the supervisee is familiar with the competence model, so that the supervisor and supervisee can better understand each other when they plan and monitor the development of competences and evaluate their developmental level.

Table 4 shows an example of the application of the competence model when used to prepare for the supervisory relationship. Prior to the outset of the internship the supervisor and the supervisee evaluated which competences had already been developed by the supervisee as part of her internship in another work organization. From the table of competences required in her work position, which had been created by the supervisor (with an extract is shown in Table 4), they selected those which the supervisee wanted to develop during the period of internship, and within these competences the specific skills and knowledge in need of more attention. Moreover, the nature of the work that occurred during the implementation of the internship triggered the development of some other competences, although these had not been selected as central for the internship.

Table 4. Example of the application of the EuroPsy competence model – Supervisor’s description of the competences of psychologists working in a kindergarten⁸

Primary competence	Work task	Competence includes these specific knowledge and skills
a. Goal specification		
Needs analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication: by phone, email, and in person • Directive interviews • Questionnaires <p>Users: parents, kindergarten teachers, those in leadership positions, external institutions, for one’s own observations</p>	<p>Skills: establishment of connection and trust, listening, asking questions, ability to understand others, and the skill of active listening</p> <p>Knowledge: knowledge of questionnaire application, technical conduct of an interview, content of anamnestic data, communication, developmental psychology, deviant behaviours, and child development</p>
Goal setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing additional skills and knowledge of professional workers • Change of behaviour: in a child, kindergarten teachers, parents • Developmental-research analytical work (e.g. climate improvement) • Offering assistance and support 	<p>Skills: listening, asking questions, engaged listening, and offering support</p> <p>Knowledge: knowledge of goal setting, developmental psychology, educational psychology, cognitive psychology, personality psychology, motivation, emotion, interpersonal relationship and communication, deviant behaviours, and child development</p>
b. Assessment		
Assessment of individuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation of behaviour: of a child and of professional workers (methods and techniques) • Use of standardized psychological tests (like SB-C) • Non-standardized instruments for observing behaviours: development scales, development area-related curricula for kindergartens, directive interviews, behavioural cognitive interviews, measuring disturbing behaviours, etc. 	<p>Skills: listening, asking questions, active listening, supporting, selection of knowledge for a particular situation, focus on a particular situation, subtlety, and neutrality</p> <p>Knowledge: the recognition and application of diagnostic instruments, technical conduct of interviews, developmental psychology, educational psychology, cognitive psychology, personality psychology, motivation, emotion, interpersonal relationships and communication, group leading, social psychology, deviant behaviours, and child development</p>

⁸ This description of the psychologist’s expression of competences in a kindergarten was prepared by Andreja Koler Križe.