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THE IMPORTANCE OF REFLECTIVE PRACTICE IN CLINICAL NURSING SUPERVISION

A IMPORTÂNCIA DA PRÁTICA REFLEXIVA NA SUPERVISÃO CLÍNICA EM ENFERMAGEM

LA IMPORTANCIA DE LA PRÁCTICA REFLEXIVA EN LA SUPERVISIÓN DE ENFERMERÍA CLÍNICA

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Abstract

Introduction: Clinical supervision in Nursing is a structural axis of the educational process, contributing to the quality of care provided and to the professional development of students. Reflective practice has increasingly been recognized as a pedagogical strategy that promotes critical thinking and informed decision making. However, the scientific evidence regarding the actual impact of this practice on clinical supervision remains dispersed and insufficiently systematized. **Aim:** This study aimed to map the available evidence on the impact of reflective practice in clinical supervision in Nursing. **Methodology:** A Scoping Review was conducted in accordance with the methodological guidelines of the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) and reported following the PRISMA 2020 recommendations (Page et al., 2021), based on the PCC strategy (Participants, Concept, Context). The search was carried out in the PubMed, EBSCOhost, and SciELO databases, covering the period from 2018 to 2024. Descriptors validated by MeSH and DeCS were used and combined using the Boolean operator AND. **Results:** After applying predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, six studies were included in the final analysis Scoping Review. The central objectives of the studies included the analysis of reflection as a pedagogical strategy, its impact on critical thinking, and the effects on the quality of care and care indicators. **Conclusion:** The analysis of the studies demonstrated that reflective practice, within the context of clinical supervision, enhances the development of critical competencies, professional autonomy, and the quality of care. However, constraints to its implementation were identified, such as lack of time, insufficient structured training, and limited pedagogical resources.

Keywords: Decision Making; Nursing; Nursing Education; Professional Development; Reflection.

Resumo

Introdução: A supervisão clínica em Enfermagem constitui um eixo estruturante do processo formativo, contribuindo para a qualidade dos cuidados prestados e para o desenvolvimento profissional dos estudantes. A prática reflexiva tem vindo a afirmar-se como uma estratégia pedagógica promotora do pensamento crítico e da tomada de decisão fundamentada. Contudo, a evidência científica relativa ao impacto efetivo desta prática na supervisão clínica permanece dispersa e pouco sistematizada. **Objetivo:** Mapear as evidências disponíveis sobre o impacto da prática reflexiva na supervisão clínica em Enfermagem. **Metodologia:** Foi realizada uma *Scoping Review*, segundo as diretrizes metodológicas do Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI), e reportada de acordo com as recomendações do PRISMA 2020, com base na estratégia PCC (Participants, Concept, Context). A pesquisa foi conduzida nas bases de dados PubMed, EBSCOhost e SciELO, abrangendo o período de 2018 a 2024. Utilizaram-se descritores validados pelos MeSH e DeCS, combinados através do operador booleano AND. **Resultados:** Após a aplicação dos critérios de inclusão e exclusão estabelecidos, foram selecionados seis artigos científicos para análise final nesta *Scoping Review*. Os objetivos centrais dos estudos incluíram a análise da reflexão como estratégia pedagógica, o seu impacto no pensamento crítico, e os efeitos na qualidade dos cuidados e nos indicadores assistenciais. **Conclusão:** A análise dos estudos demonstrou que a prática reflexiva, em contexto de supervisão clínica, potencia o desenvolvimento de competências críticas, a autonomia profissional e a qualidade dos cuidados. Identificaram-se, contudo, constrangimentos à sua implementação, como a escassez de tempo, a falta de formação estruturada e a limitação de recursos pedagógicos.

Palavras-chave: Desenvolvimento Profissional; Educação em Enfermagem; Enfermagem; Reflexão; Tomada de Decisões.

Resumen

Introducción: La supervisión clínica en Enfermería constituye un eje estructurante del proceso formativo, contribuyendo a la calidad de los cuidados prestados y al desarrollo profesional de los estudiantes. La práctica reflexiva se ha consolidado como una estrategia pedagógica que promueve el pensamiento crítico y la toma de decisiones fundamentada. Sin embargo, la evidencia científica sobre el impacto real de esta práctica en la supervisión clínica permanece dispersa y poco sistematizada. **Objetivos:** Mapear las evidencias disponibles sobre el impacto de la práctica reflexiva en la supervisión clínica en Enfermería. **Metodología:** Se realizó una *Scoping Review*, siguiendo las directrices metodológicas del Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI), y reportada de acuerdo con las recomendaciones PRISMA 2020 (Page et al., 2021), con base en la estrategia PCC (Participantes, Concepto, Contexto). La búsqueda se llevó a cabo en las bases de datos PubMed, EBSCOhost y SciELO, abarcando el período de 2018 a 2024. Se utilizaron descriptores validados por MeSH y DeCS, combinados mediante el operador booleano AND. **Resultados:** Tras aplicar los criterios establecidos de inclusión y exclusión, se seleccionaron seis artículos científicos para su análisis final en esta *Scoping Review*. Los objetivos centrales de los estudios incluyeron el análisis de la reflexión como estrategia pedagógica, su impacto en el pensamiento crítico y los efectos en la calidad de la atención e indicadores de atención. **Conclusión:** El análisis de los estudios demostró que la práctica reflexiva, en el contexto de la supervisión clínica, potencia el desarrollo de competencias críticas, la autonomía profesional y la calidad de los cuidados. No obstante, se identificaron limitaciones para su implementación, como la falta de tiempo, la insuficiente formación estructurada y la limitación de recursos pedagógicos.

Descriptores: Desarrollo Profesional; Educación en Enfermería; Enfermería; Reflexión; Toma de Decisiones.

Introduction

Clinical supervision in nursing constitutes an essential educational context, serving as a structural process for the professional nursing practice, quality of care and patient safety. This process, grounded in reflective strategies for clinical practice, is recognized for promoting professional development, patient protection and fostering excellence in care delivery. Under the guidance of an experienced professional, effective, comprehensive, and high-quality supervision is ensured, with a decisive impact on the educational journey, both initially and throughout lifelong professional development⁽¹⁻³⁾.

The pedagogical relationship established between the supervisor and the supervisee has proven to be crucial for the acquisition and consolidation of personal, relational, and clinical competencies, with clear reflections on the quality of care provided. In this regard, there has been a growing investment in clinical supervision as a training strategy, promoting a nursing practice that is more evidence-based and possesses greater interventional efficacy. Thus, it becomes imperative to value the role of the supervisor, recognizing the need to integrate, in a contextualized manner, theoretical learning with practical experience⁽³⁾.

Within this framework, the professional regulation set forth in the *Diário da República* and by the *Ordem dos Enfermeiros* stands out through the granting of Differentiated and Advanced Expanded Competence in Clinical Supervision. This competence is fundamental to sustaining qualified and comprehensive care, anchored in a model of critical and reflective training. The exercise of this competency strengthens professional identity, ensures the quality of educational support, and facilitates the acquisition of skills that have a direct impact on the safety of care and improvements in health⁽⁴⁾.

Clinical supervision aims, therefore, to guide and support the training pathway toward professional practice through strategies that enhance meaningful learning, autonomy, and empowerment via reflective analysis of practice. This approach promotes the adoption of practices aligned with high standards of quality and safety⁽⁵⁻⁷⁾.

In this regard, it becomes essential to employ teaching and learning strategies that have proven effective in promoting critical, conscious, and informed decision making. The consolidation of competencies in this area stems, to a large extent, from learning acquired in clinical practice through systematic processes of discussion and critical reflection on daily care situations⁽¹⁾.

Reflective practice proves beneficial for the performance of multidisciplinary teams, promoting the continuous development and sustained improvement of care practices⁽⁵⁾.

It is therefore important to actively involve professionals in the evaluation of their own practices, recognizing that such involvement leads to the creation of strategies tailored to continuous improvement. Critical and reflective analysis of practices, as a process for transforming thought and action, reinforces the scientific and social identity of the profession. Thus, the systematic application of reflective practice, within an environment conducive to learning, sharing, and autonomous and responsible decision making, contributes to the development of analytical and self-reflective competencies^(6,7).

The growing complexity of healthcare contexts requires nursing professionals to possess a set of competencies anchored in evidence-based practice, clinical reasoning, critical thinking, problem-solving, flexibility, innovation, and adaptability. The application of these competencies enables more effective, efficient, and safe clinical decisions. Within this framework, it is essential to integrate pedagogical models that encourage the active role of the student and promote learning habits sustained by reflective practice⁽⁸⁻¹⁰⁾.

Reflective practice thus constitutes a working method that fosters professional and personal growth through the critical analysis of experience and the emergence of new meanings applied to the clinical context. This process leads to the acquisition of grounded knowledge, sustained by the development of cognitive, relational, and ethical competencies^(11,12).

From a theoretical perspective, it is important to highlight the contribution of Donald Schön, who, since the 1980s, systematized reflective practice as a cornerstone of professional training. This author proposed a pedagogy centered on the articulation between theory and practice through reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, and knowledge-in-action. For Schön, professional performance is severely compromised when training is reduced to the technical application of standardized solutions, neglecting reflective thinking. Professional practice, as he conceived it, is a space for continuous development, whose richness emerges from the interaction between supervisor and supervisee, from the problematization of experience, and from the valuation of tacit knowledge, as opposed to traditional teaching models⁽¹³⁾.

Within this framework, it is assumed that learning to learn—through autonomous experimentation and critical reflection—constitutes a higher level of learning compared to models based on the transmission of knowledge⁽¹⁴⁾.

Based on these assumptions, deepening the knowledge regarding the impact of reflective practice on clinical supervision in nursing is fully justified, given that the available evidence is fragmented and poorly systematized. The literature lacks integrative syntheses that allow for a clearer understanding of the contribution of reflective practice to clinical supervision and to the professional development of nurses. Therefore, this study aims to conduct a scoping review, following the methodological guidelines of the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) and the PRISMA 2020 reporting guidelines⁽¹⁵⁾, with the objective of mapping the main evidence available within this field.

Method

The growing complexity of healthcare, combined with the need to ensure evidence-based clinical practice, has driven the development of rigorous synthesis methodologies capable of mapping and organizing available knowledge. In this context, the scoping review emerges as a robust, transparent, and reliable methodological approach, aimed at critically examining and

mapping the extent, nature, and characteristics of the scientific evidence related to a specific topic⁽¹⁵⁾. To structure this review, we followed the methodology proposed by the JBI for Scoping Reviews, adopting the PCC (Participants, Concept, Context) strategy. This strategy guided the formulation of the research question: “What is the impact of reflective practice on clinical supervision in nursing?” Accordingly, the following were defined:

- P (Participants) – Nurses;
- C (Concept) – Reflective practice;
- C (Context) – Clinical supervision in nursing.

The outlined objective was to map the existing scientific evidence regarding the impact of reflective practice on clinical supervision in nursing.

The search was conducted between January and March 2024 across the following electronic databases: PubMed, EBSCOhost, and SciELO. Validated terms from Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) and *Descritores em Ciências da Saúde* (DeCS) were used, specifically: “Nursing”; “Education, Nursing”; “Decision Making”; “Professional Development”; “Reflection”. These search terms were combined using the Boolean operator AND, generating the following specific search strategies:

- PubMed: “Reflection” AND “Education, Nursing” – 81 results;
- EBSCOhost: “Decision Making” AND “Education, Nursing” – 112 results;
- SciELO: “Professional Development” AND “Nursing” AND “Reflection” – 107 results.

A total of 300 articles were identified and subsequently screened according to predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria were: publications between 2018 and 2024; full text available free of charge; languages including Portuguese, Spanish, English, or Brazilian Portuguese; peer-reviewed studies. The exclusion criteria included: lack of description of the study type; inadequacy of the title or content regarding the scope of the study; duplicate records across databases.

After removing duplicates and applying the criteria, 103 articles were initially selected, of which 33 were considered eligible after reviewing the titles and abstracts. Of these, 6 articles were included in the final analysis as they fully met the established criteria.

The study selection process was systematized using a flowchart adapted from PRISMA 2020 (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses), as illustrated in Figure 1, ensuring the traceability and methodological transparency of the inclusion process.

Results

After applying the established inclusion and exclusion criteria, six scientific articles were selected for final analysis in this scoping review. The included studies focus on reflective practice in the context of clinical supervision in nursing, presenting diverse methodologies, including qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods approaches.

Sample sizes ranged from 8 to 719 participants, including nurse supervisors, nursing students, and nurses in clinical training settings. Most of the studies were conducted in hospital or academic environments, within clinical education or supervised practice contexts. The main objectives of the studies included analyzing reflection as a pedagogical strategy, its impact on critical thinking, and its effects on the quality of care and nursing care indicators.

The methodological characteristics of the included studies and their main findings are presented below:

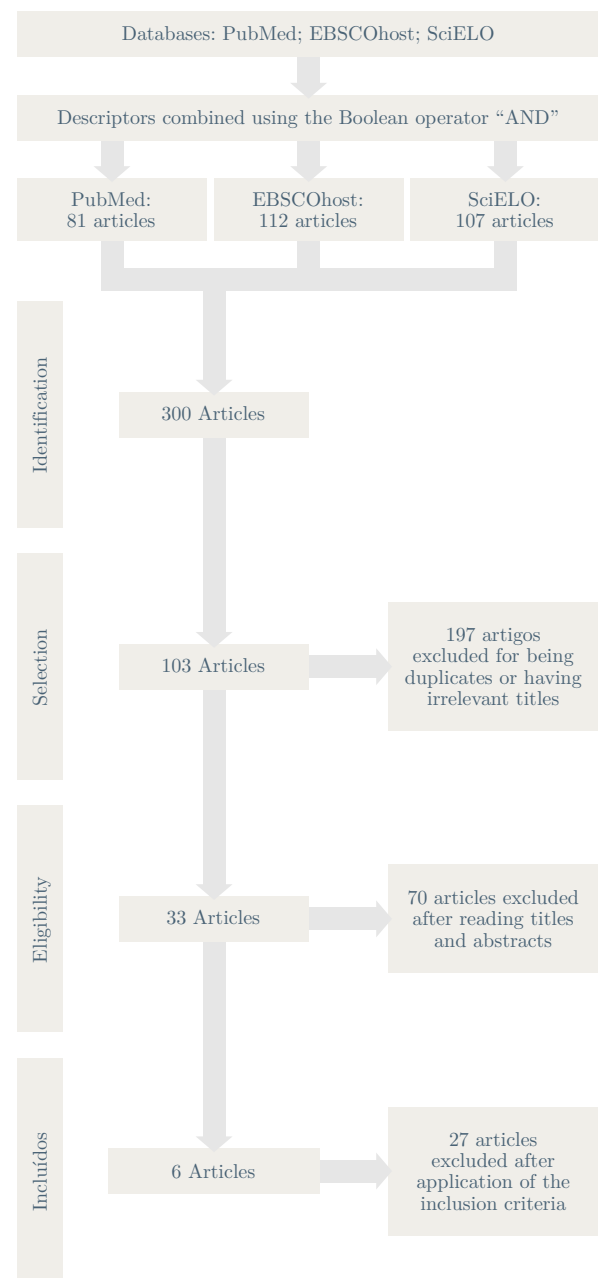


Figure 1: PRISMA 2020 Flowchart, adapted from Galvão *et al* ⁽¹⁶⁾.

Table 1: Characterization of the studies included in the scoping review.

Article Title, Authors, Year, Study Type, Objective and Sample	Results
1. Clinical Supervision Strategies: Critical- Reflexive Analysis of practices. Pires, R.; Santos, M.; Pereira, F.; Pires, M; 2021. Study: Exploratory Qualitative. Objective: To identify current clinical supervision strategies. Sample: 42 nurses.	– Critical-reflective analysis of practices was considered a supervision strategy that promotes professional development and the quality of care; – A set of individual and contextual constraints was identified that hinder the implementation of this strategy; – Critical-reflective analysis of practices is crucial for fostering knowledge, critical thinking, and decision making.
2. The reflective practice of resident nurses in the teaching-learning process at teaching hospitals. Paiva, A.; Silva, K.; 2024. Study: Qualitative, single-case study. Objective: To analyze reflective practice in the teaching-learning process of nurses in residency programs at teaching hospitals in Minas Gerais, Brazil. Sample: 47 nurses.	– “Knowing-in-action” reflection predominated in the teaching-learning process; – The practice of learning by doing and the discussion of clinical cases were considered potential strategies for the teaching-learning process; – It is necessary to expand spaces, time, and opportunities to discuss situations of doubt and uncertainty that foster reflection on “reflection-in-action,” thereby enabling more critical performance; – Teaching-learning situations should be promoted to increase opportunities for students to engage in diverse experiences. This diversity fosters the accumulation of a repertoire of knowledge and experiences among residents, preparing them to cope with the demands of their work routine.
3. Strategies for Clinical Supervision, Learning, and Critical Thinking Among Nursing Students. Pinto, C.; Vieira, R.; Carvalho, A.; Silva, A.; 2023. Study: Interpretive qualitative. Objective: To identify supervisory strategies that facilitate critical thinking skills in the context of clinical education. Sample: 8 students.	– The importance of critical thinking skills within the clinical education context was recognized, considering them fundamental to clinical judgment, decision making, and problem-solving; – Critical thinking was recognized as essential for professional accountability and quality of care; – Reflection is one of the strategies identified as most conducive to critical thinking; – To establish the most appropriate supervision strategy for the student and the learning context, it is essential that the supervisor not only know their supervisees academic background but also recognize their individuality and needs.
4. Saudi nursing student satisfaction and evaluation of reflective practice: A cross-sectional study. Al-Osaimi, D.; 2022. Study: Descriptive quantitative. Objective: To examine nursing students' perceptions of reflective practice. Sample: 261 students.	– Reflection on clinical experiences is an important component in enabling students to identify their own abilities and limitations and is related to students satisfaction; – Fourth-year students report lower levels of satisfaction and reflection compared to third-year students, mainly due to a perceived lack of time to engage in reflection, which raises concerns about the need to provide greater space and support for nursing students to engage in reflection on their learning process.
5. Supervision in Clinical Nursing Education: Significant Experiences of Nursing Supervisors. Aviz, A.; Pereira, M.; Simões, J.; 2022. Study: Descriptive and exploratory qualitative. Objective: To analyze the perceptions and reflections of specialized nursing supervisors in the context of family health nursing regarding supervision in clinical education, taking into account their significant experiences. Sample: 10 nurses.	– Clinical supervision in nursing plays a crucial role in the professional and personal development of future nursing professionals, serving as an essential tool for promoting core competencies required for decision making and problem-solving in real clinical practice settings; – The quality of supervision is fundamental to the preparation of competent professionals; – Clinical supervision extends beyond scientific and technical knowledge; it is crucial for developing reflective capacity, personal and emotional support, and organizational skills; – It is a process of monitoring the students' learning pathway, guiding them in developing the autonomy required for the “knowing-how-to-be” and “knowing-how-to-do” inherent to nursing practices; – Clinical supervision is based on a collaborative relationship between the supervisor and the student, and the quality of this relationship will determine the success of the supervision process; – The relationship between highly qualified and experienced nurses and future nursing professionals offers the latter the opportunity to build a foundation of theoretical and practical knowledge rooted in clinical reality; – Clinical supervision serves as the perfect bridge between academic theory and nursing practice; – Learning only occurs through encountering different experiences and subsequently reflecting upon them, so that individuals can construct their own knowledge.
6. Clinical Supervision: A Contribution to Improving Quality Indicators in Nursing Care. Sérgio M; Carvalho A.; Pinto C; 2023. Study: Observational, retrospective, quantitative. Objective: To compare quality indices and indicators of nursing care in medical and surgical units when clinical supervision is implemented. Sample: 719 nurses.	– The implementation of reflective practice in clinical supervision has demonstrated that structured interventions targeting critical knowledge directly lead to changes in professionals' behaviors and attitudes; – The supervision strategy directs practice toward reflection on the outcomes of quality indices and indicators that have a direct impact on patients, which contributes to the development of personal and professional competencies while simultaneously stimulating the professional recognition of the nursing profession, thereby generating value.

Discussion

Clinical supervision in nursing is an essential training process, grounded in a collaborative relationship between experienced supervisors and students in training, with a direct impact on professional development, the acquisition of critical competencies, and the quality of care. By fostering reflective capacity, emotional support, and the integration of theory and practice, this relationship promotes meaningful and autonomous learning⁽¹⁷⁾.

The reviewed literature reinforces the role of the supervisor as a facilitator of professional growth, a promoter of critical reflection, and a guide throughout the learning process^(1,3). In this context, it is essential

that the supervisor plans, monitors, and evaluates the students learning progress, adapting strategies to their specific needs and ensuring the integration of theory and practice^(3,18).

Reflective practice emerges as a central educational strategy, promoting critical analysis of clinical experience, the development of critical thinking, and evidence-based decision making. This approach, grounded in the concepts of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, provides a continuous learning space and knowledge consolidation^(2,17,20-22).

It has been found that the diversity of clinical experiences and the opportunity for structured reflection contribute significantly to the construction of professional identity, promoting student autonomy

and accountability⁽²²⁾. Donald Schön's theory, by emphasizing reflection-in-action, supports this perspective by valuing experience as a source of tacit knowledge and a driver of professional learning⁽¹³⁾.

The included studies reinforce that reflective practice should be systematically integrated into nursing education, promoting ethical, critical-thinking professionals capable of well-founded decision making in complex clinical contexts. When properly implemented, this practice is associated with improvements in the quality of care, patient safety, and professional satisfaction^(1,5,6,21).

The evidence also highlights the positive impacts of reflective supervision on indicators of care quality, the enhancement of the profession, and students motivation^(6,7,21). Nevertheless, studies reveal operational limitations to its implementation, such as time constraints, the lack of formal spaces for reflection, and the absence of specific training for supervisors^(2,21,22).

Additionally, there is a lack of formal methodologies for implementing reflective supervision and a need to provide diverse clinical experiences accompanied by guided reflection sessions^(19,25). These gaps hinder the transformative potential of clinical supervision and require consistent institutional and pedagogical investment.

Beyond its technical contribution, reflective practice proves to be an effective tool for errors prevention, consolidating ethical conduct, and strengthening professional awareness. Its integration from the earliest stages of training is associated with safer, more evidence-based, and ethically responsible practice^(26,25,28).

Elements such as curiosity, self-analysis, and critical thinking are highlighted as essential to the effectiveness of reflective practice. Pedagogical strategies such as learning journals have proven to be useful in structuring reflection and maximizing skill acquisition^(25,29).

In synthesis, reflective practice constitutes a fundamental dimension of clinical supervision in nursing, contributing to the development of professionals who are more autonomous, critical, ethically committed, and prepared for the challenges posed by the com-

plexity of care settings. Its effective implementation depends on robust pedagogical approaches, adequate institutional resources, and properly qualified supervisors.

Limitations of the Included Studies and the Review

It is important to note that the included studies present significant methodological limitations, such as small sample sizes, lack of instrument validation, and restricted geographic scope, which limit the generalizability of the results. Furthermore, this scoping review did not include the critical assessment of the methodological quality of the studies, in accordance with the methodology proposed by the JBI⁽¹⁵⁾. However, the application of the PRISMA 2020 guidelines⁽¹⁶⁾ and the PCC strategy ensured a methodological level appropriate to the exploratory nature of the study. It is recommended that future research further investigate the effectiveness of specific models of reflective supervision, assess their replicability in different clinical contexts, and explore strategies for their pedagogical systematization.

Conclusion

This scoping review mapped the scientific evidence regarding the impact of reflective practice on clinical supervision in nursing. The results indicate that reflective practice is an essential pedagogical and clinical tool, as it fosters critical thinking, evidence-based decision making, and the development of professional competencies.

It was observed that, when integrated in a structured manner into clinical supervision, reflection contributes to students' autonomy, improves the quality of care, and strengthens the professional identity of future nurses.

However, barriers to its implementation remain evident, such as time constraints, the lack of formal spaces for reflection, and the need for pedagogical training for supervisors.

Therefore, institutional investment in robust pedagogical models, supervised by qualified professionals capable of creating environments conducive to critical reflection and meaningful learning, becomes imperative.

It is recommended that future research examine the effectiveness of specific reflective supervision strategies in greater depth, explore their applicability in different clinical contexts, and incorporate the students' perspective in order to strengthen the empirical basis for this topic.

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