

Counselling Supervision

Lecture 8

Methods of Counselling Supervision

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METHODS OF COUNSELLING SUPERVISION

Lecture Seven Outline

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8.1 Introduction

In this lecture, we will discuss the methods of counselling supervision and explore various ways of negotiating for supervision contract.

8.2 Expected Learning Outcomes

By the end of this lecture, you should be able to:

- a) Discuss the methods of counselling supervision.
- b) Explore various ways of negotiating for supervision contract.

8.3 Methods of Counselling Supervision

According to Cloud, (1986) each method of supervision has strengths and weaknesses. None of the methods singularly can meet all the needs of the counsellors. Supervision takes place in a number of methods such as; self-supervision, one-to-one, co-supervision, small group, peer group, team/staff, organisational supervision. One or more supervisors maybe involved, the supervision maybe live, or deal with reported material. What is important is that different methods of supervision are not presented as if they are in competition, and one method as better than the other. All have strengths and weaknesses, and the skill needed is the ability to know which method is most suitable for this supervisee at this stage in their development. It is also important for

supervisors to ask themselves which methods of supervision they feel comfortable with, and which they consider to be either beyond their competence, or outside their beliefs.

This lecture will describe a number of supervisory methods, reviewing the strengths and weaknesses of each, and look at issues emerging from that particular form of supervision.

Self-supervision (self- reflection): This is at times referred to as ‘internal supervisor,’ (Casement, 1985). It is the ability to monitor one’s own counselling work. One of the reasons for moving towards supervisees as their own supervisors has been a reaction to supervision as a life-long commitment. The main reason for self -supervision is the need to create a reflective forum where supervisees are able to examine their own work, evaluate it effectively, and move towards different interventions with clients. While most supervisors see this as admirable and very necessary, they consider self-supervision as a preparation for supervision, rather than a substitute for it. The following are the strengths and weaknesses of self-supervision.

Strengths:

- Involves oneself alone.
- No financial commitment.
- Can utilize one’s own time.
- Builds up confidence in counsellor’s own reflections.
- Great independency.
- Proactive rather than passive response to supervision.
- Can be used as counselling is taking place.
- It encourages reflexivity.

Weaknesses:

- Counsellors may not be in touch with what is happening within themselves.
- Counsellors may miss significant factors in the relationship with clients.
- Counsellors may deny their own issues.
- Counsellors may be impulsive in interventions with clients during the sessions.

Steps involved in Self-supervision

Self-supervision is a set of procedures the counsellor uses to modify self-selected professional attitudes or behaviours. It proceeds through a number of steps such as;

Self-observation: the counsellor observes self on video or audiotape in a session with the client.

Self-assessment: the counsellor chooses criteria and assesses self against them.

Selecting a goal: a behaviour is chosen as a goal to be changed (reflective listening).

Planning for change: the change is planned.

Implementation: change is implemented.

Readjustment: change is reformulated according to what happens with the client.

One-to-one supervision or individual supervision

As the words imply, one-to-one, or individual supervision is a supervisory arrangement involving one supervisor and one supervisee. This is the most popularly used form of supervision. In some instances it is required by training while in others the choice is left to supervisees. The following are the strengths and weaknesses of One-to-one Supervision.

Strengths

- More time for supervisees.
- More opportunity for supervisees to hear about and experience a particular counselling approach.
- Gives the opportunity to create clearer and more focused learning objectives highly personalised.
- It parallel individual counselling.
- Allows for strong mentoring.
- Allows supervisees to concentrate on a number of their clients.
- Supervisees can work at his/ her own pace.
- A non-competitive environment (no sibling rivalry).
- Development of the supervisee can be monitored more easily.

- Supervisor interventions can be geared more specifically towards the learning of this supervisee.
- Full focus is on the individual supervisee isolated context.

Weaknesses:

- Input from only one person (supervisor).
- Becomes difficult if the supervisory relationship breaks down.
- Evaluation and feedback from one perspective.
- Can become collusive with very little challenge.
- Can create dependency in supervisees.
- Can concentrate on one counselling approach.
- Non-comparison for supervisees on other ways of working.

Individual supervision is expensive in terms of time and sometimes of economics. It is of particular benefit to those who are at the beginning of their client work and who are seeing several clients, and is also often the choice of full-time experienced counsellors who spend a lot of time in client work. It provides a systematic and ongoing forum that is highly educational. Every counsellor should have the opportunity of experiencing individual supervision at some stage in their training.

One-to-one co-supervision or peer supervision

Individual co-supervision is an opportunity for two individuals to take turns in being supervisor and supervisee. In altering the roles of supervisor and supervisee they share the time together within one session or take sessions in turn in being supervisor/supervisee. Below are the strengths and weaknesses of the One-to-one co-supervision:

Strengths:

- Can be easily set up.
- Works well where both participants are about equal levels of development.
- Experienced counsellors can find this empowering.
- Eliminates the 'expert' side from supervision.
- Inexpensive.

Weaknesses:

- May be loose around boundaries such as social roles involved.
- Can easily become collusive and lacks challenge.
- Can become competitive.
- Has to deal with the difficulty of changing roles within one relationship.

Because of the need to change roles, and to trust one another, it is highly advisable that one-to-one co-supervision be not the only form of supervision open to supervisees. At the beginning of training supervisees need a stronger structure in which they can feel secure, and where they do not have to take on the quite difficult role of supervisor when they are still learning how to be supervisees. Some of the key issues that must be put into consideration in choosing this form of supervision;

- Choosing the correct partner.
- Ability of both to create a learning relationship.
- Successfully negotiating roles and responsibilities.
- Clarifying counselling orientations and how to work together if different.
- Negotiating a supervisory contract that fits in with the abilities of both.
- Dealing with possible difficult points.

Remley et al. (1987), proposes a ten session (one hour each) programme, with evaluation built in so that modification can be made to suit the needs of the participants.

Group supervision or leader led supervision

This involves one or more supervisors working with a number of supervisees. It involves working with individuals in the group or using the group as a focal point. Group supervision is a working alliance between a supervisor and several counsellors in which counsellors can regularly offer an account or recording of their work, reflect on it and receive feedback and, where appropriate, guidance from their supervisor and colleagues. The objective of this alliance is to enable each counsellor to gain in ethical competence, confidence and creativity so as to give his/her best possible service to clients.

Group supervision is perhaps the most widely practised form of supervision but poorly understood' and is still at a rudimentary stage of development. In establishing group supervision one need to ask themselves; what the group goals are, supervisor and supervisees roles and the balance between teaching, case conceptualisation and interpersonal process. Early forms of group supervision combined case presentation, group dynamics within the supervision group and didactic material (Orton, 1965), while more up-to-date models use the therapeutic power of the group and stress the developmental stages of the supervisees (Sansburry, 1982; Yogev, 1982). Some of the group supervision formats include:

- a) A supervisor, designated as leader of the group, works with individuals within a group setting.
- b) There is a designated leader but the group process within supervision is used as a learning focus. The following are the strengths and weaknesses of group supervision:

Strengths

- Allows access to other people's work.
- Richness in hearing others' experiences.
- Increases exposure to diverse situations.
- For people working in isolated ways, the group provides interaction with colleagues and a sense of belonging.
- Efficient use of limited time.
- Allows more complete feedback and reflection of who you are as a counsellor.
- If safe enough, it is the place to be authentic, take risks, disclose failure or vulnerability and be helped to do something about it. Family patterns often surface in groups, such as rivalry.
- Possible to receive and hear support and to challenge at the same time.
- A place where you can rest as well as be active.
- Opportunity to learn to supervise others and to practice.
- Allows for various mediums: guest speakers, viewing of films/videos and so on.
- Trainees may be less resistant to the supervisor's feedback if other group members also acknowledge the value of the supervisor's suggestions.

Weaknesses

- Less vocal participants can easily “hide.”
- May focus on problems not of common interest to all.
- Less time for individual presentation.
- Issues of confidentiality can be tricky regarding client, counsellor and agency.
- At its worst, it is a place where it feels dangerous to be authentic, which invites competition.

Groups provide a different context in which to assess the performance of trainees.

Groups with a range of experience and expertise can work well. It is important that the range is wide enough so that experienced members can grow and be challenged and so that the least experienced will still be valued and counted equally.

Peer group supervision

This is where three or more counsellors share responsibility for providing each other with supervision within a group context. Peers are of equal status – training or experience. It is good for experienced counsellors needing to share experiences.

Peer group supervision provides a forum for:

- Sharing of work problems and experiences.
- Exchange of ideas.
- Referral networks.
- Sharing of news on counselling profession.
- Mutual support for members’ team or staff.
- Could be internal or external.
- Consist of individuals working together who employ an outside supervisor to help them deal with their client work.
- Can also help deal with interpersonal issues among the staff team.

8.4 Negotiating for supervision contract

Negotiating for individual supervision

Agree on the basics. Negotiate the length, frequency (hours of supervision), place, time, cost/payment issues and agreement about missed sessions and holidays. A supervisor may have expectations of how he/she wants the supervisee to record client or supervision material; that is, how to present and keep him/her up to date with the case load and working situation. The supervisee also may have expectations and preferences about these matters.

A supervisor must make clear his/her expectations of ethical and “professional” practice. The supervisor must be aware of what steps he/she would take if there were doubts about a supervisee’s competence or ethics. Usually, a supervisor will first raise the issue with the supervisee directly and make clear demands on the supervisee. The supervisor may reserve the right to stop working with a supervisee if he/she fails to comply.

There may be specific learning agendas that the supervisee brings to supervision. For example, “I find transference difficult to understand and spot and would like help to recognize it.”

The supervisor must schedule reviews that may or may not include course or agency requirements for evaluation or assessment.

The supervisor may need to help determine how to balance time:

- How much help is needed with addressing “professional” practice issues?
- How much focus should be placed on the development of knowledge and skills?
- To what degree will supervision be a resource for stress management and the release of tension and feelings arising from work (and maybe life)?
- It is the shared responsibility of you and your supervisee to make sure that your clients get enough of “their” supervision time; that they are brought in and thought about sufficiently to enable your best practice, and that issues of your personal maintenance and development do not interfere with supervision. This is also why review mechanisms are so important.

The working agreement

Some issues may need to be specifically agreed upon, such as the following which may be useful to document these issues in writing:

- How will the rights and responsibilities of counsellors or supervisors be safeguarded?
- What happens if the counsellor fails to show up for sessions?
- What agreement does the supervisor have with the training institution that is presenting the course the supervisee is attending?
- How can it be ensured that clients' rights are upheld?
- What action will the supervisor take if he/she is concerned about the competence of the counsellor to work with a client?
- What about adhering to codes of ethics?

Private supervision

This is a private arrangement between a counsellor and a supervisor.

The supervisor has responsibility for the counsellor's ethical practices but does not carry organizational responsibility for evaluation and assessment.

In this arrangement the counsellor is free to select his/her supervisor.

External counselling supervisor on behalf of workplace/Training institution

You may be accountable to the contracting organization for the quality of counselling and for upholding ethical practices. Your job will be easier if the workplace already has in place the following practices and if the staff and/or trainees are also aware of them:

- Statement of its aims and its philosophy of counselling.
- Description of administrative practice such as record-keeping.
- Account of the management arrangements for work implementation such as clear job descriptions, case load, overtime, work boundaries.
- Account of arrangements for supervision, including overall responsibility for the quality of the work with clients.

- Reporting requirements and confidentiality practices required by the agency of the supervisor and supervisee.
- Performance appraisal system.
- Complaints procedures for clients and lines of responsibility in case of complaint.

As a supervisor, you will need to be:

Confident in managing the relationship with the training body/organization.

Willing and able to appraise, evaluate or assess the counsellor on behalf of such bodies within your agreed role.

Trainees and employees may not have selected you and may be required to stay with you to comply with the course/organization, so you will need confidence in having power and responsibility that is not negotiable.

Dealing with resistant supervisees

Some supervisees may feel anxious and apprehensive about being supervised. Establishing an effective supervisory relationship is key to addressing supervisees' comfort levels. They must be made to feel comfortable enough to share the fears and anxieties that underlie their resistance or non-disclosure. This can be done by:

- Emphasizing that anxiety is a common response to supervision.
- Helping supervisees recognize the role of supervision and the individual benefits to themselves as counsellors.
- Ensuring there is a clear understanding of goals and expectations.
- Setting clear frameworks for confidentiality and accountability, especially in relation to practices that are below the expected standards.
- Establishing a warm, honest and open working alliance with flexibility for informal "evaluation".
- Being aware of the power dynamics and examining whether your own behaviours contribute to the resistance exhibited by supervisees. This can result if a supervisor asks the supervisees to perform tasks beyond their capacity or if the supervisor acts as an authority figure.

Peer groups

Peer groups can be successful. Successful peer groups usually have the following characteristics:

- Meet regularly or at least often enough.
- Work in a disciplined manner with allocated time arrangements.
- Work to an agreed contract or arrangement that addresses colleague responsibility and mutual accountability.

Peer groups are usually clear about the following:

- How time is allocated.
- Whether the group has help from an outside consultant from time to time.

Arrangements for leaving and joining

Guidelines for setting up peer supervision group

The main feature of peer supervision is that group members are undertaking to be both supervisors and supervisees, and are developing their abilities to exercise both roles effectively. The group's "rules and culture" will develop over time; everything does not have to be "right" immediately. Following are some ideas for setting up a contract for a peer supervision group.

As supervisor, I take shared responsibility for:

- Ensuring enough space for each of us to present our practice issues in our own way.
- Helping us explore and clarify thinking and feeling underlying practice.
- Giving clear feedback.
- Sharing information, experience and skill.
- Challenging practices we judge to be unethical, unwise or incompetent.
- Challenging personal and professional blind spots.
- Being aware of the organizational contracts in which each member operates.

As supervisee I take responsibility for:

- Identifying practice issues with which I need help and asking for time to deal with these issues.
- Becoming increasingly able to share feelings freely.
- Identifying and communicating the kind of response that is useful for me.
- Becoming more aware of my own organizational contracts and their implications.
- Being open to others' feedback.
- Developing the ability to discriminate what feedback is useful.
- Noticing when I justify, explain or defend before listening to feedback.
- Noticing, seeking feedback and reflecting on the way I compete or advise within the group.

7.5 Summary

In this lecture we discussed the methods of counselling supervision and explored various ways of negotiating for supervision contract.

7.6 Further Reading

Bernard, J. M., & Goodyear, R. K. (2013). *Fundamentals of supervision* (5th ed.). Toronto: Pearson.

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