Assessing Clinical Supervisee Games via Clinician Competence and Professional Development: Implications and Recommendations

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Watkin’s (2014) in his article, Clinical Supervision in the 21st Century: Revisiting Pressing Needs and Improving Possibilities, contends that because the supervisor-supervisee alliance may well be our most robust and significant supervision variable, an alarming lack of field-based data in this area begs for immediate empirical attention. In the current study, we specifically addressed this alliance with 46 clinical counsours (supervisees) in an agency setting, by exploring the supervisor-supervisee alliance, using a multi-rater process, and by examining the perspectives of three highly experienced supervisors rating ‘interpersonal games’ (Kadushin, 1999). We also used records of actual supervision sessions to elicit more in-depth reflective data, including supervisee competence and professional development ratings, utilized as recommended by Grant, Schofield, & Crawford (2012) and Wheeler & Richards (2007).

Given the importance of the supervisor-supervisee alliance, its integrity throughout supervision is tantamount to the success of the supervision process. If either the supervisor or the supervisee acts in inauthentic ways, the supervisee behavior here can encompass taking charge of the supervisory session, by exploring the supervisor-supervisee alliance, using a multi-rater process, and by examining the perspectives of three highly experienced supervisors rating ‘interpersonal games’ (Kadushin, 1999). We also used records of actual supervision sessions to elicit more in-depth reflective data, including supervisee competence and professional development ratings, utilized as recommended by Grant, Schofield, & Crawford (2012) and Wheeler & Richards (2007).

FOUR TYPES OF SUPERVISEE GAMES

• Manipulating Demand Levels
  This game stems from the supervisee enacting a conflict between the organizational orientation centered on what is needed to ensure efficient operation of the agency versus the professional orientation focused on best meeting the needs of the client. Kadushin calls this method of manipulating demands on them by the supervisee as ‘two against the agency’, ‘reducing for supervision’. Another form of manipulating the demands on them can be called ‘be nice to me because I am nice to you’.

• Redefining the Relationship
  One kind of redefinition suggests a shift from supervisor-supervisee to more clinician-helper/helper. The game might be called ‘Protect the infirm’ whereas the supervisee would rather expose themselves than their work. Another way supervisees can redefine the relationship is called ‘evaluation is not for friends’, which is the supervisee trying to shift to a peer-to-peer friendship and/or equals in the supervision endeavor.

• Reducing Power Disparity
  One major source of the supervisor’s power is in their expertise, greater knowledge and skill. If the supervisee can establish that the supervisor is not so expert, then some power differential is mitigated and with it a reduction of the supervisor’s power. One such game here might be called ‘if you knew Freud like I know Freud’ and ‘you remember this concept don’t you’, shifting the power so the supervisee is instructing the supervisor. Another way to play this particular game is called “What do you know about it?”, where the supervisee uses their work or personal experiences to gain a power advantage (e.g., because I’m younger I’m more in tune with... because I have young kids, I and more experienced with...).”

• Controlling the Situation
  Supervisee behavior here can encompass taking charge of the supervisory meeting via ‘I have a little list’, trying to ‘head them off at the pass’, and/or ‘it’s all so confusing’. These strategies can control the evaluative threat to the supervisee by controlling the agenda. Of course, often the work that needs to be addressed in supervision does not get addressed.

RESULTS

Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predominant Themes of those scoring medium or high</th>
<th>[from superviser notes]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Game 1:</td>
<td>Pattern of complaining about the client caseload, and overall workload</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game 2:</td>
<td>Pattern of blaming of others to avoid responsibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ratings on Counselor Competence [All]:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Game</th>
<th>Occurrence</th>
<th>% Occurrence of Intensity</th>
<th>Mean Level</th>
<th>Prof. Dev.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Game 1: Manipulating demand level of supervision</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game 2: Redefining the[ supervisory] relationship</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>41.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game 3: Reducing power disparity</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game 4: Controlling the situation</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>52.6</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CONSIDERATIONS

1. Assess resistance/evaluate anxiety by identifying intensity of ‘game’ behaviors: If low intensity, then this can be considered a normal part of supervision. If medium to high, this could be detrimental to growth of the client.

2. Role out a number of other possible issues that could produce high levels of game playing, including transference/counter-transference, power concerns, cultural issues.

3. Identify, monitor and build upon level of professional development

4. Meet the therapist where they are.

   Given that supervisee games are often associated with managing anxiety related to the supervision process, it can be helpful to utilize non-threatening approaches to lessen the potential and/ or degree for game playing.

   Clinical Supervision Interventions

   - Self Instruction Strategies
   - Cognitive Restructuring
   - Reviewing Audio/Video recording(s) of Counseling Session(s)
   - Role Play
   - Group Supervision
   - Plea for Help (Wilbur & Wilbur)
   - “Format B” (Borders)

   Interpersonal Process Recall
   - Assigning Readings and/or Films to Review
   - Micro-training
   - Modeling
   - Positive Reinforcement
   - Validation
   - Targeting Supervisee’s Psychosocial Development, Learning Styles, and Creating a Climate Consistent with Styles and Development
   - Self-Assessments
   - Self-Disclosure About own Counseling Experiences
   - Pointing out Incongruences/Discrepancies
   - Confronting Resistance and/or Blind Spot
   - Role Reversal
   - Utilize Matrix