Approaching Supervision From a Developmental Perspective: The Counselor Complexity Model

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This article presents a developmental model of counselor supervision that conceptualizes the training process as a sequence of identifiable stages through which the trainee progresses. The progress of the supervisee is described from the entry level counselor through the advanced master counselor stage. Characteristics of supervisees at each of the four levels of the model are discussed as well as the appropriate supervision environments that encourage development to the next highest level. The supervisor skills of discrimination and the creating of environments are discussed in relation to the characteristics of supervisees and the appropriate environments for the supervision process. Suggestions are offered for future directions of supervision research.

Counselor training lacks a systematic developmental model of supervision. The inadequacy of current approaches and the need for a more comprehensive developmental system of conceptualizing the supervision process is generating interest (cf. Roehlke, Hummel, Loganbill, Moore, & Weiscott, Note 1). Existing models of counselor supervision have primarily focused on skill acquisition (Brammer, 1973; Hackney & Nye, 1973; Ivey, Normington, Miller, Morril, & Haase, 1968), the importance of theory in training (Bordin, 1968; Lister, 1967), and the use of supervision as a form of counseling and psychotherapy (Delaney, 1972; Ekstein & Wallerstein, 1958; Rogers, 1956), but not on the developmental aspects of the process.

In the counselor complexity model that is presented here, the trainee is viewed not just as a counselor lacking specific skills but as an individual who is embarking on a course of development that will culminate in the emergence of a counselor identity. This end point constitutes the integration of skills, theory, and a more complete awareness of oneself and others. This process is placed in a developmental framework that takes into account the different motivations,

needs, and potential resistances of counselors at different levels or stages of development. The premise is that there are qualitative differences in addition to, and not accounted for by, mere quantitative differences in skill level and the knowledge of theories. The following model focuses mostly on supervision of one-to-one counseling, but the principles should be applicable to other counselor training issues.

The approach to supervision described by Hogan (1964) provides a foundation for constructing this developmental model. Hogan has identified four levels of supervisees and has suggested some general supervisory methods to optimize development at each level. In this system, the counselor trainee advances from the position of an apprentice, who is dependent on the supervisor, insecure, and who shows little insight, to a master of the trade, who is insightful, has personal autonomy, and is aware of his or her limitations. This development has a time table influenced by the idiosyncratic characteristics of the trainee and the environments that are experienced during training.

A second model that is integrated into the present model of supervision is Hunt's (1971) Conceptual Systems Theory. This model has been used to describe the different cognitive and personality stages of students, with an additional focus on the training of teachers. Through either in-class behaviors or scores on the Conceptual Level Paragraph Completion Method (Hunt, Butler, Noy, &

Table 1
Expected Counselor Characteristics and Appropriate Environments

Counselor level	Counselor characteristics	Optimal environments
1	Dependent on supervisor Imitative, neurosis bound, lacking self-awareness and other awareness, categorical thinking with knowledge of theories and skills, but minimal experience	Encourage autonomy within normative structure. Supervisor uses instruction, interpretation, support, awareness training, and exemplification; structure is needed
2	Dependency–autonomy conflict Increasing self-awareness, fluctuating motivation, striving for independence, becoming more self-assertive and less imitative	Highly autonomous with low normative structure. Supervisor uses support, ambivalence clarification, exemplification, and less instruction; less structure is necessary
3	Conditional dependency Personal counselor identity is developing with increased insight, more consistent motivation, increased empathy, and more differentiated interpersonal orientation	Autonomous with structure provided by the counselor. Supervisor treats counselor more as a peer with more sharing, mutual exemplification, and confrontation
4	Master counselor Adequate self- and other awareness, insightful of own strengths and weaknesses, willfully interdependent with others, and has integrated standards of the profession with personal counselor identity	Counselor can function adequately in most environments. Supervision now becomes collegial if continued

Rosser, 1977), individuals are identified as being at one of five levels of conceptual development. The theory posits conceptual styles for each stage of development as well as developmental work that must be done by the individual to allow for advancement to the next highest stage. Hunt (1971) has identified optimum environments that facilitate the advancement from stage to stage of individuals at any given level. It is interesting to note that the proper environment for any particular stage is a suboptimal environment for the next highest stage and a superoptimal environment for the previous stage. This paints a picture of the developing individual as a person who needs a changing environment over the course of development to encourage movement toward more complex stages.

Hogan's (1964) notions of four levels of counselor development and constructs from Hunt's (1971) four stages of conceptual levels have been integrated into the basis for the counselor complexity model (see Table 1). These themes have been expanded into a more complete explanation of the supervision process, including descriptions of the characteristics of the counselor at each level and of the appropriate environments to be supplied in supervision. No specific time table of progress through the four levels has been presented, as this varies significantly from trainee to trainee. It is, in fact, doubtful that a counselor would reach the higher level(s) until considerable professional experience has been acquired. Other counselors may, for various reasons, never reach the higher levels.

Counselor Complexity Model

Level 1

Counselor characteristics. The trainee has generally had a minimal amount of experience with the art of counseling. Through the early stages of training, the fledgling counselor is introduced to theories of personality, assessment/diagnosis, and other pertinent academic subjects to increase his or her intellectual understanding of human behavior. Additionally, during the early phases of training the beginning counselor is enrolled in a prepracticum

course (or some equivalent) to be trained in the widely accepted "fundamental" counseling skills of reflection of feeling, clarification, and other techniques. As is well known, these techniques relate to empathic understanding, genuineness, and concreteness, as first proposed by Truax and Carkhuff (1967).

According to Hogan (1964), the beginning counselor trainee (or Level 1 counselor) lacks confidence and is largely dependent on the supervisor for advice and direction. Furthermore, the trainee tends to be insecure and have little insight regarding the impact he or she has on clients in the counseling session.

Using Hunt's (1971) model as a basis for defining our Level 1 counselor, we found a stage of development that is one of unilateral dependence. The developing counselor is quite concerned with rules of counseling at this point and is searching for the right way to do things. The individual is dependent on authority and therefore looks to the supervisor for instruction in the appropriate approaches to working with any given client. The counselor tends to think in counseling categories and is prone to identify closely with either the supervisor's counseling approach or to subscribe with the enthusiasm of the devotee to techniques set forth by well-known theorists (e.g., Rogers or Perls). The Level 1 counselor trainee will often come to supervision sessions with prepared questions about certain client characteristics designed to elicit specific prescriptive suggestions for facilitative behaviors from the supervisor.

Extending Hunt's (1971) description of the developmental work that must be accomplished by his Stage 1 students, we observed that the trainee is attempting to define external boundaries and discover where counseling techniques end and the personality of the counselor begins. The individual is learning and assimilating the generalized standards of the profession as well as trying to assess less explicit norms and expectations of counseling. The supervisee is at the very rudimentary phase of beginning to understand how to express oneself through accepted counseling techniques in the art of counseling. A counselor identity is beginning to develop.

Supervision environment. The proper environment for the Level 1 individual is one in which autonomy is encouraged within a normative structure (cf. Hunt, 1971). This suggests a balance between two opposite needs. One need is to encourage the counselor trainee to try new approaches based on his or her own hypotheses regarding the client and to encourage risk taking in counseling sessions and supervision. The second need consists of providing the structure for supervision and counseling sessions that the supervisee so desperately wants at this period of time. Hogan lists the supervision methods used for a Level 1 counselor as instruction, interpretation, support, awareness training, and exemplification. The Level 1 counselor is not an expert in the various counseling techniques that make up the armamentarium of the skilled counselor, and previous course work in assessment and personality must be integrated with the counseling experience. Thus, it is often necessary for the supervisor to assume the role of teacher at various junctures during the supervision of this level of trainee to help make the connections between theory and practice more evident. Reading assignments and discussions can be quite effective in furthering the trainee's education in and understanding of the nature of counseling as well as in reducing some of the trainee's anxiety.

Attention must also be paid to the conditions necessary to encourage counselor development. A certain degree of autonomy must be allowed (or requested from) the Level 1 trainee to stimulate the development of his or her idiosyncratic counselor identity. Not all questions should be answered in concrete or definitive terms. The trainee should be encouraged to try his or her own approaches and to conceptualize the client in whatever terms seem most appropriate. It is also important to attend to the trainee's behavior in supervision as well as in counseling sessions. Immediacy and exploration of feelings regarding both situations will help the trainee become more aware of how he or she is affecting the client and vice versa. This should be done in a supportive atmosphere, as there is no need at this point to increase the already heightened anxiety level of the trainee. Such an approach should be

limited to matters pertinent to performance in counseling and behavior in supervision and should not develop into a counseling relationship.

At this point it is inevitable that the trainee will attempt to imitate the supervisor or some other person who is viewed as an expert. This is an appropriate learning approach for the trainee, and adequate opportunities to observe the supervisor and/or others in counseling should be supplied (cf. Bordin, 1974). Videotape equipment may be used in recording some of the supervisor's counseling sessions as well as the trainee's sessions, or co-counseling with the supervisor may be appropriate. These mechanisms as well as others (e.g., role playing) will help increase the repertoire of counselor behaviors from which the trainee can choose during the development of a personal counseling style. As suggested by Bordin (1974), the trainee should be allowed to directly observe counseling and related activities before assuming too much clinical responsibility. In addition, close monitoring of client assignment is important at all levels to protect the welfare of both the trainee and the client.

Level 2

Counselor characteristics. As the trainee develops into a Level 2 counselor, the primary characteristic becomes a dependency–autonomy conflict. The individual is attempting to find himself or herself in the practice of counseling while still having rather strong dependency needs. Self-awareness is increasing as the trainee struggles with insight into his or her own motivations and behaviors. There is a constant oscillation between being over confident in newly learned counseling skills and being overwhelmed by the increasing responsibility. As a result, motivation fluctuates (Hogan, 1964).

This level corresponds to Hunt's (1971) negative independence stage, where the individual is striving for independence and becoming more self-assertive in choosing from the increasing number of alternative behaviors available. The generalized standards and skills acquired in Level 1 provide the basis for the process of self-delineation in Level 2 (cf. Hunt, 1971). The trainee is no

longer satisfied to merely imitate the supervisor but prefers instead to begin defining his or her own individual counselor identity and to assume more responsibility for outcomes. Experimenting with different styles will be apparent at this level, along with increased occurrences of disagreement with the supervisor over how to approach a given client.

Supervision environment. The proper environment for the individual allows high autonomy with low normative pressure (cf. Hunt, 1971). The trainee should be allowed more latitude in making decisions regarding behavior in the counseling sessions while the supervisor becomes more of a reference source and less of an advisor. Hogan (1964) lists support, ambivalence clarification, exemplification, and less instruction than was used previously as the preferred supervision methods. What is important at this level is to allow the trainee maximum latitude (within limits), which will benefit both the trainee and the client. Supervision becomes more nondirective as the trainee needs to assess her or his own strengths and weaknesses in integrating facilitative techniques and theories into an existing personal value system.

It is important to remember that the trainee is still struggling with dependency during this time, and the sensitive supervisor will be prepared to instruct the trainee in new skills and to give advice when necessary. Continuous sensitivity and empathy on the part of the supervisor will help the supervisor keep attuned to the level of development of the counselor trainee.

Level 3

Counselor characteristics. The dependency–autonomy conflict of Level 2 has now evolved into an increased sense of personal counselor identity and professional self-confidence as the trainee becomes a Level 3 counselor. This individual is becoming a master of the trade who is insightfully aware of certain dependency needs as well as any neurotic motivations. The overall motivation of this individual has become more healthy and stable and less subject to situational distress (Hogan, 1964).

Hunt (1971) would describe this person as

showing conditional dependency with increased empathy. The trainee has developed into a counselor who is characterized by an increased empathy toward others and a more highly differentiated interpersonal orientation. The individual no longer tends to be a staunch and unvarying disciple of any given technique, nor is he or she one who behaves in a largely counterdependent fashion toward others in the environment. Acknowledging differences among individuals enables this counselor to be more tolerant of counselors who endorse different theoretical views, as well as to demonstrate an increased ability to work with a variety of clients.

Supervision environment. The developmental work that this individual is undertaking is directed toward building on the self-understanding acquired in Level 2 while gaining an empathic understanding of the feelings and experiences of others (cf. Hunt, 1971). The supervisory relationship is now becoming more of a peer interaction, with an increased emphasis on sharing and exemplification by both partners (Hogan, 1964). Of additional importance at this level is appropriate professional and personal confrontation as the developing counselor is now more secure in his or her counselor identity and can respond to direct confrontation in a more objective manner without the reactance that would have been expected from the Level 2 trainee.

At this level the supervisor can be more comfortable in acknowledging his or her own counseling weaknesses with less fear of losing the respect and attention of the supervisee. The relationship can become more of a peer interaction, with both individuals gaining insight and support from the supervision experience.

Level 4

Counselor characteristics. Movement into Level 4 marks the development of the master counselor. This individual is capable of independent practice due to the development of an adequate awareness of his or her personal limitations. The counselor has a personal security based on an awareness of insecurity; is insightful, with full awareness of the limitations of insight; and is able to

function adequately, even with some occasional changes in degrees of motivation. The Level 4 counselor is aware of the need to confront the struggles of living, including those specifically characteristic of the counseling profession (Hogan, 1964).

The Level 4 counselor is reaching a point of willful interdependence with others. The counselor has an increased understanding of his or her personal characteristics, values, and abilities as being different yet existing on the same dimension as those of colleagues (cf. Hunt, 1971). The master counselor has effectively integrated the standards of the profession within a personal value system.

Supervision environment. If and when one should reach the fourth level of counselor development, structured supervision by another professional would not be of as much importance as it is at earlier levels. The individual is fully capable of independent practice, as sufficient self-knowledge and an integrated counselor identity enables adequate functioning in nearly all professional situations. This level of personal development also gives the counselor enough insight to know when professional or personal consultation is necessary (cf. Hogan, 1964). Such an individual would be best utilized as a supervisor for less advanced counselors or as a participant in collegial supervision with other advanced counselors.

Supervision Skills

One of the basic premises of Hunt's (1971) theory of cognitive development is that individuals will be aided in their progress from level to level through exposure to the proper environments. In the case of counselor supervision, the responsibility of providing the proper environment for the development of counselor trainees falls, to a large extent, on the supervisor. The speed with which a trainee progresses through these stages is largely dependent on the skills and attributes of the trainee and the environments provided through supervision. Two specific skill areas are important for such effective supervision: discrimination and creating environments.

Discrimination. One of the most important attributes of an effective supervisor

should be the ability to discriminate between the possible environments that may be created in supervision. It should be readily apparent to the supervisor what constitutes giving the trainee autonomy in counseling and in supervision and what defines the relationship as a teacher–student interaction. The supervisor should also be able to discriminate between supervisee behaviors and recognize what the needs as well as the strengths are of the trainee. The supervisor should be able to recognize defensive behavior on the part of the trainee as well as those behaviors marking a development from one level to another.

The final discrimination skill involves discriminating between persons. Since no two trainees are exactly alike, the supervisor must be able to recognize the idiosyncratic style of the trainee's counseling approach and also the type of supervision and clients that will be most appropriate. Of special importance in this domain are the accessibility characteristics of the trainee. These include the following factors: (a) the cognitive orientation, which is the conceptual level at which the trainee is functioning; (b) the motivational orientation, which would determine the appropriate type of feedback and rewards for a given trainee (e.g., inner-directed types may prefer self-defined feedback while other-directed persons may prefer supervisor-defined feedback); (c) the value orientation of the trainee, which would affect the types of objectives for training that the trainee would support; and (d) the sensory orientation, which would take into account whether the trainee learns best by seeing the counseling process displayed in different modes or by hearing the supervisor explain the process.

Creating environments. The other important supervision skill is in creating environments. Since a variety of environments are necessary to aid the trainee in developing his or her counselor identity, the supervisor should be able to work comfortably at creating the appropriate environment for the specific needs of the trainee. For example, when supervising a Level 1 counselor trainee, the supervisor should be able to blend an appropriate amount of normative structure while simultaneously encouraging autonomy in the individual. The effective supervisor will also be able to alter his or her approach to supervision to suit the accessibility characteristics of the specific trainee. Monitoring the appropriateness of counselees is also necessary. Of added importance is the supervisor's skill in moving from one environment to another as the needs of the trainee change.

Discussion

As with most stage theories, one would be remiss in assuming that all four levels are pure and that no transition phases exist between them. However, it is hoped that the delineation of these levels of development and the concomitant environments for facilitating development through the levels will provide a useful model for conceptualizing the supervision process.

Although Hunt et al. (1977) discussed research supporting the person–environment matching approach in increasing conceptual level of students in elementary through high school, little research has been directed at facilitating development in older populations, and none directly relates to this model. The need exists, then, to test this model empirically in supervision with counselor trainees possessing various amounts of experience.

Further work is being undertaken to expand the model presented here. A further delineation of the characteristics of counselors at different levels will facilitate a more accurate differentiation and categorization of supervisees into the four developmental levels. In addition, a more specific description of supervision techniques that can be used to create the appropriate environments for each counselor is necessary. Work on evaluating the effectiveness of different supervision techniques for beginning counselors has already begun (Worthington & Roehlke, 1979). Once this task has been accomplished for all levels of counselor trainees, the factors appearing to be most instrumental in effecting change during the supervision process can be operationalized and subjected to empirical scrutiny.

Reference Note

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