

Chapter 3

SUPERVISORY RELATIONSHIPS

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Marilyn had been working for about 3 years in an outpatient mental health clinic that served a variety of individuals, families, and couples, and she had a good relationship with George, her supervisor. However, when George was promoted, Tim, a colleague of Marilyn's, became her supervisor. She was concerned and fearful of potential problems with Tim.

At the beginning, things seemed to be working out. Although Tim had some weaknesses as an administrative supervisor, he enjoyed clinical supervision. He was well versed in a psychodynamic approach to treatment, which led him to interpret interactions primarily in light of the dynamics of transference and countertransference. Marilyn's style as a supervisee had always been to share openly her concerns, questions, and vulnerabilities. She approached her work with Tim in the same manner. The combination of both Marilyn's and Tim's intense styles of interaction lead them quickly to the identification and exploration of Marilyn's personal issues.

Although Marilyn was an open and eager learner, she was young and had several unresolved issues in her own life. Most significantly, she was easily intimidated by her highly critical parents and was only beginning to notice and object to the disrespectful and critical attitude of her husband. She struggled with a lack of belief in her abilities and tended to emphasize her flaws. Although her work performance was more than adequate for someone with her level of experience, she had great difficulty viewing herself as a competent clinician.

In time, she began to experience Tim as critical of her as well. He seemed satisfied with her work in supervision only if she was talking about her doubts. If Marilyn objected to his feedback in any way, Tim interpreted her objection as evoked by transference. Marilyn was left in a state of confusion. She believed that she should acknowledge personal problems that could interfere with her work and that she should represent herself honestly. Although she felt threatened by Tim's approach, she also recognized the kernel of truth in much of his feedback and believed that her defensive response derived partly from her resistance to acknowledging the accuracy of his observations. As a result of her continuing confusion and feelings of being intimidated, Marilyn became less and less willing to discuss her work openly with Tim. As a result, she felt increasingly stuck with her clients, and her feelings of incompetence deepened.

Author's Note: Most of the material in this chapter is taken from Kaiser (1997).

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After many months, Marilyn began talking to her peers about the problems she was having with Tim, and she discovered that they were also dissatisfied. They perceived Tim as using his position as administrative supervisor to make decisions about such things as support for outside training based on how he felt about the supervisee who was making the request. In clinical supervision, they experienced him as arrogant and disrespectful. Tim continued to see the problem as one that he did not create. He believed deeply in his approach to supervision and the validity of identifying issues in respect to how they related to transference and countertransference. He noted, for example, that there were strong gender and developmental dynamics at play. All of the staff, including Tim, were approximately the same age—late 20s to early 30s. All of the practitioners except one were women. Several of them, including by this time Marilyn, were in the process of divorce. Tim postulated that as a single man, he was the object of much of their collective anger toward the men in their lives.

To address her concerns, Marilyn proceeded to seek outside consultation with Sarah. This experience was diametrically opposed to that with Tim. Although Sarah challenged Marilyn to push past her own comfort zone, both in terms of her own self-awareness and the risks she was willing to take with clients, she did so in a manner that communicated respect for and trust in Marilyn. When conflict arose between them, Sarah both acknowledged her part in the conflict and helped Marilyn to acknowledge her own. As a result of this relationship, Marilyn's confidence, knowledge, and skills as a clinician increased significantly, and she was able to use a variety of approaches in her work. At the same time, she felt exhilarated by newly found freedom, both from her oppressive marriage and from the oppression of her relationship with Tim. Her anger toward and mistrust of Tim continued, however, and she began to treat him with open disrespect.

In her next yearly evaluation, Marilyn was not surprised to be confronted on her poor response to supervision with Tim. However, she was dismayed by the fact that he framed her new learning as a clinician as having harmed rather than improved the quality of her work. He believed that the psychodynamic approach was superior to others in its focus on unconscious motivations and its goal of deep structural change. Many other approaches, in his eyes, were superficial in nature and did not address underlying causes of and cures for clients' problems. Although Marilyn acknowledged that she had been inappropriate in her treatment of Tim, she thought the criticism of her work was designed to punish her by undermining her confidence.

No matter what the nature of the organization, a positive relationship between supervisors and supervisees is important for supervision to be effective. Recently, authors in the field of organizational development have placed much emphasis on the need for supervisors and managers to pay attention to the "human side" of the business, with respect to their employees' personal values, their intuitive and emotional characteristics, and the ways in which people relate to each other (e.g., Buckingham & Coffman, 1999; Heil, Bennis, & Stephens, 2000; Isaacs, 1999; Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, & Smith, 1994).

A significant characteristic of human service professions is that the relationship between client and practitioner is the medium through which change

occurs (Perlman, 1979). The premise of this chapter is that the relationship between supervisor and practitioner is the primary medium through which human service professionals learn how to do their jobs. Because relationships are the central ingredient of practitioner-client interactions, the supervisory relationship has direct application to and influence on the practitioner's work. This premise is illustrated by the concept of parallel process, in which the supervisee's behaviors frequently parallel those that the client is demonstrating (Doehrman, 1976; Eckstein & Wallerstein, 1958; Shulman, 1982, 1993). Given this phenomenon, those behaviors can be addressed in the supervisory relationship, thus freeing up the practitioner and providing the practitioner with a model for

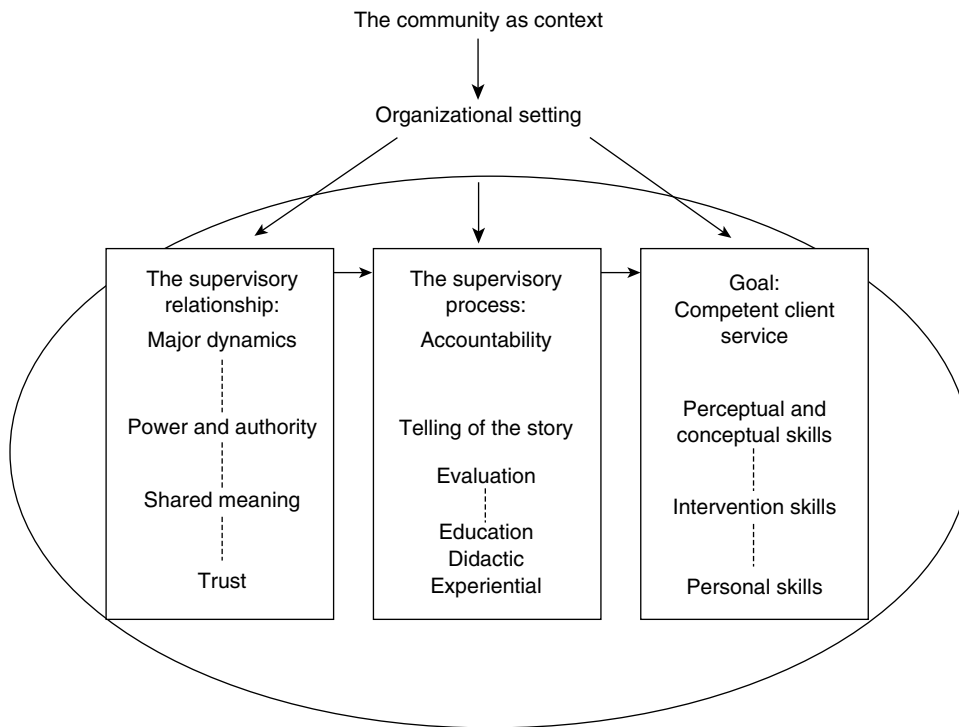


Figure 3.1 Conceptual Model of Supervision

addressing the same issues with the client. Others (e.g., Alpher, 1991; Kadushin, 1992; Peterson, 1986) have elaborated on the notion that an intricate interplay exists between the clinical and supervisory relationships.

Although the focus of this chapter is the supervisory relationship, that relationship affects and is affected by all aspects of supervision, including the context within which the supervision occurs. The function of supervision is a multifaceted one, involving a complex process of accountability that leads, hopefully, to competent work with clients. As was illustrated in the introductory case vignette, problems in the supervisory relationship often lead to difficulties with the larger processes of supervision. Conversely, a positive supervisory relationship creates an environment in which the processes of supervision can operate so that clients are ultimately better served.

Given the complexity of the supervisor-supervisee relationship, it is important to identify key elements that affect and explain the dynamics of interaction. The following is a discussion of a framework that describes the elements of supervision and their interaction. The

framework seeks to reflect the complicated nature of the supervisory process itself. Figure 3.1 is a picture in which the solid lines demonstrate the general flow of activity and the dotted lines illustrate how each part affects the others. An elaboration of the framework is best understood by focusing at first on the right side, where competent service to clients includes the practitioner's perceptual, conceptual, intervention, and personal skills. The overall process of supervision is based on accountability. The key elements of the process are telling the story, evaluation, and education. As indicated on the left-hand side, the dynamics of the supervisory relationship include power and authority, shared meaning, and trust. Since supervision takes place within a particular setting, such as a public agency, a school, an outpatient mental health center, or a hospital, and that setting exists in and serves a particular community, it is important to include the impact of both aspects of this larger context on the process. The circle around the outside of the framework represents the context: The community is outside the circle and the organization is on the inside. A discussion of each of these elements follows.

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THE GOAL: COMPETENT CLIENT SERVICE

Society mandates that the human services professions provide competent service to clients. Increasingly the professions are asked for an account of that service (Kadushin, 1992; Munson, 1989). Funding bodies are asking for a more detailed account of and explanation for what happens in the treatment. Expanded awareness of maltreatment of clients by practitioners has led to legislation defining qualifications for licensure and parameters for acceptable practice, as well as to litigation against those who have harmed clients. State licensing boards and most professional organizations have codes of ethical conduct and procedures for the reporting and sanctioning of those who breach the codes. All of these things are in place with the hope of ensuring that practitioners will act with integrity toward their clients and will take appropriate corrective action if they have not.

The goal of competent client service to clients is achieved through the development of perceptual, conceptual, intervention, and personal skills (Tomm & Wright, 1979). *Perceptual skill* is the ability to observe what is happening with the client, and *conceptual skill* is the ability to interpret those observations. Because what we perceive is intricately connected to what we think, these two skills are difficult to separate. Conceptual skills include those in three general categories: knowledge and application of theoretical approaches, diagnosis and assessment, and identification of the subjective experiences of both client and practitioner. *Intervention skill* is the ability to effectively provide services. Tomm and Wright (1979) provide an outline of perceptual and conceptual skills and the intervention skills that would accompany them. For example, a *perceptual-conceptual skill* is the ability to notice the positive effect on the entire family of the deliberate acknowledgment of each member. The accompanying *intervention skill* is to directly interact with every individual in a manner that both recognizes them and gives them status. The *personal skill* that goes along with these is the ability of the practitioner to develop increased self-awareness; it includes a commitment to personal growth.

One of the most controversial elements of personal skill development is whether to focus in supervision on the self-awareness and personal growth of the supervisee. A powerful argument for focusing on the person of the supervisee is that the practitioner's main tool is him- or herself, especially in regard to when and how to draw the line between therapy and supervision

(Rubinstein, 1992). The issue clearly relates to the nature of the job and the type of approach the practitioner is using. For example, those who use the strategic approach in psychotherapy are often of the opinion that the personal issues of the practitioner should not be a topic for discussion in supervision (Haley, 1988). On the other hand, those who use a psychodynamic approach, such as Tim in the introductory vignette, tend to view the need for practitioners to identify and work through their own issues as of paramount importance (Schneider, 1992).

Another variable that affects the degree of attention paid to personal awareness is the current need of the supervisee. For example, a supervisee might have already gained a great deal of personal awareness and would therefore benefit more from supervision that focuses on learning a particular theoretical approach or set of skills. Finally, emphasis on personal skill is greatly influenced by the quality of the supervisory relationship. The supervisee must experience this area of skill exploration as not only useful but safe to be willing to self-disclose in this area.

THE SUPERVISORY PROCESS: ACCOUNTABILITY

The person most directly responsible for insuring the ethical and competent practice of a given practitioner is that individual's supervisor. Supervisors increasingly are considered legally liable for the actions of those under them (National Association of Social Workers Council on the Practice of Clinical Social Work, 1994). One could also argue that even if they are not legally accountable for the supervisee's failure on the job, they are ethically obligated to do everything possible to help the supervisee succeed and to ensure that the supervisee does not harm clients (Levy, 1973, 1982; Sherry, 1991).

In discussing accountability, Peterson (1984) contends that to be effective, practitioners must let themselves be "touched" deeply by their clients. This makes them more vulnerable to losing their objectivity and potentially their ability to act in the client's best interests. It is the job of the supervisor, viewing the situation from a more detached position, to help the practitioner regain that ability. The idea that the supervisor is more removed and therefore more objective is frequently stated (e.g., Berger & Damman, 1982; Rabanowitz, 1987).

In this chapter, accountability is defined as the process of taking responsibility for your own behavior

and its impact on yourself and others. First, it is a *commitment to tell a true story about your work* to the best of your ability. This requires supplying the facts about what you have done, thought, and felt in a given situation. Accomplishing this calls both for self-knowledge and for the willingness to share this knowledge. It requires, as well, taking responsibility for both intended and unintended impact on another. Second, it is a *commitment to take responsible action*, by making change or correcting an injustice and by treating others with integrity, understanding both their needs and your own. Within the context of supervision, it is the supervisor's job to help supervisees arrive at and maintain this level of integrity about their work. The following steps in the process of accountability are not necessarily sequential because the process is a dynamic one.

Tell the Story. Supervisees provide an account of their work in the form of a written or verbal report, an audio or videotape, or in the form of some sort of live supervision. In addition, they give an explanation, to the best of their ability, of what was behind their actions. This includes their personal feelings and reactions or theoretical frameworks that guided their thinking about the case. Using my definition of accountability, this is the supervisee's first effort at "telling the truth." Part of the supervisor's job, at this point, is to use the supervisory relationship to develop as complete an account as possible so that both parties can arrive at an understanding of what has happened in the provision of client services.

Evaluation. The second part of the supervisory process is that of evaluation. Evaluation involves making judgments regarding the quality of the supervisee's work. This means determining such things as whether the supervisee is competent and whether the supervisee knows and is staying within the parameters of the ethical code of the profession. It also means assessing what the practitioner needs to learn to be more effective.

Education. Education can be either didactic, experiential, or both. Didactic education includes helping the practitioner learn theoretical concepts and skills within which a specific situation can be understood and addressed. It also includes enabling the practitioner to develop concrete ideas about actions that could be taken with the client. In a learning organization, there is the recognition that the education that

takes place is not exclusively one way. The supervisor's job is not to impart information to the supervisee. Rather, the job is to enable and facilitate the supervisee's learning of best practices from the supervisor, from others, and from his or her own deeper wisdom and experience. In this scenario, the supervisor is open to learning from supervisees and to promoting a transfer of knowledge among staff members. To do this effectively, supervisors must communicate a genuine respect for those who challenge ideas and assumptions, opening the way for new ones to emerge and be explored. Supervisors thus act as role models, both in their sharing of their own wisdom and in their openness to their own continued growth and learning.

Experiential education relates to the phenomenon of parallel process described earlier. In addition to conscious use of parallel process to address practice issues, the way the supervisor treats a supervisee about things that are not directly client related may be repeated in the client-practitioner relationship. For example, a supervisee whose request for an emergency meeting with a supervisor is refused may in turn refuse such a request from a client (Kadushin, 1992). The ethical climate of the supervisory relationship may also influence that of the practitioner/client relationship. In their discussion of accountability, Boszormenyi-Nagy and Krasner (1986) stress the need for practitioners to hold both their clients and themselves accountable for ethical behavior in their relationships. It follows that if supervisors assume responsibility for their own contribution to problems in the supervisory process and demonstrate a willingness and ability to make appropriate changes, their supervisees may, through the supervisor's role modeling, become better role models for their own behavior with clients. This parallel process provides a context in which they can operate ethically with clients and challenge their clients to operate ethically in their relationships with family and others.

In the introductory vignette, both Tim and Sarah shared similarities with regard to their approach to providing client services. However, Marilyn experienced Sarah as treating her with respect, willing to honor Marilyn's competence, and willing to take responsibility for her own contributions to tensions when they arose in the relationship. As a result of this experience, Marilyn became more able to hold both herself and her clients accountable in their work together.

As a result of the evaluation and education processes, the supervisee gains tools to work more

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effectively and therefore to meet the goal of providing competent client service. Using the definition of accountability given earlier (taking responsibility for your own behavior and its impact on others), it may be seen that effective work is based on responsible action and meaningful outcomes. If the practitioner has made an error or has chosen an ineffective path, this action may require correction. Often this correction will simply involve a next step in the service delivery process. The evaluation and education processes also add to supervisees' level of perceptual, conceptual, intervention, and personal skills, thus enabling them to more fully "tell the story" about their work in future supervisory sessions.

KEY DYNAMICS OF THE SUPERVISORY RELATIONSHIP

Supervision takes place in the context of the relationship between supervisor and supervisee. As will be demonstrated, the quality of the relationship has enormous impact on the process of accountability and the achievement of the goal of competent service to clients. The three major components of this relationship are the use of power and authority, shared meaning, and trust.

Power and Authority

This framework presumes that dynamics of power and authority are the most salient element in the supervisory relationship. A distinction can be made between the terms *power* and *authority*, with power being the ability to influence or control others and authority being the right to do so (Kadushin, 1992). Some supervisors' authority may be sabotaged, or they may be unable to exercise their power because of characteristics of their own, of their supervisees, or of the larger context. However, although a supervisory relationship can indeed exist without either shared meaning or trust, it has, by definition, a built-in power differential. This differential is a result of the functions of the process of accountability. Supervisors have power over practitioners primarily because of the need to evaluate the quality of their work. As the one in charge, the supervisor is responsible for setting appropriate limits and boundaries with respect to the parameters of acceptable professional behavior.

For example, a supervisor might learn that a supervisee is giving a client rides home from the agency because the client is afraid to take the bus at night. In some contexts (for example, in-home therapy) this

may be deemed appropriate, but in this agency, the policy is for practitioners to avoid doing so, partly because of potential liability should an accident occur. It would be important not only for the supervisor to make sure the supervisee is aware of the policy but also to explore with the supervisee what led to the decision to break the rules for this particular client. The discussion could involve understanding what the client may have done to "ask" for special treatment and what it means for the client to be receiving it as well as what might be motivating the supervisee to provide it. In addition, the discussion could lead to a broader one about the importance of clear boundaries in the practitioner-client relationship.

In addition, the supervisor's role as educator presumes the need to know how to promote the supervisee's growth and learning. In many situations, particularly those involving novice practitioners, both supervisor and supervisee prefer that the supervisor actually be better informed than the supervisee. Peterson (1992) maintains that professionals, including educators and those in the human services, are imbued by society with a professional responsibility to guide and care for their clients. For clients to be helped, she argues, they must put faith in the professional relationship and make themselves vulnerable to be touched by those from whom they seek assistance. In an educational setting, to truly learn, the student needs to be open to challenges of his previous assumptions and knowledge. Particularly if a supervisee is a new practitioner, as was Marilyn, a knowledgeable supervisor can be a powerful teacher. Supervisors are often unaware that many supervisees experience the power differential quite intensely and are therefore more deeply affected by exchanges in supervision than the supervisor may have intended them to be (Doehrman, 1976; Kadushin, 1974).

Although there is general acknowledgment in the literature of the greater power and authority of the supervisor, authors disagree about whether the hierarchical nature of the supervisory relationship should be emphasized or minimized (Kadushin, 1992; Munson, 1993; Wheeler, Avis, Miller, & Chaney, 1986). This debate includes discussions about whether the supervisor should do more decision making or foster more participation and input from the supervisee. It also includes discussions about how much the supervisee should be encouraged to act autonomously in contrast to relying on the supervisor for guidance.

The new attention to the learning organization has contributed to the shift from viewing supervisors

as directive and authoritarian to seeing them as collaborators, mentors, coaches, and supporters of their employees. This shift is also related to the kind of postmodern thinking that challenges some of the assumptions underlying power differentials. The clinician is viewed as a coauthor and collaborator with the client rather than the expert upon whom the client relies for guidance (Cooper & Lesser, 2002). Similarly, in the management literature, Senge et al. (1994) noted that the boss and the employees in effective organizations cocreate a shared vision of their work and therefore help people see that the organization can facilitate their own self-actualization. This can lead to an authentic alliance between the members of the organization and a mutual commitment to the work, fostering mutual accountability.

An assumption underlying the discussion in this chapter is that because supervisors have power both to evaluate and to influence, it is their ethical responsibility to use that power with utmost care. Responsible use of power in supervision involves a balance in which the supervisor is neither using that power in an arbitrary or destructive way nor abdicating that power, failing to acknowledge its inherent existence in the relationship (Jacobs, 1991; Kaiser, 1992; Thompson, Shapiro, Nielson, & Peterson, 1989). The appropriate use of power connects to the issue of trust in that, by using power in this way, the supervisor creates a safe space within which supervisees may share their work (Peterson, 1984, 1992).

It is important that supervisors use their power to set limits in a way that is both clear and fair. It is equally important that supervisors use their power to educate in a way that neither squelches the learning of supervisees (I know and you don't) nor abandons the responsibility for supervisees' learning (I don't have anything to teach you, or I can't or won't support you in finding ways to grow). Finally, it is incumbent upon supervisors to set boundaries regarding the nature of the supervisory relationship. Specifically, it is of primary importance that supervisors maintain a focus on supervisees' rather than on supervisors' needs. This includes the need to help supervisees understand the difference between friendship and collegiality and to ensure that the supervisory relationship maintains the characteristics of the latter. This is often a confusing distinction, especially in an environment in which sharing aspects of one's personal life is the norm. At bottom, a friendship has as its primary goal meeting the needs of each of the participants; a collegiality has as its primary goal meeting the needs of the organization

and the clients who are served by it. Supervisors who are more concerned, for example, with making sure supervisees like them than with making sure supervisees are doing their work adequately will compromise the supervision by avoiding giving necessary but potentially uncomfortable feedback.

Although supervisors have more power in the relationship, supervisees are not completely powerless. They can avoid supervision both by sharing a minimum of information about their work (telling less of their story) and by refusing to become vulnerable to the challenges posed by the supervisor. If they behave in this manner, their supervisors have the ability to punish them but cannot have much positive impact on the quality of their work. On the other hand, supervisees can contribute to the process by engaging in a mutual learning experience in which they are not only authentically interacting with what the supervisor is offering but are also bringing their own knowledge and wisdom to the table. To make the most of supervision, supervisees need to fully participate in the relationship-building process.

Supervisors need to have the capacity to assume a role of authority, and supervisees need the capacity to deal with authority figures. Both supervisor and supervisee come to the relationship with preconceived notions of what it means to be an authority, and those notions will affect their capacity to handle this aspect of their relationship (Peterson, 1992; Shulman, 1982, 1993). An important part of the supervisory process is to continually address this theme. This helps both to clarify the issue in supervision and to enable supervisees to use their position of power with clients in a more effective manner.

The story of Marilyn and Tim illustrates many aspects of the dynamics of power in the relationship. Although both agreed that increased personal awareness was an important dimension of the work and therefore a legitimate topic for supervision, Marilyn increasingly experienced Tim's focus on this as intrusive and abusive. It seemed to her to come more from his need to have power over her than from a genuine concern for her growth and the quality of her work. This perception was underlined by the fact that he seemed only to focus on her vulnerabilities. Furthermore, although Marilyn acknowledged her own disrespectful attitude and accepted Tim's negative evaluation of her behavior toward him, she interpreted his criticism of her new learning as an abuse of his power to evaluate, as well as of his power to educate and influence. She perceived his main goal as wanting

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to sabotage her confidence rather than to set an appropriate limit. By contrast, although Sarah also encouraged Marilyn to explore her personal issues as well as to push herself with regard to learning new theoretical approaches and more challenging intervention skills, she did so in a way that promoted Marilyn's development as a professional.

Marilyn increasingly exercised her power by refusing to engage in the supervisory process. She told as little of her story as possible and increasingly resisted Tim's interpretation of the situations she shared with him. By the end, she was openly disrespectful to him. Although Tim did in fact have many valuable insights, Marilyn's self-protective stance prevented her from any useful learning with him. Because of the enormity of the mistrust between them, Marilyn was completely unable to use the supervisory relationship to hold herself accountable in a meaningful way. This hindered her ability to do her job well.

This situation poignantly illustrates the way in which people's preconceived notions of authority figures affect the supervisory relationship. Marilyn came to the relationship with a history of negative associations with those in power. Her family experience taught her that authority figures were highly critical and would not respect her as a woman with intelligence and strength. Before meeting Sarah, she had never experienced authority figures who acknowledged their own part in a conflict rather than blaming it on Marilyn. Not surprisingly, Tim's history was not very different from Marilyn's, but partly because he was a man, his outward behavior was the mirror opposite. He clung to his power, of which he felt fundamentally undeserving and with which he was very insecure, by blocking anything that he perceived as a threat.

Shared Meaning

The second dynamic of the supervisory relationship involves shared meaning. This concept can be defined as mutual understanding and agreement. To the extent that both are occurring in the relationship, the supervision should operate more effectively. The central feature of shared meaning is clear communication. Ensuring that the message sent is the message received is challenging in many relationships, and the greater the difference between participants, the greater the challenge. In instances of cross-cultural supervision, factors such as nonverbal cues, values, norms, culturally specific meanings, and false assumptions may lead to a great deal of misunderstanding and

disagreement, particularly if these factors are not addressed. Isaacs (1999) uses the term *dialogue* to describe a process of conversation that can go in a number of different directions. Often, he contends, we tend to defend our initial position either to win or to promote a creative tension between opposing ideas, which he defines as dialectic. Another choice is to suspend one's initial position, opening the way to truly listen to what the other is saying without resistance. This choice, Isaacs contends, enables the participants to engage in "reflective dialogue," during which they can explore underlying assumptions and arrive at deeper questions and understanding. Ultimately, this process leads to "generative dialogue," in which new ideas and insights can be created. Like the cocreation of a shared vision suggested by Senge et al. (1994), generative dialogue leads to a kind of shared meaning that includes and transcends the initial meanings held by each party.

For the supervision to proceed smoothly, several major issues require at minimum a basic understanding and, ideally, an agreement between supervisor and supervisee. These issues fall under two general categories. The first is the supervisory contract and the second is the approach to client services.

Contract

Contracting can be defined as delineating the terms for working on a mutually agreed-on problem or goal. In the case of supervision, many aspects of the interaction might be negotiated. Examples include how case material will be discussed, how the supervisee best learns, and what kind of help he or she would like and can expect to receive from the supervisor. It is likely that the more the participants can cocreate the structure and content of supervision (Senge et al., 1994), the stronger the commitment of both will be to the process.

It is important to remember, however, that contracting does not assume equal power in the relationship. Contracting is linked to evaluation because determining the criteria used for evaluation requires that the supervisee be clear about the purposes, goals, and objectives of supervision. Establishing a clear contract for supervision is stressed throughout the literature on supervision. In their in-depth study of more than 400 companies, Buckingham and Coffman (1999) found that employees' understanding of what was expected of them at work was one of 12 important criteria that distinguished strong managers and strong

departments from weaker ones. Ethical supervision in the human services includes helping supervisees understand what the job entails and on what basis they will be evaluated (Levy, 1973). This prevents the supervisor from being able to misuse that power by catching the supervisee in a bind.

The supervisory contract is sometimes formally or informally stated and may not be addressed at all. Although both understanding and agreement are aspects of shared meaning, even when agreement is not possible, it is in the best interests of both parties to ensure understanding. For example, supervisees may well disagree about whether they should be evaluated on a particular aspect of their work. However, if it is a requirement, either of the supervisor, the organization, or the profession, that supervisees behave in a particular way, that requirement must be clearly stated.

The case of Marilyn and Tim depicts a situation in which, with regard to contract, there was generally shared understanding but not shared agreement. For example, Marilyn understood that Tim would evaluate her based on her willingness to share her vulnerabilities with him. Her disagreement with the validity of this and increased reluctance to cooperate led to a negative evaluation.

Approach to Client Services

This aspect of shared meaning relates to beliefs about what is helpful to clients. Isaacs' (1999) concept of dialogue is particularly relevant in this arena, as there are many factors that contribute to the development of one's beliefs about effective client services. Practitioners' theoretical orientation and practice experience, as well as their cultural and familial values and norms, will lead them to emphasize and support certain types of client behavior in favor of others, offer particular kinds of help, and do so with a style that reflects their own personality and background.

For example, a Hmong practitioner who discovers that a child is being physically abused could be concerned that if she reported to child protection she might lose her credibility and therefore her usefulness not only in her client's eyes, but in the community at large. She might think it would be more effective to start by exploring the option of encouraging the family to seek guidance from the community leaders, following a protocol that is common among many traditional Hmong families. She might also consider it inappropriate to approach the father in the family, because in her culture it would be disrespectful for a woman to

confront a man. Her Euro-American supervisor might have some grave concerns about this approach. He might worry that the community leaders would view as appropriate discipline behavior that would be defined as abuse by child protection. He might also worry about supporting the value that women should not challenge men. Even assuming a mutually trusting and respectful relationship between supervisor and supervisee, it might be difficult for the two to bridge the gap between each of their ideas of what the best practice would be.

Both practitioner and supervisor would have to work hard to discern what in fact would be in the child's best interests. They would need to develop strategies that would allow the practitioner to do what would be most helpful to the child and the family, taking into consideration cultural perceptions and values as well as the professional imperative to report suspected abuse. One possibility would be to allow the practitioner to team up with a male practitioner, making it easier to approach both parents. Another option might be for the supervisor to accompany the practitioner and act as the authority and representative from the mainstream culture, giving the message that in this culture certain types of discipline are considered abuse and must be reported. The assumption here is that the family might better accept the supervisor's authority and that, as the practitioner was not making the report, she could maintain her position of trust with the family. Relevant here is the search for best practices, characteristic of a learning organization. In this situation, both the practitioner and the supervisor would be challenged to go beyond their usual assumptions to develop a workable plan. To the extent that members of the organization can work together to discover and cocreate ideas about effective approaches to client services, it is likely that clients will be better served.

The Link Between Shared Meaning and the Other Elements of the Framework

Several connections can be made between shared meaning and aspects of both accountability and competent service to clients. For example, the more effective the education process, the more supervisor and supervisee will be able to develop an understanding and agreement of what constitutes effective client services. In addition, the more of the story the supervisee tells, the greater (presumably) will be the degree of understanding between supervisor and supervisee.

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Clearly, in the case of Marilyn and Tim, the opposite occurred. As the educational process broke down, they agreed less and less on what could be considered effective client services. Rather than telling more of her story, Marilyn told less, leaving Tim to guess at rather than really know or understand what she was doing and thinking.

Important links can also be made between shared meaning, power, and trust. As discussed earlier, the supervisor is responsible for limit setting, particularly as it relates to appropriate behavior on the part of the supervisee. Often it is unclear whether a disagreement between supervisor and supervisee is one of limit setting or one of shared meaning. The link between power and shared meaning is demonstrated in the relationship between Marilyn and Tim. Tim was concerned that Marilyn's move away from the psychodynamic approach was a reflection of her reluctance to face more challenging work with clients as well as to confront those personal issues that kept her from being the most effective practitioner she could be. Therefore, he saw the issue of Marilyn's adoption of new theories as a limit-setting issue, as he believed the quality of her work was diminished. By contrast, Marilyn saw the issue as one of shared meaning, in which she and Tim did not agree about what constituted effective client services and in which Tim was not open to new ideas about how to approach clients. She viewed Tim's limit setting as an abuse of his power.

This is very significant, in that from Tim's point of view, he would be abdicating his power, acting irresponsibly, dishonestly, and unethically if he did not push Marilyn to offer the best possible service to her clients as he saw it. It illustrates the reality that a gap in shared meaning, not only about effective client services but also about what constitutes appropriate use of power, might be extremely difficult to bridge. Frequently the gap is a result of issues related to trust. This particular disagreement may appear to be easily resolved; however, neither Marilyn nor Tim were able to bring themselves to a more authentic dialogue. Either or both may have felt too threatened, for reasons that the other did not seem able to control.

Trust

Many authors identify respect, safety, and honesty as important elements in the supervisory relationship (e.g., Doherty, 1995; Kadushin, 1992; Kaiser, 1992; Liddle & Schwartz, 1983; Munson, 1993; Peterson, 1984; Shulman, 1993). It is important to recognize that

although the major responsibility for establishing trust in the relationship lies with the supervisor, this may be difficult or even impossible if the supervisee is unable to trust or behaves in an untrustworthy manner.

Respect, or a demonstration of the supervisor's esteem for the supervisee, can be experienced both by the supervisor's communicated belief in the supervisee's ability and by taking into account relevant past professional and life experiences. Safety is usually defined as the supervisee's freedom to make mistakes and to take risks without danger of an excessively judgmental response from the supervisor. Many supervisors experience a conflict between the growth-promoting and accountability-maintaining functions of their jobs (Loganbill, Hardy, & Delworth, 1982). Growth-promoting functions require a trusting relationship between supervisor and supervisee, a condition that may appear to be threatened by the need for the relationship to include a component of critical evaluation. As a result, some supervisors and supervisees make the mistake of sweeping the aspect of evaluation under the rug rather than dealing with it directly. However, if supervisees think their supervisors are treating them fairly, neither abusing nor abdicating their power, they may be more likely to trust even, or maybe especially, a challenging supervisor.

Adding an ethical dimension helps to clarify this apparent paradox. The ability to tell the truth about oneself, necessary for the process of accountability, is directly related to the degree of trust in the relationship. Boszormenyi-Nagy and Krasner (1986) state that "personal accountability as a guideline for caring and relational integrity constitutes the foundation of trustworthiness" (p. 62). If supervisors hold themselves as well as their supervisees accountable in the relationship, trust in the relationship will increase. Supervisors can do this by telling the truth about their impressions of the supervisee and about their own feelings, by treating the supervisee with integrity, and by taking responsibility for their own part in any tensions in the relationship.

Doherty (1995) also introduces the notion of courage on the part of practitioners. His contention is that it takes courage to push themselves and their clients past their personal safety zones into areas that will promote growth and integrity in their work and in that of their clients. Peterson (1984) suggests that trust in the supervisory relationship is built in part by the confidence that the supervisor will go as far as necessary to understand completely the work of the supervisee. The supervisee must be able to believe that a

supervisor will push to gain more information, even if this challenges the supervisee, but that both push and challenge will occur in an atmosphere of acceptance. Supervisees in this type of relationship experience that they have told the whole truth about themselves and their work, to the best of their ability, and, even when they are deeply challenged, they feel accepted by the supervisor.

The mistrust between Marilyn and Tim is related to their inability to treat one another with integrity. Both believed in the principle that the supervisee should be able to tell the truth and that the supervisor needed to challenge the supervisee in the manner described by Peterson (1984). However, neither saw the other as trustworthy. Tim thought Marilyn's resistance to his challenge showed a lack of professional ability and courage on her part. Her blatantly disrespectful treatment of him was further support for his opinion. Marilyn increasingly mistrusted Tim's intent. She did not believe that Tim would treat her fairly, honestly, and without shaming her. Therefore, she did not experience the safety that was necessary for her to accept and learn from his challenge.

THE ORGANIZATIONAL SETTING

The organization within which supervision takes place has a significant impact on the supervisory relationship. The type and amount of power the supervisor exercises over the supervisee is often determined by the organization. For example, the prominence of the supervisor's evaluative role is directly connected to the degree of power vested in the supervisor by the context. When this is high, the level of trust between supervisor and supervisee may well be threatened, especially if either the evaluation is performed in a disrespectful manner or the shared meaning between supervisor and supervisee is not present. In contrast, if the agency does not support the supervisor in setting appropriate limits, this can lead to problems if practitioners are not held accountable for their practice.

With regard to shared meaning, the organization influences both the contract and the beliefs about what client services should look like. The organization may promote a situation in which the expectations for supervisee performance are unclear. In addition, the supervisor may not be in a position to attend to the learning needs of a particular supervisee. In an agency, the supervisory relationship is not voluntary. Even if the supervisor and supervisee cannot agree on the

contract, they must continue to work together, unless a transfer to another part of the agency can be arranged.

An outpatient counseling service will provide very different treatment than an inpatient psychiatric unit in a hospital, a school setting, or a crisis intervention agency. In addition, funding sources often dictate both the length of client services and what types of services are necessary. All of these variables affect the nature of client services and therefore the content of the supervision. By virtue of their position, supervisors must find a way to endorse and promote the agency directives and at the same time support the practitioners' commitment to competent service. Often there is real or perceived conflict between the two, and the supervisor, to be effective, must balance the needs of agency, supervisees, and clients (Shulman, 1993).

Finally, various characteristics of the staff might affect supervisory relationships. For example, there was very little diversity among the staff in Marilyn's agency with respect to age and gender. Although one might assume that the homogeneity of the staff would lessen some potential tensions, there is also the possibility that others were increased. When everyone's experience is extremely similar, there is a greater risk of "group think" that can have a powerful negative effect on the environment, as individual differences are not acknowledged. Tim's effort to treat each of his relationships with his supervisees as individual was upsetting to the staff, who perceived him as attempting to "divide and conquer" and to avoid acknowledging his own contribution to the problem. However, his approach is understandable, given his concern that he was being "ganged up on" by a group of like-minded female employees whom he thought were creating a negative tone in the agency.

CONCLUSION

The goal of this chapter is to help supervisors and supervisees understand the complex dynamics of their relationships, to enhance the quality of their supervisory experience. A case vignette was presented to illustrate some of the concepts in a framework on supervision. The framework delineates the various aspects of supervision and the interaction between those aspects. The goal of supervision, defined as competent client services, is achieved through the development of the supervisee's perceptual, conceptual, intervention, and personal skills. The supervisory process *accountability* occurs through the acts of the

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supervisee's talking about his or her work (telling the story), evaluation, and education. The medium in which supervision occurs is the relationship between supervisor and supervisee, a relationship of which the main elements include the dynamics of power and authority, the development of shared meaning, and the creation of a sense of trust between the participants. Both the organizational setting in which the supervision occurs and the community in which the agency exists and which it serves have an effect on the relationship between supervisor and supervisee.

It is important to recognize that the process of building any relationship takes place over time. Although it is not a linear process, one can assume that the development of the contract is an important first step. Both supervisor and supervisee come to the relationship with expectations for themselves and each other. The more clearly these expectations can be identified and explored, the more likely the relationship will begin on a positive note. However, it is entirely possible that either or both participants may be only partially aware of their expectations and that those expectations will change over time. When a supervisee is new to the field, he or she may want more guidance and expertise from the supervisor than will be wanted or needed 1 or 2 years later.

Building trust is an evolutionary process, which, as discussed above, is directly related to how the dynamics of power and authority are dealt with. Marilyn began her supervision with Tim with some misgivings about him and a general fear of authority figures but also with a willingness to tell her story and to learn from him. As she exposed herself, she experienced him as using her willingness to be vulnerable in an abusive manner. Her attempts to address the issue were met with criticism. In response, she became less and less open and, in the end, openly disrespectful. Tim began the relationship with his own trepidation about taking on the role of supervisor. Although he initially found Marilyn a willing learner, over time, he saw her as resistant to his feedback and increasingly defensive. His attempts to address the situation were met with further resistance and defensiveness.

When initial difficulties arose between Marilyn and Tim, Tim did not have the skills to address them in a way that would serve to build, rather than destroy, their relationship. Tim needed to listen carefully to Marilyn's concerns and to take responsibility for his part in the emerging conflict between them. At the same time, he needed to claim and acknowledge his greater power as supervisor. Doing so would have served as an

important building block in the development of trust between them. As Marilyn became more trusting, she would have become more open both to sharing her story and to receiving challenging feedback from Tim. With the increase in her level of skill would have come an increased ability to talk more meaningfully with Tim about her work.

However, both Marilyn and Tim brought their own subjective realities to the situation. Another supervisee might greatly appreciate Tim's approach, finding it both useful and very supportive. Another supervisor might, as Sarah did, see Marilyn as cooperative and eager to learn. Without the shared vision of her colleagues, Marilyn might have found a different way to relate to Tim, one that did not increase the hostility between them. Although the greater power and therefore responsibility in the relationship lies with the supervisor, clearly all participants and the context itself have an impact that can be strong enough to block success. Gaps in shared meaning, failures of trust, and confusion about appropriate use of power are not only inevitable but, at times, insurmountable. There is no one right or wrong way to do supervision. However, awareness that the relationship is a powerful one that requires time and attention to build and to use effectively toward the goal of assuring competent client services is crucial to its success.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Speculate on the assumptions and biases underlying both Tim's and Marilyn's responses to one another. As the supervisor, how might you create an environment in which these could be exposed and explored in a constructive way?
2. Frequently there is confusion between supervisor and supervisee regarding whether a conflict is simply a legitimate difference of opinion about effective client services or one in which the supervisor is required to set limits regarding the supervisee's work. Three examples of this conflict were offered in this chapter: Marilyn and Tim's conflict about her use of other approaches to psychotherapy and her unwillingness to explore her personal issues in relation to her work, the practitioner who gave a client a ride home, and the Hmong practitioner who was concerned about reporting to child protection.

Discuss each of these situations from the point of view of the supervisor. That is, as a supervisor, what would be

your concerns in each of these situations? At what points would you insist on a particular course of action and at what points do you think it would be important to find ways to incorporate both your and the supervisee's positions?

3. Both supervisors and supervisees bring to the table their own attitudes toward power and authority. Discuss your attitudes to being an authority figure yourself and to relating to others in authority. In which position are you more comfortable? What aspects of authority are the most challenging for you?
4. Using the elements of the framework discussed here, describe a supervisory relationship you have experienced. How do you think the issues of power and authority, shared meaning, and trust were addressed? If there were blocks in the process of accountability, what do you think contributed to them? What ideas do you have now about how you could address and resolve those blocks? If the process was successful, what do you think made it so? What part did you, as supervisor or supervisee, play in making it successful?

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