

# Assignment

## **Reflection Supervision Report 1: Other Observation Assignment**

Student's Name

Institutional Affiliation

Course Name/Number

Professor's Name

Due Date

**1. Provide a detailed description of this meaningful conversation and the evaluation of the conversation based on the questions below.**

a. What happened?

b. What did your supervisor/colleague do?

I watched a counseling session conducted by my supervisor with a 54-year-old veteran who had reportedly sought counseling services on how to take care of his five-year-old grandson. The child in question was the son of the man's daughter, a drug addict. My prior conversation with the supervisor indicated that the client struggled to understand how to navigate his mental health issues alongside the disappointment of his daughter being a drug addict and the demands of taking care of his grandson. The supervisor had met with the client on separate occasions and was helping him to overcome the post-traumatic stress disorder experienced as a result of his experiences in the military.

The supervisor informed me that he would ask the client if he would be comfortable having a trainee around during this session, with the promise that I would not say anything or weigh in on the conversation between the two during the entire process. The client agreed to these conditions. When I first met the client, I realized he had a positive relationship with the supervisor based on the firm handshake they exchanged and the pleasantries that included a smile and a little friendly conversation before the session. I reached out to greet the client and introduce myself, and the client did the same without directly looking into my eyes. I maintained eye contact with a client, and he acknowledged that the supervisor had told him about me. The supervisor gave me a slight nod of approval, signaling me to settle and be comfortable because the session was about to start.

The conversation between the supervisor and the client began with a recap of what had been discussed in the previous session. The supervisor reviewed a list of points and conclusions from the previous session while asking the clients to affirm that these were the items that had been discussed. During this process, the client sat confidently and nodded in approval to the points that the supervisor talked about. The supervisor then introduced the topic for the day, and when he mentioned the issue of the grandson, the client uncrossed his legs and moved slightly, suggesting discomfort in discussing the topic. The supervisor immediately counted this body language with words of assurance, indicating to the clients that the objective was to find the best solution for the grandson and not to condemn anyone for any reason. During the initial exchanges, the client appeared uncomfortable about the subject and was sad primarily, occasionally supporting his cheek with his palm. The conversations around his daughter were the most difficult to navigate because he hesitated to give his responses to the supervisor. The supervisor mediated this discomfort by telling the client to take his time. The supervisor also gives small leads to the client by beginning sentences and letting the client finish them. This strategy was largely effective because it allowed the supervisor to write down notes that would later prove helpful in summarizing what had been discussed during the session.

The supervisor also asked the client to communicate his ideal perspective on the best solution for his problem. When asked, the client had a long pose and appeared to be breaking down while speaking remorsefully about his daughter and grandson. The supervisor handed him a handkerchief, informing him that talking about all the issues at once was not mandatory. Once the client had calmed down, the supervisor asked him if he was comfortable continuing, and he didn't respond. The client stared at the floor and asked this supervisor if they "could do this another time." The supervisor nodded in approval and assured the client that everything would get better with time. Once the session was over, the supervisors stood and moved towards the client. The two exchanged a few words, and then the client looked in my direction and gave me a little before making his way out.

## **2. Respond to the conversation by reporting further observations, expressing feelings, or asking some questions. (To work out)**

- a. What did your supervisor/colleague want to achieve? What was the purpose of the conversation?
- b. What struck me during the conversation? (Positive and "negative")

The supervisor wanted to introduce the client's grandson and daughter's issue. The goal was to establish preliminary goals that would help to address potential solutions for the best parenting strategies the client could use for his grandson. The supervisor had communicated to me that the client often felt uncomfortable talking about his immediate family, given the personal losses he had experienced, including the loss of his spouse two years back. To understand the client's preferences towards dealing with the emotional loss of having no immediate family to turn to, the supervisor designed this situation to allow the client to confront his emotions. The choices of the supervisor to design the session were evident in the emotionally charged conversation that had ensued. The supervisor wanted the client to talk about his feelings or at least show them. This approach helped the supervisor to understand how to structure subsequent conversations around the sensitive topics of the grandson and the daughter. I realize that the supervisor managed to achieve his objectives based on the emotional reaction he obtained from the client and the success he had in setting goals that would drive further counseling sessions.

The initial positive exchanges between the supervisor and the client struck me during the conversation. I felt that the client and the supervisor were too friendly and doubted they could have a fruitful conversation. My criticism of the supervisor's approach to the client before the session was that it had unlimited personal boundaries. However, I later understood that these interactions were necessary to establish rapport and remove any barriers that would have prevented free and open exchanges between the supervisor and the client. Once the session began, the client and the supervisors spoke freely with one another and explained their positions with follow-up questions from either side, helping to set the tone and the mood for the session. From my observations of both the client and my supervisor, I realized that the latter had invested a lot of time to remove the tensions and that the constructive conversations resulted from the communication



strategies the supervisor had deployed. I also understood that personal boundaries could be hard to establish in a counseling session because I thought the supervisor would have been more objective and firm with the client from the beginning. I realized that the supervisor had adapted his communication strategies to the client's needs rather than applying a generalized approach to communicating with him.

The most uncomfortable moment during the conversation was when the client had a little breakdown when the supervisor asked questions about his daughter. When the client broke down, I lost track of the progress made in the earlier phases of the conversation and was focused on the client's emotional response. I was tempted to speak and reach out to the client, but I remember that I was bound by conversational rules established at the beginning of the session. I immediately turned to the supervisor to see how he would handle the situation. He did not make a move towards the client during his breakdown and only gave him a handkerchief. I realized that maintaining boundaries and space between the client and the supervisor ensures one does not undo the progress in developing a conversation. The supervisor managed the emotional breakdown of the client positively by giving him time to express his emotions and then asking him to communicate whether he felt comfortable continuing with the session. I realized that the decision ended with no significant discussions on how to manage the parenting of the grandson or the client's relationship with the daughter. Initially, I felt there was little progress during the session because the session only ended with identified goals for the next session. However, my follow-up conversation with the supervisor revealed that he had achieved his goal of getting the client to discuss an uncomfortable topic.

From the supervisor's management of the conversation between himself and the client, I gathered that emotional intelligence is an essential skill for counselors. While it would be easier to respect the physical boundaries between the client and supervisor, the emotional boundary is more difficult to deal with, considering the pain experienced by a client due to a heavy burden on them. The positive communication strategies used by the supervisor to regulate the client's emotional response provided me with insights on how I could manage my feelings in an emotionally charged session. I think that the supervisor's application of conversational skills yielded positive results in the session and helped the client overcome a difficult phase of his problem, which was speaking about his grandson and daughter.

### **3. Relate the conversation to your own experiences, skills, or knowledge based on the questions below. (Make connections)**

- a. Have I experienced a similar event (a conversation, an event in my private life, etc.) experienced before?
- b. What were the differences and similarities?
- c. What skills or knowledge would I have to deal with this?

Looking back on my private life, I experienced a similar conversation with a friend who found it difficult to speak about her absent father. My friend felt disappointed with his father, and despite her mother's attempts to reunite them, my friend avoided the conversation and would get angry at anyone who suggested that she could repair his relationship with her father. I tried to bring up the topic several times. Each time I tried, we experienced a conversational breakdown, with my friend ending up crying or using curse words against me. I promised myself that I would not give up on trying to help my friend overcome the emotional conflicts that made it difficult for him to develop positive relationships with his parents. Comparing this conversation with the session I participated in with my supervisor, I realize there are many differences and similarities I can reflect on as part of my personal and professional growth.

The context was the main difference between my personal experience and the professional conversation between the client and the supervisor. In my context, I acted as a friend trying to help another friend and, therefore, applied friendlier conversational rules. Contrastingly, the supervisor-client relationship in the example I have covered was driven by professional communication rules. These rules made it easier for the supervisor to break down the subject for the client and encourage him to express his emotions. My conversations with my friend were more direct and personal because I knew my friend's background and history and felt the rapport was already there. However, I realized that my friend could not communicate with me freely because I did not fully understand how she felt about his father. I assumed that the best outcome for my friend would be for her to forgive his father and for him to move on with her life without holding any grudges. Another difficulty was that my friend's mom encouraged me to talk to her but did not give me a complete background on how the problem between my friend and her father had started. This lack of transparency made it harder to approach my friend's issue compared to the supervisor's conversation with the client. The supervisor had invested time to understand the client's background, not only as a war veteran but also as a person trying to deal with emotional losses from the passing of close family members.

There was an aspect of loss in both my example and the conversation between the client and the supervisor. My friend felt that she lost part of her life due to having a strained relationship with her father, similar to what the client felt towards her daughter, whom he felt was lost to drug addiction. My conversational approach with my friend did not yield results because I took the higher emotional ground by assuming that my friend was strong enough to overcome the trauma caused by her father. I realized the supervisor was largely successful because he had applied a step-by-step approach to break down the client's problem and was patient enough to understand what he needed at different points of their conversation.

To deal with my friend's problem, I will have to show patience and get my friend to talk openly about her relationship with her father rather than assuming information about her. I will also have to put aside my emotional investment in my friend to avoid premature interventions if my friend has another emotional breakdown. Looking back on how the supervisor handled the emotional breakdown in the client, I noticed

that he gave him time to calm down, which established a neutral ground for further conversations on how to proceed with the session. Establishing this ground with my friend will be difficult, given our close relationship. However, I now understand that some boundaries need to be established between clients and counselors, which I am willing to work on as part of my personal and professional growth.

#### **4. What were the underlying factors that influenced the conversation? (To declare)**

- a. Explain in detail why these factors were important.
- b. How are the underlying factors related to each other?
- c. Try to take different points of view. How could someone else/another student/senior colleague, for example, act during the conversation? Or what do you know about this from the literature? What alternative explanations can you think of?

One of the factors that influenced the conversation was the power balance between the client and the supervisor. Power balance in client-therapist relationships determines the flow of information between the two and may assist in determining how much information should be revealed to facilitate the client's recovery (O'Connor, 2019). I felt that the power balance in the relationship between the client and supervisor leaned heavily on the supervisor's side because he had enough information about the client to structure subsequent conversations around the sensitive topics. The client's position made him subservient to the supervisor's suggestions, which explains why he agreed with almost everything the supervisor said. I also questioned how much the client knew about the supervisor enough to develop trust towards his ideas. The levels of privacy in this conversation were evident based on how little the supervisor talked about himself, and this made me question how to overcome informational barriers that make it hard to develop close relations with clients. Privacy levels can determine the supervisor's level of control over therapeutic conversations (Amis, 2017). I realized that there was just enough privacy from the supervisor's side because the client did not hesitate to respond to the supervisor even when he asked for private information.

Another factor that mediated the interactions between the supervisor and the client was the power distribution achieved by the counselor's qualifications. I realized that the client trusted the supervisor to develop solutions to his problems because he felt the supervisor was competent and qualified enough to do so. The client's feeling of powerlessness made it easier for him to engage in goal-setting processes on what would be discussed in the next decision. Green (2015) and Piper & Treyger (2012) observe that managing the power differential between the client and the therapist is an invaluable process that is subject to abuse but can also be leveraged to achieve positive outcomes in the therapeutic process. I felt that the supervisor leveraged his balance of Power to construct positive conversations with the client without undermining the client's feelings. The power factor presented a significant step for the supervisor to model the conversation in a way that allowed the client to perceive a sense of safety in discussing difficult topics relating to his

daughter and grandson.

Apart from the supervisor's better positioning in the power differential, there is also a need to consider the client's vulnerability that could result from their perception of a problem. Zur (2009) observes that therapists should consider the vulnerable factors that clients may be predisposed to and how these factors could impede their effective participation in the therapeutic process. In the described case, the client was vulnerable to feelings of guilt and shame because his daughter was a drug addict. Lloyd (2013) and Liahaugen et al. (2023) explain that parents may feel responsible for failing to protect their children from drug and substance abuse. Such responsibility may capitulate into feelings of guilt and shame, making it hard for parents to talk freely about their children (Hlungwani et al., 2020; Butler & Bauld, 2005). From this perspective, the counselor needs to develop conversations in a way that navigates the guilt and shame and relieves tensions that may impede the therapeutic process. I feel that the conversation between the client and the supervisor was managed in a way that allowed the client to confront his shame and guilt over his daughter's addiction.

## **5. Indicate what you would do differently in the future and why. (Future trading)**

- a. What action alternatives does your supervisor/colleague have?
- b. What would work best and why?
- c. What theories can I connect this to?
- d. How will you incorporate the reflection into future behavior?
- e. Describe at least three related learning goals for yourself for the coming (internship) period to this assignment.

To manage the relationship with the client in future sessions, I would consider reviewing the client's position when participating in the therapy process to ensure that they do not feel disadvantaged or vulnerable in the therapeutic process (Corey et al., 2015). I was concerned about the power differential between the client and the supervisor. I want to engage in strategies that could help to promote the positive use of professional Power to help a client. Craciun (2016) observes that correctly utilizing professional Power could empower clients to take responsibility for their problems rather than being subject to the therapist's suggestions. I look forward to using more open conversational pathways for improving the client's positioning in the power differential. For example, I could ask the client to describe the best scenario for himself, his daughter, and his grandson and then work on a solution based on this description. This decision embodies a client-centric therapeutic process and could make the client perceive that they are involved in creating a solution. A client-centric therapeutic process ensures that a therapist pays attention to the client's problems and uses the problem to identify solutions rather than applying

generalized approaches (Yao & Kabir, 2023). I feel that the supervisor applied this approach, allowing him to frame his tone and attitude toward the client, leading to the successful meditation of a pathway for solving the client's problems.

I look forward to enhancing my understanding of different client issues by paying greater attention to the client's description of the problem and suggesting solutions that align with the client's positioning and status.

I can connect my further interactions with the client to the family systems theory that seeks to establish homeostasis in the family system. The imbalance in the client's family is caused by the losses he has experienced in the past, which makes him feel vulnerable to further losses, especially of his daughter, who is now a drug addict. A family systems approach requires the counselor to consider the role played by every family member in developing healthy interactions that help establish stability and equilibrium in the family (Lander, Howsare, & Byrne, 2013). I can incorporate this theory to probe the role that the client, the grandson, and the daughter play in facilitating stronger family interactions that could protect the client from feeling responsible and vulnerable to the problems within his family. I could structure conversations starting with the client's past and how he feels about his grandson due to the perceived failure of parenting his daughter. The conversations with the client could also focus more on his relationship with his daughter and provide a neutral ground from which the counselor could pursue reconciliatory efforts with the daughter.

This reflection will help me to consider a wide range of factors affecting clients before structuring conversation pathways during the therapeutic process. I am committed to learning more about how specific problems experienced by clients could be explained using theoretical and practical knowledge to help design solutions and interventions on behalf of the client. I am also aware of the influence of the power differential between the client and me, which could make it easy or difficult to develop positive interventions that help the client address their issues. The self-reflection approach also assists me in considering how my communication behaviors in therapeutic processes could be constructive or detrimental to the long-term care goals for clients. Going forward, I have identified the following three objectives as the main focuses on my professional growth and development as a counselor.

**Objective 1:** I want to learn how to prepare for entire conversations with clients by assessing conversation points before meetings. I need to learn how to write down preliminary goals, anticipate possible client responses, and how they could affect the effectiveness of my professional interventions.

**Objective 2:** I want to develop my emotional intelligence and grow my recognition of professional boundaries to avoid undue influence in the therapeutic process. I look forward to accessing client's positioning, especially when they express their emotions.

**Objective 3:** I look forward to utilizing evidence-based approaches to assess and explain the client's problems. I recognize the significance of existing theories and look forward to applying more practical approaches that could help to describe potential solutions to issues faced by clients.

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