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Incorporating Leadership Models Into Counseling Supervision: Recommendations to Strengthen Services

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Abstract

Counseling supervision is considered a fundamental instructional tool for the counseling profession. Despite the existence of supervision guidelines and standards, researchers continue to report that a majority of supervisors (especially administrative and on-site supervisors) lack formalized supervision training, leading to inconsistent and confusing training experiences for counselors-in-training (CIT). It is recommended that the counseling profession examine research-based leadership models (including situational leadership, servant leadership, and transformational leadership) in order to present a competency-based method for providing supervision to CITs. Recommendations for administrative supervisors, on-site supervisors, and counselor educators are included.

Keywords: counseling supervision, leadership models

Counseling supervision is a fundamental instructional tool used to monitor counselor development and accountability (Barnett, Cornish, Goodyear, & Lichtenberg, 2007; Bernard & Goodyear, 2014; Gazzola, De Stefano, Theriault, & Audet, 2013; Glossoff & Durham, 2010; Kaslow, Falender, & Grus, 2012; Ladany, Mori, & Mehr, 2013; Ronnestad & Skovolt, 2001). Supervision is widely regarded and relied upon in the counseling profession as an intervention to prepare, teach, and monitor the quality of

counseling provided by supervisees. Similar to the field of counseling itself, counseling supervision has evolved throughout the decades and is regarded as a distinct specialty within the profession. Regardless of the specific definition, counseling supervision involves a professional evaluative relationship between two helping professionals, with the supervisor having more counseling experience than the supervisee (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014; Kaslow et al., 2012). Supervision includes a wide range of interventions, including direct observation, case conceptualization, role-playing exercises, modeling behaviors, and psychoeducation. In order to keep counseling supervisors abreast of best supervision practices, it is recommended that advancements are made to evolve the practice of supervision.

In its infancy, counseling supervision was conceptualized as a “germ theory” in that seasoned practitioners assumed that by observing their practice, counselors-in-training could acquire the skill set needed to be effective clinicians (Blocher, 1983). This theory was unsubstantiated and potentially dangerous, causing professionals to call for a more formalized process for training helping professionals (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014; Hadjistavropoulos, Kehler, & Hadjistavropoulos, 2010). In 1990, the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) developed the *Standards for Counseling Supervisors*, which highlighted that counseling supervision was a unique specialty in the counseling profession that required professional consideration related to training and credentialing (Borders et al., 2015). To date, 26 states have adopted policies on the training of supervisors (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2010). Thus, 15 years post the release of professional standards, 52% of state licensing bodies require that supervisors receive some form of specialized training before agreeing to supervise counselors seeking their Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) license. This suggests that the advancement of supervision training and credentialing in the counseling profession is slow moving.

As of 1988, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) required that Counselor Education and Supervision doctoral programs provide training on supervision to doctoral students (Dye & Borders, 1990). However, there is no such requirement for master’s-level counselors, and this is the population that provides the majority of supervision services to counselors and counselors-in-training (Glosoff, Durham, & Whittaker, 2011; Studer, 2005). Many site supervisors with a master’s degree reported high levels of supervisor self-efficacy (DeKruyf & Pehrsson, 2011), which can be problematic if the counseling supervisor lacks formalized training and comprehension of supervision standards.

However, despite advancements made in supervision thus far, including a large research body of empirical support and specific ethical guidelines and credentials, the majority of individuals providing supervision services to counselors in the field are ill-prepared and lack formalized training (DeKruyf & Pehrsson, 2011; Glosoff & Durham, 2010; Jacob, McMaster, Nestel, Metzger, & Olesky, 2013; Ladany et al., 2013; Watkins, 2012). In their study of school counselors, DeKruyf and Pehrsson (2011) found that 48% of site supervisors reported no training in the provision of supervision services. Of those subjects who did receive training, the majority (27%) stated that they received this training at national/state conferences, while others reported applying training from other academic disciplines and on the job training. It is estimated that 95% of counselors with 15 or more years of experience will serve as a counseling supervisor (Bernard &

Goodyear, 2014); however, less than 20% of these professionals have received supervision training (Peake, Nussbaum, & Tindell, 2002).

Despite the prevalence of professional support related to counseling supervision, counselors and supervisors continue to struggle with conceptualizing supervision services. For example, ACES polled their professional membership and found that subjects requested additional guidance on the provision of supervision services on a daily basis (ACES Executive Council, 2002). In response to the ambiguity in the application of supervision services, ACES appointed a taskforce to review the professional literature including research findings, educational practices, and ethical/legal resources. Upon completion of their thorough review, ACES Taskforce members developed a *Best Practices in Clinical Supervision* resource. Borders et al., (2015) recommended that this resource should be shared by counselor educators with site and administrative supervisors, as a large number of these professionals are providing supervision to master's-level clinicians without having had formalized training in providing effective supervision services. If counseling center personnel (i.e., administrative and site supervisors) do not interact with counselor educators on a regular basis, these professionals may not be as privileged to the best practices information so readily available to those in academia. Borders et al. (2015) also recommended that counselor educators and clinical administrators use these best practices in providing outreach and advocacy, both important concepts to the counseling profession, throughout the community to educate professionals about the importance of supervisor preparation.

Glosoff et al. (2011) found that the majority of counseling professionals who provide supervision services to master's-level clinicians, including administrative and on-site supervisors, have not received supervision training themselves. Supervision administrators "both supervise and evaluate supervisor performance and suggest goals for professional development" (Henderson, 1994, p. 4). Oftentimes, administrative supervisor responsibilities extend beyond the typical supervision responsibilities to include business/agency compliance and supervisee adherence to company policy (Henderson, 1994). Site supervisors are degreed helping professionals who typically work in collaboration with counselor education programs during the counselor-in-training's (CIT) clinical placement experience (CACREP, 2016). Site supervisors often assist in the training and evaluation of CITs during their academic training (CACREP, 2016). A challenge associated with these two types of supervision roles is that the professionals are often required to balance multiple responsibilities and relationships with their supervisees from differing perspectives (e.g., business productivity versus counseling training), oftentimes leading to confusing and inconsistent training experiences for CITs. In addition, ill-equipped supervisors are unable to promote cultural changes in counseling agencies leading to supervisors experiencing burnout, inadequate training opportunities for new professionals, and a host of other issues (Kaslow et al., 2012).

This lack of formalized training is especially concerning when practicum and internship training requirements allow counselors-in-training to receive supervision from a site supervisor with only 2 years of counseling experience after being awarded their master's degree (CACREP, 2016). "This suggests that a supervisor-in-training will likely have his or her first supervision practicum conducting supervision with a group of trainees whose level of counseling experience is roughly the same as their own,"

(Gazzola et al., 2013 p. 18). To further complicate this issue, the practice of counseling supervision can be an ambiguous and confusing process for both the supervisor and supervisee. Although there are multiple supervision models available in the counseling literature for supervisors, including theoretical models, developmental models, and process models (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014), specific recommendations on implementing these models in practice is less available (Bernard, 2010; Gazzola et al., 2013; Ladany, 2002). Not to mention, many of the models included in counseling textbooks were developed decades ago and may not reflect commonly accepted best practices and the changing counseling profession (Gazzola et al., 2013). In response to these challenges, Jennings, Goh, Skovholt, Hanson, and Benergee-Stevens (2003) stated, “perhaps searching more broadly to see what other disciplines know about this area may prove beneficial” (p. 70).

One suggestion found in the literature to address these issues is for the counseling profession to look toward the career literature and their years of research in leadership development (Bedford & Gehlert, 2013; Jacob et al., 2013; Kaslow et al., 2012). Leadership is often conceptualized as developing teams to work toward achieving a goal (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005), and this concept is consistent with components of agency and counseling center mission statements. In the leadership research, the personality and characteristics of all invested stakeholders, as well as the project goals, are linked to successful leadership outcomes (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005; Kaslow et al., 2012). These models include competency-based initiatives (e.g., Transformational Leadership), situation specific initiatives (e.g., Situational Leadership), and implicit initiatives (e.g., Servant Leadership; Hogan & Kaiser, 2005; Kaslow et al., 2012; Ladany et al., 2013).

It is well documented that successful leaders are able to build and manage relationships that encourage followers to invest in the common goal (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005, Jacob et al., 2013; Kaslow et al., 2012). Similar to this ideology, counseling supervisors must engage and invest supervisees into the supervision process through the implementation of leadership and relationship building skills. Administrative and site supervisors would benefit from training on current leadership models to improve the delivery of supervision services and ensure supervisee competency. This manuscript was developed to explore three widely accepted career leadership models—Situational Leadership, Servant Leadership, and Transformational Leadership—in an effort to identify specific methods for counseling supervisors to utilize in the practice of supervision. These particular models consist of principles that are easily transferable to supervisory relationships within the counseling profession. Recommendations for administrative supervisors, site supervisors, and counselor educators are included.

Leadership and Supervision

In response to this paucity of training opportunities for master’s-level supervisors, researchers have recommended adopting a competency-based supervision program that would require a focus on training objectives and end goals in determining CIT success (Falender et al., 2004). Regardless of the professional support to identify a more formalized process, there are currently no guiding principles available (Gazzola et al., 2013). Until a more suitable solution is identified, administrative and site supervisors could consider the advantages of incorporating leadership models into their provision of

supervision services. The benefits of infusing leadership models into counseling supervision are numerous because this is a cost-effective solution to addressing the lack of formalized training to supervisors in the field. Information on leadership models is readily available through online and print resources, not to mention these approaches are more structured and less ambiguous. Whether counseling agencies have access to counselor educators and trained administrators, the suggestions included in this manuscript can be used independently by an agency or in agreement with a counseling program.

Situational Leadership

First proposed in the 1960s by Hersey and Blanchard (Fernandez & Vecchio, 1997; Graeff, 1997), Situational Leadership has become a top career model for training staff (Fernandez & Vecchio, 1997). Situational Leadership is the assessment of a staff person's learning needs so that the leader can modify their style of instruction to meet those needs. For counseling supervision, this would translate into how a supervisor assesses the supervisee's abilities and guides the supervisee's development as a counselor consistent with Borders and Brown's (2005) recommendations for all counseling supervision practices.

In this approach, there are three factors: (a) task behaviors, (b) relationship behaviors, and (c) readiness level (Hersey & Blanchard, 1993). In supervision, task behavior refers to how the supervisor directs the supervisee (Bedford & Gehlert, 2013). An example of task behaviors might include training on the policies and procedures of the counseling center. Relationship behavior refers to how the supervisor initiates and maintains a working alliance with the supervisee (Bedford & Gehlert, 2013). Examples of relationship behavior might include developing rapport with the supervisee and providing a supportive learning environment to promote growth. Finally, readiness level is the preparedness of the supervisee to complete agency tasks (Bedford & Gehlert, 2013). This includes an examination of the supervisee's competence and training related to their ability to execute job tasks effectively, including demonstration of basic counseling skills. From a Situational Leadership perspective, by matching the supervisee's needs with a leadership style that fits them—a solutions-focused, strengths-based approach to successful management is utilized.

According to Situational Leadership theorists, there is not one management style that works with all staff (Fernandez & Vecchio, 1997). This belief is consistent with learning and supervision theories purporting that supervisors are to meet their supervisees where they are (DeKruyf & Pehrsson, 2011). In applying the three factors described above, Hersey and Blanchard (1993) proposed four types of leadership styles ranging from "low relationship and high task to high relationship and low task" (as cited in Fernandez & Vecchio, 1997, p. 68). In simple terms, through identifying the supervisee's task and relationship behaviors (using a four style approach), a supervisor can adjust their management from a very structured and instructional approach to a more autonomous, supervisee-driven stance (Graeff, 1997; Kaslow & Bell, 2008). In assessing the task and relationship behaviors, the following conclusions can be made: (a) Style 1—the supervisee understands the process of counseling and agency practices, but they do not have a solid working alliance with the supervisor; (b) Style 2—the supervisee understands the process of counseling and agency practices and has a strong working

alliance with the supervisor; (c) Style 3—the supervisee has a poor comprehension of the process of counseling and/or agency practices, but they have a strong working alliance with their supervisor; and (d) Style 4—the supervisee has a poor comprehension of the process of counseling and agency practices and does not have a solid working alliance with their supervisor (Bedford & Gehlert, 2013).

Once the supervisor considers the task and relationship behavior of the supervisee, individuals who practice Situational Leadership transition toward a solutions-focused style of management by considering the supervisee's readiness level. In assessing the readiness level, the following conclusions can be made: (a) Readiness 1; (b) Readiness 2; (c) Readiness 3; or (d) Readiness 4 (Bedford & Gehlert, 2013, p. 59). For Readiness 1, the supervisee's counseling abilities may be inadequate and they may be insecure about their performance. This may be demonstrated in the supervisee through confusion, anxiety, resistance to share audio/video tapes, etc. In this case, the supervisor would focus on relationship building to support the supervisee while providing clear structure and direction (Graeff, 1997). Through this development of a working alliance, the supervisor can create a climate for the supervisee to explore their deficiencies in an effort to improve before a formalized evaluation occurs. Readiness 2 describes a supervisee who has overestimated their counseling abilities; however, their actual performance is not consistent with their perception. These supervisees can be especially difficult to work with, as they may not respond well to direction, yet they are not completing the task to meet expectations. It is recommended that supervisors again provide clear structure and direction in teaching the supervisee through a consultative role that helps the supervisee understand the deeper rationale behind the provision of counseling services (Bedford & Gehlert, 2013; Graeff, 1997). Instead of revisiting a task over and over again to achieve mastery, the supervisor should attempt a more global approach to the philosophy/purposes behind the tasks. In a counseling setting, that may be discussing the importance of counseling documentation, treatment planning, executing a counseling theory appropriately, etc. The intention is that this consultative approach may prompt a willingness to learn and improve on behalf of the supervisee. For Readiness 3, the supervisee is able to complete tasks related to their counseling performance, but they are insecure and may ask for direction even when they do not need it. In this case, relationship building is important (Graeff, 1997). Finally, for Readiness 4, the supervisee is competent and capable in completing job tasks and may benefit from a supervisor who encourages autonomy (Graeff, 1997).

According to the available research, Situational Leadership can be an effective tool in a work environment; however, more research is needed (Graeff, 1997). According to Vecchio's (1987) study of teachers and principals, he found that new employees require more structure and direction than seasoned professionals, which aligns with the Situational Leadership approach to provide directional task behaviors while building a relationship. This is also consistent with counselor education's recommendation to provide structured and supportive training opportunities to practicum and early career counselors-in training.

Servant Leadership

Servant Leadership is a style of leadership that has gained attention recently (Parris & Peachy, 2012), although its origins can be traced to the 1970s when Robert

Greenleaf first proposed the concept. Servant Leadership is a management style that motivates, guides, and provides hope through the provision of a caring environment and positive working relationship with staff persons (Greenleaf & Spears, 2002). In supervision, this would translate into the establishment of a positive working alliance whereby the supervisee feels invested as a counselor-in-training. In addition, Servant Leadership practices align with basic counseling philosophies as they focus on relationships, empowering individuals, promoting self-growth, and value identification (Ehrhart, 2004). It is anticipated that many counselors and supervisors will easily identify with Servant Leadership practices as they closely align with counseling philosophies.

From a supervision perspective, Servant Leadership focuses on how the supervisor can help their supervisee grow beyond the completion of agency tasks (e.g., counseling documentation, treatment planning) to foster personal growth and development (e.g., self-awareness as a counselor). Thus supervisors who use a Servant Leadership approach focus on the development and interests of the supervisee, rather than exclusively focusing on the goals of the overall organization (Yoshida, Sendjaya, Hirst, & Cooper, 2014). This can be accomplished by the supervisor through the incorporation of self-growth opportunities into supervision, so the supervisee can continue to develop as a professional counselor (Hannay, 2009).

In supervision, Servant Leadership is exemplified through six main functions and behaviors that the supervisor applies. These six functions include: a) empowerment; b) stewardship; c) authenticity; d) providing direction; e) humility; and f) interpersonal acceptance (Van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2015). In applying these functions, a supervisor thus encourages the CIT to achieve autonomy, self-awareness, ethical decision-making and acceptance (Van Dierendonck, & Patterson, 2015). The goal of this leadership style is to establish a strong relationship with the supervisee that is egalitarian and focused on CIT development. Unlike more structured leadership approaches, Servant Leadership does not provide a structured framework for supervisors to apply, but rather identifies relational skills needed to encourage supervisee investment in their growth and success at a counseling center.

Servant Leadership approaches have also been found to be an effective tool when working with multicultural individuals (Mittal & Dorfman, 2012). Liden, Wayne, Zhao, and Henderson (2008) found that the application of Servant Leadership practices in a professional setting improved the job performance and commitment of employees. Furthermore, these same respondents also reported an increased commitment to becoming involved in community programs and advocacy initiatives. This finding aligns with counselor education recommendations to incorporate social justice in supervision and promote supervisee investment (Glossoff & Durham, 2010). Servant Leadership appears to be a management approach that aligns with counseling philosophies while providing some guidance to supervisors in working with supervisees.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational Leadership is a competency-based approach that identifies a problem, creates a vision of change through inspiration, and addresses the values and ideals of stakeholders to motivate action (Jacob et al., 2013; Kaslow et al., 2012). A Transformational Leadership style reflects the leader's capacity to promote change in order to achieve organizational goals (Choudhary, Akhtar, & Zaheer, 2013). In a

counseling environment, transformational supervisors enforce the mission of the agency while maintaining ethical behaviors and quality assurance. Using this style, supervisors support the supervisee's development as it serves as precondition for organizational transformation. Supervision skills might include the establishment of a positive working alliance, developing shared goals among staff members and supervisees, and focusing on agency cohesiveness (i.e., a shared common goal; Kaslow et al., 2012). These skills may be particularly appealing to an administrative supervisor who balances multiple responsibilities in the agency setting.

To support the development and unique strengths of supervisees, supervisors empower counselors-in-training by linking their goals and strengths to the goals and vision of the counseling agency (Kaslow et al., 2012). This can be achieved through the development of supervision goals, formative/summative evaluative methods and professional training opportunities. Transformational supervisors achieve success by evoking an emotional bond in the supervisee that encourages them to invest in the success of the agency and the organizational mission. Thus, special attention is paid to the supervisee's emotional attachment to the organization and to their relationship with the supervisor (Tebeian, 2012).

The application of Transformational Leadership can be conceptualized using four behavioral components: idealized influence; inspirational motivation; intellectual stimulation; and individualized consideration (Smith, Montagno, & Kuzmenko, 2004). For idealized influence, the supervisor, using the working alliance, garners feelings of admiration, trust, and respect from supervisees (Jacob et al., 2013). This demonstrates to the supervisee that the supervisor is invested in their success and performance at the counseling center. Inspirational motivation refers to the supervisor's ability to inspire the supervisee to invest in their own development and self-growth by challenging their preconceived notions and encouraging the examination of different perspectives (Jacob et al., 2013). The concept of intellectual stimulation focuses on utilizing effective and creative strategies to stimulate self-awareness and provoke change in the supervisee (Jacob et al., 2013). Finally, individualized consideration refers to the supervisor's ability to recognize the unique characteristics the supervisee brings to the center and utilizing these skills in achieving goals and promoting the working alliance.

The positive outcomes associated with a Transformational Leadership style include higher levels of motivation, performance, morale, and satisfaction of all the individuals within the system (Kaslow et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2004). This process can result in higher levels of interpersonal trust, openness, and group cohesion. Burnout can be minimized and the psychological well-being of all members in the training culture will be enhanced. Supervisees will receive higher quality supervision, which will enable them to be more competent practitioners (Kaslow et al., 2012). Considering Skovolt and Trotter-Mathison's (2011) belief that counselor burnout is a result of poor organizational structure, the Transformational Leadership supervision style addresses organizational structure and may be a great method to insulate supervisees from burnout by providing them with structure, support, and company investment.

Strategies to Incorporate Leadership Models Into Counseling Supervision

Kaslow et al., (2012) recommended that the supervision literature move from recommending standards and competencies to actually applying these recommendations in practice. One way to implement competency-based practice into supervision is through the utilization of commonly regarded leadership models including Situational Leadership, Servant Leadership, and Transformational Leadership approaches. The benefits of implementing these models might include business advancement, a practical solution to training administrative and site supervisors, and enhanced collaboration with counselor education programs.

Agency Advancement as a Business

One benefit of integrating career leadership models into administrative and on-site supervision practices is that these methods can help counseling professionals develop into agency leaders (Kaslow et al., 2012). Oftentimes, counselor training includes a focus on counseling skills and relationship dynamics, thereby omitting important business and professional processes. By integrating organizational models into counseling identities, professionals will be more prepared to conduct management and administrative responsibilities at the agency level.

Targeted Training for Administrative Supervisors

Administrative and site supervisors are often responsible for a variety of counseling and administrative tasks at the agency-level. Thus, a competency based supervision style may be an appropriate intervention in helping supervisors utilize a strengths-based method to working with supervisees that is structured, not dependent upon a specific theory, and overlaps with agency standards (Kaslow et al., 2012). In addition, trainings on career leadership models are offered frequently and available resources are plentiful via print resources and the Internet, making training materials easily accessible for supervisors.

Collaborating With Higher Education and Evaluating Students

In a time of accountability, a more formalized method to conducting counseling supervision may help counselor education programs to evaluate and remediate problematic students. Leadership models can provide a strategy for supervisors to work with supervisees that are clear, organized, and grounded in research. Since leadership models are competency based in making the assessment of targeted outcomes easier to evaluate, counselor education programs and licensing boards may be able to report evidence-based outcomes with confidence to accrediting and licensing bodies.

Oftentimes, supervision is perceived as a developmental process whereby an individual progresses as a counseling professional over time due to client exposure, continued experience, and an intentional focus on development as a counselor (Carroll, 1996). A common struggle of supervisors is promoting supervisee growth without turning the session into a counseling session. Through implementing leadership models, supervisors can use popular methods that acknowledge growth without encouraging inappropriate self-disclosure. This method is also beneficial for collaboration with higher education programs that must demonstrate to administration and regulating bodies that

professional procedures were adhered to in remediation and dismissal proceedings. Through implementing a formalized process to evaluate and supervise CITs, counseling centers and counselor education programs can work together to ensure client safety and optimal training opportunities for CITs.

Discussion

It is clear the counseling profession needs to identify new and innovative methods to train the majority of administrative and site supervisors who are employed in the field. Despite a large body of literature with training recommendations (Barnett et al., 2007; Bernard & Goodyear, 2014; Gazzola et al., 2013; Glosoff & Durham, 2010; Kaslow et al., 2012; Ladany et al., 2013; Ronnestad & Skovolt, 2001), the minority of individuals providing on-site supervision are ill-prepared for the task (DeKruyf & Pehrsson, 2011; Glosoff & Durham, 2010; Jacob et al., 2013; Kaslow et al., 2012; Ladany et al., 2013; Watkins, 2012). By applying business-approved approaches to counseling supervision, administrative and on-site supervisors could immediately and independently begin utilizing the information in the provision of supervision services. In addition to recommendations on the application of these approaches, there are also large-scale benefits including agency advancement, easy and affordable targeted training opportunities, and increased collaboration with counselor educators.

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