

Is Your Counselling Supervision Humanistic?

Brenda Rogers

There has been debate in AHPP on whether doing supervision work is hierarchical in nature and whether, if it is hierarchical, this makes it un-humanistic. This is difficult for a humanistic organisation which insists that all its registered practitioners are supervised. Maybe the word 'supervisor' is unhelpful, as it has such authoritarian connotations; most counselling-supervisors (BAC's name to distinguish from line-supervision) act as consultants to practitioners. Supervisors are employees, so if you're a private practice counsellor you can change supervisors if you're not satisfied with their contribution to your practice. The relationship is one of equal partners each with their own area of expertise, just as your client is the expert on their own inner life and feelings. Even if your employer pays for your supervision, you should push for a change of supervisor if you don't find the sessions useful and beneficial to the work you do. Being able to change if it doesn't work well for you is an important aspect of humanistic supervision.

The following is a fairly light-hearted quiz for you to decide whether your own supervisor (or your own supervisory work — dare you give copies to your supervisees?) is competent, right for you and

humanistic. I hope it may raise some interesting questions for you and your supervisor. You will need to tick more than one of the possibilities in many questions.

1. Do you feel that you are (a) partners in a working alliance (b) boss and servant?
2. Who has responsibility for setting ethical and practice standards? (a) you (b) your supervisor (c) the agency you work for (d) your professional organisation (e) your supervisor's professional organisation.
3. Who is responsible for the standard of competence in your counselling? (a) you (b) your supervisor.
4. Your supervisor is (a) trained in supervision theory and practice (b) has not trained as a supervisor but has studied the issues and is an experienced and ethical counsellor (c) you don't know and don't like to ask.
5. If you were identifying with a client because you had some unworked-out problem of your own, would your supervisor (a) counsel you about your problem (b) suggest that this was a therapy issue which you should deal with elsewhere (c) explain identification to you and expect you to be able to separate your issue from the client's?

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6. Your friend's sister wants to come to you for counselling. You're short of clients and need more fees to meet living expenses. Do you (a) see the sister and not mention it to your supervisor (b) ask your supervisor if it's O.K. to work with the sister (c) tell your supervisor about your financial pressures?
7. You're stressed and aware that you haven't paid full attention to a client. Do you (a) ask your supervisor for stress management techniques (b) take time out and hope that you'll feel better after a break (c) discuss your dilemma with your supervisor and check out whether it's the stress or your relationship with this particular client that is the problem (d) have a good cry in the supervision session (e) feel angry with your supervisor for not realising that you were heading for problems through overwork?
8. Counsellor colleagues are planning a workshop day for supervisors and counsellors to get together as a group, followed by a social get-together. Do you (a) decide not to tell your supervisor at all (b) invite your supervisor warmly to come (c) tell your supervisor that it has been arranged but that you don't feel comfortable for them to come with you/you only want them to come to the workshop part?
9. Your supervisor is also your (a) course tutor (b) therapist/counsellor (c) training course director (d) line manager (e) best friend (f) supervisee.
10. Your supervisor seems to spend a large part of each session asking you detailed questions about your method and style of working. Do you (a) ask why (b) assume there must be a good reason for this (c) wonder if there is a question about your competence (d) suggest other ways of working together?
11. Who decides what you will bring to your supervision sessions? (a) you (b) the supervisor (c) you negotiate the sessions together (d) your employer.
12. You feel very woolly about what counter-transference (or any other theoretical construct) really means. Do you (a) ask your supervisor to explain it to you (b) assume your supervisor is no more likely to understand it than you do (c) avoid using the term?
13. At the end of supervision sessions you usually feel (a) tired but satisfied (b) stupid (c) discouraged (d) enthused (e) full of things to work on (f) puzzled (g) inferior (h) superior.
14. After a supervision session, do you imagine that your supervisor feels (a) astounded (b) worried for your clients (c) pleased with your progress (d) that you've worked hard together (e) worn out?
15. A client brings a problem about a kind of abusive sexual behaviour you have never heard of before and which shocks you. Do you (a) ring your supervisor to ask for information over the phone rather than face to face (b) feel uncomfortable talking about it at all in supervision but do so just the same (d) ask someone else and then not mention it in supervision (e) share your feelings with your supervisor (e) find your supervisor admits that they, too, find the topic difficult?
16. You are of a different race/culture/ethnic group/age/gender/sexual orientation to your supervisor *and/or* one but not both of you is disabled: (a) the differences between you are never mentioned (b) the differences are all yours, the supervisor seems to be the norm (c) this sometimes causes misunderstandings which you work on together (d) you discussed the differences early in the supervision and the pain they cause both of you.

17. Your client seems to block the counselling and you seem to be blocking the supervision. Does your supervisor (a) tell you that you are avoiding/defending/resisting (b) ask if you have interpreted the client's obvious denial (c) blame you (d) suggest you change supervisors (e) explain parallel process (f) apologise for not being strong enough to break through your blocking (g) share their own blocked feelings?

18. Your supervisor feels that you are working with issues beyond your competence and training. Does s/he (a) tell you this frankly (b) ask you how you could refer the client on (c) beat around the bush until you come to your own realisation (d) contact the client to refer them to someone else (e) discuss the possibility of further training for you (f) take on the client for you (g) suggest increasing the frequency of supervision?

19. You know what you need to bring to your client but you don't know how to do it. Would you (a) hope to have an inspiration before the next session (b) ask your supervisor's advice (c) think that your supervisor would despise you for not having the techniques (d) ask your supervisor to role-play the situation with you and model some possible strategies?

20. You have made an awful bloomer in your work with a client, but have rescued the situation. Do you (a) feel relieved and keep it to yourself (b) tell your supervisor in the hope of learning from it (c) feel worried in case your supervisor finds out and 'shops' you to your professional organisation or trainers (d) tell your supervisor because confession is good for the soul (e) assume that your supervisor will be open about similar mistakes in their practice?

21. A colleague is looking for a supervisor. Do you (a) recommend yours but

warn them of some possible pitfalls (b) suggest they look for someone else (c) suggest they meet your supervisor and discuss what they want from supervision?

22. Which of the following could you bring to a supervision session? (a) professional development and career issues (b) practice management, note keeping, fees (c) training (d) clarification of theory (e) need for support (f) complaints about the supervision (g) relationship between counselling work and life (h) organisational issues which affect the counselling (i) ethical issues (j) personal therapy (k) relationship with other professionals (l) counselling processes and techniques.

23. You and your supervisor have differing trainings and theory bases. Do you feel that your supervisor (a) makes an effort to understand your theoretical background and philosophy of counselling (b) imposes their own theories on your practice (c) assumes that theory isn't important? Or (d), theory doesn't come into your supervision?

24. Your supervisor (a) has a good understanding of the context you work in (private practice, organisation, agency) (b) is unaware of the particular issues raised by the context.

25. You have worked really effectively with a client. Would you (a) share your and your client's success with your supervisor (b) not mention it in case you were thought vain or self-satisfied (c) assume that supervision is only about difficulties?

26. If you were not in the roles of supervisor and counsellor, do you think you would (a) be polite acquaintances (b) dislike one another (c) be friends (d) not feel good enough to expect friendship of such an august being (e) be glad to have an excuse not to become involved (f) think 'now I can get even'?

27. Your supervisor is totally confident, well trained in counselling and supervision, intelligent, experienced, knowledgeable, mature, integrated, humanistic and caring. (a) You should model the rest of your life on this paragon (b) you are deluded (c) this is your first supervision session and the name is transference (d) you come to me for supervision — congratulations!

Scoring

Add up the points according to the ratings below. Add up the 'H' points separately.

1. a:2+H b:0
2. a:2 b:1 c:1 d:1 e:0
3. a:2+H b:0
4. a:3 b:2 c:0
5. a:0 b:2 c:1+H
6. a:0 b:1 c:2
7. a:1 b:0 c:2 d:1 e:0
8. a:0 b:2+H c:2+H
9. a:0 b:0 c:0 d:0 e:0 f:3+H
10. a:2 b:0 c:0 d:3+H
11. a:2 b:0 c:3+H d:1
12. a:3 b:0 c:0
13. a:3 b:0 c:0 d:3+H e:3+H f:1 g:0 h:1
14. a:2 b:0 c:1 d:3+H e:0
15. a:1 b:2 c:0 d:3 e:3+H
16. a:0 b:0 c:2 d:3+H
17. a:0 b:0 c:0 d:0 e:3 f:1 g:3+H
18. a:2 b:2+H c:0 d:0 e:1 f:0 g:1
19. a:1 b:2 c:0 d:3+H
20. a:0 b:2 c:0 d:0 e:3+H
21. a:1 b:0 c:3+H
22. a:1 b:1 c:1 d:1 e:1 f:3+H g:1 h:1 i:1
j:0 k:1 l:1
23. a:3 b:0 c:0 d:0
24. a:3 b:0
25. a:3+H b:0 c:0
26. a:2 b:0 c:2+H d:0 e:0 f:0
27. a:1 b:0 c:1 d:4+H

Your Score

'H' points: H is for Humanistic; each H point indicates that your supervisor encourages and facilitates a relationship of equals who negotiate the content and meaning of the supervisory sessions together. The humanistic supervisor is open, appropriately self-disclosing, congruent and respects the counsellor and the client and their relationship. The focus of the supervision is on the well-being of the client first and on the counsellor's well-being as necessary to the counselling relationship. The model is one of growth, creativity and mutual learning, not negatively fearful discouragement of anything other than rigid theory-based practice.

There are a possible 20 H points. A high score indicates that you have encouraged a humanistic model of supervision which is shared by your supervisor.

Ordinary points: more than 80: you have a really good supervisor who understands the ethics, boundaries, theories and practice of supervision and suits you and your style of counselling.

60-80: your supervisor is competent; look at any questions which scored low and consider if they should be brought to supervision.

35-60: are you suited to one another? Are you dependent for instruction rather than consultancy? If a trainee or beginning counsellor, this might be appropriate; if experienced, are you and your supervisor in any way a partnership of equals?

Less than 35: is this tutoring by an authority figure? If so, do you learn and grow, or just endure bravely?