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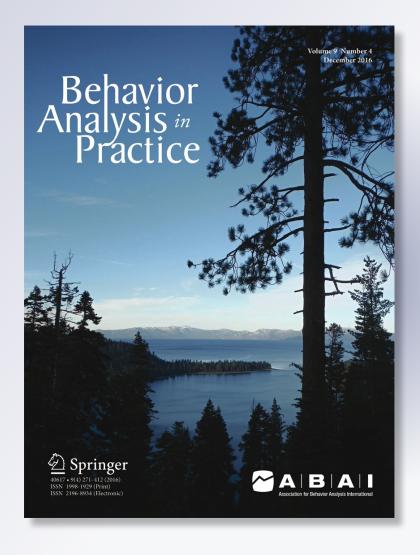
Tyra P. Sellers, Linda A. LeBlanc & Amber L. Valentino

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SPECIAL SECTION: SUPERVISION PRACTICES

Recommendations for Detecting and Addressing Barriers to Successful Supervision

Tyra P. Sellers [1] · Linda A. LeBlanc [2] · Amber L. Valentino [2]

Abstract Behavior analysts who supervise staff are responsible for establishing a healthy supervisory relationship and for teaching basic behavior analytic skills (e.g., verbal repertoires, technical repertoires, clinical decision-making). In addition, supervisors should prepare their supervisees to succeed in their subsequent professional activities by developing their interpersonal skills and professionalism repertoires. Difficulties in the supervisor relationship and problematic personal and professional skills often become the focus of targeted supervision efforts after the effects of deficits (e.g., avoidance of supervision, complaints from consumers, persistent tardiness) are detected. The primary purpose of this paper is to provide guidance to the supervisor's effort to identify and address barriers to successful supervision related to a damaged supervisory relationship and persistent interpersonal and professional skills of the supervisee. A secondary purpose of this paper is to act as a general call to supervisors to continually and thoughtfully reflect on their own history, repertoires, and behavior, such that they may continue professional growth as supervisors.

Keywords Certification · Fieldwork experience · Individual · Mentoring · Practicum · Professionalism · Supervision

Practicing behavior analysts are frequently responsible for training and supervising staff (DiGennaro Reed & Henley,

✉ Tyra P. Sellers
tyra.sellers@usu.edu

1   Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation, Utah State University, 2865 Old Main Hill, Logan, UT 84322, USA

2   Trumpet Behavioral Health, 390 Union, Suite 300, Lakewood, CO 80228, USA

2015; Parsons, Rollyson, & Reid, 2012; Turner et al., 2016). There is a dearth of evidence-based resources to guide specific supervision activities and to guide the full set of repertoires that should be targeted in supervision. In a recent article in this special issue, the current authors provided practicing behavior analysts with recommendations for creating effective supervisory experiences (Sellers, Valentino, & LeBlanc, 2016). Sellers et al. suggest that supervisors should follow five recommended practices: (1) establish an effective supervisor–supervisee relationship, (2) establish a structured approach with specific content and competencies, (3) evaluate the effects of your supervision, (4) incorporate ethics and professional development into supervision, and (5) continue the professional relationship post-certification. The authors suggest specific strategies that the supervisor might use to achieve success. For example, an effective supervisor–supervisee relationship should begin with an honest discussion about the purpose and scope of supervision, the expectations for performance, and the commitment to the relationship by both parties. These recommended practices are designed to enhance the supervisor's ability to influence the supervisee's acquisition of behavior analytic skills (e.g., assessing preferences, writing behavior intervention plans), and acquisition of professional and interpersonal skill sets (e.g., inspiring confidence in clients, getting along with peers).

Even when supervisors follow all of these recommended practices, problems may become evident throughout the course of supervision. The problems may be in the supervisory relationship itself (e.g., the supervisee avoids supervision due to a history of aversive interactions, perception of favoritism among supervisees, resistance to accepting feedback), or they may be related to the supervisee's interpersonal skills (e.g., socially unskilled, poor time management). These deficits and excesses could limit the success of supervision and ongoing professional activities. Problems might arise because

the supervisor has not initially engaged in optimal supervisory practices or has not yet explicitly shaped the interpersonal and professional repertoires. Problems may also arise because reasonable supervisory practices proved ineffective for various reasons. These issues are distinct from performance issues related to the supervisee's repertoire of behavior analytic skills (e.g., difficulty identifying the differences between a motivating operation and discriminative stimulus), but can be equally detrimental to long-term success as a behavior analyst (Bailey & Burch, 2010).

Behavior analysts solve problems by identifying the function or cause of the problem so that function-based intervention strategies can be employed. This same approach is useful in the context of supervisory relationships (Turner et al., 2016). Taking a systematic approach to solving problems that arise in supervision provides a critical model for the supervisee's future professional behavior. The inability to employ effective supervisory skills can have serious repercussions for an organization, such as staff dissatisfaction and turnover (DiGennaro Reed & Henley, 2015; Scott, Nolin, & Wilburn, 2006). There is also risk to consumers if behavior analysts fail to develop the interpersonal and self-management skills that are necessary for effective practice.

Unfortunately, supervisors may sometimes react to a stressful supervisory situation (e.g., negative interactions with the supervisee, deteriorating performance of the supervisee) with one of two escape responses: ignoring it or terminating the relationship. First, the supervisor might be susceptible to subtle negative reinforcement contingencies and ignore the problem if there have not yet been any serious negative consequences. For example, a supervisor might provide extensions to deadlines to manage a supervisee's time management problems during the relationship, but the supervisee will likely fail in future situations when deadline extensions are not available. Directly addressing disorganization and tardiness by teaching the supervisee to employ their own time management strategies and organization systems (e.g., Allen, 2015) would be an alternative function-based solution. Second, a particularly frustrated supervisor might terminate the supervisory relationship or transfer the supervisory relationship to another person. This strategy immediately removes the irritant for the supervisor, but may worsen the supervisee's long-term likelihood of successful development, as a new supervisor might not detect the issue. In addition, this approach removes the opportunity for the supervisor to grow and learn from the experience of identifying and addressing these repertoires using a behavior analytic approach. Many issues that arise may be unpleasant to address, and require additional effort to successfully resolve, which may contribute to some supervisors avoiding them.

Behavior analysts can rely on evidence-based staff training practices and methods for assessing and addressing performance issues related to behavior analytic skills (Carr,

Wilder, Majdalany, Mathisen, & Strain, 2013; DiGennaro Reed, Hirst, & Howard, 2013; Parsons et al., 2012). However, there are fewer published resources to guide the supervisor's efforts in addressing problems in the relationship, or in basic interpersonal and professionalism repertoires. Fortunately, as behavior analysts, we have an established framework for assessing and intervening with performance issues if we focus on applying the same principles and skills that we use to benefit our consumers. Therefore, supervisors should engage in direct assessment of the supervisory relationship, developing performance plans for him/herself or his/her supervisee when necessary, to ensure that the supervisory relationship is healthy and productive. The field could benefit from additional resources providing specific recommendations to assist behavior analysts providing supervision in detecting and addressing some of the most commonly occurring problems that arise in supervision contexts.

The primary purpose of this paper is to provide guidance to the supervisor's effort to identify and address barriers to successful supervision related to: (1) a damaged supervisory relationship and (2) persistent interpersonal and professional issues of the supervisee. A secondary purpose of this paper is to act as a general call to supervisors to continually and thoughtfully reflect on their own history, repertoires, and behavior, such that they may continue professional growth as supervisors. The authors drew from relevant literature and books, as well as their combined experience proving supervision throughout their careers. Due to the scope and breadth of this topic, it is not possible to provide in depth descriptions or examples for each suggestion; however, readers are encouraged to explore the resources cited and pursue additional training and discussions with colleagues when problems arise. To assist accessing resources, a table is included (Table 1). Questions are provided in the appendix to facilitate use of this article for instructional, supervisory, or continued professional development activities (e.g., journal clubs). The recommendations included herein are most appropriate for behavior analysts supervising individuals who are governed by the Behavior Analyst Certification Board® (BACB®) (i.e., Registered Behavior Technicians™ (RBT™), Board Certified Associate Behavior Analysts® (BCaBA®), Board Certified Behavior Analysts® (BCBA®) or those seeking to become registered or certified). However, many recommendations are relevant to behavior analysts in charge of supervising other clinical staff (e.g., non-registered/certificated line staff and paraprofessionals).

Problems in the Supervisory Relationship

Throughout the supervisory relationship, the behavior analyst must evaluate the effectiveness of the supervision that has been provided (Professional and Ethical Compliance Code

Table 1   Resources for addressing issues during supervisions

Persistent supervision issue	Potential indicators	Assessment and intervention ideas and resources
Disorganization and poor time management	-Difficulty retrieving needed materials -Frequently late to meetings/ appointments -Frequently missing deadlines, asking for extensions or removal of tasks	-Assess if global issue or related to specific skill (as this may require specific skill or confidence building in the primary area of concern) -Assess potential barriers with PDC-HS (Carr et al., 2013; Ditzian et al., 2015) -Assign supervisee relevant readings: Allen (2015); Bailey & Burch (2010); Covey (2004); Daniels (2013a, b) -Print, review, and post productivity infographic (Ganesh, 2015) -Review and teach use of common organizational and calendaring tools (e.g., Google Calendar, iCal, Outlook) and tips (create recurring events, color code calendar events, set reminders, use "to do" tools, use location-linked reminders in iPhone, create relevant folders for emails, flag by level of importance)
Poor interpersonal skills	-Too much/not enough eye contact, facial expressions, vocal inflection -Dominating conversations or not engaging enough -Poor body language/posture -Frequent arguing, disrespectful language, rigidity	-Questionnaires and observation scales (Bedwell et al., 2014) -Assess function of behavior and relevant skill deficits -Review recommendations for effective interpersonal skills (Hoover et al., 1988) -Select and teach interpersonal skills (Bedwell et al., 2014; Klein et al., 2006) -Assign supervisee relevant readings: Carnegie (1981) *How to win friends and influence people*; Carnegie (n.d.) Dale Carnegie's Secrets of success retrieved from http://www.dalecarnegie.com/ebook/secrets-ofsuccess -Assign supervisee to complete online module on interpersonal skills: interpersonal skills in the workplace: examples and importance at http://study.com/academy/lesson/interpersonalskills-in-the-workplace-examples-and-importance.html
Difficulty accepting/ applying feedback	-Arguing, defensive statements, giving consistent excuses -Demanding specific examples of the problem -Crying, not responding at all	-Assess function (avoidance or attention) -Review strategies for effective feedback: feedback articles at www.aubreydaniels.com/blog; DiGennaro Reed et al. (2013); Reid & Parsons (2006); Reid et al. (2012) -Assign supervisee to read Bailey & Burch (2010) –Ch. 20 *Knowing When to Seek Help (and How to receive Feedback)* -Clearly outline expectations for receiving feedback (Sellers et al., 2016) -Use the Corrective Feedback Instrument-Revised (CFI-R) (Hulse-Killacky et al., 2006) –Engage in the specific activities for discussions about feedback (Hulse & Robert, 2014)

for Behavior Analysts 5.07, Behavior Analyst Certification Board®, 2014). An effective supervisor is also consistently evaluating the quality and health of the supervisory relationship to ensure an opportunity to effect change in the supervisee's behavior. The critical first step for the supervisor is to continually and actively assess for developing issues in an attempt to detect them before they worsen and/or negatively impact consumers with whom the supervisee is working. Self-evaluation and close attention to the supervisee's behavior can also provide a means for supervisors to identify issues, ranging from simple to complex.

The supervisor should make time at each supervisory meeting to actively assess the status of the supervisory relationship to ensure early detection of any problems that may be developing. For example, the supervisor may begin each meeting by asking the supervisee how things are going related to the supervisory relationship (e.g., "Do you feel comfortable with the amount and type of feedback being provided," "Are there any additional supports I could provide,"). If the supervisee shares a success or a difficulty, or provides feedback about the supervisor's behavior, the supervisor can provide praise and

guidance. Starting each meeting with this sort of check-in may eventually result in the check-in serving as a discriminative stimulus for the supervisee to discuss developing issues or concerns in a proactive manner. Engaging in these behaviors can indicate to the supervisee that the supervisor values maintaining a collaborative relationship.

Some problems in the supervisory relationship might be detected by answers to the questions listed above. Other problems may be detected in the subtle behavior of the supervisee (e.g., frequent uncomfortable or unproductive supervision meetings). For example, patterns of canceling meetings or preferring phone meetings to live contact could be indicators that the supervisee is engaging in avoidance behavior. Some supervisees may become emotional (e.g., crying, holding their breath, averting their gaze, arguing) in response to feedback or task assignments. Alternatively, a supervisee who is typically talkative in meetings may speak less as a result of a developing problem in the supervisory relationship. Speaking less could function to avoid feedback or detection of a lack of understanding of a particular topic. The supervisee may have contacted punishment (e.g., perceived harsh criticism) for incorrect

answers in the past, or his or her own lack of confidence in the material may be discriminative for a "smile and nod" response that has been reinforced in the past. Supervisors should attend to subtle indicators of potential problems such as changes in vocal and facial affect, body language, eye contact, and changes in vocal behavior (e.g., talking less or more, change in tone of voice, stuttering, or other verbal dysfluencies).

Note that these same subtle indicators could also be indicative of distress due to significant singular life events (e.g., death in the family, illness). The supervisor should gather information to assist in determining if this behavior appears to be evoked by specific events, and if the supervisee might need additional supports (e.g., referral to counseling or other support services). However, if the behavior is characteristic or occurring at increasing frequency, then the problem may be related to the quality of the supervisory relationship and warrants specific attention and intervention. The supervisor might attempt to gather some data on the frequency of these behaviors to determine if they occur frequently enough to warrant addressing. With some thought, the supervisor can likely operationalize the behavior(s) of concern to facilitate monitoring or data collection. In the event that the behavior is difficult to define, the supervisor might consider taking a few minutes at the end of each meeting to write some anecdotal notes summarizing the supervisee's behavior during the meeting.

In addition to assessing for behavior that may indicate an emerging or present issue, it is also important to consider the supervisee's history with supervision. Supervisors should inquire directly about the supervisee's past experience with supervision at the start of the relationship. Asking the supervisee about his or her history with supervisors might reveal valuable information that could resolve or prevent emerging issues. For example, the supervisee might share that a previous supervisor delivered corrective feedback in an aversive way leading the supervisee to become anxious before meetings and cancel them. With this information, the supervisor can work to address the issue by changing his or her own behavior with the goal of strengthening the supervisory relationship.

Ensuring that corrective feedback is delivered in a supportive and respectful manner may increase the acceptance of the message (Reid & Parsons, 2006; Reid, Parsons, & Green, 2012). Another strategy could be to increase the frequency with which low stakes corrective feedback is delivered. For example, the supervisor may identify that feedback about errors performing behavior reductive strategies evokes anxious or defensive behavior, but the supervisee accepts feedback about writing style or implementing skill acquisition programming in a professional manner. The supervisor might provide feedback more often around writing and skill acquisition programs, followed by praise for accepting the feedback and making the needed changes. This may help to provide the supervisee with a more current positive history around receiving performance feedback, and research has demonstrated the efficacy of

frequent feedback (Alvero, Bucklin, & Austin, 2001). Another strategy could be to increase the active support during and after corrective feedback. Including empathetic and supportive statements during the feedback session may create a more pleasant experience for the supervisee (Reid et al., 2012). For example, the supervisor might say: "I know it's difficult to hear that you need to keep working on this skill, but we will tackle this together." Following the feedback session the supervisor might create opportunities for the supervisee to practice, allowing the supervisor to provide praise. In addition, the supervisor can check in with the supervisee later in the day, or the next day, to assess how the feedback session affected the supervisee. The supervisor might send a quick text or email, such as: "Hi Mary! Just checking in to see how things went for the rest of your day. I sure appreciated your hard work in our meeting." Providing the follow-up check-ins may communicate to the supervisee that he or she is valued and that the supervisor is invested in his or her success.

It is also important to note that supervisees may not be able to tact the problems that existed in previous supervisory relationships, perhaps due to a limited history with supervisors in general, or limited work history. In these cases, it may be useful to ask open-ended questions and deduce based on the supervisee's response. For example, the supervisor might ask: "Tell me what a typical supervision session looked like for you when you worked with your past supervisor.", or "How did you feel after a supervision meeting in the past?" The aforementioned changes in body language and voice, as well as the content of the message, may offer insight into some of the problems that existed.

At the first sign of difficulties, the supervisor should assess his or her own behavior relative to the supervisee. In other words, consider whether it is the behavior of the supervisor that must change (e.g., smile more, reprimand less, actively acknowledge how much you value the opportunity to teach someone things that they do not know) in order to produce a change in the behavior of the supervisee. For example, perhaps the supervisor has not been timely and organized and the supervisee has lost respect for them as a mentor. Perhaps the supervisor has not provided sufficient reinforcement or opportunities for practicing skills in role-play or observed direct implementation, or provided effective corrective feedback about pinpointed skills for improvement. We refer the reader to existing resources for guidance on skills that may increase the effectiveness and structure of the supervisory activities (Reid et al., 2012; Sellers et al., 2016). Changes in the supervisor's instructional repertoire may result in positive outcomes for the supervisory relationship.

The next step is to determine if the supervisee's performance issues are generally related to aspects of the supervisory relationship (i.e., the supervisee would likely perform better under the supervision of someone else), or are a function of skill deficits on the part of the supervisee (i.e., even under

optimal supervisory conditions, the problems would be present or persist). If the issues appear to stem from skill deficits, the supervisor should employ a functional behavior assessment framework. That is, the supervisor should define the behavior of concern, determine the conditions under which the behavior is likely to occur or not, and identify the relevant reinforcer maintaining the problematic behavior or the critical barrier to acquiring the targeted skill.

For example, one might have a supervisee who is consistently late to meetings and misses deadlines for reports. To assess if this is a pervasive problem, or if it is specific to the current supervisory relationship, the supervisor might check in with past supervisors and also examine his or her own behavior (e.g., Are meeting times and deadlines reasonable? Are expectations clear?). If the supervisor determines that this is a persistent performance problem, the supervisor should examine the relevant antecedents (e.g., the supervisee has no consistent planning and calendaring system, the supervisee has difficulty prioritizing tasks) and consequences (e.g., the supervisee misses a non-preferred part of the meeting, someone else completes a significant portion of the report). In this case, it could be that the supervisee's behavior of arriving late to meetings and not turning in reports on time is maintained by negative reinforcement. With knowledge about the function of the problem behavior, the supervisor can proceed with implementing function-matched interventions (e.g., moving the non-preferred portion of the meeting to the middle or end of the agenda, removing the option to have someone else complete the report). This would likely be combined with other components, such as teaching and reinforcing things like time management skills, breaking down and prioritizing tasks, and goal setting.

It is possible that issues in the supervisory relationship have arisen, at least in part, due to the supervisor's behavior. For example, perhaps the supervisor has engaged in behavior that leads to distrust (e.g., failing to follow through with obligations, blaming the supervisee, assigning the supervisee responsibilities for which he or she is not qualified, taking credit for the supervisee's work). Supervisors who employ punishment, coercion, or harsh feedback styles could damage supervisory relationships and occasion avoidance or counter-controlling behaviors on the part of the supervisee. Behaviors related to the supervisor's level of management might also damage the supervisory relationship. As an example, an overly involved supervisor may not allow the supervisee to progress in levels of independence and responsibility, thus preventing the development of self-confidence and independent skills. The supervisee might perceive that the supervisor does not have confidence in the supervisee's ability. On the other hand, a supervisor who is vague and does not clarify expectations is not providing sufficient prompts to occasion correct responding on the part of the supervisee. This supervisor might be perceived as disinterested, not invested in

the supervisee's success, or as setting the supervisee up for failure. The above behaviors could result in the supervisory relationship becoming aversive, with the supervisee working to avoid interactions, or becoming sullen, withdrawn, or argumentative.

The recommendations for addressing all of the issues listed above are similar. Supervisors should take a multi-step approach to repairing the relationship with a sincere apology and a well-thought out action plan for changes in the ongoing relationship. The first step is to clearly describe the problematic behavior in the context of an apology. For example, the supervisor might say: "I owe you an apology because I have been overly harsh in my corrective feedback, and have not been clear about my expectations." The second step is to describe how the behavior has impacted the supervisee. Continuing with the same example, the supervisor might provide the following acknowledgement: "I am sorry that you have felt like you have been ineffective or undervalued." Steps one and two essentially amount to acknowledging the impact of the supervisor as a critical environmental determinant of the supervisee's behavior.

The third step is to describe how the supervisor's behavior has negatively impacted the supervisory relationship. The supervisor in our example might say: "Providing harsh feedback and unclear expectations has not been helping you develop the skills we have targeted for you, and has likely made you want to minimize your interactions with me." The fourth step in the process is to clearly indicate what the supervisor will do instead of the problematic behavior. This critical step serves the dual functions of (1) demonstrating to the supervisee that the supervisor has engaged in a thoughtful, critical analysis of his or her behavior, and (2) providing the opportunity for the supervisor to overtly describe the remediation plan publicly which may increase the likelihood that the supervisor will follow through. The supervisor might say: "I will make sure that I do not raise my voice when giving corrective feedback. I will also provide written bullet points of expectations for assigned tasks and I will review those with you to model, practice, and answer questions." The fifth and final step is to have a follow-up conversation to evaluate the effects of the apology and the action plan.

In addition to the process outlined above, there are several other strategies worth mentioning. The supervisor might review articles on supervisory practice from other disciplines for resources to address general barriers (Scott et al., 2006) and specific issues such as providing effective feedback (Hulse & Robert, 2014). The supervisor could invite the supervisee to have an open an honest conversation about the relationship, with the goal of identifying where breakdowns occur and what might be done to fix them. The supervisor might directly ask the supervisee what he or she can do differently to foster a more positive supervisory relationship (e.g., break complex tasks into smaller components, slow the rate of assignment

of new tasks). The supervisee might provide insight into preferences for interpersonal interaction style (e.g., less humor or sarcasm, no public praise). The supervisor could also reach out to a mentor to provide guidance with effective problem solving or to observe the mentor conducting supervision meetings.

In some cases, the issues might be due to "relationship conflict" (Lau & Cobb, 2010). This type of conflict is characterized by a mismatch between an essential characteristic, value, or world view of the supervisee and supervisor. Perceptions or beliefs about things like religion, culture, gender, political identity, and sexual orientation may be underlying barriers to a healthy supervisory relationship, as can core communication styles (e.g., being very direct versus being softer and more indirect). The mismatch may produce clear feelings of discomfort or overt behavior that communicates disapproval. In other instances, these mismatches might result in covert and very subtle behavior that slowly erodes the relationship over time. For example, a supervisor with certain strong religious beliefs may find it uncomfortable to provide supervision to someone who holds different religious beliefs, or is a member of a group that is not accepted within the supervisor's religion. On the other hand, a supervisor who exhibits relatively flat affect may negatively impact some supervisees who perceive the flat affect as aversive, creating a barrier to developing an effective supervisory relationship. The effects in situations like these will likely be cumulative and slowly erode the relationship over time.

The supervisor or supervisee experiencing such issues is certainly distressed by the mismatch, but that distress does not justify engaging in behavior that directly or indirectly damages the relationship. The first step towards a remedy is for the supervisor to self-assess the degree to which he or she feels capable of behavior change. In many cases, it is difficult to expect a supervisor or supervisee to change a fundamental characteristic, personal value, or religious belief. In cases such as these, our professional code requires that we take measures (e.g., seek out training, consultation, or mentorship) to ensure that the differences do not impede our ability to provide effective supervision (Compliance Code 1.05(c), BACB, 2014). The supervisor and supervisee may need to initiate an open, but mutually respectful, conversation about the differences early in the relationship (Daniels & D'Andrea, 1996). Supervisors should recognize the inherent power differential in the supervisory relationship, navigating the conversation accordingly to actively learn about the supervisee's culture, experiences, perspectives, and goals (Daniels, D'Andrea, & Kyung Kim, 1999).

Hughes Fong, Catagnus, Brodhead, Quigley, & Field (2016) provide recommendations for behavior analysts that are specifically related to increasing cultural awareness in their work with consumers. One can translate the authors' specific recommendations around increasing cultural awareness as applicable to the supervisor–supervisee relationship. A supervisor can employ strategies such as talking about culturally diverse experiences with colleagues, practicing mindfulness (i.e., focusing on the present moment), and committing to being scientific-minded (Hughes Fong et al., 2016; Kupferschmidt, 2016; Szabo, 2015). Engaging in these behaviors may result in the supervisor increasing self-awareness and ability to identify preconceptions and assumptions about the supervisee that might be barriers to effective supervision. Hughes and colleagues also suggest using structured self-evaluation tools [see Hughes Fong et al. (2016) for a description of recommended evaluations and references], which may facilitate a supervisor's ability to assess the degree to which he feels that the supervisory relationship can move forward.

If the supervisor feels that he or she can mitigate the underlying perceptions and behaviors that are barriers to the relationship, then it is reasonable and responsible to attempt to do so. However, it is critical that the supervisor engages in honest self-reflection, as continuing to provide supervision within an unhealthy relationship is unfair to the supervisee if the supervisee would have a more effective experience with a different supervisor. If the supervisor identifies that the primary relationship barriers cannot be changed or eliminated, then the supervisor should have an honest, direct conversation with the supervisee to facilitate a transition to a different supervisor (Chang, 2013; Turner et al., 2016). In fact, when the supervisor cannot effectively resolve the barrier, the Compliance Code directs a BCBA to make a referral to a supervisor who will be able to provide effective services (Compliance Code 1.05(c), BACB 2016). The conversation is likely to be tense and could evoke escape and avoidance reactions, so it is important that the supervisor first identify an alternative supervisor who is likely able to provide high quality supervision given the particular situation. The supervisor could initiate the conversation by stating that there appears to be a strain in the supervisory relationship that is not anyone's fault, but that might impair the supervisory outcomes. The supervisor can identify positive characteristics of the supervisee and express his or her desire to ensure that the supervisee has access to the best supervision possible via an alternative supervisor.

Persistent Professionalism and Interpersonal Problems

Several general categories of problems related to interpersonal and professional repertoires can arise during training as a professional behavior analyst (Bailey & Burch, 2011). The categories described herein are meant to be common illustrative examples rather than an exhaustive list. Supervisors should consistently monitor for development of concerns in these categories to address issues early in their development. A supervisor can evaluate the development of possible

professionalism concerns by assessing the frequency of observable occurrence (e.g., hearing rude comments) and the degree to which there are observed effects on others (e.g., the supervisee is generally not invited to social outings with peers). Once an issue is detected, it is the supervisor's responsibility to identify the barriers to the desired performance and develop an action plan addressing the area(s) of need. Readers are referred to the Performance Diagnostic Checklist—Human Services (PDC-HS) for a model of a function-based evaluation process that may prove useful for some performance issues (Carr et al., 2013; Ditzian, Wilder, Kind, & Tanz, 2015). For example, the PDC-HS assesses for barriers to optimal performance associated with issues related to training, the clarity of tasks and appropriate prompts, and available resources, materials, and processes. Other barriers assessed include those related to consequences for engaging in the response, the effort required to engage in the response, and the possible competing contingencies. The PDC-HS includes a guide to intervention planning with relevant references and resources. The subsequent action plan for a supervisee might include modeling the desired skill, increasing the opportunity for the supervisee to practice the skill to mastery, breaking the skill into smaller component parts, creating supports or job aids to facilitate performing the skill correctly, or referring the individual to additional resources.

Disorganization and Poor Time Management

One common issue that may impact a supervisee's performance is disorganization of poor time management. For example, the supervisee may fail to complete tasks, require more time than typical to complete tasks, arrive late for meetings and appointments, or have difficulty locating materials. The supervisor can readily detect issues related to organizational and time management skills by tracking the supervisee's performance related to meeting deadlines, attending meetings, and carrying out tasks that require planning and organization. It is important to consider if the organizational issues are an overarching problem that is evident in all areas of performance (e.g., study behavior and personal life are also chaotic), or if the organizational and time management problems are primarily evident in applied practice tasks. If the problems are generally constrained to or worsened in applied practice tasks, the difficulty may be related to an inability to effectively prioritize or to fluently engage in new specific required skills (e.g., translating procedural descriptions from the literature into a useful program for everyday implementation).

If the problems are global, the supervisor might provide resources for general effective organization and time management strategies, as well as implement some targeted interventions (e.g., using appointments and lists in electronic calendars, self monitoring of management of deadlines, color coding systems). The supervisor might suggest that the supervisee

read books focusing on developing effective organizational and time management skills (Allen, 2015; Bailey & Burch, 2010; Covey, 2004). For those who prefer online resources, consider asking the supervisee to review the five steps for setting and meeting goals by Daniels (2013a, b), the productivity tips and infographics included in the online article by Ganesh (2015), or to identify and try out one of the many available organization/time-management apps.

However, if the supervisor determines that the barriers are related to the supervisee's inability to effectively prioritize or fluently engage in specific skills, the action plan will be more targeted. The supervisee may not have sufficient experience with the full range of tasks to effectively determine which tasks should be assigned high priority. In this case, the supervisor may elect to prioritize the tasks for the supervisee and describe the strategy that he or she used to establish the priorities. The supervisor could describe the steps necessary to complete the task and the likely negative outcomes related to completing the task at different latencies (e.g., immediately, within 48 h, within a week), until the supervisee can engage in this skill independently. In some cases, the barrier may be related to the supervisee not being fluent enough with the required skills to complete tasks in the required timeframe. In such case, the supervisor may break the task into discrete skills and assign a specific amount of time to complete each step. Over time, the allotted duration can be shortened, or single tasks can be combined, as the skills become more fluent. In addition to the ones described above, many different organizational and time management issues may become evident. In each instance, the role of the supervisor is to detect the issue quickly, conduct an assessment of the scope of the problem and contributing causes, and to develop a targeted plan to address discrete skills, increase motivation, and provide resources.

Interpersonal Skills

Another common problem detected in supervision is lack of interpersonal skills that are critical to the success of the supervisory relationship and ongoing professional success (Bailey & Burch, 2011). Interpersonal skills include specific communication skills such as active listening, effective writing skills and effective speaking and non-vocal communicative behavior (e.g., facial expressions and body posture). Supervisees may avoid eye contact, exhibit flat affect (e.g., lack of vocal inflection, limited range of facial expressions), or speak too little to be an effective social communicative partner. Another sub-set of interpersonal skills includes professional relationship-building skills like cooperation, negotiation, and conflict resolution (Bedwell, Fiore, & Salas, 2014; Klein, DeRouin, & Salas, 2006). Some common behaviors that produce an impression of unprofessional behavior include speaking too casually in professional interactions, seeming

combative in discussions, avoiding conflict, or being unwilling to compromise when it is appropriate to do so.

Whatever the deficit area, a functional assessment approach should be used to define the problem, identify likely causes and barriers, and develop recommendations to address the problem. Bedwell et al. (2014) provide a nice summary of available questionnaires and behavior observation scales that might help newer supervisors identify a range of interpersonal skills deficits. Next, the supervisor should conduct an analysis of the situation constraints and likely causes of the skill deficits. Determine if the problems are evident in all situations or more evident in certain contexts (e.g., more with clients than with peers). Some problems may occur due to problems attending to and discriminating subtle social cues that would otherwise shape more effective social behavior. Other problems may occur due to negative reinforcement rather than a discrimination problem.

Many interpersonal problems are primarily due to a lack of discrimination of subtle contextual cues. The individual may have had a history of family members, friends, and other supervisors who modeled these or similar behaviors or who accidentally shaped inappropriate social behavior. That is, a supervisor may have modeled using humor to diffuse tense interpersonal situations but the supervisee's subsequent attempts to imitate the humor were less skillful and were perceived as overly sarcastic. It may also be that the individual cannot discriminate when he or she engages in the behavior leading to a lack of audience control. For example, a supervisee might not realize that he or she is making facial expressions of disapproval or disbelief during a supervisory or client meeting. In this example, the supervisor may have to explicitly describe the behavior and employ strategies to facilitate the supervisee's awareness of engaging in the behavior (e.g., watch video recordings, develop a subtle cue that the supervisor can give to indicate that it is occurring).

The supervisee may have a history of contingencies that have directly shaped their poor interpersonal behavior. For example, avoiding eye contact and remaining quiet may have allowed the supervisee to avoid prior social interactions that were anxiety provoking. The supervisee may have contacted punishment for bringing up difficult situations in the past leading to current anticipatory anxiety and avoidance. The supervisor may need to help the supervisee learn to identify situations that he or she is likely to avoid, creating a hierarchy of aversive topics or situations (Friman, Hayes, & Wilson, 1998). The supervisee might also need to learn to tact the features of those situations, identify any covert vocal behavior (e.g., negative self talk) or somatic responses (e.g., upset stomach, headache, shortness of breath), and develop alternative/incompatible responses that increase the likelihood of successfully addressing the issue. The supervisor could role-play with the supervisee, using multiple exemplars, until the new, incompatible responses are fluent. Most importantly, the supervisor should differentially reinforce any instances in which the supervisee

brings a potentially emerging problem to the supervisor's attention (e.g., "Thank you so much for noticing and telling me that this parent seems reluctant to implement the program. That is going to allow us to come up with a strong rationale for the current program or to develop an alternative intervention program that is more acceptable to the parent.").

One of the most common interpersonal problems for young aspiring behavior analysts is lack of appropriate assertiveness skills. For example, the supervisee might participate in his or her first multi-disciplinary Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) meeting and respond negatively to another IEP team member's suggestions or be overly assertive about behavior analytic suggestions. The supervisee may never have been in a situation in which they needed to accrue social value by reinforcing the behavior of team members who are strangers before respectfully offering other solutions to a joint problem. Another common interpersonal pattern occurs when a supervisee becomes overly assertive or emotional after a series of prior avoidance responses. For example, the individual may say "yes" to inappropriate requests of a peer (e.g., "will you proofread my paper the night before it is due") or client (e.g., "I want to rearrange my appointment with you again") perceiving that he or she is "thinking of the other person's feelings" or being accommodating. If the inappropriate requests that have been reinforced continue to occur, the individual may suddenly respond very differently by becoming upset and overly assertive (e.g., "stop taking advantage of me," "we are going to terminate your services because you are not fully committed to therapy"). Often the initial responses are reinforced because the supervisee does not have a history of calmly addressing situations directly and immediately (e.g., "I am sorry I can't help you tonight, but I already have other plans. Give me a little more notice next time and I will gladly proof your paper.").

Difficult conversations with clients and their families may prove to be the most difficult of all resulting in significant avoidance unless this repertoire is directly taught in a supportive, mentored environment. Most aspiring behavior analysts who are relatively young will have a long history with agreeing with their own parents and almost no history with calmly and kindly disagreeing due to potential long-term negative outcome (e.g., "I know you want the best outcome for your child and I am concerned that the frequent shift and cancellation of appointments might limit how far your child can progress in services"). Similar issues can arise when a new behavior analyst has to provide corrective feedback to their own supervisees or address a sensitive issue of professionalism. Without explicit instruction and practice, the new supervisor may avoid feedback on issues that feel awkward but are important to the professional context (e.g., "please wear clothing that has a higher neckline or waistline so that you don't inadvertently show an inappropriate amount of your body in the workplace"). Practicing behavior analysts will likely be required to have a variety of difficult conversations with staff

or clients. The skills to successfully navigate these conversations are subtle and unlikely to exist prior to modeling, rehearsal and feedback with a supervisor. If a supervisor fails to teach these appropriate assertiveness skills, the supervisee could proceed down a path of poor client relationships and poor supervisory relationships in their career as a behavior analyst. In addition to live behavior skills training (BST), supervisors might also refer supervisees to excellent print resources (Carnegie, 1981; Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, & Switzler, 2011), and assign specific sections to address relevant areas of concern.

Difficulty Accepting and Applying Feedback

Difficulty accepting feedback is a common issue that arises during many supervisory relationships. In terms of the supervisee's behavior, this may take the form of arguing with the supervisor, demanding very specific examples of the behavior of concern, defending or explaining, or crying and other emotional responses. While there are many reasons that a supervisee may react emotionally or unprofessionally to receiving feedback (e.g., having a bad day, the mode of feedback delivery), if it is a recurring issue that persists despite reasonable adjustments, it is likely that the behavior is maintained by access to either social positive reinforcement (e.g., in the form of arguing back, providing explanations, consoling the individual), or social negative reinforcement (e.g., the issue is dropped or put on hold), or a combination of both. Most available resources focus on how to deliver effective feedback (Daniels, 2013a, b, 2015; Parsons et al., 2012; Reid et al., 2012), and this section assumes that supervisors have assessed his/her own behavior in their regard and made the necessary changes to ensure that he is employing best practices in delivering feedback. However, Hulse and Robert (2014) suggest having critical conversations to pre-plan for feedback, such that supervisees are more likely to accept feedback. The authors recommend some specific activities that can be completed using the Corrective Feedback Instrument-Revised (CFI-R) to gather relevant information (Hulse & Robert, 2014; Hulse-Killacky, Orr, & Paradise, 2006). Whereas the authors suggest doing this at the outset of the relationship, it seems reasonable that it could be implemented once the supervisory experience has begun.

Sellers et al. (2016) provide a recommendation to explicitly discuss the expectations around accepting feedback. Bailey and Burch include a chapter that addresses strategies for effectively receiving feedback that a supervisor can assign to a supervisee (Bailey & Burch, 2010). It may be necessary for the supervisor to overtly define the behavior for the supervisor and point out examples of accepting feedback successfully as they arise in the context of the supervisory relationship. The supervisor should discuss the purpose of feedback, clearly outlining the negative ramifications of not accepting feedback in a professional manner. The supervisor might also facilitate

the supervisee engaging in self-reflection, as this can be positively linked with increasing acceptance of corrective feedback and even creating action plans (Sargeant, Mann, van der Vleuten, & Metsemakers, 2009). The supervisor might ask questions to evoke self-reflection such as: "Have you ever received feedback like this from me or other previous supervisors?" The supervisor and supervisee might elect to develop a specific plan that includes alternative behavior for the supervisee to engage in, such as taking notes, paraphrasing back the feedback, or thanking the supervisor for the feedback. The pair could also practice these skills in a role-play context using fictitious scenarios that are less likely to evoke the typical emotional responses in the supervisee.

Consider a scenario wherein a supervisee has consistently responded to corrective feedback about incorrect implementation of targeted assessment procedures with defensive statements. The supervisor might clearly define the supervisee's behavior of defensiveness as making statements that that direct the responsibility away from the supervisee and give some recent examples (e.g., "For example, when we discussed ensuring that the items in the preference assessment were in working order, you replied: 'The line therapist left the toy on overnight and ran out of the batteries.'"). The supervisor could then explain that the purpose of the feedback is to ensure that the client receives high-quality services and that the team use time in clinical services efficiently. The supervisee could be directed to paraphrase the corrective feedback to the supervisor to replace immediately engaging in defensive statements (e.g., "Ok, so what you are saying is that I should have checked the batteries before setting up the preference assessment."). Finally, the supervisor could role-play using fictitious scenarios that have not historically been problematic for the supervisee. The supervisor might say: "I know that you are amazing at getting your reports turned in on time, or ahead of time. But, let us pretend that you were consistently late with reports and I need to give you some corrective feedback." Using made up scenarios might reduce the presentation of stimuli that evoke the specific problem behavior associated with receiving feedback.

Supervisors should take measures to ensure that strategies are matched to the likely function of the supervisee's behavior of concern. For example, if the behavior is maintained by the attention provided during the exchange, the supervisor should take care to deliver the feedback in a supportive, but direct manner, and inform the individual that questions and discussion will take place in the following meeting. Likewise, if the behavior is maintained by avoidance or escape from the unpleasant conversation, the supervisor should ensure that feedback is delivered before ending the meeting. If needed, the supervisor could acknowledge that the feedback may be difficult to hear and offer the supervisee a break to get a drink of water or use the restroom, before returning to complete providing the feedback.

A different, but related issue is when a supervisee consistently fails to respond to feedback by making the necessary

changes to products or his/her behavior. This problem may occur in conjunction with difficulty receiving feedback or in spite of having accepted the feedback in a very professional manner during the meeting. The supervisor should first ensure that the feedback is high quality, prescriptive, and stated in a positive and supportive manner (DiGennaro Reed et al., 2013). If the feedback was effective, a possible cause for failed behavior change may be a lack of follow-up and performance checks in the desired skill. The supervisor ought to clearly outline the required steps for the supervisee, schedule or contrive specific performance checks, and provide timely ongoing feedback. For difficulties with accepting or implementing feedback, it may be necessary to link changes in receipt of feedback to systematic performance reviews.

The supervising behavior analyst should put forth every reasonable effort to detect, conduct a functional assessment, and repair or address issues that might arise during the supervisory relationship. Even persistent problems may be overcome with a systematic behavior-analytic approach, leading to positive outcomes for the supervisor and supervisee. However, if the supervisee's professional and interpersonal issues remain unchanged and lead the supervisor to believe there is a risk of incompetence in the supervisee's ongoing and future clinical practice, the supervisor might consider if it is appropriate to terminate the supervisory relationship in a professional manner. This option should never be taken lightly, should be a last resort, and should be in accordance with the conditions outlined in the supervision contract (a sample can be obtained on the BACB website). Recommendations for establishing the supervision contract at the beginning of the supervisory relationship are outlined in the Sellers et al. (2016) article.

Depending on the presenting problems, it is possible that a supervisor might take other actions, in addition to terminating the supervision contract (e.g., involving management or human resources, filing a "Notice of Alleged Violation" with the BACB); however, that is outside of the scope of this paper. To terminate the relationship, the supervisor should prepare a written document indicating why the relationship is being terminated, referring to the specific conditions within the contract. In a final meeting, the supervisor should review the document with the supervisee to answer any questions she might have.

Conclusions

Various problems may become evident throughout the course of supervision. The problems may be in the supervisory relationship itself or they may be related to the supervisee's interpersonal skills or professional repertoires. These problems could limit the success of supervision and jeopardize ongoing professional activities if they are not detected and addressed swiftly by an attentive supervisor. The transition from the student role to the professional role can be a challenging one

if the supervisor and graduate program have not actively focused on establishing critical skills for becoming a professional behavior analyst in addition to basic concepts, principles, and procedures (Bailey & Burch, 2010).

Taking a thoughtful and systematic approach to issues that may arise during the supervisory relationship has several important effects that are worth summarizing. First, addressing the issues directly increases the skills of the supervisee and their future chances of success. Second, the skills of the supervisor may improve through their efforts to examine the literature on supervision and engage in a systematic functional assessment and development of an action plan. This process is also modeled for the supervisee, increasing the likelihood that the supervisee will take a similar approach if he or she moves into a supervisory role in the future. Both the supervisor and supervisee may be less likely to avoid difficult or uncomfortable situations during supervision in the future if they have been successful at addressing issues. While this paper does not provide coverage of all problems that could arise during supervision, the examples provided here will hopefully provide sufficient guidance and resources to help supervisors detect and address commonly occurring problems.

Appendix A   Potential Study Guide for Journal Clubs

1. List three different behavioral indicators that issues may be present in the supervisory relationship.
2. List and describe the five steps to take in repairing a defective relationship due to problematic supervisor behavior.
3. List common barriers to effective organizational and time management skills.
4. List and describe three reasons that defective interpersonal skills might develop.
5. What are two recommendations for addressing issues related to difficulty accepting feedback?

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