Preplanning for Feedback in Clinical Supervision: Enhancing Readiness for Feedback Exchange

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Abstract

This article makes the case for preplanning for feedback in clinical supervision. Preplanning for feedback can help supervisors maximize the positive benefits of feedback delivery by building and solidifying a supportive supervisory climate that enhances supervisee receptivity to corrective feedback. The Corrective Feedback Instrument-Revised (CFI-R) is introduced as a major tool to facilitate preplanning. Additional resources that derive from the CFI-R are presented to assist supervisors in the preplanning process.

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Abstract

This article makes the case for preplanning for feedback in clinical supervision. Preplanning for feedback can help supervisors maximize the positive benefits of feedback delivery by building and solidifying a supportive supervisory climate that enhances supervisee receptivity to corrective feedback. The Corrective Feedback Instrument-Revised (CFI-R) is introduced as a major tool to facilitate preplanning. Additional resources that derive from the CFI-R are presented to assist supervisors in the preplanning process.

Keywords: clinical supervision, evaluation, preplanning, feedback

Feedback is at the core of effective clinical training (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014) and is emphasized in the ACA Code of Ethics as a continuous feature in counselor training programs (2014). In order to provide effective feedback, openness to feedback is essential. Openness to feedback is assessed in admissions decisions (Duba, Paez, & Kindsvatter, 2010) and encouraged throughout the counselor training process (Swank & McCarthy, 2013). Historically, others have noted the importance of the working alliance between the supervisor and the supervisee (Bernard & Goodyear; Ladany, Ellis & Friedlander, 1999; Mueller & Kell, 1972). In their extensive writing on the topic of supervision, Mueller and Kell (1972) noted that the supervisory relationship was unique in that the supervisor had access to knowledge about the counselor in ways that were limited to few people. If supervision was to be successful, the supervisor had a responsibility to understand the counselor and gain the trust of the counselor. Preplanning for feedback can provide a foundation for supervisors to enhance counselor development. Training programs have found that "feedback is an essential skill for learner improvement" (Bing-You & Trowbridge, 2009, p. 1330).

There is evidence of potential barriers that can interfere with openness to receiving feedback. For example, Eckstein and Wallerstein as cited in Bernard and Goodyear (2014) emphasize that a favorable supervision climate is necessary to help supervisees stop asking, "how can I avoid criticism," and start asking, "how can I make the most of this supervision time?" (p. 226). Bing-You and Trowbridge (2009) observe that when learners view negative feedback as a personal attack they do not find the feedback useful; in fact devalued and discounted feedback does not lead to improved learner performance. Bernard and Goodyear (2014) and Bing-You and Trowbridge (2009) further note that defensive reactions to corrective feedback and past experiences with authority figures are a few examples of factors that may impede a supervisee's ability to receive feedback. These examples mirror ones identified by Hulse-Killacky and Page (1994) when they explored reactions to corrective feedback in counselor training groups and could well exist for supervisors and supervisees.

Bernard and Goodyear conclude that without favorable conditions for evaluation and the delivery of feedback the supervisory relationship can be compromised. Training programs have maintained that learner defensiveness also interferes with a supervisor's desire to provide constructive feedback (Gigante, Dell, & Sharkey, 2011; Swank & McCarthy, 2013; Raspisarda, Desmond, & Nelson, 2011). In the context of medical training rounds, Cantillon and Sargeant (2008) mention that barriers to giving constructive feedback are rooted in supervisors' lack of instruction in giving feedback and their fears of damaging their relationships with learners. Data from a study examining doctoral students' transition from supervisee to supervisor pointed out that one of the "steep learning curves" for new supervisors was learning "the skill of how to structure not only supportive but evaluative feedback for supervisees" (Rapisarda, Desmond, & Nelson, 2011, p. 119).

As counselor educators and supervisors we recognize the importance of clinical supervision to the profession and to the welfare of clients and realize the challenges inherent when barriers exist on the part of supervisors and supervisees to making feedback work effectively in clinical supervision settings. That recognition drives our attention to the matter of preplanning for feedback in supervision as a means for creating necessary and favorable conditions for evaluation. Preplanning for feedback in supervision is a competency we believe

will help the supervisor prepare for the first session with the supervisee and activate an effective feedback process in clinical supervision.

What We Know About Feedback

Knowing how one is perceived by others is a necessary ingredient for enhancing interpersonal learning in counseling and therapy groups. Over the years knowledge about self in relation to others has extended beyond therapeutic settings to teams, classrooms, boardrooms, and other venues where people come together to address tasks and work together to achieve designated goals (Hulse-Killacky & Page, 1994). In previous decades much attention was directed to best practice for delivering effective feedback in counseling groups. Research findings led to the identification of concepts and guidelines to maximize the delivery and receptivity of feedback, especially feedback of what was early on referred to as negative feedback (Morran, Robison, & Stockton, 1985; Morran, Stockton, & Bond, 1991; Morran & Stockton, 1980). Even with clear guidelines and appropriate language, however, individuals often indicated hesitation and discomfort in giving and receiving feedback. In their 1994 article Hulse-Killacky and Page defined corrective feedback as feedback intended to encourage thoughtful self-examination and/or to express the feedback giver's perception of the need for change on the part of the receiver (Hulse-Killacky & Page, 1994). This definition is similar to Swank and McCarthy's (2013) definition: "Corrective feedback addresses behaviors that have undesirable consequences" (p. 100). In 1983 Yalom expressed the view that hesitations to engage in feedback are rooted in social norms. He wrote,

> Feedback is not a commonplace transaction. As a matter of fact, there are very few situations in life when one feels free to comment directly on the immediate behavior of another person. Generally such direct feedback is taboo; virtually the only place it is permissible is the parent-child relationship and, occasionally in an exceedingly intimate (or exceedingly conflicted) relationship (p. 187).

Yalom's quote highlights potential barriers that can interfere with giving, clarifying, and receiving feedback, especially feedback of a corrective nature.

If, as Yalom writes, feedback is not a commonplace transaction and yet is a central component in clinical supervision as evidenced by the placement of "evaluative" in Bernard and Goodyear's (2014) definition of the supervisory relationship, then how does a supervisor begin to address potential roadblocks that make it hard for supervisees to accept and use feedback to full advantage in supervision?

In the context of group work, Robison and Hardt (1992) recommended that group leaders and members could benefit by participating in structured conversations focused on the value of feedback, the importance of leaders modeling openness to feedback, and any concerns that members might have about receiving corrective feedback. Such discussions were viewed as necessary preplanning activities to normalize and encourage feedback exchange in group settings. Transferred to the supervision setting, preplanning discussions can help normalize feedback, promote a supervisor's understanding of self, and provide a way for the supervisor to learn about the supervisee.

The Corrective Feedback Instrument-Revised (CFI-R)

The Corrective Feedback Instrument was developed as a tool to encourage the type of conversation recommended by Robison and Hardt (1992). At the time of its publication the 55-item CFI was seen as one means for helping to address concerns that members of counselor training groups might have to giving, receiving, and exchanging corrective feedback (Hulse-Killacky & Page, 1994). Hulse-Killacky and Page observed that the reactions to corrective feedback uncovered in the development of the CFI mirrored concerns expressed by members of personal growth groups in earlier research studies and supported Yalom's (1983) statement.

After its use as a discussion tool for 10 years, the CFI was further examined and revised through exploratory factor analysis procedures. This decision was made with the belief that a shorter instrument might be an even more user friendly tool for use in education, clinical, medical, business, and community settings. In 2006 the Corrective Feedback Instrument-Revised (CFI-R) was introduced (Hulse-Killacky, et al, 2006). The revised instrument consists of 30 items, presented in a 6-point Likert format of response choices: strongly disagree, disagree, slightly disagree, slightly agree, agree, and strongly agree. The CFI-R items load on one of six factors that together provide comprehensive information on a person's preferences for and reactions to giving, receiving, and clarifying corrective feedback. The language of the CFI-R reflects its initial focus on groups, group leaders, and group members. For the purposes of preplanning for feedback in supervision these terms can easily be changed to supervision, supervisors, and supervisees.

Overview of the CFI-R by Six Factors

The following presents the CFI-R through a focus on the six factors. A representative item from each of the factors is provided. The six factors are Feelings, Evaluative, Leader, Clarifying, Childhood Memories, and Written.

- The *feelings factor* with 5 items taps emotions associated with corrective feedback. This factor includes items like, "I worry too much about upsetting others when I have to give corrective feedback."
- The *evaluative factor* includes 5 items that suggest corrective feedback is criticism and features the item, "It is hard for me not to interpret corrective feedback as a criticism of my personal competence."
- The *leader factor* includes 7 items that refer to the leader's encouragement of norms that support the exchange of corrective feedback. One item reads, "When the norms of the group support the exchange of corrective feedback, I will be open to receiving corrective feedback."
- The *clarifying factor* emphasizes the need for clarification so that all parties understand the message being sent. Three item comprise this factor. One reads, "I am usually too uncomfortable to ask someone to clarify corrective feedback delivered to me."
- The *childhood memories factor* with 6 items captures the reality that many reactions to feedback can begin during one's early years; a function perhaps of culture or family influences that create memories which then may serve as barriers to either giving or receiving feedback. A sample item reads, "Receiving corrective feedback as a child was painful for me."

- The *written feedback factor* includes 4 items that provide information on preferences for written versus spoken feedback. For example, "It is easier for me to write down my corrective feedback than to speak it."
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Preplanning for Feedback with the CFI-R. *If*, a goal of supervision is to create a climate where supervisees will more likely shift their attention from avoiding feedback to accepting feedback as a means for building therapeutic competence and improving their professional performance, *then* preplanning for feedback using the CFI-R serves as an intervention to encourage this shift (Hulse, 2013).

Discussions on potential barriers to receiving corrective feedback in supervision have extended beyond clinical supervision to include law enforcement training (McDermott & Hulse, 2014b; McDermott & Hulse, 2012) and medical and health professional education and training (Archer, 2010; Gigante, Dell, & Sharkey, 2011). Consistency exists across these literature sources supporting the need to make feedback a reality in supervision by addressing thoughts and feelings that may impede a supervisee's ability to receive and apply feedback for professional competence in those areas. In our counselor training program we notice the benefits from intentional preplanning with the CFI-R to help supervisees reframe their view of feedback and prepare for feedback in supervision. When students engage in structured discussions on the topic of feedback we observe that they can better listen to, absorb, and apply feedback, and be motivated to change as a result of the feedback received. At our institution we have also observed that using the CFI-R in clinical supervision moderates negative reactions to feedback, minimizes dispositional issues in clinical supervision, and maximizes the possibility that supervisees will more likely engage with feedback rather than avoid or disregard the feedback (Robert & Hulse, 2014; Robert & Hulse, 2013). Through structured dialogue the supervisor and supervisee can each increase self-awareness and gain knowledge and understanding about the other.

Preplanning activities with the CFI-R. The CFI-R is a flexible tool that can be used in totality, in a shortened version, or with items organized by clusters and factors. Conversations on the topic of feedback can take place one-on-one, in small groups, or in movement activities based on responses to selected items. In the following discussion we will present various uses of the CFI-R to emphasize versatility and to demonstrate that even with time constraints, supervisors have many options on how to adapt the CFI-R for maximum benefit.

Activity 1: Working with all items on the CFI-R. In this example the supervisor asks the supervisee to complete the 30 items on the CFI-R. The supervisor reviews all responses and then meets with the supervisee to discuss his or her responses. The supervisor could also have this type of conversation with a group of students in a practicum class. In this situation the supervisor can tally the responses for each student across the 30 items and present the frequencies in a grid format where students can review how they responded to each item while seeing the responses of others in the class. Questions posed by the supervisor could include, "Were you surprised by how others responded? How are your responses similar to or different from others in the class? What did you learn by completing the CFI-R and reviewing all the responses?" A conversation on the various ways supervisees interpret and manage feedback helps the supervisor and supervisees learn about each other, develop an understanding of different perspectives, which can eventually lead to increasing self-awareness and the emergence of empathy for different perspectives.

Activity 2: Group movement activity. In this activity the supervisor can select certain items that represent each of the 6 factors. Supervisees can be asked to stand in one place if they agree with the item and stand in another place if they disagree. In this activity supervisees can actually visualize where they position themselves in relation to others. Questions to encourage conversation can include, "If you agree with the item, *I feel criticized when I receive corrective feedback,* what might be the consequences of being paired up with a supervisor who disagrees with this item?" Back and forth conversations using different items on the CFI-R help build self-awareness on the part of the supervisor and supervisees and validate the merits of this type of preplanning activity.

Activity 3: Exploring responses on the CFI-R. The purpose of this activity is to provide supervisees opportunity to review their individual responses on the CFI-R within three clusters: Cluster 1: Receiving Corrective Feedback, Cluster 2: Clarifying Corrective Feedback, and Cluster 3: Giving Corrective Feedback. (See Appendix A for a copy of Exploring Responses on the CFI-R). As supervisees review their responses to items in each cluster they discuss which responses indicate a level of comfort or confidence and which responses reflect a level of discomfort or concern. Once items have been discussed within each cluster supervisees are asked the following questions to facilitate transfer of learning: "What was the value in talking through these various responses? What did you learn about yourself? What are your next steps to increase your comfort and confidence for receiving, clarifying, and giving corrective feedback?" In our work with this activity students report that this type of discussion lowers their anxiety and helps them normalize the topic of feedback. Supervisees report that they begin to see that they are not alone in their concerns. They state that the conversations create in them a willingness to engage more frequently in giving, receiving, and clarifying corrective feedback.

Activity 4: CFI-R: Items matched with factors. In this activity the supervisor can examine supervisee responses by factors and decide if responses require further exploration. For example, as illustrated in McDermott and Hulse (2012) the supervisor might observe that the supervisee agrees strongly with all 5 items on the evaluative factor. The supervisor might then decide to gather more information on what appears to be concerns about evaluation. An example would be how a Field Training Officer responded to a recruit in the McDermott and Hulse (2012) article where the supervisor could take time to clarify the supervisee's feelings and hesitations in order to help the supervisor understand where roadblocks might exist to receiving and incorporating the feedback. Exploring responses to items by factor can also illuminate the positive impact a supervisor can have. If, for example, supervisees tend to agree with the 7 items on the Leader factor they are indicating that the supervisor's behavior and acceptance of feedback can positively shape the feedback process (See Appendix B for a copy of the CFI-R: Items Matched with Factors).

Activity 5: CFI-R items organized in categories to encourage puzzling. This activity (Hulse & McDermott, 2014b) was designed to encourage puzzling and hypothesizing on the part of the supervisor. This activity includes the phrase, "Knowledge→ understanding→ empathy." We believe that such puzzling can only enhance knowledge on the part of the supervisor which leads to understanding and then to the development of empathy for a supervisee's feelings and reactions to feedback. The four categories selected for discussion in this activity are criticism, conflict, modeling, and role of past experiences. These categories use different descriptors than the CFI-R factor names to encourage creative exploration on the part of supervisors. Under the heading of criticism the statement is made, "If a supervisee agrees with Item #1 (I feel criticized

when I receive corrective feedback), then you might hypothesize that the supervisee will agree with items

- #9, *I think negative thoughts about myself when I receive corrective feedback*
- #10, *It is hard for me not to interpret corrective feedback as a criticism of my personal competence*
- #20, *When I am not sure about the corrective feedback message delivered to me I do not ask for clarification*
- #26, *When I am given corrective feedback, I think my skills are being questioned* and
- #29, *It is too scary for me to ask other group members to clarify their corrective feedback if it is unclear to me.*"

Through engagement in this activity the supervisor develops hypotheses to guide future discussions about the extent of the supervisee's feelings on the topic of "criticism." Supervisors interested in this type of puzzling can develop additional categories and include other items in different combinations. Questions for supervisors to reflect on include, "What are the implications of observing these responses? How might you use this information in supervision?" This activity also illuminates the many ways that one can tailor items on the CFI-R for use in particular supervision circumstances (See Appendix C for a copy of CFI-R Organized by 4 Categories for Discussion).

Conclusion

In our discussion of the CFI-R as a tool to facilitate preplanning for feedback in supervision we have emphasized the importance of taking time first to know oneself as the supervisor and to then to know the person of the supervisee. One way to learn about self and others in the context of giving, receiving, and clarifying corrective feedback is to begin answering the questions of: who am I, who am I with you, and who are we together? (see Hulse-Killacky, Killacky, & Donigian, 2001). Taking time to answer the question, "who am I?" can prompt experienced and novice supervisors to reflect and engage in critical thinking about their role as supervisors. The Self-Assessment of Feedback Skills (see Appendix D) is a tool for facilitating this type of reflection. By taking upfront and focused time to develop a climate for successful supervision, supervisors increase chances that supervisees will more likely engage with feedback rather than avoid or disregard feedback.

We offer these points to consider:
- The practice of supervision is intentional
- Feedback is at the heart of supervision
- Supervisors need to engage in self-reflection early on about their own preferences, concerns, and barriers to delivering effective feedback
- Supervisors have a responsibility to convey early on their openness to feedback as a tool for learning; to lead by example
- Supervisors need resources to help them facilitate conversations early on with their supervisees to identify concerns, expectations, and fears about receiving feedback, especially of a corrective nature
- The supervisor is always charged with helping supervisees move from avoidance of criticism to an acceptance of feedback; to view feedback as an impetus for professional growth and development

Preplanning for feedback is one way to help develop the trust that Mueller and Kell advocate. Preplanning for feedback also helps make the full impact of feedback in supervision valuable for supervisees who are dedicated to building their therapeutic competence and enhancing their professional growth.

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Appendix A

Exploring Responses on the Corrective Feedback Instrument-Revised (CFI-R):

Identifying Areas of Comfort and Discomfort

For each of the three cluster areas below review your individual responses on the CFI-R and then discuss. Make sure you include some reflection on how you will use this information in supervision.

Cluster Area #1: Receiving corrective feedback

     Review and discuss your responses to the following items on the CFI-R:

          1, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 21, and 26

     Which responses indicate a level of comfort or confidence for you?

     Which responses reflect a level of discomfort or concern for you?

Cluster Area #2: Clarifying corrective feedback

     Review and discuss your responses to the following items on the CFI-R:

          2, 20, and 29

     Which responses indicate a level of comfort or confidence for you?

     Which responses reflect a level of discomfort or concern for you?

Cluster Area #3: Giving corrective feedback

     Review and discuss your responses to the following items on the CFI-R:

          4, 14, 15, 16, 19, 23, 25, 28, and 30

     Which responses indicate a level of comfort or confidence for you?

     Which responses reflect a level of discomfort or concern for you?

Transfer of Learning

     What was the value for you in talking through these various responses?

     What did you learn about yourself?

     What are your next steps to increase your comfort and confidence for receiving,

          clarifying, and giving corrective feedback?

Appendix B

Corrective Feedback Instrument-Revised
Items Matched with Factors

Leader Factor:
- When the norms of the group support the exchange of corrective feedback, I will be open to receiving corrective feedback (12).
- I like to hear the leader clearly state his or her support for corrective feedback (13).
- If I am in a group setting where corrective feedback exchange has been established as a norm, I will be receptive to corrective feedback (18).
- If I observed the leader reinforcing the giving of corrective feedback in the group, I would be willing to give corrective feedback more frequently (19).
- If I have a part in helping set norms for receiving corrective feedback, then I will probably be open to receiving corrective feedback (21).
- I believe that positive experiences with corrective feedback can occur in a group when the leader takes an active role in setting the stage (27).
- If I can take part in helping to set norms for giving corrective feedback, I will probably be more open to giving corrective feedback (28).

Feeling Factor:
- Telling someone I have a different view is scary to me (14).
- Verbalizing corrective feedback is awkward for me (16).
- I try to avoid being in conflict with others whenever possible (23).
- Most of the time I am too uncomfortable to say what I really mean to someone else (25).
- I worry too much about upsetting others when I have to give corrective feedback (30).

Evaluative Factor:
- I feel criticized when I receive corrective feedback (1).
- I think negative thoughts about myself when I receive corrective feedback (9).
- It is hard for me not to interpret corrective feedback as a criticism of my personal competence (10).
- When I receive corrective feedback, I think I have failed in some way (11).
- When I am given corrective feedback, I think my skills are being questioned (26).

Childhood Memories Factor:
- I remember corrective feedback delivered as a child to be critical (3).
- Because my childhood memories of corrective feedback are negative ones, I am very sensitive about receiving corrective feedback now (6).
- Receiving corrective feedback as a child was painful for me (7).
- I fear conflict because of my negative experiences with corrective feedback as a child (8).
- When I reflect on the corrective feedback I received as a child, I hesitate to give others corrective feedback (15).
- I always felt criticized whenever I received corrective feedback as a child (22).

Written Feedback Factor:
- Giving written corrective feedback is easier for me to do than speaking directly to the person (4).
- When I need to give corrective feedback, I prefer to write it out (5).
-

- I prefer to receive corrective feedback in written form (17).
- It is easier for me to write down my corrective feedback than to speak it (24).

Clarifying Feedback Factor:
- I am usually too uncomfortable to ask someone to clarify corrective feedback delivered to me (2).
- When I am not sure about the corrective feedback message delivered to me I do not ask for clarification (20).
- It is too scary for me to ask other group members to clarify their corrective feedback if it is unclear to me (29).

* For feedback in supervision these terms can easily be changed to supervision, supervisors, and supervisees.

Appendix C

CFI-R Organized by 4 Categories for Discussion
Knowledge→understanding→empathy

Criticism:
If a supervisee agrees with Item #1 (**I feel criticized when I receive corrective feedback**), then you might hypothesize that the supervisee will agree with items, 9, 10, 20, 26, and 29.
- What are the implications of observing these responses?
- How might you use this information in supervision?

Conflict:
If a supervisee agrees with item #23 (**I try to avoid being in conflict with others whenever possible**), then you might hypothesize that the supervisee will agree with items, 16, 25, 29, and 30.
- What are the implications of observing these responses?
- How might you use this information in supervision?

Modeling:
If a supervisee agrees with item #12 (**When the norms of the group support the exchange of corrective feedback, I will be open to receiving corrective feedback**), you might hypothesize that the supervisee will agree with items, 13, 18, 19, 21, 27, and 28.
- What are the implications of observing these responses?
- How might you use this information in supervision?

Note: agreement with these items emphasizes the importance and power of modeling on the part of the supervisor and how that modeling helps develop feedback as an important part in the organization's culture. The supervisor plays a large role in shaping a culture of feedback.

Role of Past Experiences:
If a supervisee agrees with item #9 (**I think negative thoughts about myself when I receive corrective feedback**), you might hypothesize that the supervisee will agree with items, 3, 6, 8, 15, and 22.
- What are the implications of observing these responses?
- How might you use this information in supervision?

Note: there are many issues that may create a defensive or closed response to feedback. The goal is not to address the childhood memories directly but to be aware that past experiences can figure in to how supervisees respond to feedback.

Once you become acquainted with the items on the CFI-R you will understand the items and then you can take liberties with the items in tailoring their use to your particular circumstances.

Appendix D

Self-Assessment of Feedback Skills:
A Preplanning Activity for Supervisors

Purpose: For use prior to supervision, this tool can promote self-awareness and help supervisors gain clarity about their feelings and reactions to giving and receiving feedback.

1. Describe an experience where you gave a supervisee positive feedback. What were your feelings while giving this type of feedback? How did the supervisee respond to you?
2. Describe an experience where you gave a supervisee feedback of a corrective or constructive nature. What were you feelings while giving this type of feedback? How did the supervisee respond to you?
3. Describe an experience when you received positive feedback. What were your feelings while receiving this type of feedback? How did you respond to the feedback giver?
4. Describe an experience when you received corrective feedback. What were your feelings while receiving this type of feedback? How did you respond to the feedback giver?
5. Have you ever been in a position to give positive or corrective feedback to a supervisee 20 or more years older than you? What was your comfort level in this situation?
6. Have you ever been in a position to give positive or corrective feedback to a supervisee from a different culture or different racial group than your own? What was your comfort level in this situation?
7. Rate your general level of comfort in giving feedback to others
   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10
   Discomfort   Comfort
8. Rate your general level of comfort in receiving feedback from others
   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10
   Discomfort   Comfort