

*MAINTAINING PROFICIENT SUPERVISOR PERFORMANCE
WITH DIRECT SUPPORT PERSONNEL:
AN ANALYSIS OF TWO MANAGEMENT APPROACHES*

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A traditional management approach using indirect feedback was compared to an approach involving direct feedback for maintaining supervisory proficiency in observing and providing feedback to staff. Three supervisors participated in each condition. The first 3 supervisors then received direct feedback. Direct feedback was accompanied by high levels of performance relative to the indirect feedback protocol. The need for maintenance procedures with supervisors is discussed.

DESCRIPTORS: supervisor performance, feedback, staff management

A major variable that affects work behavior among direct support personnel in human service agencies is the quality of supervision provided. Despite the recognized importance of supervisor performance, there has been little behavioral research that specifically targets maintenance of supervisor performance in human service agencies (Jensen, Parsons, & Reid, 1998).

One common management approach designed to maintain supervisor behavior involves instructing supervisors in performing certain duties and then requiring the supervisors to document their completion of the duties. The documentation is then periodically

reviewed by senior management. From a behavioral perspective, such a process can be viewed as involving instructions, self-recording, and indirect feedback based on what the supervisors self-record. Though common, the effectiveness of this type of management process for maintaining supervisor performance has not been investigated. The purpose of this investigation was to compare the process just described with an alternative management approach that involves direct feedback based on actual observations of supervisor performance.

METHOD

Participants, Setting, Behavior Definitions, and Observation Procedures

Participants were 6 supervisors (aged 34 to 48 years) of direct support staff working in four living units in a facility for people with severe disabilities. All staff and supervisors had been trained to teach people with disabilities by following a task analysis, least-to-most assistive prompting, correcting cli-

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ent errors, and reinforcing client behavior (Schepis, Reid, Ownbey, & Parsons, 2001).

One target behavior was the supervisors' observation accuracy (observing a staff member's use of the client-teaching skills), defined as the percentage of teaching procedures scored by a supervisor that coincided with an instructor's scoring. The instructor had a masters degree in behavior analysis and over 10 years experience in staff and supervisor training. An instructor and supervisor each observed a staff member's teaching proficiency, and recorded each teaching skill as correctly performed by the staff member, incorrectly performed, or not applicable (Jensen *et al.*, 1998). The criterion for accurate observation was that the supervisor's recordings matched the instructor's recordings on at least 80% of all recordings per teaching session.

A second target behavior was the supervisor's feedback performance in terms of providing verbal feedback following a six-step protocol to a staff member after he or she had conducted a client-teaching session (*cf.* Parsons & Reid, 1995). An instructor observed the supervisor's feedback following a teaching session, and scored whether each feedback step was implemented. The criterion for providing feedback was that at least 80% of the feedback steps were provided by the supervisor. Interobserver agreement checks were conducted on 34% of observations, averaging 98% for the supervisory observations and 93% for feedback provision.

Experimental Conditions and Design

Training (prebaseline). All supervisors were trained to observe and provide feedback to staff regarding their teaching proficiency, as described by Jensen *et al.* (1998).

No direct feedback (baseline). The existing agency policy regarding supervisory responsibilities for observing and providing feedback was discussed with each supervisor and was provided in writing. The policy specified

when observations and feedback should occur (e.g., at least weekly for new staff) and that supervisors were to complete a designated form for each observation and feedback session and send the form to their area supervisor. The area supervisor reviewed the forms at least monthly to ensure completion and incorporated feedback regarding a supervisor's completion of the forms into the supervisor's performance evaluations. To evaluate maintenance of the supervisor's skills, on a weekly basis an instructor watched as a supervisor observed a staff member's client-teaching session and provided the staff person with feedback. No feedback was provided to the supervisor by the instructor.

Direct feedback. Procedures in place during the preceding management condition remained. In addition, after an instructor watched a supervisor observe a staff member's client-teaching session and provide feedback, the instructor provided verbal feedback to the supervisor. The feedback focused on the degree to which the supervisor's recordings coincided with the instructor's recordings regarding the teaching, and the degree to which the supervisor's feedback provided to the staff member followed the feedback protocol. Feedback to the supervisor followed the same protocol as that used with staff. Feedback initially was provided weekly until the supervisor's observation and feedback performance met the 80% criterion for three consecutive sessions. Using the same criterion, feedback was faded to every 2 weeks, then every 3 weeks and finally, once per month.

A modified multiple probe design was used to demonstrate experimental control. Initially, the 6 supervisors were divided into three pairs. Three weeks after completing training, 1 member of each pair was arbitrarily assigned to receive direct feedback and the other was assigned to the usual (baseline) management condition of no di-

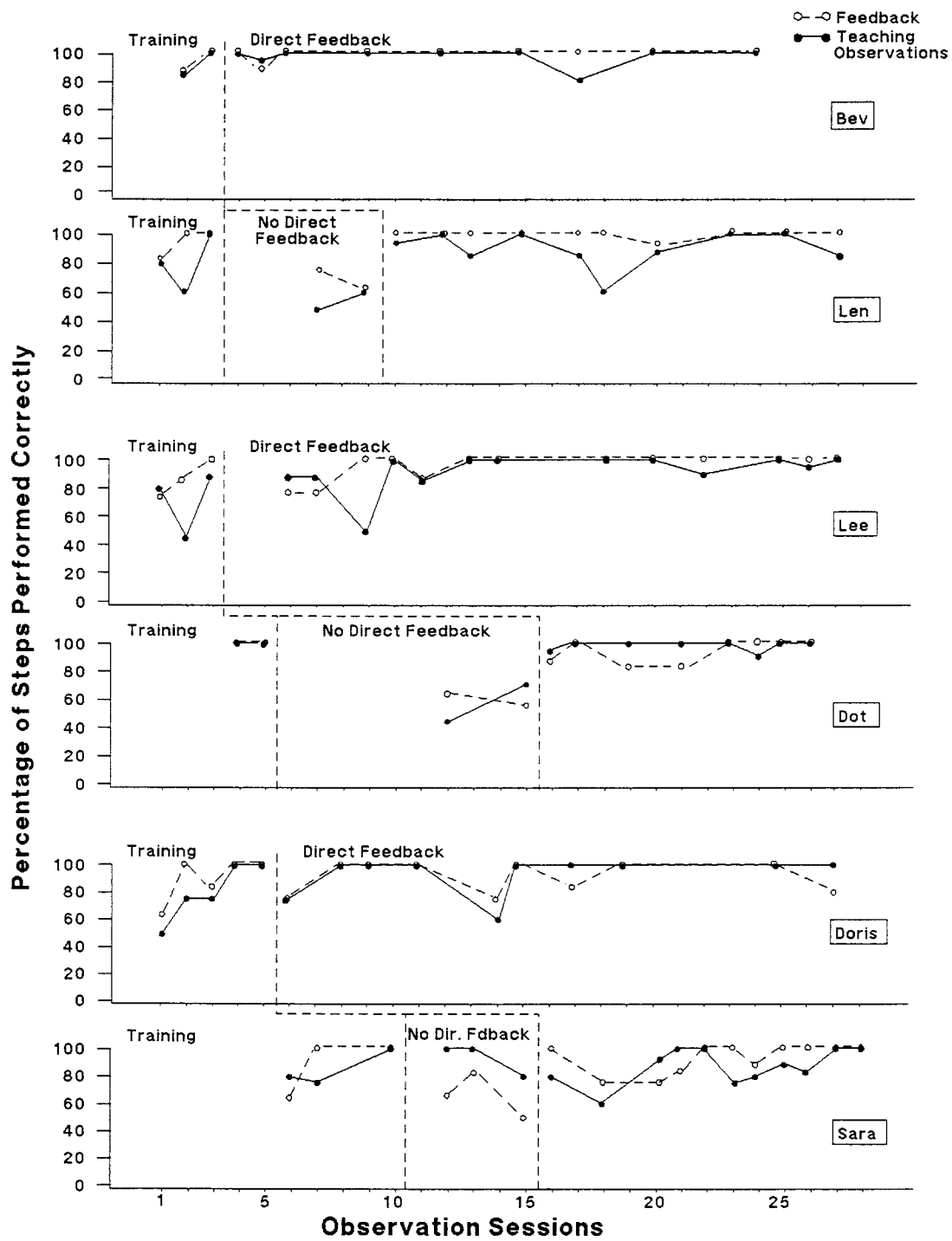


Figure 1. Percentage of steps performed correctly for observations and feedback during each observed client-teaching session by staff for each supervisor during each experimental condition.

rect feedback. Following 3 to 5 weeks of direct feedback with the former supervisors, observations were conducted of the other supervisor member of each pair in the no-direct-feedback condition. Direct feedback was then implemented with the latter supervisors.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

For the 3 supervisors who began receiving direct feedback 3 weeks after training, their proficiency in observing staffs' client teaching and providing feedback to staff generally was maintained at or above the preestablished 80% criterion level (Figure 1). For the 3 supervisors who did not receive direct feedback following training, their performance rarely met criterion. When the latter 3 supervisors subsequently received direct feedback, however, their performance with both observations and feedback improved, although the improvements were somewhat variable with 1 of the 3 supervisors. During direct feedback, all supervisors met performance criterion on 90% of sessions for observation accuracy and providing feedback. In contrast, during the no-direct-feedback condition, the supervisors met criterion on 29% of the sessions for observations and 14% of the sessions for feedback. Across all 6 supervisors, the direct-feedback condition was in effect 13 to 28 weeks. At the end of the study, the feedback schedule for individ-

ual supervisors ranged from every 2 weeks to monthly.

Results suggested that the traditional management approach of instructions, self-recording, and indirect feedback did not effectively maintain adequate supervisory performance. However, supervisors performed adequately when direct feedback was added to the approach. Numerous investigations have demonstrated that supervisory feedback is often necessary for maintaining desired levels of work performance among direct support staff (Jensen *et al.*, 1998). Results here suggest that the supervisors themselves may also require direct feedback in order to implement procedures proficiently on a consistent basis with their staff.

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