



Change agenda

COACHING SUPERVISION MAXIMISING THE POTENTIAL OF COACHING

Introduction

The use of coaching has grown exponentially in the last ten years. The CIPD's 2006 learning and development survey showed that nearly 80% of all respondents were in organisations that were investing in one or more forms of coaching.

As investment in coaching has grown, so too has the need to find ways of quality assuring the services being provided, to develop and sustain the coaches who are delivering them, and to find ways of drawing out the organisational learning from the many coaching conversations taking place in the organisation.

Coaching supervision has a pivotal role in addressing these needs, but it's still at a very early stage of development and isn't yet used by most coaches and organisers of coaching. This Change Agenda reports on research into good practice in coaching supervision carried out by Bath Consultancy Group for the CIPD. Its aim is to provide guidance on making the best use of coaching supervision. It's also intended that the research will contribute to discussion on how this area of work should develop.

It shows too how supervision is beginning to play a key role in the continuing professional development of both internal and external coaches and how some organisations are using supervision to create a sustainable coaching culture.

You can read the different parts of this Change Agenda in any order. The first gives an overview of what coaching supervision is and why it matters, the second gives a summary of the current state of supervision in the UK, and the third gives guidance on good practice. The text is illustrated by case studies showing how very different organisations are using coaching supervision to support their coaching services.

What is coaching supervision and why does it matter?

Coaching supervision is a relatively new activity and little has been written about it. In the last two years, however, definitions have begun to emerge. These include:

‘Supervision sessions are a place for the coach to reflect on the work they are undertaking, with another more experienced coach. It has the dual purpose of supporting the continued learning and development of the coach, as well as giving a degree of protection to the person being coached’ (Bluckert 2004).

‘Coaching supervision is a formal process of professional support, which ensures continuing development of the coach and effectiveness of his/her coaching practice through interactive reflection, interpretative evaluation and the sharing of expertise’ (Bachkirova, Stevens and Willis 2005).

‘The process by which a coach, with the help of a supervisor, can attend to understanding better both the client system and themselves as part of the client-coach system, and by so doing transform their work and develop their craft’ (Hawkins and Smith 2006).

These definitions agree that:

- Supervision is a formal process.
- It is interpersonal, and can be undertaken one-to-one, in groups or in peer groups.
- Reflection on client work is central to supervision.
- Its goals include developing greater coaching competence.

But this research project has also shown that supervision has other functions that are important to those who are organising coaching services. We now suggest, therefore, this broader definition:

... a structured formal process for coaches, with the help of a coaching supervisor, to attend to improving the quality of their coaching, grow their

coaching capacity and support themselves and their practice. Supervision should also be a source of organisational learning.

There is, to date, only limited published work on the models and theories used in coaching supervision. This is partly because coaching supervisors are often drawn from psychology, psychotherapy or counselling backgrounds, where supervision has been established longer. But, until the coaching community develops its own definitions, models and theories of supervision, the practice will be limited and coaching supervision will remain ‘dressed in borrowed clothes’.

These ‘borrowed clothes’ have created three rather limited coaching supervision approaches:

- psychological case work – focusing on understanding the psychology of the coaching client and how to work with it
- ‘coaching the coach’ – focusing on the coach rather than on their coaching
- managerial supervision – focusing on fixing problems and resolving difficulties.

Coaching supervision now needs to develop its own models in order to:

- better understand the coach’s clients and their organisational context
- explore coaching relationships
- develop ways of improving coaching and coaching interventions
- contribute to the coach’s continuing professional development
- attend to the ‘live’ relationship between coach and supervisor and the ways this might be paralleling the coaching session dynamics
- ensure the coach is supported and resourced to manage coaching work within their capability.

Should it be called 'supervision'?

This research shows that some individuals and organisations dislike the term 'supervision' since it can create an old-fashioned image of overseeing, monitoring, controlling and policing.

While the most commonly used terms are 'coach supervisor' and 'coaching supervision', some organisations have opted for different ways of describing the person and the practice, such as 'coaching the coach', 'lead coach', 'coach mentor', 'meta coaching' or 'reflective practice'. But the term 'coaching supervision' is gradually becoming more widely accepted as the thinking behind this term is now better understood and more widely practised.

Why does it matter?

Supervision is well established in many 'people professions' such as psychology, social work, nursing, psychotherapy and counselling – and is now being established in the newer discipline of coaching. Drawing on the history and evolution of supervision in other professions, Hawkins and Smith (2006) define three main functions of effective coaching supervision as qualitative, developmental and resourcing.

The **qualitative function** provides quality control in working with people. All coaches, no matter how experienced, have issues they don't see, communication they haven't heard and challenges they're not communicating. Consequently, high-quality coaching can't be maintained by a coach acting in isolation. Supervisors have a responsibility to ensure their supervisee's work is appropriate and falls within defined ethical standards.

In cases where the organisation sponsors supervision, the qualitative function may also minimise the risk of unprofessional practice by ensuring the organisation's standards are upheld and the boundaries of the coach's competence aren't overstepped. Supervision is also a way to ensure the coaching is aligned with organisational objectives.

The **developmental function** addresses the skills, understanding and capabilities of the supervisee through the reflection and exploration of the supervisee's work with their clients. In this exploration, the supervisor helps the coach to:

- understand the client better
- become more aware of their own reactions and responses to the client
- understand the dynamics of coach–client interaction
- examine how they intervened and the consequences
- explore other ways of working with this and other similar client situations.

The **resourcing function** provides emotional support enabling the coach to deal with the intensity of working with clients. Inevitably, coaches will be affected emotionally by being present and empathic with their coaching clients. To remain effective, coaches need to attend to themselves so they avoid over-identifying with their clients or defending against being further affected.

Current practice in coaching supervision

This part of the Change Agenda is drawn from research carried out during the summer of 2006. It's derived from web-based questionnaire responses from 525 coaches and 128 organisers of coaching services, feedback from focus groups attended by 31 practitioners, and in-depth interviews with six organisations using coaching supervision to support their coaching services.

How widely is supervision practised?

Coaching supervision is increasingly recognised as valuable by coaches and organisers of coaching but it's still not practised by most coaches. While 86% of coaches responding to our survey believe that coaches should have coaching supervision, only 44% actually do so. Coaches who are members of a coaching professional body are more likely to have supervision, with 75% reporting that they do so. The use of coaching

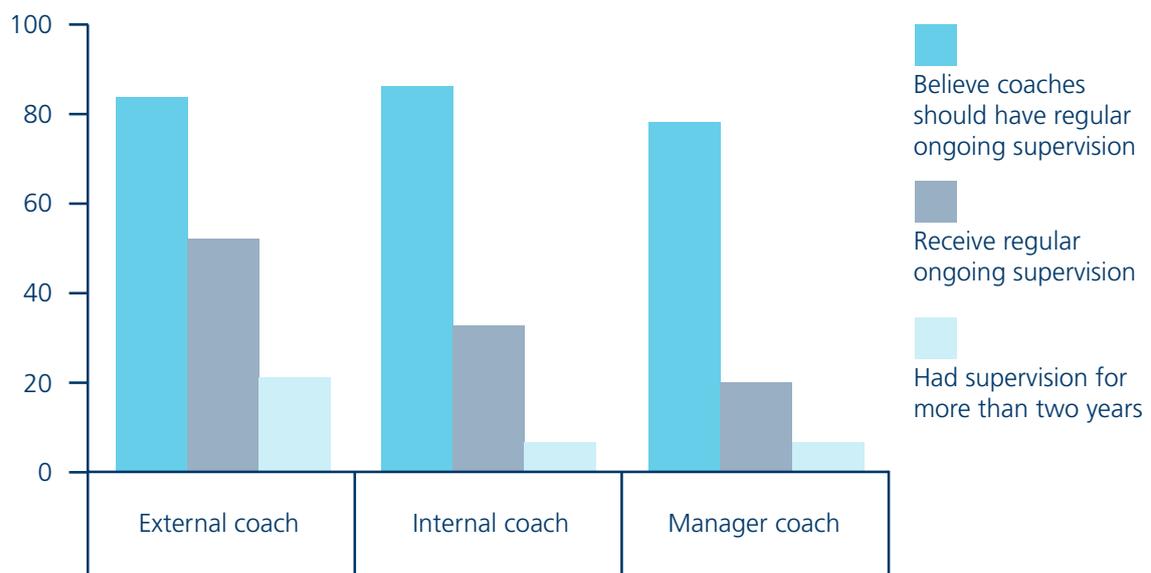
supervision is growing rapidly, with the majority of coaches starting supervision in the last two years.

Those who don't practise supervision give a number of reasons for this, including:

- Supervision isn't required by my organisation. (42%)
- Supervision is too expensive. (17%)
- I can't find a supervisor. (17%).

The gap is even greater for those who organise coaching services. In all, 88% say they believe coaches should have supervision, but only 23% report that they provide it. Some of the reasons they give for not providing supervision are that it's too expensive (19%), they can't find a supervisor (13%), or their organisation's coaches don't need supervision (10%).

Figure 1: Belief in and use of supervision



The questionnaire responses also show a significant gap between the 'haves' and 'have nots'. It seems that those who do start to receive coaching supervision soon want more. More than half the coaches said they have no supervision, whereas the coaches who are supervised have more than one supervision format, with an average of 2.4 types of supervision per person. This includes 87% who use one-to-one face-to-face sessions, 52% who have peer group supervision, 45% who have one-to-one telephone sessions, and 39% who use facilitator-led groups.

Internal coaches (employees of the organisation who coach staff who do not report to them)

Many organisations use more than one format of coaching supervision. Among those providing supervision for internal coaches, 75% use individual face-to-face sessions, 55% use groups with a designated supervisor, 30% use individual telephone-based supervision and 15% use peer groups without a facilitator.

Organisations use a mix of external and internal resources to provide individual and group supervision. Frequently, the organisation providing coach training also provides supervision. In other cases, an external coach/supervisor is typically recruited through a network recommendation.

External coaches (coaches who are contracted into the organisation to provide coaching services)

Most organisations expect their external coaches to maintain their own supervision arrangements as part of their professional standards. Only 10% of coaching organisers responding to our survey provide supervision for external coaches, with 60% of those only having started to do so within the last year.

A few notable exceptions include:

- Pauline Dixon, National School of Government, provides individual face-to-face or phone sessions for a network of 35 associate coaches offering coaching for senior civil servants. The 'reflective conversations' are held at key points in the coaching cycle: a briefing before the first session, after the first session, after the mid-point session and at the end of the coaching contract.

The meetings are normally face-to-face but can also be conducted by phone. Typically, the session structure explores several key questions:

- How's the coaching for this client going?
- What's gone well?
- What could have been better?
- What have you learned?
- What's transferable to other situations?

Dixon notes: 'It's an important element of managing the quality and effectiveness of the coaching. All of the coaches are quite keen to participate. I have never had anyone say no.'

- Sandra Henson, Ascentia Corporate Coaching, has linked coaching supervision to ISO 9001:2000 Quality Assurance processes. All coaches must 'undertake 2 hours of supervision once a month or every six weeks or for every 35 hours of coaching, whichever is the soonest.' Both coaches and the supervisor keep logbooks to demonstrate regular supervision. Coaches say supervision has evolved from being a 'must do' requirement. In the words of one: 'I really look forward to my supervision sessions. I continue supervision because I want to and not because I've been told to.'

- Sam Humphrey, of Humphrey and Co., has experience of group phone supervision of external coaches working on leadership development programmes. She reports that it:
 - accelerates the coach's team effectiveness and provides professional development
 - gives focus to the measurement of their coaching outcomes
 - gives an opportunity to get feedback and ideas on their work
 - helps coaches understand the wider context they work in and informs their questions in one-to-one coaching sessions
 - identifies themes and patterns to feed back into the organisation and leadership development.

Commenting on the importance of supervision for coaches generally, she says: 'Supervision provides safety for clients and safety for coaches. It helps the coach to be aware of personal limits and capabilities.'

- One leading UK bank, which requires their external coaches to maintain their own supervision, invites the coaches to attend a conference two or three times a year. The half-day starts with a business update, including strategy, new business, leadership changes and restructuring. It progresses with discussion and feedback from the coaches on their insights and perceptions about the organisation. The primary output is feedback on themes and common issues of the leadership culture. It also provides feedback on the coaching policy and process effectiveness.
- supervisor-facilitated one-to-one supervision with a group member on a current coaching client situation or issue – this could include tapes of coaching
- one-to-one or trio peer supervision on a current coaching client situation or issue – this could include tapes of coaching
- an action learning format, where one participant shares a current coaching client situation or issue with other members asking questions or sharing their perspectives
- feedback on organisational and cultural themes.

Structure of coaching supervision

While every coaching supervisor has their own unique methodology and style, there is often a similarity of structure for supervisory sessions. A typical structure for a one-to-one session, whether conducted face to face or by telephone, could be:

- check in (sharing recent experiences and feelings)
- establishing the session focus and desired outcome
- supervisory discussion on a current coaching client's situation or issue – this could include tapes of coaching
- exploring the coach's personal issues and skill development needs
- discussing concerns the coach may have
- establishing learning and commitment to future action.

Group supervision with a designated supervisor and peer supervision often have similar formats. Typically, this may include:

- group check-in (where participants share recent experiences and feelings)
- agreeing who wants to 'present a client'

Supervisor training and qualifications

Coaching supervisor training and qualifications are very diverse. Some supervisors have:

- extensive coaching experience
- coaching supervisory training (a minority)
- experience of counselling or psychotherapy supervision
- a coaching Masters degree (a minority).

Internal coach supervisors appear to have less robust training and qualifications. Many have completed a coaching diploma and have some experience of being supervised, while only a small minority have had coaching supervision training.

Table 1 summarises what training and qualifications respondents to the questionnaires said they would require from a supervisor.

Coaches place more emphasis on training in supervision, while those who organise coaching services tend to give more weight to business experience. Only a minority in both groups look for qualifications in psychology or psychotherapy.

Table 1: Supervisor training and qualifications

Requirement	Organisers of coaching	Coaches
Business/organisational experience	85%	69%
Training in supervision	60%	72%
Supervision qualification	20%	37%
Psychotherapy/psychology qualification	20%	34%

In the focus groups, participants emphasised that it was important that supervisors of coaching had broad experience of coaching themselves. They also said that the match between supervisor and coaches and with the organisation was more important than training or qualifications. The supervisor's authenticity and ability to create a 'shift' in the coach is perceived as critically important. In practice, most organisations select supervisors following a recommendation or referral.

The benefits of coaching supervision

Responses to the questionnaires showed that coaches and organisers have different views about the benefits of coaching supervision. Coaches are interested in making themselves more effective, while those who organise coaching services put more emphasis on quality assurance.

Coaches see the main benefits of supervision as developing coaching capability (88%) and assuring the quality of their coaching (86%). Only 25% indicate they have supervision because their professional body requires it or because the client organisation requires it (9%).

Those who organise coaching, on the other hand, use supervision to monitor coaching quality. This includes protecting the client and minimising the organisational risk of unethical or unprofessional practice. Supervision

helps to ensure that coaching is focused on work objectives and within the boundaries of the coach's capability. They also see coaching supervision as raising coaching standards by continually improving quality and effectiveness.

Those organising supervision for external coaches said that broadening a coach's understanding of the client and their organisational issues forms an important reason for implementing coach supervision. In the case of internal coaches, benefits include bringing geographically dispersed coaches together to share good practice, improving collaborative working and identifying organisation themes and issues.

Good practice in coaching supervision

This research has identified important elements of good practice in coaching supervision. These are described below and are illustrated by our wheel of good practice (Figure 2). This part of the Change Agenda also gives guidance on how to assess whether external coaches are making effective supervision arrangements, how to get started in coaching supervision, and how supervision can help to increase the return on your investment in coaching.

Good practice in coaching supervision means that:

It takes place regularly

Supervision needs to happen regularly to allow coaches to attend adequately to the breadth and depth of their coaching work. As examples of good practice, both the BBC and PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) provide monthly supervision sessions to their coaches. BBC coaches must attend a minimum of six individual sessions and four group sessions per year to continue on the coach register. PwC offers monthly group

supervision with an external supervisor, and coaches supplement this with one-to-one supervision sessions.

The Oxford School of Coaching and Mentoring requires trainee coaches to have one hour of supervision for every 20 hours of coaching, and fully trained coaches have one hour of supervision for every 35 hours of coaching.

Factors to consider when determining supervision frequency:

- Role. If coaches are 'volunteers' who have other day jobs, there will be a limit to how much off-the-job time is acceptable.
- Type. If coaches are primarily skills or performance coaches, they will normally require less supervision than coaches working with clients to achieve fundamental change.
- Sustainability. Coaching supervision should be provided through a relationship based on meetings at least bi-monthly.

Figure 2: Coaching supervision: wheel of good practice



Building internal coaching capability at the BBC

Very few organisations have developed a coherently planned structure for providing coaching supervision to their internal coaches. One of the few is the BBC, which provides coaching for senior and executive managers through a network of 60 trained volunteer internal coaches, and where coaching supervision was first introduced in 2001.

Supervision was seen as a way of closing the gap between the capability of the internal coaches, who had received six days' training, and experienced external coaches also being used by the BBC.

'I was concerned that the coaches wouldn't be able to remember all that they learnt on the coach training. We wanted to ensure that our coaches were providing a consistently high level of coaching comparable to external coach providers.'

The experience of establishing coaching supervision at the BBC has led Liz Macann, Head of Executive, Leadership and Management Coaching, to see the importance of five key aspects of the process:

1 Be clear about your purpose

Macann urges HR or coaching managers to consider what they want from supervision. 'Is it primarily for embedding learning? Is it for offloading? Is it to develop tools and techniques? Or is it for reflection and thinking about oneself, the client and how to improve your coaching practice? Supervision can be all of these. It will evolve, but it helps to be clear about your purpose.'

2 Design a framework that provides consistency and flexibility suited to your context

BBC coaches must have a minimum of six individual supervision sessions and participate in at least four group sessions a year to maintain their 'right to practise' and contribute to the BBC's coach accreditation process.

Coaches have two types of supervision. Each coach has an hour of individual supervision with their lead coach at two-monthly intervals. Individual sessions are usually face to face, but they can be over the phone. Normally, the session will focus on one or two coaching clients.

On alternate months, coaches participate in a half-day of group supervision with 10–12 coaches in each coaching set. By design, the group supervisor is not the same person as the individual supervisor. This ensures all coaches have two independent sources of ongoing supervision. In addition to the individual and group supervision, coaches may contact any lead coach/supervisor for particular needs arising between sessions.

3 Develop trained supervisors

With the wisdom of hindsight, Macann observes: 'I would introduce supervision training earlier if I were to do it again.' Several lead coaches went on coaching supervision training in 2004. 'The training helps the supervisor to help the coach shift so the coaching becomes more transformational.'

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Building internal coaching capability at the BBC (continued)

4 Maximise continued learning and development in the supervision process

Typically, the group supervision sessions at the BBC include:

- check-in regarding their coaching work
- sharing new tools and techniques learned from books and/or attending courses
- co-supervision in threes
- coaching 'book club' recommendations from group members.

5 Maximise organisational learning while protecting individual confidentiality

Group supervision sessions frequently raise organisational issues or trends worth noting. Occasionally, they use a 'talking wall' technique to identify organisational themes discussed in coaching.

In this way, group sessions provide an 'emotional and behavioural monitor for the organisation'. Themes are fed into the Leadership Team of the Leadership and Development function and may also be used as feedback to the Leadership Board.

Client confidentiality is protected in both individual and group supervision. People work with a 'no names or grades' rule. If there is the possibility a client could be recognised, the coach camouflages the details. By using these guidelines, they haven't experienced any confidentiality difficulties.

Macann notes a number of positive outcomes from coaching supervision, including:

- a sense of community and connectedness with other coaches
- a belief in the coaching process being stimulated
- ongoing personal development that informs coaching practice
- more effective working with 'sticky' clients
- confident coaches who are better equipped to deliver high-calibre, time-effective coaching
- an organisation safety net to help coaches maintain boundaries and minimise any organisational risk.

However, Macann is quick to mention that their use of coaching supervision is more about the developmental aspects and being more effective than about the avoidance of risk.

It focuses on client, organisation and coach needs

Supervision involves at least three clients: the coach, the coaching client, and the client's organisation. One of the key outcomes of supervision is to develop 'super vision', which enables a coach to have a broader understanding of the coach–client system and the client–organisation system. When selecting a supervisor, it's important that they have training and experience in the system dynamics involved in coaching and don't just focus on the psychology of the clients.

It provides continuing professional development to the coach

Supervision should also be a key part of the continuing professional development of the coach, helping them connect theory with practice and develop reflective practice as a core element of their work.

Some organisations use professional development to complement their supervision practice. Standard Chartered Bank, for example, provides periodic

masterclasses to top up coaching skills and build coaching capacity. Sarah Jones, Group Head of Leadership Development at Standard Chartered, says: 'The masterclasses are a shot in the arm. They remind us of the best habits of coaching and help to accelerate competence and confidence.'

Several organisations ensure that a mix of experienced and newer coaches work together in supervision as well as drawing people together from different seniority levels. This helps all participants learn from different perspectives.

Going global with Standard Chartered Bank

Standard Chartered is a global company of 44,000 employees operating in 56 countries. With a large global footprint and significant growth aspirations, the organisation perceives leadership development as essential to the future success of the business. To develop its leadership talent, Standard Chartered introduced a 'strengths-based' approach to leadership development in 2000.

As part of this ongoing initiative, the organisation has a network of 200 'Strength Coaches' spanning the globe. The coaches are all HR relationship managers, who were invited to become Strength Coaches as a component of their role. To become a coach, individuals must attend a four-day training course and complete ten coaching sessions over four months, with one audio-recorded session, and they must commit to ongoing professional development.

Sarah Jones, Group Head of Leadership Development, leads the coaching network and its supervision. Jones says: 'Providing support for the coaches requires a global network of 34 "team coaches" who each provide ongoing supervisory support for three to seven coaches. Team coaches are selected from the 'cream of the coaches' with at least two years' Strengths Coaching experience. We look for people who are deeply committed to their own personal development in the area of coaching and the development of others.'

The team coaches are expected to meet each coach for one and a half to two hours every three months as a minimum. If a coach would like more support, they can arrange additional meetings with their team coach. Most of these are face-to-face meetings, but they can be by telephone or video calls. Some supervisors use groups and some run 'surgeries' when they're in the country. The typical supervisory meeting includes:

- reviewing coaching clients: what I've done particularly well and would like to repeat in my coaching; what I've done less well.
- providing support in relation to situations that have been stretching
- challenging the coach: 'what was on your mind?'
- reviewing the current business pressures: 'are there any themes that are emerging?'

Coaches are encouraged, within the bounds of confidentiality, to bring feedback to the supervisory session from clients they've coached. Coaches are also required to tape at least one session per year and bring it for review.

To facilitate management of the coaching initiative and coaching supervision of the team coaches/supervisors, there are seven Leadership Facilitators who provide ongoing supervision for the team coaches.

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Going global with Standard Chartered Bank (continued)

The team coaches note the organisational themes discussed as part of the supervision. Periodically, these are fed back to the HR and Organisation Effectiveness teams. The Chief Executive takes a keen interest in the feedback related to the organisation's ongoing efforts to develop effective leadership.

Since Strengths Coaching is integral to HR, they do not calculate the cost of the coaching and supervision as a 'separate line' item. Jones emphasises: 'Strengths Coaching is critical to our leadership development strategy. Coaching supervision is essential to coaching; we can't afford not to do it. The supervision process helps us ensure that a coach working in 'x country' would never feel like a lost soul. Knowing that they're supported as part of an international network helps the coaches to feel confident and to know that they are key to our strategic strengths approach. This is passed on through the coaching to the leaders they work with. We're keen to ensure that employees perceive individual attention and development. This results in higher staff engagement and we see the results in stronger business performance and lower employee turnover.'

To optimise the benefits of coaching, Jones recommends:

- Provide your coaches with great training – it's a challenging role.
- Be clear about the target population for coaching and the performance outcomes you'll focus on.
- Ensure you only work with numbers of 'coachees' that your coaching population can give appropriate attention to.
- Make sure both coaching and coaching supervision are part of an individual's objectives or it's unlikely to get done.

And about coaching supervision:

- Set supervision in place from the beginning.
- Pick the best of the coaches to be supervisors. Being a supervisor should hold kudos.
- Consider using external supervisors while your own coaching population gains experience.
- Ensure that both the supervisors and coaches understand what supervision is and what it's not.
- Have a clear timetable of activity that is monitored.

It quality assures coaching provision

Organisations want assurance that they're managing the risks associated with coaching. Since most coaching is done confidentially one to one, there is a risk that the client could be harmed if the coach isn't working ethically or competently.

When coaches open their work to scrutiny by another experienced practitioner, the quality of coaching is improved. Supervision has the dual function of minimising the risk of poor or unethical practice while ensuring that coaches do the best they can for their clients and the organisation. Barbara Picheta, Leader, Coaching Centre of Excellence at PwC, says: 'To open one's work to scrutiny is important best practice in

any helping activity. If you're going to bother to have coaches in the workplace, this is part of it – it's not an optional exercise.'

It provides support for the coach

The human capacity to empathise, support and challenge erodes over time. If coaches aren't adequately supported, they can develop defensive routines that limit effectiveness.

Sam Humphrey of Humphrey and Co. says: 'Coaching supervision helps the coach to be aware of personal limits and capabilities and to keep feelings where they should be kept; the client does better if the coach is able to remain in service of the client.'

Coaching supervision at PricewaterhouseCoopers

PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP is an international business advisory firm with more than 20 UK offices. With 15,000 employees in the UK, it has 750 partners and 800 directors. This is an organisation with a strong commitment to coaching as a way of supporting individualised personal development and leveraging outstanding business performance. Most senior managers, directors and partners are expected to provide coaching support for their staff as part of their role. In addition, executive coaching is offered, where appropriate, to talented senior people to help them address their business, leadership and personal development challenges and maximise their potential.

Coaching is provided through the Coaching Centre of Excellence, led by Barbara Picheta, comprising a team of six specialist internal coaches, extended by a pool of around 30 external coaches. There are also about 20 human capital consultants in the business, who may spend up to 40% of their time on coaching. Picheta explained that: 'Senior people need a confidential space to explore how they are working and to think about the issues they and their business are facing, and they value a confidential off-line relationship in which to do that.'

Typically, a specialist coach might have up to 30 clients, seeing each one about once a month. The coach's background could be in psychology, learning and development, counselling including career counselling, psychotherapy, consulting or business, and some will have qualifications in one or more of these areas. Human capital consultants will typically have an HR, development or business background. Those who coach may spend up to 40% of their time on coaching and the number of clients they work with will vary accordingly.

The specialist internal coach team has had supervision arrangements in place for seven years. This has been based on group supervision, led by an external facilitator and complemented by one-to-one supervision. There has also been a strong tradition of co-consulting and shadow consulting. The four facilitators chosen to lead group supervision over this period have always been experienced coaches and supervisors, with a psychology or psychotherapy background, and each has come from a different orientation so that the group could get exposure to a range of perspectives – such as Gestalt theory, psychodynamics and bioenergetics.

The human capital consultant coaches working in the Assurance, Advisory and Operations business areas have had group supervision for over a year. Supervision groups for these coaches are led by a facilitator and, again, these are supplemented by one-to-one supervision sessions where needed.

Group supervision sessions follow the same model in all cases. These are monthly sessions lasting for around three hours and beginning with a group check-in, which typically takes half an hour. Each group has around six members and those who want to discuss a particular case will bid for time – typically each will then have between 30 and 45 minutes to explore this. Philip Raymond, human capital consultant and coach, observed: 'All members of the group join actively in this exploration, observing, listening and reflecting what they see; some of the most valuable insights can be from other members of the group.'

Working together in a group can help coaches to see a range of perspectives on an issue, getting others' reactions to their own way of working and learning. It can help individuals understand blind spots, relationship patterns and the approaches others are using. It can also help to promote deeper relations with colleagues.

A quite different outcome can be the emergence in these sessions of organisational issues and systemic themes. These may include the effects of a new policy, or responses to changes in the business and insights as to whether these are working well. This information is regularly reported back at partner level in the form of themes and observations and on a confidential and non-attributable basis. It informs perceptions of coaching, as well as having obvious value in organisation development.

Coaching supervision at PricewaterhouseCoopers (continued)

Confidentiality is an obvious consideration, but group supervision at PricewaterhouseCoopers is based on very clear contracting around this and it is revisited quite regularly. There is also a strong ethos of reliance on the personal integrity and ethics of coaches.

There are a number of complementary supervision activities. Personal supervision or individual coaching is used to explore areas of concern that crop up between group sessions for cases where confidentiality is a particular concern and as a way of exploring individual learning needs, such as finding out more about a particular approach or model. There have also been learning forums, seminars and workshops in relevant areas of interest.

External coaches are required to make their own arrangements for supervision. However, they are invited every four months or so to early evening sessions, which focus on briefings about organisational issues including changes in the environment. It's likely that coach selection in the future will include questions about personal supervision and perhaps evidence of how effectively it is used.

Reflecting on the value of coaching supervision, Picheta and Raymond agree that it's an important supportive and educative practice and that both clients and coaches benefit from improvements in coaches' skill levels and confidence. But just as importantly, it helps to ensure coaching is delivered ethically, that the quality is right and that any potential risk to both clients and coaches is managed. As Picheta observes: 'To open one's work to scrutiny is important best practice in any helping activity. If you are going to invest in coaches in the workplace, this is an essential part of it – it's not an optional exercise.'

It generates organisational learning

A great deal of information about the organisation can come out of coaching. Themes, common issues, descriptions of leadership or culture will inevitably emerge from the coaching conversations – along with feedback about the coaching process and coaching policy. If harvested, it can result in significant organisational learning.

Some organisations have time at the end of each supervisory session to identify organisation themes and trends that can be captured as organisational learning. Others have special feedback sessions on a periodic basis. The frequency of the feedback meetings ranges from fortnightly to six-monthly, with the norm being quarterly.

Organisational learning can be fed back into the organisation so an effective response can be made. This may inform policy or leadership or organisational development processes.

Normally, themes are captured in writing and agreed with coaches before being submitted to the

organisation. Depending on the organisation, the submission of feedback is generally done by the coaching supervisor or coaching manager.

This information must be handled ethically. It should never be used in making decisions about coaching clients or their careers. Close attention should also be paid to confidentiality issues (see box opposite).

It manages ethical and confidentiality boundaries

Ethical practice can't be maintained by rules and regulations. Many ethical situations are fraught with complexity requiring careful exploration rather than simple answers. Supervision provides a forum for all parties to increase their ethical maturity. On the surface, this may seem to contradict coaching confidentiality since the coach discusses their client with the supervisor or supervisory group. Certainly, supervision may place pressure on the boundaries of confidentiality, especially in groups of internal coaches where clients may be known to group members.

It balances individual, group and peer supervision

Organisations should create their own well-designed mix of individual, group and peer supervision to match the nature of the coaching provision offered.

- Group supervision can be overtaken by the dynamics of the group and leave insufficient time for each individual.
- Peer supervision can become collusive.

How to manage confidentiality

- Discuss and agree ground rules about confidentiality at the start of the supervisory relationship.
- Recognise that confidentiality can't be absolute. The supervisor reserves the right to take action if law-breaking or potential self-harm are involved. The duties of confidentiality and care co-exist.
- Make sure that any written record of the supervision protects the confidentiality of both the coaching client and coach.
- In group sessions, avoid using names or grades and change details in cases where there is the possibility the client could be identified.

Using both individual and group sessions optimises the benefits. Individual supervision gives coaches uninterrupted time to reflect on their coaching and explore their development needs. Personalised supervision lets the coach explore the dynamics of the coach–client relationship and the way they are working with the client.

Group sessions are more economical and assure a consistent approach for all coaches. In addition, group participants can learn by presenting their clients or participating when someone else is presenting. Janet Campbell-Smith of Greater Manchester Police says: 'Group supervision can be developmental for those who are just listening. Hearing others' ideas can be helpful and it's an opportunity to affirm one's own skills and those of others.'

All supervision has limitations:

- Individual supervision with a senior practitioner can lead to dependency.

Mike Munro Turner of the School of Coaching and Jericho Partners says: 'Group supervision gives new insight about my own work, about what colleagues do and what I might use from that.'

Building supervision into coach training; the Centre for Excellence in Leadership and Greater Manchester Police

The Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CEL) was formed in 2003 by Ashridge Business School, Lancaster University Management School and the Learning Skills and Development Agency, with the primary purpose of promoting leadership and diversity in the learning and skills sector. It also works in other sectors, including the police and prison services.

In early 2005, Greater Manchester Police (GMP) contracted CEL to assist in a leadership development programme to support a culture change initiative across the 12,000 police officers and staff. Since then, CEL has delivered its Leaders as Coaches programme to a range of HR practitioners and police officers from inspector to chief superintendent. The six-month programme includes an initial two-day coaching workshop, two half-day supervision and training sessions and a final one-day review workshop. Participants are expected to complete 18 hours of coaching practice over the six months and have six and a half hours of being coached.

(continued)

Building supervision into coach training; the Centre for Excellence in Leadership and Greater Manchester Police (continued)

Shaun Lincoln, CEL Director of Coaching and Mentoring, said: 'We provide supervision at cost so I make it as affordable as possible. Just as I wouldn't use a coach without supervision, it would be an issue for us if the coaches we train are not supervised.' Janet Campbell-Smith, Leadership Programme Manager in GMP, observed: 'We want our coaching to be the best and we recognise that supervision is a professional requirement.'

Supervision of coaching is built into the initial programme and continues after the coaches 'graduate' from the training. Group supervision is offered on a quarterly basis and coaches are expected to attend two in each year. The sessions are three hours with about six participants. The groups use a 'reflecting teams' technique, in which group members ask questions about an issue raised by a coach seeking feedback. This affirming process includes group members identifying what has impressed them about the coach's approach so far. While the individual raising the issue avoids eye contact, the group discuss what is going through their minds, what the event triggers and how it sits with their own practice.

Although groups use the same techniques each time they come together, group membership varies. The group may be led by a CEL facilitator or it may be a peer group of coaches meeting without a leader but using the approach taught by CEL.

At the start of the training, ground rules were set about confidentiality and this contract is renewed at the start of each supervision group session. This is reinforced by guidance in GMP's coaching policy and by the fact that no coach would know who others are coaching. Lincoln said the importance of confidentiality is always addressed and it is recognised as a 'deal breaker'. 'If you want to put an end to coaching in the organisation – then break confidentiality,' he said.

Top-up skills workshops organised by CEL complement supervision to help coaches continuously develop. Campbell-Smith also arranges regular email briefings to all coaches every six to eight weeks to keep in touch. Additionally, all coaching relationships are monitored. The contract at the start of the relationship includes a 'no fault opt-out' clause for either party at any point. There is a mid-point review after three months, when forms are sent to the coach and coachee asking for feedback on how satisfied they are with the process. There is another similar review at the end of the coaching relationship.

There have been some powerful benefits from group sessions, including shared understanding about coaching practice. Coaches have also learned that sometimes the answers are in their own group of peers, not with the external network. Reflective practice has also helped coaches to see how powerful a 'solutions-focused' approach can be outside a coaching context, with all this implies for cultural change. There has also been an unexpected benefit. Working together in group supervision has improved understanding between police officers and police staff.

Campbell-Smith said: 'Group supervision can be developmental for those who are just listening. Hearing others' ideas can be helpful and it's an opportunity to affirm one's own skills as well as those of others. This doesn't always come easily and it can be very important to work on what has gone well for the coach.'

How to assess the supervision of external coaches

Those who organise coaching services often expect external coaches to arrange their own supervision. For example, Shaun Lincoln, Programme Director, Coaching and Mentoring, at the Centre for Excellence in Leadership, commented: 'I would expect coaches to have supervision as part of their continuous professional development and I wouldn't employ a coach who didn't have supervision.'

Many organisations, however, simply assume an external coach has supervision. For those that do ask about it when selecting coaches, the process is often haphazard, with most purchasers of coaching currently doing little more than asking coaches to tick a box saying they receive supervision. Clearly, supervision should receive more attention in coach selection processes.

With the input of the research focus groups, we've developed four key assessment areas and the positive answers assessors might seek (Table 2).

Getting started: introducing coaching supervision into your organisation

- Plan coach supervision from the outset of any coaching initiative and budget for it. In the words of one focus group participant: 'If you don't provide supervision for internal coaches and manager coaches, the sustainability and return on investment of your coaching initiative is in jeopardy.'
- If you haven't experienced coaching supervision, you might find it helpful to find a coach supervisor and get experience of being supervised before introducing it to your organisation.
- Be clear about the purposes both of your coaching initiative and the supervision that will support it. Liz Macann, Head of Executive, Leadership and Management Coaching at the BBC, says 'Is it primarily for embedding learning? Is it for offloading? Is it to develop tools and techniques? Or is it for reflection and thinking about oneself, the client and how to improve your coaching practice? Supervision can be all of these. It will evolve, but it helps to be clear about your purpose.'
- Design a framework for supervision that suits your organisation's particular needs. You might find it helpful to complement your supervision sessions with skills updates, for example, through workshops.
- Make sure your coaching supervision operates within confidential and ethical boundaries. Supervision requires two levels of contracting: one for client case work and another for organisational learning as informed by coaching.
- Recruit a supervisor from outside the organisation or train a senior coach to be a coach supervisor. Ensure the supervisor's background and skill set are suitable for the coaching they'll supervise. A solid coaching background and business experience are fundamental to this. Supervision training and experience as a supervisor will also help to ensure that the needs of the coaches, their clients and the organisation are met.
- Pilot supervision and adjust it to the needs of the organisation and the coaches.
- Create a system to document learning, and identify any issues with coaching supervision.
- Build in time to harvest organisational themes that emerge from coaching.
- Ensure supervisors have adequate supervision of their coaching supervision.

Table 2: Questions to ask external coaches about their supervision

Questions	Positive answers
How often?	At least every two months or 1:35 ratio of supervision to coaching
From whom? And what is their background, experience and qualifications?	An experienced coach with supervision/training experience
What are the benefits of the supervision you receive?	Can describe benefits for themselves, their clients and their client organisations
Can you describe a situation where supervision transformed your coaching?	Demonstrates reflective practice, ability to receive challenges and new ideas non-defensively and to apply learning

Return on investment

Coaching can be an expensive development option and it makes sense to ensure that it's of a high quality and yields a good return on investment. Coaching supervision contributes to this by enabling an organisation to monitor coaching, develop coaching capability and increase coaching's organisational impact.

Monitoring coaching quality

Supervision creates a regular opportunity for coaches to reflect on their coaching and its impact on the coaching client. As one survey respondent noted: 'Fundamentally, supervision is about improving and evaluating the service to the clients (organisation and individual). I find it unthinkable to coach without it.' Reinforcing coaching objectives during supervision keeps the purpose of coaching central to coaching interventions. Regular ongoing supervision provides a safety net for the coaching client, the organisation and the coach.

Developing coaching capability and capacity

By reflecting on their practice, coaches develop greater self-awareness and develop better tools and techniques. They also generate personal insights and discover the best way to meet coaching objectives. This results in more skilful coaches with greater capacity to help their clients achieve their personal and organisational aims.

The ultimate aim of supervision is to improve coaching practice across the organisation. Coaching supervision makes better coaches and better coaches make better managers who can deliver business targets. But it doesn't stop here. Managers experiencing good coaching will in turn be able to improve the performance of staff around them – the 'informal coaching' effect.

Sarah Jones, Group Head of Leadership Development at Standard Chartered, comments: 'We are keen to ensure that employees receive individual attention and development. This results in higher staff engagement and we see the results in stronger business performance and lower employee turnover.'

Drawing organisational learning from coaching activity

Coaching is most commonly a one-to-one process to improve the effectiveness and productivity of coaching clients. But organisations are keen for these individual conversations to be connected, and, in doing so, nurture a coaching culture that delivers greater organisational impact. Group supervision can be especially helpful in generating learning across the coaching community and capturing the patterns and dynamics within the organisation that can be more widely applied.

Conclusions and the way forward

For coaches, coaching supervision is an essential part of their continuous professional development. It's the pivotal link between theory and coaching practice. For those who organise coaching services, it's the key to effective quality assurance, to managing the risks that can be inherent in coaching, and to drawing learning from the coaching conversations that take place in the organisation. It can help to increase the return on an investment in coaching and can even help to provide evidence of that return.

Coaching supervision is, as yet, though, at a very early stage of development. It will become more firmly established as practitioners and purchasers of coaching become better informed and more confident about using it. It will also become more firmly established as coaching develops its own supervision models and practices that meet the needs of the client, the coach and the client organisation.

Those who are now involved in coaching supervision as coaches and organisers of coaching are the pioneers, but this research has shown that they're often convinced of the value of the supervision they've received and are developing new and often innovative practices.

In any case, the risk of not supervising coaching is significant. Without it, it's hard to be sure that

coaching standards are good and that coaches are properly trained and supported in their roles. On the other hand, the potential benefits are easily identified. They include improved coaching quality, increased coaching capability and greater organisational value. These benefits apply not only to those being coached but to those they work with in the wider organisation. In this Change Agenda, we've highlighted how processes can be built into supervision so that it also provides useful organisational learning based on the key themes and patterns emerging across the many coaching conversations.

Coaching supervision can also play a key role in the future development of the coaching profession, where supervision is not only providing learning and development to those being supervised, but where the learning is also flowing back through supervision from the experience at the client interface to the profession itself learning and developing.

The challenge now is to develop and embed models and practices in coaching supervision so that it can provide the maximum support and benefit for coaches and coaching services. We hope this Change Agenda has made a contribution to that end.

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Written by Dr Peter Hawkins and Gil Schwenk, Bath Consultancy Group



Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
151 The Broadway London SW19 1JQ
Tel: 020 8612 6200 Fax: 020 8612 6201
Email: cipd@cipd.co.uk Website: www.cipd.co.uk

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