

Supervision FAQs

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.'

(Hawkins and Schwenk, CIPD research 2006).

Some coaches/mentors may be cynical, scared, thinking that supervision is a line management-type process – i.e. being monitored/judged/appraised/performance managed. The coaching profession as a whole is continuously debating whether supervision is the right name for this process. (Some argue for the term 'super-vision' which is a process of helping you step back, metaphorically, from your work in order to take a broader view of your coaching practice.)

What is the purpose of supervision?

Broadly speaking, professional supervision offers coaches and mentors support in three key areas:

Quality Control

- To ensure quality of coaching
- To ensure the coach is working within his or her areas of competence
- To ensure the coach is maintaining professional and ethical standards (The AC, EMCC, APECS and the ICF all ask their member coaches to abide by their codes of ethics)

Development

- To provide a regular space for the coach to reflect upon the content and process of the coaching work
- To help the coach to develop an 'internal supervisor' and become a better reflective practitioner
- To help the coach improve coaching practice and coaching interventions
- To attend to the live relationship between coach and supervisor and to see how this might be paralleling the dynamics from the coaching sessions
- To make greater sense of difficult and complex work assignments and to gain more clarity going forward
- To help the coach attend to what is potentially not being heard/seen/said or felt

Support

- To provide a supportive space for the coach to process what has been absorbed from the client and the client's system
- To provide an opportunity for the coach to receive information, feedback and another perspective
- To ensure the coach is supported and isn't dealing with issues beyond his or her capability.

1-1 or Group Supervision? Which is best for me?

In practical terms, supervision occurs in either 1-1 or group sessions. Very experienced coaches may create their own peer supervision groups.

Supervision can be conducted over the telephone or face to face.

The potential **advantages** of group supervision are as follows:-

- Ideally, the group provides a supportive atmosphere of peers who can share reflections, give feedback, offer a different perspective, share ideas and best practice and can learn from each other's experiences

The potential **disadvantages** are:-

- In larger groups, there may be less time for each person to receive supervision – with this in mind, individuals may be reluctant to share their concerns or self disclose or alternatively there may be a competitive spirit in the group or collusion ('you say wonderful things about me, and I will reciprocate'). Either way, it is important that group dynamics do not go unacknowledged so that they can be attended to and learnt from – this is part of the supervision process
- Confidentiality issues around the client

How Often Should Supervision Take Place?

There are no hard and fast guidelines around the number of hours of supervision a coach should have - this would depend on the number of coaching hours each person is doing, how experienced they are and so on. Less experienced coaches tend to benefit from more frequent supervision. A new or trainee coach may require clearer guidance and advice and closer attention to the anxieties often experienced in those early days of coaching. A more experienced coach will probably want a more equal, peer supervision relationship.

The ICF, AC, APECS and EMCC all make recommendations on Supervision, so if you are a member of one of these coaching bodies, and are therefore bound by their code of ethics, you will want to check out their current recommendations around supervision frequency.

What happens during Supervision?

Normally the supervisee presents a set of issues around a client or clients with whom he or she is currently working. The supervision may focus on session content, interventions being made by the supervisee with this client, the relationship between the supervisee and his client or the organisational context in which the work is taking place.

Examples of Supervision Issues

- Contracting - how to contract with the client and the client's organisation
- Feeling 'stuck' with a client and not being sure why – unsure what to do next
- How to manage a three-way discussion in coaching (coachee/line manager/coach)
- Finding a client difficult and not knowing why
- Crisis of confidence – 'my client wants to improve his self confidence but I don't feel confident myself so who am I to help him?'
- Struggling to have empathy or build rapport with a client.
- Finding it hard to challenge and/or support a client
- Not knowing how to deal with cultural difference/diversity issues
- Finding a client really boring!
- Unsure whether the client needs a therapeutic intervention
- How to develop impact and presence as a coach

How to Choose a Supervisor

Peter Bluckert (www.pbcoaching.com) recommends that a supervisor working with **executive** coaches should have most of the following:-

- At least 1000 hours of coaching experience
- A minimum of 5 years' practice as a coach
- Highest professional standards and ethical behaviours
- Firm grounding in corporate issues
- Advanced-level coaching skills
- Significant knowledge of coaching theory
- High- level psychological training and background

- A qualification in coaching supervision or significant training in coaching supervision
- Significant experience of receiving supervision both 1-1 and group

Of course, choosing a supervisor is like choosing a coach – speak to a couple of trained supervisors (get recommendations from fellow coaches) see if you like the way they work; see if you think they are the right ‘fit’ for you.

The AC and UK ICF have a list of UK supervisors on their respective websites.

Further Reading

Books

Coaching, Mentoring and Organizational Consultancy - Peter Hawkins and Nick Smith.

On being a Supervisee: Creating Learning Partnerships – Michael Carroll and Maria C Gilbert.

Leadership Coaching
Team Coaching
Coach Supervision
Coach & Mentor Training
Facilitation

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