

What is Supervision?



Some Definitions of Supervision

“At its simplest, supervision is a forum where supervisees (in this case coaches) review and reflect on their work in order to do it better. Coaches bring their practice to another person... and with their help review what happened in their practice in order to learn from that experience. Ultimately, supervision is for better coaching work. It is not the only help to better work but in the estimation of many it is one of the most effective interventions. In a relationship of trust and transparency, supervisees talk about their work and through reflection and thoughtfulness learn from it and return to do it differently. Supervision is based on the assumption that reflecting on work provides the basis for learning from that work and doing it more creatively.”

– Michael Carroll (2007), ‘Coaching Psychology Supervision’ in Palmer and Whybrow (eds) *The Handbook of Coaching Psychology*, Hove: Routledge

“... a structured process for coaches, with the help of a coaching supervisor, to attend to improving the quality of their coaching capacity and support themselves and their practice...”

– Peter Hawkins and Gil Schwenk (2006), *Coaching Supervision: Maximising the potential of coaching*, London: CIPD

“...supervision is a special, contractual, multi-faceted relationship between two people (the supervisor and the supervisee)... which exists for the explicit purpose of providing a supportive forum for both the development and monitoring of the work of the supervisee. This relationship must include a code of practice for the particular profession, a code of ethics and the organisational and administrative requirements of the context in which the supervision takes place.”

– Petruska Clarkson (2007), *Transactional Analysis Psychotherapy*, Hove: Routledge

“Supervision is part of the educational and learning process, perhaps the most important part in the development of a trainee or the continuing professional development of a practitioner. It can be seen as a key to the most ‘real’ part of learning where growth happens through reflection on ... individual, lived experience.”

– Rosemary Napper and Trudi Newton (2007), ‘The Bigger Picture: supervision as an educational framework for all fields’, *Transactional Analysis Journal* 37

“Supervision is a discussion between peers with the explicit purpose of reflecting on the client work of the supervisee in a way that promotes learning and development.”

– Coaching Development Supervision Training (2010), London

“Supervision is supervision of the work and the person and, crucially, it is done with the person. It is reflective, supportive and creative, a looking and thinking together. The overarching purpose is clear and explicit – to enable the coach to do the best possible work with their clients. Within this there are three vital contributing purposes – first to manage the client work to ensure clarity and safety for all concerned, second to support the coach in their work and ensure they have the resources they personally need, and third to facilitate the coach’s ongoing learning and development in their craft and profession... Supervision is shared creative reflection. It means offering a mirror up to the coach’s work and looking at it together, bringing new ways of seeing, understanding and working. It involves stepping back from experience and thinking about it in order to find fresh perspectives, apply other insights and create new possibilities...”

– Patrick Hobbs (2010), unpublished essay *A Shared Mirror: a Personal Philosophy of Coach Supervision*

Some Characteristics of Supervision

- Supervision is about the supervisee's work with their clients. It begins with this and comes back to this.
- Its overarching purpose is to enable the supervisee to do the best coaching they can, work that is clean, safe, creative and effective for all concerned.
- Its focus is the supervisee's professional practice, learning and development, and all that affects this.
- It sees and supports the supervisee in their work as both a professional and a human being, and connects the supervisee's work to their vision and purpose, personal and professional.
- It is a relationship between persons, professionals and peers built on transparency and trust.
- It is a formal process with the explicit purpose of supporting and developing the supervisee in their work as a coach. It is to be enjoyed and yet is much more than a cosy chat.
- It is a professional discipline, possibly a professional expectation and requirement. As such it will usually involve sessions at regular intervals in support of the supervisee's work.
- It celebrates the supervisee's gifts and successes as well as addressing challenges and edges.
- It steps back from the work of the supervisee, looks at it and reflects upon it, helping the supervisee to understand, make sense and move forward.
- It unlocks and deepens the supervisee's wisdom, skill and creativity as a coach.
- It is a double process – it is about both what happens between the supervisee and their client and what happens between the supervisee and the supervisor.
- It is sensitive to the psychological dynamics at play in the coaching relationship, in relationships touching the coaching, and in the supervision relationship.
- It may include teaching, theory and the sharing of professional or technical insight.
- It makes learning conscious and explicit so that the supervisee thinks and keeps thinking about their work, experiences a shift and has a conscious understanding of this shift.
- It looks ahead, supporting and facilitating the ongoing work and development of the supervisee as a professional coach. It is future-orientated and forward-looking.
- It keeps an eye on professional and ethical boundaries and includes an explicit commitment to ensure that the coach is working in a way that is appropriate and safe for all concerned.
- It may be directive. The supervisor may offer comments, praise, affirmation or warning, and may direct or ask the coach to do or not do certain things.
- It helps the supervisee to manage and tackle questions arising in their work with clients – this is the **management** function of supervision.
- It supports the supervisee to nurture and unlock their personal resources as a human being as well as a professional and to bring these to their work – this is the **support** function of supervision.
- It focuses on and facilitates the professional learning and development of the supervisee – this is the **development** function of supervision.

Note

It may be that supervision uncovers issues in the supervisee's personal experience that may need to be tackled through another kind of intervention. The supervisor will listen and support the supervisee and may also decide to refer the supervisee to a coach, counsellor or psychotherapist for further personal work.

The Supervision Triangle

Coaching supervision has 3 dynamic and interconnected aspects:

Management – the ‘normative’ function

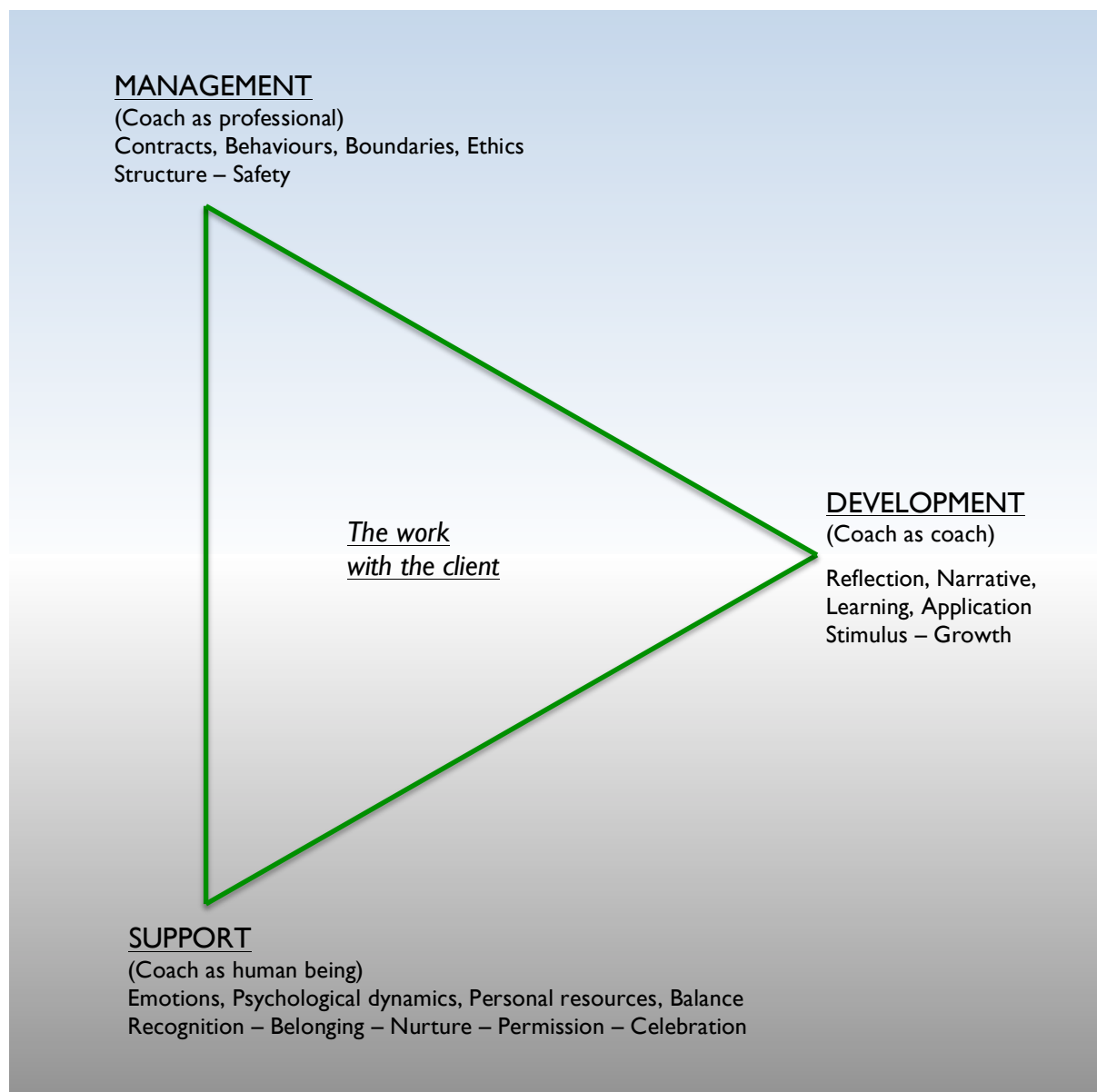
This is about the coach as a professional managing questions coming up in their work – contracts, behaviours, boundaries, ethics. This provides structure and safety.

Support – the ‘restorative’ function

This is about the coach as a human being and how they are coming to their work – emotions, psychological dynamics, personal resources and balance. This offers recognition, belonging, nurture, encouragement, permission and celebration.

Development – the ‘formative’ function

This is about the coach as coach, learning and developing – reflecting and building a narrative, thinking and learning and applying that learning. This meets the coach’s needs for stimulus and growth.



Some Differences Between Supervision and Coaching

- In supervision the focus is on the supervisee's work with their clients. This is the heart of supervision.
- Coaching focuses on the coachee's personal experience, while supervision focuses on the supervisee's work and professional development.
eg - A person in supervision said: "And that (something in a session with a client) takes me back to my own childhood abuse" and the supervisor replied "And that really happened to you (honouring and respecting it)... and how is this impacting your professional work (bringing the focus back to their work)?"
- Coaching honours and respects the professional while keeping the focus on the personal and what is important for the coachee. Supervision honours and respects the personal while keeping the focus on the professional and what is important for the coach's work.
- Coaching stays very close to the coachee and their experience, while supervision takes a step back, beginning and ending in a meta position outside what is happening for the supervisee.
- Coaching invites a person to go into their experience. Supervision invites the coach to be aware of their experience and also to get outside of their experience and reflect upon it.
- In coaching the emphasis is on the coachee's experience, while in supervision the emphasis is on the supervisee's reflection (on their experience) and learning.
- Coaching looks to change the coachee's experience, while supervision looks to change the supervisee's understanding – and through this help them to develop them in their work and potency as a coach.
- Coaching tends to be more about feeling, inviting the coachee to connect with their feelings ("What do you feel?"). Supervision embraces feeling and yet is also more about thinking, inviting the coach to reflect and deepen their understanding ("What do you think?").
- Most approaches to coaching are non-directive and a coach will rarely offer guidance or direction. In supervision the supervisor will offer thoughts from their own experience and will give guidance and direction.
- In coaching the agenda belongs to the coachee. In supervision both supervisee and supervisor hold an agenda and the supervisor is free to pursue an agenda in service of the coach, their work and their professional development.
- In coaching codes of ethics and practice are there to guide the coach. In supervision these codes are an explicit and acknowledged part of the work and are there as a guide and reference point for both coach and supervisor. It is part of the supervisor's responsibility to monitor professional and ethical boundaries.
- Coaching rarely involves explicit theory, while supervision will refer to theory, will look to theory as a tool and framework for reflection and learning, and may sometimes include teaching.
- Coaching looks at a question primarily from the perspective of the coachee, while supervision will look at a question from many different perspectives, including an ethical perspective.
- Coaching focuses on the needs, safety and outcomes of the coachee, while supervision focuses on the needs, safety and outcomes of both the supervisee and the supervisee's client(s).
- In coaching the coach's responsibility is to the coachee (and any other stakeholders who may be included in the contract), while in supervision the supervisor holds a responsibility to the supervisee, to the profession, and to serve the over-arching purpose of supervision, which is to enable the supervisee to do the best work they can with their client(s).