

## Coaching Supervision – an overview

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### Introduction

Supervision is an essential part of a coach's continuous professional development. In addition to the benefits to the individual coach, it can also provide the organisation with increased return on its investment in coaching through more effective quality assurance and the opportunity to distil important organisational learning from the diverse coaching conversations that take place.

Despite these benefits, however, take up of supervision is still limited. According to research carried out for CIPD by Bath Consulting Group (Hawkins and Schwenk, 2006) although 88% of organisers of coaching and 86% of coaches themselves believe they should have regular, ongoing supervision, as yet only 44% of coaches receive it and only 23% of organisations provide it.

### What is supervision?

- The term originates from the psychotherapy, counselling, and social work traditions and, unfortunately, can imply controlling/monitoring other's work;
- It can be defined as '*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*' (Hawkins and Schwenk, 2006);
- The key aim of supervision is to encourage this kind of 'reflective practice', i.e. provide an opportunity for the coach to systematically review and reflect on their coaching in order to learn from it and apply their new learning, thereby improving their coaching performance;
- Supervision can be one to one or group or a combination of both;
- It can be done face to face or over the phone or in a combination of both; and
- It can be done with peers or with an identified supervisor.

### The benefits of supervision

- In the research referred to above, Hawkins and Shwenk identify it as having 3 main functions:
  - i. *qualitative*( to do with maintaining coaching standards, ensuring coaching ethics and adhering to the purpose for the coaching);
  - ii. *developmental*(to do with enhancing the coach's competence and skills);
  - iii. *resourcing*( to do with supporting the coach to handle their 'stuff' , e.g. the emotional triggers, internal barriers, etc. that might otherwise get in the way of their being effective);
- In addition to benefiting the individual coach as described above, it also benefits the organisations who provide coaching by helping them manage the common risks associated with coaching (e.g. that the coach is operating within the agreed ethical framework and to the desired standard) as well as providing opportunities for sharing organisational learning; and
- Supervision can be helpful in identifying themes and issues arising out of the coaching that are important to the learning of the organisation as a whole. This, in turn, can be helpful in

increasing and providing evidence of the organisation's return on their coaching investment.

### **What differentiates coaching supervision from coaching?**

- The skills associated with supervision are similar to those of coaching (.e.g. listening, incisive questioning, EQ, self-awareness, ability to offer support as well as challenge appropriately, understanding of and ability to work with difference, etc.);
- In addition, an appreciation of the business/organisational context in which the coach and their clients are working and an understanding of group, team and organisational dynamics as well as systems theory are valuable attributes of the supervisor;
- The supervisor has a number of 'clients': the coach, their coaching client(s) and the organisation(s) in which the coach is operating. They should also have an eye to the standards and development of the wider coaching community and the profession as a whole; and
- The 7-eyed process model of supervision (Hawkins and Smith, 2006) helps unpick the complexity of the supervision process by identifying seven modes that the supervisor needs to hold in their awareness when working with a supervisee:
  - i. Focus on their client and what and how they present
  - ii. Exploration of the strategies and interventions used by the supervisee
  - iii. Exploration of the relationship between the client and the supervisee
  - iv. Focus on the supervisee
  - v. Focus on the supervisory relationship
  - vi. The supervisor focusing on their own process
  - vii. Focus on the wider contexts in which the work happens

### **Choosing an effective coach supervisor**

- Like choosing an external coach, most supervisors are selected on the basis of personal recommendation and referral;
- Look for broad coaching experience plus business/sector experience;
- A supervision qualification is desirable;
- 'Chemistry' between supervisor, coach and their organisation is also important, i.e. don't just consider what the supervisor can *do* (their skills, experience and capabilities), but also *who* they are and *how* they present ( e.g. their personal impact , presence and authenticity); and
- Most importantly, are they capable of 'creating a shift' (Hawkins and Smith,2006) i.e. provide the kind of supervision that transforms the coach and the coach's practice?

### **Best Practice considerations for introducing coaching supervision into your organisation**

- Plan early for supervision. Make it part of your coaching strategy;
- Be clear about its purpose – e.g. are you providing mostly business or transformational coaching? This will have implications for the kind of supervision you provide;
- Create a supervision offering that is tailored to the needs of your organisation, e.g. are you planning to develop your own internal coaches and create a coaching culture or are you mostly using external coaches for a selected group of senior executives...or a combination of both?

- Offer supervision regularly, .i.e. monthly/bi-monthly/based on the number of hours of coaching done, e.g. 1 hour supervision for every 10 hours coaching;
- Provide a range of supervision opportunities, i.e. combination of one-to-one and group supervision, either face-to-face or over the telephone, plus developmental events for the wider coaching community (internal and/or external) in which particular coaching skills/capabilities are focused on;
- Also provide opportunities for the coaching community to share key organisational themes and issues arising from supervision and create a system for feeding these back to the organisation. *NB Make sure that confidentiality and boundaries issues are carefully contracted beforehand;*
- Ensure external coaches have their own supervision arrangements in place and/or provide resources (i.e. budget, time, recommended external supervisors, etc.) for them to use. Make it a requirement of the job;
- Either recruit external supervisors or be prepared to train experienced internal coaches.....and ensure the supervisors also have supervision! and
- Review and evaluate the impact of supervision in terms of the coach, their clients and the organisation as a whole.

## Conclusion

Coaching is now well-established and widespread in organisations and we have seen the rise of the professionalism of coaching. However, coaching supervision is still in its infancy and more commonly taken up by individual coaches than by organisations as part of their coaching strategy, although its value as a quality assurance mechanism is widely recognised. In the current climate, with increased scrutiny on spending and value for money there are real advantages to be gained from effective supervision. It brings benefits and returns both for the individual, where it has the power to create a transformational shift in the coach and the coach's practice, and for the organisation, where it can ensure a focus on its purpose in providing coaching (i.e.alignment between coaching and its core strategy) and on sharing and distilling the organisational learning that emerges from coaching across the organisation as a whole.

## Recommended reading

- HAWKINS, Dr. P. & SCHWENK, G. (2006) *Coaching Supervision: Maximising the Potential of Coaching*: CIPD
- HAWKINS, P. & SMITH, N.(2006) *Coaching, Mentoring and Organisational Consultancy*: McGraw-Hill
- MCGURK, Dr. J,(2008) *Coaching and Buying Coaching Services*:CIPD