

Event report September 2006



# COACHING SUPERVISION A PAPER PREPARED FOR THE CIPD COACHING CONFERENCE

# Coaching supervision

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## Foreword

The coaching industry is growing fast and is making an important contribution to learning in the workplace. The CIPD's 2006 learning and development survey showed that nearly eight in ten respondents were using coaching activities in one form or another, and a similar number were seeking to develop an organisational culture characterised by coaching to support improved performance.

The CIPD's research is designed to support this growth in coaching by providing up-to-date advice and guidance on good practice to members of the HR and learning and development communities.

This report summarises some of the main findings of research into good practice in coaching supervision commissioned by the CIPD from the Bath Consultancy Group. The CIPD will publish a full report in its Change Agenda series at the end of November and this will be available at [www.cipd.co.uk/changeagendas](http://www.cipd.co.uk/changeagendas).

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## Introduction

Supervision is well established in many of the people professions such as psychology, social work and counselling and is just beginning to become established in the much newer profession of coaching.

This report gives a short overview of some of the key points from the CIPD's research on coaching supervision and covers:

- how the research was carried out
- what is supervision?

- how widely is supervision practised?
- the benefits of supervision
- how to assess the supervision of external coaches
- good practice in developing supervision in organisations
- a case study on supervision of internal coaches at the BBC
- useful books and articles relating to supervision.

The headline findings so far from the research are:

- Supervision is important for coaches themselves. This research has shown that a large majority of coaches, and of those who organise and buy coaching, agree that coaches should have regular coach supervision. Even the most experienced coaches need help to constantly re-examine their practice, to continue to develop their skills and self-awareness, and to avoid being drawn into their clients' systems. For organisations, coaching supervision can be a way of assuring quality by opening up practice to peer scrutiny and by making sure that coaches are regularly attending to their personal and professional development. For the coaching profession, the establishment of coaching supervision can help to increase the credibility and image of the coaching industry. Coaching supervision is now being advocated by nearly all the professional coaching bodies.
- A striking revelation, though, is that far fewer (less than half) of all coaches actually do have coaching supervision and less than a quarter of organisations that use coaches provide any form of supervision for them.

- There has been a large increase in the number of coaches receiving supervision in the last two years.
- Organisations need to better understand the nature and benefits of supervision; be able to establish an effective supervision process; and know how to assess the supervision arrangements of external coaches.

### **How the research was carried out**

The findings of this research are based on:

- two web-based questionnaire surveys of coaches and coach supervisors and of those who manage and buy coaching services in organisations. The questionnaires brought in responses from 525 coaches and 128 managers and purchasers of coaching
- four focus groups of practitioners in London, Bristol and Edinburgh, which explored the themes that had emerged from the completed questionnaires
- structured in-depth interviews with respondents from six organisations that have developed coaching supervision as part of their coaching services
- a literature review of books, conference papers and articles on coaching supervision and the professional development of coaches
- discussions with the professional bodies in the field of coaching and a review of their policy documents
- discussions with a number of bodies providing coaching supervision training and those attending training programmes in coaching supervision.

### **What is supervision?**

Because coaching supervision is a relatively new activity, there is still uncertainty about what it is and how it functions. There has been a lack of books, papers and research in this area. It's only been in the last couple of years that coaching conferences

have started to have papers specifically on supervision, and the first books on this subject are due out in December 2006.

Some of the coaches who've already embarked on supervision have gone to those trained as supervisors in one of the psychology-related professions (psychology, psychotherapy, counselling). Others have gone to more experienced coaches. The effect is that, until the coaching profession develops its own definitions, models and theories of supervision, the practice will be constrained and coaching supervision will continue to be dressed in borrowed clothes.

These borrowed clothes have led to three limited approaches to coaching supervision:

- psychological case work, where the focus is on understanding the psychology of the coaching client and how to work with it
- 'coaching the coach', where the focus is on the coach rather than the coaching
- managerial supervision, where the focus is on fixing problems and resolving difficulties.

Coaching supervision needs to develop its own integrating model that focuses on:

- better understanding of the coach's clients and their organisational context
- exploring the coaching relationships
- developing ways of improving the coaching and coaching interventions
- contributing to the continuing professional development of the coach
- attending to the live relationship between coach and supervisor and also how this might be paralleling the dynamics from the coaching sessions
- ensuring the coach is supported and resourced to manage the coaching work and isn't dealing with issues beyond their capability.

Supported by the research, we developed the following definition of coaching supervision:

*'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.'*

### **How widely is supervision practised?**

The understanding and implementation of coaching supervision has developed at a rapid pace in the last couple of years. According to the surveys, 88% of organisers of coaching and 86% of coaches believe that coaches should have continuous and regular supervision of their coaching. But only 44% of coaches receive continuous and regular supervision and only 23% of organisations provide coaching supervision. So approximately half the number of coaches who believe that coaches should have regular supervision actually have supervision themselves.

However, coaching supervision has accelerated recently, with the majority of coaches starting supervision in the last two years (58%).

Coaches and organisers of coaching give many reasons for not practising supervision. For coaches, 42% don't have supervision because it's not required by their organisation, while others indicate that it's too expensive (17%) or they can't find a supervisor (17%). For organisations, the main reasons for not providing supervision are, again, that it's too expensive (19%) and they can't find a supervisor (13%). Interestingly, 10% of organisations say their coaches don't need supervision. We can see the above as symptoms of a new and forming profession where supervision is only beginning to be established.

### **The benefits of supervision**

In contrast to the barriers to its use, the main reasons for having coaching supervision are

different for coaches and organisations. For coaches, the main reasons are developmental, for example, to develop coaching capability (88%) and to assure the quality of the coaching (86%). Interestingly, only a minority indicate that one of the reasons they have supervision is because their professional body requires it (25%) or because it's required by the client organisation (9%). For organisations, the main reasons are qualitative, for example, to monitor the quality of coaching provided (70%) and to improve the quality and effectiveness of the coaching (50%).

From the focus groups, discussions and good-practice interviews, it became clear that, if well developed, supervision can simultaneously:

- provide quality assurance of the coaching
- be a central aspect of the continuing professional development of the coaches
- be an essential supportive resource to the coaches
- provide a mechanism for the organisation to learn from the collective patterns emerging across the various coaching relationships.

### **How to assess the supervision of external coaches**

From the research, it's clear that most coaches believe supervision is an important aspect of good practice. Many organisers of coaching expect that external coaches will have arranged their own supervision, and, for many organisations, that's a clear benefit. 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.'

Table 1, opposite, summarises what respondents said they'd require from a supervisor.

**Table 1** | Respondents' requirements of coaching supervisors

Requirement	Percentage of respondents	
	Managers/purchasers	Coaches
Training	60	72
Business/organisational experience	85	69
Supervision qualification	20	37
Psychotherapy/psychology qualification	20	34

One interesting difference between our two groups of respondents is that managers/purchasers of coaching see business experience as being more important than do coaches, who are more likely to require their supervisor to have received training in supervision.

However, most purchasers of coaching, when assessing potential coaches, are currently doing little more than asking coaches to tick a box saying they receive supervision. From the completed questionnaires, it was obvious that the lack of clarity in the requirements for supervision was a major factor in supervision not being taken up as widely as people thought it should be. In the research focus groups, there were interesting discussions about better ways of assessing the quality of supervision the coach has arranged. From this emerged four key assessment areas and the sort of positive answers that assessors might look for (Table 2, below).

**Good practice in managing the supervision of coaches**

*'To open one's work to scrutiny is important best practice in any helping activity. If you're going to invest in coaches in the workplace, this is an essential part of it – it's not an optional exercise.'*

Barbara Picheta, development consultant and coach,  
PricewaterhouseCoopers UK

Only a limited number of organisations have systematically introduced supervision for their internal and external coaches. As part of the research, we interviewed six of the best examples of good practice. From these interviews and also from the data from the focus groups, questionnaires and literature research, we developed the wheel of current good practice (Figure 1, on page 6).

**Table 2** | Questions to ask external coaches about their supervision

Questions	Positive answers
• How often?	• At least every two months or a 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?	• Answer should demonstrate reflective practice, ability to receive challenges and new ideas non-defensively and to apply learning

**Figure 1** | Coaching supervision: wheel of good practice



Good practice in coaching supervision means it:

- takes place regularly:** supervision needs to happen regularly (gaps between supervision of more than six weeks make it hard to sustain continuity) and allow time to attend adequately to all of the coaching work. Oxford School of Coaching and Mentoring currently requires trainee coaches to have one hour of supervision for every 20 hours of coaching and fully trained coaches to have one hour of supervision for every 35 hours of coaching.
- focuses on client, organisation and coach needs:** in supervision, there are always at least three clients that need attention – the coach’s individual clients, the organisations they work for and the coach themselves. Good supervision not only balances the attention between all three, but also explores the relationship between the different parties.
- provides continuing professional development to the coach:** besides focusing on current coaching work, good supervision should also be a key part of the continuing professional
- development of the coach, helping them to connect their training and their practice.**
- quality assures the coaching provision:** all coaches, no matter how experienced, are sometimes unaware. Not opening up their work to scrutiny by another experienced practitioner results in the quality of coaching being limited.
- provides support for the coach:** to be and remain a good coach means attending to your own needs and not engaging in work beyond your capability. It’s almost impossible to do this alone. Sam Humphrey, former Head of Global Coaching for Unilever said that 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.’
- generates organisational learning:** some of the organisations we talked to have developed effective ways to ensure that the learning from supervision doesn’t just benefit the coach and

supervisor, but effectively flows back into the wider organisation (see BBC case study below).

- **manages ethical and confidentiality boundaries:** coaching in complex organisational contexts inevitably involves ethical and confidentiality issues that supervision can help to address. It's also important that the confidentiality issues of the supervisory arrangements are addressed (see BBC case study below).
- **balances individual, group and peer supervision:** organisations need to create their own well-designed mix of individual, group and peer supervision that matches the nature of the coaching provision offered.

#### **A case study on supervision of internal coaches 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 of training, and experienced external coaches who were 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 coaching 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 essential aspects of the supervision process:

- **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.'

#### • **Design a framework that provides consistency and flexibility suited to your context**

- At the BBC, coaches must have a minimum of six individual supervision sessions and participate in at least four group sessions per year in order to maintain their 'right to practise' and contribute to the BBC's coach accreditation process.
- The coaches have two types of supervision. Each coach has an hour of individual supervision with their lead-coach at two-monthly intervals. The individual session is usually face to face, but it 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 ten to twelve coaches in each coaching set. By design, the group supervisor is not the same person as the individual supervisor. This ensures that 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 that come up between sessions.

#### • **Develop trained supervisors**

- With the wisdom of hindsight, Macann observes: 'I would introduce supervision training earlier if I were to do it again.' Several of the 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.'

#### • **Maximise the continued learning and development in the supervision process**

- Typically, the group supervision sessions at the BBC include
  - o check-in regarding the coaches' coaching work
  - o sharing new tools and techniques learned from courses, books
  - o co-supervision in threes
  - o 'book club' – recommendations of books related to coaching that members have come across.

- **Maximise organisational learning while protecting individual confidentiality**

- The group supervision sessions frequently raise organisational issues or trends that are worth noting. Occasionally, they'll use a 'talking wall' technique to identify organisational themes that are discussed in coaching. In this way, the group sessions provide an 'emotional and behavioural monitor for the organisation'. The themes are communicated to the Leadership Team of the Leadership and Development function, and may also be used as feedback to the Leadership Board.
- The confidentiality of clients is protected in both individual and group supervision. They work with a 'no names or grades' rule. If there's the possibility that a client could be recognised, the coach should camouflage the details. Using these guidelines has meant there haven't been any difficulties regarding confidentiality.

Macann notes a number of positive outcomes from coaching supervision:

- There's a sense of community and connectedness with other coaches.
- It stimulates belief in the process of coaching.
- There's ongoing personal development that informs coaching practice.
- It encourages more effective working with 'sticky' clients.
- Coaches become confident and are better equipped to deliver high-calibre, time-effective coaching.
- The organisation has a safety net that helps coaches maintain boundaries, thus minimising any organisational risk.

However, Macann is quick to point out that the BBC's use of coaching supervision is more about development and being more effective than the avoidance of risk.

## **Useful books and articles relating to coaching supervision**

### **CHARTERED INSTITUTE OF PERSONNEL AND DEVELOPMENT (2006)**

*Learning and Development: annual survey 2006.* London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.  
Available at: [http://www.cipd.co.uk/subjects/training/general/\\_tdsurvey.htm](http://www.cipd.co.uk/subjects/training/general/_tdsurvey.htm) [Accessed 17 August 2006].

### **CLUTTERBUCK, D. and MEGGINSON, D. (2005)**

*Making coaching work: creating a coaching culture.* London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

### **DOWNEY, M. (2003)**

*Effective coaching: lessons from the coaches' coach.* 2nd ed. New York: Thomson.

### **GOLDSMITH, M. and LYONS, L. (2006)**

*Coaching for leadership: the practice of leadership coaching from the world's greatest coaches.* 2nd ed. San Francisco, CA: Pfeiffer.

### **HAWKINS, P. (2006)**

Coaching supervision. In: PASSMORE, J. (ed). *Excellence in coaching.* London: Kogan Page.

### **HAWKINS, P. and SHOHET, R. (2006)**

*Supervision in the helping professions.* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

### **HAWKINS, P. and SMITH, N. (2006)**

*Coaching, mentoring and organizational consultancy: supervision and development.* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

### **JARVIS, J. (2004)**

*Coaching and buying coaching services.* London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.  
Online version available at: <http://www.cipd.co.uk/subjects/lrnanddev/coachmentor/coachbuyservs.htm> [Accessed 18 August 2006]

### **JARVIS, J., LANE, D.A. and FILLERY-TRAVIS, A. (2006)**

*The case for coaching: making evidence-based decisions.* London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

### **O'NEILL, M.B. (2000)**

*Executive coaching with backbone and heart: a systems approach to engaging leaders with their challenges.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.

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