

Reviewed Section. Research

Exploring the Double-value of Supervision: A developmental Perspective for internal Coaches

Michelle Lucas, Greenfields Consulting Ltd, UK

Abstract

The research set out to explore the potential for group coaching supervision to add value to both internal coaches and the organisation they work for. The article explores the value derived by the internal coaches. Although working with a small sample, the findings indicate that coaching supervision generated a positive impact on the coach's development. Recommendations for practice and for further research are included.

Keywords

Internal coach, supervision, coach development

Introduction

Typically the reported benefits of supervision relate to the coach rather than what value has been added for an organisation. However, there is a relative scarcity of evidence on the developmental impact of supervision for the internal coach. This research provides a case study opportunity to test the value of supervision to both the internal coaches and their organisation, hence the title "The exploration of "double value" of group coaching supervision". The study set out to explore three questions:

- What impact does group supervision have on internal coach development?
- How can a supervisor capture organisational themes when working in group supervision?
- If and when organisational themes are captured, are they of use to the client organisation?

This article is concerned only with the first of these three questions. The remaining two questions consider what value might be derived for the organisation and are the subject of a separate article that is planned to be published in a later edition of the International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching.

The International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching

Volume X Issue 2
December 2012



Reviewed Section. Research

Literature Review

When considering supervision for coaches (whether internal or not), there seems to be a well-accepted “trilogy” of its purpose. These three main reasons are described as

1. “normative” (where we are concerned with ethical issues and quality assuring practice)
2. “formative” (where we are concerned with supporting the supervisee’s development and learning) and
3. “restorative” (where we are concerned with managing the supervisees resources if and when their clients issues impact upon them personally).

Different authors use different labels which reflect their different origins and perspectives. However, they all recognise the need to support the supervisee’s development. As Kadushin (1976 as cited in Hawkins & Smith, 2006) refers to its “educative” purpose and comments from the world of Social Work. Procter (1988) refers to its “formative” purpose which originates from the world of counselling. Finally Hawkins & Smith (2006) comment from a coaching perspective and label it “developmental”.

Many practitioners would subscribe to the developmental nature of supervision – for example Arney (2006) notes that “more and more coaches are viewing supervision as essential to their practice Believing it developed their coaching capability and assured the quality of their work..... .”

There are several authors who identify a positive influence of supervision on coach development. A study by Butwell (2006) explored how 8 internal coaches, new to supervision, perceived the value of group supervision. They came together 5 times for half a day over a 14 month period. The session included a “showcase” of a coaching tool plus one volunteer brought a case for discussion. Butwell reports a number of positive experiences including applying insights from others cases, to their client work. It also raised awareness about models presented, although not with sufficient understanding to use them. Finally, she noted that it helped the coaches recognise and deal with client boundaries.

The International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching

Volume X Issue 2
December 2012



Reviewed Section. Research

This last point seems particularly pertinent for the internal coach. Typically the internal coach also has a “day job” and therefore has to deal with multiple relationships within the business.

The work of McGivern (2009) also identifies the developmental impact of supervision although she reports on 6 experienced and “freelance” executive coaches rather than internal coaches. Her study reports on the culmination of their supervision experiences. It is not clear though whether their experiences derived from individual or group supervision. Nevertheless, one of her four main findings related to how supervision “improved their practice”. The coaches inferred that supervision’s “bespoke nature offers the best continuous education for the coach”.

The literature also suggests that developing as a reflective practitioner is another consequence of coaching supervision. McGivern (2009) identifies the theme “taking a look in and through the mirror” which serves to raise self-awareness and promote on-going professional development. She describes the opportunity through supervision for meta-reflection and exploring differing perspectives.

Supervision as an enabler for reflection is also reported in an Australian study by Armstrong and Geddes (2009). They comment on the on-going supervision groups with their trainees suggesting that “coaching supervision is not only a place to reflect, it teaches them *how* to reflect, therefore honing their reflective practice”. This suggests that group supervision can enable coaches to utilise reflection outside of the formal group supervision setting itself.

Some more specific developmental findings are identified in a Case Study on Deloitte. Champion (2011) comments that as a result of supervision, internal coaches report “a huge amount of learning and development”. Specifically, Champion identifies that they learned how to prepare for and engage with supervision and how to engage in reflective practice. They developed a greater awareness of the choices they make during a client session; were able to use supervision to link theory to practice. They also widened their perspective through sharing resources such as articles and by witnessing a range of effective coaching approaches used by their peers

In summary therefore, there is a growing body of evidence for the developmental benefits of supervision, including honing reflective practice, learning coaching techniques and sharing resources amongst peer groups. However, these studies do

Reviewed Section. Research

not help us understand what is changing in the way coaches develop their craft. Maxwell (2010) has identified 4 different types of internal coaches. Her matrix, replicated in Figure 1, identifies two dimensions. The first looks at the focus for the coaching – i.e. whether it is concerned with “short-term” or “long-term” issues. The second dimension considers whether the coaching work is being done at a “surface” or “deep” level. This model has been used in the case study as a framework for gathering participant’s self-reflection on how their work has shifted over the period of the research.

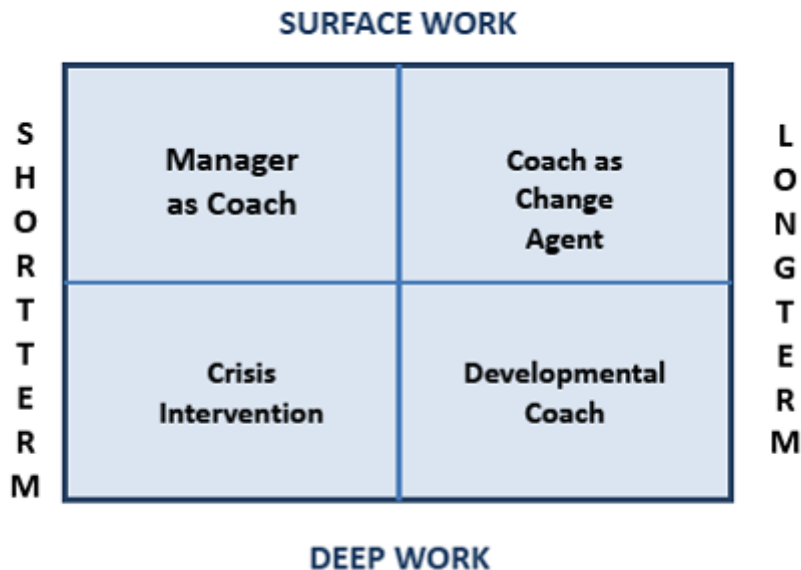


Figure 1. Maxwell (2011) different Types of Internal Coach

Hawkins & Smith (2006) have considered how the coach’s developmental journey unfolds. They offer a 4-stage development model mapping the broadening perspective of the coach. When considering the orientation of the material a coach brings to supervision it is often possible to determine an underpinning question to their issue. This in turn can give some cues as to what their developmental stage might be as outlined in Table 1. This framework is also used in the study to map the participant’s development journey. Of course this model is not intended to be linear and therefore any one “assessment” can only be seen in relation to that particular client: coach relationship at a point in time.

Reviewed Section. Research

Table 1.

Hawkins & Smith (2006) Stages of Development and indicative questions underpinning their reflections

Hawkin's Stage	Label	The question the coach is most concerned with
Stage 1	Self-centred	"Can I make this work?"
Stage 2	Client centred	"Can I help this client make it?"
Stage 3	Process centred	"How are we relating together?"
Stage 4	Process in context centred	"How do all the processes interconnect?"

Methodology

The Case Study Organisation

The study involved working with a team of internal coaches engaged in a major strategic change programme called 'LEAP!'. The client organisation is a long-established footwear retailer. Neither the coaches nor the organisation had any experience of coaching supervision and so it provided a "greenfield site" for a case study.

Initially, there were seven participants. This included, the LEAP! Change Programme Co-ordinator (CPC), three Area Sales Managers (ASM) and three Senior Change Leads (SCL). By the end of the programme only 4 participants remained, the 3 ASMs had dis-engaged from the research. One ASM dropped out after the first workshop due to additional workload. The second ASM disengaged after workshop 3 when he was promoted to a different Region not involved with LEAP! The third ASM resigned from the business due to family health problems also after workshop 3.

Reviewed Section. Research

The Group Supervision Activity

The study included a series of five group coaching supervision workshops which were facilitated by the author of this article. Each workshop lasted half a day, typically this time allowed for 4 of the 7 participants to bring a case for review. The first workshop was predominantly a contracting session and the last workshop a review session. Workshops 2, 3 and 4 were therefore the core of the group supervision experience.

In order to structure the participants contribution to the cases brought for supervision, four techniques were offered to the group. The presenting coach chose which approach most appealed to them given the nature of the issue brought for discussion. The four techniques are detailed in Appendix 1.

Research Methods

A mixture of research methods were used in this research.

1. On-line questionnaires completed by participants.

The primary vehicle for testing the impact of group supervision on participant's self-perception was established through a "before and after" on-line questionnaire. It was completed in advance of the first contracting session and again after the fifth and final workshop. Nine of the questions posed are provided in Appendix 2. Most required free form text responses to ensure a minimum of bias from the researcher. One question was quantitative in nature, another three questions were multiple choice.

Two questions were added to the "after" version of the questionnaire, in order to incorporate Maxwell's model of internal coaching (see questions # 7 and # 8). This enabled participants to use the model to track any changes to the way they were working.

There was a further questionnaire (also on-line) which was sent to participants after each workshop – its primary purpose was to gather feedback on the workshop experience. However, Question 3 was "How will our discussion influence your coaching conversations in future?" Responses to this particular question served to supplement the data from the before and after survey.

All of this data was analysed by question with the narrative responses being reviewed for themes, comments are used verbatim in the Findings section.

Reviewed Section. Research

2. Contemporaneous Supervisor Notes

During the workshops, I as the supervisor and researcher captured the order in which participants worked on their cases, the content of the case brought to supervision, the technique chosen to explore their cases, and the roles the non-presenting coaches played (for example some were peer questioners, some worked as observers).

3. Stakeholder Interviews

At the end of the series of workshops, I held a semi-structured interview with two organisational stakeholders, the Change Programme Co-Ordinator and the HR Director. Each interview took between 45 minutes and an hour, and was in two parts. In the first 15 – 20 minutes the researcher asked two questions prompting feedback relating to coach development.

What impact do you think the workshop has had on the participants?
What have you noticed about them? What specific examples can you offer?

The second part of the interview shared the preliminary findings of the research and invited their comment. Analysis of this part of the interview will be reported in a separate article.

Ethical Issues

This piece of research was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of Oxford Brookes University, and was supervised by one of their Academic Tutors. All of the participants were given full information about the study before they agreed to participate and signed a consent form. They were assured of confidentiality that data would be aggregated and as far as possible presented in a non-attributable basis. Because of the small number of people involved and because the results would ultimately be presented back to organisational stakeholders, the researcher shared the preliminary report with participants. They were invited to make amendments or deletions to any of the quotes if they believed they could be personally identified from the report. No amendments were requested.

Reviewed Section. Research

Findings

What Impact does Group Supervision have on Coach Development?

1. Coach Self-report : before and after survey

Responses from the “before and after” supervision survey were compared and the three primary findings that attest to an impact on coach development were as follows.

The first “shift” evidenced was an increasing sense of confidence that the participants were having “proper” coaching conversations. Of the 7 participants that completed this question before the workshops the average rating was 5.6/10; of the 5 participants that completed this question at the end of the workshops the average rating was 6.8/10. See Figure 2 below. This would indicate a slight rise in the level of coach confidence over the period of participating in the group supervision workshops.

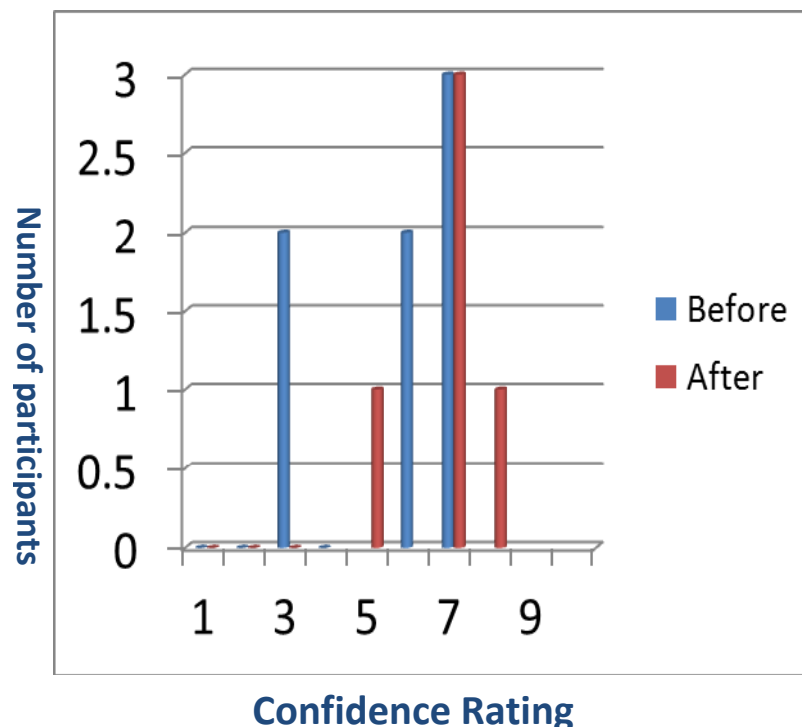


Figure 2. Comparison of participants self-rating before (n=7) and after

Reviewed Section. Research

Secondly, using Maxwell’s (2011) model of internal coaching as a framework, participants were asked to report on how their style of coaching had changed since the start of the programme. Figure 3 shows the overall proportion of time the participants recorded as working in each of the four quadrants “before” and “after” the research intervention.

As the comparison chart shows, they believed they were doing slightly less “surface work” (79% dropped to 71%) . the same amount of “deep work” (41% both before and after). However, the biggest shift was in moving from short term perspective (67% dropped to 40%) in favour of the long term perspective (53% rose to 72%)

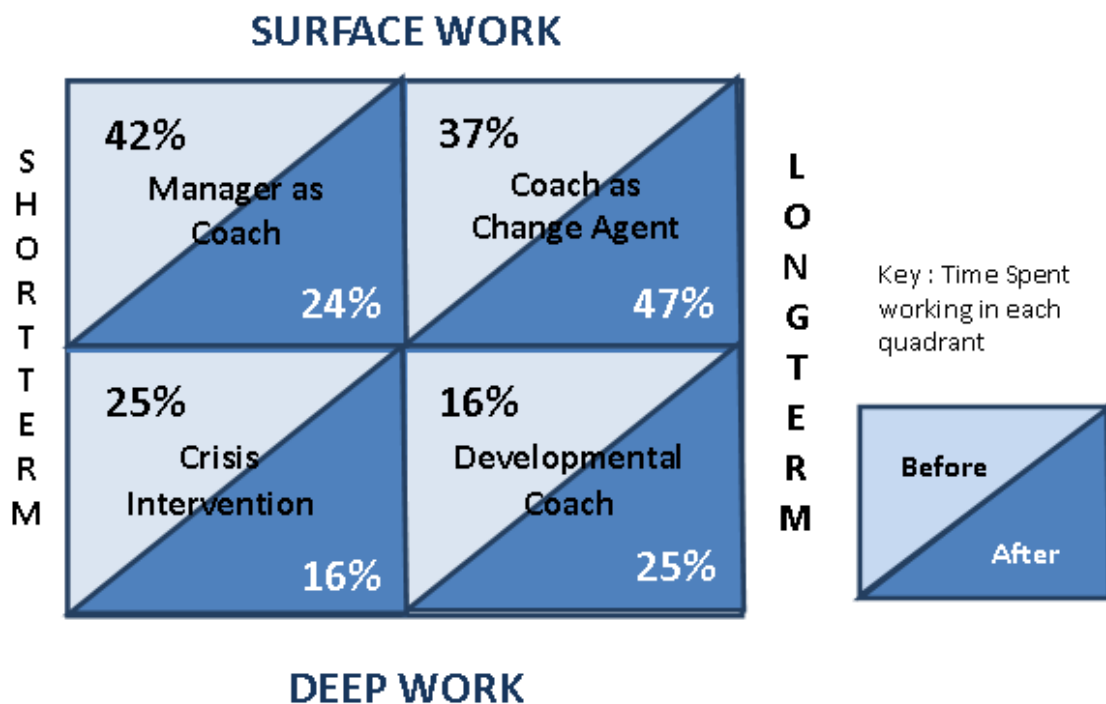


Figure 3. Using Maxwell’s model to map shifts in perception about the type of coaching work delivered at the start of the programme compared to the end of the programme

Responses to Question 4 suggest that they were becoming more deliberate in allocating time for reflecting on their coaching work and more keen to reflect

Reviewed Section. Research

immediately after their coaching conversations. Table 2 provides some examples of their comments.

Table 2

Example comments on Q4 of before and after on line survey

<i>How and when do you reflect on your conversations?</i>	
Some example “before” comments	Some example “after” comments
<i>“I don’t reflect on them often enough”</i>	<i>“I try to reflect after each session, also at the end of every week I go through more generic conversations”</i>
<i>“due to the current pace of the business, at times it can be some hours after a conversation before I reflect on the content”</i>	<i>“Now at the end of the conversation or at the end of the visit in the car”</i>
<i>“When travelling in the car I go over conversations I’ve had to assess how they’ve gone and the outcomes”</i>	<i>I reflect after the conversation, I will take notes of my thoughts when possible”</i>
<i>“Whilst driving and in my daily journal”</i>	<i>Straight afterwards if possible, if not in the car on my way home</i>

2. Coach Self-report: post workshop feedback

The post workshop feedback questionnaire included the question “How will this affect your coaching conversations of the future?” Their comments were organised according to Hawkins' (2006) 4-stage model. Typically their comments relate to Stages 1 and 2 of Coach development, although there are a couple of comments that begin to suggest some Stage 3 level thinking (see Table 3)

Reviewed Section. Research

Table 3

Responses to Q3 of post workshop questionnaire and how they relate to Hawkins Developmental Stages.

Stage 1 : How am I doing?	<i>They help me to consider alternative solutions or methods which I possibly would not have thought about before” [WS2-1] “Influenced my discussion with my line manager around my development areas [WS2-4]</i>
Stage 2 : Can I help this client?	<i>I will stop and think if I am the right person to have the conversation in the first place [WS2-3] It also clarifies how my 'case study' individuals are feeling and highlights many points about them that I hadn't recognised (emotion, workload, pressure form above etc) [WS4-1]</i>
Stage 3 : How are we relating ?	<i>I will think about the different approaches I can take to help them move their thinking forward [WS3 – 5] I am trying to show the change I want rather than just talk about it [WS3-2]</i>
Stage 4 : How do processes interconnect?	No examples.

3. Supervisor Observations.

During the workshop, the researcher acted as the supervisor and tracked the nature of the issues that the coaches brought for supervision, Table 4 below maps these cases to Hawkins' (2006) hierarchy of coach development.

Table 4

Number of supervision cases according to Hawkins (2006) Developmental Stages

	Workshop 1	Workshop 2	Workshop 3	Workshop 4
Stage 1		2	2	1
Stage 2	2	2	1	1
Stage 3				1
Stage 4				1

The International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching

Volume X Issue 2

December 2012



Reviewed Section. Research

Consistent with the coaches' comments in the post-workshop feedback, most of the cases related to Stages 1 & 2 of the model.

Example 1 below provides a case which was brought in Workshop 2 and illustrates Hawkins Stage 1 of Coach development. Here the underlying question is about his performance as a coach. The coach appears to completely miss the question of whether his coaching style worked for the "client" despite some behavioural clues to the contrary.

Example 1: Excerpt of case from Workshop 2 illustrative of Stage 1 Development

I was coaching a Store Manager to help him understand why the current performance was perceived as a problem, my own manager was also in attendance. The Store Manager began to "well up" as we were talking it through. Afterwards my manager gave me feedback that I'd been too direct and too involved in the detail – but my Store Managers know me and know my style. How can I get my manager to understand that what I'm doing works?

However, in the final workshop one case related to Stage 3 and a further case related to Hawkins Stage 4. Example 2 provides an example which indicates how the coach is becoming interested in how the system is operating and how things are interconnected which is illustrative of Stage 4 development.

Example 2 : Excerpt of case from Workshop 2 illustrative of Stage 1 Development

It's such a mix – I'm doing some great work with some Area Store Managers who really "get" it and who are able to create the right tone in Stores. And then there is one who's really frustrating, he seems to be working to his own agenda and no matter what they commit to in a session they never deliver on it. When I'm working with his Store Managers I can see the knock on effect he's having, they're confused because they're in the middle of mixed messages. If I try to support the Store Managers directly, then I'm not actually helping because it's this "maverick" ASM that is at the root of the problem – but when I work with him nothing seems to "stick". And why do I feel this "my problem" – he's not my direct report and no-one else is tackling his difficult behaviour...

4. Anecdotal evidence from Interviews with key Stakeholders:

The Change Programme Co-ordinator (CPC) reported a positive shift in her own coaching capabilities as well as those of the Senior Change Leads (SCL) reporting to her. There was anecdotal evidence to back this up. According to the CPC, people in

Reviewed Section. Research

the business had, unprompted, commented on the shift in their style. One SCL in particular had a reputation for being “very tell” and was now taking a much more considered approach. Another Senior Change Lead was ranked the highest of all the applicants at an assessment centre on her coaching ability, people continue to talk about her as a role model for good coaching skills.

The Group HRD also commented on the positive accounts of the Assessment centre performance. He also attributed much of the shift in the participants’ self-perceptions, to the depth of the skills and maturity of thought processes he now saw demonstrated by the CPC.

Finally, an unexpected finding was that in Workshop 4 participants reported using the group supervision techniques with their own change teams.

Discussion

The research question looked at the impact of supervision on Coach development. Subjective data from the participants themselves provide an indication of a positive impact, including

- an increase in confidence that they were truly having coaching conversations
- a move towards working on longer term issues
- a greater determination to reflect more immediately after the coaching conversation takes place

The content analysis of what the participants brought to supervision revealed some “glimmers” of advancing maturity in their reflections on their coaching work. Participants started bringing issues which were indicative of Hawkins’ Stage 1 and 2 thinking. However, by the end this was supplemented with issues indicative of Stage 3 and 4 thinking. This seems significant given they had only participated in 3 group supervision sessions.

Workshop participants using the supervision techniques with their own teams may help to explain the speed of their development. Having created a community of practice, they were engaging in peer supervision between workshops. This coupled with a growing “keenness” to reflect on their work perhaps means they were more able to “self-supervise” on transactional matters. This would have freed up their curiosity for

The International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching

Volume X Issue 2
December 2012



Reviewed Section. Research

issues other than those directly related to “self”. Such an apparently genuine interest in self-understanding and in understanding others would place them in “The Questioner” stage of cognitive-development as defined by Bachkirova & Cox (2007).

In addition, the interviews with organisational stakeholders revealed some more objective evidence. Observations in the wider organisation and the account of an exemplary performance at an assessment centre all attest to improved coaching skills over the period of the research.

Limitations of the Research

Although there is evidence that Group Supervision aided the coach development, generalisation of these findings should be made with caution given the small sample size. Also the evidence is primarily subjective self-report. Whilst there is some supporting anecdotal evidence, it may have been helpful to also survey the Store Managers who received coaching from the participants.

Conclusion

Whilst recognising the small scale nature of the research intervention, there is favourable evidence that group Coaching Supervision can positively impact on internal coach development. This manifested in an increasing confidence, greater maturity of thought in the cases brought to supervision, more deliberate reflection and a desire to use supervision techniques in their own community of practice.

Recommendations

Implications for Practice

The participants connected with group supervision activities with relative ease. This suggests that Coach Supervisors looking to extend their supervision business with organisations, may also want to consider working with “Change Agents” as well as those neatly labelled “internal coach”.

Recommendations for Research

Given the relatively small sample size and the relatively short time frame there is clearly an opportunity for longitudinal studies of the developmental impact of supervision on more and larger groups of internal coaches. This participant group was new to coaching, however, in a slightly more experienced group it might be possible to track development against an established competency framework.

Reviewed Section. Research

This particular case study organisation was from the private sector, has a good reputation for developing its people and has a culture which encourages openness and continual improvement. It would be interesting to see the impact of group supervision with internal coaches within different industry segments and different cultures.

Finally, if repeating this study with internal coaches and an external supervisor, consideration should be given to whether independent use of the supervision techniques will cause an unmanaged risk in the business. It is recommended that future supervisor/researchers contract more clearly that these techniques are only for use by a trained supervisor or a coach who has on-going supervision relationship.

References

ARMSTRONG, H & GEDDES, M. (2009). Developing Coaching Supervision Practice : an Australian Case Study. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*. Vol. 7, No. 2, August 2009.1-15.

ARNEY, E. (2006.) Insider's guide. *People Management*. November 2006,40–42.

BACHKIROVA, T & COX, E. (2007). A cognitive-developmental approach for coach development. In PALMER, S & WHYBROW, A (Eds), *Handbook of Coaching Psychology : A guide for practitioners*. East Sussex : Routledge.

BIRCH, D & DE HAAN, E. (2011.) Supervision for Consultants. *Training Journal* January 2011 (pp. 63 – 67).

BUTWELL, J. (2006). Group Supervision for coaches : Is it worthwhile? A study of the process in a major professional organisation. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*. Vol. 4, No. 2, Autumn 2006.43-53.

CHAMPION, C. (2011). *Beyond Quality Assurance : The Deloitte Story*> In BACHKIROVA, T. , JACKSON, P. & CLUTTERBUCK, D. (2011) *Coaching & Mentoring Supervision : Theory and Practice*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

HAWKINS, P & SMITH, N. (2006). *Coaching, Mentoring and Organizational Consultancy*. Supervision and Development. Maidenhead : Open University Press.

Reviewed Section. Research

HAY, J. (2007). Reflective Practice and Supervision for Coaches. Maidenhead : McGraw Hill.

MAXWELL, A. (2011). Supervising The Internal Coach In BACHKIROVA, T & JACKSON, P (Eds) Coaching & Mentoring Supervision : Theory and Practice. Ch. 14, (pp. 183 – 196). Open University Press.

MCGIVERN, L. (2009). Continuous Professional Development and Avoiding the Vanity Trap: an exploration of coaches' lived experience of supervision. International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring. Special Issue No. 3, November 2009. 22-37.

Appendix 1

Four Techniques used to Structure Group Supervision Discussions

Line of Enquiry: After the case has been presented, each participant offers a question that has arisen for him/her hearing the case. The presenting coach then chooses which question to work with and a discussion then ensues.

Keep it Real: In listening to the case presented each participant considers what is resonating with him/her and then shares that experience “warts and all”. What is shared could be prompted by similar content or indeed a similar reaction to that which the coach describes.

Affirmations & Alternatives: upon hearing the case each participant is invited to offer feedback on both what they “liked” in the coach's approach and what they might have “done differently” had they been in the other coaches shoes. What is important here is that the affirmation and alternatives are given in equal measure

The Seven-Eyed model: Whilst listening to the case each participant is allocated one or more of the “eyes” in Hawkins (2006) Seven Eyed Model to pay attention to. After the case is presented each participant offers their observations that come from their particular lens and the presenting coach is invited to comment on how this shifts their

Reviewed Section. Research

thinking (or not). The supervisor offers a final perspective if anything appears to have been missed.

Appendix 2

Before & After Online Survey for Participants (After version)

This was produced on Survey Monkey and sent online – it was explained that confidentiality would be maintained with results provided on an aggregated and non-attributed basis. It was sent via e-mail along with a copy of the Maxwell (2011) model for ease of reference.

#	Question	Format
1	If you were to describe yourself as a coach, what are the first three words that come to mind?	3 x Free text boxes
2	How confident are you that your coaching conversations are truly “coaching” conversations?	Rating system 1 – 10 where 1 = “no confidence” and 10 = “totally confident”
3	Now that you have attended the Group Coaching Supervision Workshops, what would you say the main benefits were of participating?	Free text box
4	How and when do you reflect upon your coaching conversations?	Free text box
5	What would you do if you became aware of a conflict of interest during a coaching conversation?	Free text box
6	If you were to find that a coaching conversation had an impact on you personally, who would you go to for support?	Multiple choice (choose as many as apply): Line Manager A colleague/peer The HR /L&D Department A professional Coach Family or friends

Reviewed Section. Research

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| 7 | When you started LEAP! What proportion of your time did you spend doing each of the following types of coaching? (must add up to 100%) | Number required for each of the following categories
Manager as coach
Coach as Change Agent
Developmental Coach
Crisis Intervention e.g.
Counselling |
| 8 | Now we are at the end of the Group Coaching Supervision sessions, what proportion of your time do you spend doing each of the following types of coaching? (must add up to 100%) | Number required for each of the following categories
Manager as coach
Coach as Change Agent
Developmental Coach
Crisis Intervention e.g.
Counselling |
| 9 | Is there anything else you would like to comment on now that we have finished the Group Coaching Supervision workshops? | Free text box |
-

About the author

Michelle brings a blend of psychology, organisation development and Board level business experience to inform her coaching and supervision practice. She has an MBA, PG Diplomas in Coaching & Mentoring Practice and in Coaching Supervision from Oxford Brookes and is a member of the EMCC. Michelle is an Accredited Coach with the AC and is the AC Lead on Coaching Supervision. She is also a Fellow of the CIPD and a member of the BPS.

E-Mail: michelle@greenfieldsconsultancy.co.uk