



INTEGRATIVE COACHING SUPERVISION

Coaching supervision is a relatively new but already somewhat controversial discipline. What is coaching supervision? What are its functions and what forms can it take? Should it be mandatory or not? Most of all, how can coaching supervision become effective in today's dynamic and multifaceted context? [Philippe Rosinski](#) answers your questions and makes the case for an integrative approach in this issue's Deep Dive.

Integrative coaching supervision, based on global coaching, is a holistic approach that calls upon multiple and interconnected perspectives to facilitate the unleashing of human potential in search of performance, fulfillment and meaning. It helps coaches to work more effectively and more creatively with their coachees.

Integrative coaching supervision supports coaches on their developmental journey by operating from six perspectives: physical, managerial, psychological, political, cultural and spiritual – and it embraces the complexity paradigm: everything is connected.

Integrative coaching supervision serves to unfold the remarkable coach, whose expert knowledge of diverse coaching techniques never becomes a substitute for establishing authentic, fluid and caring relationships with coachees.

What is coaching supervision?

The Association for Coaching (AC) defines coaching supervision as follows:

'Coaching supervision is a formal and protected time for facilitating a coach's in-depth reflection on their practice with an experienced Coaching Supervisor. Supervision offers a confidential framework within a collaborative working relationship in which the practice, tasks, process and challenges of the coaching work can be explored. The primary aim of supervision is to enable the coach to gain in ethical competency, confidence and creativity so as to ensure best possible service to the coaching client, both coachees and coaching sponsors. Supervision is not a "policing" role, but rather a trusting and collegial professional relationship.'¹

The International Coach Federation (ICF) describes coaching supervision in this way:

'Coaching Supervision is the interaction that occurs when a coach periodically brings his or her coaching work experiences to a coaching supervisor in order to engage in reflective dialogue and collaborative learning for the development and benefit of the coach and his or her clients.'²

The ICF distinguishes this from mentor coaching for credentialing:

'Mentor Coaching focuses on the development of coaching skills mainly in the context of initial development. Coaching Supervision offers the coach a richer and broader opportunity for support and development. In Coaching Supervision, the coach is invited to focus much more on what is going on in their process and where the personal may be intruding on the professional.'³ The ICF goes on to

stipulate that coaching supervision goes beyond mentor coaching while encompassing it.

What are coaching supervision's functions?

Building upon the work of Peter Hawkins and Nick Smith (2006), Barbara Moyes (2009) and Mike Munro Turner (2011), Paul Lawrence and Ann Whyte (2014) describe three main functions, which I share and articulate with an emphasis on the coach's development and possible transformation:

1. Developmental and transformational.

To help the supervisee address complex coaching situations by learning to coach from multiple perspectives, by adopting a systemic approach, by raising self-awareness while expanding one's worldview, by acquiring new tools and by honing specific skills. Beyond this, supervision helps the supervisee to develop and transform as a person and as a coach.

2. Resourcing practice.

To provide emotional support that could help the coach deal more effectively and more serenely with challenging situations.

3. Maintaining Quality.

For the supervisee to ensure his/her coaching meets the necessary quality and ethical standards, and brings a constructive contribution to the coachee, his/her organisation and various stakeholders.

What forms can coaching supervision take?

Coaches do not all share the same understanding of supervision. Lawrence and Whyte (2014) identified sixteen forms of supervision based on the combination of 4 variables (each with two possible values):

- Formal or informal
- Individual or group
- Regular or *ad hoc*
- Paid or unpaid

Coaching supervision is not always viewed as a formal practice that involves an explicit contract between a supervisor and supervisee. And contrary to the definitions above, coaching supervision is not necessarily one-to-one with a single supervisor. Group supervision with a supervisor and between peers (i.e., *intervision*) are also options. Coaching supervision sessions can be held on an *ad hoc* rather than regular basis. Unpaid supervision is also a possibility, particularly in the form of *intervision* when coaches meet with fellow coaches for that purpose.

¹ <http://www.associationforcoaching.com/pages/about/coaching-supervision> Coaching Supervision Guide accessed on 11 January 2016

² <http://coachfederation.org/credential/landing.cfm?itemNumber=2212&navItemNumber=3364> accessed on 11 January 2016

³ *Id.*

I work both as an individual supervisor and as a group supervisor. In the latter case, the programme will start with a pre-work assignment: to introduce themselves and to present their vision of the coach they want to be, the challenges they face in their coaching practice and their expectations for the supervision programme. Even in group supervision, I typically start with an individual session. It is an opportunity to clarify personal goals, identify development opportunities and discuss how to make the most of the subsequent group sessions.

In group supervision, I act as a *facilitator* calling upon the expertise available in the group to address individual challenges, as a *coach* helping each participant access his/her own resources to address his/her challenge, and as a *mentor* to offer additional perspectives and suggestions as necessary. Participants learn from each other as well as from me: both through the various insights about their individual challenges and also through the cases from other participants and corresponding discussions. Of course, I learn from my participants as well.

Having the humility to accept that there is only so much we can know and so much more we won't be able to know is liberating. But we can still do our best to push our boundaries. Having the courage and the curiosity to continue to learn, including from our supervisees and peers, is stimulating and sets a positive example.

What are the arguments against mandatory supervision?

Nobody disputes the necessity for coaches to engage in continued and life-long professional development. There seems to also be a consensus about the importance of stepping back and engaging in a reflective practice. However, obliging every coach to work with a supervisor on a formal and regular basis is a different matter. The arguments against that proposition include the following points, which I summarize and comment below.

● Blurring the distinction between coaching and psychotherapy

Vikki Brock (2015) argues: 'The 'coaching supervision' agenda appears to be predominantly driven by certain (some) coaching psychologists/psychotherapists ... This 'non-clinical' supervision stems from a therapeutic model.'

It is up to the coaching community in its rich diversity to reaffirm that effective coaching draws from a wide range of disciplines beyond psychology⁴, not to mention different contexts between coaching and psychotherapy. Consequently, coaching supervision cannot be the mere extension of supervision in psychotherapy.

● 'One size fits all'

The needs of a junior coach are different from those of a mature coach. Moreover, coaches have found various ways to obtain what supervision is meant to provide: to develop themselves, obtain emotional support and achieve high quality. A standard mandatory supervision program is therefore unlikely to be a panacea, particularly when it emphasises a certain worldview and excludes other valuable possibilities.

I personally learn a lot and continue to develop my coaching practice by reading across a wide range of domains and by interacting with diverse people around the world (including my clients). I am curious to explore their views, reflect and ponder the implications for my own development and for coaching. I also work

with a fitness coach. His insight and support alongside occasional help from an orthopaedic surgeon friend also benefit my continuous development. Learning from my practice of sports (cycling in particular) has repercussions way beyond sport: learning to better pace myself and to listen more carefully to my body for example.

● Emphasising a mechanistic approach to learning

Bob Garvey (2015) argues that a mechanistic approach is dominating the coaching professionalisation agenda 'through standards, competence frameworks and alleged quality assurance.' He suggests that this stifles creative and innovative thought, and is inadequate in our complex, unpredictable, non-linear environment. As we are mired in the technical specifications, we risk losing sight of the greater human concerns and planetary challenges. Garvey explains that we need flexibility of thought, sensibility of context, and critical interpretation. He suggests that 'one way forward is to return to the underpinning values of humanism... A coach would not 'arrive' when 'passing' but would be developing a way of life and a way of relating. Assessments would therefore be continuous, embedded in practice and peer led.'

Mandatory supervision, if it reinforces a mechanistic approach, may paradoxically contribute to coaching's impoverishment rather than its elevation. Building on Garvey's points I believe that effective supervision should in fact help coaches to embrace the complexity paradigm and to establish genuine human connections.⁵

● Inadvertently shrink possibilities by shutting coaches in rigid frameworks

I have witnessed the damaging effect of rigid supervision. An experienced coach had ended up more confused and less confident as a result of previous supervision. The supervisor had imposed his own worldview. The supervisee was expected to fit into a mould rather than become a unique coach and affirm her own singularity. My work as a supervisor notably consisted in helping her to deconstruct those limiting norms and beliefs, and to replace them with more effective alternatives.

Certifying supervisors is an attempt to promote quality but certification itself is not immune from the risk of reinforcing a certain worldview at the expense of other alternatives. To avoid this trap, much existing training provision does promote a holistic approach and a systemic view. However, important perspectives are sometimes superficially examined if not omitted altogether (e.g., culture) and the complexity paradigm⁶ is still often insufficiently understood and taken into account.

Unfolding the remarkable coach

The coaching development journey involves learning new techniques as well as increasing one's quality of being and connectedness.

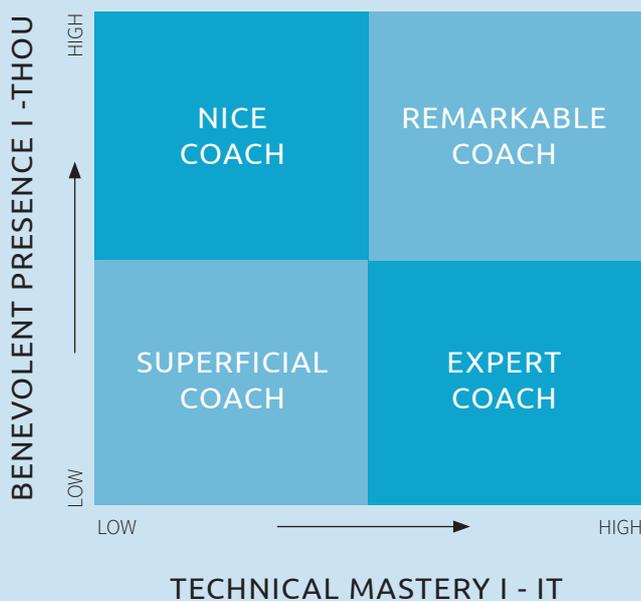
The options can be represented in a two-by-two matrix using Martin Buber's concepts of 'I-It relations' and 'I-Thou relationships' as variables. 'I-It relations' while instrumental are prevalent in coaching: we objectify the other and evaluate outcomes (e.g., using various assessments, applying different techniques). In 'I-Thou relationships', we are authentic, and fully present, turning 'from separation toward deep bonding'.⁷ Without 'It', a coach cannot exercise his profession, but without 'Thou' a coach cannot be a coach in the noblest sense.

⁴ See Rosinski (1999, 2010), (Page, 2006), (Cavanagh & Lane, 2012)

⁵ See (Rosinski, 2010, part III)

⁶ Id.

⁷ See more in (Kramer, 2003) and (Rosinski, 2010, chapter 11)



'High' levels of these variables, mean high *quality: depth and breadth of knowledge* for 'I-It' (substantive expertise & wide view made of various perspectives), *depth and breadth of caring* for 'I-Thou'.

The **superficial coach** is lacking both in knowledge and in caring. He/she may attract clients with low fees and by appealing to companies who don't understand what effective coaching is really about.

The **expert coach** can be knowledgeable about various coaching models and may have authored research projects and new tools. And the best experts go beyond their original disciplines to explore new territories. However, the risk is to be overly attached to the science and techniques of coaching, treating coaching in a mechanistic fashion (for example, by applying models and rules too rigidly). He/she may be lacking in human warmth, and fail to establish fluid relationships, which are crucial.

In contrast, the **nice coach** connects easily with his/her coachee, eliciting trust. He/she genuinely cares about people, coming across as authentic. The limitation here stems from a certain laziness. Since we coaches are masters of the process rather than the content, we may be tempted to stay in our comfort zone relying on simple coaching models, and on our listening and questioning skills with minimal content knowledge. We may even pride ourselves on our lack of knowledge (which prompts naïve yet potentially valuable questions) and the quality of our intuition. Consequently, we may ignore realms such as culture and complexity that usually require greater mental effort on our part but that could prove beneficial to our coachees. Nobel Prize laureate Daniel Kahneman contrasts 'fast thinking' based on what behavioural scientists often call 'System 1', which is rapid, automatic, emotional and intuitive; and 'slow thinking' rooted in the slow, calculative, deliberative but lazy 'System 2' (2011). System 1 is often in charge. It is indispensable but not always reliable. Kahneman has shown the many ways our System 1 can trap us. The nice coach does not sufficiently engage his/her System 2 and may consequently be found wanting.

The **remarkable coach** is committed to continuously learn and grow, both in depth and breadth of expertise and skills. Moreover he/she treats coaching as an art that transcends technique, and is eager to establish deep human connections with coachees (not to mention other stakeholders and even the world at large). I subscribe to what Irvin Yalom, Professor Emeritus of Psychiatry at Stanford University, declared about his approach to psychotherapy: 'In my work with clients, I strive for connectedness above all else. To that end, I am resolved to act in good faith: no uniforms or costumes, no parading of diplomas, professional degrees, and awards; no pretense of knowledge I do not possess; no denying that existential dilemmas strike home for me as well; no refusal to answer questions; no hiding behind my role; and, finally, no concealing my own humanness and my own vulnerabilities.' (2008)

Remarkable coaches are congruent. By modelling their quest for excellence as well as their humanity and authenticity, they are credible and can become role models.

Six perspectives for an integrated coaching supervision approach

I have found six interconnected perspectives (physical, managerial, psychological, political, cultural and spiritual) to be particularly useful in my work as a coach and as a coaching supervisor.⁸

While some of these perspectives are covered one way or another in much coaching supervision and supervision training, others are sometimes either superficially explored or ignored completely.

For example, concerning the **physical perspective**, I found somatic methods not unusual among coaches and supervisors. These help supervisees become more conscious of their bodies and physical sensations. 'Somatic intelligence'⁹ sometimes evokes this awareness of our body and the mind-body connection. However, and more prosaically, the physical perspective should also include, in my view, taking active care of our health and fitness. This involves in particular regular physical exercise around all fitness components and healthy nutrition, which are surprisingly missing in habitual coaching supervision. A fitness regimen includes taking the time to recuperate and to rest.

The **cultural perspective** is often left out. This deprives the coach or the coaching supervisor of acquiring the habit of challenging and enlarging worldviews. Sunstein's research reveals 'the immense importance of diversity, not necessarily along demographic lines, but in terms of ideas and perspectives' (2015). Cognitive diversity (alongside constructive dissent) promotes two things that institutions need: creativity and innovation (Rosinski 2003). Effective coaching supervision cannot afford to miss this chance to help clients to go beyond limiting norms, values and assumptions; to discover new behavioural and cognitive options; and to embrace increasing complexity for greater creativity. Moreover, coaching from a cultural perspective is also an effective approach to overcome the immunity to change phenomenon described by Robert Kegan (2009)¹⁰.

The **political perspective** is proving again and again illuminating for my executive coachees, who sometimes still view politics as an evil activity that should be eliminated. Through integrative supervision, coaches can become equipped to appreciate why politics in organisations are inevitable and how they can be turned into a constructive form. Coaches acquire tools to help their clients increase their impact while serving others, not just themselves.

⁸ See (Rosinski, Global Coaching, 2010) and (Rosinski, Coaching in a Global World, 2014)

⁹ See for example (Strozzi-Heckler, 2003)

¹⁰ See also (Rosinski, How to Integrate Nature & Nurture in Coaching, 2016)

The **spiritual perspective** is usually part of coaching supervision, notably through the popular notion of mindfulness¹¹. Mindfulness means ‘maintaining a moment-by-moment awareness of our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment.’ Mindfulness also ‘involves acceptance, paying attention to our thoughts and feelings without judging them—without believing, for instance, that there’s a “right” or “wrong” way to think or feel in a given moment. When we practice mindfulness, our thoughts tune into what we’re sensing in the present moment rather than rehashing the past or imagining the future.’¹² Being fully present is increasingly important to maintain our effectiveness and even our sanity, when our smartphones make it so tempting for us to be distracted.

Finding meaning, deriving purpose and appreciating life could also involve explorations that are not part of standard coaching supervision. These include:

- Adopting the sunflower strategy: turning resolutely toward the light by appreciating the miracles of the day¹³
- Dealing with adversity: mustering courage and developing resilience¹⁴
- Existential exploration: learning from the great philosophers to address the ultimate concerns of the human condition that we share¹⁵
- Clarifying our position vis-à-vis societal issues and ethical dilemmas
- Raising our level of consciousness¹⁶

The supervisor can engage in these conversations with a combination of humility, empathy and wisdom. She can encourage the coach to continue to keep faith in the human constructive potential despite inevitable setbacks and without ignoring the shadow side. The supervisor can help the coach to discern what can be changed for the better and focus on effective ways to make purposeful progress happen.

The **managerial perspective** concerns down-to-earth areas such as time management, personal organisation, project management and more generally practices aimed at increasing results and productivity. This perspective relates to metrics and scorecards to appraise results and gauge productivity. The well-known Situational Leadership model¹⁷ is part of this perspective: it is useful in helping leaders adapt their style to the situation and consider possibilities they might otherwise overlook. Coaching supervisors are usually familiar with managerial models. However, this may not be true for supervisors coming to coaching from psychotherapy.

The **psychological perspective** is obviously part of standard coaching supervision since this activity originated from the psychotherapeutic approach. Having a healthy and mature ego, an OK-OK attitude, engaging with clients in a constructive, benevolent and fluid fashion are indispensable conditions to be a legitimate coaching supervisor and to be an effective coach.

When this is second nature, the coaching supervisor will be much less likely to fall prey to ‘transference’ and ‘countertransference’.

‘The term transference refers to Freud’s view that important feelings about adults in early childhood are “transferred,” or cast, onto someone else’ (Yalom, 2008). This typically happens when the coachee behaves in some ‘irrational’ manner vis-à-vis the coach (for example: being distrustful of a coach who is generally trusted by other coachees).

The opposite can happen and is known as ‘countertransference’: the coach sees the coachee in a distorted fashion, different from the way others would see that person. And elements of transference and countertransference may coexist. As Vincent Lenhardt explains: the coach ‘needs to be able to manage his own emotional and affective reactions, which have been reactivated by the transfer upon him from the person he is helping’¹⁸. The therapist’s most vital instrument is their own self and it must therefore be finely honed: they ‘must have a great deal of self-knowledge, must trust their observations, and must relate to their clients in a caring and professional manner’.¹⁹ This applies to coaches as well.

Coaches with a psychoanalytical background are trained to recognise ‘irrational’ behaviours that would typically puzzle others. Unconscious coping mechanisms (also called ego defence mechanisms) are at play, which alter perception of both internal and external realities in a largely involuntary way. This mental distortion of reality helps reduce anxiety and depression. It allows us to conceal from ourselves internal drives and feelings that threaten to lower our self-esteem. Some argue that ‘teaching these concepts should be reserved for advanced psychological and psychiatric training’, but George Vaillant, professor of psychiatry at Harvard University, disagrees: ‘You can quickly train unsophisticated independent observers to identify ego defense mechanisms’ (1993)! The mature, psychologically savvy coach can learn to recognise these phenomena without advanced psychological training.

More generally, coaching supervision should favour an integrated approach, encouraging learning from different schools in psychology, which can all contribute to coaching’s effectiveness: behavioural and cognitive psychology, Transactional Analysis, Neuro-Linguistic Programming, psychological profiling (e.g., MBTI, FIRO-B), and positive psychology.

Coaching supervision and adult development

Coaching supervision’s first function is developmental.

If we examine key adult development models²⁰, we notice the following themes at the advanced levels: an appreciation of ambiguity, the capacity to apprehend paradoxes and multi-faceted reality, and the ability to approach reality from multiple perspectives and in the interest of multiple stakeholders.

These are precisely the qualities promoted by global coaching and integrative supervision, which enable human development at all

¹¹ See for example (MacKenzie, 2013)

¹² <http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/topic/mindfulness/definition> accessed on 14 January 2016. “Though it has its roots in Buddhist meditation, a secular practice of mindfulness has entered the American mainstream in recent years, in part through the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn and his Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program, which he launched at the University of Massachusetts Medical School in 1979.”

¹³ See also (Rosinski, 2007)

¹⁴ See also (Frankl, 1959)

¹⁵ Yalom (1980, pp. 8-9) identifies four ultimate concerns: death, freedom, isolation and meaninglessness.

¹⁶ See notably (Hawkins, 2006) even if I question how one could pretend establishing a universal and valid “scale of consciousness”. See also (Vaillant, 1993): mature defense mechanisms are in line with greater consciousness. Conversely, cynicism and dishonesty to promote specific short-term interests without regard for humanity at large and future generations reveals a poor level of consciousness, which coaches will best not support. See notably the appalling facts and despicable practices described in “Merchants of Doubt” (Oreskes & Conway, 2010)

¹⁷ See (Hersey, 1979-1993) and (Rosinski, 2010, pp. 81-86)

¹⁸ See (Lenhardt, 2008, p. 68) and (Rosinski, 2010, p. 105)

¹⁹ Ibid

levels but are indispensable to coach/supervisor at the highest developmental levels to face complex challenges.

The maturation of involuntary coping mechanisms at high levels of adult development also means that the coaching supervisor will be less prone to countertransference, by effortlessly, unconsciously relying on mature defences²¹ rather than neurotic or immature versions. Contrast for example how 'suppression' (mature), a semi-conscious decision to postpone paying attention to an emotion or need in order to cope with the present reality, differs from 'repression' (neurotic), the burying of painful or dangerous thoughts in the unconscious (the emotion is conscious, but the idea behind it is absent). With involuntary repression, a coaching supervisor may not know why she feels upset. She may not acknowledge that her client expects her to behave against some of her core values or has triggered a sensitive spot. However, with involuntary suppression, the coaching supervisor will clearly understand the strong emotion and be able to park it if necessary in order to finish the important and urgent task at hand.

To be able to foster the continued development of his coachees, the coach needs to have reached a level of personal development at least equal to their level. Similarly, the coaching supervisor can facilitate this development as long as she has reached a level of personal development at least equal to that of her supervisees. To be truly able to apprehend our multi-faceted reality, a coaching supervisor cannot ignore essential perspectives such as culture and its many possible variations in cultural orientations.

Integrative coaching supervision is the global coaching of the coach

Coaching supervision may be different from coaching. At the end of the day, it all depends on the nature of your ambition for coaching supervision and for coaching, respectively. However, I contend that integrative coaching supervision is the global coaching of the coach. Global coaching is already truly holistic in essence, including everything that concerns the coach's development and also avenues that traditional coaching may miss. It juggles multiple perspectives and seamlessly links and possibly leverages these alternative viewpoints to help address complex challenges. As avid and polyvalent learners, integrative coaching supervisors are aware of their limitations and are therefore keen to collaborate with other professionals with complementary know-how to serve their supervisees, or to refer the latter to the former. This way, supervisees' growth is not restricted by the supervisor's inevitable limitations but can be further enabled by combining diverse standpoints.

Four interconnected levels of application for integrative coaching supervision

Integrative coaching supervisors appreciate the systemic context in which they and their supervisees operate. Ideally, they are equipped to work at four levels: individual, team, organisational and societal. They understand how these levels are interconnected and how to work on the total system to make a difference.

Like their supervisees, they may deal with several stakeholders. This is the case for example when a coaching supervisor cooperates

with a Learning and Development or Organisational Development manager, by supervising a cadre of business coaches (internal or/ and external) working for that company. Strict confidentiality needs to be guaranteed so that coaches can freely open up with their supervisor. At the same time, the coaching supervisor can report back common themes and potential avenues for organisational development. In any event, boundary issues need to be carefully managed.

In addition, the integrative coaching supervisor can discuss the organisation's societal impact and help the coach engage their coachees on a lasting high-performance and purposeful path²².

Conclusion

There are more and more coaches offering their services. A multitude of schools trains aspiring coaches who quickly swell the ranks. Coaching supervision promises to help all these professionals in their continued development and possible transformation, to provide emotional support, and to ensure high quality standards are met. However, current coaching supervision often overlooks crucial perspectives and sometimes inadvertently shrinks possibilities by enclosing coaches in rigid frameworks. Furthermore, it regularly reinforces a mechanistic worldview and fails to embrace today's complexity.

In our interconnected and turbulent environment, integrative coaching supervision is needed to help coaches develop their effectiveness, creativity and humanity. By enabling coaches to unleash their multifaceted potential, integrative coaching supervisors will indirectly help their clients' coachees achieve greater performance, fulfillment and meaning in their lives.

²⁰ Berger (2006), Vaillant (1993, 2012), Rosinski (2010)

²¹ Vaillant (1993) identifies the following mature unconscious defense mechanisms: altruism, sublimation, suppression, anticipation, humour.

²² It is beyond the scope of this article to explore this systemic context in more detail but let me refer you to (Global Coaching, 2010) for more information on this subject.

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