

Why Leaders Need Supervision

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It is important to differentiate between managerial supervision which applies to the overseeing of productivity and development of entry-level employees and the well-established profession of supervision in the helping professions with roots in the 19th century, evolving through the disciplines of social and clinical work, education, counselling, psychotherapy and latterly coaching. Supervision in these disciplines has now become a valued, and professionally required relationship and is becoming increasingly recognised as a distinctive enough discipline to be of great benefit to a much wider audience of organisational professionals at all levels of the organisational system including leaders.

Leadership supervision (or super-vision as it is sometimes referred to) provides a confidential, safe, reflective and restorative environment between a leader and a qualified, accredited supervisor, the latter having a highly attuned and empathic stance, who is knowledgeable about leadership, is psychologically aware and who is a candid and wise confidant.

Supervision attends to the practice of the leader them-selves. A leadership supervision contract aims to foster a healthy sense of self, deepen self-awareness, strengthen leadership abilities and confidence and explore the effectiveness of the leader. The supervision relationship is a psychologically safe place in which the leader can share vulnerabilities, fears, anxieties, etc. with the supervisor. The relationship accommodates exploration of ethical issues thus developing the leaders 'ethical compass' an important and necessary attribute for a leader.

Unlike coaching which focusses on tasks, goals and performance outcomes, the supervision relationship provides a much needed oasis of time for a leader to reflect deeply on the ways that their leadership and their relationships with others emotionally impact on them through a generative, collaborative and creative dialogue.

The supervisor is a trusted companion and wise guide. They are external to the leader's organisational system and thus impartial so they can help the leader locate and focus on what needs paying attention to within the complexity of the system. Insights and foresights are explored to achieve judicious thinking and professional practice.

The emphasis on reflective practice is very much the focus of supervision. Reflective practice gives the opportunity for a meaning making dialogue to be co-created between leader and supervisor around organisational issues, emerging themes, concerns, stresses, fears, joys etc. This provides fertile ground for the reflexive learning of the leader; the development of their 'reflexive muscle' which can continue to be built and stretched for both personal and professional acuity both on the leaders metaphorical 'back stage' and 'front stage' of their leadership role.

Anyone who finds themselves in the leadership landscape knows it can be a lonely and isolating place both from an organisational and personal perspective. It can be fraught with many different and conflicting dynamics, obstacles, boundaries, relationships, ethical issues, the list goes on, which can take their toll on the leader. To be able to reflect on, explore and navigate the complex leadership landscape with a leadership supervisor contributes greatly to the leader's capacity to function at optimum 'best self'.

Engaging in leadership supervision is a much needed keystone of leadership practice. It encompasses all the above mentioned areas whilst also affording a regenerative, replenishing and restorative relationship for a leader at any level in the organisation.

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