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THE COACHING SUPERVISION RELATIONSHIP is a formal learning process in which a coach engages with a more experienced coaching practitioner in order to articulate, reflect on, evaluate and receive support to monitor his/her coaching practice. The process of coaching supervision should be congruent with the coaching process itself and model key coaching skills. The objective is to develop the skills of a coach as an effective and ethical practitioner thus facilitating the performance, and safeguarding the well-being, of the client, the client organisation, and him or herself. Increasingly, many coaches – either experienced practitioners or trainees – together

- Prescriptive: giving advice, being directive.
- Informative: instructing, informing, being didactic.
- Confrontative: challenging, giving direct feedback.
- Cathartic: facilitating release of tension, free expression and emotion.
- Catalytic: stimulating reflection and self-directed problem-solving.
- Supportive: validating, confirming, giving approval.

Burnout is the result of constant or repeated emotional pressure associated with an intense involvement with people over long periods of time. Fineman states three effects of burn-out:

- a state of emotional and physical exhaustion with a lack of concern for the job, and a low sense of trust of others
- a depersonalisation of clients; a loss of caring and cynicism towards them
- self-deprecation and low morale, and a deep sense of failure.⁴

Patti Stevens takes a look at this vital relationship and explains its importance to all those involved in the coaching process.

Coaching

with the organisations they work for are recognising the need for a supervisory relationship to give the support, checks and balances needed to ensure best practice, optimum performance and ongoing professional development.

Coaching supervision focuses on the processes and dynamics of the interactions that occur between a coach and client during a session. Hess defines supervision as 'a quintessential interpersonal interaction with the general goal that one person, the supervisor, meets with another, the supervisee, in an effort to make the latter more effective in helping people'.¹ The European Association for Supervision (EAS) defines supervision as 'a consultation concept with the help of which individuals, teams, groups and organisations reflect on their behaviour and structures in their jobs'.

Progress within the coaching profession is being made in consideration of supervision that is rapidly becoming recognised as a professional requirement for both trainee and experienced coaching practitioners who may be working as either in-house or independent coaching practitioners. The European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) has recently published a Code of Ethics identifying the need for coaching supervision in the 'Competence' section.

The coach mentor will:

1d. Maintain a relationship with a suitably qualified supervisor who will regularly assess their competence and support their development. The supervisor will be bound by the requirements of confidentiality referred to in the Code. What constitutes a 'suitably qualified supervision' is defined in the EMCC's standards document.

A useful model of six supervision categories to give structure to a coaching supervision relationship has been developed by Heron.² There is no implication that any one category is more or less significant and important than the others. These categories are as follows.

The EAS supports the view that supervision draws on and unites many theories in which basic assumptions are borrowed from psychoanalytic, systems, behavioural, cognitive and gestalt schools of thought. These concepts are firmly rooted in the counselling and therapeutic domain. While coaching is distinct from therapy in that it is not a remedial intervention, the process of coaching supervision most certainly can be therapeutic (as can coaching), and utilises many techniques, models and skills from the therapeutic profession.

A panel of expert supervision practitioners who offer consultancy to organisations, and who recognise that supervision is strongly connected to organisational consultancy and coaching and mentoring, see supervision as the skilled facilitation of reflection. When asked whether a specific professional identity should be developed for supervisors in organisations and professional associations, most believed it was inevitable and will eventually become a profession in its own right as it is in mainland Europe. They believe that all supervisors should be trained and practising therapists, and that the two roles of supervisor and therapist should be delineated clearly but not in a hierarchical manner.³ A coaching supervisor trained in the psychological and therapeutic profession can raise awareness for the coaching supervisee of psychological processes that may be occurring in his/her client work and thus facilitate these dynamics together with ethical considerations that could impede the coaching process and potentially undermine and abuse best practice.

When a coach is engaged with a client s/he is dealing with human processes and, as such, emotional and psychological responses are evoked in both coach and client during and after sessions. A coach is bound to absorb feelings and emotions from his (or her) clients. Therefore, if he does not have the support of a coaching supervisor who has the skills to help him process these feelings he can become overburdened and ineffective, which will eventually lead to burnout.

FUNCTIONS OF SUPERVISION

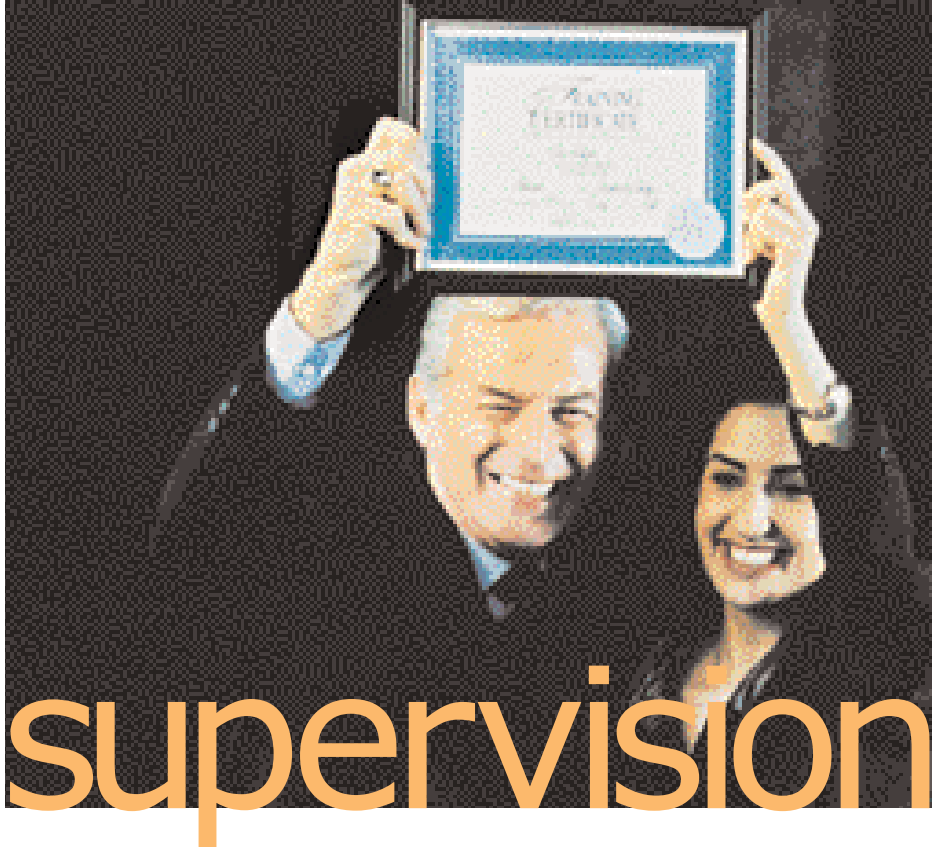
As has been identified, a coaching supervisor has many roles to play. There is a long-held belief that good supervision needs to maintain at least three basic functions. Kadushin describes these as:

- educative: development of the supervisee
- managerial: quality control
- supportive: ensuring the supervisee is able to process his/her experiences.⁵

Within the coaching supervision relationship (as in the coach/client relationship), it is important that a clear contract exists that reflects the expectations of both parties. This contract needs to contain the components listed in Table 1 (see page 19). Schein describes the psychological contract as:

a person's perception of an exchange agreement between themselves and another party ... it implies that there is an unwritten set of expectations operating at all times between individuals and is a powerful determinant of behaviour both on a personal and professional level.⁶

All of the above should be revisited in session at regular intervals to monitor progress and ensure that a mismatch of expectations has not occurred. The breakdown of any of the components of the negotiated contract jeopardises the trust that is necessary in underpinning the success of a coaching supervision/coaching relationship. The psychological component is a very potent and often neglected part of the overall contract. A mismatch of expectations and understanding of the psychological contract can cause problems resulting in the breakdown of the coaching supervision/coaching process and potential psychological harm. It is predominately this part of the contract in which coaching supervision can be of greatest value and support in the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) of and best practice for the coaching practitioner.



- Evaluation fails to show results over time.
- The growth of coaching demand leads to lower quality entrants flooding into the profession (as is feared).
- Clear standards do not emerge.

It is concluded in the summary that within the corporate environment the HR role emerges clearly as the facilitator, standard checker, buyer and relationship holder of coaching services, as well as the orchestrator of internal coaching initiatives. As the growth and professional development of coaching continues to evolve with increasing amounts of successful practice-based evidence being published, there is an increasing acknowledgement within private and public sector organisations that coaches need to be trained and accredited to a recognised professional standard. Inherent in this, as in other helping professions where supervision is a professional requirement, is that the client work and development of the coach is professionally supervised.

The evaluation of coaching is an important area on which to focus as the profession evolves. The provision of a relationship with a trained and experienced coaching supervisor who has a psychological and therapeutic background gives an evaluative framework ensuring quality control and best practice for the effective and ethical coaching practitioner. Within a CPD framework, coaching

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supervision gives vital support and monitors and encourages the growth, progress and performance of coaching supervisees (be they experienced practitioners or trainees), and therefore by implication their clients and purchasing/employing organisations. ■

Listed below are some of the features and benefits that are fostered from the categories and roles of coaching supervision that have been mentioned thus far.

- The opportunity for a coach to reflect on and review his or her coaching techniques in a confidential relationship thereby ensuring best practice.
- From the client's perspective, the supervision of his or her coach gives confidence that there is an external quality control over the coaching process.
- The supervisor provides a confidential relationship within which to consider ethical, contractual, legal and boundary issues and concerns.
- CPD for the coach by way of learning processes.
- The supervisor provides emotional support for the coach thus ensuring competent and ethical management of psychological dynamics.
- The supervisor provides an opportunity for the coach to discuss his/her clients' business and organisational challenges and dilemmas, thus effectively managing the client relationship.⁷

RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

In April 2001, Andrew Lambert (on behalf of the Careers Research Forum) conducted research into executive coaching and mentoring. The executive summary notes that in particular there are three threats to the perception of coaching.

TABLE 1: THE COMPONENTS OF THE COACHING SUPERVISION CONTRACT

- **Procedural:** concerned with negotiating, and recording dates, time, duration and location of supervision sessions.
- **Professional:** addressing the issues of boundaries and confidentiality, and paying attention to the content of the supervision session – that is, what does the client want to achieve in terms of skills, development, goals, expertise and so on.
- **Perceptual:** attention to foresight – that is, regard and provision for the future and exploration of insights.
- **Psychological:** concerned with checking out and gaining clarity about the expectations of each party, and consisting of the hidden aspirations and concerns of the coach/client, which may be outside awareness until they are considered and made explicit.

References

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