



The
British
Psychological
Society

Special Group in Coaching Psychology

Guidelines on supervision for Coaching Psychology

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Contents

1. Background	3
2. Introduction	4
3. The nature and purpose of supervision.....	8
4. The management of supervision work.....	9
5. The issues of responsibility.....	11
6. Competencies of the supervisors.....	12
7. The issue of confidentiality	13

1. Background

1.1. Need for clear guidance

Increasingly, psychologists offering coaching services are applying an integrative form of coaching psychology practice that draws on specialist knowledge from across the whole domain of psychology. As most psychologists are specialists in only one or two narrow domains of psychology it is increasingly important that clear guidance is provided for supervision of integrative coaching psychology services.

In 2006 the Professional Practice Board of the British Psychological Society initiated work on harmonising professional practice guidelines across the profession, and these guidelines will include more detailed guidance on practice supervision than is currently available to practitioners.

1.2. Consistency of guidelines across domains of practice

To take this project forward a working party has been established and it is likely that this work will progress later in 2006 and into 2007. Early discussions within the context of both the Professional Practice Board and the harmonisation working party have suggested that a range of supervision issues are common to all psychologist practitioners irrespective of their domain of practice. As such, it is useful to ensure congruence in supervision practices across the Society subsystems. However, it is also considered to be likely that each sub-specialism will benefit from contextualising the generic guidelines to their area of practice taking into account the specialist needs of specific client groups or work areas.

This general approach congruent with the way Subject Benchmarks for domains of practice relate to the core domain of practice and represented by the National Occupational Standards for Psychology. A discussion paper exploring Subject Benchmarks for Coaching Psychology has also been developed and SGCP members are encouraged to read and comment on both discussion papers.

1.3. The purpose of this supervision guidelines paper

is to maintain dialogue with the members of the SGCP about supervision practices that apply to the professional practice of coaching psychology and psychological coaching and to provide interim guidelines for Chartered Psychologists¹ working as coaching psychologists and acting as supervisors.

1.4. Two aims of this paper

This paper will support the SGCP in achieving of two specific aims. These are:

1. To invite discussion which will inform the development of a coaching psychology perspective that will be presented within the context of the harmonisation of professional practice guidelines working party².
2. To inform the further development of supervision guidelines which are contextualised for coaching psychology supervision.

¹ The guidelines do not provide a framework for non-Chartered psychologists to supervise others.

² This aim relates more specifically to the SGCP Discussion Paper on Supervision for Coaching Psychology (December, 2006).

2. Introduction

2.1. Implications of growth and demand

Growth and demand for professional services, which are focused on one-to-one development in work and life, has increased substantially over the past 10 years. Psychological theories and methods are being integrated into generic coach and mentor training programmes within both graduate and undergraduate programmes. And there are now plans to integrate a new unit on the psychological underpinnings of coaching and mentoring within the National Occupational Standards for Coaching and Mentoring in the Workplace to assist with boundary management between the domains of psychology and coaching practice at NVQ and S/NVQ levels 3 and 4.

This growth in the delivery of coaching training that includes explicit reference to psychology reflects an increase in the level of interest in using psychological approaches by non-psychologists also reflected throughout the broader coaching and mentoring community.

A key implication of these developments is that psychologically-oriented approaches are increasingly being applied within coaching practice and coach training programmes by practitioners with little or no formal training in psychology as well as by experienced psychology practitioners.

2.2. Role for psychologists in providing supervision

Whilst it is desirable to see psychology applied broadly throughout the general community and society in general, this increase in the explicit application of psychology within coaching practice implies that a corresponding role for psychologists in providing supervision to support the use of psychology within broader coaching practice. At the same time coaching psychologists as a professional group have a responsibility to demonstrate best practice in terms of personal and professional development and demonstration of quality in the delivery of psychological services by adopting appropriate supervision practices themselves.

2.3. Supervisory needs of groups

The following broad groups are represented in the membership structure of SGCP and the supervisory needs of each group are different. Supervisory needs reflect:

Chartered Psychologists

- Chartered Psychologists who are applying their professional expertise derived from one primary domain of psychology in relation to coaching process.
- Chartered Psychologists who are integrating professional practices from across two or more sub-domains of psychology and applying these within the coaching process.

Members with the Graduate Basis for Registration (GBR)

- GBR qualified members of British Psychological Society who are already practitioners in training in one (or more) of the Society Divisions.
- GBR members who have not selected a qualifications route from amongst existing options. Some GBR members have expressed the view that existing divisional routes do not support their career goals as coaching psychology practitioners.

Affiliates

- Coaching practitioners from a range of professions and backgrounds and who have no formal training in psychology or any related area of practice such as counselling, or psychotherapy.
- Coaching practitioners who are highly qualified in a related area of practice such as counselling and psychotherapy and who are applying knowledge and skills from these related domains of practice within their coaching practice.

Supervision requirements will differ for each these membership groups of SGCP and the supervision requirements for affiliates and GBR members are not straight forward.

2.4. **Affiliate/GBR limitations on the supervision**

For members who are either affiliates, or possess the Graduate Basis for Registration, it is important to note that within the British Psychological Society there are limitations on the supervision of the professional practice of psychology. We advise that all members consult the Society's *Code of Ethics and Conduct* and ensure that both the professional development services offered and supervision process engaged with is fit of purpose in supporting development needs. The code of conduct applies equally to all membership levels and types.

2.5. **Implications of Charter**

As the British Psychological Society is a professional Society with a Royal Charter, this has specific implications for our members. Only members whose expertise in psychology has been clearly demonstrated by thorough completion of the chartering process are recognised as professional practicing psychologists. Therefore, the supervision of psychological practice should be conducted by a Chartered Psychologist because no other form of practice qualification is recognised by the Society. Forms of supervision covered by this caveat include the supervision of psychologist Practitioners in Training (PIT's) who working towards chartered status (within any Division) or the professional practice of psychology in any area of psychological work.

2.6. **Case for developing accreditation route**

It is important to note that Coaching Psychology is viewed by the British Psychological Society to be a valid area of psychological work. However, there is currently disagreement about whether or not coaching psychology represents an area of practice, which has sufficient breadth and depth to warrant its own qualifications route leading Chartered Status. The findings of our Coaching Psychology Subject Benchmarks Project have clearly demonstrated that there is a good case for developing an accreditation route for Coaching Psychology that would lead to Chartered Status or equivalent.

Given that the term 'supervision' does have specific meanings and implications within the British Psychological Society, it is advisable that for some of the professional development activities that hosted for members will use the term 'support', rather than supervision. For example, affiliates and GBR members could engage in 'professional support or development' groups within the context of the SGCP, however, they could not engage in 'peer supervision' for any aspect of psychological practice.

One of the key aims of this supervision guidelines paper is to invite all SGCP members to consider both the general principles and particular aspects of contextualising generic supervision guideless for the practice of coaching psychology. We would also like to explore the creation of supervision guidelines for the application of psychology by coaching practitioners who either have no psychology qualifications, or partial progress towards professional status within the British Psychological Society.

2.7. **Responsibility of Members**

The SGCP takes the position that all Society members who provide coaching psychology or psychological coaching services, whatever their background and status should receive regular supervision for their coaching activities. Whilst it is not mandatory it is expected that coaching psychologists will have some form of supervision that best supports their practice. There is no one prescriptive model and it is left to the supervisor and supervisee to negotiate an appropriate contract. It is, however, the responsibility of each individual member to ensure that they access an appropriately qualified supervisor and to ensure that all psychology practice conforms to guidelines prescribed within the Society's *Code of Ethics and Conduct*. This paper addresses the gap between guidelines set out by the Society for Chartered Psychologists as part of CPD, the *Code of Ethics and Conduct* and Independent practitioner guidelines. This does have some specific implications where the 'professional practice of coaching psychology' is concerned which will be described in detail.

Existing British Psychological Society generic guidelines for supervision can be found distributed through official documents published by the Society. The guidelines for independent practitioners state that all psychologists whether employed by an organisation or operating within an independent practice should access appropriate supervision.

These generic guidelines do not prescribe what specific types of supervision practices are appropriate for practitioners working integratively as coaching psychologists. So the development of individual supervision practices for integrative practitioners has been left to the good judgement of practitioners and their supervisors. This does not imply that poor standards exist for coaching psychology supervision, however, it does mean that different types and expressions of supervision practice are currently considered to be appropriate depending upon the nature and extent of coaching psychology practice employed by a coaching psychologist practitioner. Guidelines for integrative forms of psychological practice will be covered within the generic professional practice guidelines that are being produced by the Professional Practice Board (Generic Professional Practice Guidelines Working Party Documents).

A range of published supervision guidelines for other areas of psychological work do, however, exist and are contextualised for the specific needs of practitioners working in other areas of psychology practice. Not all Divisions and Special Groups of the Society have published guidelines, however, it is often the case that coaching psychologist practitioners will at a minimum adopt the guidelines endorsed by their main divisional affiliation (Division Professional Practice Guidelines – Division of Occupational Psychology to be provided as hard copy).

2.8. Type and level of supervision needed

Exercising judgement over determining what type and level of supervision is needed for any coaching activity must take into account the nature of the coaching process. Some forms of coaching applied in work settings are described as being largely ‘performance based’ and aimed at achieving specific work based goals that are pre-determined by a management performance appraisal. These activities may provide little scope for working directly with clients on deeper issues of personal motivation. However, even when services do not involve working with underlying issues, they can impact on clients at a very deep level or require that the practitioner has a sophisticated understanding of deep motivational drives to succeed in implementing the ‘surface’ level implementation.

So the SGCP takes the view that the coaching process generally holds substantial similarity to any psychological or psychotherapeutic service that is delivered on a one-to-one basis. It is a dynamic process that has potential to influence both the recipient as well as the personal and organisational systems of which they are a part. The coach can influence the coaching process intentionally or unintentionally and supervision plays an important role in ensuring that the coach maintains an appropriate degree of awareness as well as due diligence with relation to the impact they have on the client at both the surface and ‘deep’ levels.

Access to feedback within some contexts is often limited, unsystematic and infrequent and these factors can represent significant risks to the interests of the client. Ensuring the professional development of the coaching psychologist in these circumstances generally indicates that supervision should be provided by an external, rather than an internal supervisor.

The following are examples of situations which emerge within the coaching process and which require close attention and discussion with experienced colleagues in possession of appropriate psychological competences:

- **Coaching contracts** generally imply that a practitioner whether a psychologist or a psychological coach does not work directly with underlying issues and dysfunctions. When the coach or psychologist identifies that a client's 'blocks' to development would be better served by psychological intervention then it can be necessary to refrain from working on the deeper issues. This could be a difficult decision to make without a reflection process facilitated by a supervisor who understands the process of diagnosis and on-referral to appropriate sources of psychological support. Issues relating to the nature of the contract may either prevent or explicitly endorse interventions of either a deep or even 'clinical' nature within the context of the coaching process. However, these are factors that must be taken into account in addition to the simple competence of the coaching psychologist or coach to deliver the service.

- **Management of boundaries**
The management of personal as well as professional boundaries is important within the coaching process and supervisors must be competent to ensure that any underlying personal issues that could affect the coaching process are managed effectively and appropriately.

- **Management of values conflicts and confidentiality issues**
Coaching services are frequently applied within a complex system such as a family, social network or work organisation. These environments are unpredictable and complex. Successful management of values conflicts and confidentiality issues are highly dependent on effective and sensitive contracting. Participating in a supportive and critically reflective process of supervision can both prevent serious issues from occurring and ensure that issues that do emerge are managed well.

3. The nature and purpose of supervision

3.1. Primary purpose of coaching supervision

As in psychology supervision generally, the primary purpose of coaching supervision is to ensure that the needs of the client(s) are met in the most effective and appropriate manner. Within the context of generic coaching practice this may mean the application of psychological principles and also of expertise drawn from other professional domains such as health care or management science.

3.2. Defining coaching supervision

One possible way to define coaching supervision is: 'Coaching supervision is a formal process of professional support which ensures continuing development of the coach and effectiveness of his/her coaching practice through interactive reflection, interpretative evaluation and the sharing of expertise' (Bachkirova, Stevens & Willis, 2005). The key difference between coaching and coaching psychology supervision is that coaching psychology supervision explicitly addresses the psychological nature of the coaching relationship and as well as the application of psychological theory and methods within the coaching process.

Coaching supervision is concerned with supporting the SGCP member in their coaching role; examining the coaching process which includes the relationship between coach and client. The purpose of supervision is to enhance the effectiveness of the service; ensuring that ethical standards are maintained throughout the coaching process. It also provides a formal structure for a coaching practitioner to reflect on the ways in which they are effectively meeting the needs of clients and how they need to continually develop their practice.

3.3. Main aims of supervision

The main aims of supervision could be summarised as allowing the coaching psychologist or psychological coach to:

- Assess the extent to which they are meeting the needs of their clients;
- Reflect on their practice;
- Question their approach and practice in a supportive and challenging environment;
- Monitor their relationship with the client and the organisation;
- Develop new approaches and learning in order to be more effective with clients;
- Provide a structure for coaches to develop their practice and report on their progress; and,
- Ensure high standards of ethics in coaching process.

4. The management of supervision work

4.1. Formats of supervision

1-2-1 supervision supervisor and supervisee

1-2-1 supervision involves one member of SGCP being supervised by one coaching supervisor. For example, a coach with little experience may seek a supervisor who can provide a competent professional support and assist them in finding their own style of practice. Experienced psychologists who work as coaches may also like to choose this format of supervision if they are interested in a process that is entirely focussed on their own practice and have identified a supervisor, collaboration with whom they believe can significantly enrich it.

Co-supervision (peers)

Co-supervision involves two peers providing supervision to each other where one coaching psychologist takes the role of a supervisor for their peer and then they change roles. It is expected that the peers in this case are already experienced coaching psychologists and both are competent as coaching supervisors. Typically the time would be divided equally between them.

Group supervision with an identified supervisor

A group of practitioners in coaching meet with an identified appointed supervisor for the purposes of supervision. In some groups the supervisor can lead the group in a fairly structured way, setting the time allotted to each practitioner and working with each one in a fairly focussed way. It is possible also for the group members to allocate supervision time equally and to use the supervisor as a technical resource. In group supervision there needs to be set criteria for membership and the way the group works together with the supervisor. This is best defined in a written document so that the membership is aware of the way group supervision in the particular group works.

Peer group supervision

Peer supervision in a group setting takes place where a group of experienced coaching psychologists meet and provide supervision to each other on a reciprocal basis. As with group supervision, there needs to be set criteria for membership and the way in which the peer group supervision is going to be managed. The criteria for membership need to be discussed and agreed before the group sets itself up and be reviewed periodically.

4.2. Which format of supervision is appropriate for whom?

In considering what supervision will work best for a SGCP member, and ultimately for the clients of the coaching practitioner, the following issues should be considered:

- What format of supervision most fits his/her development needs as a coaching practitioner in order to be effective with clients?
- Depending on the member's experience, what level, frequency and type of supervision are they looking for?
- Depending on the amount of coaching they are carrying out, how frequent does the supervision need to be?

Note: It is suggested that peer and group supervision formats without an assigned experienced supervisor are suitable only for those members of SGCP who are not only possess the full range of psychological knowledge and practical skills relevant to the domain of coaching psychology but also have necessary competences (see 5.1.) and are in a position to act as coaching supervisors.

4.3. Coaching supervision climate and management

Coaching supervision is most effective where the climate:

- Is appropriately supportive;
- Is constructively challenging;
- Provides a safe environment for open disclosure and discussion;
- Is underpinned by the relevant psychological theories; and,
- Provides a structure of agreed confidentiality and ethics.

4.4. **Coaching agreement**

Supervision should be arranged with a formal agreement that is discussed and established from the outset. This agreement should include, and should set out the:

- Frequency of the supervision;
- Nature of the supervision, location, length of sessions;
- Number of people, if this is a format of group supervision;
- The criteria for membership of the group;
- Fees charged (if applicable)
- Duration of agreement; and,
- Review points.

4.5. **Frequency of supervision**

The frequency of supervision for a member of SGCP will depend mainly on two main factors: their experience in coaching and the amount of coaching work that he/she is undertaking. Coaching psychologists who have little experience will need more supervision in the early stages of their development and practice, and possibly more one-to-one supervision to focus specifically on their practice. In terms of the second factor, a coaching practitioner who is working extensively, and maybe exclusively, with coaching clients will require more frequent supervision than one who coaches clients from time to time and coaching forms a small part of the work they undertake.

Note: The baseline for the amount of coaching supervision is suggested as one hour per month. It is considered to be an absolute minimum relevant only to the experienced, well-trained coaching psychologists engaged on a relatively light coaching load. Participation in group supervision should be counted proportionally to the frequency of sessions and a number of participants. With more than seven participants the attention to the individual cases and so effectiveness of individual supervision would be significantly diminished.

5. The issues of responsibility

5.1. Roles and responsibilities

With the respect to monitoring, maintaining and enhancing their effectiveness in addressing the needs of their clients: (a) coaching psychologists are responsible for their work with a client and for presenting and exploring as fully as possible this work with the coaching supervisor; (b) supervisors are responsible for helping coaches to reflect upon that work.

- Supervisors and coaches must also take into consideration in any decision process their responsibility to other parties involved, for example, sponsors, managers, colleagues, and trainers.
- Supervisors should inform coaches about their own training, qualifications, philosophy and theoretical approach and the methods they use.
- Supervisors and coaches are responsible for effective contracting of their relationship which includes consideration of their respective legal liabilities to each other, the employing organisations and client.
- Supervisors and coaches are responsible for setting sufficiently clear boundaries between supervision, consultancy, training and coaching and being particularly sensitive and careful in the area of dual relationships.
- Supervisors and coaches must distinguish between supervising and coaching the coach. When the supervisor provides coaching to the coaching psychologist a clear contract must be negotiated to ensure that it is not done at the expense of supervision time.
- Supervisors are responsible for observation of the principles embodied in relevant codes of ethics and these regulations.
- Supervisors and coaches are responsible for regularly reviewing the effectiveness of the supervision arrangement and considering changing it when appropriate.

6. Competencies of the supervisor

- 6.1 Coaching supervisors must ensure that they are sufficiently experienced, competent and appropriately trained to provide supervision.
- 6.2 Coaching supervisors need to be skilled in the following areas considered as particularly important and specific for effective supervision of coaching:
 - Contracting;
 - Assessment and evaluation of coaching process;
 - Developing individuals in different contexts (e.g. organisational, community, individual, etc.);
 - Nature, models and dynamics of one-to-one relationships;
 - Models and theories of supervision;
 - Issues of power in coaching and supervision;
 - Supervision of complex coaching situations;
 - Using resources of the group; working with group dynamics; prioritising needs of individuals and a group with supervision tasks (for group supervision models).
- 6.3 Supervisors must monitor their own supervision and be prepared to account for this when necessary.
- 6.4 Supervisors must monitor the limits of their competence and be open with the coach about the issues that they don't feel confident to deal with.

7. The issue of confidentiality

- 7.1. Rigorous respect for the confidentiality of their clients is fundamental to the ethical practice of coaching psychologists. This applies to coaching supervision as well as to coaching itself:
 - Coaching psychologists will not reveal the identity of their clients when discussing their practice in supervision, unless it is necessary for the process of supervision;
 - If a coaching psychologist does identify a client in supervision, the client should be informed of the supervision;
 - Coaching supervisors, co-supervisors and participants in group supervision sessions will respect the confidentiality of any client information that is revealed in supervision.

- 7.2. There may be exceptional cases where it is appropriate for a coaching supervisor to break confidentiality. For example:
 - Where he/she is obliged to do so for legal reasons;
 - When it is clearly in the public interest to do so.

- 7.3. In cases where a supervisor wishes to use information about a supervisee's work for the purpose of research he/she should seek coach's permission and take measures to preserve his/her anonymity.

The Guidelines for Supervision for Coaching Psychology have been approved by the British Psychological Society, Special Group in Coaching Psychology Committee (SGCP). The document had been developed on behalf of the SGCP by members of the Professional Practice and Research (PPR) Sub-committee and the Supervision Guidelines Working Party. This consisted of Pauline Willis and Clare Huffington (PPR Co-Chairs), Tatiana Bachkirova, Kris Bush and Emma Donaldson-Feilder. Doug Young also from the SGCP committee helped to format the document in its final stage prior to publication.

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