

IS SUPERVISION A SAFE SPACE TO EXPLORE INTEGRATIVE PRACTICE?

Michelle Lucas and Liz Ford reflect on their own supervision journeys and suggest we use supervision as a place to experiment with different ways of working.

In their book *Further Techniques for Coaching and Mentoring*, David Megginson and David Clutterbuck describe four stages of coach development, moving from being focused on models, through being process-driven and then philosophy-based, to developing an eclectic perspective, where the practitioner is able to draw on a wide range of techniques and approaches to suit the client context. Here we discuss how reflection and supervision have helped us develop and integrate different ways of working into our practices.

Michelle: I've noticed that how I use supervision has changed over time. To begin with I had no idea how to get the best from my supervisor, almost always bringing her my 'problems'. An indication, perhaps, of the anxiety many of us face as we begin our coaching journey. This prompted a change of emphasis, specifically contracting to look at what I did well and understanding the origin of those skills.

Four years later, with a growing interest in transactional analysis (TA), I sought out a TA supervisor who could both help me reflect on my work and help me integrate new models and concepts. Actually, that wasn't such a bright idea, as trying to understand material that was beyond my awareness and using concepts that I had yet to understand was not a good combination!

My independent reflections were becoming more thematic and I was beginning to understand that I needed to work on myself in order to be in the best shape possible for my clients.

With a growing portfolio of group supervisees, I felt the need to engage in group supervision for myself. I found a group with systemic emphasis – another area of interest. Additionally, I continued individual peer supervision in a chain arrangement, which brought a less UK-centric perspective to my reflective practice.

My relationship with my individual supervisor spanned about five years. In considering where to go next, I wanted a supervisor who thought differently and who could stretch me to think differently too. The outcome was to reach out to an existential practitioner whose work I admired. We are now enjoying exploring deep and shallow, dark and light conversations prompted by life issues and by my responses to client work.

Perhaps my first experience of supervision makes me more vigilant to how it serves me now. I noticed quickly when my sense of equity in my group supervision was being jostled and I made more deliberate choices about what I chose to bring (and not bring) to supervision.

This prompted me to establish formal peer group supervision with other supervisors, and my sense of equity has since returned.

What's been interesting in my own journey is an increasing desire to be the architect of the supervision I receive. As my practice has matured and become more complex, the more I have sought out new and different perspectives to build breadth into my reflective practice and in turn to bring breadth to my client work.

Liz: Since my initial gestalt-based training, I have developed my style and approach through exploring subjects of special interest. This started with a supervision session where the coach and I worked with metaphor. This was so impactful that I went away to learn more about working with metaphor, a journey that took me into clean language, emergent knowledge, creative techniques and working outdoors.

More recently, I have been part of a reflective practice group that offers many different ways of thinking about my work. I am very visual and love working with pictures, so I've enjoyed consciously choosing methods that I might not be naturally drawn to or have not worked with before. One such method is using poetry. I've found that focusing on the words and the emotions they stir in me has brought a different type of insight to my work.

Choosing different ways of working isn't always easy and requires me to be willing to sit with a degree of discomfort for a while, giving time for thoughts to settle, resistance to dissipate and insight to emerge. Learning to be comfortable with not knowing and understanding where my resistance comes from during different types of activities has helped me develop a higher level of patience and acceptance in my client work. In turn it has helped expand my capability and capacity to understand and work with resistance in others.

Engaging with different approaches and practices reminds me how my supervisees might feel when trying something new, and also of what their coachees might experience. It reconnects me with a sense of vulnerability, which is so important in helping me meet my clients where they are and be alongside them. It has also helped me discern which models and methods to integrate into my practice to offer flexibility to my clients, while also staying true to my authentic self.

We have both found that supervision is a great way to develop coaching capability, offering opportunities for new ways of working, reflecting and being. What might you want to experiment with and how could you do this within your own supervisory relationships?