

Last year, coaching supervisors **Liz Ford** and **Benita Treanor** were approached by Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust to design and deliver a coaching supervision pilot study. Here they describe their involvement in the study, their approach, key findings and potential uses of this model for the future



Supervision: developing team coaches

As experienced coaches and coach supervisors, we are both passionate about the multifaceted benefits of supervision and we were thrilled to be invited to be involved in an exciting coaching supervision venture being explored by Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust.

Individual and team coaching was introduced to the Trust by way of an in-house team coach training course. Staff from all areas of the Trust were invited to apply for a place on this course, and now successful graduates from a wide variety of backgrounds including clinical psychology, radiography, organisational development, social work and nursing deliver team coaching throughout the Trust in support of organisational development (OD) initiatives.

The Trust wanted to ensure the advancement of high quality and effective coaching within the Trust and therefore approached us to design and deliver a supervision pilot study.

The aim of this study was to introduce consultative supervision for a group of six coaches in order to:

- Support the individual coaches and further their continuing development in dealing with stressors, pressure and challenges
- Ensure coaching standards were maintained and ethical practice adhered to across the Trust
- Gather important learning which could further drive organisational development
- Assist the OD service in developing a supervision model that could be used and sustained within the Trust

Why supervision was considered important

It has been noted that there are increased expectations both by and on professionals that they will be accountable for their work, striving for the highest quality of service, and attentive to their relations with clients and colleagues. This supervision study represented a significant advance in ensuring the organisation supports coaches in 'good practice' and builds sustainability and resilience within a multidisciplinary service, alongside working with ethical guidelines as stated by the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC), to which the Trust's coaching service subscribes.

Supervision is now recognised as an important part of the continuing development of coaches and is recommended by all professional coaching bodies, including the European Mentoring and Coaching Council.

Our supervision approach

We are committed to 'passionate supervision' seeing it as a way of co-creating new ways of thinking and being 'in-action' to what's emerging in the now¹. We believe that supervision can offer coaches permission to bring their 'whole person' to their learning, be present to what they need to attend to and be held in a place of respect and regard².

We define coaching supervision as a relationship where coaches discuss and reflect on their coaching practice with someone who is equally or more experienced in their line of work. It provides a safe, confidential space in which the process, practice and challenges of coaching can be explored.

The main aim of supervision is to enable the coach to gain ethical competency, confidence and creativity so that they can provide their clients with the best service possible. The key elements of coaching supervision as listed by Elaine Patterson³ are:

The four key elements of coaching supervision

- Assuring professionalism, integrity and ethical practice
- The personal and professional learning and development of the supervisee
- Rest, refuelling and restoration
- Celebrating and honouring the work

Michael Carroll distinguishes between functional supervision and supervision as a way of being, suggesting that 'viewing supervision as a reflective process that allows participants to think deeply and vulnerably about life and values, work and career, relationship and connections, might make an immense difference not only to how we work, but also to how we live'⁴.

Throughout the pilot we continued to be inspired by the courage and determination of the supervisees in moving beyond their fears, stepping out and working authentically within the wider organisation.

Method of delivery

Introductory workshop

To begin the supervision pilot study we delivered a one-day introductory workshop for the six chosen team coaches. The main aim of this was to increase the group's understanding of coaching supervision and to introduce the concept of supervision being empowering, energising and generative⁵, rather than their previous

experience of a traditional medical approach with the emphasis on checking. We worked to develop clear contracting regarding confidentiality, group agreements⁶, working relationships, learning styles, their dual roles, group dynamics⁷ and mapping out the influence of the wider systemic context⁸ within which they worked.

We introduced the principles of coaching supervision and some key models of supervision which might be used in the following group sessions. These included the Seven Eyed Model⁹, After Action Review¹⁰ and Kolb's Experiential Learning Model¹¹. This theoretical input was interspersed with practical exercises, supervision demonstrations and group discussion to make the day highly interactive. Throughout the workshop we modelled reflective practice and enabled the group to explore their perceptions and experiences of supervision, thus broadening minds.

Group supervision sessions

Following the introductory workshop a series of three half-day group supervision sessions were delivered over the next four months. Group, rather than one-to-one, supervision was chosen because of its alignment with the way the team coaches worked within the Trust and because of the added benefits of being able to learn from each other. These sessions gave the team coaches the opportunity to explore and learn from issues arising from their coaching, using a variety of tools and techniques.

Although each session was experiential and the supervisors worked with the issues that emerged, the following framework was used to structure the meetings.

Supervision session framework

- Check-in
- Reflections on the previous session
- Agenda-building and guidance on presenting
- Presentation of issues
- Review of learning

Each session was facilitated by two supervisors. This enabled the coaches to experience a variety of supervision approaches and styles. It also made it easier for the key themes to be tracked and coaches' reflections to be captured.

We created a balance between adopting a 'no risk' approach and helping coaches to vary their practice according to their intuition/gut

feel, different circumstances, styles and approaches. There was an increased emphasis on 'self accountability and ownership', especially when coaches were exercising their own judgment in order to adapt their practice to the needs of a particular context.

Collating evidence of coaching activity, themes, successes and concerns

During the study the coaches were asked to provide a record of their coaching appointments within the Trust and also to reflect on the successes they attained and the challenges they experienced. These, along with key themes arising from the supervision sessions, were fed back anonymously to the OD service to provide an ever developing picture of coaching activity within the Trust and of issues that they might need to address in future development initiatives. It also enabled the coaches to have a clearer picture of the systems they were part of and how they interacted with them¹².

Achievements

Positive reactions

'The group worked well together and the supervision environment felt safe'

The reaction from the team coaches involved was overwhelmingly positive. They felt that a safe and non-judgmental environment had been created which enabled trust and the open sharing of case material. It was felt that the different but complementary styles of the supervisors and their approach, which modelled honesty, openness, sharing and a willingness to be vulnerable, led to a depth and richness of learning for all.

'It has motivated and reassured me. I feel much more confident - not perfect but doing OK'

Although the sessions were structured around a framework, it was felt that there was enough flexibility to be able to work on emerging themes and to meet changing group needs. There was good balance between consistency and the introduction of new ideas and concepts.

Participants reported feeling motivated and energised following the sessions.

The reaction of the OD service was that the supervision pilot study provided a framework which:

- Provided assurance that they were meeting the needs of their coaches
- Enabled them to develop a more sustainable service as a result of enhanced resilience
- Provided a source of inquiry for coaches to

enable them to differentiate supervision from coaching and to use the process to consolidate their identity and practise as a coach

- Assisted them to understand what approach would work in the Trust for the future support of coaches and other helping roles.

Enhanced learning

'The supervision pilot was a very rich learning experience. It gave us the opportunity to learn from each other and to explore issues in more depth than in the coaching training'

The coaches reported that a rich, creative learning environment developed and deepened as the sessions progressed. There was full engagement from all participants and this, together with the developed trust within the group, enabled sharing, experimentation and risk-taking, which resulted in significant individual and collaborative learning.

The following gives examples of the learning that the coaches reported they developed as a result of the supervision pilot study.

Key learning developed

A greater understanding of...

- Coaching and coaching supervision
- The relationship between coaching and organisational objectives
- Where to get support and how to support each other
- Different levels of coaching, coaching approaches and applications of coaching
- The ethical dilemmas surrounding the role of internal coach
- The complexity of working in an organisational context
- The importance of holding clients accountable and how to do it
- The importance of contracting: what, when and who with
- The value of diversity, amongst coaches as well as clients
- How they impact on others and how others impact on them and how to manage this
- How reflection allows the strength of one's vulnerability to be a valuable learning enabler
- The power of group processes, particularly:
 - Use of feedback
 - Use of questions
 - Listening without judging

- Learning from others' experiences, puzzles and issues.

Improved performance

As the supervision pilot study progressed, all the coaches reported an increase in their confidence as coaches and an ability to identify more fully with this role.

'I feel more confident, solid in my ability and energised'

They also reported developing the ability to affect the sustainability of performance: theirs and that of others. They mentioned being able to use techniques to reduce barriers which negatively impact on performance as well as using interventions to increase performance, both in terms of quantity and quality.

Another important aspect of performance sustainability is wellbeing: emotional, physical and mental. Supervision was thought to positively impact on this for the coaches and coaching to positively impact on it for coachees.

The coaches felt that these developments in confidence, resilience and sustainability worked together to have a positive impact on their performance in a number of ways.

Benefits for coaching performance

An enhanced ability to...

- Recognise, manage and deal with uncertainty
- Use different interventions
- Practise at a deeper/higher level, leading to sustainable changes for clients
- Challenge assumptions, behaviours, beliefs, values and actions
- Refocus anxiety/fears for effective outcomes
- Deal with teams and complex issues
- Reflect on and monitor their own performance
- Use 'self' as a resource
- Adapt and align their approach to client needs

An increased energy and enthusiasm for coaching leading to...

- A willingness to be more innovative on formal projects for teams and individuals
- Identifying everyday opportunities to use coaching eg with direct reports and colleagues

Greater organisational insight

Due to the way we sensitively fed back information and the relationships we developed with key sponsors, the Trust gained insight

into the way supervision could be used with coaches and other professions to develop and support practitioners whilst also raising organisational awareness. In addition to this, we list below the other benefits which the group thought the Trust gained from the project.

Organisational benefits of supervision

- Increased organisational learning
- Early identification of possible areas for intervention
- Greater alignment of individual, team and Trust aims, goals and objectives
- An opportunity to uncover organisational blind spots
- Assurance that practitioners offer a high quality, ethical and consistent approach
- Coaches and other practitioners who are able to perform at a higher standard, thus improving the performance, motivation and engagement of others within the Trust

Next steps

The participants of this pilot study were unanimous in their support for coaching supervision provision to be continued. Their reasons were:

- To make best use of the Trust's investment in coach training
- To maintain and develop coaching practice
- To ensure the best care of clients
- To support and sustain practitioners
- To provide a confidential forum to discuss complex issues
- To promote and ensure ethical best practice
- To achieve a consistency of approach
- To maintain motivation and momentum following coach training
- To ensure the coaches deliver what the organisation needs

'If coaching is to be provided as a quality service, something that is meaningful, then the coaches must be properly supported for their own good, the good of the client and the good of the Trust'

As a result of the supervision pilot study, a realistic and practical model of supervision was developed which involves a combination of group supervision sessions, facilitated by

external qualified and experienced supervisors, and the introduction of buddy supervision pairs (Figure 1).

As the number of team coaches in the Trust increases, it follows that a greater demand on supervision provision will be made. To ensure the supervision model is sustainable, we suggested that coaches who have been in regular supervision for about 12 months, and have been actively coaching within the Trust, could be considered for training as internal coach supervisors and could take over the running of the group supervision sessions.

We also suggested that, moving forward, this supervision model could be used for other roles within the Trust which might benefit from a safe, confidential place in which to explore complex issues and learn from their practical experiences. Such roles might include mediators, mentors, and palliative care staff.

'This pilot has had a huge personal impact on me. I have loved every minute of the sessions and learned so much from the process, the supervisors and my colleagues. It has fired up my enthusiasm for coaching and made me feel part of a coaching community'

As this Trust considers its next steps, we have gone on to use this model successfully with palliative care staff within two different organisations and are seeing the ongoing benefits of this reflective practice approach on both individuals and their organisations. ■

Liz Ford is an AC accredited coach, coach supervisor, Action Learning Set facilitator and trainer. She works with senior managers and leaders in the private, public and third sectors as well as independent and organisational coaches. Her main aim is to foster potential, nurture belief and inspire excellence.

liz@ford-consulting.co.uk
www.ford-consulting.co.uk

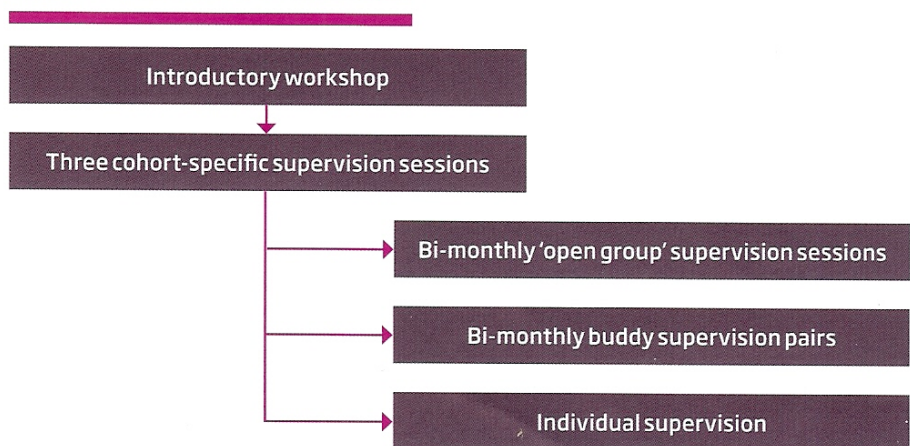
Benita Treanor is a BACP senior accredited psychotherapist and supervisor, organisational developer, AC accredited coach and coach supervisor. She is passionate about supervision as a process for developing coaches' capacity to access a deeper level of learning and connection between the coach, client and wider context/ community of which we belong.

benitatreanor@btinternet.com

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Figure 1 – Proposed Supervision Model



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