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Author(s): Passmore, Jonathan

Title: Supervision and continuous professional development in coaching

Year of publication: 2011

Citation: Passmore, J. (2011). Supervision and Continuous professional development in coaching. In J. Passmore (ed.). *Supervision in Coaching: Understanding coaching supervision, ethics, CPD and the law*. London: Kogan Page.

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Supervision and Continuous professional development in coaching

Jonathan Passmore

Introduction

Continuous professional development is becoming an essential part of practice for professionals. While coaching has yet to fully emerge as a profession, its progress over the past decade suggests that coaching has many of the features of a profession on par with counselling. However before becoming a profession a number of challenges need to be overcome.

The first of these challenges is the need for a distinct and unique body of knowledge. We can track the lineage of coaching back to the 1930's (see for example Gorby, 1937; Bigelow, 1938). In the early period of coaching's history, before 1990, research was sporadic (see, for example, Grant et al 2010). From 1995 coaching practitioners and researchers have been working hard to build a research base. In the early period, 1995-2001, this focused on case studies, stories and descriptions of what coaches found worked for them (Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001). More recently we have seen a growth in quantitative studies and use of more formalised qualitative research methods. We have also seen a development in research methods with papers using recognised methods such as Grounded Theory and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and well described method statements, which are characteristics of a developing research maturity (Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011).

A second challenge is the development of recognised and formalised training. The status of a profession is often measured by the level of training demanded. High status professions often require practitioners-in-training to study for five to seven years and through this process to obtain post-graduate qualifications. Examples include doctors and accountants, where entry is through rigorous university and professional examination. In contrast health care workers may require more limited training which is in turn reflected in the status and financial rewards obtained by its members.

A third challenge is an agreed code of conduct, such as an ethical code. Such codes set out publicly the standards required of members of the profession. These codes set expectations for the public and also offer members of the public protection through a formal complaints mechanism. Such complaints mechanisms can ultimately lead to members of the profession being barred from practice.

A fourth challenge is a perception among members that they belong to a single group with a shared definition of their practice. A dentist knows, as does the public, what this role is and what the limits of practice are. This is not to say there are not grey areas or boundaries, but dentists have an identity which binds them together.

A fifth challenge is the role of continuous professional development (CPD). In short this involves undertaking on-going development after completion of the formal training. CPD has become accepted in coaching as an important aspect for coaching practitioners. There has been a

growth in coaching supervision, coach training and publications. This book focuses on the emerging area of coaching CPD, with a specific focus on supervision as an approach which has become widely accepted as a useful model for coaching practitioners for reviewing and enhancing their practice.

This chapter will review the six sections of the book and offer a short insight into the developing nature of coaching CPD and supervision.

Supervision in coaching

The first section of the book focuses on alternative models for supervision practice - little has been written on this topic to date. One exception is Peter Hawkins' (2007) Seven Eyed model which is summarised in *Excellence in Coaching*. The majority of models including Hawkins are drawn from social work, nursing or counselling practice. While there are clear parallels with these professions, there are also important differences which should be reflected by coaching developing models of practice to suit the demands of coaching.

The seven chapters in this section offer varying perspectives on supervision approaches from a reflective practitioner model through action learning to more traditional psychological approaches used in coaching such as gestalt and humanistic. The chapter has also tried to stimulate debate by including innovative practice through the inclusion of chapters on the imagined field and the role of presence in supervision.

As an emerging profession coaching needs to develop its own body of knowledge suited to the unique demands and clients in the field. Such knowledge can of course be inspired by and grounded in other domains of practice, but for coaching to describe itself as a profession this knowledge must be distinct. A failure to create unique knowledge and models will lead to coaching being considered a sub-set of counselling or mentoring.

As yet we do not have universally agreed models of practice. Even the relevance of supervision has been in question. Given the diverse nature of coaching, a diversity in continuous professional development can be considered to be a strength. Such diversity recognises that coaching works in many different spheres from individuals in work to those outside, , from personal coaching to health and workplace coaching, in both one to one and group settings.

Coaching ethics & the law

In this section we have three chapters which focus on the development of ethical standards and the law. In the first of these, Claire Townsend reviews the development of ethical codes of practice in coaching. The development of these codes is a relatively new phenomenon. Most of the coaching professional bodies codes only date back to around the millennium and some are

newer than this. Further, given the unregulated nature of coaching, few of the codes have been tested through public complaints and the need to remove members. The chapter compares and contrasts the codes adopted by the main coaching professional bodies to guide coaches in understanding the subtle but important differences which regulate their practice.

In the second of the three chapters we present a model for ethical decision making. Given the complex, changing and contradictory nature of codes of ethical practice, plus the low level of awareness among coaching practitioners of the contents of such codes, we have tried to develop a model to frame ethical decision making. The ACTION model, like GROW, aims to be easily remembered and is grounded in research with coaching practitioners. In this way coaching is gradually building its own unique field of knowledge.

The third chapter focuses on the legal issues which can impact on coaches from data protection to confidentiality. These are rarely discussed in the literature but are the foundation of ethical practice, as coaches need to ensure they comply with the legal requirements of the Government or the State in which they operate.

Taken together the three chapters aim to offer an overview of the issues facing coaches and a structure for continuous professional development.

Continuous professional development

In the fourth section we draw on the thinking of two groups of writers one from the UK, the other from the US on their ideas about continuous professional development. In the first chapter David Hain and his colleagues argue the case for CPD's role in coaching. The note that while CPD is sometimes regarded as an additional pressure in a time constrained world, it has a vital role to play in helping coaches keep up to date. We share these views.

Continuous professional development is a vital part of coaching and a critical aspect if coaching is to establish itself as a separate profession. Some might hold the view that it is a foregone conclusion that coaching will become a profession. In my view the jury is still out. Coaches and coaching bodies, such as the Association for Coaching and the International Coaching Federation, have some choices to make. One route leads to a continuation of growth and aspects of professionalization, but not professional status. A second route leads to coaching becoming a recognised and respected profession.

In the 1950s academics in the US debated the role of management and its growing professionalization. Over the past sixty years management has become acknowledged as an important skill for people leading other people. Management has developed a body of unique knowledge, training courses exist at post-graduate level such as the MBA's, but it has failed to become a profession. We might consider why this is the case.

One reason why management has failed to establish itself as a distinctive profession is that management is diverse. The term can be applied in many situations from the person managing an assistant to the role of the chief executive of Microsoft. Both may be managers but their roles are different. Management lacks a single bond which ties together these diverse groups.

A second hurdle which 'management' has not overcome is an agreement on training to enter the profession. In accounting or medicine, an agreed qualification offers entry to the profession. Without the qualification and registration, a recognised title cannot be used. Such titles often come about because of trade bodies who argue the case to protect a title which is subsequently protected by law.

A third challenge which has blocked the development of management towards professional status is the lack of a body to represent its interests and with a single voice. While diversity can be a positive step, for example accounting as a number of different bodies, it can lead to infighting and introspection as members look to differentiate themselves from one another, as opposed to seeking uniting common themes in their practices and definitions.

Coaching suffers from similar challenges. So far efforts to bring together and gain agreement between professional bodies have failed. Even in relatively small and more regulated states such as Norway the experiences of collaboration have proved negative (Svaleng & Grant, 2010). The relatively large number of professional bodies can be seen as a weakness if the aim is to establish a single profession, particularly if members of those bodies see themselves as unique or different from members of other bodies.

Further coaching has yet to resolve fully issues of training and access to the profession. Almost all of the professional bodies have established accreditation arrangements. These largely remain practitioner focused, reflecting the dominance of practitioners and independent coaches on professional committees within coaching.. To make further progress coaching needs to increase the level of qualifications it is seeking from under- graduate to post-graduate and move from practice based qualifications, such as hours of practice, to knowledge and skills based. One challenge to this argument is that coaching is practice and not a theory based 'profession'. However, while a surgeon certainly needs to undertake training on how to perform a task, the profession also demands they also have a solid body of knowledge about the human body and use evidence to guide their practice which is shared with each other firstly through formal training and later through journals, videos and books.

So where does this leave coaching in its aspirations towards professional status? It leaves it with a significant amount of work to do, some difficult challenges to overcome, but with a growing base of practitioners with energy and desire for learning and development.

Personal reflection

The final section of the book offers a series of chapters to aid continuous professional development through personal reflection. In the first of these David Lane and Max Bloomberg review the nature of coaching research; methods and approaches. In their chapter the two writers note the value of coaching research and highlight the particular role played by practitioner based research. In this way research becomes liberated from the academic, and can be embraced by all. In a domain such as coaching, practitioners need to move from pure practice to reflective practitioners, skilled and able to share their growing knowledge and experiences with others. In the same way academics need to remain grounded in practice;

continuing to undertake coaching and client work, as a way of remaining connected to the essence of coaching.

In the second Declan Woods reviews the role that reflective logs and diaries for learning can play in CPD. I have previously argued that for some supervision is a useful and essential process, as they gain value from openly discussing with others their work. However for others, reflective logs can play a useful role, either alongside supervision or for some coaches, in place of supervision. The log offers a formal time and space to reflect on what has happened, to check information and form a view about future action.

Thirdly, Peter Hawkins discusses how coaches can enhance their own ethical maturity. Hawkins' notes that a coach's frame of reference both enables and limits their ability to develop those they coach. To become more effective, the coach needs to develop themselves, as well as to develop their coaching practice. This means the coach needs to work simultaneously on three aspects of their personal development; their relational engagement capacity, their ethical capacity and their cognitive capacity to embrace and work with complexity.

The final section of the book offers a series of case studies. Case studies can offer highly useful material for both classroom based discussions and personal reflection. They are widely used in counselling and in education. Rather than gather together a host of these drawing solely from my own experience, we have asked different writers and practitioners from the UK, US and Europe to share a case study and comment on the case.

Conclusions

The nature of coaching practice is changing. Coaches need mechanisms to keep up and to continually reflect and update their knowledge and skills, this series of chapters offers a review of the diverse ways coaches are achieving this goal.

Alongside this coaching is moving forward with the aspirations of becoming a profession. This chapter raises a number of the challenges which stand in its way and how such challenges have foiled others who came before.

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