

# The value of coaching supervision as a development process: Contribution to continued professional and personal wellbeing for executive coaches

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## Abstract

Coaching supervision is a prerequisite for accreditation of executive coaches by coaching associations in the UK. However, there is still considerable skepticism, caution, even ignorance about the nature and purpose of coaching supervision and many coaches do not engage. The aim of this action research was to explore what happens in the coaching supervision process with a view to establishing its relevance and value. The project involved two groups of participants (a) six executive coaches and (b) five coaching supervisors who engaged in their own regular supervision sessions. The findings affirmed that one-to-one reflection on practice with a qualified supervisor is a vital factor. However, there is surprising new evidence about what else is useful that includes a range of support for coaches to contribute to their continued professional and personal wellbeing.

**Key words:** coaching supervision, supervision relationship, adult learning, reflective practice, generative dialogue

## Introduction

With the increasing complexity in today's global economy, with change being a constant phenomenon and the ambiguities and pressures associated with this, executives in organisations need to demonstrate their flexibility and resilience to contend with such difficulties. They need to develop their emotional awareness and capacity to learn and think differently to ensure they keep pace (Kegan & Lahey, 2009). Thus, during the past 15 years there has been a significant shift in the way that organisations support the development of their people, particularly those at executive level. One-to-one "executive coaching" has emerged as a significant option to facilitate sustainable improvement in executives' performance and their transformational growth to meet these demands (Mezirow, 1991; Cox, 2006; Hawkins & Smith, 2006, Bachkirova, Jackson & Clutterbuck, 2010).

Not only is the number of coaches growing (Coaching at Work, 2009) but also a number of member associations have developed globally and in the UK there are at least six such Associations: Association for Coaching (AC), Association of Professional Executive Coaches & Supervisors (APECS), European Mentoring & Coaching Council (EMCC), International Coaching Federation (ICF), Special Group in Coaching Psychology (SGCP) and Worldwide Association of Business Coaches (WABC) with some estimated 5000 members amongst them (Coaching at Work, 2010). These member organisations go some way to meeting the demand from both clients (sponsors and coachees) and practitioners to "professionalize" this occupation (Lane, 2010, 2011; Gray, 2011). They each provide a definition of standards, underpinned by Ethical Codes (e.g. EMCC, 2010a, AC, 2013) and offer accreditation processes to provide independent benchmarks against which

practitioners may be assessed so that clients know what to expect from coaches with different levels of training and accreditation (e.g. APECS 2007; EMCC 2009; AC 2013).

### ***The demands of executive coaching***

Coaching embraces a diverse range of approaches and includes: behavioural, business, performance, developmental, leadership, executive, transactional and transformational (Bachkirova et al, 2010). While there are many definitions of coaching (e.g. Bachkirova, Cox & Clutterbuck) the overall purpose of the coaching is to facilitate change in the individual coachee at one or several levels including behaviour, capability, beliefs, identity or purpose (Dilts, 1996).

Executive coaching in particular, demands a wide range of skills, knowledge and purpose, particularly given the organisational context in which it occurs (Hawkins & Smith, 2006; Brunning, 2006, Pampallis Paisley, 2006). To be an effective coach requires the application of knowledge and skills from at least some or all of the following areas: adult development theory (Kegan, 1982; Wilber, 2000), adult learning theory (Kolb, 1984, Mezirow, 1991) reflective practice (Argyris & Schon, 1974, Schon, 1983,), emotional intelligence (Goleman et al, 2001), organisational change and systems theory (Von Bertalanffy, 1968, Hawkins & Smith, 2006, Brunning, 2006). Furthermore, each coach requires excellent communication and relational skills coupled with thorough self-awareness (Senge et al, 2005, Carroll & Gilbert, 2005 & 2011; Cox, 2006, Stober & Grant, 2006, de Haan, 2008,).

As the coach draws on this significant range of knowledge and skills there is often pressure on the coach to be held accountable for the results either by the coachee and/or the sponsor who is paying for the coaching (de Haan 2008). This then raises the question of what support coaches need and how best they might find this.

### ***The role of coaching supervision***

Given this context, coaching supervision has been identified as one source of support in the field of executive coaching (e.g. APECS, 2007; EMCC, 2010b; AC 2013). At the same time, it has been encouraged and more recently mandated for coaches seeking accreditation by virtually all the professional coaching associations in the UK (APECS, AC, EMCC, SGCP & WABC). Its purpose is to provide coaches with an opportunity for reflection on their practice at the same time ensuring standards are maintained, thus offering sponsors and coachees some assurance of quality control (e.g. APECS, 2007).

While this stance supports the intention to professionalise the practice of coaching, based on a study conducted on behalf of Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) (Hawkins & Schwenk, 2006) less than 50% of coaches engaged in supervision. Reasons offered then and continue to be cited include: fear of exposure, fear of being shamed, delusions of grandeur, lack of curiosity, inability to find a supervisor, resistance to pay for the service (Hodge, 2014).

From the mid 2000s some dedicated literature in coaching supervision started to emerge (Hawkins & Smith, 2006, 2013; Hay, 2007; Carroll, 2009, 2010; Bachkirova et al, 2011; de Haan, 2012; Brockbank & McGill, 2012; Murdoch, 2013). Many of these authors have their roots in the helping professions such as social work and psychotherapy where there is an established body of research and literature. At the same time, it has been this heritage of “the borrowed clothes” from psychotherapy (Schwenk, 2007) that some coaches have cited as a reason for supervision not being relevant to coaching. While definitions vary, for the purpose of this paper I offer the following definition of coaching supervision:

*Coaching supervision is a co-created learning relationship that supports the supervisee in their development, both personally and professionally, and seeks to support them in providing best practice to their client. Through the process of reflecting on their own work in supervision, the supervisee can review and develop their practice and re-energise themselves. It offers a forum to attend to their emotional and professional wellbeing and growth. Through the relationship and dialogue in this alliance, coaches can receive feedback, broaden their perspectives, generate new ideas and maintain standards of effective practice (Hodge 2013: xv).*

This research inquiry sought to explore the relevance and value of coaching supervision for executive coaches.

## **Existing supervision models in the literature**

### ***The purpose and tasks of supervision***

Descriptions of the purpose of supervision include: “*educational, supportive, managerial*” (Kadushin 1976), “*formative, normative, restorative*” (Proctor 1997) and “*developmental, resourcing and qualitative*” (Hawkins & Smith 2006). Patterson (2011) offers a fourth function of coaching supervision, namely “*celebrating and honouring the work of the supervisee* (2011:123)”. Together the supervisor and supervisee attend to the ongoing development, professional standards and wellbeing of the supervisee. It is clear from this that learning lies at the heart of coaching supervision.

To fulfil these purposes, Carroll (1996:53) describes the ‘*generic tasks of supervision*’ from the supervisor’s perspective as: “*to consult, to counsel, to monitor professional ethics, to evaluate, to teach, to set up a learning relationship, to manage administrative aspects*”. Hawkins & Smith (2006:149) offer a similar list that includes: “*teacher, monitor evaluator, counsellor, coach, colleague, expert technician, boss, manager of administrative relationships*”.

### ***Different models of supervision***

All the models of coaching supervision contain a number of elements that add to the complexity of the process. Hawkins & Smith (2006) 7-Eyed Model for coaching and consulting supervision, for example, offers the supervision dyad (i.e. coach and supervisor) seven key lenses through which to explore the work. The coach brings to supervision what is going on for the coachee with their issues, concerns and change outcomes. They also consider what is happening for themselves as coach in terms of their skills and interventions. They explore the coach/coachee relationship, the supervisor/supervisee relationship and the organisational, social, economic, legal and/or political system in which the client work is taking place.

Recent models such as Three Worlds, Four Territories (Munro Turner 2011), the Seven Ring Model (de Haan 2008 & 2012) and the Seven-Eyed Model combined with Systems Constellations (Moral 2011) are all variations on Hawkins & Smith (ibid) original concept. Each of these propose that all primary participants in the process i.e. coachee, organisational sponsor, coach and supervisor bring with them their own histories and the associated complexity into the system that may need to be attended to within the core dyad relationship. Gray & Jackson (2011) offer a Systemic Model that places the tasks of supervision such as contracting and teaching within an organisational and social “container” and conclude that the overall purpose of supervision is to enable the coach to develop and change.

The Full Spectrum Model (Murdoch, Adamson & Orris 2006) takes a different perspective by placing the supervision relationship at the centre of the work with the tasks, skills and contexts

informing this learning relationship. In their view, whatever the tasks of supervision or the lens through which the focus is placed, the relationship between supervisor and supervisee is primary.

In each of these models, what is clear is the complexity of supervision as the dyad explores the supervisee's own process alongside the client work. Together, they are attending to the supervisee's development and wellbeing, allowing for the coach's own stage of development from "*novice to expert*" (Dreyfus & Dreyfus 1986, Hawkins & Smith 2006).

### ***The Need for Research***

To date, there is a paucity of research-based evidence in coaching supervision (to the author's knowledge, there are currently only three unpublished doctoral studies: Pampallis Paisley, 2006, DeFilippo, 2013, Hodge, 2014). It was considered vital to capture and share with the profession the voices of executive coaches and supervisors rather than relying solely on expert opinion in the literature (e.g. Hawkins & Smith 2006, Bluckert 2006, Hay 2007) and the subsequent mandate from the coaching associations now insisting on supervision as a prerequisite for accreditation of coaches (e.g. APECS, 2007, EMCC, 2009, AC, 2013a.).

This article gives an account of a practice-based, inductive inquiry that explores the lived experience of the supervision process for both coaches and supervisors. The central research question at the heart of the inquiry was: how can the experience of supervision be made more fit for purpose for both coach and supervisor in such a way that both parties benefit from it as a developmental process? As a result the author hoped to find out more about what goes on in coaching supervision to the end of enhancing the coaching profession.

The outcome of the research was expected to be of value to the following professional groups:

- Existing coaches who engage in supervision who might learn how to take further advantage of this forum to support their ongoing professionalism and practice
- Non-user coaches would hear the practitioners' perspective, rather than the "perceived power-holders" of accrediting bodies, coach trainers, client buyers
- Purchasers and corporate sponsors of coaching in organisations might gain further awareness of the value of supervision so they could make informed decisions when considering its relevance as a selection criterion in recruiting executive coaches (Ridler Report 2013)
- Coach training companies would be able to provide the appropriate forum, level and facilities with their students based on the findings from this study
- Coaching supervision training companies could offer an evidence-based level of curriculum content to develop coaching supervisors

### **Methodology**

Given the need for a practice-based inquiry, the most appropriate methodology was Action Research. At the heart of Action Research methodology (Whitehead 1989, Reason & Bradbury 2001, McNiff & Whitehead, 2009) is personal change for the practitioner as well as changes to the wider system and the community in which the work takes place. By undertaking this Action Research doctoral study, the Lead Researcher not only explored the question of what goes on in supervision to contribute to the knowledge base of the profession, but also explored her development and the role of other influences on her practice (See Figure 3). These themes are explored in the Findings.

With its emphasis as a qualitative, relational methodology involving inquiry *with* participants over a series of cycles, this longitudinal methodology was appropriate and congruent to support the Project and the approach taken as described in the following sections. It aligns with the supervision process (Carroll & Gilbert 2005 & 2011, Hawkins & Smith 2006):

- co-created and relational
- dialogic and generative rather than testing a hypothesis
- based on lived experience from an action-and-reflection-on-practice approach
- over time rather than a one-off incident so that it could model the development of the working relationship of supervisor/coach
- practice-based so all participants would deepen their insights and awareness about their practice as coaches and/or supervisors
- collaborative, sharing and exchanging approaches to practice
- allowing for the uncertainty and “not knowing what would emerge” (Reason & Marshall 2001) from one cycle to the next

### ***Selection of research participants***

The Project involved two groups of participants (a) six executive coaches and (b) five coaching supervisors who engaged in their own regular, individual supervision sessions. Each group met separately in four Action Learning Set meetings over a twelve-month period where they explored their experiences of coaching supervision.

The selection of participants was informed by the following criteria that were aligned with those applied to accredit “senior” practitioners by several of the professional associations (APECS, EMCC, AC). Likewise, these criteria were cited as important to organisations that engage executive coaches (Ridler 2013). Thus, each participant needed to demonstrate:

- holding a professional qualification in coaching or affiliated field (e.g. Human Resources, Organisational Development)
- with a minimum of 5 years’ experience of executive coaching
- experience in a line management function
- coaching clients working in an organisational context
- evidence of capacity to reflect (e.g. with learning journals)
- experience of being in a supervision relationship
- a level of accreditation by one of the professional coaching bodies

Participants came from invitations that were issued to members of four of the five main UK based coaching bodies (APECS, EMCC, AC, ICF) either via personalized emails or through the associations’ LinkedIn Groups. Taking this approach sought to minimise influence or coercion on the part of the Lead Researcher (Gray, 2009). The fifth body (SGCP) requested that a formal research proposal be provided before issuing an invitation to its members. In the interests of time, given that many coaches are members of one of the other bodies as well as this one, it was deemed that the sample would still meet the core criteria. In the interests of validity and trustworthiness of data, the Lead Researcher did not include her own clients in the Project.

The Lead Researcher interviewed each applicant using a semi-structured interview process and sent the interview notes to a “critical friend” (Torbert, 1976) for a 3<sup>rd</sup> eye scrutiny. The critical friend paid particular attention to applicants’ organizational breadth and depth, their awareness of whole systems and their own commitment to Continuing Professional Development (CPD). The reason for this scrutiny was to minimize the potential for personal bias by the Lead Researcher. It was also

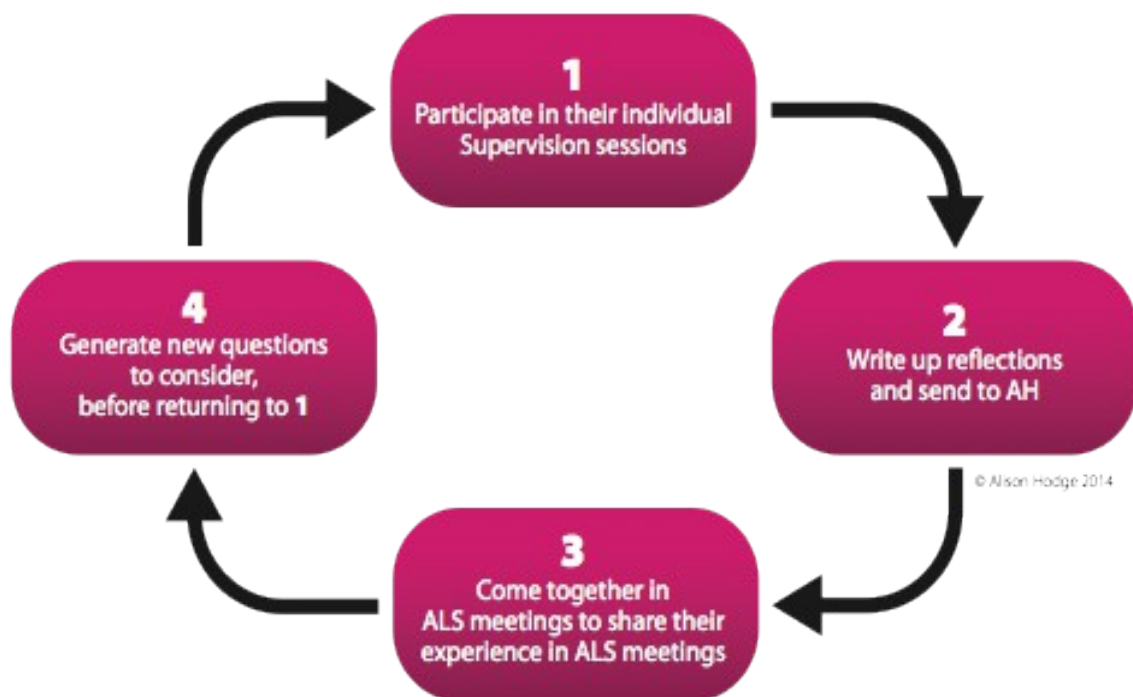
informed by the market's increasing expectation that executive coaches needed not only to hold an accreditation from a professional body, but also have significant business and coaching experience and also be in supervision (Ridler, 2013).

From those who applied, six coaches and five supervisors were invited to join the Project. They represented the aforementioned four professional bodies thus meeting the intention of purposive sampling (Gray, 2009). Each person participated voluntarily (Bandura, 1977, Cox, 2006) and could choose to leave the Project at any time, modeling best practice (Carroll & Gilbert, 2005). Two groups were formed, coaches and supervisors, who had no commercial relationship with each other, nor did the two groups meet during the Project. Five applicants were not recruited to the Project for the following reasons: They did not have a clear practice as an executive coach or coaching supervisor, they were supervising their own teams led by a quality control agenda, they were expecting to receive supervision of their practice as part of the process or they did not have enough time to commit.

Once "recruited" each group of participants met for Induction Meetings. Here the core conditions of safety and trust were co-created (Rogers, 1957, 1980) and we agreed the boundaries of engagement and confidentiality.

#### ***Data generation and data gathering***

The tasks the participants undertook for the Project during a series of four Action Research Cycles over 9 months are shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1: Project Tasks for the Co-Researchers**

In the first cycle the participants engaged in their individual supervision sessions as supervisees/supervisors, wrote up their experiences and reflections based around three questions provided by the Lead Researcher (See Table 1 – ALS1). Thereafter, each group met for digitally recorded data gathering sessions based on an Action Learning Set (ALS) format (Revans, 1980) when

each participant presented their experience and shared their reflections of being in supervision addressing the questions that were co-created in their respective group (See Table 1 – ALS2, ALS3, Ending Session). While each participant presented, other members listened and gathered key themes on Post-its. Each group then engaged in dialogue around the themes from the data presented and agreed what questions to explore during each ensuing cycle (See Table 1 – ALS 2, ALS3, Ending).

Session	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3
Induction			
ALS 1 – questions posed by lead researcher	Issues brought to supervision	What happened/emerged - worked/didn't work - process, content and relationship	Changes to coaching practice
ALS 2 – questions co-created by the participants	Changes to practice	What influenced changes to practice	Supervisor/ee relationship
ALS 3 - questions co-created by the participants	Support in supervision - fit for purpose	Support beyond supervision - fit for purpose	In an ideal world.....
ENDING SESSION - questions co-created by the participants	Impact of research project on coaching/supervision	Experience of engaging in action research	Impact of Lead Researcher on participants

**Table 1: Coaches Group - Questions asked at ALS Meetings**

Session	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3
Induction			
ALS 1 - questions posed by lead researcher	Issues brought to supervision	What happened/emerged - worked/didn't work - process, content and relationship	Changes to practice
ALS 2 - questions co-created by the participants	Changes to practice	What influenced changes to practice	Impact of the supervision relationship
ALS 3 - questions co-created by the participants	What specifically about your supervision do you know/feel is effective and how do you know this?	Why do you think/feel your supervision is valued by your supervisee? What informs this?	n/a

Session	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3
ENDING SESSION - questions co-created by the participants	Impact of research project on coaching/supervision	Experience of engaging in action research	Impact of Lead Researcher on participants

**Table 2: Supervisors Group - Questions asked at ALS Meetings**

Following each ALS meeting, the Lead Researcher collated the data on Post-its and shared this with participants to inform their practice and reflections between meetings. The intention in this cyclical process was that the participants would live their reality of being in supervision and by participating in the ALS meetings, reflect on their experience to deepen their learning. Through their exchange of experience and dialogue, they expanded their awareness of what is possible in supervision. By working through several cycles of inquiry, with its emergent nature (Reason & Marshall 2001, Rowan 2001) participants were able to review their development needs and subsequent changes to practice.

By involving two groups, the data met the criterion of “rigour” as described by Dick (1999). With the wealth of professional knowledge and experience of the participants (Strauss & Corbin 1990) they challenged their individual assumptions about their practice at a practical and theoretical level. The Lead Researcher chose not to contribute her own client experience to the core data, but rather focused on managing the Project, attending to the relationships, creating safety to enable participants’ disclosure of their practice, particularly when facilitating the ALS meetings, choosing and managing the data gathering methods and conducting the formal analysis that contributed to the final report.

### ***Data analysis***

The ALS meetings provided the primary source of data for analysis. After each meeting the Lead Researcher transcribed the recordings and collated the data. She shared this with the participants and drew out her reflections that informed her practice as a supervisor. This informed the themes that emerged in each subsequent ALS meeting. Thus the data analysis was ongoing and emergent. This was congruent with Action Research methodology and with how supervision practice occurs. After supervision sessions it is customary for a supervisor to reflect on the themes that have emerged from a specific session and periodically review the cumulative themes that emerge over time with a particular supervisee and discuss these (Gilbert & Evans 2000, Hawkins & Smith 2006).

Once all the ALS meetings had been completed, the Lead Researcher analysed the cumulative data taking the following steps:

- (a) Review of the participants’ notes from their supervision sessions
- (b) Review of ALS meeting transcripts and the data gathered
- (c) Collation of recurring language, themes, ideas and actions into Mind Maps
- (d) Identification of similarities and differences in themes between the two groups (Boyatzis 1998)

The participants were not engaged in the final data analysis so that the Lead Researcher retained her personal independence and autonomy. This methodological approach using emerging



thematic analysis also informed the Lead Researcher as she reflected on her own practice as a supervisor and is discussed in the next section.

## **Findings from the Project**

### ***Experience of the research participants***

The participants agreed that the practice of executive coaching is complex and demanding. They acknowledged that what occurs in the coaching space is unpredictable and challenging. They recognised that coaching may be emotionally charged as they understand and work with the coachee's emotions to support the learning and change the coachee seeks to make that the coaching espouses to support. The participants were clear about the need to support themselves. They appreciated the power and value in the one-to-one relationship of supervisor/supervisee as well as the actual process of supervision that enables them to attend to their overall wellbeing and effectiveness. They found that supervision provides a restorative space for offloading concerns of their personal and professional lives and appreciated and valued the reassurance, affirmation, feedback, challenge and encouragement that they received from their supervisor.

Within each of the research groups, there was a recurring theme of how isolated the coach can feel, especially when complex, emotional or “messy” issues arise in a coaching assignment. Several of the participants declared that it was the process of dialogue (Schein 1993, Isaacs 1999) with their supervisor that enabled sense and clarity about what was happening with and between themselves and their clients. This dialogue often proved more relevant and powerful than other forms of reflection such as journaling or personal note making as it enabled them to gain understanding, self-awareness and identify new ways to proceed with a client. At the same time, all participants agreed that they did not, nor could, rely solely on their one-to-one supervision to keep them fit for purpose. They sought a range of additional methods to support themselves and these are discussed in the final section of this paper.

Through their participation in the Project, with the discipline of writing up their supervision sessions, the research participants became more appreciative of their experience of being in supervision. They acknowledged that they were reflecting on their development more deeply. Consequently they gained a fresh perspective on supervision, in bringing about changes in their practice and its value to their wellbeing. By reflecting and sharing their experience and practice with others in the ALS meetings they felt affirmed and appreciated (Schein 1993, Isaacs 1999). This time together provided added confidence. Feedback from the participants suggested that the relationships that were co-created in the Project modelled what they might expect and seek to co-create with their supervisors/ees.

### ***Experience of the Lead Researcher***

There were strong parallels between the findings from the research groups and the experience of the Lead Researcher while undertaking her doctoral research at Middlesex University. The university advisers provided far in excess of the prescribed 18 hours per annum of academic supervision. They were available and supportive throughout the doctoral journey over six years, providing guidance and motivation besides extensive direction around research theory and University protocols.

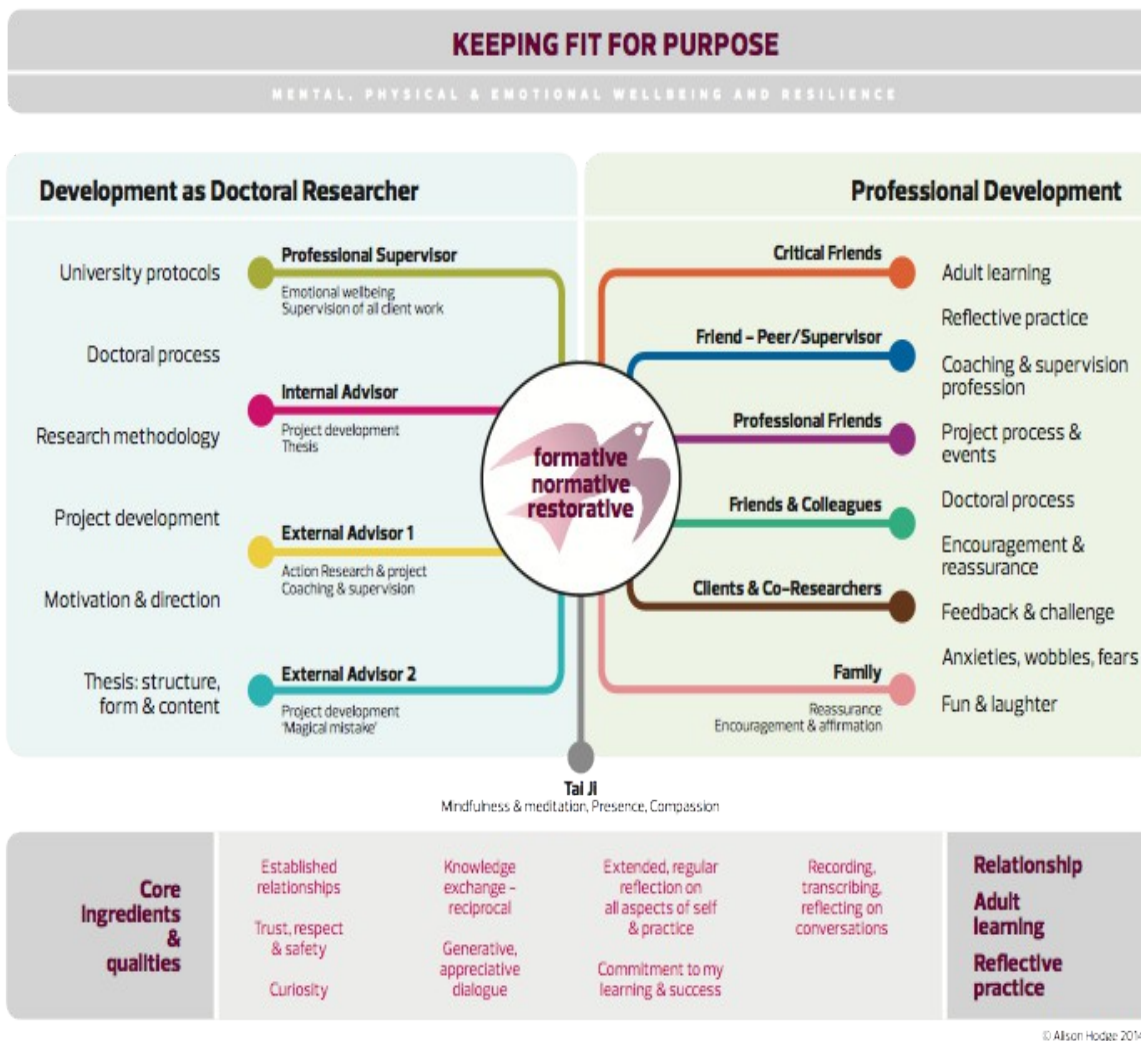
The Lead Researcher also engaged with a number of people including her professional supervisor, “critical friends” (Torbert 1976) and professional colleagues. She recorded and transcribed many of these conversations that generated data to inform and support her during the Project. While some of these relationships and conversations were not framed as “supervision” *per*

se, they were integral to provide essential support throughout the complex, unpredictable and challenging maze of the doctoral journey. Here were the evident parallels with the complexity and challenges of executive coaching and the support described by the participants.

Figure 2 represents these various relationships and shows the range of content that was explored or attended to by the Lead Researcher in “keeping fit for purpose”. Recurring themes in these generative dialogues included coaching and supervision theory and practice, methods of adult learning, the Project process and events. At an emotional level, she gained reassurance and encouragement, feedback, challenge and support.

The most consistent finding here rested in the core ingredients and qualities of these relationships (See the bottom section of Figure 2). Mutual trust, safety and respect developed over time. Through the generative, appreciative dialogue, knowledge was exchanged, thus everyone learned and new knowledge was co-created. Each of these people was quite clearly committed to the Lead Researcher’s learning and success. This certainly echoes the experience of the Project participants in their practice (Proctor 1997, Bachkirova et al 2011, Hawkins & Smith 2013).

No one person would have been able to meet all the needs of the Lead Researcher during the doctoral process and it would be naive to suggest the possibility. Likewise, the same could be said for executive coaches and this was borne out in the experience of the research participants as they explored how supervision supports their coaching practice.



**Figure 2: Keeping Fit for Purpose**

## Discussion and Conclusions

While supervision may still conjure up negative associations for some coaches, the author believes that this process of dialogic reflection on practice provides a vital ingredient to support executive coaches to practice safely and freshly (Proctor, 1997, Hawkins & Smith, 2006, Brunning, 2006). As executive coaching becomes more professional, the professional coaching bodies and those who offer supervision need to emphasise the positive and valuable aspects of the process and how it supports coaches in their development and wellbeing. There is a need to highlight and stress the value of the safe space for the coach to explore their practice, resolve dilemmas, re-connect with self and offload any doubts that can arise during coaching assignments.

### *The nature and complexity of executive coaching*

Given the demands and challenges of executive coaching, there is value for coaches to explore and reflect on their practice with another person and/or group of colleagues, ideally a qualified

coaching supervisor who understands and is familiar with the contexts of this work. This dialogue enables the coach to allay doubts, learn new approaches and re-charge their batteries.

Based on the findings from this Project, autonomous practitioners are able to determine the appropriate level and frequency of supervision to meet their own needs. As indicated by the participants, professional executive coaches need to consider the volume of coaching and number of client assignments they are engaged in at any one time as well as other personal or professional demands that affect how they show up with their coachees. Together with their supervisors, they calibrate and monitor how they are taking care of themselves so they are able to engage effectively and consistently with their clients thus avoiding “burnout” or “compassion fatigue” (e.g. Stamm, 2010). Ideally, based on this evidence, as the coach matures, through practice and reflection, they also develop what Casement (1985) describes as their “internal supervisor” that supports and informs the coach particularly when they are in the actual coaching room with their client.

### ***Is one-to-one supervision enough?***

What became clear during the inquiry was that one-to-one supervision alone is not enough to support coaches in this work. The participants were aware that they needed and wanted additional diverse methods that allowed them to reflect on their work and that enabled them to keep themselves fit for purpose. These methods, both alone and with others, were over and above their one-to-one relationship with a qualified supervisor. Professional activities they referred to included action learning sets, peer support groups and coaching practice groups. They declared the importance of engaging in a wide range of other activities that addressed their overall physical, emotional and mental wellbeing. They identified that regular exercise, hobbies, rest and holidays were integral to their wellbeing and resilience. Some discussed their involvement in the arts, theatre and music to stimulate creative insights and new perspectives.

### ***Choosing a supervisor***

Coaches need to consider carefully what they need and want from a supervisor before engaging with one person. Interestingly, the participants agreed that it was only once they had engaged in supervision that they really appreciated its true value (Carroll & Gilbert, 2005, 2011). They suggested that newer coaches could need guidance in what to look for, considering their experience, their stage of development as a coach (Hawkins & Smith, 2006, Drake, 2011), their learning style (Kolb 1984) and their self-awareness.

The development needs of each coach are likely to vary (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986; Drake, 2011) and therefore the style and emphasis in the supervision will also need to vary. However, the following Table 3 identifies the most significant elements that emerged from the research groups and that correspond with Carroll & Gilbert’s (2005, 2011) analyses of the roles and responsibilities. Reflecting on and sharing experience and practice with others in, for example, ALS groups or group supervision, provides affirmation (Isaacs 1999, Schein 1993) and gives practitioners added confidence. Feedback on the value of the group learning experience from the research participants is borne out in the literature (Revans, 1971; Wenger, 1999).

Supervisee Responsibilities	Supervisor Responsibilities
Need to ask for what is needed to co-create a safe place to share the work, coaching practice and whole of self; avoid deference and compliance	Establish and co-create safe space to enable the supervisee to share their work; show trust, respect, non-judgment, presence, attending to supervisee needs - not supervisor agenda
Explore and establish clear purpose of supervision	Initially may guide on purpose and subsequently co-create with supervisee
Give and receive feedback to and from supervisor - attending to the relationship, what is working or not working to support learning	Give and receive feedback to and from supervisee to ensure the supervisee is supported in their reflection and learning
Prepare for sessions	Prepare for and manage time keeping in the sessions
Bring all of self, present work openly and honestly. This includes relevant client issues, concerns and anything else that may impact on coaching effectiveness and overall practice.	Identify areas to explore + offer new perspectives/theory to expand supervisee's awareness and understanding
Identify and explore own learning and development needs; apply learning that will enable changes to practice	Respond to and engage with the learning style and needs of the supervisee
Attend to own well-being beyond the supervision space to show up effectively with clients	Attend to own well-being to show up effectively in supervision session - engage in own supervision of practice
Keep notes and reflections from supervision sessions	Keep notes and reflections from supervision sessions
Share and explore concerns that may have ethical implications	Attend to and support supervisee to resolve ethical concerns
Manage boundaries and confidentiality	Manage boundaries and confidentiality
Keep in touch with developments in the profession that may impact on the field of executive coaching - organisational/leadership themes	Keep in touch with developments in the profession that may impact on the field of executive coaching - organisational/leadership themes

**Table 3: Supervisee & Supervisor Responsibilities (Hodge 2014: 221)**

### **The Emerging Model - Three Pillars of Supervision**

Through the process of this inquiry, the Lead Researcher as author of this paper believes that there is a place for a new model of supervision. Whilst existing models (Seven-Eyed Model (Hawkins & Smith 2006), Full Spectrum Model (Murdoch et al 2006), Systems Model (Gray & Jackson 2011)) serve coaching supervision very effectively, her model of The Three Pillars of Supervision (Figure 3) has now been developed as a result of this inquiry. It places greatest emphasis on the bedrock conditions that underpin coaching supervision (Gilbert & Evans 2000, Hawkins &

Smith 2006, de Haan 2012). The model shows the breadth and depth of the supervision process that enables coaches and supervisors to make the most of this experience.

The Three Pillars refer to (1) the supervision relationship, (2) creating the core conditions for adult learning and (3) promoting the value of reflective practice. The Three Pillars provide the foundation stones and conditions to contain the generative dialogue that takes place to enable new knowledge, insights, self-awareness and learning to emerge. Within the container any of the various models, purpose and tasks may be incorporated and appropriately applied to meet the overall purpose of supervision i.e. the learning of new skills, the maintaining of standards and the overall wellbeing of the supervisee (Kadushin 1976, Proctor 1997). These elements are now shown in Figure 3 and then discussed.



**Figure 3: The Three Pillars of Supervision**

### ***Pillar 1: The supervision relationship***

All the research participants stressed how vital the supervision relationship was to enable them to engage effectively in the process (Hawkins & Smith, 2006, de Haan, 2012, Murdoch, 2013). The trust and safety that is co-created provides the container and conditions that enable coaches to share their practice and disclose their fears and vulnerability. They are able to reconnect with their confidence and skills, and gain clarity about their practice, all of which may have been challenged during a coaching assignment (Hawkins & Smith, 2006, de Haan, 2008). It is vital that coaches do not feel judged by the supervisor, but are supported to engage, explore, contribute, and thus are able to learn and grow.

The process and relationship of the supervisor/supervisee provides vital information at two levels: (1) what arises in the supervision space in the form of the parallel process (Casey 1993:78) and how this can raise awareness and give insights into what is happening in the client system thus give the coach direction in how to proceed with their client (2) through observation, modelling and feedback from the relational phenomena that exist in the supervision relationship, coaches gain insight and self-awareness that they can take into their coaching relationships (Hawkins & Smith 2006, Hay 2007, Critchley 2010, Drake 2011).

### ***Pillar 2: Create the core conditions for individual adult learning***

The second pillar of supervision is for both parties to have an understanding and appreciation of the core conditions for adult learning (Knowles, 1980, Brookfield, 1986, Mezirow, 1991, Boud, Cohen & Walker, 1993). Given the existing reticence and resistance amongst many coaches to engage in the practice of supervision as discussed earlier, the participants agreed that supervision needs to be framed clearly as a voluntary, collaborative, dialogic, reflective learning space. As the coach becomes more aware of their preferred learning methods (Kolb 1984), they are then able to engage in the appropriate forms of reflexive practice that enable them to maximize the effectiveness of the supervision process (Carroll & Gilbert 2005 & 2011, Bolton 2010).

According to the participants, the supervisor positively influences the outcomes when they create an atmosphere that gives permission to “not know” (Raab, 1997). The supervision space and relationship inspires the coach’s curiosity and willingness to explore and learn rather than provoke defensiveness or need to appear as “expert” (Schon, 1987, Gilbert & Evans, 2000). When each coach is inspired and motivated to take personal responsibility for learning as autonomous adults (Cox, 2006) they are more likely to be open to new avenues of inquiry that will enhance and develop their practice. The participants all agreed that learner autonomy and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977) achieve very different outcomes from arbitrary stipulations and guidelines.

Based on the feedback from the research participants, when the coach takes personal responsibility for their supervision, (including preparation and subsequent reflections) this gives them a wider purpose than just meeting imposed accreditation requirements. As a result, there is a different dynamic and outcome. The relationship, the process and the learning is more highly valued and acted upon. This in turn leads to a deepening of the coach’s personal development, practice and professionalism. This voluntary approach may potentially conflict with the coaching associations’ mandated approach in their wish to establish standards of professional practice. At the same time, anecdotal evidence shows that there is a relatively small percentage of coaches seeking accreditation within some of the professional bodies (e.g. EMCC & AC less than 50% of their members are accredited). On this basis, it could be concluded that the compulsory engagement in supervision is one of the deterrents to coaches seeking accreditation.

### ***Pillar 3: Promote the value of reflection***

The third pillar of supervision is reflection on practice (Boud, Keogh & Walker, 1985, Schon, 1987, Fook & Gardner, 2007). Based on the experience of the research participants, the coach needs to make time to prepare for supervision sessions and then, significantly, take time to write up their reflections after sessions. Through their participation in the Project, and the discipline of writing up their supervision sessions as part of this process, the research participants became more aware and appreciative of their ongoing experience of being in and engaging in supervision. They acknowledged that they were reflecting on their personal and professional development more deeply as a result of their experience during the Project. They gained a fresh perspective on the role supervision plays in bringing about changes in their practice and its value to their wellbeing as a whole.

### ***Summary and areas for further research***

In closing, there are suggestions for further research that have not been addressed in this Project.

1. Prompted by DeFilippo's (2013) study of dyad relationships, it would be useful to identify the impact of "critical moments" in coaching supervision, similar to de Haan's study in coaching (2008).
2. As there are still many coaches who do not engage in coaching supervision as defined here in this inquiry, it would be useful to explore the perspectives and practice of these practitioners and investigate their ongoing effectiveness and wellbeing. Another avenue for research would be to establish what evidence there may be for any direct links between the impact of supervision and coachees who are being coached.
3. There is a current trend in supervision to support internal coaches specifically and this would be an interesting line of inquiry as there is evidence that, increasingly, organisations are creating their own teams of internal coaches (St John-Brooks 2014) and this has not been investigated directly in this study.

Findings from this inquiry confirm that the process of executive coaching is complex and demanding especially in an organisational setting (Hawkins & Smith 2006 & 13, de Haan 2012). One-to-one supervision with a qualified supervisor provides a vital forum for coaches to reflect on their practice and attend to their wellbeing and development that helps to keep them fit for purpose. There are also many other activities that may fall under the heading of supervision including action learning sets, peer and group supervision, communities of practice (Wenger 1999) that contribute to the coach's wellbeing and effectiveness. Encouraging coaches to seek supervision voluntarily is likely to yield a greater commitment to learning and growth by the coach as they take autonomous responsibility to ensure they provide the best possible professional service to their clients.

In this exciting, rewarding, yet challenging and demanding world of executive coaching, there is a need for a variety of modes and methods at different times to sustain and expand the ongoing professional development and wellbeing of executive coaches. At the same time, there are still questions around how practising supervisors can best contribute to the creation of a profession that honours individuality, autonomy, learning and reflective practice and at the same time, supports certain minimum standards. In this context, the Three Pillars of Supervision Model may provide a platform for development and lead to operational criteria against which professional practice can be evaluated.



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