

Supervision Techniques 8

FOUR SUPERVISION TECHNIQUES
EDITED BY MICHELLE LUCAS

THE VALUE OF NOTICING
THE POTENTIAL FOR COLLUSION
TAPPING INTO THE CLIENT PERSPECTIVE
WORKING WITH BLOCKS

Where can this be used?				Typical level of supervisee experience required	
					
Professional one-to-one supervision	Professional group supervision	Peer group supervision	Individual reflection	Most levels	Experienced supervisees only

TECHNIQUE 1: THE VALUE OF NOTICING

Written by Diane Hanna

Where can this be used?				Typical Level of Supervisee Experience Required	
					

When is this used?

This approach is helpful in the check-out of a supervision session. It can sometimes be used within a reflective practice session with a coach or group of coaches when they have a reaction to the work of supervision.

What is the approach?

The intention of this approach is to build the self-reflective skills of the coach and build self-awareness at a cognitive, emotional and felt sense level.

Step 1: Encourage introspection with the supervisee(s).

Step 2: Quietly encourage self-reflection on the question:

- What did I notice about myself in this session?

Step 3: Continue to encourage the supervisee to self-reflect further with questions such as:

- How do I respond to what I noticed?
- Perhaps consider what thoughts you may have had?
- What emotions were evoked in you?
- What sensations came into your awareness?

Step 4: Finally encourage supervisee to self-reflect and write down the answer to the questions like:

- What does my response tell me about me?
- Perhaps consider what feels familiar or conversely new to you?
- Cast your mind backwards, might this reflect common themes in your practice or wider life?

Step 5: Supervisor asks: “What has changed?” and “How will this inform your practice going forward?”

Step 6: By way of close, invite the supervisee to consider what further reflection they will engage in independently.

How to work with this approach...

This approach can be a deceptively simple way of encouraging deep reflection on the part of the supervisee. It provides a rigor to the check-out process of supervision and more readily allows coaches to access themselves on multiple levels. Encouraging the supervisees to write down their responses and then talk about them, rather than just talking them through, as this generates deeper learning and the use of more senses in this process. When working in groups this also allows individual supervisees to process their reactions to another group member so that they can share their response in a thoughtful manner rather than sharing their more visceral reaction. In a group setting these questions often require a significant pause as they are challenging to answer. Having spent the bulk of the session with the support and challenge of their fellow supervisees in mind it requires work to shift awareness to think and experience themselves again.

What else might need attention?

On occasion this exercise can lead to deeper introspection and supervisees being overly critical of themselves. It is important to attend to the restorative aspect of supervision in this exercise and ensure that the supervisee is leaving renewed and restored to their best coach self and not doubting their capabilities. Asking “How does this inform your practice?” or “How can you be more of your best self as a coach?” are great questions to ensure a resourceful coach state.

Should the supervisee find they have nothing to reflect on, hold the silence to allow the inner work to happen. Alternatively change the state in the conversation for a few moments and go back to the reflective exercise much as you may do with a coach client.

A word of caution.

As this is a check out activity it is important not to be rushed at the end of a session. Ensure you allow a proportionate amount of time to this process, in line with the length of the session itself. Another watch out is to ensure that the coaches leave the session with a positive energy and restored to be their best self as coach.

What other uses are there for this approach?

You can usefully use these questions with clients and encourage self-reflection as part of sessions with clients so that they better understand themselves.

Further reading:

Hay, J. (2007) *Reflective Practice and Supervision for Coaches*. Maidenhead: Mc Graw Hill.

Morgan, K. and Watts, G. (2015) *The Coaches Casebook: Mastering the 12 traits that trap us*. Inspect & Adapt Ltd.

Passmore, J. (2011) *Supervision in Coaching Supervision, Ethics and Continuous Professional Development*. London: Kogan Page.

TECHNIQUE 2: EXPLORING THE POTENTIAL FOR COLLUSION

Written by Michelle Lucas and Lynda Tongue

Where can this be used?				Typical Level of Supervisee Experience Required	
					

When is this used?

Sometimes a supervisor may sense that the supervisee has greater empathy with one of the stakeholders in the coaching process than may be helpful. This often occurs when working in an organisational context, where the coaching assignment has undertones of being remedial work and the system draws the coach into doing part of the job of the line manager.

Alternatively the coach may have developed a deep empathy with the individual client due to some shared history or experience and may be losing their neutrality. This approach prompts exploration of the psychological distance (see Micholt, 1992) amongst the parties and often illustrates where there is a risk of collusion.

What is the technique?

Step 1: As the supervision dialogue unfolds, keep in mind what is happening to the objectivity, neutrality or curiosity of the supervisee.

Step 2: Invite the supervisee to draw a triangle where the points of the triangle are labelled Coach; Client; Organisation – or use 3 post-its to create a triangle – encourage them to think about what kind of triangular shape would reflect how ‘connected’ they feel to each party.

Step 3: Ask them what they notice about the configuration of the triangle.

Step 4: Explore with them any comparisons where the distance is shorter or longer than others. For example: What’s your sense of how the greater distance between you and the client (compared to the distance between you and the organisation) manifests in how you are working?

Step 5: Further perspective can be gained by looking at the distances from the client’s and the organisation’s position. Each time focusing on how that distance might be showing up in the work itself.

Step 6: Allow some reflection time and ask the supervisee to share what they are aware of now that may have been outside of their awareness before, perhaps enquire how this exploration might influence the work in future.

How to work with the technique...

Often as soon as the supervisee maps out the triangle, insight occurs and Steps 3-5 happen naturally. Where a supervisee maps out an equilateral triangle, it can be useful to enquire if there have been moments in the work when the triangle became lopsided in some way. Again this typically generates insight around how different topics shift the working relationship. Occasionally this does not provoke any further dialogue and an alternative line of enquiry will need to be found.

In most organisational situations, there may be more than three parties involved, the same principles can be adopted using oblongs (four parties) pentagons (five parties) etc.

What else might need attention?

Offering this technique is often predicated by the supervisor noticing the possibility of collusion in the system. Where the supervisee does not seem to be deriving value from the technique, remember not to get too wedded to your own insight. In this moment, it can be useful to notice how this impacts on your own sense of self and the relationship with the supervisee. A parallel process could be in play and so making transparent the distance you are currently experiencing between you and your supervisee (or any other stakeholder), may help illuminate what could be happening for the supervisee and their client in the session.

A word of caution.

Whilst supervisees of all levels could benefit from this type of exploration – those practitioners who are very tools-oriented and who work transactionally, may struggle to see the importance of subtle relationship dynamics. As always there is a need for the supervisor to meet their supervisee ‘where they are’.

What other uses are there for this technique?

Once experienced as a supervisee, the principles of this approach could be used with any clients who wish to explore relationship dynamics. When working directly with a client the labels may be replaced with the different stakeholders they are working with.

Reference:

Micholt, N. (1992) Psychological Distance and Group Interventions. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 22 (4), pp.228-233.

Further reading:

Hay, J. (2007) *Reflective Practice and Supervision for Coaches*. McGraw-Hill: Maidenhead. pp. 118-120.

TECHNIQUE 3: TAPPING INTO THE CLIENT PERSPECTIVE

Written by Lesley Matile

Where can this be used?				Typical Level of Supervisee Experience Required	
					

When is this used?

A supervisee may find this approach helpful should they be curious about their impact on a client. This could relate to an existing or a new client. The supervisor could select this approach if they believe that ‘hearing from the client’ might provoke useful fresh thinking for the supervisee.

What is the approach?

With the supervisee listening with curiosity, each group member speaks directly to the supervisee sharing how they are experiencing the client : coach relationship through personally crafted impact statements. This ‘one step removed’ feedback often enables powerful messages to be offered. The supervisee, equipped with new insights, can then decide on their next steps.

Step 1 (a): Invite the supervisee to introduce the coach/client relationship they wish to discuss.

Engaging with the group, the supervisor encourages questions which focus on Mode 1 (bringing the client into the room) and 3 (the relationship between coach and client) in Hawkins and Smith (2006) Seven Eyed Model. For example:

- How did the coaching come about?
- Describe the client and what you notice about them
- How do you feel about this client?
- What do you notice about the nature of this relationship?
- What do you think is going on which is not being said?
- What do you think may be getting in the way of a really productive relationship?

Step 1(b): Meanwhile, the supervisor encourages group members to listen carefully to the language and body language used by the supervisee; and to notice how they are reacting themselves.

Step 2: The supervisor agrees with the supervisee the exact wording of the question(s) for the group members. For example:

1. What is it like being coached by me?
2. What opinions have you formed about me personally?

Step 3: The supervisor advises the group to respond as though they were the client regarding how they are experiencing the coach and the coaching relationship. Each group member answers the specified question with only 'I' statements looking directly at the supervisee as they do. They can share what they imagine they would think and feel or if this would duplicate an earlier response, they can offer a different but equally plausible reaction to help add to the variety of perspectives.

Step 3(b): The supervisee listens without responding and notes what resonates for them.

Step 4: After each group member has spoken, the supervisor encourages the supervisee to reflect, while others remain silent. When appropriate the supervisor poses a question such as "What new helpful insights have you had?" or "What in particular resonates for you?"

Step 5: To conclude, supervisor then asks:

"With these fresh thoughts about what may be going on from the client's perspective, what might you do in subsequent sessions?"

How to work with this approach...

From the perspective of flow, it is most useful if the approach is introduced at the outset of the supervision process. The supervisee can then give their informed consent to this approach without significant explanation at the point of it being suggested.

When crafting their impact statements, the supervisor should remind group members that the supervisee is not seeking advice, or comments about the wider system, rather to understand what possible impact their approach may have on the client (in so far as they understand them).

The supervisee need not respond to each comment in turn, rather process out loud only what resonates as most valuable.

What else might need attention?

One might expect a mixture of positive and less positive comments, a bias in any one direction might hold information about the current group dynamics. This could provide useful material for a group process review.

A word of caution.

As always, the supervisor needs to gauge the level of trust in the group and manage the level of candor according to the resilience of the supervisee. The supervisor needs to invite the group members to speak boldly but with sensitivity, holding the tension of stimulating

helpful new thinking and appreciating that recognising potentially negative impacts can be difficult to hear. Group members may feel they are being judgmental, and that is what is being asked for!

What other uses are there for this approach?

With appropriate contracting this could be used between coaches and their clients where feedback is expressly requested.

Reference:

Hawkins, P. and Smith, N. (2006) *Coaching, Mentoring and Organisational Consultancy Supervision and Development*, Maidenhead: Open University Press.

TECHNIQUE 4: WORKING WITH BLOCKS

Written by Julie Allan and Alison Whybrow

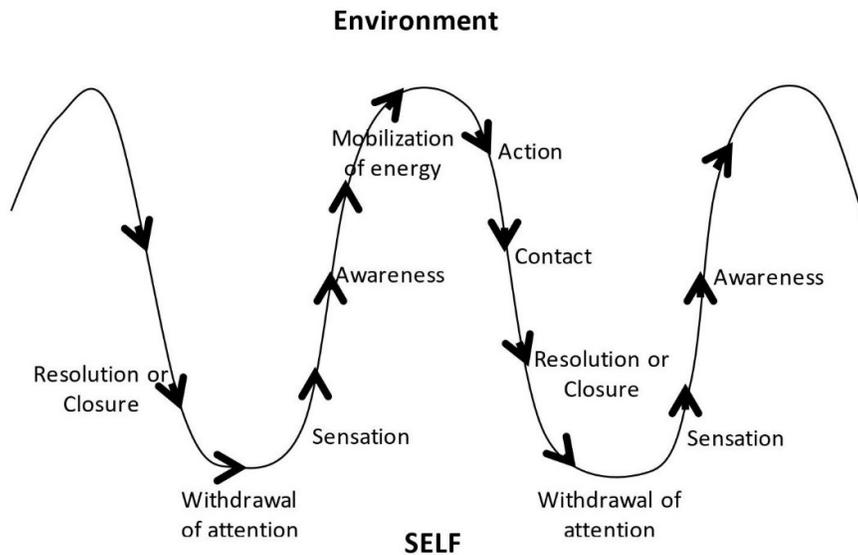
Where can this be used?				Typical Level of Supervisee Experience Required	
					

When is this used?

The purpose of this type of exercise is to explore the nature of what might be going on when somebody is experiencing a ‘block’ or ‘resistance’ in relation to something important for them. They may be stuck at some point in the gestalt cycle, for example. Each part of the cycle comes with an accompanying way in which resistance can show up - these are known as ‘interruptions to contact’, and the intention is to address such interruptions in a way that allows progress.

From a gestalt frame, being in full contact with the ‘block’ would of itself be the completion of a cycle within the greater cycle(s). See Figure 3.1. This approach allows an embodied type of exploration that can be informative and contactful, including the benefits of working somatically (with body), whether there are words for this block or not. It can produce a shift that enables movement.

Figure 3.1: The gestalt cycle of awareness adapted from Zinker 1977).



What is the experiment?

The experiment involves using a wall or other immovable part of the room, to serve as an embodiment of this block. It can be done standing or seated, as appropriate. Brief the supervisee along the following lines:

Step 1: Set up.

- Place your back against the wall. Bring to mind the situation about which you feel stuck.
- You can have your eyes open or closed, whatever suits you. The wall represents the 'stuck'.

Step 2: Explore.

- Feel the wall behind you, experiment with leaning against it more or less heavily, shifting weight from side to side, being straighter or less straight, back of hands or palms to the wall, all the different ways you can find.
- Notice any sensations. Notice how things change when you adjust your position. Do any colours, places, images come to mind?

Step 3: Explore more.

- If you like, you can experiment in other ways. What if the wall felt soft? What if it was a tree? What if

Step 4 (optional): Expanding safely beyond the block.

- Imagine a safe bubble for yourself as you lean there. What would it be like to extend that bubble behind you to include the wall and everything behind it? If you try it, stay a while and then bring the bubble back to this side of the wall.

Step 5: Consolidate awareness.

- When you are ready, disconnect from the wall. What do you notice now?

How to work with this experiment...

As with many gestalt experiments, light facilitation is used to enable somebody to explore. Consider that this way of working may not suit everyone and could be experienced by some as confusing or annoying. Such a response is also part of the field and potentially informative, but whatever a supervisee chooses to work with is their choice; an experiment is just that – an experiment, not a mandate in which choice is over ridden by a supervisor's inappropriately strong attachment to a specific process or outcome. So, if a supervisee wishes to explore the nature of the 'nothing' or 'annoyance' they feel, that is fine, and it is equally fine for them to say they don't think they are getting anything from it and do not want to continue.

A word of caution.

Resistance is normal and can be functional. The task is not to eradicate but to explore, and in so doing expand awareness of what the resistance is like, what it is serving and whether it is still needed. It may need to stay but change form.

What other uses are there for this experiment?

With skilled clients and supervisors in a group setting, it can be interesting to sit back to back and become a living 'block' for the partner. This gives the possibility of some careful exploration of a moveable, living block and indeed of experiencing self in the role of block. What is that like? It is important to de-role after this.

Exploration of blocks in this way can also be used in coaching, with previous supervised learning or training.

Reference:

Zinker, J. (1977) *Creative Process in Gestalt Therapy*. Vintage Books. p. 77.

Further reading:

Allan, J. and Whybrow, A. (2019). Gestalt Coaching. In: S. Palmer & A. Whybrow (Eds.) (2019). *Handbook of Coaching Psychology: a guide for practitioners*, 2nd ed. London: Routledge. Ch.14.

Clarkson, P. (1989). The cycle of Gestalt formation and destruction (Figure 3.1). In *Gestalt Counselling in Action*. London: Sage. p.29.

Spoth, J., Toman, S., Leichtman, R. and Allan, J. (2016). *Gestalt Approach*. In: J. Passmore, D.B. Peterson, and T. Freire, (Eds). (2016) *The Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of The Psychology of Coaching and Mentoring*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons. Ch.20.