



*The future of
coaching and
mentoring:
evolution,
revolution or
extinction?*

Part 2

Journal of
the Association for Management Education and
Development



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Professional coaching and the dangers of coaching supervision

Vikki Brock



Professional coaching burst onto the world stage in the early 1990s, though a form of coaching had been practiced since the 1930s. Much has been written about coaching in research, articles, books and papers since, and coaching supervision has been touted as the next extremely lucrative revenue stream for coaches. There is a paradox between coaching and mentoring which has roots in person centred humanism and the control by professional coaching bodies as highlighted by Bob Garvey in Part 1 of this special issue of e-O&P focusing on the future of coaching and mentoring.

This article explores the potential for detrimental consequences and inappropriateness of imposing mandatory 'supervision' on coaching practitioners, versus the established mentor coach approach.

Developments in the International Coach Federation (ICF) towards mandatory imposition of practice supervision framed on models applied in psychotherapy, counselling and clinical psychology are used to highlight key developments in America, which could herald a significant culture shift within the profession if they are to be accepted by the wider, global ICF community of practice. With the ICF being a leading coaching professional body, where the ICF goes other organizations may follow.

Keywords

Coaching, mentoring, supervision, neofeudalism, surveillance, control, professionalism, business, ethics, future, change.

Introduction

Let's face it, I am an American coach writing from the perspective of coach mentoring and supervision in the United States of America (USA) and as prescribed by the International Coach Federation (ICF). This perspective can be in sharp contrast to the European and UK perspectives where the major professional body appears to be the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) followed by the Association of Coaches (AC).

How do coach mentoring and coaching supervision relate?

To look more closely at the distinctions and similarities between mentoring for coaches and coaching supervision, I will use the International Coach Federation (ICF) as an example. Since the mid-1990s, coaching has used "mentors" to assist coaches in growing their skills, building their businesses, developing

their foundations, preparing for certification, and reflecting on experiences. On March 25, 2010, ICF (2010) defined a form of mentor coaching, for credentialing purposes only, specifically:

“For purposes of Credentialing, mentor coaching means an applicant being coached on their coaching skills rather than coaching on practice building, life balance, or other topics unrelated to the development of an applicant’s coaching skill.”

This ICF definition applies primarily to credential applicants who have not been trained by an accredited coach training program, where the provision of observation and feedback to the coach in training would already been assessed. This specific form of mentoring is also required for renewal of the introductory Associate Credential Coach (ACC) credentials where a minimum of 60 hours of coach specific training is required.

Throughout the coaching profession, when credentials such as these are attained, coaches continue to mentor students and experienced coaches in the areas of credential preparation, professional and personal development, business development, and other areas (including reflective practice). In fact, until recently, in the USA the term “coaching supervision” had evolved into “mentoring for credential purposes only” as a way to distinguish it from more traditional forms of mentoring.

ICF (2012) further delineates mentor coaching from coaching supervision as:

One area of confusion around the concept of coaching supervision is about the differences in terminology, between supervision and mentoring. (Currently, ICF defines Mentor Coaching as coaching for the development of one’s coaching, rather than reflective practice, coaching for personal development or coaching for business development, although those aspects may happen very incidentally in the coaching for development of one’s coaching.) Having a clear definition of coaching supervision is important to help differentiate coach supervision from Mentor Coaching as defined by the ICF.

As this is the case, the ICF definition defines a specific type of mentor coaching and is not inclusive of all ‘mentor coaching’ that is used for coach development. The proponents of coaching supervision argue on the other hand that this is the only form of mentor coaching and thus there is a need for “coaching supervision” to meet the other needs. The current [policy outlined on the ICF website](#) states

“Coaching Supervision is distinct from Mentor Coaching for Credentialing”.

There is no disagreement on this statement. However coaching supervision is NOT distinct from mentor coaching as defined within the profession. As early as 2005, Bachkirova, Stevens and Willis stated “Coaching Supervision is a formal process of professional SUPPORT, which ensures continuing development of the coach and effectiveness of his/her coaching practice through interactive REFLECTION, INTERPRETATIVE EVALUATION and the sharing of expertise.”(Bachkirova et. al., 2005) Hawkins (2009) describes the three elements of coaching supervision as:

1. Coaching the coach on their coaching
2. Mentoring the coach on their development in the profession
3. Providing an external perspective to ensure quality of practice.

The above definitions and elements describe some, but not all of what mentor coaching encompasses. Same for the ICF (2012) description of coaching supervision, which is only a portion of how mentor coaching is described - "Coaching Supervision is the interaction that occurs when a coach periodically brings his or her coaching work experiences to a coaching supervisor in order to engage in reflective dialogue and collaborative learning for the development and benefit of the coach and his or her clients." Mentor coaching includes credential preparation, professional and personal development, business development, and other areas (including reflective practice).

In 2012 ICF posted a position statement on Coaching Supervision (ICF, 2012) which constituted a significant change in the purpose of their credentialing programs. In 2014 (ICF, 2014) they then changed the long-standing policy on the way Continuing Coach Education (CCE) units could be used to allow serving as a coach mentor and/or supervisor to qualify for credential renewal. This new policy on CCEs appears to put the mentor/supervisor above the need for continuing education requirements, which is anomalous. ICF Assistant Executive Director George Rogers (G Rogers email September 26, 2014) confirmed that, at the July 2014 ICF Global Board meeting, the Board reviewed and "approved phase 1 of a proposal that had been developed by the ICF Australasia Supervision Task Force" (led by Tammy Turner, a certified coaching supervisor and graduate of the Coaching Supervision Academy).

Further, in a July 14, 2014 [video-recorded presentation](#) (Goldvarg, 2014) at Royal Roads University in Victoria, British Columbia, ICF Global President Damian Goldvarg (a newly-certified Coaching Supervisor at the time) clearly stated an intention to make Coaching Supervision mandatory for ICF credential renewal within three years. He later said he misspoke, and supports ICF website (ICF, 2014) which states:

"In the interest of providing some access to Coaching Supervision in a world which is not yet globally ready to offer sufficient numbers of specifically trained coaching supervisors for the demand that is anticipated, ..."

There appears to be a conflict of interest given that the former ICF Global Board President and the leader of the task force upon which the board based their recent coaching supervision changes are both certified coaching supervisors advocating a specific approach related to their own qualifications. Additionally, it appears that the form of supervision used as the inspiration for this approach is derived from clinical psychology/therapy, which involves supervision all the time for all coaches. It does not make sense that coaches should be facing the same or more stringent, longer-term supervision requirements that are required of registered clinical psychologists (Lisa Mallett, 2014).

Supervision is the 'new' term for what mentoring has always been. Requiring mentoring (or supervision) for students and coaches going for certification is beneficial for their growth and development. However, surely it is not something to be controlled or mandated by professional associations.

Chronology of coaching supervision

Coaching supervision has its roots in the model of supervision used in the therapeutic disciplines of psychology and social work. It operates from this borrowed therapeutic model, and is a technique unsupported by evidence-based research within the coaching field. The "Coaching Supervision" agenda appears to be predominantly driven by certain (some) coaching psychologists/psychotherapists, coaching

supervision training providers, coaching supervisors, and coaching supervision associations publicly dedicated to making Coaching Supervision a mandatory standard of practice in the coaching. In fact, the EMCC requires coaching supervision to become a member.

Coaching supervision first appeared in early 2000 (Appendix) in the UK during the same period the coaching psychology sub-discipline of psychology was formed. Evidence of a “coaching supervision” agenda abounds. The ICF, for example, is being advised on the subject of coaching supervision by individuals who are certified coaching supervisors, who have graduated from the Coaching Supervision Academy, and have an interest in seeing coaching supervision become a mandatory requirement.

A Dublin university offering a coaching supervision training program (UCD, 2014) claims that:

“Supervision of coaching is increasing in demand as professional bodies such as the EMCC, AC and ICF are making it a requirement for ethical practice and necessary for individual accreditation. Organisations are also insisting that coaches they take on have in place proper supervision arrangements”.

These claims are not yet true for the ICF and it is not clear what evidence has been used as the bases of these marketing messages. This kind of misinformation muddies the waters.

Implications (unintended consequences) for coaching’s future

What is happening here is “Professional bodies claim that supervision, as one of their rules, reassures potential clients or sponsors and ensures quality control. (Garvey, 2014).

The coaching supervision movement is spreading globally through a concentrated marketing effort. These coaching supervision proponents are lobbying coaching professional associations, coaches, and prospective employers of coaches to embrace coaching supervision (or “non-clinical supervision” that stems from a therapeutic model).

This agenda has far-reaching and negative implications on a multitude of fronts. This trend now threatens to:

- Blur the carefully drawn lines/distinctions the ICF has drawn between the type of coaching practice covered by ICF credentials and related, but different forms of practice such as psychotherapy;
- Places the coaching industry at risk of broad government intervention via increased regulation and possible licensure;
- Create onerous and expensive burdens for all coaches, especially for those coaches who are self-employed, independent business people who would have to pay for the cost of their own supervision; and
- Ultimately control the coaching industry through effecting changes that could eventually limit the supply of coaching professionals, thereby creating higher incomes for those who influence and control both how many, and who, would be allowed to enter the profession.

A key risk associated with the Coaching Supervision agenda is the blurring of carefully drawn distinctions the ICF has made between the coaching that is credentialed by the ICF and forms of practice applied in other parts of the world where there are differences in the regulatory frameworks for mental health services where the blurring of these boundaries is less of an issue. As this is the case, the psychology, or therapy based

models of “supervision” activity are highly inappropriate for widespread application or adoption across the coaching industry. It is important to bear in mind that the framing of the service being supplied is not therapeutic in nature and where providers do not supply services to vulnerable client populations. I believe that coaching services focused on clients who are “creative, resourceful and whole” (ICF, 2000) according to the mandate of the ICF, do not require the same type of supervision that is applied within a clinical context.

Considerations that need to be made before clinical models are imported

It is also the case that the application of clinical models of supervision should not be conducted without careful consideration of the type of practice and context. As Jeff Auerbach PhD Psychology, MCC, President of College of Executive Coaching and Past ICF Vice-President, states (email dated February 18, 2015):

With over 500,000 mental health professionals in the US (versus approximately 20,000 coaches) I think “supervision” in a helping type of field equals the type of supervision where the supervisor assumes legal responsibility. I think it is rather naïve for coaches to think that they can redefine “supervision” to mean something other than how it is commonly used in the other helping fields. Having two licenses in helping professions myself and having had over 6,000 hours of “supervision” pre-licensure, I find that the type of supervision that most mental health professionals go through is actually very similar, if not identical, to what one of the major coaching supervisor authors, Erik de Haan, describes in Supervision In Action: A Relational Approach To Coaching And Consulting.

The Wiley International Handbook of Clinical Supervision (Watkins and Milne, 2014) cites research conclusions from the past 15 years (3 studies) showing that not all state clinical supervision can clearly demonstrate quantitative, empirical benefits – not to the supervisor from their supervision training, not to the coaching supervisee, and not to the supervisee’s clients. Further, supervision is being questioned for the therapy field in Canada: On the one hand, supervision is central to a clinician or counselors’ learning and practice. On the other, the contribution it makes to a client’s wellbeing is assumed and is not always tested. Matching the practice with evidence within the specific context of application is clearly important. So, if there were to be appropriate application, then there would need to be a compelling raft of evidence based practice and research to assess the efficacy of the models applied to the type of coaching championed by the ICF.

Recent coaching research by de Haan et. al. (2013) finds that the relationship, rather than technique, most affects the success of the client engagement. Page continues (email dated February 28, 2015) by asking for ‘due diligence’ and relying on valid data to “know about the different elements of supervision [and mentoring], how they are experienced by coaches, and what the outcome is of those experiences.”

The trend within coaching to require supervision for all coaches is, therefore, misguided and fraught with dangers for the entire profession. From the earliest days, coaching has been a self-regulated profession, successfully fighting off attempts to regulate it by government and outside professional entities. Mentor coaching, in its broad definition, has provided and continues to provide the reflective opportunities that are purported to be provided by coaching supervision.

Is it wise to open up a regulatory Pandora's box?

Finally, adopting clinical forms of supervision, using the language that applies to regulated areas of clinical practice in the USA holds significant risks for the coaching profession, as represented by the ICF. Whether or not coaching is the de-facto practice of psychotherapy becomes less clear if practices applied to the legal control of therapeutic practice become mandated for all coaches. From the creation of the first credentialing program in the mid-1990s efforts have been made to keep the distinctions between these types of practice clear and to “reinforce professional coaching as a distinct and self-regulating profession.” (ICF, 2005)

Auerbach (email dated February 18, 2015) consulted with Eric Harris, JD who:

‘felt that a US court would see coaching supervision, because of the similarities in the methods of the supervision process in the mental health fields, and in the similarities between coaching and counselling, as a form of consultation that would align with what is commonly known as the type of supervision that licensed mental health professionals experience, which is defined by the American Psychological Association as the supervisor having authority and legal liability. In the mental health fields this legal liability of the supervisor leads to many people not wanting to take on the responsibility of supervising others, hence causing a serious difficulty for aspiring professionals to get their required supervision.’

Linda Page, PhD Psychology, MCC, Founder and president of Adler International, identifies a type of psychological supervision that she calls “developmental supervision”, which is very relevant to coaches. However, in an email dated February 28, 2015, she states “I believe this is the type of supervision that is captured by the "mentor coach" designation.”

Coaching supervisors stand to make a great deal of money from providing coaching supervision. In a profession that has seen many trained and certified coaches unable to make a living, since the global financial crises, this added requirement may cause even more coaches to leave the field. Some argue that supervision (and mentoring) is actually exploitive of coaches and coaching, representing a form of ‘pyramid model’ and reinforcing the unfortunate perception that the industry’s growth is in part coaches making money from coaching other coaches who may be required to hire/pay these coaching mentors and supervisors. I say, let the market be the deciding factor--the reputation and work of effective coaches will speak for themselves, and clients will continue to be well served.

What can be done?

We need to be sensitive to the notion that professional regulation is changing – that it is not the same in all countries. Here I have presented a North American-based perspective of coaching supervision, where government regulation is unlikely provided that the scope and practice of coaching as defined by the ICF is not compromised. This culture shift in the coach profession to more control by professional associations through mandated supervisory practices, may lead to coaches voting with their feet.

The future of coaching as defined by the ICF can be best supported by fewer rules and requirements from professional associations and more humanism (or as Bob Garvey says, less neofeudalistic surveillance and more ethical and democratic way of being). Bottom line, mandatory coaching supervision doesn’t make any sense for coaches who are professionally credentialed by the ICF (and more specifically in North America).

How about using a critical friendship approach rather than supervision? Or, as the Association of Corporate Executive Coaches (ACEC) calls it “Rapid Cycle Peer-to-Peer Coaching” (CB Bowman email February 28, 2015). What this means is a collaborative approach where coaches call on peers and/or friends when facing a challenge or want support (like writing an article, reflecting on a client situation, or exploring an issue). Mature and experienced coaches have a strong support network that provides critical friendship. For those who are training to be coaches, the existing mentoring model (which provides all of what coaching supervision purports to provide) is a solid model that is accepted and achieves the desired results. Perhaps we would be wise to adopt an evaluation based approach associated with our current forms of support before adopting clinically focused models that may have no relevance to the coaching we practice.

There is a growing awareness in North America that the special interest group composed of Coaching Supervision training providers, Coaching Supervisor practitioners, and two professional coach associations - all based in psychological and psychotherapy models which require “supervision” for trainees - is now dangerously confusing the distinctions between the practice of coaching and therapeutic disciplines.

Senior experienced coaches and others are concerned about the dangers of this trend toward coaching supervision. We want to keep the defined boundaries between coaching and therapeutic disciplines by:

- Maintaining the traditional inclusive definition of coach mentoring
- Recognize the value of critical friendship also known as peer-to-peer coaching or coach consultation
- Eliminate or restrict coaching supervision to training and credential purposes only

This will ensure that coaching, as it is has been defined within the ICF, remains a self-regulating profession with strong professional associations that accredit coach specific training programs and credential coaches that meet stringent educational and practice standards. Then, as with most professions, let the marketplace decide who is effective and who is not.

If you are concerned about this disturbing trend, 1) take the time to determine valid facts through due diligence and 2) make your voice heard with your professional associations. The International Coach Federation (ICF), European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC), and Association for Coaches (AC) are international bodies operating in markets with different regulatory approaches. All have blanket policies in place regarding coaching supervision. If they do not fit the way your practice is framed, as is the case for the ICF in the USA, then make your voice heard, before it is too late.

Appendix: Chronology of coaching supervision activities:

| | |
|------|---|
| 2001 | Coaching Supervision Academy (CSA) founded by Edna Murdoch and Miriam Ormiss. |
| 2002 | CSA delivers training with internal and external coaches; gives presentations to coaching groups and organizations. |
| 2004 | Association for Professional Executive Coaching and Supervision (APECS) formed in the UK, by co-founders John O'Brien and Patti Stevens. |
| 2005 | Definition of Coaching Supervision was presented by Tatiana Bachkirova, Patti Stevens and Pauline Willis at a meeting of the Oxford Brookes Coaching and Mentoring Society (OBCAMS). The definition was created during the development phase of the Post Graduate Diploma in Coaching Supervision offered by Oxford Brookes University. |

| | |
|------|--|
| 2006 | <p>CSA 1st supervision training program for executive coaches plus diploma course launched.</p> <p>Coaching Supervision Maximising the Potential of Coaching written by Dr. Peter Hawkins and Gil Schwenk of Bath Consultancy Group.</p> <p>Bath Consultancy Group wrote CIPD Report on Coaching Supervision and partnered with Centre for Supervision and Team Development.</p> <p>Michael Carroll publishes "Supervising Executive Coaches" in therapy today, June 2006, vol 17, no 5, p47</p> |
| 2007 | <p>Reflective Practice and Supervision for Coaches (Coaching in Practice) published by Julie Hay (psychotherapist and coach).</p> <p>Coaching Psychology supervision guidelines published by British Psychology Special Group in Coaching.</p> <p>The Australian Psychologist GRAY, D. E. (2007), Towards a systemic model of coaching supervision: Some lessons from psychotherapeutic and counselling models. Australian Psychologist, 42: 300–309.</p> |
| 2009 | <p>CSA diploma course and a sister-course in Sweden approved for ICF CCEUs.</p> <p>CIPD Report released "Coaching Supervision Maximising the Potential of Coaching".</p> <p>"Why Coaching Supervision is Important" by Gladeana McMahon (counsellor and psychotherapist) is published.</p> <p>"Literature Review on Coaching Supervision" published by Barbara Moyes.</p> <p>Peter Hawkins published a chapter on Coaching Supervision in The Handbook of Coaching.</p> |
| 2010 | <p>David E. Gray published integrated model of supervision and mentoring.</p> <p>EMCC issues guidelines on supervision.</p> <p>Oxford Brookes University held 1st International Conference on Coaching Supervision.</p> <p>CSA diploma courses in France, USA, Ireland and Singapore with advanced courses offered.</p> |
| 2011 | <p>Association of Coaching Supervisors (AOCS) formed, possibly by graduates of CSA.</p> <p>Coaching And Mentoring Supervision: Theory And Practice: The complete guide published by Tatiana Bachkorova (coaching psychologist), Peter Jackson and David Clutterbuck, http://www.amazon.com/Coaching-Mentoring-Supervision-complete-practice/dp/0335242987.</p> <p>Supervision in Coaching: Supervision, Ethics and Continuous Professional Development by Jonathan Passmore editor.</p> |
| 2012 | <p>Association For Coaching (AC) published Coaching Supervision Guide.</p> <p>Supervision In Action: A Relational Approach to Coaching and Consulting Supervision published by De Haan.</p> <p>ICF published a position on coaching supervision.</p> <p>CSA accredited community reaches 130+ and their program is EMCC accredited.</p> |
| 2013 | <p>CSA 1st cohorts in USA, Singapore, Sydney.</p> <p>Oct/Nov ICF Australasia Chapter article by Tammy Turner on coaching supervision (CSA Graduate, MCC, ICF Australasia Director of the Professional Standards' Committee and Leader of the ICF Coaching Supervision Task Force).</p> |
| 2014 | <p>July ICF Global Board made decision on coaching supervision for credential renewal (paid or unpaid) based on ICF Australasian Task Force (led by Tammy Turner) recommendation.</p> |

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Acknowledgements

I'd like to thank the editorial team, particularly **Pauline Willis** for her help in focusing the article to what I really intended to communicate, positive critiques of drafts of the article content and the 'critical friendship' she provided throughout the process. And also, Lisa Mallett for her unwavering commitment to engage in this topic in an honest and transparent manner based on facts.

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