Case Study
Diploma in Coaching Supervision

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“As we become empty [of our everyday concerns and obsessions] we are able to show up to life. To show up is to be present without pre-determined ideas and judgments. This is both simple and rigorous. We do this challenging work of ‘clearing our mirror’ not in a monastery or in a hidden cave but in [the hurly-burly of] everyday life … There is no distant realm to be reached after lifetimes of striving; no journey from here to there. What the Sufi seeks is the only and always just here, just now … And yet, there is road to be travelled”

(Amidon 2006)

Hawkins & Smith, 2013 Page 298

Introduction

This case study is a reflection of my learning journey as a coach supervisor in a group supervision setting. The first enquiry I asked myself is “Is this Mentor Coaching or Supervision?”

Mentoring vs Supervision

Group supervision: The advantage of this form of supervision is that the supervisee gets the benefit of feedback from peers as well as learning from the variety of work that is presented by others in the group. (Carroll & Gilbert 2011, Page 25)

“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 benefits of the coach and his or her clients …” (Murdoch, ICF Webarchive, 2012)

“Mentor Coaching focuses on the development of coaching skills mainly in the context of initial development.” (Murdoch, ICF Webarchive, 2012)
In choosing to use my Supervised Coaching work at International Coach Academy (ICA – www.coachcampus.com), I enquired whether what I was doing was Mentor Coaching or Coaching Supervision. One of the purposes of the group was to fulfil their graduation criteria in becoming an ICF ACTP certified coaches. Whilst I listened to their live laser coaching, I assumed the role of an assessor, a mentor, a supervisor and a group facilitator. Some of the coaches in the group were already practicing coaches whilst some are new to the industry. At ICA, we meet our students where they are at and endeavor to up their mastery and game through the process. After discussing this with my CSA tutor, I am confident that what I am doing is coaching supervision since coaching supervision includes mentoring and more. More importantly, I would like to use this context to demonstrate the CSA Full Spectrum Model’s four main cornerstones; Contracting, Relational Presence, Models and Energy Management (FSS, Murdoch & Arnold 2013), in particular what I am learning and putting into practice after the CSA journey.

Setting the Context
I supervised a group of Chinese speaking coaches (in Chinese) as part of the Certified Professional Coach course for ICA.

The group meets twice a week for six weeks in a private teleconference forum and there were 6 supervisees in my group. Each supervisee was responsible for inviting a client into the call and the supervisee will conduct a 15 minutes laser coaching session. Once the coaching session completed, the client would leave the call and feedback for the coach will be carried out amongst the group in a safe environment for learning.

** With the decision to look at the group supervision from the lenses of the CSA’s four cornerstones, the case will not be presented in a chronological fashion; rather, specific interactions will be picked to highlight my learning.

** Whilst I have made my best endeavor to showcase scenarios under the CSA’s four cornerstones, as we all appreciate, life is never so clean cut and supervision happens as the “Magic in between” (Voldtofte, 2005). The scenarios under each cornerstone are picked to highlight my own learning and there will be times when you may see slight demonstrations/mention of different cornerstones under a heading.

** For purposes of confidentiality, all names have been changed.
FULL SPECTRUM MODEL OF COACHING SUPERVISION

http://coachingsupervisionacademy.com/
Contracting

Contracting in coaching supervision is to promote safety and predictability and creates a frame for the field in which we are working. Within this frame, as the supervisor, I have total freedom for co-initiating, co-sensing, co-presencing, co-creating and co-evolving the session. (Scharmer, 2009, Page19)

“All forms of supervision relationship need to begin with a clear contract, which is created and formed by both parties, covers areas of Practicalities, Boundaries, Working alliance, the session format (and) the organizational and professional context.” (Hawkins & Smith 2013, Page 172-173)

I started the first session by congratulating them in coming into this phase of their learning journey with ICA. I built trust and respect in the group by first stating the purpose of our time together, which is to hone their learning and to bring all aspects of their learning together and demonstrate that in their coaching practice to fulfill the ICF accreditation. They were reassured that as their supervisor I was there to support their learning towards attaining the ICF list of competencies. I explained that all feedback is given with intent to acknowledge what is going well and what can better and stressed that there is no right or wrong in this environment. “Passionate supervision puts development, growth and transformation at the heart of the supervision relationship.” (Shohet 2008, Page 50)

We contracted that in this teleconference space, the 6 coaches and I will commit to creating a space of trust, a space of holding each other with encouragement and feedback and of mutual learning. We then contracted clearly their roles and responsibilities as coach and observers and my role as the supervisor and group facilitator. It was also highlighted that they need to contract with their clients clearly when they invited them to participate. It was important to contract around confidentiality and let their client know that their coaching session will be carried out in the supervisory environment with fellow colleagues listening in as observers and what the clients should do if they dial into the call early. As we run three consecutive coaching session a night, the adherence of time is critical to the process, so I made clear that I will hold them accountable to the 15 minutes of coaching and if necessary, I would come in to request for a completion, and the coach would have to complete their session with the next sentence. (Carroll & Gilbert 2011, Page 36). I then went round and asked how they are feeling right now and for those who are coaching that night, what do they
want me as their supervisor to pay attention to? The group gave me feedback that after the round of contracting, they felt less nervous and felt more excited about the journey that we were about to set forth together.

I experimented with asking them what they want me to pay attention to and this is different to my prior practice of holding the group supervision prior to the CSA course. By contracting this way, it promoted safety and intention for self-reflection for the supervisee and provided safety for me as a supervisor because I have now spot contracted with the coach the areas they would like me to focus my feedback on.

Another area of contracting with the group was the commitment to stay with the group for the duration of the 6 weeks. After the first week, I received an email from one of the coaches, Matt that he cannot make the pre-agreed time and asked to make it up in another class. I then realized that Matt had a psychological contract that as long as he can make up the classes, all will be well. (Bluckert 2006, Page 87) However, the overall learning in the intact group was as important as the individual coaching sessions. I clarified with Matt that my psychological contract with him was for him to keep his commitment to the time he has signed up for and given the genuine need to be away, we spot contracted so that he can swap with someone else and ensure that our group size remains the same. My learning here is that whilst we stated that the group will stay together throughout the 6 weeks, the intent behind it is not explicit enough. Alas, for the next round of group supervision in 2014, I will have to remember to reinforce and further explain the importance of the group staying together as a learning group.

Relational Presence

Relational Presence is the foundation of the quality of relationship for which supervision takes place. The supervisor's ability to relate with the supervisee(s) and build rapport to promote safety, trust and connectedness is fundamental in holding the frame that is created with contracting.

“The essence of working with another person is to be present as a living being … What matters is to be a human being with another human being, to recognize the other person as another being in there.” (Gendlin, article - The Primacy of Human Presence)

In a session I supervised Fern, she was coaching her client to reframe some negative feelings about a personal issue. She started the session with some small talk, and then asked what her client wanted out of the 15 minutes and very quickly started to probe deeply into the
client’s feelings and sensations in the body. Listening to that conversation, I felt a clench in my heart and felt fear. After the session, I invited the rest of the coaches to provide acknowledgement and feedback for Fern’s session, and they acknowledged her courage to use a very different coaching intervention and for her tenacity in holding the space for her client. As I got ready to provide my feedback, I energetically reached out to Fern and wrapped her in my energy field and sent her my positive regard. I acknowledged her courage to attempt different interventions too and at the same time stated that I was curious about the interventions she used and asked how she felt about the session. I was conscious that I was using Eye 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 and 7 of the Seven Eyed Supervisor Model. (Hawkins & Smith, 2013, Page 183) She said that she has chosen to use these direct and deep probing techniques because her client was very conscious of energetic fields and was familiar with the techniques and they have done it before.

I shared with her that I felt fear (Eye 6) and stated if her client is sensitive to energy, there were 6 other people on the call and we brought with us distinct energetic vibrations. Fern then realized that she was too focus on getting to the issue that she had forgotten to contract with her client about the use of the familiar techniques in a relatively unfamiliar environment (since it was the client’s second session). She reflected and made a connection that it may be the reason why her client was not able to get any deeper during the last 5 minutes as she had probably hit a psychological block of safety. This session was a great reminder of how contracting helps build safety.

“To be free of time is to be free of the psychological need of the past of your identity and the future for your fulfillment. It represents the most profound transformation of consciousness that you can imagine.” (Tolle, 2001 Page 37).

In Amy’s first session, she did a complete session of coaching within the 15 minutes that included clear contracting, focus in on the goal of the session, explored the client’s issue at hand as well as the options available and ended with a tangible action plan. I felt like time stood still for me as I listened to the conversation, the tempo of the conversation was melodious, flowing and going in the right direction; I felt immensely calm listening to the coaching interaction. After the session, I acknowledged Amy for a piece of work that was complete in process and felt she was dancing with her client all the time. I shared with her that I felt that my time stood still and was struck by the quality and steadfastness of her coaching. Her reaction surprised me as she broke into tears, thanking me for my feedback and shared that her family member has been poorly and she had been overwhelmed with life challenges. However, that evening when she turned up for the session, she made a
decision to focus on coaching and she made a decision to ‘be empty’, and just come alongside her client. That session taught all of us a big lesson around mindfulness “Power of now …”

Models and Tools

Models and tools like Seven Eyed Supervisor Model, Transactional Analysis, Creative Supervision, Reflective practices and Coaching Psychology provided a systematic and structured way to increase the effectiveness of supervision in the messiness of human interactions. By overlaying the models and tools to the interactions, it brought clarity and surfaced dynamics that were being played out in supervision and or coaching relationships. Whilst the models and maps are the most tangible and visible part of supervision, it is most powerful when it is executed with clean contracting, openhearted relational presence and awareness of one’s energy (energy management). In other words, models and maps weaved the magic of supervision with the other 3 cornerstones.

“Being fully present. Coaching is a dialogue not an interview. That means getting engaged and making genuine contact.” (Bluckert, 2006, Page 20)

Tim has a management consulting background and has wanted to extend his services into coaching. After his first session, when I asked what he felt he did well in his session, he stated that he was proud that despite he was under the weather and he still managed to complete the coaching. I acknowledged his tenacity and provided the feedback that his questions were rather broad and conversation stayed at a relatively high level. On reflection, I was not able to tell him what I really wanted to say. What I really wanted to say was the session was a facilitated conversation at best and not coaching.

“A “Rescuer” is someone who often does not own their vulnerability and seeks instead to “rescue” those whom they see as vulnerable.” (Karpman Drama Triangle article by Miriam Orriss 2004)

Looking back, I realized that I was caught in the Karpman Drama Triangle in the rescuer position. Once I heard that he was not feeling well (spoken from a Victim position), my empathetic self went over-drive and jumped straight to the Rescuer mode. The con in this scenario is that “Please be nice to be me” and that hooked my script belief of “I should be nice’. As a result of being hooked in the Rescuer position, I gave a rather superficial and less than powerful feedback of “your questions are
rather broad and high level”. I persecuted myself for delivering a polite feedback and felt helpless because I could not change what I have done. It is quite clear that I was caught in my own drama. I am not able to own “I am not nice” and thus as a pattern, often gets hooked into the drama of “being nice”. Reflecting on the supervision interaction, the focus is on giving good quality feedback that helps my supervisee develop, being caught in the drama of “being nice” has reduced the impact of my supervision.

“Parallel processes are the result of transference.” (Erik de Haan, 2012, Page 27)

The other dynamic that was present in this interaction is transference; I have transferred my experience of interacting with older Chinese male into this session as I wanted him to ‘save face’ and not be shamed as a result of my feedback. As a result of transference, I refrained from probing deeply and in the same way he was delivering a superficial session; I was delivering a superficial feedback, a parallel process was in action (Eye 5 Hawkins & Shohet 1989). I was becoming aware of how easily I got into the Rescuer mode and how this particular transference shifted me to a polite state. This awareness helped focus my development to stay on the balcony and advocate with consciousness, providing clearer feedback with a cleaner intent to support my supervisee’s development.

After Tim’s third session, he was still sounding more like a consultant with good facilitation skills and I decided I had to deliver some hard facts, i.e., if he continued this way, I will not be able to support him favorably in his assessment and it is not my wish to see him fail. Learning from my previous experience of being polite and not wanting to bring shame into our relationship, I decided to have a one to one conversation with him. I had to take a few deep breaths to centre and ground myself and connect to my higher Self as a supervisor before the conversation. (Transpersonal - Assagioli’s Egg, 1980) Tim’s case surfaced my compliant child behavior (Transactional Analysis, Berne, 1992) and I had to consciously remind myself, “What is my work?” and how do I bring the facts into the room gracefully by practicing clean language (David Grove, 1980) and balancing advocacy and enquiry.

In this conversation, I shared with Tim my observation around how he is driving every coaching session to a solution and I asked Tim how he felt about it. He paused for a moment and said that for every session, he is thinking how he can provide value for his client within the 15 minutes and thus resulting in his focus on pushing the conversation and the client to a solution. I sat with Tim and practiced Kline’s incisive questions. The limiting assumption I heard was “I had 15 minutes to deliver value to my client.” No wonder it was contracting and stressful for him as well as his client. I asked if he had all the time in the
world and he is not expected to provide a solution what he would do differently. (Kline, 1999, Page 44) And I waited and paid attention…

He took a while and said that he will slow down, accompany his client as if they were taking a stroll and notice what he was saying and asking whatever came to his mind. I felt excited with his response and could feel a flutter in my chest. (Eye 6) I shared my feeling with him and asked what he was feeling at that moment when he said those words. He said that he felt more at ease and less constricted. I asked what would help him to remember to coach from the place of taking ‘a stroll’. He responded that he would take deep breaths to slow down and let go of all his personal needs to deliver value and the metaphor of taking a stroll is a good reminder to him. I invited him to experiment with ‘the stroll’ and see how that works for him in his next coaching session.

In the next session, Tim showed up to the call in a more relaxed mode, I noticed that he was able to listen and follow his client better. Not only did he picked up the cognitive layer of information (he was already listening well during his past 3 sessions), he picked up on his client’s emotions and probed, deepened the exploration by asking some powerful and reflective questions! He strolled with his client during the 15 minutes and the client went away with insights as well as further reflection she can do after the session. I asked Tim what he has done well during the session. He spoke quite excitedly and said that he was beginning to have a feeling of what it means to ‘dance with the client’. I felt joy and excitement (Eye 6 Hawkins & Shohet, 1989) the moment he shared. Tim said that he felt joy too as felt that he has made a major breakthrough in his coaching.

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“Mary Beth O’Neill (2000:13) stresses what for her are the two most important qualities of a coach, ‘backbone’ and ‘heart’: ‘Backbone is about saying what your position is, whether it is popular or not. Heart is staying in relationship ad reaching out ever when the relationship is in conflict.’ (Hawkins & Smith, 2013, Page 295)

It was Karen’s second session with her client and they were reviewing the actions taken after the last session. Karen acknowledged all the success that the client has and enquired what she would like to explore in this session. Karen’s client said that she was becoming aware that something was stopping from acting on one of the tasks and she wasn’t sure what it was. Karen’s next statement and enquiry got me really curious. She stated that “stopping” is a negative phrase and invited her client to think about what could be the positive situation. She then led her client into a visualization session to work on her issue creatively.
the visualization session, when the client started to go into details, she stopped the client and invited her to distance herself from the details. Interestingly, Karen began to sound increasingly detached as she moved the conversation to plausible actions that the client can take.

“To create value, the artisan takes the wool, spins, dyes it with many colours, then weaves a carpet that not only has utility, but also sustainability and beauty.” (Hawkins & Smith, 2013, Page 295)

After the session, I asked Karen, “and when you hear your client say “stopping”, what do you feel?” (Grove’s Clean Questions) She said that it was negative and she was trying to move her client to a more positive mode. I asked Karen what is her relationship with being negative and being positive. She noticed that she wanted to move away from being negative to being positive. With further enquiry, Karen realized that her personal difficulty with “being negative” has prompted her to move the conversation to the positives and potentially missed an opportunity for her client to really get underneath what’s “stopping” her and make a more lasting shift. The other realization was that personally she was trying to work on “being less detailed” and once her client started to get detailed, alarm bells went off for her and again she tried to move the conversation to a more macro level. I was curious what she felt was the impact of this unconscious act on her coaching. Karen recognized that because she was not able to own her “negative” and “detailed oriented” shadows, she could not hold the space for her client to explore them too. This was not only a huge learning for Karen but also for the rest of the group as they start to understand “who you are, is how you coach”.

**Energy Management**

Energy management is about my inner state as a person first then as a supervisor. This cornerstone is arguably the most important and possibly the least known. Being mindful, working with the present to travel down and up the U (Scharmer’s Theory U, 2009), learning from the future are part of Energy management.

“The success of an intervention depends on the inner conditions of the intervenor” - Bill O’Brien, late CEO of Hanover Insurance
Before every session, I would take about 5 minutes to take deep breaths to center myself and connect to my intent for the upcoming session; bringing myself to a state of Open Mind (unconditional witnessing), Open Heart (unconditional impersonal love) and Open Will (seeing the essential self) and allowing what needs to unfold in the coming session to come to pass. (Figure 11-2, Scharmer 2009, Page 180) From that space, I reaffirm my intention and transmuted vibrations of love and light into the space that we are all coming into or the living field. “Love is the universal vibration that allows people to transfer healing energy from one to another.” (Gordon. 1999, Page 17)

“In the world of quantum physics, we are all connected, all the time and in every place. At this level we discover that ALL matter is energy – the desk, the car, you and me. There is no solid boundary between matter and non matter; and both are made up of the same thing – energy, or quantum particles” (Miriam Orriss, 2006, Resources at www.coachingsupervisionacademy.com)

Once a session started, I invited the coaches to share with me what they would like me to pay attention to. All their requests come into the deep listening and holding space that I held so that we can achieve co-sensing, co-presencing and co-creating their learning. (Figure 15.10, Scharmer 2009, Page 246)

“The inner supervisor helps us to discover how we can get out of the way, so that we can be of service, to assist what is necessary both for the individual (or individuals) we are with right now, and for work in the wider world.” (Hawkins & Smith, 2013, Page 295)

Throughout the group coaching process, the methodology of inviting the coaches to acknowledge and reflect helped to build their internal supervisors. I built in reflection in action during the session where I sometimes pause and become curious of my own feeling and thoughts, and after the sessions, I kept a journal of what I thought I did well, could have done better, points for wonder and themes across the different sessions. In this way, I was building up my internal supervisor to focus on learning rather than labeling the experience, in parallel with the group. (FSS, Murdoch & Arnold, Page 106, 117)

Ryan has developed an easy and effective holding presence over the five sessions. In his last session, he employed the metaphor of going on a road trip with his client to explore her plan for the next 12 months for her career. The flow of the conversation was going well; where the client was metaphorically traveling into the future on the highway with lovely images of slowing down to smell the roses. Then she said she hit a roadblock when she started to think
about what she needs to prepare in anticipation for the next 12 months. Ryan asked her what would happen if she didn’t know where she was heading on a road trip and the client responded that she would stop at a gas station and ask for directions. I was full of curiosity by Ryan’s next question. He asked what the blocks are in her plans right now and launched into an exploration of practicalities to formulate an action plan.

“VOF (voice of fear): Fear of letting go of the familiar self and world; fear of going forth; fear of surrendering into the space of nothingness” (Scharmer 2009, Page 246)

In my conversation with Ryan after the session, I acknowledge the ease in which he held the space for the client creatively think about her enquiry. I shared my observation as above and told Ryan that I felt disconnected when he switched gear into exploring the practicalities with the client and I asked what was going on for him at that moment. He reflected and said that he was suddenly aware that he had 5 minutes left and he wasn’t sure where the road trip metaphor would lead them. Thus he decided to get practical to help his client get to an outcome with the remaining time. I stated that his client just told him that if she didn’t know the way, she would ‘stop at the gas station to ask for help’.

“Presencing is a movement where we approach our self from the emerging future.” (Scharmer 2009, Page 163)

I asked ‘If you let go of needing to know where to lead your client, what would you do?’ He laughed a little, in a relaxed tone said, I would ask her ‘what does the gas station represent’ and ‘what help would you seek?’ Ryan recognised that his fear has ended the beautiful road trip for his client and possibly a beautiful journey to learn from the future as it emerged.

Conclusion

The cross fertilization of learning in a group supervision is fascinating. The individual coach learned from the 6 sessions they have conducted as well as the 30 other sessions they observed. After every group session, the coaches took away something for their own learning.

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<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Core Concern</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Self-centred</td>
<td>“Can I make it in this work?”</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Client-centred</td>
<td>“Can I help this client make it?”</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Process-centred</td>
<td>“How are we relating together?”</td>
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Table 8.3 Supervisee Developmental Stages (Hawkins & Smith, 2013, Page 179)

When we first started, I observed the coaches were at Level 1 when they started and moved towards Level 2 and 3 as they progressed. There is a Chinese saying “学无止境” that translates to there is no end to learning. If a coach is likened to be a mirror for our clients, then it is our job to maintain and keep ourselves as clean as possible.

In parallel, I journeyed through the different levels as a supervisor over the 6 weeks, listening to over 40 sessions of coaching, learning about myself as supervisor, experimenting with new found tools and techniques and strengthening those muscles that I already had. I flexed and stretched in the space marked by the four cornerstones of Contracting, Relational Presence, Models and Tools and Energy Management.

As I conclude this case study, the statement that stood out for me is …

“Who you are, is how you supervise” - Edna Murdoch

I cannot end my case study without expressing my deepest gratitude for ICA (www.coachcampus.com) and the wonderful group of supervisees who journeyed with me for the 6 weeks. This community has provided me a place to constantly test out my work and polished my being.

I am immensely grateful.

Thank You.
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