

Coaching the coach

As winner of *TJ's* coaching award for 2009, Deloitte understands the importance of supervision for its internal coaches. **Helen Slingsby** tells us more

While the coaching industry is in its go-getting, experimental twenties, its cousin, coaching supervision, has yet to make double digits.

When surveyed by the CIPD three years ago, a healthy 88 per cent of organisations and 86 per cent of coaches concurred that coaches should have regular ongoing supervision, and yet only 44 per cent of the coaches were receiving such support.

Things have moved on a bit, with coaching supervision guru and Bath Consultancy Group chairman Dr Peter Hawkins observing a “marked growth” in both the requirement for coaching supervision and in its providers. But it would be fair to say that coaching supervision is still in its infancy, even more so at organisational level, which is why the work of the coaching team at business advisory firm Deloitte in the UK has been doing on internal supervision is all the more groundbreaking.

The CIPD defines coaching supervision as “a structured formal process for coaches, with the help of a coaching supervisor, to attend to improving the quality of their coaching, grow their coaching capacity and support themselves and their practice. Supervision should also be a source of organisational learning”.

Hawkins adds that other coaching practitioners and



academics say supervision “provides a degree of protection” to the person being coached.

This year’s recipient of *TJ*’s award for best coaching programme, for developing an innovative, effective and cost-saving internal coaching team, Deloitte’s creation and implementation of an internal coaching supervision programme through talent management firm Cedar Talent Management provides the focus here.

There are notable organisations, like the BBC and PricewaterhouseCooper, that have adopted structured coaching supervision programmes for their internal coaches but they are rare. Deloitte’s coaching team has distinguished itself by embracing the supervision process rapidly and wholesale, and against the backdrop of the economic slump. It has used it to leverage respect and credibility within the business as well as boost competency and confidence across the board.

Hawkins and Smith (2006) say the benefits of internal coaching supervision include bringing geographically-dispersed coaches together to share good practice, improving collaborative working and identifying organisational themes and issues.

Deloitte UK has been employing a growing number of external coaches for the past five years as part of its commitment to developing people, but in 2007 it sought to reduce its financial burden by creating an 18-strong internal coaching team. Supervision was introduced a year ago, in September 2008.

“Creating the team was a huge shift financially and met the needs of the tougher economic climate head-on,” explains Caroline Flin, head of coaching at Deloitte. “Before this, a request [for coaching] would come in and it would be responded to with reasonable efficiency but there was little vision, strategy or cohesion in the coaching model.”

Internal supervision focus tool used in Cedar’s kickstart meeting

As the coach develops, the focus for supervision may move through these four stages.

LEVEL 1 SELF CENTRED:

Can I make this work?

High levels of motivation but often lacking insights. Characterised by high levels of anxiety to do the ‘right’ thing and to be effective. Can tend towards an overly mechanistic approach and attempt to play the role of expert.

LEVEL 2 CLIENT CENTRED:

Can I help this client make it?

Increased awareness of the complexity and multi-dimensional nature of coaching. Coach fluctuates between over-confidence and feeling overwhelmed and can become reactive to his clients.

LEVEL 3 PROCESS CENTRED:

How are we relating together?

Increased professional self confidence with greater insight and more stable motivation. Characterised by greater flexibility and adjustment of approach to the client in order to meet the specific needs at that particular time in the given context.

LEVEL 4 PROCESS IN CONTEXT CENTRED:

How do all the processes interconnect?

The coach has reached ‘Master Level’ and will be mainly engaged in a coaching role, characterized by personal autonomy, insightful awareness, personal security, stable motivation and an awareness of the need to confront her own personal and professional issues.

(Adapted from Hawkins & Smith, 2006)

Box A

This reflected a market in which brand distinction comes in the development of exemplary client relationships. Hawkins says: “Many professional services firms realise it is becoming less and less possible to differentiate their services from the competition purely on product quality and that they need to differentiate through how they relate to their clients. This is requiring their partners and senior managers to

have much higher relationship skills and emotional intelligence than was previously necessary.”

Initially the coaching support of the crucial transition of key Deloitte people from technically excellent practitioners to influential leaders, relationship builders and client managers, was inconsistent. In two years, Deloitte has experienced a cultural shift in which coaching is now at the forefront of maximising potential.

“Put simply, we know that every coaching interaction we have with our people should ultimately lead to improved performance, and what people business wouldn’t put that at the heart of their development strategy? Given this level of importance, supervision is a relatively small investment to make to build the credibility and expertise of our internal cadre of accredited coaches,” explains Deloitte head of learning Neil Imber.

The in-house team, comprising HR and L&D professionals, was created and put through a coaching programme devised by Elizabeth Ferguson of Duncan MacQuarrie Associates. The team is charged with coaching Deloitte’s most senior and talented managers, working to boost skills such as rapport-building and relationship management, as well as raising self-awareness and building confidence.

However, as the consulting firm began integrating coaching with other leadership and talent initiatives, it was felt that the coaching team needed to step up its game too, so supervision, which is still fairly rare for individual coaches and more so for internal coaches, was recommended.

“Approval from the business and potential coachees required a rigorously-trained and strongly cohesive team. Organisationally, this was hugely important for our credibility,” highlights Flin.

“Supervision was a key way to demonstrate that development not only of leaders but also of coaches was being taken seriously.”

“Supervision was a key way to demonstrate that development not only of leaders but also of coaches was being taken seriously”



Flin's job also was to present the supervision programme as both a financial saving, when compared with the cost of external coaches, and a long-term investment given the rigorous training the internal coaches were receiving, making them equal partners with the external coaches being employed elsewhere in Deloitte.

Cedar Talent Management immediately started work on tailoring a coaching supervision programme to suit the needs of the team.

“They sought to understand the organisation and the coaching team's position and its requirements. They asked a lot of questions and did not make assumptions, which mirrored the coaching process,” says Flin.

Cedar coaching supervisor Christine Champion designed a ‘kick-off’ event so all coaches could explore and agree on the supervision model and outline what they wanted, and expected,

from the process and not feel it had been imposed upon them.

Before the programme started, the internal coaching team had been asked to reflect on their coaching practice using Hawkins and Smith's (2006) four stages of coach development as a benchmark (see Box A left). The model describes the coaching development continuum as moving through four key areas: skills to help people develop their competencies; performance to help people develop their capability to use their skills effectively and timely on the right choices; development to help people develop their capacity within their current level of being, and, finally, transformation to help people to shift to a higher order level of being.

After reviewing the model and their own development as coaches, they were asked to think of key areas in which supervision could add value to their coaching

activities and note down the most important areas.

The kick-off event did not simply look at coaching supervision theory; it also created the framework for, as well as the feel and purpose of, future sessions. Thus, coaches debated the purpose and key tasks of supervision for the group and themselves; they explored and defined the respective roles of supervisor, supervisee and other key stakeholders. They also defined the values and vision for supervision and contracted on the supervision process, agreeing boundaries, ethics, confidentiality, feedback and evaluation.

In all, the event was a useful exercise in creating clarity about the process and in managing expectations. It also had the added benefit of assuaging concerns about the true purpose of supervision, as one of the main challenges to the programme being accepted was initial

suspicion and ignorance of what being in supervision means. “There was some resistance from coaches who did not have a clear idea of what supervision was – they saw it as a kind of assessment process – but fortunately the kick-off event helped with this,” explains Flin.

Other challenges were to do with getting busy HR and L&D people, who make up the internal coaching team, to find time for supervision amongst the many competing priorities of their day job and to avoid last-minute cancellations. The supervision sessions have cemented the coaching team and now individuals seem determined to make the sessions. “Now the group is more established, this is less of an issue as our coaches know the value the time they invest will have,” adds Flin.

Says Champion: “Everyone is very committed to coming and it is seen as a priority. It is recognised that it is a key developmental investment for coaches. Supervision is good for confidence as it provides the opportunity for benchmarking and has restorative aspects, which is needed in this climate as it is very challenging working with executives.

“Deloitte is ahead of the game. Not many organisations provide internal supervision of this type to this level. It is a trailblazer, taking notice of what the professional bodies are proposing as best practice and investing in its coaches and the value of the role, rather than paying lip service. Coaching supervision is an emerging field so for an organisation to be backing it is even more impressive.”

Supervision comprises meetings three times a year in two groups, overseen by Champion and Cedar director of professional coaching standards Gladeana McMahon. There is also a single one-to-one session in the autumn with one of the supervisors. Group sessions

Role of CEDAR supervision at Deloitte

- Contracting
- Establish a working alliance
- Work with parallel process
- Work systemically
- Provide constructive feedback
- Sensitive to learning styles
- Provide new perspectives
- Create learning experiments
- Attend to personal development
- Enhance reflexivity
- Develop high-level skills
- Expand interventions and tools
- Develop psychological mindfulness
- Develop new competencies
- Build the internal supervisor
- Review standards and ethics
- Provide restorative and developmental support

Tips for group members

Trust the process

- Avoid trying to look competent in front of the group
- The focus should be on the supervisee and his coaching client
- Declare any conflicts of interest
- Set clear boundaries

Box B

can take many forms, including investigating challenges and difficulties, sharing successes or breakthroughs, or discussing boundaries (see Box B above).

Cedar uses the seven-eyed coaching supervision model (Hawkins and Smith 2006), which looks at the coaching/organisation/coachee and supervisor relationship from all angles. It explores the coaching client, the coaching strategies and interventions used, as well as the coach/client relationship plus the coach/supervisee relationship as well as the coach/supervisor relationship, the supervisor and, finally, the supervision strategies used (see diagram above right).

Champion favours the model for its versatility and recognition of the “broader systemic”

influences on the organisation, such as the economic climate. “It ensures the coachee is receiving the best interventions that are appropriate for him,” she says.

Issues taken to the sessions include the coaching/counselling boundary, the tripartite arrangement between coach, Deloitte and coachee, ethics and managing coachee expectations. Coaches sometimes know the client in another capacity, which is a further challenge. Often the session can provide an arena for sharing, exploring and learning. It can also be a dress rehearsal for an upcoming, and potentially tricky, coaching meeting.

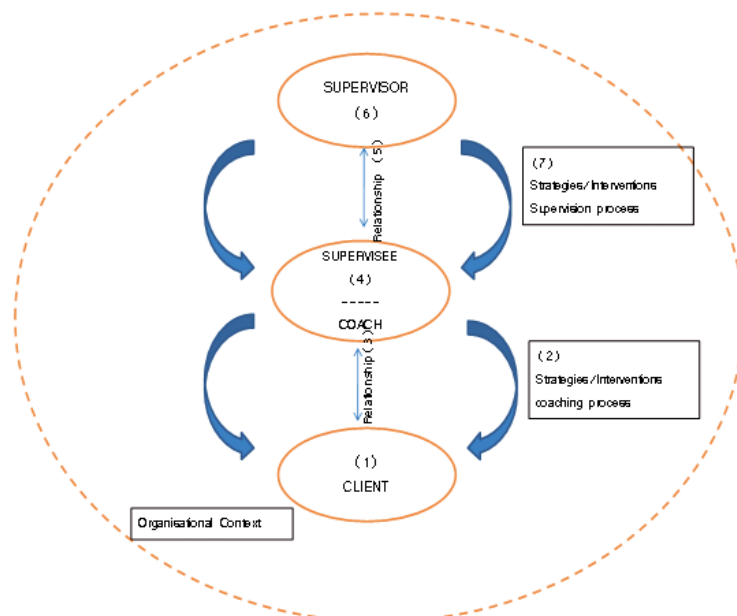
Coaches are encouraged to reflect on the work they bring to the session and on the feedback they receive. They are asked to consider what worked well for them in the session, what insights or thoughts they may have experienced since the client/coaching session and, also, to explore their behaviours, thinking and feelings at the time of the session. Crucially, the supervision asks them to look at what they might have done differently as a result of the learning and reflection, and what they would change, or improve, or learn from others.

So what difference has coaching supervision made to Deloitte’s internal coaches and the quality of their work? “Personally, I’m more confident, knowing there is an expert available to support my coaching,” says Flin. As far as the rest of her team is concerned, she says, there has been a noticeable shift in the type of material being presented to Champion and McMahon: “It has matured as the coaches’ experience has grown. We are making more demands on our supervisors.”

Champion adds that the team members now have a more “holistic”, client-centred approach to their practice. “The coaches are now working at a more transformational than transactional level. It’s about

The 7 Eyed Coaching Supervision Model

CEDAR
TALENT MANAGEMENT



© 2008 Savile Group. All rights reserved.

DDAS

CEDAR
TALENT MANAGEMENT

Fairplace where else?

unpicking what is happening in the moment - looking deeper at what's driving the individual rather than worrying about whether they are using the right tool or technique; they are working with more focus on the coaching relationship. It's about looking at other ways of working and development. Supervision has broadened their repertoire."

Honesty is the key here, she adds. "These coaches are becoming so open with each other; they bring real challenges rather than worry that others may think them less than competent. Time spent early on contracting and agreeing the rules of engagement is essential."

Supervision has increased the professionalism of the internal coaching team, which in turn has raised its profile across Deloitte and increased its credibility among

the partners, senior managers and potential recipients of its support.

"I believe it has led to a virtuous circle: our coaches have learned that they can bring coaching forward as a key part of what they do, improve buy-in from their management to make the time for coaching (by having it written into their objectives) and learn from their practice," says Flin.

For Cedar and other supervision providers, the future looks rosy for a number of reasons. Professional coaching bodies are demanding more of its coaches, their training and development, accreditation and supervision, and they are consequently requiring the extra support. Also, coaching purchasers are refusing to use individuals who do not have supervision.

In the words of Shaun Lincoln

Adapted
by Cedar
Talent
Management from
Hawkins
and Smith

of the Centre for Excellence in Leadership: "I would expect coaches to have supervision as part of their continuous professional development and I would not employ a coach who did not have supervision."

Deloitte is at the forefront of this trend, cultivating a home-grown team that is saving money and ensuring key employees are being sensitively primed for the tough transition to management.

It would be fair to say therefore that coaching supervision is rapidly catching up with its older coaching cousin and is key to supporting the development of the coaching profession. ■

Helen Slingsby is an associate of Cedar Talent Management. She can be contacted on +44 (0)118 984 4962 or at helen.slingsby@fairplace.com