

101 Coaching Supervision Techniques, Approaches, Enquiries and Experiments Edited by Michelle Lucas, Routledge, 2020, 362, ISBN 9780367481148 (hardback) | ISBN 9780367481155 (paperback) | ISBN 9781003038061 (ebook)

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The book is, as it explains quite clearly in the title, a presentation of a large number of techniques that can be used in coaching supervision, each one showcased and explained by a practitioner in the field. It is a “How to” book but with the splendid addition of clear and simple explanations of a range of philosophies that underpin the techniques. The many contributions have been carefully managed by the editor to present a cohesive book that nonetheless retains the different voices that contributed, and this keeps it light and engaging. There is a refreshing lack of jargon and the text is very readable.

The foreword and introduction explain the aims and ideas behind the book and include important information about the way the book is organised and how to use it.

The book is divided into ten sections, each one presenting a philosophical approach to coaching supervision, and the techniques that support this approach. The ten philosophical approaches are:

- eclectic perspective
- existential
- gestalt
- person-centred
- positive psychology
- psychodynamic perspective
- solution-Focused
- systematic
- thinking environment
- transpersonal

Each of these approaches is introduced and explained briefly by an expert in that area. These include such voices as David Clutterbuck, Hetty Einzig, Linda Aspey and Carmelina Lawton-Smith, some of whom have also contributed a technique.

The introductions mostly follow a common form with the following sub-headings

- How is this philosophy described?
- What are the underpinning principles and beliefs of this philosophy?
- What is the role of the coach supervisor in the context of this philosophy?
- How would you prepare yourself to work congruently with this approach?
- How might this way of working be particularly useful to the supervisee?
- Anything else you need to consider before using the techniques that follow

Each sub-heading is followed by an amount of explanation and detail, length depending on the writer, that sets out to answer the question posed. This helps to explain the context and thinking that underpins the approaches and, as one would expect from a coaching background, the focus is on how it can help the supervisee to see new truths, explore new ideas and arrive at new solutions. It is helpful to have the different philosophies explained clearly in relation to a specific context and this grounds the techniques in a particular mindset.

Gathered under each philosophy are a number of techniques, presented by a wide range of practitioners, that support the philosophical approach.

The person-centred approach presents just two techniques while the eclectic philosophy presents rather more with 41 different ideas. Other sections present between three and eleven different techniques.

Each technique has a handy set of icons at the top indicating the most appropriate setting for the technique to be used: professional one-to-one supervision, professional group supervision, peer group supervision and individual reflection. It seems likely that those techniques best suited to adaptation to action learning sets would be the ones labelled with peer group supervision or professional groups supervision icons.

There is also an indication of the level of expertise the supervisee should have in order to get the most from the approach: “most levels” or “experienced supervisees only”. For action learning sets it is most likely that “most levels” would be the appropriate level, but this of course depends on the group and experience of the facilitator.

This quick look icon bar at the top of each technique helps to save time by filtering out those techniques that are not appropriate for the setting.

The presentation of the techniques uses a common framework:

- title
- when it is used
- what it is
- how to work with it
- what else might need attention
- a word of caution
- what other uses there are
- a reference section which includes ideas for further reading and additional resources.

This gives the book cohesion, in spite of the large number of different voices who have contributed to it, and makes it very easy to locate the information that you might need.

The sections on “how to work with it” have useful ideas and practical suggestions while the “word of caution” sections give clear indications as to when this technique might not be appropriate or could be counterproductive.

The work throughout is well-supported with references to literature and relevant research.

For an inexperienced supervisor this book provides an extensive buffet of techniques and ideas. For those who are interested in understanding more, the signposts to further reading are useful. This book is a nice reminder of old favourites for experienced coach supervisors, and within the 101 suggestions there will be some new ideas that might refresh the sessions and give a new slant to conversations that may have slipped into a rut.

For readers of this journal the question is likely to be, how can these techniques be helpful to me in my work with action learning sets? It seems likely that the different philosophies can be utilised in action learning sets at different stages of the work.

As an example:

At the beginning of a journey, techniques from within the Thinking Environment philosophy could be appropriate to gather thoughts in a safe environment. One technique to use could be “Rounds” presented by Linda Aspey. This is built on Nancy Kline’s work around beautiful listening and invites each participant to share their thoughts for a specific period of time, while the rest of the group pay beautiful attention and refrain from interruption. Once everyone has had the opportunity to talk, the facilitator prompts further rounds with questions such as “how has your thinking changed?”, “do you have more thoughts on this?”. Linda describes how Rounds can bring equality into a room where there may be power differences between the participants and enables everyone to have a voice.

“Capturing journeys on a big scale” presented by Michelle Lucas and Andy King from within the Eclectic philosophy might be something that is useful when nearing the end of a project to capture the learning points gained during the project’s enactment. This technique involves the group in creating a large drawing of the journey and adding in the points of interest such as challenges, learning, resolutions and so on. Sometimes, they suggest, having a visual image can be helpful in seeing progress and highlighting the value of the journey as more than a way of just getting to the destination.

These and many of the other techniques have the group or peer supervision icons and it seems likely that these techniques are ones that can be most readily adapted to work with action learning sets.

While not an action learning set book, it seems like a useful resource if you are looking for a range of new and different ways of working with groups and fits well with other books on a similar topic – the main difference being that rather than a detailed look at the process this is a lighter touch on a range of ways in which you can enable discussion and learning within your action learning sets. I think that both new and experienced facilitators would find something new and interesting among the plethora of ideas that could enhance practice.