Resourcing the Supervisory Relationship during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The Resourcing function has been described as being at the heart of supervision. This article makes a special case for the utility of Resourcing in coaching supervision in the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, when supervisees may more than ever require the development of capacities for resilience and non-reactivity. A practical and proactive approach for supervisees to better resource themselves is proposed, employing The Seven Eyed Model of Supervision as a framework for suggested areas of exploration and inquiry particularly applicable to working in the supervisory relationship under conditions of heightened distress.

Keywords: Supervision; supervisory relationship; Resourcing in Supervision; COVID-19 coronavirus; coaching, coaching psychology.

INTRODUCTION

T tanding at 18 million confirmed cases, and 696,000 deaths globally in August 2020 at the time of writing this article (WHO, 2020), the physical and psychological health toll of the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic is a grim ongoing reality. In its wake, major changes to our way of life, working practices, possible economic hardship, an uncertain future, socialdistancing, self-isolation continue to presage a challenging outlook for many. Alongside the negative effects, there have been some social and psychosocial positive effects arising from these major changes, for example benefits from home working such as productivity gains, time savings from no longer needing to commute, a reduction in pollution levels (Kaushik & Guleria, 2020). There is also the potential for positive developmental aspects – of enhancing resilience (Panchal et al., 2020) and even well-being (Palmer et al., 2020). Nevertheless, evidence suggests the negative effect of COVID-19 coronavirus on mental health and well-being is being widely felt (Torales et al., 2020; Bevan, 2020).

Recognising the potential negative psychological impact of COVID-19 for clients¹, the British Psychological Society (BPS) (2020) has issued guidance for psychological professionals during the pandemic, emphasising the need to keep services open during the crisis, maintain training, and provide remote delivery of services. Primarily client-focused, these guidelines also

¹ The term 'client' is also used to describe the coachee in this article, rather than representing other stakeholders or sponsors.

indicate the need for self-care of psychological professionals whilst responding to a high level of need, and acknowledge that supervision (provided remotely) and other self-care is even more important at this time to enable effective service provision.

Developing this point specifically in the coaching psychology domain, the International Society for Coaching Psychology provides COVID-19 guidelines for its members on its website, referring to its Code of Ethics and Guidance to coaching psychology, particularly highlighting areas of (i) recognition of personal or health related problems impairing practice, (ii) informed consent for client to work remotely, and (iii) putting in place a Coaching Will in the event of becoming unwell (https://www.isfcp.info/iscp-covid-19-information/). Specific to coaching supervision, the Association for Coaching website has Coronavirus (COVID-19) Policy and Guidance, including a virtual Supervision Support Group, with regular Supervisors' Virtual Meet-ups (https://www.associationforcoaching.com/ page/Covid19updates).

COACHING SUPERVISION AS A REFLECTIVE RELATIONSHIP

Coaching Supervision can be described as a reflective relationship in service of enhancing reflective practice, involving development and use of the supervisory relationship as a container for processing what arises from the work (Hawkins, 2019). Along with the *qualitative*, quality control function, and the *developmental* function relating to skills, understanding, and capacities of the supervisee, the erstwhile largely neglected *resourcing* function plays a critical part in enabling the supervisee to develop their capacities to reflect and to resource themselves.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY RESOURCING?

Whilst the functions of supervision have been described in various ways, Hawkins and Smith (2013) in a relational, collaborative model of supervision propose the Qualitative, the Developmental, and Resourcing functions of supervision. Although the Qualitative and Developmental functions have received much more attention and focus than the Resourcing function, resourcing has been argued to be at the heart of supervision (Hawkins (2019).

Rather than a transactional provision of resources (such as books, models, tools) suggested by a dictionary definition of the term, Resourcing in supervision in the context of Hawkins and Smith's Seven-eyed Supervision Model (2006;2013; Hawkins, 2019) has a particular meaning.

"The **Resourcing Function** is a way of responding to how those engaged in the intensity of work with clients are necessarily allowing themselves to be affected by the distress, pain and fragmentation of the client, how they need time to become aware of the way this has affected them and to deal with any reactions."

Hawkins, 2019; pg. 62

We therefore use supervision to *resource ourselves*, both as supervisees and supervisors, rather than our supervisor necessarily providing resources to us as supervisee.

Essential in any context, the current context of coaches working in COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath highlights a particular need for resourcing supervisees to avoid over-identifying with, or defending against being further affected by their clients' distress (Hawkins & McMahon, 2020). Lack of attending to these emotions by the supervisee/supervisor could lead to supervisee stress and ultimately to 'burn-out' (Maslach et al., 2001).

COACHING SUPERVISION AS A SOURCE OF SELF-CARE AND PROACTIVE ACTION

The resourcing, or restorative role of supervision has been discussed in the literature (Turner & Palmer, 2019). However, within the COVID-19 context, there may also be a need to adopt a more practical and proactive approach to enable supervisees to better resource and prepare themselves in terms of their current (and future) practice, wellbeing and health. This could apply in relation to physical, social and/or psychological factors. Within the current uncertainty of the pandemic, supervision can offer a supporting environment that brings psychological safety for the coach, particularly when focusing upon potentially challenging and sensitive personal topics. For example, considerations might include signposting the coach's clients where the practitioner becomes ill, or indeed even legacy planning if death or incapacitation occurs. A coach may also experience the serious illness or sadly even death of a client because of the novel coronavirus and resourcing the self-care of the coach at the time, through the supervisory relationship, might become significant. The importance of the supervisor being engaged in their own supervisory relationship is an important point to also note here.

A further function of supervision at this time might relate to the changing work environment of the coach. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, restrictions (e.g. lockdown, shielding, social distancing, face coverings) have been put in place in many countries around the world. As a result, most coaching practitioners, who would have previously worked face to face or in offices, have now found

they are working from home-offices and in a virtual setting. Areas of self-care to consider in supervision under these circumstances might include practical conversations around managing work-life boundaries, taking breaks from a computer-based setting, practical resourcing and trouble-shooting relating to working virtually and remotely (e.g. managing stress around unstable broadband, finding an appropriate space to work, time-scheduling breaks).

RESOURCING USING THE SEVEN EYED MODEL OF SUPERVISION

The Seven Eyed Model of Supervision (Hawkins, 2011; Hawkins & McMahon, 2020) is an integrative relational and systemic framework drawing from a variety of theoretical and psychotherapeutic approaches, applicable to all helping relationships. It attends to the relationships between the practitioner, their clients and stakeholders, the supervisory relationship, and the interplay between these relationships within the wider systemic contexts of all these parties. Whilst only the supervisee and supervisor are likely to be directly present in supervision meetings, the client, organisational, systemic context are also imported into the conscious and unconscious awareness of the supervisee. This creates the client-practitioner matrix, and the supervisee-supervisor matrix, divided further into three categories each. There are therefore six categories, or modes, of managing the supervision process, as well as a seventh category or mode, wider contexts.

In addressing the Resourcing needs likely to be foremost in the situation of COVID-19 and its aftermath, these modes are explored, providing particular areas of focus, tasks and interventions that may be appropriate or helpful to the supervisory work.

Mode 1 The client (or coachee) and how they present

In this mode, the supervisor is working to enable the supervisee to increase their tolerance of 'not knowing' and become more acutely aware of what actually happens in the session. The emphasis is on supervisors encouraging their supervisee's *being* with the client, rather than rushing a rapid interpretation, or working from fixed ideas about how the client work should happen. This may be particularly important in a context where the client may not be able to access and gain support as usual from those in their support, social, and work network. Armed with the presenting details, the content of the sessions can be explored for links with the external life of the client. If working remotely paying particular attention to non-verbal communication channels, and awareness of the potential challenges for assessing the emotional states of clients is suggested (Kanatouri, 2020; pg 216).

Example of Resourcing Mode 1

Areas of exploration and enquiry might be prompted by the supervisor asking:

What has the client shared in the session about their own COVID-19 experience?

What interpretation[s] is the coach making about the clients COVID-19 experience?

In what ways (if any) might the remote/virtual setting of the coaching session be perceived from the clients perspective?

Mode 2 The Supervisee's strategies and interventions

Whilst this mode might not appear to be the most obvious route to resourcing in the sense that Hawkins (2019) defines, indirectly the supervisee's choice and implementation of interventions has implications for resourcing in the supervisory relationship. For instance, the supervisee may be drawn to feelings of 'rescuing' the client, and choose interventions and offer advice that obviate the responsibility for the client to find their own solutions. Likewise, that same supervisee may be struggling with managing the changes inherent in working during lockdown, have concerns about their own personal, family, financial, work situation, in addition to struggling to select interventions with the client at this particular point, and the supervisor (who may have their own similar concerns and challenges) may respond by 'rescuing' them. In turn, the supervisor suggesting interventions in such a case may be appropriate and helpful, or not, depending on how and when it is offered, and the supervisee's response and subsequent use of the suggestions. Employing a reflective journal, and exploring these issues in supervision or supervision of supervision (Moral & Turner, 2019; Turner & Palmer, 2019) may prove helpful resourcing inputs.

Example of Resourcing Mode 2

Areas of exploration and enquiry might be prompted by the supervisor asking:

Has the supervisee changed their way of working with clients during the COVID-19 pandemic? If so, how?

What resources does the client have/need to support their goal attainment and maintenance during the COVID-19 period?

Mode 3 The client/supervisee relationship

The focus in this mode is on both the conscious and unspoken, or unconscious interaction between the client and the supervisee. This mode takes a distancing approach, seeking to enable the supervisee to develop a perspective on the client, themselves, and the dynamics of the coaching relationship between them. For instance, the client may be seeking to extend the coaching sessions, and be overly-reliant on the supervisee as coach, rather than finding their own solutions. The supervisor therefore works with the supervisee towards developing a third-person perspective on their coaching relationships.

Example of Resourcing Mode 3

Areas of exploration and enquiry might be prompted by the supervisor asking:

How might somebody observing the work with this client, describe the coaching relationship?

If you were the supervisor today in this session, what areas would you explore with the supervisee about this coaching relationship?

Mode 4 The Supervisee

This mode focuses on the internal processes of the supervisee, and the each-way impact of these on their work and client relationships, including countertransference. This may be for instance examples where the supervisee is feeling themself the client's fear, distress, or anger, where the client is unable or does not engage with those emotions. The aim is to create greater awareness in the supervisee of their largely unaware reaction to their client, and to create space to respond rather than react to the client, using their understanding of their reactions to the client as information on the client and the client's difficulties. Hawkins (2019: pg.70) describes working with the 'reactivity triggers' (or events or interactions triggering the reactivity and emotional patterns) of our supervisees. The supervisee is aided in raising their capacity to Notice, Catch, Use as Data, Act on, their reactivity as it happens. In the event that strong supervisee emotions are evoked, the personal-professional boundary needs to be attended to, and the supervisee's agreement to working with countertransference material obtained.

In this mode, the supervisee is effectively resourcing themselves through supervision (Hawkins & McMahon, 2020: pg 35). Such resourcing includes the supervisee's reflection on the supervision, evaluating whether it is fulfilling their current and potential future needs, and whether there are psychological, practical, or organisational blocks preventing them from more effectively using the supervision they are receiving. A key consideration here is self-supervision: whether their supervision is encouraging the supervisee to develop a healthy internal supervisor that they can access during work with their coachees.

Further areas of focus in Mode 4 are support and welfare needs of the supervisee, and their general well-being. How is the supervisee managing in the present situation? Are there issues specific to the current situation in their working or personal life that are impacting on their client work, on how they are experiencing their own coping, resilience, support network resources, self-care, that need to be discussed and addressed. Several practices (Hawkins, 2019: pg.71) may be helpful here, such as invoking External Resources such as nature; Mindfulness to assist in focusing on the present in supervision; wide-angled empathy (being compassionate and empathic towards every person, system in the supervisee's narrative) in resourcing themselves.

Example of Resourcing Mode 4

Areas of exploration and enquiry might be prompted by the supervisor asking:

How is the supervisee self- managing during their own COVID-19 experience?

What reflective processes are they using to monitor their coaching approach?

What resources and support do they need?

Mode 5 The Supervisee/Supervisor relationship

The fifth mode focuses on how the client/coach relationship is reflected in the supervisee/supervisor relationship. This may be apparent through parallel processing, for example the supervisee (usually unconsciously) presents the characteristics of a 'demanding' client when in supervision in a 'demanding' way. Rather than responding in a 'demanding' manner to the supervisee, the supervisor's task is to lightly identify and name, then explore the process with the supervisee.

The 'real' relationship between supervisee/supervisor also needs to be addressed in this mode, primarily in the form of contracting and re-contracting, regular reviews, and attending to the boundaries of the supervisory relationship, including ethics and any ethical dilemmas that may arise. The supervisor's sharing of any formal reporting on the supervisee, and feedback between supervisee and supervisor are all important components of this category of managing the supervisory process. Whilst the supervisory relationship is not a therapy relationship, appropriate emotional processing and exploration of the coaching work within the 'container' of the supervisory relationship is justified where exploring the supervisee's emotions are salient to the work. In the event of the supervisee requiring further support when experiencing unusual levels of stress, personal problems, discussion of where to take the work explored, such as counselling or other forms of support are part of the focus of this mode.

Example of Resourcing Mode 5

Areas of exploration and enquiry might be prompted by the supervisor asking:

What does the supervisory relationship look like?

What parallels can be drawn between the coaching relationships of the supervisee and the supervisory relationship? What are the differences?

What feedback can be shared between the supervisee/supervisor about the supervisory relationship? What are the review processes?

How does the supervision context provide an appropriate space for psychological safety, learning, reflection and resourcing for the coach?

Mode 6 The Supervisor

The sixth mode reflects how the client-supervisee relationship enters into the internal experience of the supervisor. This may take the form of responses that the supervisor has when discussing the supervisee's client work, for instance 'interruptions' of visual images, strong emotions, or physiological changes, such as feeling tired or energised. These responses are important sources of information about what is happening in the supervision room, as well as reflecting what was happening in the client work. Importantly, the supervisor needs to understand their own processes as well, (see Aquilina, 2019, for a discussion of tuning in to present moment awareness in using ourselves as instruments in supervision) in order to identify sudden changes or differences in themselves that do not reflect their own inner processes, but relate to the superviseeclient process. The supervisor's task is to assist in bringing the material into the room, and gently exploring its meaning with the supervisee in relation to their work with their coachee.

Additionally, the supervisor may be prompted to share knowledge, experience, ideas for reading material, experiences of learning from mistakes from the past, or more personal experiences from their own lives, for example, values. Such selfdisclosure can be helpful to supervisees in helping normalise their experiences and concerns, particularly so in exceptional situations, for instance when precipitously working predominantly online with their clients, or when their clients' issues are set within a context of high anxiety and uncertainty occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic and its implications. The supervisor's self-disclosure can help strengthen the supervisory relationship and the supervisee's professional identity development, with the proviso that the self-disclosure is clearly linked to the supervisee's work under discussion, and that the supervisory relationship is already good (Hawkins & McMahon, 2020). This point about self-disclosure accords with research into the Michelangelo phenomenon, an interpersonal model of how a relationship partner's responsive support of personal goals facilitates movement towards those goals and relationship wellbeing (Reis, 2012). In this research, self-disclosure has been found to be relevant only where it establishes the possibility for partners to display partner responsiveness (Rusbult et al., 2009).

Examples of Resourcing Mode 6

Areas of exploration and enquiry might be prompted by the supervisor asking:

What responses do they (as the supervisor) have when discussing the supervisee's client work (e.g. interfering thoughts and or 'interruptions' of visual images, strong emotions, or physiological changes)?

What do they (as the supervisor) notice is happening/not happening in the supervision space? What inner processes do they notice? Are these internal experiences helpful/unhelpful within the supervisory relationship?

How are they (as the supervisor) drawing upon their own professional experience and examples within the session? How does this self-disclosure assist with learning and reflection within the supervision room?

Mode 7 The Wider contexts

Moving to the final mode, the wider contexts in which the work happens, the most obvious focus in the current time of COVID-19 is the impact of the larger systemic, economic, and ecosystemic levels of context on the client work which is being discussed in the supervisory relationship. We need of course to reflect on this experience. Whilst often these wider contexts can remain in the background to more pressing immediate concerns focused on in modes 1 to 6, they need to be addressed, and at present, are pressingly foreground. As supervisees, clients and supervisors, we are arguably all working within a global context of uncertainty, anxiety, change, which has rarely, if ever, in our lifetimes, been so apparent, requiring novel and rapid responses to collective human existence. So we can proactively use our reflections on our current experience as an opportunity for a deeper re-examination of our assumptions and beliefs, and reinvent our ways of working (Hawkins & McMahon, 2020: pg. 13) to resource the increasing demands our supervisees, clients, and supervisors will be called upon to meet.

Examples of Resourcing Mode 7

Areas of exploration and enquiry might be prompted by the supervisor asking:

What are the wider issues, relating to the novel coronavirus pandemic, being discussed by clients in coaching sessions (e.g. economic, political, public health)?

How can our experiences of the current COVID-19 pandemic inform our work as coaches, supervisees and supervisors?

DISCUSSION

Recognising the heightened need for support for coaching professionals during the challenging context of COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, this article has proposed that addressing the areas of supervisee resilience and self-care required in these times argues for a particular emphasis on the resourcing function of supervision. A summary of how to work towards resourcing within the modes of the Seven Eyed Model of Supervision is also offered in Table 1.

Underpinning the article has been focus on the supervisor encouraging the supervisee to reflect on what happens in the coaching work, and develop their capacities for recognising, understanding, and dealing with their reactions to their clients' distress.

The Seven Eyed Model of Supervision can be used to address the resourcing needs likely to be present, and examples in each of its seven modes have been provided to illustrate their potential application in the supervisory context.

CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic continues to present coaching professionals and their clients with new challenges and threats, to their mental health and well-being. In this context, the Resourcing function of supervision is thrown into sharp relief as a particularly important resource for enabling supervisees to ultimately grow their capacities, including resilience, to resource themselves, and thereby better understand, and remain non-reactive to, their clients' distress and the stresses of life.

Categories for managing supervision process	Focus of category	Examples of possible issues arising from working in COVID-19 and aftermath context	Potential interventions
Mode 1 Clients ¹ and how they present	Increasing supervisee's tolerance of 'not knowing'	Client unable to access usual support from support, social, work network Transferring to working remotely via video with clients	Encourage supervisee's being with client Attention to non- verbal communication channels, potential challenges for assessing emotional states of clients when working via video
Mode 2 The Supervisee's strategies and interventions	Supervisor focuses on how and why supervisees made interventions, retrospective preferred, and potential future interventions	Supervisee evidently struggling with working remotely via video, workload, impact of COVID-19 on personal situation. Supervisor feels need to 'rescue' client by offering suggestion of intervention when client hesitates in finding their own alternative intervention	Help supervisee see various intervention options
Mode 3 The client/supervisee relationship	How the unconscious of the client informs the supervisee about the client's needs, and how the supervisee is getting in the way	Supervisee reports client's repeated efforts to extend and over-run sessions, and for coach to 'find solutions' for client	Helping supervisee move to a third-person perspective
Mode 4 Focusing on the Supervisee	Supervisee's internal processes Creating Supervisees' greater awareness of reaction to their client's emotions Creating space to respond rather than react to client Supervisee support and welfare needs Supervisee general well-being	Supervisee feels client's underlying anxiety and fear Supervisee experiences stress in coping with workload/increasing volume of online coaching/personal Supervisee's personal life impacted by family health/social-distancing/ economic difficulties	Working on reactivity triggers Attending to personal- professional boundary Invoking External Resources, internal resources (Mindfulness, compassion and empathy)

¹ The word client is used to describe the coachee or direct coaching client, rather than stakeholders or sponsors within the coaching engagement

(continued on page 8)

Table 1: Working on resourcing during the COVID-19 context within the modes of the Seven Eyed Model of Supervision (continued from page 7)

Mode 5 The Supervisory Relationship Mode 6 The Supervisor	How client/coach relationship is reflected in supervisee/supervisor relationship Parallel process Attending to quality of the 'real' relationship between supervisee/ supervisor Attending to boundaries of the supervisory relationship Attending to the supervisory relationship Supervisor responses as source of information How supervisee/client experience enters supervisor experience	A colluding "being kind to client" supervisee attitude reflected in next supervision session in "colluding supervisor" Supervisee's personal feelings of distress relating to their client's distress shared and explored in order to understand and work better. Looking at where to take the work explored, may indicate counselling or other support for supervisee. Supervisor feels sleepy when supervisee discusses work with a client. This could be reflecting the client's, supervisee's, or supervisor's feelings being denied or shut off.	Learning from parallel process Regularly reviewing supervisory contract Attending to dual roles Sharing of supervisor evaluations of supervisee Sharing of informal and formal feedback between supervisee and supervisor Supervisors knowing, and monitoring sudden changes in their own process Being clear about feelings towards supervisees. Noticing shifts in sensation, thoughts, whilst simultaneously attending to both session content and process
Mode 7 The Wider Contexts	Contextual field in which client work and supervision take place	Major change to personal and working lives of clients, supervisees, supervisors Ecological context of the COVID-19 crisis	Listening and attending to the presence, and impact, of wider systemic levels present in the work

Source: Adapted from Hawkins & McMahon, 2020 and extended

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