



101 Coaching Supervision Techniques, Approaches, Enquiries and Experiments.

Gestalt Chapter: Technique 47 (pages 151-154)

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Giving an Object a Voice

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Where can this be used?					Typical Level of Supervisee Experience Required	
 Individual Supervision	 Group Supervision	 Peer Supervision	 Independent Reflection	 All levels		

When is this used?

This can be useful where the supervisee might benefit from taking an observer perspective such that they distance themselves from their own experience and in doing so open up their thinking. It can therefore be particularly useful when there is some 'stuckness' to be explored.

What is the experiment?

Influenced by the work of Joyce Scaife (2010) supervisees are invited to consider what objects are typically present as they work which could bear witness to what happened. The idea is a perceptual positions experiment – playing with the notion that if we take a different position (even that of an inanimate object!) we might access new information.

Step 1: Create a supervision focus for the enquiry in a way that is authentic for you. The approach could be used both with very specific client situations or when seeking to understand themes or patterns in a supervisee's work.

Step 2: Invite the supervisee to consider which objects are routinely with them as they work, then choose one.

Step 3: Ask the supervisee where their chosen object was when the topic being explored was playing out; use some visioning techniques to help bring this to life. So if they chose their pen, you might invite them to consider where was the pen at that point in time? How were they holding it? What was the colour of the ink that was flowing onto the page? What sounds could they hear as they used it or held it?

Step 4: Become playful – invite some exploratory questions along the following lines:



- What might [object] have noticed that you might not yet have noticed?
- If the [object] had a voice what might it be saying? To who? And how?
- What advice might the [object] be giving you right now?

Step 5: Allow some reflection time and encourage the supervisee(s) to consider what is emerging for them now that might not have been attended to before.

Step 6: Bring the exploration back to the original supervision focus if this has not naturally happened within Step 5.

Step 7: Invite the supervisee(s) to reflect on the process, what did they notice about their response to this approach.

How to work with the experiment...

This requires an 'out of the box' mind set and for that reason it can be helpful if the supervision relationship is firmly established. It will work best when the supervisor takes an emergent approach, working with what is generated in the moment. For example: one supervisee felt their phone would advise them "to take a break, to stop being so serious all the time" ... so the supervisor built on this and enquired "so if your phone sent you on holiday, where would it send you?". Interestingly the prospect of going on holiday without the phone, even hypothetically, evoked anxiety ...and in noticing that, laughter. This visceral awareness prompted the realisation of how enmeshed they had become with their work. The supervisee then committed to resolve this through engaging in peer coaching.

The experiment intends to help the supervisee to think more speculatively and hypothetically, so the supervisor's question needs be posed tentatively. In Step 4, notice the use of the word "might" rather than "would" – this encourages possibility and options rather than implying certainty or any assumption that an answer should be known.

What else might need attention?

Some supervisees can struggle to engage with this kind of abstract activity, and this is useful information. Where rapport is good, it may be possible to enquire how the struggle with this approach might say something about what they struggle with in their client work. For example, How do they manage ambiguity? How easily do they play? This could then become a topic for the supervision discussion or a matter for individual reflection.

A word of caution.

Despite its playful nature it is not suitable as an ice-breaker – it can prove disorienting for those more comfortable with logical and analytical approaches. Even in more established groups it needs careful positioning and contracting to ensure supervisees are open to new ways of working and to seeing this as an 'experiment'.



What other uses are there for this experiment?

The idea of tapping into external perspectives could be used in many situations. It could be used with coaching clients provided that it is contracted for clearly and the practitioner feels that the client would enjoy seeing what it might bring.

Reference:

Scaife, J. (2010) *Supervising the Reflective Practitioner: An Essential Guide to Theory and Practice*. Routledge: East Sussex. pp. 98-99.