






101 Coaching Supervision Techniques, Approaches, Enquiries and Experiments.

Thinking Environment Chapter: Technique 91 (pages 311-314)

Edited by Michelle Lucas and Published by Routledge 2020.

Thinking Pairs

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Where can this be used?				Typical Level of Supervisee Experience Required	
	 <p>Group Supervision</p>	 <p>Peer Supervision</p>		 <p>All levels</p>	

When is this used?

This can be useful when deciding what a supervisee wishes to focus on in the session, or to deeply explore each person's own thoughts on an issue before the whole group considers it, or as protected time for brief reflective practice with a peer supervisor.

What is the Thinking Pair?

Thinking Pairs are one of the Building-block applications of the Thinking Environment. It is based on the Thinking Partnership session, one of the full Applications of the Thinking Environment™, where two people offer each other sustained listening to generate independent thinking. Where a Thinking Partnership session typically lasts 30-90 minutes, a Thinking Pair will use less time. In supervision it can be used as follows:

Step 1: The contract.

Either agree that each person will think about their own material or agree a shared question that both will consider in turn. If a whole group is working in pairs, perhaps with the intention of sharing thoughts afterwards, agree a common question.

Agree the duration of the Pairs - typically five to ten minutes each and who will be the first to think. Commit to an absence of interruption, and that the Listener will only speak if the Thinker invites them by saying "I'm done" or requests a question.

Step 2: The exercise.

The Listener asks, "What would you like to think about today, and what are your thoughts?" Or if a group-in-pairs exercise, the question they have agreed, e.g., "What do you think might be common ground arising from our work?"



The Thinker responds, safe in the promise that they will not be interrupted, the Listener listens with ease, fascinated attention and encouragement. Should the Thinker invite a question, the Listener offers “What more do you think, or feel, or want to say?”

When the agreed time has elapsed, they swap roles and repeat the exercise so the other has their turn.

Step 3: The close.

Each person offers a brief Appreciation of a *quality* or strength observed in the other. Note this is not a comment on narrative content or actions.

How to work with the Thinking Pair...

In most conversations we interpret pauses and silences as an opportunity or subtle invitation for a question or comment. People seem to think in waves (often out loud) and pauses (often silent) and both are of equal value. In this approach, a pause is not a prompt to contribute rather an invitation to stay Easeful.

If the Thinker says they are completely finished before the agreed time and the “What more” question does not generate more, both can sit comfortably in case more thinking may come. Alternatively, the Thinker may finish and invite the other to become the Thinker.

What else might need attention?

The purpose here is to generate independent thinking which means the process is highly emergent. In the context of supervision, it may be helpful to think more strategically about client work and to introduce some structure.

For example, using Clutterbuck, Whitaker and Lucas (2016) distinctions of long-term approaches to supervision, then the question posed could take a particular direction:

1. Whole Case Load: “What from your coaching practice would you like to think about today, and what are your thoughts?”
2. Supervisee-Led: “.... which clients do you most want to think about today...?”
3. Developmentally Led: “..... given your current development needs who or what would be most helpful to think about today...?”
4. System Led: “... what do you think your client organisations would invite you to think about today...?”

A word of caution.

As in all forms of conversation, any narrative can trigger the Listener and make it challenging for them to stay interested in the Thinker’s thoughts. It helps to relax and remember that that they will have a turn, they can then return to being fascinated by how the Thinker’s thinking is unfolding.

What other uses are there for the Thinking Pair?

It can be used in a variety of situations and contexts for example team meetings, facilitated events, and mentoring, where quality independent thinking is the goal. Coaching clients can find a Thinking Partner outside of the coaching sessions. Thinking Pairs are not suggested as a way of working



between Coach and Client as it can elicit content that is beyond the coaching boundary, but a Dialogue (see page 306-308) could be used instead.

References:

Clutterbuck, D. Whitaker, C. and Lucas, M. (2016) *Coaching Supervision: A Practical Guide for Supervisees*. Routledge: Maidenhead. pp. 158-161.

Further Reading:

Kline, N. (1999) *Time to Think: Listening to Ignite the Human Mind*. London: Cassell Illustrated.

Kline, N. (2015) *More Time to Think: The Power of Independent Thinking* (2nd ed.). London: Cassell Illustrated. (See chapter: "How's it going? Coach supervision in a Thinking Environment" pp. 191 - 192.)