

Supervision : a revealer of intrapersonal and systemic phenomena

The supervision session : a precious moment for the coach

A supervision session is a reflective moment in time, a pause that allows you to step back from your coaching practice and return to it with renewed clarity.

For the coach, sharing the experience of a coaching session - including its challenges - in a judgement-free space, helps to identify and name how the client's behavior or energy affects them.

Exploring how a client may touch, unsettle, or irritate the coach allows for distance and a deeper understanding of what is truly at play.

Stéphane, an experienced coach, comes to supervision to discuss new coaching sessions that feels like an uphill climb. After two sessions with his client, Bruno, a young Sales Director, Stéphane grows frustrated that Bruno seems ill-equipped to manage his highly strategic role, while the company is facing an economically difficult phase. Stéphane realizes he has gradually slipped into an "expert" stance - providing tools and methods in each session, which Bruno readily accepts - but it feels like a bottomless pit. There would be so much to teach this Sales Director, yet Stéphane knows that this is not his mandate. This small agri-food company has always operated with few processes or tools, and now faces the need to structure itself more strongly in order to continue its growth.

The Effects of the Supervision Session

During supervision, Stéphane realizes he is in a phase of his professional life - near the end of his career - where he feels a strong desire to transfer his knowledge and share his past experience as a sales trainer. This personal dynamic fuels his unconscious wish for Bruno to become commercially successful.

Stéphane becomes aware of this, and decides to let go of the operational progress he wishes to achieve on behalf of his client. As Carl Rogers, one of the fathers of humanistic psychology, said : « You cannot want for another what only he can want for himself ».

Returning to the humanity of the coach - for example, their parallel identity process - is a key component of supervision. It helps address this long-term question: *"What kind of helper am I becoming, and what am I pursuing through helping?"*

Free from his own desire for Bruno's success, Stéphane can now return to Bruno's actual request - which is relational : Bruno wants to better assert himself with his boss and develop his leadership. This is his real path to growth.

The supervisor also offers a hypothesis of a parallel process: the client relies on the coach's input just as he relies on his boss's. He unconsciously hopes the coach will reveal this pattern and help him work through it.

This assumption resonates with Stéphane, who uses it to reposition himself as a coach. He decides to share his observation of their dynamic through metacommunication. Bruno, in turn, becomes aware of what he is reenacting during the session and of his ability to shift his position in relation to his hierarchy.

This example illustrates how the coach's intrapersonal dynamic and the client's systemic dynamic meet in a phenomenon waiting to be revealed.

For the Supervisor: a Connection to Self, to the Other, and sometimes to the World - Fertile ground for the coach

For the supervisor, the supervision session is a moment of philosophical friendship, as Reine-Marie Halbout describes it - a time of connection to the other, to oneself, and often to something greater than both. From the very beginning of the coach's story, the supervisor is permeated by the energy of the coach-client system. She listens attentively to the words, tone, and rhythm, lets her imagination wander, and observes what arises within herself.

In Stéphane's case, the supervisor feels an impulse to control the supervisee, a subtle judgment of his work, and also a sense of sadness. An image comes to mind : a primitive Central American tribe visited by a stranger who is surprised to see them eating on the ground and advises them to use a table. Is that advice truly fitting for them? This image, through ancestral symbolism, mirrors Stéphane's projection onto the company's situation. The supervisor thus acts as a resonating chamber : the emotions and images that pass through her reveal how the coach experiences and perceives his coaching work.

The Liberation of Energy - for the Coach and, by Ripple Effect, for the Client

By identifying these internal echos (emotions, impulses, imagery), - in the spirit of Mony Elkaïm's systemic approach -, the supervisor later reflects them back to Stéphane to raise his awareness. Stéphane recognizes his impulse to control his client, his need to teach "the right way," and his desire to pass on - all linked to the closing chapter of his professional life.

This awareness allows him to let go and respond more appropriately to his client's needs. He also reconnects with his sadness about ending his career. In resonance, he hypothesizes that Bruno may also be facing a kind of ending - a symbolic loss - as he transitions from operational to leadership responsibilities.

In his next session with Bruno, Stéphane changes one small thing that changes everything : he allows Bruno to be truly heard in his desire to grow and make an impact within his company.

This illustrates how intrapersonal and systemic phenomena surface during supervision, and once named and untangled, ripple back into the client's system - releasing new energy.

What Does This Reveal About the Company's System?

The company is under pressure from an increasingly competitive market. Its artisanal culture now needs to evolve toward a more industrial mode of operation. It is caught in a cultural tension: its deep-seated values and beliefs fear being disrupted. The Sales Director's role sits precisely at this turning point between the company's past and future.

The cultural conflict - the need to structure without losing its identity - could be described, in Transactional Analysis, as an impasse. This tension is internalized by Bruno, and likely by many employees. As a result, Bruno does not yet see the resources within himself and looks outward - to his boss or his coach - for ready-made answers, instead of reflecting on his role and how he wishes to position himself amid change. Yet that is precisely what he desires and why he began coaching - and he will achieve it.

Setting up a coaching engagement often represents an attempt by the organization's culture to resolve such tensions - as described in Jacques Moreau's tensional and systemic approach in Transactional Analysis - a frequent conflict in times of strategic transformation. Coaching a key player becomes an initial space for dialogue about it. The new conversation Bruno begins with his boss, thanks to coaching, will likely lead to a broader collective reflection necessary for success - around questions such as:

"Who are we becoming through this transformation?"

Do we want it?

What will remain our foundations?

What are our resources? What are we willing to evolve to open new perspectives?"

The supervision session is often where these broader systemic, cultural, and organizational dynamics are decoded - those that influence the client and give meaning to the coaching issue. Once aware of these deeper dimensions, the coach can choose to guide the client differently - for example, by exploring their place and role in the system.

Thus, from supervision to coaching, and from coaching back to the client's system, conflicts unwind through increased awareness - fostering growth for every actor and for the system as a whole.

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