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Many Roads Can Lead to Rome – Supervisors’ perspectives on successful supervision and the challenges it brings.

Moira Lafferty, Brian Hemmings, Jonathan Katz, Matthew Cunliffe, & Martin Eubank

Introduction – The Qualification and Supervision

In the last 10 years the Qualification in Sport and Exercise Psychology (QSEP) has continued to grow and develop, with the number of enrolled candidates and subsequent successful completions increasing year on year. As these practitioners enter the world of sport and exercise as Chartered and HCPC Registered practitioner psychologists, with full Divisional membership, the qualification’s reputation with service users has continued to grow. We now see numerous organisations not only employing those who have successfully completed, but also offering, short term placements, in-service training opportunities and internships.

Although described as an “independent route”, the training, progression and development of the neophyte practitioner is scaffolded and supported at a macro level through the work of the QSEP Board, the Chief Supervisor and Chief Assessor and at a micro level through their coordinating supervisor. The Supervisor QSEP Handbook identifies and describes the core aspects and expectations of both coordinating supervisors and key role supervisors. In QSEP terms a coordinating supervisor has overall responsibility for guiding the candidate through the qualification from enrolment to final submission. To become a coordinating supervisor, the practitioner psychologist must be HCPC registered and a Chartered Member of the British Psychological Society with full Divisional membership of the Sport and Exercise Psychology Division. Furthermore, they must have two years post qualification HCPC registration and have completed the necessary training to be entered

onto the Register of Applied Psychology Practice Supervisors (RAPPS). A key role supervisor may take responsibility for supervising either, aspects of applied practice where their experience complements the specific placement or situation, or, a Key Role in its entirety. For example, where the co-ordinating supervisor is in private practise they may feel it is beneficial for Key Role 3 Research to be supervised by a currently research active colleague.

It is at this micro level, working with their coordinating supervisor in a supervisory relationship, where personal growth and development occurs and ultimately, it is through this relationship that service delivery competence is developed (Tod, Marchant, & Anderson, 2009). Service delivery competence is described as “the application of suitable psychological theory, through the use of appropriate skills and interventions, in a therapeutic relationship to meet a client’s needs and expectations, with routine reflection by the practitioner on how they have influenced the process of service provision” (McEwan & Tod, 2015, p. 80). Whilst the concept, attributes, measurement, and validation of service delivery competence are critical questions worthy of debate and discussion, that is not the focus of the present article, nor indeed is a discussion surrounding the actual QSEP specific supervisor training.

Instead, we focus more directly on the stories of supervision and supervision in practice at the micro level by drawing on the views and experiences of three supervisors, two (Brian and Jonathan) with numerous years of supervisory experience and one newly qualified supervisor (Matt). Brian and Jon supervise their QSEP candidates through a combined group and individual supervisory programme; in contrast, Matt adopts an individual approach with all his supervisees. In the remainder of this article, these three supervisors present their thoughts and personal experiences on three core areas:

developing the supervisory relationship; challenges to supervision, and, the concept of continued development as a supervisor.

Area 1 – Developing the Supervisory Relationship

The development and subsequent nurturing of the supervisory relationship is critical to successful supervision (Cropley & Neil, 2014). In the following section our supervisors share their views and experiences about positive supervision and supervisor trainee relationship development.

Brian Hemmings and Jonathan Katz

Positive or constructive supervision is founded on the supervisee-supervisor relationship. It necessarily benefits from the supervisee perceiving the supervisor to be appropriately available to meet their professional needs. Further, for the supervisor to be mindful of the supervisee's wider context outside the parameters of the Stage 2 process. This facilitates a sense of a safe and positive learning environment where the supervisee feels comfortable in sharing their professional vulnerabilities while going through the learning process. Additional helpful elements include the supervisor being prepared for supervision activities, be they in person or indirectly over various electronic/telephone platforms.

A shared online resource, such as Dropbox that we use, provides a common facility for all members to be, and hopefully feel, included and informed in developments between formal contact times. The addition of a candidate-led WhatsApp group has provided an additional resource for all group members to share experiences, opportunities and

developments in the field. It has also enabled current and graduates of the supervision programme to interact, adding additional layers of access to support and information.

Matt Cunliffe

I fully believe that the supervision relationship is the responsibility of the supervisor (Corrie & Lane, 2015). Positive supervision starts with good contracting. Without a good foundation of expectations, roles, responsibilities, and methods, along with clear financial information then supervision can often feel undefined and unstructured. The BPS provides a sample template contract which has the basic elements; however, I have developed a highly specific contract which details my requirements for supervision of a candidate. Supervisees can give feedback and input into the contract if they feel anything is missing. I feel that this structured and detailed approach provides clarity on what to expect from me and protects both the supervisee and myself should any disagreement arise.

The relationship within supervision can be similar to a therapeutic relationship. The similarities are often seen within the working alliance literature (Bordin, 1983), which describes tasks, goals, and bonds as being fundamental to a good working relationship. Within QSEP supervision the goals of the supervisee are usually simple; the completion of the QSEP process, and the goals of the QSEP are fairly general in terms of competence in four specific key roles, however I will often go further than this and use other literature (e.g. the cognitive therapy competence framework, Hayes & Hoffman, 2018) in order to develop the specific skills that are required to be a sport psychologist.

The tasks in supervision are agreed between the supervisee and myself, we agree on key model specific training courses and additional CPD (sport specific e.g. UKAD anti-doping training), and the supervisee will identify key actions at the end of every supervisory meeting that they will complete before the next session, which we then review on a regular

basis. The bond within supervision is more complicated to describe as it relies on the interpersonal skills of both the supervisor and supervisee to develop. For me this is built on a moment-by-moment basis where I show trustworthiness, empathy and positive regard (Rogers, 1957).

Finally, I use regular feedback from my supervisees on the supervision relationship and supervision process. I often give considerable amounts of feedback to my supervisees on their work and in line with many therapeutic models (CBT, REBT, and ACT) I elicit feedback from my supervisees informally on a session-by-session basis but more formally using The Leeds Alliance in Supervision Scale (Wainwright, 2010), and the Supervision Relationship Questionnaire (SRQ; Palomo, 2004) in order to get more reliable and detailed feedback on the supervisory relationship.

Summary and Integration

Whilst approaching the development of the supervisory relationship from differing stances, there are commonalities and shared views in both accounts. Importantly, the recognition that supervision goes beyond the boundaries of QSEP key roles and the qualification and that central to the developing relationship is preparation for supervision. All supervisors allude to the creation of safe space within supervision with Brian and Jon describing how supervisees must feel able to share vulnerabilities and Matt identifying how supervision is adapted through moment to moment interactions. Brian and Jon describe the benefits of peer support and the development of peer to peer supervision through the use of differing media and the WhatsApp group and Matt draws on the importance of his approach to seeking feedback on supervision through formal and informal methods, all crucial elements in developing the supervisory relationship (Van Raalte & Anderson, 2000; Van Raalte, Petipas, Andersen, & Rizzo, 2016).

Area 2 – Supervision Challenges

Whilst there is a developing evidence base focusing on supervision in the sport and exercise domain, to-date there has been limited attention and focus on supervision challenges. In particular, the barriers or issues that supervisors face when supervising and how these might be reduced and or alleviated (Lima Fogaca, Koppang, & Zizzi, 2018). Responding to the question of the particular challenges to supervision in their specific contexts, our authors share their thoughts and experiences.

Brian Hemmings and Jonathan Katz

We have known each other for 21 years and Jonathan brings huge excellence to supervision with his sport and counselling psychology qualifications and experience. We have six great people as candidates on the programme and each have specific strengths and particular supervision needs. Stage 2 is a costly business for candidates in training and we are mindful that our programme delivers in a professional way, and therefore thorough preparation for supervision meetings and ongoing support and communication with candidates is high on our agenda.

In our early days as professionals it took time before we realised that the relationship between psychologist and athlete/coach is critical for success. Whilst the importance of the professional relationship in sport psychology practice is now firmly embedded in the literature, we still feel sport psychology needs to do more to centralise the importance of active listening skills and the development of relationships in effective consulting. In our BPS handbook (Katz & Hemmings, 2009) and our BASES counselling skills and working alliance workshops over many years, we proposed that for too long sport psychology has been overly focused on 'content' or 'intervention' questions. We believe the

successful long-term associations we have had with multiple athletes, coaches and organisations have come about through maintaining human relationships, showing appropriate personal care, and sustained professionalism rather than through any particular personal excellence in delivering 'techniques'. This also applies to supervision relationships.

Many times in supervision through sharing concerns, doubts and questions, candidates' own reflections have been deeper and shaped toward more positive actions, and this has led to increased confidence in practice as a result. Handling disappointments, dealing with conflict, coping with insecurity and personal stress all affect sport psychologists as much as they do athletes and need to be managed. Also both being long-term self-employed psychologists, we feel experienced to discuss business matters, pricing, and general negotiation skills which do not typically form part of sport psychology training.

Matt Cunliffe

Given QSEP is an independent route way, trainees may experience feelings of isolation and loneliness. To mitigate this, supervisors and trainees have formed supervision groups, which facilitate connection, collaboration and the sharing of procedural knowledge. Over time, I envisage my supervision moving to a mixed supervision model of both individual and group-based supervision in order to offer a better quality of supervision and sharing between supervisees. However, in the meantime I will encourage supervisees who are being supervised individually to seek out other trainees and psychologists, to join the trainee Facebook group, and attend as many networking events as possible in order to build relationships and share knowledge.

The second challenge I have found through being a supervisor is working with the QSEP in order to understand the exact requirements for assessment. The key roles are well defined; however, there is a lack of clarity on what constitutes competency in these areas.

For example, what constitutes competency in conducting consultation (key role 2). Through research of specific models I have developed my ideas of what goes into each of these key roles (e.g. *KR2.4 Conduct consultancy* involves contracting with clients, agenda setting, formulation, appropriate use of cognitive or behavioural techniques, and evaluation, along with problem specific competencies, and core meta-competency). Using this knowledge has helped to develop my trainees in an effective way; however, as each assessor has their own nuances and understandings of what it takes to be a safe practitioner it can be quite challenging evidencing this in the assessments.

The final challenge faced is potential supervisees' lack of understanding with regards to how to use supervision effectively, and, the personal requirements of the QSEP on supervisees. This challenge takes a number of forms, firstly potential supervisees are inadequately prepared to understand what they need to look for in a potential supervisor, what the minimum requirements are and what represents good value for money. This means that they are often unaware of what good supervision looks like, and what they need to look out for to commit to a supervisor for a long period of time. Secondly, many potential supervisees lack the understanding of what it really takes to get through the QSEP processes, many of my initial conversations are around the difficulties and barriers that are presented to trainees throughout the process. Potential supervisees are ill-equipped and ill-educated about the realities of going through the process. There are a number of possible reasons for this; for example, being taught at MSc level by people who haven't been through the process themselves, or a lack of realistic view of the first two years of a supervisee's career, i.e. it won't be all Team GB, professional sport, and it often takes a considerable amount of effort, unreasonable persistence, and extraordinary determination to gain entry to even local clubs, to make a living from the profession, and to complete the

QSEP process. Early education on what it really takes from people who have completed the process is important so that supervisees have realistic perceptions of their career path prior to starting the process.

Summary and Integration

When discussing the challenges to supervision all supervisors talk about managing expectations of supervisees. Matt discusses how this can be in terms of helping supervisees realise that “you do not suddenly start working with and for GB”. In contrast, Brian and Jon allude to helping supervisees manage the insecurities and stressors of working as an applied practitioner and actively discuss the business management elements. Matt identifies how supervisees may at times feel isolated and how in the future he may look towards a hybrid model of group and individual supervision, akin to the model of Brian and Jon. Brian and Jon identify how for them, a humanistic approach, active listening, relationship development and showing appropriate care are critical.

Area 3 – Developing as a Supervisor

Whilst the BPS mandatory online modules and the QSEP face-to-face workshop introduce new supervisors to the logistical and regulatory qualification framework and the core aspects of supervision, they were not developed to train practitioners to become competent nor authentic supervisors. This happens with continued professional development, self-reflection and peer-to-peer discussion and the sharing of ideas (Hutter, 2014; Hutter, Van der Zandee, Rosier, & Wylleman, 2018). In the final section, our supervisors discuss what they see as their ongoing development needs and allude to some of the challenges of meeting these.

Brian Hemmings and Jonathan Katz

An ongoing challenge for the supervisor is to remain fresh, current and energised over time. There is a certain amount of repetition across candidate experiences so it is important for the supervisor to retain quality of support. One way this can be assisted is that our supervisory process is built upon the supervisor-supervisee relationship. As such, taking the time to make supervisory inputs bespoke to the person facilitates their learning opportunity as well as providing a challenge for the supervisor to remain active and creative.

Keeping abreast of developments, Stage 2 demands and expectations (for candidates and supervisors) is an ongoing challenge. Further, also keeping abreast of developments within the applied context is challenging. It includes appreciating that, as in our case, a number of candidates gain experience from a wide range of settings, for example from dog agility to professional football and rugby. Thus, it's important to recognise one's, the supervisor's, range of experience and managing 'the fit' between supervisor experience with supervisee need.

Our programme integrates both group-based and individual supervision and we divide which members we are co-ordinating supervisors for. One consequence of this is that we have greater depth of knowledge of some supervisees than others that requires vigilance in having mutual handovers. Group supervision delivery requires the challenge to maintain a focus on the group process and interactions to complement the different focus for individual supervision.

Matt Cunliffe

The biggest need I have found in being a supervisor is having effective and in-depth training on doing supervision. Having completed the QSEP supervisor training I was left wanting more information on the mechanics of supervision, and further information about

the requirements for assessment. I completed plenty of reading about supervision models; however, going on extra training in CBT supervision, how to use supervision, and a few external supervisor training courses gave me more confidence in conducting supervision. Further to this an understanding that supervision is very similar to client work (especially from a CBT model) actually made the transition to supervisor quite smooth.

In addition to good training and CPD in supervision and specific requirements of the qualification, I believe that as a supervisor and effective practitioner I should undertake an hour of supervision for every 10 hours of client facing work that I do. This also applies to supervision. In my contracting process I have a clause that allows me to talk about the work within the supervisory relationship with another supervisor in order to keep my practice effective, and to reflect effectively on the work I am do. This formal supervision often includes discussion about the supervisor relationship, the tasks that occur within supervision and how my values, procedural knowledge, and declarative knowledge impact upon supervision. In addition to this formal supervision I often undergo self-practice and self-reflection using a declarative-procedural-and reflective model of reflection from CBT developed by Bennett-Levy et al. (2009). Furthermore, I utilise self-supervision, that is the self-correction and adjustments I make in order to continue meeting the changing needs, attitudes, emotions, and physical state of my supervisee (Leith, McNeice, & Fusilier, 1989).

Summary and Integration

When discussing their development needs, all of our supervisors made reference to staying up to-date with the qualification requirements. However, Brian and Jon suggest that, in their context of group supervision with numerous candidates there is also the need to retain currency in terms of the applied practice evidence base. They also identify the need

for themselves to remain 'active and creative' in terms of supervision and how working as a supervisory dyad means that they must be cognisant of the skills necessary for group and individual sessions and allow their approaches to complement each other. In contrast, Matt focuses on aspects of personal development such as the importance of having supervision as a supervisor, the alignment of his supervisory practice model to his applied practice philosophy and critically the role of self-reflection in and of practice.

Drawing Conclusions – Areas for further consideration

In this article, our focus was on sharing the experiences and thoughts relating to supervision from supervisors working in different ways, with differing experiences and at differing points in their journey of supervision. The use of personal perspectives and thoughts developed from being in specific contexts can provide learning experiences to all, whether through personal reflection in and of supervision, or recognition of areas for development as a supervisor (Cropley & Neil, 2014). Whilst many commonalities emerged, there were also differences which serve to remind us that supervision is never a single way or path, and indeed the capstone of successful supervision may be linked to numerous factors. This includes but is not limited to, the fit of supervisor to supervisee through the alignment of philosophies, the model of supervisory practice, and the individual needs of the supervisee which all contribute to relationship development.

In drawing conclusions from the contributions there are several key questions that emerge which may help all supervisors reflect on their practice. We summarise these in Table 1 and hope they evoke personal reflection and serve as areas for exploration at both the individual and community level so we can continue to enhance supervision and ultimately the development of the next generation of practitioners.

Table 1 – Critical Questions to reflect upon.

- How, when talking to supervisees do we make them aware of the challenges within the field?
- How as supervisors do we manage expectations?
- How do we create safe supervisory space, so supervisees feel confident and comfortable in sharing their fears, thoughts and insecurities?
- What is the role of peer to peer support within supervision and is this an area we need to develop?
- How can technology and differing media be embraced within supervisory practice so that supervision maintains pace with Generation Z, and what are the challenges of this?
- As supervisors can your supervision philosophy and model be articulated, grounded in an evidence base and discussed?
- How do we develop supervisory contracts that both cover the logistical requirements of QSEP but importantly afford protection for the supervisee and ensure development of competent practitioners through value for money?
- What supervision is needed for supervisors? How do we engage with meta-supervision and what does it mean?

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