An ICCS Essentials Report

International Centre for Coaching Supervision

Supervision for Internal Coaching

Elevating Quality, Ethics, and Organisational Impact



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Table of Contents

Executive Summary 1

Introduction: The Case for Supervision in Internal Coaching 2

The Rise of Internal Coaching – But at What Cost? 2

The Three Core Functions of Supervision and Their Role in Internal Coaching 4

1. The Normative Function – Governance, Ethics, and Professionalism 4

Why It Matters in Internal Coaching 4

Common Normative Challenges in Internal Coaching 5

2. The Formative Function – Growth, Learning, and Development 5

Why It Matters in Internal Coaching 5

How Supervision Supports Formative Growth 6

3. The Restorative Function – Wellbeing, Resilience, and Emotional Support 6

Why It Matters in Internal Coaching 6

Key Restorative Challenges in Internal Coaching 6

Why These Three Functions Matter Together 7

Up Next: Implementing Supervision in Internal Coaching 7

The Business Case for Supervision in Internal Coaching 8

1. Coaching Supervision as a Driver of ROI 8

How Supervision Enhances Coaching Effectiveness 8

2. Reducing Risk and Strengthening Ethical Integrity 9

How Supervision Mitigates These Risks 9

3. Supporting Internal Coach Retention and Well-being 9

How Supervision Supports Coach Retention 10

4. Aligning Coaching Supervision with Organisational Strategy 10

How Supervision Drives Strategic Alignment 10

Up Next: Implementing Supervision in Internal Coaching 11

Implementing Coaching Supervision in Internal Coaching ...12

1. Choosing the Right Supervision Model 12
One-to-One Supervision: Deep, Individualised Support 12
Group Supervision: Scalable and Cost-Effective 13
Triangular Supervision: Balancing Internal and External Oversight 13
2. Training Internal Coaches to Become Supervisors 14
How to Identify Internal Coaches for Supervisor Training 14
Recommended Training Pathway 14
3. A Step-by-Step Approach to Embedding Supervision in Internal Coaching 14
Phase 1: Laying the Foundation (0-3 Months) 14
Phase 2: Pilot & Test (3-9 Months) 15
Phase 3: Full Implementation & Scaling (9+ Months) 15
Final Thoughts: Making Supervision Work in Internal Coaching 15
Up Next: Conclusion and Next Steps 15

Conclusion and Next Steps 16

The Case for Coaching Supervision in Internal Coaching 16
Key Next Steps for Organisations 16
How ICCS Can Support Your Supervision Journey 17
Final Thoughts: The Future of Internal Coaching is Supervised 18

Appendix: Case Studies - The Realities of Supervision in Organisational Coaching 19

Executive Summary

As internal coaching becomes a cornerstone of leadership and professional development in organisations, the demand for consistency, ethical rigour, and coaching excellence has never been greater. Yet, many internal coaching functions operate without structured supervision, leading to **inconsistencies in quality, ethical blind spots, and coach burnout.**

Supervision provides a structured, reflective space where internal coaches can **develop their practice, uphold ethical standards, and sustain their well-being**—ensuring that internal coaching delivers real impact.

Despite its value, many organisations hesitate to implement supervision due to **concerns about cost, time, and internal capacity.**

This paper explores how coaching supervision can be **integrated into internal coaching structures incrementally and effectively**, addressing these concerns while **enhancing coaching impact, governance, and organisational learning.**

It outlines:

- The **three core functions of supervision** and their role in internal coaching.
- The **business case for supervision**, including its impact on coaching ROI.
- Practical **implementation strategies**, including training internal supervisors.
- **Case studies** showcasing organisations that have successfully embedded supervision.

By the end, HR, L&D leaders, and coaching managers will have **a clear roadmap for embedding supervision**—ensuring that internal coaching remains **effective, ethical, and sustainable.**

Introduction: The Case for Supervision in Internal Coaching

The Rise of Internal Coaching – But at What Cost?

Internal coaching has seen rapid growth, with organisations increasingly recognising its value in leadership development, employee engagement, and performance improvement. **Done well, internal coaching enhances organisational culture and accelerates talent development.**

However, without supervision, internal coaching faces **three major challenges:**

1. **Inconsistent quality** – Coaches operate with different levels of skill and experience, leading to uneven outcomes.
2. **Ethical dilemmas and blind spots** – Without structured reflection, internal coaches may struggle with **confidentiality, conflicts of interest, and power dynamics.**
3. **Coach well-being and resilience** – Internal coaches, especially those balancing other roles, may experience **stress, emotional fatigue, or role confusion.**

Despite these challenges, many organisations hesitate to implement supervision due to **perceived barriers** such as:

- **Cost** – Seen as an added expense rather than an investment in coaching excellence.
- **Time & capacity** – Concerns about how to structure supervision within existing workloads.
- **Internal expertise** – Lack of trained supervisors within the organisation.

These concerns are valid—but they don't have to be barriers. **Supervision can be implemented in a phased, resource-efficient manner,** ensuring that internal coaching remains **high-quality, ethical, and sustainable.**

Rather than being an added burden, supervision **supports and strengthens internal coaches,** helping them develop professionally, navigate ethical complexities, and maintain their well-being. Moreover, by embedding supervision, organisations can ensure that coaching delivers **measurable value,**

aligns with organisational objectives, and upholds the highest professional standards.

The key lies in **understanding the role supervision plays and how it can be integrated effectively within an organisation's coaching culture.** Supervision is not just about compliance—it is about growth, reflection, and creating **coaching environments that thrive.**

To explore this, we will first examine **the three core functions of supervision—normative, formative, and restorative—and how they each contribute to strengthening internal coaching.**

The Three Core Functions of Supervision and Their Role in Internal Coaching

As internal coaching continues to evolve within organisations, the need for structured **supervision** becomes more apparent. But what exactly does supervision do for internal coaching? Why is it more than just a **quality check** or an **optional extra**?

Supervision serves three core functions—**Normative, Formative, and Restorative**—each playing a distinct yet interconnected role in ensuring that **coaching is ethical, impactful, and sustainable.** These functions, first introduced by I**nskipp & Proctor**, are widely recognised in coaching and other helping professions.

By integrating supervision through these three lenses, organisations can move beyond simply **managing** their internal coaching function to truly **enhancing and future-proofing it.**

1. The Normative Function – Governance, Ethics, and Professionalism

"Ensuring coaching is not just effective,
but ethically sound and professionally aligned."

Why It Matters in Internal Coaching

Internal coaches often **wear multiple hats**, balancing their role as coaches with other responsibilities. Unlike external coaches, they operate **within the same organisational system** as their clients, which can create **ethical dilemmas, power dynamics, and boundary challenges.**

Supervision provides a **structured space to explore these complexities**, ensuring internal coaching remains:

- **Ethically aligned** – Coaches work within **clear professional boundaries.**

- **Accountable** – Internal coaching is evaluated **against best practices.**
- **Consistent** – Coaching quality does not vary between different teams or regions.

Common Normative Challenges in Internal Coaching

- **Blurred boundaries:** How does a coach handle confidentiality when coaching a direct report or colleague?
- **Conflicts of interest:** How can an internal coach navigate organisational expectations versus client needs?
- **Ethical dilemmas:** What happens when a coach learns of sensitive or legally significant information?

Without supervision, internal coaches may **unintentionally reinforce ethical blind spots**, leading to **inconsistencies in practice, reputational risks, or even legal concerns.** Supervision **prevents these pitfalls by providing a structured space for reflection, discussion, and ethical decision-making.**

2. The Formative Function – Growth, Learning, and Development

"Helping internal coaches refine their skills, deepen their impact, and continuously improve."

Why It Matters in Internal Coaching

Unlike external coaches, internal coaches may have **limited opportunities for ongoing development.** While they receive initial training, they often **lack continuous learning spaces** that help them refine their techniques, reflect on their practice, and stay at the forefront of coaching excellence.

Supervision acts as a **learning hub** where internal coaches can:

- **Enhance coaching skills** – Learn new techniques, refine questioning styles, and gain deeper self-awareness.
- **Receive constructive feedback** – Identify strengths and areas for improvement in a safe, developmental space.
- **Expand systemic awareness** – Understand coaching through a **wider organisational lens,** recognising patterns and cultural influences.

How Supervision Supports Formative Growth

- **Real-case reflection:** Coaches can **bring real client cases** to supervision, gaining new perspectives and insights.
- **Skill sharpening:** Supervisors challenge coaches to **improve presence, listening, and intervention styles.**
- **Self-awareness & bias reduction:** Coaches learn to recognise **how their own assumptions** might be shaping coaching conversations.

Without formative supervision, internal coaching **risks stagnation**, with coaches using the **same methods over time** without deepening their practice. Supervision ensures they continue to **develop, refine, and grow,** ultimately increasing the **effectiveness of coaching across the organisation.**

3. The Restorative Function – Wellbeing, Resilience, and Emotional Support

"Protecting the internal coach from burnout, isolation, and emotional fatigue."

Why It Matters in Internal Coaching

Internal coaches are often expected to **give emotional and psychological support to employees,** yet they themselves may not have **a space to offload and process their experiences**. This can lead to **stress, emotional exhaustion, and decreased effectiveness** over time.

Supervision provides a **psychologically safe space** where internal coaches can:

- **Process difficult coaching conversations** – Avoid carrying client stress into their own lives.
- **Prevent burnout** – Recognise emotional fatigue early and develop resilience strategies.
- **Navigate emotional triggers** – Develop awareness of **how client interactions impact their own emotions.**

Key Restorative Challenges in Internal Coaching

- **Emotional residue:** Some coaching conversations (e.g., career uncertainty, workplace conflicts, personal challenges) can be **emotionally taxing.**

- **Loneliness in the role:** Many internal coaches work **without a peer network** to share experiences.
- **Role pressure:** Internal coaches may feel **responsible for "fixing" problems,** leading to **stress and over-involvement.**

Supervision acts as a **protective mechanism,** helping coaches **safeguard their wellbeing and stay resilient in their roles.** Without it, coaching effectiveness can decline, leading to **demotivation, disengagement, and even high turnover among internal coaches.**

Why These Three Functions Matter Together

These three functions—**Normative, Formative, and Restorative**—work in **synergy**. A well-supervised internal coaching function ensures that:

- **Coaches are growing (Formative)**
- **Coaches are supported (Restorative)**
- **Coaches are working ethically and professionally (Normative)**

This triad creates a **culture of reflective practice, ongoing learning, and ethical integrity,** positioning internal coaching as a **true strategic asset** within the organisation.

Up Next: The Business Case for Supervision in Internal Coaching

Understanding the **value of supervision is one thing**—but how do organisations **embed it effectively** within internal coaching structures? In the next section, we'll explore the **business case for supervision**, including its impact on coaching ROI and organisational effectiveness.

The Business Case for Supervision in Internal Coaching

As organisations invest in internal coaching, the **pressure to demonstrate effectiveness, ethical integrity, and measurable impact** increases. While coaching supervision is widely recognised in external coaching, many internal coaching programmes **lack structured supervision**—often due to perceived barriers like **cost, time, and capacity.**

However, the absence of supervision comes at a cost of its own: **inconsistent coaching quality, ethical vulnerabilities, and a lack of long-term coaching effectiveness.** Supervision is not just a **best practice**—it is a **strategic enabler** that strengthens the **return on investment (ROI) of internal coaching.**

In this section, we explore how coaching supervision:

- **Enhances coaching effectiveness and consistency** across the organisation.
- **Mitigates risk and protects ethical integrity** in coaching interactions.
- **Supports internal coach retention, well-being, and professional growth.**
- **Aligns coaching with organisational strategy, ensuring tangible impact.**

1. Coaching Supervision as a Driver of ROI

"An unsupervised coach can only improve through trial and error. A supervised coach improves through structured reflection and professional support."

How Supervision Enhances Coaching Effectiveness

Coaching supervision ensures that internal coaching is **not left to chance** but instead **consistently refined, evaluated, and aligned with best practices**. The benefits include:

- **Higher Coaching Impact:** Coaches improve **techniques, questioning skills, and systemic awareness,** leading to **better coaching outcomes.**

- **Standardisation of Coaching Quality:** Ensures that all internal coaches **maintain a high standard** rather than working in silos with varying effectiveness.
- **Faster Development for Internal Coaches:** Supervision **accelerates skill development,** reducing the time needed for coaches to become highly effective.

2. Reducing Risk and Strengthening Ethical Integrity

"Supervision protects not only the coach but also the organisation's reputation."

Internal coaching is embedded within the **power structures, cultures, and politics of an organisation.** Unlike external coaches, internal coaches **operate within the same system as their clients,** increasing the risk of:

- **Confidentiality breaches** due to internal reporting structures.
- **Power imbalances** when coaching across levels of hierarchy.
- **Conflicts of interest** where coaching objectives and organisational goals clash.

How Supervision Mitigates These Risks:

- **A structured space to process ethical dilemmas** and develop best practices.
- **Prevention of boundary violations** through ongoing reflection and oversight.
- **Stronger governance around coaching standards**, reducing reputational risk.

3. Supporting Internal Coach Retention and Well-being

"A well-supported coach is an effective coach. Supervision ensures internal coaches feel valued, heard, and professionally developed."

Many internal coaches operate **alongside their primary job roles,** juggling coaching responsibilities **without dedicated support**. Without supervision, internal coaches may experience:

- **Emotional fatigue** from handling sensitive coaching conversations.
- **Frustration and disengagement** due to limited professional development.
- **High turnover rates** as coaches feel undervalued or underprepared.

How Supervision Supports Coach Retention:

- Provides a **psychological safe space** for reflection and emotional processing.
- Boosts **professional confidence** by offering structured development.
- **Enhances job satisfaction** by ensuring internal coaches **feel supported and invested in.**

4. Aligning Coaching Supervision with Organisational Strategy

"Coaching supervision is not just a process—
it is a strategic enabler that aligns coaching with business goals."

Without supervision, coaching effectiveness is difficult to **measure, evaluate, or improve** in alignment with **wider organisational objectives.** Supervision ensures that:

- **Coaching goals align with leadership development, culture change, and talent retention strategies.**
- **Organisational themes are surfaced and addressed** through coaching insights.
- **Data from supervision informs HR and L&D strategies,** making coaching more integrated into the business.

How Supervision Drives Strategic Alignment:

- **Helps identify trends** from coaching conversations that inform **business decision-making.**

- Ensures that coaching supervision is a **visible, strategic function,** not just an HR-led initiative.
- Supports **leadership buy-in** by linking coaching success to business outcomes.

Up Next: Implementing Supervision in Internal Coaching

Understanding the **value of supervision** is one step. The next challenge is **embedding supervision into an internal coaching programme without overwhelming** resources.

In the next section, we will explore **how organisations can structure and implement coaching supervision effectively.**

Implementing Coaching Supervision in Internal Coaching

Understanding the **value of supervision** is just the first step. The real challenge for organisations is **how to embed supervision into an internal coaching programme** without overwhelming resources.

Many internal coaching leaders—like David Hunt—recognise the need for supervision but are unsure **how to structure it effectively.** They may ask:

- *Who will provide supervision—should we train internal supervisors or bring in external experts?*
- *Should we use one-to-one or group supervision models?*
- *How do we introduce supervision without adding too much time and cost?*

The good news? **Supervision can be implemented incrementally,** with different models to fit an organisation's unique needs. In this section, we'll explore:

- **The key supervision models used in internal coaching**
- **How to train internal coaches to become supervisors**
- **A step-by-step approach to embedding supervision effectively**

1. Choosing the Right Supervision Model

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to supervision. Organisations must choose a model that aligns with their coaching culture, resources, and leadership structure.

Here are the three primary supervision models used in internal coaching:

One-to-One Supervision: Deep, Individualised Support

What It Is: A supervisor works with each internal coach individually to explore their coaching practice, ethical dilemmas, and development areas.

Best For:

- Large organisations with senior, high-level internal coaches.

- Situations where coaches deal with sensitive, high-stakes coaching (e.g., executive coaching, leadership development).
- Can be more expensive if using external supervisors.

Challenges:

- **Resource-intensive** (requires dedicated time from a trained supervisor).
- Can be **more expensive** if using external supervisors.

Group Supervision: Scalable and Cost-Effective

What It Is: A small group of internal coaches meets regularly with a supervisor to **reflect together, share challenges, and learn from each other.**

Best For:

- Organisations with multiple internal coaches at similar experience levels.
- Creating a **peer-learning culture** and **cross-functional insights**

Challenges:

- Less **individual focus** compared to one-to-one supervision.
- Requires skilled facilitation to ensure **equal participation and confidentiality.**

Triangular Supervision: Balancing Internal and External Oversight

What It Is: A model where the **supervisor, internal coach, and a key stakeholder (e.g., HR or L&D leader)** meet periodically to discuss coaching effectiveness and alignment with business goals.

Best For:

- Organisations where internal coaching is deeply tied to **organisational change initiatives.**
- Ensuring coaching is aligned with **HR and leadership development strategies.**

Challenges:

- Requires **careful contracting** to protect **confidentiality and psychological safety.**
- Can create **tension if the organisation exerts too much control over coaching discussions.**

2. Training Internal Coaches to Become Supervisors

For supervision to be sustainable, many organisations **train their own internal coaches to take on supervisor roles.** This reduces reliance on external supervisors and embeds a **culture of reflective practice internally.**

How to Identify Internal Coaches for Supervisor Training:

- **Highly experienced internal coaches** (5+ years of coaching experience).
- Strong understanding of **ethics and systemic coaching challenges.**
- Skilled in **facilitation, reflection, and constructive challenge.**

Recommended Training Pathway:

1. **Enroll selected internal coaches in a formal supervision training programme** (e.g., ICCS's Accredited Diploma in Coaching Supervision).
2. Provide **shadowing opportunities with existing supervisors to learn by observation.**
3. Introduce **pilot supervision sessions** where new supervisors work with a small cohort of internal coaches.
4. Offer **ongoing professional development** to ensure **continuous growth and ethical alignment.**

3. A Step-by-Step Approach to Embedding Supervision in Internal Coaching

Organisations often hesitate to introduce supervision due to **fears of complexity, cost, or resistance from coaches.** However, supervision can be **phased in gradually** with minimal disruption.

Phase 1: Laying the Foundation (0-3 Months)

- **Secure leadership buy-in** by linking supervision to coaching effectiveness and ethical integrity.
- **Conduct a supervision needs assessment** – How many coaches? What level of experience? Which supervision model fits best?
- **Engage key stakeholders (HR, L&D, senior coaches)** to align on supervision goals.

Phase 2: Pilot & Test (3-9 Months)

- **Run a small-scale supervision pilot** (e.g., 5-10 internal coaches).
- Use a **mix of one-to-one and group supervision** to determine what works best.
- **Collect feedback** from coaches and supervisors to **refine the approach.**

Phase 3: Full Implementation & Scaling (9+ Months)

- **Expand supervision across the internal coaching function.**
- **Train selected internal coaches** as supervisors.
- **Integrate supervision into coaching contracts** and formal development plans.
- **Regularly evaluate supervision's impact** on coaching effectiveness and organisational outcomes.

Final Thoughts: Making Supervision Work in Internal Coaching

Supervision **doesn't need to be complex or disruptive.** By selecting the right model, training internal supervisors, and **introducing it incrementally,** organisations can:

- Ensure **coaching quality and consistency.**
- Reduce **ethical risks and organisational blind spots.**
- Support **internal coach development and retention.**
- Align coaching with **business strategy and leadership goals.**

Up Next: Conclusion and Next Steps

In this final section, we bring the paper to a close by **exploring your next steps** and **highlighting how ICCS can support you along the way**.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The Case for Coaching Supervision in Internal Coaching

Internal coaching has become a strategic enabler for leadership development, performance improvement, and culture change.

However, without structured supervision, even the best coaching programmes can face inconsistencies, ethical risks, and coach burnout.

This whitepaper has outlined how supervision can:

- **Enhance coaching quality** by ensuring consistency across the organisation.
- **Strengthen ethical integrity** by helping coaches navigate confidentiality and role boundaries.
- **Sustain internal coaching teams** by preventing burnout and increasing engagement.
- **Align coaching with business strategy,** ensuring measurable impact and ROI.

Supervision **is not just a compliance measure**—it is a **value multiplier** that transforms coaching from an isolated function into a f**ully integrated, high-impact practice** within organisations.

Key Next Steps for Organisations

If your organisation is considering embedding coaching supervision, here are three immediate actions to take:

Assess Your Internal Coaching Supervision Needs

- What challenges do your internal coaches face? (e.g., ethical dilemmas, lack of professional development, emotional fatigue.
- How consistent is coaching quality across the organisation?
- Is coaching aligned with business priorities, or is it happening in silos?

Choose a Supervision Model That Fits Your Organisation

- Group supervision for scalability and peer learning.
- One-to-one supervision for deeper, individualised reflection.
- Triangular supervision for alignment with HR and leadership strategy.

Train Internal Supervisors or Engage External Experts

- Identify **experienced internal coaches** to train as supervisors.
- Consider enrolling them in a **supervision training programme** (e.g., ICCS's **Accredited Diploma in Coaching Supervision).**
- Alternatively, work with **external supervision professionals** to support early-stage implementation.

How ICCS Can Support Your Supervision Journey

At the **International Centre for Coaching Supervision (ICCS),** we specialise in helping organisations **train, implement, and embed high-quality coaching supervision.**



Accredited Supervision Training: Train your internal coaches to become **certified supervisors** through our **Accredited Diploma in Coaching Supervision.**



Supervision Implementation Support: Need help designing a **scalable supervision framework?** We can guide you through the process.



Coaching Supervision Thought Leadership: Stay ahead with **best practices, research, and case studies** from industry leaders.

🔗 **To explore how coaching supervision can elevate your internal coaching programme, visit iccs.co or book a consultation with our team.**

Final Thoughts: The Future of Internal Coaching is Supervised

Organisations that embed supervision into their internal coaching programmes are **future-proofing their coaching culture.** They create **safer, stronger, and more effective coaching environments**—not just for their coaches, but for the entire organisation.

The question is no longer whether supervision is needed, but how soon organisations will integrate it into their coaching culture.

Appendix: Case Studies - The Realities of Supervision in Organisational Coaching

The following case studies offer a window into the lived experience of coaching supervision within organisations of varying sizes, sectors, and levels of maturity.

These are not polished tales of unmitigated success. Rather, they are grounded, honest accounts of what it means to implement supervision in the real world—with all its constraints, complexities, and breakthroughs.

Drawn from interviews with coaching supervisors across multinational firms, large charities, internal L&D departments and external consultancies, these stories illustrate the diverse models and approaches in practice today. They include:

- **External supervisors** working with internal coaching teams over many years to foster self-sustaining reflective spaces
- **Internal supervisors** navigating dual roles and systemic pressures
- Models based on **group supervision, ad hoc one-to-ones, and blended learning environments**
- The tensions between supervision, line management, and organisational culture
- The subtle but significant shifts in professional identity that supervision supports

While each case is unique, collectively they provide rich insight into what works, what evolves, and what continues to challenge those creating and holding supervisory spaces inside organisations.

They highlight the importance of structure, senior sponsorship, role clarity, and ongoing reflection—not only for the supervisees, but for the supervisors themselves.

These case studies are offered not as templates to follow, but as reference points for understanding the range of possibilities and pitfalls in embedding supervision into organisational coaching practice.

Case Study 1

Professionalising Coaching and Internal Supervision in a Large Charity

Andy Thorp

As a coach and supervisor within a large charity, Andy Thorp has spent over a decade supporting the development of a coaching service that, until recently, had evolved in a mostly informal way.

With around 2,500 employees and 14,000 volunteers, the organisation had long offered coaching in a patchwork manner. Internal, external, and occasional volunteer coaches provided support across the charity, but without a structured framework, oversight, or consistent supervision. "It was all a bit ad hoc," Andy recalls.

Motivated to bring greater rigour and coherence to this work and working alongside the organisation's Talent Development Manager, Andy undertook a qualification in coaching supervision—not only to meet professional obligations around ethics and reflective practice, but also to begin creating a more professionalised coaching offer within the organisation.

Today, Andy supervises a modest but meaningful cohort of coaches: eight internal and four volunteers. Group supervision sessions are held every six weeks, and he takes an inclusive approach to attendance. "If one person shows up, we do one-to-one supervision; if more show up, it becomes group supervision," he explains. This flexible model ensures continuity, but engagement remains a challenge. "Not everyone is actively coaching at any given time," Andy notes. "And if they're not coaching, they don't always see the value of supervision."

This variable engagement is a common feature of internal coaching schemes, where coaching is rarely the individual's full-time role. Many of the organisation's internal coaches come from learning and development backgrounds—Andy included—and often juggle multiple responsibilities. As such, supervision is sometimes seen as a responsive resource, rather than an ongoing developmental space.

One of the key outcomes of supervision, Andy explains, is helping coaches distinguish between coaching and advising—an important distinction when coaches work in other roles across the organisation. "Helping coaches clarify the difference between offering advice and holding a coaching space is essential," he says. Clients, too, can misinterpret the nature of coaching, particularly when the coach is a known colleague, and may expect answers rather than facilitation.

Operating as an internal supervisor brings unique challenges. Andy is both part of the system and attempting to hold a reflective space within it. "I try to play the naïve card," he says—asking curious, open questions and avoiding assumptions, in order to gain some distance from the organisational dynamics he's embedded in. But he acknowledges the limits of this approach. "I may not be as challenging as I could be if I were external. My other relationships with the coaches might get in the way."

Despite these complexities, supervision is gaining traction as a valuable part of the organisation's professional development offer. Andy has introduced conversations around themes such as parallel process and neurodiversity, occasionally bringing in guest speakers to enrich the space. His role often stretches beyond traditional supervision, incorporating elements of signposting, resourcing, and advocating for coaching as a professional discipline.

Still, the coaching function sits somewhat on the margins of the organisation's development strategy. "We didn't make a big song and dance about it when we launched the coaching service," Andy reflects. "I think there's still work to do to raise awareness and help people understand what coaching is—and isn't."

Andy's long-term vision is to embed coaching and supervision more deeply into the fabric of the organisation. He hopes to raise the standard of coaching overall, expand understanding of its value, and explore how supervision might support other roles—such as mentors and mental health first-aiders—who currently work without formal reflective spaces.

His work offers a thoughtful case study in how internal supervision can support ethical, effective coaching—even within a complex, evolving organisational landscape.

Case Study 2

Creating a Gold Standard for Internal Coaching Supervision

Mia O'Gorman

In 2018, Mia O'Gorman began training a group of twelve internal coaches at Balfour Beatty as part of her role as Thinkstitute's lead Partner for coaching. For Mia, the integration of supervision wasn't an afterthought—it was baked in from the start. Each trainee coach participated in virtual group supervision as part of their EMCC-accredited foundation training.

What began as a single session embedded in qualification has since evolved into a long-term, highly structured supervision programme that many would now view as exemplary.

Over the years, the programme expanded—first to another cohort of eight, then six more within a joint venture organisation. Today, approximately 24 internal coaches take part in quarterly supervision.

The model is flexible yet robust: each coach signs up to four sessions per year, with the option to attend more when needed. Sessions are held monthly for each of the two business units, with a maximum group size of eight, though most sessions average between four and six participants. Mia describes it as a "semi-closed group"—open only to members of the organisation, yet allowing autonomy in choosing session dates.

A unique strength of the model lies in its consistency and evolution. Many of the original twelve coaches remain in the group six years on. Over time, the supervisory dynamic has shifted from Mia leading the supervision process to a more shared, co-created space—what she sees as a "participative or co-operative group" in Brigid Proctor's group supervision typology. These seasoned coaches can use their experience to support and challenge each other within sessions, reducing Mia's need to direct.

In addition to group work, those who pursued EMCC accreditation at Senior Practitioner level now receive quarterly one-to-one supervision, also funded by the organisation. Importantly, the people holding the budgetary reins are themselves members of the coaching pool—including the Head of Leadership Development and the internal manager overseeing coaching delivery. This built-in leadership participation ensures ongoing commitment, strategic alignment, and a deep understanding of supervision's value.

Balfour Beatty has also developed internal coaching policies, including quality assurance measures stipulating that coaches receive supervision. This clarity and structure are, according to Mia, rare: "It's just become how we do things around here."

Supervision Themes

Mia highlights several recurring themes in the supervision sessions:

- **Contracting:** Especially in triadic relationships involving coach, coachee, and line manager. These often include agenda-setting and final review conversations with the manager—requiring careful navigation.
- **Managing multiple relationships:** As internal staff, coaches may already know their coachees or their managers, making boundaries and neutrality more complex. This sometimes leads to reallocation of coaching assignments, or sensitive decisions about whether to continue working with someone.
- **Endings:** Coaches frequently struggle with how to close engagements cleanly—particularly when informal follow-ups begin to resemble ongoing coaching, blurring contractual lines.
- **Hierarchies and team dynamics:** As the supervision pool expanded, new groupings occasionally included line managers and their team members. While some managers intentionally avoid sessions where their reports are present, others rely on goodwill, discretion, and conscious bracketing of knowledge. Mia introduced the idea of "goodwill," drawing on Robin Shohet's concept of relational responsibility beyond confidentiality.
- **Restorative holding:** Especially during and after the Covid period, the supervision space became a vital place of emotional support—providing belonging, reflection, and mutual care amidst uncertainty and organisational stress.

Challenges and Learnings

One notable challenge emerged when the original group of twelve had to integrate new members. Despite existing workplace relationships, some experienced coaches felt their safe, reflective space was being disrupted. Mia was surprised by the strength of this reaction and facilitated re-contracting over several sessions to re-establish group cohesion. The experience underscored the significance of group history and psychological safety in supervision groups.

Another ongoing challenge has been the possibility of hierarchical pairings—team members and their managers—in the same session. Mia addressed this by inviting participants to consider their scheduling choices and offering optional 1:1 supervision sessions for matters too sensitive to bring to the group.

Reflections on the Supervisor's Role

Mia's position as an external supervisor who has developed a long-term relationship with the team offers both proximity and perspective. While she now knows the organisational culture intimately, her stance outside the system allows her to question embedded norms and assumptions. She believes having prior organisational experience—in her case, nine years in HR and L&D—is essential for this kind of work, enabling her to understand dynamics from the inside while holding a more independent space.

As she notes, "Being an internal coach is more complex. The multiplicity of relationships, the blurred boundaries, the sense of being both insider and helper—it all adds up. Supervision, in this context, isn't optional. It's essential."

https://thinkstitute.com/

Case Study 3

Deepening Reflection and Navigating Complexity in Internal Coaching

Beatrice Zornek

For over two years, Beatrice Zornek has been providing group supervision to internal coaches. Beatrice's role as an external supervisor offers a unique vantage point. That externality makes a difference—it helps me remain detached, to see more clearly what's systemic and what's not."

This clarity is vital. Many internal coaches, Beatrice observes, receive limited training compared to external coaches.These internal coaches often only coach one or two clients in any given month. This limited experience can lead to both underdeveloped reflective practices and a lack of confidence. "They might come in thinking an issue is all due to the system," she explains, "when in fact it's a common coaching dynamic that is independent of the system.. Or, conversely, they might overlook the systemic forces at play and personalise something that is bigger than them."

Supervision, then, becomes a dual process of differentiation and development—helping coaches discern what's theirs, what's the system's, and how to navigate both with ethical clarity.

Ethical dilemmas are a recurrent theme. Many internal coaches come from HR and sit within complex organisational power structures. Conflicts between loyalty to the organisation and confidentiality to the client often surface—though they're not always named as such. Internal coaches might feel hesitant to share certain things in a group where ethical dilemmas surface, or where there might be a connection to someone else in the group. These concerns point to a deeper vulnerability that Beatrice holds with care. "I think people worry they'll be judged, or that they've crossed a line without realising," she says. "Our job as supervisors is to create safety—but also to gently explore those ethical tensions and encourage accountability."

Interestingly, while restorative support plays a role, Beatrice finds the formative and normative functions more pronounced. “They sometimes come inclined to do the ‘right’ thing— which might come in conflict with confidentiality, or stepping outside the coach’s role to resolve interpersonal tensions between clients and their managers.”

Over time, she has observed a maturing of reflective practice. Coaches who initially responded to challenges with surface-level fixes—“I’ll journal,” or “I’ll take a walk”—are now exploring deeper dynamics: power, transference, boundaries, and systems. “They’re becoming more able to sit with discomfort, to think with greater complexity, and to hold tensions rather than solve them.”

The work isn’t without its limitations. Given the quarterly frequency and voluntary nature of the supervision, Beatrice is aware that the developmental arc is gradual. However, she sees her role as offering something both impactful and irreplaceable: “For internal coaches with limited training, supervision is the best way to grow. It’s reflective, responsive, and real-time.”

Beatrice also sees a broader organisational opportunity—especially in retaining an external voice. “Internal supervisors get caught in the same blind spots as the coaches. They need external supervision themselves, otherwise it’s just recycling the same systemic thinking.”

Indeed, her work demonstrates how external supervision within internal structures offers a powerful paradox: the closer one is to the system, the harder it becomes to see it clearly. Beatrice’s ability to hold space, challenge assumptions, and introduce depth of thinking illustrates how supervision can not only develop coaches but also act as a quiet agent of organisational integrity and care.

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Case Study 4

Reframing Coaching from a 'Nice-to-Have' to a Strategic Asset

Csaba Csetneki

When Csaba Csetneki began supervising internal coaches across several major Hungarian corporations, he quickly recognised a familiar pattern—one that revealed the hidden fragility of even the most promising coaching initiatives.

Despite the size and maturity of these organisations, coaching often existed on the margins: informal, voluntary, and disconnected from the broader systems it sought to influence.

Time and again, Csaba observed that the coaching function had grown not through strategic vision, but organically—rooted in the passion of individuals who had completed coach training and wanted to give something back.

In many cases, it was precisely this enthusiasm that helped coaching take root within organisations. Yet ironically, this same organic development became the very thing that limited its influence. Without formalised roles, accountability structures, or connection to departments like Learning & Development or Organisational Psychology, internal coaching remained a "floating" function—respected, perhaps, but not integrated.

Coaches, too, often internalised this ambiguity. Csaba noted a tendency toward what he describes as "nice" coaching: a well-meaning but overly casual approach, marked by vague boundaries, reluctance to set fees or KPIs, and a hesitancy to claim professional standing within the system. Some coaches gave their time freely, even outside their official roles, reinforcing the perception of coaching as a soft, supplementary activity rather than a strategic development lever.

Supervision in this context, Csaba explains, is anything but straightforward. It demands more than technical coaching know-how. It requires the supervisor to hold a mirror up to both individual practice and organisational culture—to explore not only how the coach is

working, but how they are positioning themselves within the system. It also calls for a high degree of resilience, adaptability, and emotional intelligence on the part of the supervisor. “Internal supervision is not for the faint-hearted,” Csaba reflects. “You’re supporting coaches who are often under-resourced, under-recognised, and operating without a clear mandate. You have to help them find their ground while seeing the wider system clearly.”

Through regular group and one-to-one supervision, Csaba created a reflective space where internal coaches could step back from their day-to-day and consider their professional identity, their relational stance, and the organisational narratives shaping their work. This often meant challenging long-held assumptions—about generosity, visibility, even power. Over time, coaches began to recognise the unintended consequences of their invisibility and to step more boldly into a professional posture. They started naming their value, aligning with organisational objectives, and making their work more legible to stakeholders.

Csaba’s work illustrates the deeper role of supervision in organisational settings—not just as a developmental function, but as a catalyst for systemic change. By helping coaches to see themselves not simply as helpers, but as professionals operating within a complex web of relationships, Csaba reframes coaching as something far more than a “nice-to-have.” He positions it as a serious, strategic asset—one that, with the right support, can evolve from the margins to the heart of organisational life.

https://versenycoach.hu/en

Case Study 5

The Supervision Programme That Never Was: Adoption and Launch Challenges

Neal Henderson

Neal Henderson spent seven years as an embedded coach within a vast and highly complex public shipyard in the United States, working as part of a large defence contractor that provided coaching services to project teams maintaining and modernising US Navy vessels. Though technically an external coach, Neal was fully immersed in the internal culture and rhythms of the organisation—his desk situated within the team, his coaching spanning individuals, leadership groups, and entire project systems.

In this demanding environment, Neal gradually took on a senior coaching role, mentoring junior coaches and increasingly offering what he later realised was a form of supervision—long before he had the language for it. Inspired by his training at the International Centre for Coaching Supervision, Neal began laying the groundwork for a formal supervision programme within the coaching team, which comprised around ten coaches deployed across different shipyard projects.

His aspiration was both practical and relational. Many of the coaches were new to the profession, often holding entry-level credentials and facing the complexity of group dynamics, ethical tensions, and organisational politics with little support. Neal wanted to create a space where they could grow their proficiency, explore ethical dilemmas, and cultivate resilience. "You can really feel like you're out on a windy corner," he recalls, "dealing with hugely ethical questions and not knowing if you're making any difference."

The vision for supervision was threefold: formative, helping coaches grow in skill and awareness; normative, offering a space to reflect on ethical practice; and restorative, creating a sense of belonging and support in what was often a high-stress and isolating environment. Neal hoped this would lead to greater internal coherence, deeper trust, and ultimately stronger service delivery to clients.

Initial uptake was promising. A few coaches immediately recognised the value of supervision, and Neal began piloting group sessions and peer reflection. He also supported his own manager, the lead coach, who strongly championed the initiative. But beyond this early enthusiasm, Neal encountered significant resistance.

"There was a split," he explains. "Some of the coaches wanted to master their craft. Others thought they already knew it all—tools made them good coaches, and that was enough." For many, the concept of supervision was misunderstood, coloured by its associations with managerial oversight or irrelevant professional contexts. In the US, Neal observed, "supervision" simply didn't carry the same developmental meaning it does in places like the UK or within the EMCC framework.

Beyond the team itself, structural barriers loomed even larger. While his immediate leadership supported the initiative, senior management further up the chain saw coaching—and by extension, supervision—as overhead. In a company of over 20,000 people, with around 30-50 coaches, the coaching function was marginalised. "We were out of the core business," Neal notes. "People didn't understand the value of coaching, let alone supervision. It was hard to get them to invest."

Despite these challenges, Neal persisted, building internal processes, running pilot programmes, and advocating for broader organisational investment in coaching development. But just as the programme was beginning to gain traction, the coaching contract with the shipyard was lost. The incoming vendor lacked both the experience and understanding to continue the initiative. The supervision programme came to an end—before it had truly begun.

Looking back, Neal sees the experience not as a failure, but as a learning story. "It's a story of education and persistence," he reflects. "And a reminder that without senior sponsorship, just like with any change initiative, it's really hard to make it stick."

Now operating as an external coach and aspiring supervisor to smaller organisations, Neal still carries the vision he tried to implement. "Whether it's in defence or smaller systems, anytime you have multiple coaches embedded in a team—especially if they're technically external—supervision becomes essential. Not just for quality assurance, but to foster cohesion, emotional wellbeing, and a shared sense of purpose."

For Neal, the supervision programme that never was remains a symbol—not of what failed, but of what's still needed in systems where coaching is emerging, misunderstood, or undervalued.

https://www.frontrowresults.com/

Case Study 6

Building Trust and Shifting Perceptions as an Internal Supervisor

Leo Costa

Leo Costa is a career coach and internal supervisor at a multinational firm providing coaching services. His team of 15 coaches supports client organisations through career transition and development services. The coaches are external-facing, delivering career coaching sessions as part of the company's service offerings to corporate clients. In 2022, Leo completed the ICCS Diploma in Coaching Supervision and, shortly thereafter, stepped into the role of internal supervisor for his team.

The introduction of supervision within the team was both timely and transformative. Some of the coaches had recently been moved into coaching roles from other departments and were new to the profession. Supervision offered them a critical space to gain confidence and clarity around their coaching practice. For more experienced coaches, however, Leo's new role initially triggered some discomfort. "They didn't recognise the legitimacy of all of this," he explains. "I think they misunderstood supervision as some sort of hierarchical thing—like I was their manager." Leo knew he would need to navigate these assumptions carefully.

Drawing on what he had learned through his training, Leo approached the task with humility and openness. "I'm not trying to put myself above anybody," he says. "I'm just trying to create a space where people can make sense of what they're doing." His emphasis on psychological safety helped to smooth the transition, gradually winning over sceptical colleagues. Over time, the tone of the sessions shifted from surface-level concerns—such as whether it was okay to ask a yes/no question—to deeper, more reflective topics. "We started talking about ethical dilemmas and how the coach felt in the session. It became much more restorative."

Leo runs monthly group supervision for the team, with an average attendance of 8–10 people. Participation is optional, yet engagement remains high—something Leo sees as a testament to the value the

coaches find in the space. He also offers one-to-one supervision on demand, though he notes that these require more prompting. “When they do come, they always say how eye-opening it was,” he shares. “But they’re busy people—so it’s about nudging them at the right moment.”

One of the most compelling outcomes of supervision has been the measurable improvement in coaching performance. Leo explains that in the company’s ad hoc coaching platform—where clients book sessions online—the number of clients booking a second or third session more than doubled after the introduction of supervision. Additionally, internal feedback surveys showed improved ratings post-session. “These were clear indicators,” Leo notes. “The coaches were doing something right in that first session, and supervision helped them get there.”

Leo’s own development remains a priority. He regularly undertakes new training to stay exposed to different perspectives, including executive coaching programmes and ongoing mentor coaching as he works toward his PCC. He also participates in wider networks and webinars to ensure his view isn’t limited by the internal culture of his organisation.

Reflecting on his role, Leo highlights the importance of clear contracting—particularly in an internal setting where roles and reporting lines can easily be misunderstood. “I had to be clear: I’m not your manager, I’m not your mentor. I’m here to support your coaching practice.” He emphasised this not only with the team but also with his own manager, ensuring everyone understood his function was developmental, not evaluative.

As Leo looks to the future, his goal is to increase participation in one-to-one supervision. He’s exploring how to leverage informal moments and internal communication channels to remind coaches of the support available. “It’s not about pushing,” he says, “but about planting reminders that this space exists—for them.”

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Case Study 7

Supervision at Scale in a Global Organisation

Gary Holmes

When a large multinational organisation began to re-energise its internal coaching culture, Gary Holmes emerged as one of the key figures in shaping its supervision offer. Within a vast and decentralised workforce of 80,000 employees, the company had around 200 internal coaches—most of whom delivered coaching alongside their main professional roles. As the coaching community grew, it became increasingly clear that supervision was either lacking or highly inconsistent.

"There wasn't a lot of supervision," Gary reflects. "We realised we were asking people to coach without offering the support that supervision provides."

Gary became one of three core supervisors leading a central community of around 100 internal coaches, with 70 to 80 actively engaged at any given time. While this group was collaborative and well-connected—sharing tools, platforms and approaches—challenges soon emerged:

- The organisation's global reach meant cultural fragmentation, making it difficult to embed a consistent supervision model.
- Some coaches were resistant to supervision, perceiving it as evaluative or managerial oversight.
- A lack of clarity in contracting led to misunderstandings about what supervision was meant to provide.
- Limited supervisory capacity left only a few supervisors responsible for supporting a wide pool of coaches.

Another notable challenge was scope creep. As one of the few structured points of contact in the internal coaching system, supervisors often became informal hubs for operational issues, performance feedback, and wider organisational concerns.

“Things started coming to me that weren’t really supervision,” Gary explains. “It wasn’t just reflective practice—it was logistics, feedback, even cultural insight. The role became broader than intended.”

Despite these complexities, the impact of supervision was profound. Group supervision, in particular, offered a restorative and reflective space—an antidote to the isolation many internal coaches experienced.

“The biggest impact,” Gary shares, “was giving coaches a chance to talk with one another. The more experienced coaches felt they were contributing to others’ development, while newer coaches found reassurance and inspiration.”

Supervision also began to surface larger systemic patterns. Cultural nuances in regions like South Africa and India added unexpected layers, with supervisors becoming not only reflective partners, but also informal bridges for cross-cultural understanding.

As Gary puts it:

“We thought supervision was about raising the bar—but we realised it’s also about holding people. It’s about creating a space where you’re not alone.”

While the organisation is still early in its supervision journey, this evolving model shows what’s possible when supervision is framed not as oversight—but as a practice of community, reflection, and care.

Case Study 8

Building Structure and Depth in a Coaching Community at Costain

Claire Fryer

Claire Fryer, Group Behavioural Management and SHE Strategic Performance Director at Costain has over 20 years' experience as a qualified executive coach, performance coach and is an EMCC Global Mentor, Coach, Supervisor. Claire has been quietly pioneering a structured, ethical, and impactful approach to internal coaching supervision and what began in 2020 as a simple intention to bring greater rigour to internal coaching has since blossomed into a well-structured programme that blends supervision with community, reflective practice, and continuing development.

Supported from the outset by the Chief People Officer and in partnership and working closely with Costain's Learning & Development teams L&D, Claire introduced a formal supervision model for the organisation's core cohort of qualified internal coaches. These coaches – drawn from diverse sectors such as defence, transportation, water, energy, defence and civil nuclear – now form a committed supervision community meeting bi-monthly. The structure includes reflective check-ins, supervision processes, learning inputs, and peer-sharing, underpinned by an ethos of ethical, developmental practice.

Claire describes the shift as one from a general 'coaching community' to a space for "coaching community supervision," where qualified coaches explore real issues of practice. "What I noticed," she reflects, "was the deepness – when we said this is supervision, not just a check-in, everything changed."

Each supervision session is planned in advance by a small team, often incorporating tools, models, or guest speakers. While group supervision is the backbone, Claire also offers one-to-one sessions for more sensitive or personal issues, challenging or complex issues that a coach may be involved with, in addition to supporting the coaches within her behavioural management coaching team. The overall result is a strong

cohort of coaches who are consistently and regularly engaged. “We’ve built a quality core,” Claire says, “and the smaller numbers have actually raised the quality and reflective space of what we do.”

Common themes include contracting, coaching boundaries, confidence, navigating complexity in conversations, and knowing when to signpost. The work is always clearly delineated from therapy or mentoring. “We were really clear from the beginning,” Claire explains. “This is coaching. These are the boundaries. That clarity has protected both coaches and clients.”

Costain’s coaching service now reaches employees across roles – from operatives to senior leaders – with structured coaching used not only for performance but for leadership development, succession planning, and cultural change. A particularly striking example was a coaching programme for frontline supervisors which delivered measurable improvements in performance and career development behaviour across a large infrastructure project.

Reflecting on the success of the initiative, Claire credits strong leadership backing, clear ethical foundations, and joined-up thinking across Costain’s HR and L&D functions. “When you have that support,” she says, “it opens the door to doing what’s right.”

Her advice to others? “Start with structure. Ethics, governance, clarity – get that in place from the start. And don’t do it alone. Build a small group to help you plan and hold it. That’s what makes it sustainable.”

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