



# ‘Superwise’:

the challenge and the magic  
of integrated supervision

With the launch of a new supervision training programme dedicated purely to integrative practice, author of *Personal Consultancy* and founder of the PGDip/MSc in integrated counselling and coaching at the University of East London (UEL), **Dr Nash Popovic**, talks to **Diane Parker**

### **How do you define integrative practice in general?**

Broadly speaking, integrative practice can be grouped into three categories.

The first is *fused integration* – where the ingredients are completely blended, such as when making a gin and tonic. An example of this kind of integration is cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT), in which there is no demarcation between the cognitive and behavioural elements.

The second, *eclecticism*, is a kind of integration involving elements taken from various approaches but not in any systematic way – to use another food and drink analogy, this is more like making a fruit salad.

The third kind is a *demarcated integration*, which is more like drinking a tequila. You take salt, tequila and lime, but not at the same time, and in a particular order. Personal consultancy, the model of integration I practise and teach, belongs in this category.<sup>1</sup>

So, we use counselling and coaching skills with the same client but at different stages of the process. This is not about simply adding coaching to our counselling repertoire. The personal consultancy model integrates two basic modes of working with the client: *being* with the client and *doing* with the client. In other words, we are there for the client, to listen to them and to support them, but we are proactive as well in using certain interventions to help them make tangible changes outside sessions, in the real world.

We also integrate the scopes: working with the inner world of the client as well as ‘visible’ behavioural patterns. Furthermore, we integrate timeline: we work with the past, but we pay attention in equal measure to the present and the future. Too often, it is assumed that all clients’ issues stem from the past but it may, in fact, actually relate more to their future outlook (eg, fear of death and dying, or lack of meaning and hope).

We also integrate problem-focused and solution-focused methods. This requires bringing together skills and practices from a variety of approaches into one coherent model. What we don’t integrate are theories of these approaches, as that is impossible because they contradict each other. So, personal consultancy is firmly based on practice. We are primarily interested in what works – what can make a difference for our clients.

### **You led the MSc in integrative counselling and coaching for more than a decade, and you left that to run a training in integrative supervision. Why was that?**

I like the challenge. The MSc in integrative counselling and coaching became an enormously popular and successful programme, and I felt that it was time for me to move on to the next stage for this novel approach. Developing training in integrative supervision appears to be a natural step in that direction. When you think about that – what a strange job supervision is! You supervise people without ever seeing their clients or their work. How do you know that your supervisee is telling the truth about what’s happening behind closed doors? What guarantees do you have that your supervisee will take on board what you discussed, or that an excellent supervision session will translate into equally effective or helpful supervisee’s client sessions? And yet you need to help them learn, grow and navigate all the vagaries of one-to-one work. That’s the challenge and the magic of supervision.

### **Why do we need integrative supervision? What purpose does it fulfil, and how does it serve our clients – and the profession as a whole?**

One of the major challenges my students on the MSc integrative counselling and coaching programme experienced was finding a truly integrative supervisor. There is still a gap in the market in this respect. We simply need more trained integrative supervisors to plug this gap. Integrative supervision serves our clients and the profession as a whole, mainly because it has the potential of making our profession more effective. Some clients come to see a counsellor because they want an opportunity to unload, to talk to somebody, but most come because they are not where they want to be. I have never had a client who is totally happy with where they are; they usually want to make some changes in their life. I believe that we can be far more effective in this way, and integrative practice can play a big part in that. This is because an integrative practitioner can work with the inner world of the client – helping them resolve internal conflicts and overcome inner barriers that prevent them from moving on. But they can also help them build on that – make concrete ‘visible’ behavioural changes and achieve their goals. This is like rebuilding the house: if you just focus on the foundations, you still don’t have good walls and roof. On the other hand, you can build a wonderful house, but if you don’t address its foundations, it will not last long. What an integrative practitioner can do is build the house on good foundations that will help the client to not only make a change but also create sustainable, lasting change. Integrative supervision is an essential part of that journey.

When I did some preliminary research in preparation for creating the training, it struck me that many practitioners find supervision boring. I think this is because they don’t get from supervision what they would really like, which is how to do what they do better, how to be more successful at their job, and how to produce better results with their clients. It seems that too much time in supervision is still spent on talking about and analysing the client, rather than on the process that is going on. Interestingly, existing supervision training courses also spend precious little time on how to produce good results. This is

understandable, as these courses attract people from different modalities, and you don't want to impose your way of working (your approach) onto them. So, the aspect of the training that focuses on helping supervisees be more effective with their clients falls between the cracks. The training in integrative supervision has an advantage in this respect. As it is familiar and uses elements from different modalities, it can focus on helping trainees discern through discussion what can work well in various real-life situations.

### **What about practitioners who do not integrate their practices but offer coaching and therapy as distinct and separate services? Why might they be drawn to working with an integrative supervisor, and how might this benefit them and their clients?**

Well, it is actually quite hard to keep these two apart. More often than not, they complement each other, as in the familiar Taoist black and white Yin-Yang symbol. I see counselling as *Yin* and coaching as *Yang* (with those little pesky dots of the opposite in the middle of each), and as in most aspects of life, we often need both. Think about that: if you have a counselling client, would you not use your coaching skills if you knew that the client could benefit from them? We also know that many coaching clients need some counselling before they can really focus on achieving their goals. So, in my view, every practitioner could benefit from integrative supervision. The obvious benefit is that such supervisors can cover both aspects of their practice. But there is more to that – it opens the door for those practitioners to take a step toward integrating the best of both worlds, by learning to determine when and how these practices can be used and combined in an ethical way. I think we tend to adhere to self-imposed boundaries between these two helping professions too rigidly.

### **What is the current demand for integrative supervision? As a practitioner, supervisor and educator, what changes and developments in the field have you noticed over the past 10 years, for example?**

There has been a steady march of integrative practice in the last 20 or so years. Before that, it was a relatively small niche, and now it is the fastest growing and dominant approach. Most practitioners claim that they practise integratively, although what they integrate and how, may differ widely. Integration between counselling and coaching is particularly popular with clients, which should not come as a surprise – why not get two for the price of one if you can? With the popularity of this kind of integration, the popularity and demand for integrative supervision will naturally grow, too.

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### **If I am currently a practising coach, therapist or counsellor thinking of undergoing training in integrated supervision, what do I need to consider? What experience or training do I need to have?**

You need to practise integratively and love it! This does not necessarily have to be integration between counselling and coaching. After all, some counselling/therapeutic approaches, such as solution-focused therapy (SFT) are closer to coaching than counselling in nature. It is important, though, that you integrate elements of at least one 'relational' approach that prioritises exploring the inner world of the client (such as person-centred, existential or psychodynamic) and elements from at least one more proactive approach that emphasises behaviour change and goal attainment (such as SFT, CBT and coaching).

### **What are the benefits of training specifically as an integrative supervisor, as opposed to another training or modality? Who might I serve as a result of my training and experience in this specialist area – and how?**

I cannot generalise, as other trainings in integrative supervision may have different priorities. However, some of the things we would like our trainees to learn are:

- How to use supervision time productively, which requires minimising time spent on analysing the client. It's easy in supervision to slip into discussing clients, analysing what's wrong with them, where their issues stem from, their attachment styles, or their personality types. While this can make the supervisor and supervisee feel engaged and professional, it often does little to help the client get to where they want to be. We find that supervision is more effective if it focuses on the process that is taking place in the session, as well as how to help the client translate the benefits of the session into benefits in real life
- How to recognise blind spots in the supervisee's work. It's common to identify blind spots in hindsight – when it's too late. Our trainees will learn how to help supervisees recognise these in time, when they can do something about them
- How to listen, give feedback, and make suggestions without triggering supervisees' defence mechanisms, and how to create an atmosphere where supervisees feel safe and comfortable to open up and be honest. Integrative supervision is conducive in this respect as it is less ideologically driven. This means that it is less rigid and more open-minded to diverse views and perspectives, which, in turn, encourages supervisees to be more open, as they don't feel that they have to adhere to assumptions of a particular theoretical framework
- How to maintain focus in supervision sessions and help supervisees stay focused in sessions with their clients (this is based on the principles behind the personal consultancy model)
- How to help supervisees manage their own conflicts and barriers to productive work, such as lack of confidence, as well as overconfidence; not liking the client or liking/sympathising with them too much; being triggered or over-identifying with the client; and feeling stuck or rushing to help

- How supervisees can help clients find their way forward without being overly directive
- How to ensure supervisees receive consistent support, even with monthly or fortnightly sessions.

I am aware that each of these points may need further clarification and explanation, but that would take us way beyond the scope of this interview – perhaps we would need a book!

**I am not a supervisor, but over the course of my training and career as both coach and psychotherapist, I have been blessed to work with some remarkably skilled and inspiring supervisors, operating in a range of modalities, each offering something unique. In your experience as both a supervisor and supervisee, what would you say are the essential qualities of a good supervisor? And what additional skills and qualities do you consider to be especially important in order to carry out ethical and effective integrative supervision?**

This came up in a regular discussion group I run called Pub Psychology (so named because it generally takes place in a pub!). We were exploring something along these lines in a recent session on supervision, and it occurred to me that replacing the letter 'v' in the word 'supervise' with the letter 'w' might give us a clue about the most important quality of a supervisor. Supervision is not about *vision* but *wisdom*. A great supervisor has the wisdom to know how much they can do, as well as the wisdom to know their limits. They need to help their supervisees acquire the same wisdom; to help them be aware of their limits as well as constantly reaching beyond those limits. What does this mean in practice? It means

understanding that the limits to what we can do are always defined by the client and what they are willing to do. After all, they have to make any change, and we can't do it for them. This means that the core of our practice is collaboration. Working collaboratively is not just an ethical issue; it is a necessary condition for effective work. Pushing the boundaries means constantly exploring ways to deepen this collaboration so that it bears fruit outside the session and beyond their work with us.

The other essential quality of a supervisor is an ability to establish an 'I-thou' relationship.<sup>2</sup> We are now going through another wave of hype about artificial intelligence (AI) and the inevitable fears that AI will eventually replace counsellors and supervisors. I am old enough to have ridden these waves before and I have no fear that it will happen now or ever. This is because AI will never be able to do 'I-thou', as AI doesn't have 'I', nor is it capable of experiencing. This is why this quality is so important. Those who reduce their coaching, counselling or supervision practice to simply follow some form of protocol do so at their own peril.

More specifically, integrative supervisors need to be able to maintain balance. They need to be comfortable and confident enough to work in depth and help the supervisee deal with deeper issues, such as past traumas and existential issues, but also to be able to deal with the 'surface' (I use the term surface, to indicate the 'visible' aspects of our work, such as changing behavioural habits). They also need to be able to balance *being with* the client with *doing with* the client (eg, introducing some interventions), focusing on the problem with focusing on the solution, and balancing the focus on the past, the present and the future. And finally, they need to balance knowing and discovering, to keep the magic alive!

**Thank you, Nash. Keep us posted on that book! ■**



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Dr Nash Popovic** is the creator of the personal consultancy model for one-to-one practice that combines relational approaches with goal-orientated approaches such as CBT and coaching.

In 2014, Nash co-authored *Personal Consultancy* (Routledge, 2014), and in 2015, he launched the MSc in integrative counselling and coaching at the University of East London (UEL), the first programme of its kind in the world. He is the founder of the Personal Consultants and Integrated Practitioner Network (PCIPN) and integrative supervision training (<https://tinyurl.com/6hjs3srj>), as well as the creator of a comprehensive personal development guide,

*Personal Synthesis* ([www.personalsynthesis.com](http://www.personalsynthesis.com)). Nash also works as a personal consultant and integrative supervisor in private practice.

To learn more about the integrated supervision training, see the Personal Consultants and Integrated Practitioner Network at: <https://tinyurl.com/bdddxdx>

**Diane Parker** is the Editor of *Coaching Today*.

#### REFERENCES

- 1 Popovic N. Jinks D. *Personal consultancy*. Abingdon: Routledge; 2014.
- 2 Buber M. *I and thou* (2nd ed., trans. Smith RG). NY: Scribner; 1937.