When I started my formal training as a coach I realised that most serious coaches typically had a supervisor (who in turn, I supposed, had a supervisor, and so on), and that coaching organisations expected it. I therefore began to consider what I thought I wanted and needed from supervision. It included an opportunity to reflect on challenging aspects of coaching sessions I was giving, share experiences, consider my further development as a coach, professionalise my practice, improve my coaching skills and seek endorsement of what I was doing as a coach from a more experienced and respected member of the coaching community. I realised I might seek these ingredients from different sources.

To date, I have had supervision sessions from three or, depending on how broadly one interprets the term supervision, four sources. First, from an extremely experienced psychologist and coach who supervises me along with one, sometimes two other people who are nearer the beginning of their coaching careers. We each bring an issue to supervision and take turns to witness the supervision of our co-supervisees. I have learnt as much from listening to the questions asked by other supervisees and the questioning style of our supervisor as by seeking answers to my own questions. Our supervisor also raises awareness of the coaching landscape generally and is a rich source of advice, connections and industry understanding.

Another source of supervision is the network of contacts I’ve met through my training and indeed through my group supervision sessions. A few of us engage in one-to-peer supervision sessions, face to face, by Skype or by phone, sharing and reflecting on our current challenges.

I also have one-to-one supervision sessions with a counselling psychologist due to the nature of some of the work I’m now doing. The flavour here is entirely different. I find myself trying to
resist the lure of our sessions becoming counselling, or at least personal coaching sessions. In my mind they should be about my clients not about me if they are to serve their intended function. But is that possible or indeed necessary? I value these sessions for an opportunity to consider boundary issues and my own reactions to the coaching process with someone who works more often with troubled than well people. They are very focused and intense.

There is of course another kind of supervision open to us all. Reflective practice. I realise that my reflections written following each coaching session are a rich source of challenge and self-development. By looking back over my coaching ‘diary’ I can discern themes, developmental needs, strengths and weaknesses. I can reflect on my reflections. I can even bring my reflections to one or more of my other supervision sessions…

I conclude, in writing this account of my experience of supervision so far, that there is value for me at least in seeking a variety of supervision styles. One may settle into a particular supervisory relationship but if that gets too comfortable perhaps that is the time to challenge it. Perhaps the overriding factor for me is being able to have a dialogue with a disinterested third party about what would otherwise typically be a solitary, one-on-one activity with one’s client. That one-on-one activity carries with it a vast weight of responsibility. As a coach one has issues in one’s hands of massive importance in the coachee’s life. Supervision helps one share that burden of responsibility responsibly.

REFLECTIONS ON SOME BOOKS ABOUT COACHING SUPERVISION

I read Coaching and Mentoring: Theory and Practice, by Bob Garvey, Paul Stokes and David Megginson in order to gain a wide perspective from three experienced academics and practitioners, and I choose just two areas they write on to highlight here. First, Part 2 of the book looks at influences on coaching and mentoring, focusing specifically on ‘power’ within the coaching and mentoring relationship, networks and social interactions in the context of the ‘knowledge economy’, the growing use of electronic media, and the function of ‘goals’. The goal discussion in particular is helpful reading for someone starting coaching supervision, whether as supervisor or supervisee, since it asks the reader to challenge the belief that goal setting is necessarily good practice and to look at possible alternatives. The authors argue that ‘the discourse of “goals” is a power issue that raises some important questions about the way people interact and communicate within organizations’ (p. 152). Secondly, Part 3 turns to what might be described as ‘live issues’ in coaching and mentoring. Here the authors are perhaps at their most thought provoking: they explore contemporary debates that are influenced by ‘mindset, territory, power and control’ (p. 5), with particular reference to the move towards supervision of mentors and coaches, diversity and standards, competencies and professionalisation. In the section on supervision, even the term comes under scrutiny and the authors note that there is as yet no consensus on how to decide who is qualified to supervise (p. 195).
With regard to setting coaching and mentoring competences, we are asked to consider ‘do standards raise standards’ (p. 192) or encourage a tendency to mediocrity?

Another broad-based book directly relevant to this topic is *Coaching and Mentoring Supervision: Theory and Practice* by Tatiana Bachkirova, Peter Jackson and David Clutterbuck. For the purposes of this chapter I refer to just a few aspects. First, the book is part of a series devoted to ‘Supervision in Context’. The series editors, Peter Hawkins and Robin Shohet, believe that ‘quality supervision is the key link in helping practitioners link what they learn in theory, with what they learn and do in practice and is therefore the core of all continuous personal and professional development’ (p. x). The authors of the current book acknowledge that the necessity for supervision in coaching is still not universally accepted, but they put a strong case for it being highly desirable, and possibly even more desirable than for counsellors (p. 4). They argue that coaches may well have a tripartite relationship of client, organisation and coach to consider, rather than the traditional client/counsellor pairing. Coaches are less well equipped to identify boundary cases where a client may have mental health issues and coaches may not be so self-aware because it is not compulsory for a coach to undergo personal development work before and during training, in contrast to counsellors.

Secondly, the authors give three definitions of supervision from other authors in the opening pages of their book (p. 3), which echo our own in Chapter 15 and might be summarised as a process whereby supervisees review and reflect on and evaluate their work in order to transform it through the sharing of expertise, and in order to gain an understanding of both the client system and themselves as part of the client-coach system. Finally, I note that Part 3 looks at different contexts and modes of supervision, ranging from supervision of coaches within an organisation, group and peer supervision, supervising in mentoring and organisational consulting contexts and e-supervision. This overview opens out the debate about whether the one-to-one, face-to-face supervision model is necessary, which of course is also challenged in Chapter 15 of this book.

**REFERENCES**
