

Practical Supervision in Applied Sport Psychology

Paul McCarthy, Zoe Moffat,
and Lindsey Burns



“This proposal represents a ground-breaking addition to the field of applied sport psychology. Its unique blend of theoretical depth, practical guidance, and real-world insights makes it an excellent resource for both students and supervisors. This book has the potential to redefine the landscape of supervision in sport psychology, providing a comprehensive and accessible guide for students and supervisors alike.”

Dr Robert Morris, *Associate Professor in Sport Psychology at the University of Stirling and Senior Sport Psychologist at the UK Sports Institute, UK*



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Practical Supervision in Applied Sport Psychology

Practical Supervision in Applied Sport Psychology delivers a ‘how-to’ guide in the supervision of sport psychology trainees and qualified practitioners. It serves as a resource for the supervisee and the supervisor, supporting scholarship in applied sport psychology at the postgraduate level, especially for those training to become sport psychology practitioners.

This new book offers a compact and comprehensive manual on supervision that meets the needs of supervisees and supervisors by educating and supporting them within applied sport psychology to deal competently with the challenges of supervision and the supervisory process. With practical examples and scenarios throughout, the text helps supervisees become better informed about the supervisory process, its challenges, and its drawbacks. *Practical Supervision in Applied Sport Psychology* also enables supervisors to get to grips with beginning supervising trainees, while holding a resource that is accessible and informative for lifelong learning in supervision.

Emerging from decades of experience in both supervising and being supervised in applied sport psychology, this new book is vital reading for scholars, teachers, researchers, and those practising supervising and receiving supervision within the field of applied sport psychology.

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To Lesley, Liam, Euan, and Niamh, for all time.

For Michael, Delia, and Phoebe whose love and presence
shape every good thing I do. – Lindsey Burns



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Preface

Several researchers, practitioners, and educators have written extensively about supervision and its importance in our field of professional practice (Andersen 2000, 2021; Poczwardowski et al., 2023). Despite their encouragement for supervision in applied sport psychology practice, it remains on the periphery. Our goal in writing this book is to offer trainees, supervisees, supervisors, practitioners, and training directors a resource to refer to in their roles. To meet their requirements, we aimed for a practical lens over a purely theoretical supervision text. We leaned towards an applied, sport-specific nuance and integrated theory and research where necessary, while keeping a keen eye on the practicalities of supervision. In short, this book intends to provide a practical and relational guide to supervision for supervisees and supervisors in applied sport psychology.

For some of you reading this preface, you are transforming from a student of psychology to a practitioner of psychology (Falender & Shafranske, 2012). It is a daunting transformation for anyone. In practical terms, the change might mean moving from reading a case study about treating a football player presenting with low mood following an injury to leading this work with a football player at their training ground. Occasionally, some trainees embark on this applied journey with little support or guidance, which places the trainees and their clients' welfare under great strain. Every trainee deserves education, training, and supervision to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to work competently with clients, and although the focus within this book is on supervision, supervision works best alongside appropriate education (e.g., learning about CBT) and training (e.g., working in triads to develop Socratic methods). After all, supervision is psychologists' third most frequent professional activity (after psychotherapy and assessment – diagnosis), though diminishing time is devoted to it (Falender, 2018; Norcross & Rogan, 2013).

Supervisees need to know what supervision entails, how to use it, and how to thrive within it. A good-enough supervisor will help you marshal the knowledge, skills, and attitudes you need to be a good-enough supervisee.

Supervision is a blend of art and science. Yet, this blend creates a tension between art and science: Should I lean more towards art or science? In the workplace of sport, we see athletes, athletic backroom teams, coaches, and fans who crave data, reason, and explanation, and yet they also revel in the artistry and insouciance of casting off convention and doing it differently. Perhaps supervision also gets tossed from art to science and back again, but for trainees and practitioners, it remains a staple to maintain good health within our therapeutic relationships and our lives outside the office (Adams, 2024; Norcross & Guy, 2007).

Supervision, therefore, represents our ballast. It offers us a base of professional support and guidance, a soft place to land when things fall apart, and the encouragement we need to stretch ourselves when we wish to avoid and escape. Imagine client sessions not going so well on a practicum placement at a professional rugby academy. The feedback from the staff feels overwhelming, and the shame insurmountable. It is within this crisis of confidence that supervision offers a way forward. Supervision sessions, whether with a supervisor or in a group, offer an opportunity to manage shame and progress with the work.

Good practice in applied sport psychology relies heavily on the supervisory relationship. Often, supervision is an ethical requirement, especially in training. We wrote this book for the supervisor and supervisee, not as a binding set of standards, but as a guide from which each can take what they need. What matters most is that the supervisor and supervisee can recognise the parameters of their roles and responsibilities in a supervisory relationship. Depending on one's experience and developmental path, we encourage you all to give and receive the support, validation, and challenge that fits. The book's distinctiveness comes from its focus on applied sport psychology, its integration of ethics, professional standards, and relational practice, its emphasis on practical application, and its consideration of the immense value of effective supervision. We wish you all the best on your journey.

How Is This Book Organised?

When we started writing this book, we felt it might be endless, considering the extensive range of principles, processes, and practices in supervising applied sport psychology. To explore these concepts, procedures, and methods, we divided the content into three sections: getting started in supervision, managing the supervisory process, and supervising in diverse contexts and challenges. Beyond this structure, our intention was twofold. First, to help those being supervised to appreciate the scope of the supervisory process and, second, to help supervisors recognise the strengths of their practice and consider how to fill any gaps. Some chapters will appeal more to supervisees than to supervisors and vice versa; however, we feel that cultivating an appreciation of each other's roles will bring empathy and compassion to the supervisory process. We also intended to lean towards the practical rather than the theoretical or research landscape, though we blend theory and research as necessary in different chapters. Several themes recur across chapters (e.g., relationship quality, developmental stages, power dynamics); however, we feel this is appropriate for an introductory text on supervision. Although there is a scarcity of books specifically on supervision in applied sport psychology on the shelves, related fields offer excellent supervision titles, along with book chapters and research articles in applied sport psychology for reference. This book is not about competing with existing works. Instead, we want to provide a short, comprehensive, and helpful starting point for new supervisors and those being supervised in the applied sport psychology field (Henderson, Millar, & Holloway, 2014).

Choosing the Right Supervisor

Choosing the right supervisor will bring various criteria into view. As a supervisee, you may seek to meet essential criteria like a supervisor who is knowledgeable, approachable, and warm, with experience supervising CBT. Or perhaps she has worked in a particular sports setting that matches your practicum placement. We encourage you throughout this book to consider which supervisor fits you and your process best. One's process means an ongoing personal journey of self-understanding, growth, and change; it occurs for those working in applied sport psychology and often begins in supervision and coincides with personal therapy for those who choose it. Supervision provides another perspective, another space for thinking (Mollon, 1997), and in this space, an opportunity to visit unconsidered viewpoints, theories, elements of transference and countertransference, what has been created and what has been lost. The endless list of challenging countertransference issues (e.g., anger, erotic attraction, frustration, missed appointments, needing control, over self-disclosure, wanting to be liked, rescuing) means we need someone to help us explore our responses towards our clients, what these responses mean, and work out a way to understanding them rather than to act upon them (Adams 2024).

Through your education or training, you might be familiar with scenarios where sport psychology practitioners leverage their role to exert control, as opposed to fostering empowerment and self-governance. And because it is so familiar, you might not consider it to be unhelpful to your needs. Sometimes we cannot find a supervisor who feels right for us. One reason for this circumstance might be what we are seeking or, more precisely, avoiding. Adams (2024) suggested we might seek collusion, soothing, and complacency to avoid challenge, exploration, and insight. A supervisor might collude to keep a firm grip on their grandiose position or to avoid the work of delving into the cluttered corners of supervisees' working lives. But we spend our time in the internal world of our clients. We work with clients to understand, manage, and support them to change

their internal world. If we are to help them, we need to look within to understand ourselves and ourselves in relation to our clients.

Our motivations for becoming psychology practitioners are many and varied. Our pure motivations for becoming psychology practitioners seem clear (e.g., to make a positive difference, help others feel better; other people believe we are good with people) and yet our shadow or unconscious motivations (e.g., drive for power, meeting our own needs, need to be liked) trip us up and thwart the good work we can do with our clients. After we understand these hidden intentions, we can collaborate with our clients instead of taking advantage of them, unknowingly using them for our own purposes, or projecting aspects of ourselves onto them. Supervision offers us an opportunity to see both sides of our motivation. It is not the rightness or wrongness of our motives, but the opportunity to see all of them as they appear and not deny their existence. We, as health professionals, are bound to uphold our ethical and professional standards, prioritise personal growth, and address our internal challenges. The privilege of working with clients brings with it a deep responsibility to understand ourselves as much as we want to understand those we serve.

At the outset of supervision, we might work at cross-purposes because what the supervisee needs might be at odds with what the supervisor needs. The supervisor's zeal to impart bundles of knowledge in a few sessions might inadvertently mean that establishing a positive supervisory alliance is relegated to a position further down the list. The supervisee's need to feel safe and develop a sense of trust does not receive the time, space, and openness it deserves. Or, for some trainees who have completed a master's degree and are eager to begin practicum placement, the grandiose professional self acts as a defence against their feelings of helplessness and lack of knowledge at the beginning of their professional training (Teitelbaum, 1990).

Depending on the stage of your journey (early, middle, or late career), we present these challenges as points for reflection. At each stage, your needs will change; finding the right fit for your needs seems wise.



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1 What Is Supervision?

In this chapter, we shall summarise what supervision is (and is not), as well as its key definitions and core concepts. Next, we shall present the essentials of supervisory practice within theoretical models and frameworks, and some functions and purposes of supervision. Then, we shall explore the historical development of supervision in applied sport psychology. Finally, we conclude with a brief discussion of the evidence base and current trends for effective supervision.

1.1 Defining Supervision

Supervision in applied sport psychology refers to the collaborative relationship between a more experienced practitioner (supervisor) and a less experienced one (supervisee), designed to enhance professional competence, monitor the standards of service delivery, and ensure ethical practice in applied sport psychology contexts. Unlike traditional clinical supervision, supervision in applied sport psychology encompasses unique dimensions related to performance enhancement, team dynamics, and the high-pressure competitive environments in which practitioners typically operate. Some of the core concepts we explore in this book encompass reflective practice (i.e., systematic examination of one's professional experiences to improve future practice), professional development (i.e., continuous growth in knowledge, skills, and competencies), ethical decision-making (i.e., applying ethical frameworks to complex applied sport psychology scenarios), competency assurance (i.e., ensuring practitioners meet and maintain professional standards) and knowledge transfer (i.e., transmitting explicit and tacit knowledge from experienced practitioners to developing ones).

Applied sport psychology is typically theoretically guided, empirically grounded, and practically meaningful. One aspect of the field of applied sport psychology is supervision. Supervision facilitates personal and professional development, promotes practitioner competencies, and supports