

Chapter 3: Project Plan

*“What makes a fire burn
is space between the logs,
a breathing space”.*
(Brown, J., 2016, p.34)

Principle Inquiry

What are the qualities and conditions that create enough safety in the supervision relationships within a group to enable self-disclosure, reflection, and learning? How are these qualities and conditions designed and brought forth?

I first set out to explore this question by asking coaches to experiment and bring their actual coaching to the supervision sessions through recordings, transcripts, or coaching in the session itself. This was a provocative ask of self-disclosure—to have a coach share with the group their actual work, rather than share through storytelling. It was an ask to experiment with an approach that was not utilized.

My initial project proposal was for qualitative research using phenomenological case studies of North American coaches in virtual small group supervision. The title of my project was “Bringing one’s self fully into supervision: Moving beyond storytelling in developing our self as the instrument of our coaching”.

I planned to collect data from two supervision groups. The data would consist of participants’ reflections on supervision through surveys, responses to monthly journaling prompts, and four action learning meetings. In those meetings we would explore what had happened in their sessions, inquire about different approaches they may want to take, seek their agreement to do so, and in our next meeting, share what worked and did not.

Recruitment of the sponsoring organization

In planning the project, I approached an organization (the “Sponsor”) with which I was affiliated as faculty, as coaching supervisor, and in a handful of other roles³. The Sponsor was the first, in North America, to establish a supervision center as part of their services for coaches that had completed their coach training certification. The selection of this community was intentional—I wanted to do this research as an insider-researcher (Costley, Elliott and Gibbs, 2010). The compelling factors were:

1. **Quality**—The Sponsor is one of the pre-eminent coach certification programs in North America, and they were on the leading edge of coaching supervision here.
2. **Relationships** —
 - a. Easier recruitment—I had long term relationships within the system; I was respected and known.
 - b. “Benefit of the doubt” from others when inevitable tensions arose in the process.
 - c. Political savvy—I knew the culture, the leaders and faculty, and I was a member of the leadership team.
3. **Access**— This would provide access to a pool of potential participants of certified coaches and certified supervisors.
4. **Shared knowledge**-I knew the language and practices, including the curriculum, the coaching methodology, and the focus on the ongoing development of one’s self as an instrument of the work.
5. **Giving back**—My own professional and personal development had flourished within this community. I expected my research would contribute to the professional and personal development of colleagues and influence our collective practices of supervision.

The three primary benefits to the Sponsor would be the opportunity for supervisors and alumni to learn as research-participants, early access to my learning, discoveries and conclusions, and contribution to our profession through sponsorship of formal research.

³ A detailed list of my relationships is set forth in Appendix 1 .

Supervision center operating principles

The supervision center had several operating principles. It had been established to provide ongoing professional and personal development for coaches. Supervision was available to alumni as well as to organizations who contracted for supervision of their internal coaches. The certified supervisors were active in the coach certification training programs as faculty, mentor coaches, and/or coaches for the students. Small groups provided a cost-effective approach; groups of six were preferred. The coaches paid for the supervision, and the supervisors were paid as subcontractors by the Sponsor. The supervision engagements were 10 sessions over about one year, and all sessions were 90 minutes, conducted virtually using Zoom as the videoconferencing technology. It was typical for the supervision sessions to be recorded, and the recordings shared with participants.

Collaborative recruitment

The broad outline of my ask was to conduct the research with supervision groups within the supervision center which would require collaborative recruitment. The participants would be engaging in paid supervision groups as research participants. The Sponsor and I crafted the agreement with particular attention to a design that would differentiate standard supervision from research. This was to mitigate the risks that if the research requirements led to dissatisfaction with supervision, the experience would be less likely to impact coaches' willingness to engage in future supervision. The Sponsor agreed to collaborate in the recruitment of participants. The sponsorship agreement, intended as a working set of principles, was signed in December 2016. (It is set forth in Appendix 1; redacted.)

Pivot #1 I will participate as a supervisor

The project was approved in February; by mid-March I had decided to participate as a supervisor. I was influenced by input from my academic advisor, substantive content adviser, two of my existing supervision groups, and other coaching colleagues. I requested and received approval to modify my proposal (Downing, 2017c). I let the

Sponsor know; they readily supported the decision. The data would include the recordings of my supervision sessions. This would bring the virtual room as supervision happened into the data collected; the “very task itself” (Revans, 2011, p.3).

My duties of care were to three sets of relationships—with the Sponsor as established by our agreement, and in service to their relationships with faculty and alumni; with the participants whom I supervised with the explicit goal to not negatively impact their supervision experiences through the research process; and with all the participants as researcher.

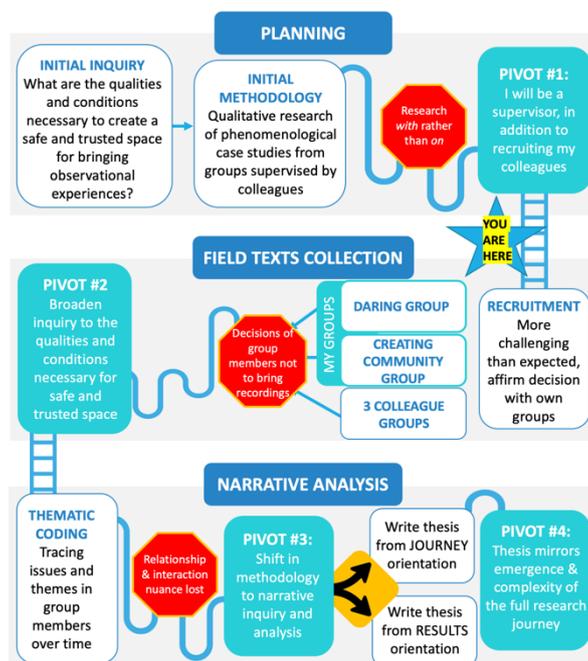


Figure 5: Pivot #1

Methods for collecting data

I planned to include five types of data collection methods: video recordings of my supervision sessions; video recordings of the action learning meetings; participants’ journaling entries; email correspondence and other interactions among myself, participants, and the Sponsor; and my writings and reflections.

The video recordings – supervision sessions

The video recordings of the supervision sessions would provide the record of what happened in the actual sessions. Reviewing recordings was very familiar and comfortable. I had used them extensively to provide mentoring, developmental goals, and insights for coaches in training. As mentioned in the first Chapter, I had consistently recorded my supervision sessions and reviewed them periodically for my own learning and occasionally for use with my supervisor.

Each session would be recorded automatically on Zoom. I would then download the recordings and have them transcribed by a third party transcription service. These field texts would be stored on the One Drive software available through Middlesex. As a precaution, backup copies were stored on my local hard drive.

Unique Data Set

There are fewer than 10 doctoral level studies on coaching supervision; in seven of them, the data collection was based on interviews of individual participants. Hodge (2014) engaged in action learning sets with her participants over a year's time. Pampallis Paisley (2006) undertook collection of rich varieties of data including observation, interviews, journal entries, supervising coaches, and conversations with colleagues and members of the academy. Passmore and McGoldrick (2009) used observation of one supervision session and 6 interviews; and Armstrong and Geddes (2009) the researcher observed 3 supervision sessions and interviewed 10 participants.

The field texts for this research were planned to be a unique data set as they would include the recordings of the two groups' supervision sessions, totaling 25 hours over 12 months; and the researcher was not observing, she would be the supervisor.

The Video Recordings – action learning meetings

Similarly, the video recordings of the action learning meetings would provide the record of what happened in those interactions. The recordings, transcription, and storage would be handled consistently with the supervision recordings.

In my design, I intentionally selected action learning sets (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014), for collective learning through iterative cycles. I did not originally plan an action research approach (Bradbury, 2015), but I did plan to use “action learning strategies” (Revens, 2011; Fiss, 2009, p.427). I anticipated the groups would experiment, evaluate, and reflect; share what they were learning as well as inquire about the learning of the other groups; modify or refine their approaches, and do another series of experimenting, reflecting, evaluating, and sharing back.

The plan was to meet with each of the groups at the midpoint of their year, following the completion of their ten sessions, and once more, 3-6 months later. I was interested in learning with them during the year and again, at a later time, to see if their perspectives or process had changed.

However, as it developed, my relationships with the three groups supervised by my colleagues did not evolve as I had imagined—I had two significant discoveries about my standing as an insider-researcher with respect to their groups and the nature of our debriefing sessions. I explore my positionality and the evolution of the debriefing meetings into focus groups rather than action learning sets in Appendix 2.

In Chapter 7, I share the experiences of these three groups.

The journal prompts—individual views

The supervision sessions and action learning meetings would give me the perspectives of the groups. The journaling would give me individuals’ reflections about the experiences. The entries would provide contrast and comparison of how individuals described the sessions privately, as well as views of their learning. I used open-ended broad questions

to create the space for them to share whatever was most on their minds. I assumed the journal entries might be more candid and forthright than the discussion in the action learning meetings and if so, that in itself would be good information.

Journal prompts would be sent to participants at the end of each supervision session. The original prompts were organized around the individual's learning (Q1, Q2 and Q4) and an inquiry about the supervision process (Q3 and Q5). The original prompts are set forth below in Table 2. I would ask in the action learning meetings if the questions were useful or if they would prefer others and modify as they requested.

Table 2 Journal Prompts to be sent to participants following each session	
Q1.	What is most on your mind from this supervision session?
Q2.	What, if anything, did you notice, learn, discover, or recognize in your self [sic]? How might this impact you as a coach?
Q3.	What was useful for you in this session?
Q4.	Are there any other stirrings, observations, reflections, or ideas on your mind?
Q5 –	Please check any of the approaches used in the session today
___	Case studies or sticky situations
___	Recording
___	Transcript
___	Coaching each other
___	Group dynamics
___	Other: _____

Table 2: Original Journal Prompts

Note that the journal prompts were intended for research purposes. What some of the participants coincidentally discovered was that journaling following the sessions resulted in continuing reflecting, learning, and identifying ways of experimenting with clients.

Data Collection: correspondence and other interactions

I would retain the email correspondence among myself, participants, and the Sponsor as well as notes, reflections, or recordings of occasional and informal interactions as part of the field texts collected.

Data Collection: My experiences and reflections

My collections of journaling, meditations, reflections, noticing, notes of conversations with colleagues, recordings of sessions in which I was supervisee⁴, any watercolors, doodles, and sketched images would be included.

⁴ My supervisor signed an Informed Consent to participate in the research as my supervisor, as a supervisor-participant that granted me permission to record our sessions, have them transcribed and included as data. It is included in Appendix 3.

Summary of data sources

1	Transcripts of subject matter experts, quasi-structured interviews
2	Interactions and discussions from recruitment and selection process
3	Recordings, transcripts and correspondence with pilot group
4	Expertise from a variety of relevant knowledge domains
5	Recordings and transcripts of 10 supervision sessions with Creating Community Group
6	Recordings and transcripts of action learning or focus group meetings
7	Monthly Journals of all participants during 12 months and 3 months after completion of the supervision groups.
8	My own journals, reflections, learning, and questions
9	Spontaneous dialogue that emerges throughout the research process
10	Changes in the culture, values, norms or procedures of the Supervision Center

Table 3: Data Collection Sources

Timelines

The timeline for the project was to begin recruitment in May-June 2017, have the groups begin in August-September 2017, and have the action learning meetings taking place over the 12 months of supervision with the final meeting about 3-6 months later. These are set out below in Figure 6 Research Project Timeline and Figure 7 Research Timeline for Data Collection:

Research Project Timeline



Figure 6: Research Project Timeline

Research Timeline for Data Collection

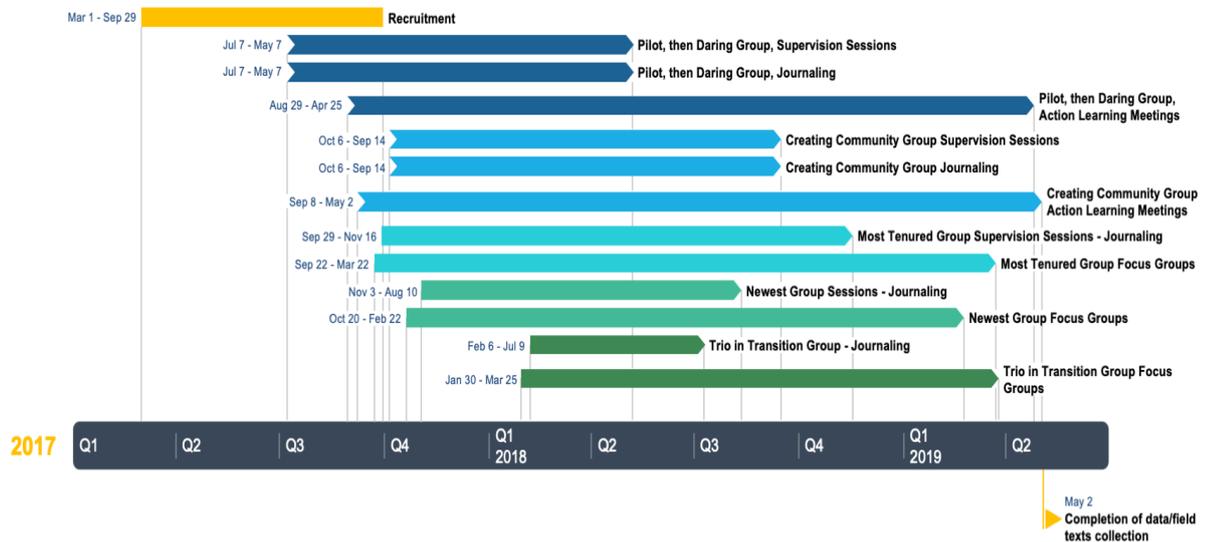


Figure 7: Research Timeline for Data Collection

The Informed Consents

The initial drafts of the Informed Consents were approved with the project and included provisions that the research was being conducted under the auspices of the University; the asks of the participants; the confidentiality provisions for the participants and their clients; specifically what data will be collected; how it will be stored and utilized; that participation was voluntary and participants may withdraw at any time without negative recourse; the intellectual property rights of the researcher; and whether de-identified quotes may be used. There were four versions of the Informed Consents, one for each of the scenarios: supervisor-participants, coach-participants, coach-participants in my groups, and with my own supervisor (See Appendix 3).

Protecting confidentiality

I was aware of the amount of information that was available online in LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and other social platforms. At Harvard College in the early 2000s research was conducted anonymously from the researchers' points of view that subsequently exposed the identities of many of the participants (Zimmer, 2010). The ability to protect individuals, especially those situated in relatively small communities requires care. Consistent with the obligations to protect the identities of the participants, I planned to take the following steps:

1. To disclose, in this thesis, that Hudson Institute of Coaching⁵ was the sponsoring organization. It was easily discoverable, as my affiliations within this community were (and are) visible in my LinkedIn profile, my speaker and author profiles, and on my website. The Sponsor was aware of this; I confirmed this with potential participants.
2. To disclose only the following limited information on the participants
 - a. Participants were based in North America, with one exception
 - b. Years as a certified coach: newly certified to 5 years, 6-10 years, more than 10 years
 - c. Gender
 - d. Whether the participant was actively coaching, an emerging coach, a coach in an organization role or no longer actively coaching
 - e. Participants' experience in supervision in general terms; none of the participants listed being in supervision on their LinkedIn profiles
 - f. The number of coaches in each group

Even with this care, it was possible than some participants could be identified or disclose their participation. Appropriate provisions were included in the Informed Consent.

⁵ The sponsorship does not imply concurrence, approval or endorsement of the views, content, findings or conclusions in this thesis.

Ethical inquiries about power, coercion, and relationships

I would look for signs of ethical issues throughout the project, including the potential use of power or coercion, as well as gauging if my care and availability were at appropriate levels. I held six values to guide the implementation of the project:

- Whatever happened in the supervision groups was just what the research needed as data.
- I would put relationships first.
- I would take a stance of inquiry and curiosity with the participants, not a stance of directiveness.
- My supervisor role would be primary in the supervision sessions with my two groups, and my researcher role would be primary in the meetings with the three other groups.
- I would share openly with participants the experiences and learning of the others, while preserving confidentiality.
- We were all adult learners, engaged in a commercial relationship, for the purpose of our mutual personal and professional development; the principles of adult learning would inform resolutions of conflicts or concerns.
- I would engage in supervision of my supervision and of my role as researcher with my supervision supervisor.

Data Analysis – not yet a plan

When I developed the project proposal, I merely said I would analyze the data. I was anticipating thematic analyses that were interpretative, consistent with a phenomenological study (Creswell and Poth, 2018); I believed the project would change based on what emerged; and that emergence had the potential to impact how to analyze the data. As a new researcher I had read about data analysis, thought about it, but had not yet practiced it. I had the propositional knowledge but not the experiential, practical, or presentational knowledge (Heron, 1999). I had the theories but lacked their application to the real world.

Three of my five original goals were about starting with the experiences of a few:

1. To carry out the research project as a case study exploring the lived experiences of the coaches in the two small groups.
2. To become a practitioner-researcher and learn more about myself as coach, as supervisee and as supervisor through incorporating the discoveries from the research into my practice.
3. To potentially change the practice of supervision within the Supervision Center as informed by the research and the individual experiences of the participants.

I decided to explore data analysis methods as I was collecting the initial data, so that I had actual data to consider how to move from collecting qualitative data to data analysis (Saldaña, 2015).

The Richness of Multiple Perspective and Possibilities

Flyvbjerg (2006) stated that the richness and complexity of sharing the details of the case, is itself “the answer” (p.240). In his passionate defense of case studies, he wrote:

knowledge that cannot be generalized does not mean it cannot enter into the collective process of knowledge accumulation in a given field or a society. A purely descriptive, phenomenological case study without attempts to generalize can certainly be of value in this process and has often helped cut a path toward scientific innovation (ibid.).

His approach requires close attention to the experiences of each of the participants. He cautions against the use of theories to summarize or generalize (ibid.). In contrast, Czarniawska-Joerges (1997) notes narrative may enter organizational study through case studies, and it requires an interplay among the theories and the narratives. Both agree that use of narratives and the resulting narratives are themselves ways of knowing.

Flyvbjerg (2006) makes the argument that the case, if accurately and richly reported from a variety of perspectives, is genuine. By variety of perspectives, he is focused on the

possible contradictions and differences of experiences and the essentialness of capturing all that the participants experience. I intended to live these principles in the data analysis.

A case study did not require a particular method for data analysis (Yin, 2018); I deferred the selection at that point. Many methods can be used within case studies, as Fiss (2009) states:

that because the case study approach is a research strategy that aims to maintain the configurational, holistic nature of the case or cases, it is not limited to any particular form of evidence or data collection, and it can involve single or multiple cases, various methods of data collection and levels of analysis (p.427).

I planned to review and consider the data regularly, particularly following each phase of action learning meetings. Willig (2013, p.38) writes: “the researcher collects and analyses data in a cyclical fashion so that initial attempts at data analysis inform strategies for further data collection, and so on. Such studies’ findings emerge, in cumulative and piecemeal fashion, from the research process as a whole”.

Ontological and epistemological views

I have placed this section at the end of this Chapter because I am writing it almost at the end of the writing of my thesis. The balance of this Chapter was written in the past and future tense – past represented in what I had planned and what I had planned was to take place in the future. This section is written in the present tense. My values and philosophies about research as framed by ontological and epistemological views were unclear to me for much of the time. Their articulation has crystalized within me.

“What we take to be the truth about the world importantly depends on the social relationships of which we are a part”.

(Gergen, 2015, p.3)

Social constructionism (Gergen, 2015) is a way of making sense of the world in which we make meaning in relationships, we construct knowledge through dialogue with others, we pay particular attention to language, we accept “there is no one, authoritative account that represents all the participants” (ibid., p.4), we shift the perspective from the individual self to the relational self and the “*care for relationships is primary*” (ibid., p.13) (*emphasis in original*). A principle of social constructionism is the hope of improving a part of the world.

Social constructionism has its roots in a variety of academic disciplines and is described as “an umbrella” or a “general theory” (Burr, 2015; Gergen, 2015, p.29). By its very nature of inquiry, it creates opportunities for new ideas and ways of being (Gergen, 2015, p.13, 32). It has five foundational aspects (Gergen, 2015). The first is that we construct meaning through our social interactions—relationships are central. The second is that our cultural beliefs in what is acceptable, and what is not, are developed through our relationships with others. This does not mean that we should privilege what we know more than what other cultures know, it is the opening up to the belief that if we have socially constructed them, then they are optional views of knowledge. Third, language is at the heart of social construction, how we use it, what words mean and how they are used in social interactions. Fourth, there is no universal truth, but rather multiple truths, based on how language is used in particular contexts by particular individuals. Fifth, our values, implicit and explicit arise in our relationships and therefore influence our understandings. “What we take to be knowledge of the world will always carry the values of those traditions that fashion our inquiry and our conclusions” (ibid., p.13).

My view of the world is within the social constructionist paradigm that regards “reality as being individually and socially derived” (Costley, Elliott and Gibbs, 2010, p.84). This arises from my experiences of the need for learning in community, that each of us construct meanings as we experience things, and the recognition that we each construct what happens based on our prior experience (Creswell, 2013; Karr, 2016). As Creswell (2013, p.8) states “the goal of the research is to rely as much as possible on the participants’ view of the situation being studied”. That is my commitment in this endeavor.

In this chapter I have explained my project plan, methods and methodologies. In the next chapter I set out the process and results of the recruitment of participants.