

# Supervision and coaching in Estonia

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**SHORT HISTORICAL BACKGROUND** Estonia lost its independence in 1940, when the country was occupied by the Russian army. More than fifty years of isolation followed, including a lot of terror and fear. Tens of thousands of people were sent to Siberia in cattle wagons. A new type of person emerged: the *'Homo soveticus'*. Some of their features were passive acceptance, lack of initiative, and an indifference to the results of work. More sarcastically put, the following phrase captures this attitude perfectly: 'They pretend to be paying us, and we pretend to be working.'

During the Soviet era, there was little contact between Estonian and European psychologists. As such, the development of Estonian psychologists slowed down severely and in many ways. The borders with western countries were closed off and traveling and communication happened mainly within the boundaries of the Soviet Union. Outside

literature and music were spread by way of the 'underground', from person to person. Back when I studied psychology (1985-1989), there were three different specialisations: school psychology, work psychology, and advertising psychology. I decided to choose work psychology. During this period, the regime had already started to fall apart. I wrote my final thesis about the work of Erich Fromm. In spite of the difficulties mentioned above, I succeeded in getting hold of some of Fromm's books in English. At the time, it was common for people to make photocopies of any books they managed to get hold of. My library consisted of up to a hundred of such photocopied 'books', from the works of Jung to books about yoga.

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One of the more practical applications of psychology at the time was for communication skills training and trainers' education, led by Henn Mikkin. Supervision and coaching as such had not yet appeared on the scene.

After an attempted coup in the Soviet Union in 1991, Estonia declared itself independent once more, and the borders were opened once again, in more ways than one. Our country was flooded with 'western' culture, including all kinds of psychotherapy approaches, such as psychodrama, Gestalt, solution-focused brief therapy, neuro-linguistic programming, et cetera.

Supervision in Estonia began in 1995, when the first education program started. This programme lasted 2.5 years, and 25 supervisors participated in it. It was led by the German Achim Fritzsche and was financed by the Social Ministry. The basic theme for the programme was 'supervision for foster home specialists'. The third group graduated in 2006. The graduates received the qualification of supervisor and coach, and I belonged to that group.

The Estonian Supervision Association was established in 1997. Today, it has 91 members. In 2009, its name was changed to Estonian Supervision and Coaching Association (ESCÜ).

**PRESENT DAY** The International Supervision and Coaching Institute (ISCI) was established in 2011 by eleven supervisors and coaches with intensive work experience. Our main goal was (and is) to educate subsequent generations of supervisors and coaches. All of the members are teachers or main teachers to our students. Besides that, we provide supervision services for the social ministry and the unemployment insur-

ance fund's social workers, for the social insurance board's childcare specialists, and for the police and border guard board, as well as additional training for colleagues, individual and group coaching, open coaching training groups for managers, et cetera.

The first ISCI training group started in 2013 and graduated in 2016. The second group graduated in 2017, and a third group will graduate in 2018. The fourth group is currently in a formative stage and will start at the end of 2017. We have several other training institutes for coaches, but ISCI is the only one that currently provides qualifications for both supervisors and coaches. Another special aspect of ISCI is that we teach many different approaches, such as the systemic approach, constellations, psychodrama, Gestalt, solution focused approach, et cetera. Our graduates are able to work with state and business organisations in their private practice, via both individual and group processes.

In 2008, *Happy team* was published, written by my wonderful colleague Signe Vesso and me. When we started working on this book, the word 'coaching' still sounded too unfamiliar and foreign to our text editor, so it was changed to 'training'. However, it has since become a household name. Last year, there was a competition in Estonia to find an Estonian equivalent for 'coaching'. The word 'kootsing' was the winner, but has not been spreading very quickly and many people refrain from using it. There is also an Estonian term for 'supervision' ('töönõustamine'), but this roughly means 'work counselling', and we obviously cannot counsel the work.

Nowadays, both supervision and coaching are growing and spreading, overlapping and differentiating in Estonia. Many institutions

offer education and training in the field of coaching. There is still ongoing discussion about terminology, similarities and differences. It seems that the coaching field is very diverse and lacks regulation. Some people who work as coaches have only read a couple of books and attended a two-day seminar, whereas others have twenty to thirty years of practical experience to fall back on.

The supervision field is a bit more stable and trustworthy, but does suffer from a reputation problem. Unfortunately, supervisors are often the victim of critical remarks and comments, because therapists and trainers sometimes offer supervision without the required qualification.

**FUTURE TRENDS** Estonia now seems to be clearly facing the west. Contacts, conferences, cooperation - European countries are involved in all of it. The main future trends in supervision and coaching are definitely professionalisation and regulatory improvements.

#### ***Estonian Supervision and Coaching Association***

The ESCÚ has developed a quality system in order to ensure area development, high service quality and constant development of supervisors and coaches. There are three quality levels; 'master supervisor and coach' is the highest one can reach.

In order for people to qualify as part of one of those quality levels, quality groups are formed. Groups are not allowed to include close colleagues. Each candidate gets a three-hour session in which they share their ethical and philosophical principles, explain how they work and present an overview of one client process. After that, they answer questions from group members.

These quality groups then present proposals for confirmation of quality levels to the Board of Association. These quality levels are valid for three years. After that, one can change or renew their level. Apart from quality groups, there are also many so-called 'est- vision' groups, which usually meet once a month (for three hours at a time) for peer review.

#### ***International Supervision and Coaching Institute***

A curriculum working group has been formed to ensure permanent improvement of the curriculum. Every training group has its own main teachers (usually three or four), who maintain an overview and know students personally. Other members of ISCI and ESCÚ teach and share their practical approaches as guest teachers. We also invite foreign guest teachers on a regular basis, to enrich our curriculum. This brings students into contact with different ways of thinking about and approaching supervision and coaching. We encourage students to develop their own unique style of working with people.

During the first stages of the education program, students focus on competences needed for individual supervision and coaching. Later on, the emphasis is on competences needed for working with teams, groups and organisations.

The educational program lasts for 2.5 years (650 hours altogether, including all hours of direct contact) and consists of study sessions, peer group work, teaching supervision, individual supervision and coaching practice, group supervision and coaching practice, observation practice, working with literature and developing a personal portfolio. Our training is based on the standards of

the Association of National Organisations for Supervision in Europe (ANSE) and the International Coach Federation (ICF) framework of competences.

#### ***Focus on managers***

Estonian managers are responsible for navigating their teams through complicated changes. To do this effectively and successfully, they require a coaching mindset, mindfulness, authentic caring, and tools and methods for individual and team development.

As there are many highly skilled coaches in our country, we are able to provide managers with many positive and useful examples of individual and team coaching. This pres-

ents us with an opportunity to ignite a spark and inspire them to become a coaching leader and enrol in 'coaching leader' development programs.

#### ***Focus on ourselves***

Besides professional development, I would like to point out two more trends that will lead towards a better future. The first trend is personal development: knowing our minds and changing/developing our minds. The second is cooperation between professionals on an international level. One of the best things that has happened to me during recent years was being part of an international intervention group for nine years. ▲