

Reflections from the Field

Conceptualising how coaching supervisors meet their supervisees' needs: towards a coaching supervision intervention framework

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Abstract

This paper builds on the coaching supervision process heuristic proposed by Lewis (2023). It describes a research project designed to conceptualise coaching supervision interventions through interviews with five experienced coaching supervisors using the conceptual encounter research method. Findings are presented as a working definition of coaching supervision and a framework for coaching supervision interventions. The iterative development of the framework is discussed from multiple perspectives. The paper illuminates the intentional choices coaching supervisors have when selecting interventions and suggests pragmatic uses for the framework, including its implications for the education of coaches and coaching supervisors.

Keywords

coaching supervision, supervision interventions, coach development, reflective practice, intentionality

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Introduction

The literature review that follows shows there is little evidence indicating how coaching supervisors intentionally choose their interventions. This research involved an iterative cycle of interviewing experienced coaching supervisors and continually refining a conceptual model. The resulting paper describes how a framework for intentionally choosing coaching supervision interventions emerged through the research process. I suggest possible uses of the final conceptual model for coaching supervision practitioners, the training of coaches and coaching supervisors, and areas for further research.

Literature review

A comprehensive literature review published in 2020 found that nobody has explored supervision theory explicitly and that research which theorises the process of coaching supervision is “rare.” It concluded that more empirical studies into coaching supervision are needed (Bachkirova, Jackson, Hennig & Moral, 2020). My own literature review revealed the dominant discourses surrounding supervision tasks, processes and interventions are not integrated, indeed they are quite separate. In addition, the literature is mostly predicated on therapeutic supervision and the resulting definitions have subsequently been lifted and applied, sometimes adapted and sometimes not, to coaching supervision.

Interventions

Heron (1976) proposed a ‘Categories of Intervention’ framework that represents the prevailing discourse for supervision interventions, albeit through a counselling lens. He defined an intervention as “an identifiable piece of verbal or nonverbal behaviour that is part of the practitioner’s service to the client,” (Heron 1991, p3). He placed emphasis on the supervisor choosing an intervention from two main categories: authoritative and facilitative. However, it is difficult to map these uniquely to the functions of supervision (as described by Hawkins & Smith, 2013), see Table 1. As such, Heron’s framework is not unambiguously helpful for *intentionally* choosing functional interventions. In addition, there is a paucity of evidence surrounding how it might apply to coaching supervision.

Table 1: Tentative mapping of interventions to functions

Category	Intervention	Functions
Facilitative	Catalytic	Developmental/Resourcing
	Cathartic	Resourcing
	Supportive	Resourcing/Developmental
Authoritative	Prescriptive	Qualitative/Developmental
	Informative	Qualitative/Developmental
	Confronting	Qualitative/Resourcing

Processes

Page and Wosket (2001) set out a five-stage process for therapeutic supervision, each stage of which can be mapped readily to the CLEAR model of coaching supervision (Hawkins & Smith, 2013). Between the Contracting and Review stages, the CLEAR process involves Listening, Exploring and Action. Lewis (2023) found coaching supervision involves a joint exploration stage as antecedent to interventions and suggested this is a richer description than the LEA stages of CLEAR. Table 2 shows the three models together.

Table 2: The supervisory process

Page and Wosket (2001)	Hawkins & Smith (2013)	Lewis (2023)
Contract	Contract	Contracting
Focus	Listen	Joint exploration stage: Intuiting, Analysing
Space	Explore	
Bridge	Action	Interventions: Analysing, Evaluating, Supporting, Developing
Review	Review	Review

Hawkins’ 7-Eyed model of supervision^[1] represents a “universally useful” (Lucas 2020, p292) process model of supervision based on the concept of systems theory, which views individuals and groups as interconnected and interdependent within a larger systemic context. Hawkins and Smith (2013) adopted this as their central supervision model. They suggested interventions fit within the Explore stage and that different interventions could be deployed to enact each of seven modes

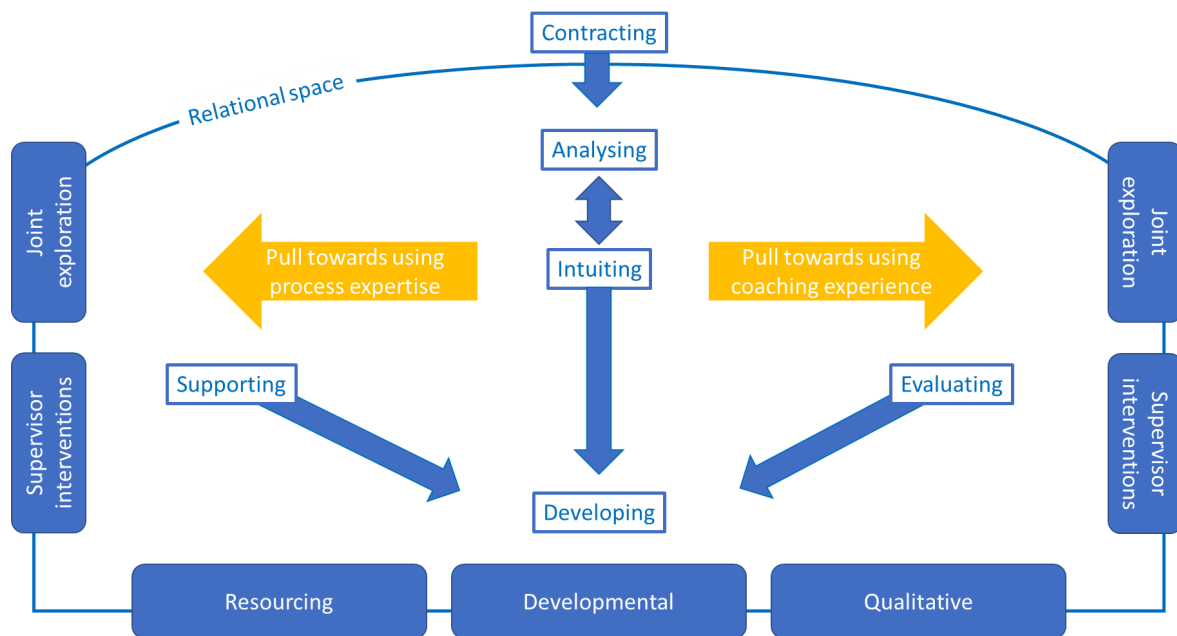
described in the 7-Eyed model. They concluded a supervisor must be able to use all seven modes to understand the supervisee's presenting issue from a variety of perspectives. They also, somewhat tentatively, attempted to integrate the modes into a process map that showed how supervisors might move through them to best effect. This demonstrates how the 7-Eyed model may be used as an exploration guide, but not how to choose interventions.

Tasks

Carroll (1996) set out seven tasks of therapeutic supervision. However, some of these are interventions and others are not. Armour (2018) identified the need to define the tasks of *coaching* supervision, and others (e.g., Hodge, 2016; Lewis, 2023) have attempted to simplify the description of supervisory tasks as applied to coaching.

In an attempt to understand what coaching supervisors actually do, Lewis (2023) interpreted the lived experience of coaches and their supervisors and proposed a heuristic that defined five tasks of coaching supervision – Intuiting, Analysing, Evaluating, Supporting and Developing - within a two-stage process and linked them to the functions of coaching supervision, see Table 2 and Figure 3.

Figure 3: The process of coaching supervision



The limitations of this heuristic are:

- While Analysing is identified as an intervention, it does not appear in the intervention stage.
- It is not clear where Analysing and Developing interventions lie between the pulls a supervisor experiences towards using their process expertise and towards sharing their coaching experience.
- While there is a clearer mapping to functions, there remains ambiguity surrounding the mapping of the Analysing intervention.
- The heuristic represents a process rather than a framework for choosing interventions.
- There is no recognition of the importance of considering the wider system.

Hence the research question is: 'how might a framework for intentionally choosing coaching supervision interventions be conceptualised?'

Because this research question relates specifically to coaching supervision, a working definition of coaching supervision is required for context. Another problem is that coaching supervision itself has many different definitions. Common to such definitions are the concepts of a 'safe,' 'confidential' and/or 'relational' space, and the idea of furthering the supervisee's reflective practice with another practitioner (De Haan, 2012; Hawkins & Smith, 2013; Lewis, 2023). For this research, I commenced with a working definition of coaching supervision as a "relational space to further the supervisee's reflective practice by externalising it with their supervisor" (Lewis, 2023).

Method

The aims for this research were to:

- Produce knowledge about the structure of coaching supervision interventions in relation to each other.
- Understand my own practice of choosing interventions in more depth, apply the learning to my own practice and make it available to others.
- Add to the literature by interpreting the lived experience of other coaching supervision practitioners.

The objective to transcend content and reveal structure required a constructivist epistemology; to interpret multiple perspectives on reality and meaning co-created through dialogue. I assumed a critical realist stance; there is no objective, observable reality. Rather, I held a belief that a structure would emerge through my understanding of others' experience that would also be bound up in my own interpretation of being a coaching supervisor myself.

The main implication of this stance is that I would need to bring my own experience into the project. This led me to choose conceptual encounter (De Rivera & Kreilkamp, 1981) as a suitable research method. Reason (1998) recognised conceptual encounter embodies Heron's (1992) extended epistemology of knowing: grounded in the phenomenology of 'experiential' knowing, articulated in metaphorical 'presentational' knowing, expressed as a conceptual framework ('propositional' knowing) and intended to be used in practice ('practical' knowing), which further supported its use to meet my project goal. My role would be to function as "gatekeeper of concept development, which necessarily involves interpretation" (Jackson & Cox 2020, p86). The main challenge would be how to integrate the lived experience of others with my own knowledge and experience as a practitioner and researcher. To respond to this challenge, I maintained a research diary throughout the project in which I analysed the data and emergent themes as the project progressed. From the outset, I expected conceptual encounter to be a creative and immersive method.

Procedure

A five-step process was adopted:

1. Generate an initial conceptualisation.
2. Select research partners.
3. Conduct an interview.
4. Revise the conceptualisation.
5. Iteratively repeat steps 3 and 4 with the revised conceptualisation and further research partners until I judged "saturation" (Guest, Namey & Chen, 2020) had been reached.

Step 1: Generate an initial conceptualisation

De Rivera noted that researchers may have a notion about the conceptualisation in “advance” of conducting research interviews (De Rivera & Kreilkamp, 1981, p7). To generate an initial conceptualisation, I took the heuristic in Figure 3, drew on literature and my own experience to address its limitations and adapted it from being processual to being structural. My intention was to take the five tasks in Figure 3 - Intuiting, Analysing, Evaluating, Supporting and Developing ^[2] - and place them into this initial framework.

Addressing limitations: the coaching/mentoring continuum

Figure 3 shows the pull between supervisors deploying mentoring (drawing on their coaching experience) and coaching (drawing on their process expertise) in their interventions. It is not clear where Analysing and Developing lie on this coaching/mentoring continuum. To resolve this, I drew on my own reflective practice. I experience the Analysing intervention as being similar in my supervision and coaching practices; an exercise in holding space for my client to generate new understanding, and I therefore suggest it is more aligned to the coaching process. It can be argued mentoring is a long-term development activity (see Megginson & Clutterbuck, 2005). This certainly accords with my own experience that Developing interventions within a long-term coaching supervision relationship have more in common with mentoring than coaching.

Addressing limitations: tension between certainty and tolerating ambiguity

In my experience, there is tension between the certainty of knowing ‘one best way’ coaching that is espoused by professional bodies to help novice coaches to enter the field (Bachkirova & Lawton-Smith, 2015; Hurlow, 2022; Rajasinghe, Garvey, Smith, Burt, Barosa-Pereira, Clutterbuck & Csigas, 2022) and instead letting go and tolerating ambiguity, where more experienced practitioners ‘break’ or transcend the norms (Drake, 2011; Rajasinghe et al., 2022), so that the supervisor “is available to the supervisee first as a human being and second as a trained professional,” (Hycner, 1993). This argument is further supported by De Haan (2008) and Rajasinghe et al., (2022), who found an experienced coach learns to tolerate tricky situations by “letting go” of the certainty and safety of learnt coaching tools and techniques. The same could be true in supervision. Furthermore, Adamson and Brendgen (2022) suggested safety in the supervisory relationship can be maintained by staying “within the boundary of [the supervisor’s] role as an expert and the security provided by models and theories,” (p76). They also suggest this changes as the relationship deepens. This accords with my own experience: in relational supervision, safety is provided by the relationship itself with less reliance on what Hycner (1993) referred to as “professional superiority.”

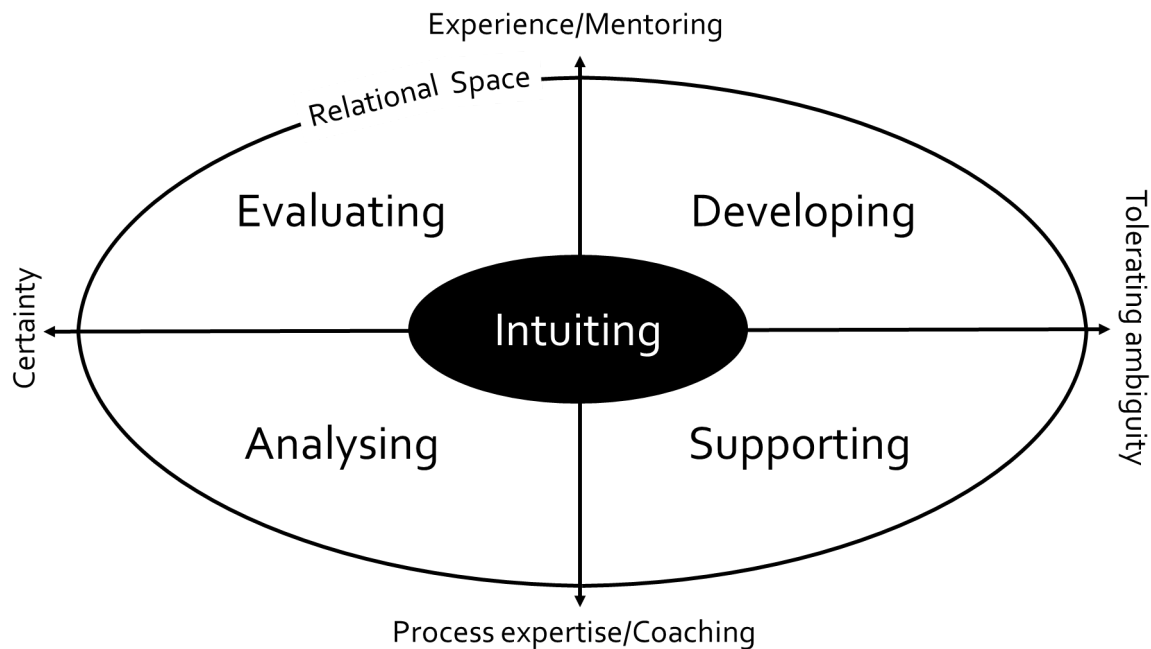
In my experience, Analysing and Evaluating are more closely related to the former, more certain approach: a supervisory dyad analyses ‘what is’ to be able to contain the scope of the presenting issue or theme; and the supervisor evaluates client outcomes or the supervisee’s process against expected or contracted outcomes and what is expected of a coach. Conversely, Supporting and Developing are more closely aligned with working at your edge, letting go and tolerating ambiguity: Supporting the supervisee to trust themselves to let go of strict rules of coaching and to cultivate their own ability and confidence to work with more complex and ambiguous situations.

Initial conceptualisation

The pull between coaching and mentoring, and the tension between certainty and tolerating ambiguity led me to prepare a tentative initial conceptualisation that incorporated these dichotomies as vertical and horizontal axes and placed the five tasks of supervision in relation to

them, as shown in Figure 4. Following Lewis's (2023) assertion that supervisors access their intuition to choose interventions, I placed Intuiting at the centre of the conceptualisation.

Figure 4: Initial conceptualisation of coaching supervision interventions



Step 2: Select research partners

Through my professional network, I then purposively sought coaching supervisors to be research partners. Specifically, I sought experienced, qualified practising coaching supervisors because I would expect them to be able to describe their experiences and jointly interpret them conceptually with me. This goes some way to address sampling issues that have been identified in phenomenological approaches (Jackson & Cox, 2020) such as homogeneity of the sample and sharing a common language to describe phenomena. Nine supervisors volunteered and I interviewed five of them in the following order (pseudonyms have been used to preserve anonymity): Ellen, Deborah, Yvette, Natalia and Ned. They each signed an ethics statement and completed a brief questionnaire about their definition of and approach to coaching supervision, their length of experience, qualifications and accreditations. Four are UK-based and one is based in the Middle East. All have postgraduate level coaching and supervision qualifications and four of them are accredited, each with a different professional body (CSA, APECS, AC and EMCC). They have been practising supervisors for between five and 20 years. I felt satisfied there was sufficient homogeneity in the sample.

Step 3: Interview

My intention in designing a semi-structured interview was not to provide research partners with specific questions in advance but to ensure we would explore the tasks and interventions of coaching supervision while giving them the opportunity to influence the direction of the interview, to express their views and to suggest revisions to the conceptualisation during the interview. I interviewed the research partners individually over a period of nine weeks, each interview lasting approximately 90 minutes. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

De Rivera and Kreilkamp (1981) described the Conceptual Encounter interview as comprising two parts: in Part I the investigator would ask a research partner for "specific, concrete examples" (p3)

of the experience that is being studied that “faithfully describe the actual events that occurred in as much detail as possible” (p3). Lindsay-Hartz (1981) suggested there are four aspects to describing experiences: situation (meaning), transformation of perception, bodily expression and function. In the interviews I aimed to explore these four experiential aspects of interventions between supervisor and supervisee and with the wider systemic context. I structured Part I loosely around the five tasks under investigation using questions such as, “What is your experience of Analysing each case or theme the coach brings to supervision?”, “To what end do you undertake this analysis?”, “What is your experience of Evaluating your supervisee’s practice against what is expected of a coach?”, and “What is your experience of Supporting your supervisee through the emotional challenges they face?”

In Part II of the interviews, I aimed to observe the change in perception of coaching supervision, with the intent to get closer to its “essential meaning,” (Borredon, 2000) by noticing the change in the research partners’ relationship with its non-essential aspects. This involved exploring the research partners’ embodied response to the conceptualisation, whether through how they rationalised it, explored how it resonated, compared it to their supervision process, or visualised its creative essence; and then ascertaining to what extent it fitted with their understanding of the functions of supervision. I shared “abstract ideas about the essential characteristics” (De Rivera & Kreilcamp 1981, p3) by setting out the current conceptualisation and asking to what extent the elements fitted with their experience and with their understanding of the functions of supervision, and whether they could think of any exceptions to it. This also involved sharing the working definition of coaching supervision and comparing it to their own definition. Here the discussion shifted from the “concrete experience of the other to the abstract ideas of the investigator” (p4). To what extent did my ideas fit? How did this generate a new understanding of the experience? Was there something wrong or was something unclear?

Step 4: Revise the conceptualisation

Following each interview, I read and re-read the transcripts and my contemporaneous notes from the interviews many times and made further notes in my research journal. I reflected on the findings and manually coded themes. I then revised the conceptualisation and working definition in a way that characterised the situations shared by the research partner including their experience of their thoughts, feeling and actions taken when supervising others and their reflections on their experiences. My intention was to make revisions so that the conceptualisation was “broad enough to include all instances of the phenomena” (De Rivera and Kreilcamp 1981, p6). This process required sincere discernment on my part, balancing my personal supervision experience and role as gatekeeper of the model with acknowledging and reflecting the research partners’ experiences and suggestions. I certainly experienced what De Rivera terms, an “intensely personal encounter.” (p8).

Step 5: Iteratively repeat steps 3 and 4

I repeated steps 3 and 4 with the next research partner, using the revised conceptualisation in Part II of the interview. I did not know how many interviews I would undertake because “numerous instances are needed” (De Rivera & Kreilcamp 1981, p6). As researcher I needed to be “honest in pursuit of the truth” (p14). I stopped repeating the process when I achieved a new understanding of the research topic, interviews no longer generated anything new to add to the conceptualisation and the final conceptualisation used “few but powerful concepts in a precise way” (p8). I judged this to have occurred after I had completed five iterations.

Findings

In phenomenological research, the researcher has a choice between presenting findings sequentially from each research partner or presenting thematically. In Conceptual Encounter, the latter is often chosen; however, this runs the risk of losing the essence of the iterative research process. For example, Bachkirova (2015) presented a final conceptualisation and then thematic findings, whereas Snape (2021) presented the iterations to her conceptualisation, followed by thematic findings. This latter approach is a more faithful representation of how the conceptualisation emerges from the research process, but it can cause problems when attempting to separate findings from the discussion of those findings.

To resolve these challenges, I have chosen to present each thematic finding and describe how it affected the conceptualisation through the iterative interview/reflection/revision cycle. I believe this approach will help the reader understand how the final conceptualisation emerged. At each iteration, a figure shows the cumulative revisions made. I then discuss the final model in a subsequent section (see Discussion).

Each interview generated findings that affected both the working definition and the conceptual model. Reflecting on the findings as I considered the next iteration suggested themes. Subsequent interviews amended and ultimately finalised the themes. Below, I present:

- A brief description of the revisions to the working definition I made as a result of findings.
- An overview of the revisions to the conceptualisation I made iteratively as a result of the findings (see Figure 5). This figure also identifies four themes suggested by the findings.
- Findings from each of these four themes, each accompanied by a figure representing revisions made following each theme

Revisions to the working definition of coaching supervision

Lewis (2023) proposed a working definition of coaching supervision as “a relational space to further the supervisee’s reflective practice by externalising it with their supervisor,” and suggested this space is “co-created” by the coach and their supervisor. During her interview, Deborah noted the oval shape represented containment, suggested adding “safe” to describe the space and that because not all supervisees engage in reflective practice, that the definition could be expanded to include “encouraging” and “enabling” reflective practice. Yvette suggested the definition would be suitable for group supervision if the protagonists were pluralised. As these observations resonated when reflecting on my own practice, I expanded the working definition:

Coaching supervision is a safe relational space co-created by coaches and their supervisors for encouraging, enabling and externalising the coaches’ reflective practice.

This revised definition resonated with the final two research partners. Natalia liked “very much” the “beautifully brief definition.” She added, “It rings true for me.”

Figure 5: Revisions to the conceptualisation

Interview	Revisions made following the interview	Theme
Ellen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reframed 'Intuiting' to 'Noticing' • Suggested re-labelling the vertical axis • Suggested including the wider systemic context 	1. Noticing
Deborah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggested re-labelling the horizontal axis 	2. Reflection and action
Yvette	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reframed 'Analysing' to 'Exploring' 	3. Recognising and naming interventions
Natalia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No revisions 	
Ned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalised the subtitle for each intervention 	4. Clarifying the meaning of interventions

Theme 1: Noticing

In the very first interview, Ellen suggested, "Intuiting for me *is* the process." She offered the term, "Noticing" for what "informs the lens" for her supervision interventions. I revised the term "Intuiting" to "Noticing" to reflect this. Subsequently, all the research partners agreed Noticing is the first thing they do when a supervisee describes the case or theme they have brought to supervision. Ellen said she notices body language, facial expressions, breathing and other nonverbal clues as well as the language their supervisees use. Natalia and Ned subsequently agreed. "Ideas occur to me," said Ned, "... as a result of an awareness of an embodied experience." He observed that Noticing is not interpreting, rather it is, "as close to phenomenological awareness as possible." Natalia suggested, "Noticing is a broader term than Intuiting." It was clear to all the research partners that Noticing was central to the process of supervision.

Ellen suggested making the labels of the vertical axis more descriptive. Subsequently, all the research partners recognised the intentional choice between using their process expertise to 'hold space' and 'sharing their knowledge and experience' in their supervision practices.

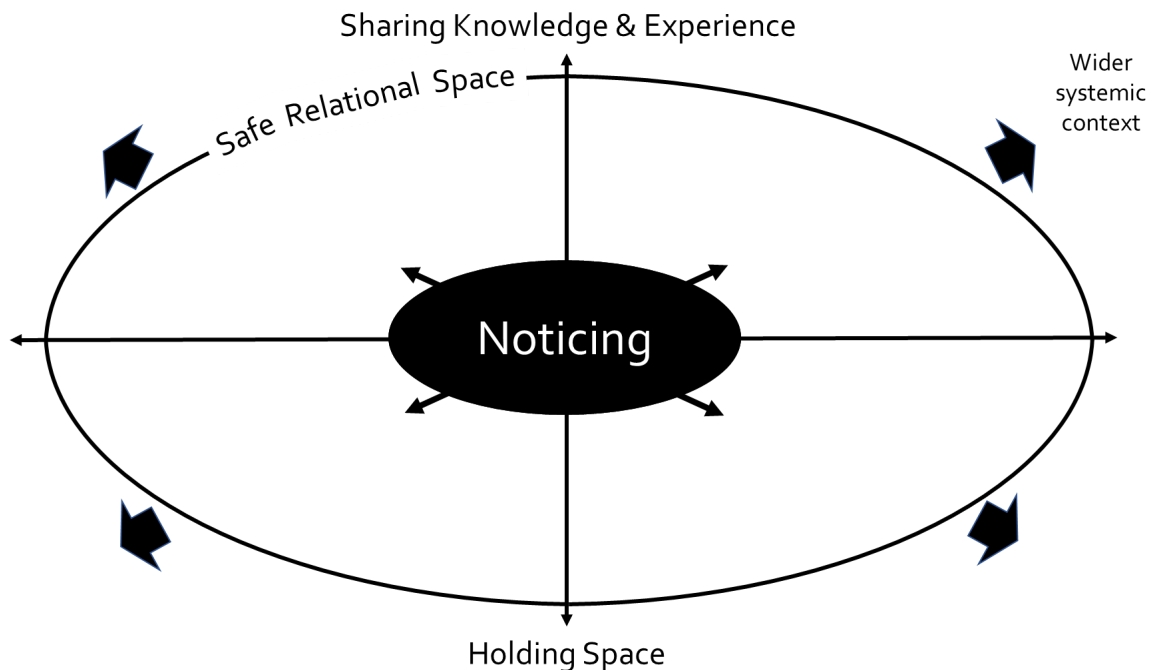
I will usually have a dialogue going on with myself ... one of the fundamental parts of any form of listening work is being in more than one place at the same time ... remaining present with the supervisee, thinking about what is going to be useful to do here, what's going to be a useful way to respond. (Ned)

Ellen said Noticing informs her choice to share her knowledge and experience of coaching in the form of a model or framework, as long as such sharing has been contracted for. She contrasted this with her preferred way of supervising, which is not to share her knowledge but rather to hold space and work emergently. She noted that supervision is both holding space and sharing knowledge. Natalia, Deborah and Yvette also gave examples of sharing knowledge and holding space.

As a result of these findings, I also added arrows from Noticing to each intervention to represent Noticing as central to the choice of intervention. Ellen also challenged where Noticing the impact of the wider system fitted into the conceptualisation. To recognise the fundamental importance of supervisors expanding their attention to the wider systemic context, I added arrows that go beyond the safe, relational space to indicate how Noticing goes beyond what is happening within the supervisory dyad to consider the impact of the wider system: the client, the client's world and the wider world.

Figure 6 shows the revisions I made following Ellen's interview.

Figure 6: Theme 1 revisions



Theme 2: Reflection and action

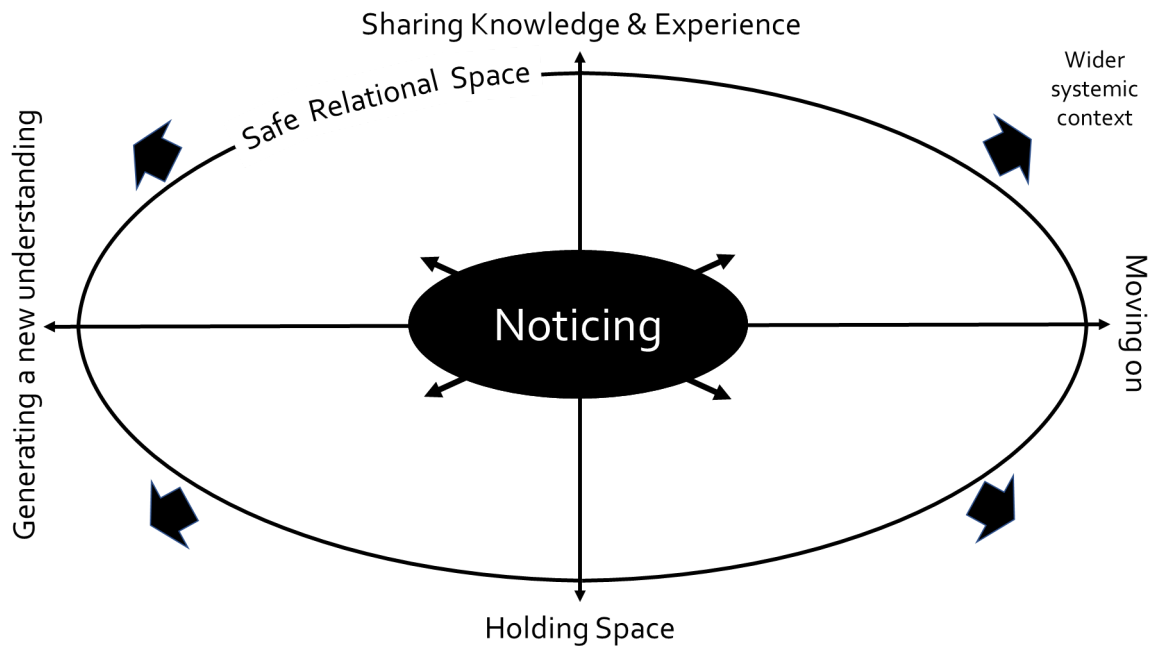
In the initial conceptualisation (Figure 4), I had labelled the end points of the horizontal axis as "Certainty" (for Analysing/Evaluating) and "Tolerating ambiguity" (for Supporting/Developing).

Deborah preferred "comfort" to "certainty." Subsequently both Natalia and Ned reframed the supervisor's intention in this regard as helping the supervisee "generate a new understanding" of their case or theme.

When considering ambiguity and edge, Deborah suggested, "If you are pushing towards the edge, they need to feel safe." She also suggested supervision is the "bridge" to internalise the learning so that the coach's practice develops and benefits their clients. From this point on, the notion of "moving on" emerged as a more general description of how the supervisor's intention shifts after the dyad has jointly generated a new understanding.

Figure 7 shows the revised labelling of the horizontal axis.

Figure 7: Revisions from themes 1 & 2



Theme 3: Recognising and naming interventions

Reframing Analysing as Exploring: Lewis (2023) set out the evidence for Analysing being a coaching supervision intervention. In her interview Yvette was triggered by the term Analysing; she and Ellen suggested they do not analyse the cases or themes their supervisees bring to supervision. “It is [only] Analysing what really needs to be explored,” said Yvette adding, “I hold space and just explore.” Deborah had previously suggested the words “focusing” or “framing,” and said her supervisory dyads give themselves “permission to just explore.”

All the research partners agreed Exploring is a joint activity. “We unpack it together,” said Yvette. Following Yvette’s interview, I revised the name to ‘Exploring.’ Subsequently, Ned offered, “All supervision involves Exploring ... I need to facilitate their process of exploration.” He referred to using the 7-Eyed Model (Hawkins & Shoet, 1989) as an exploration guide.

Most of the research partners agreed Exploring is an intervention because the activity is an end in itself to raise the supervisee’s awareness. Ellen had previously suggested, “We don’t know what we don’t know,” and so for her Exploring is both an intervention in itself *and* used as a catalyst to move the conversation on.

Evaluating: All the research partners recognised Evaluating as an intervention comprising two aspects: Evaluating client outcomes and Evaluating what constitutes good coaching practice. Both Deborah and Ellen had talked about Evaluating the impact of their supervisees’ coaching on their clients. Yvette went further, suggesting she explicitly celebrates coaching successes and only refers to competency frameworks when absolutely needed.

That said, all the research partners recognised Evaluating against what is expected of a coach as an intervention, although some felt less comfortable Evaluating in this way. Indeed, all but one explicitly said they held their ethical code “lightly,” despite two of them being accredited as assessors on coach training programmes.

Two research partners said they evaluate the strength of relationship between coach and client to help their supervisees determine what makes the difference between good and poor coaching

relationships (Ellen), or where the supervisee is “struggling” or “not really adding much value” (Deborah). Most research partners talked about contracting and boundary management being typical topics for evaluation. For one of her supervisees, Deborah said, “It always comes down to contracting and boundaries.” Ned subsequently said topics arise in supervision “as a result of not having contracted carefully.”

Developing: All the research partners recognised Developing as an intervention. Ellen believes Developing “*is* the work we are doing.” Yvette said supervision develops her supervisees’ “competence and confidence.” Natalia uses Developing interventions to move her supervisees “to a different level of practice ... more mature ... richer. ... deeper.” Ned notices during supervision when he becomes aware that “there’s an opportunity for development and learning ... for [the supervisee] to grow as a coach.”

They all also recognised Developing as being aligned with sharing knowledge. Deborah said she shares tools and techniques with her supervisees to “help them stretch their repertoire or try something a bit different.” Ellen said she will “share something specific in service of [her supervisees’] development,” and Ned gave examples of “dropping in” from his own “knowledge or wisdom.” Natalia said, “I love teaching” and she draws from “a deep well” of techniques to share with her supervisees to help them develop their practice.

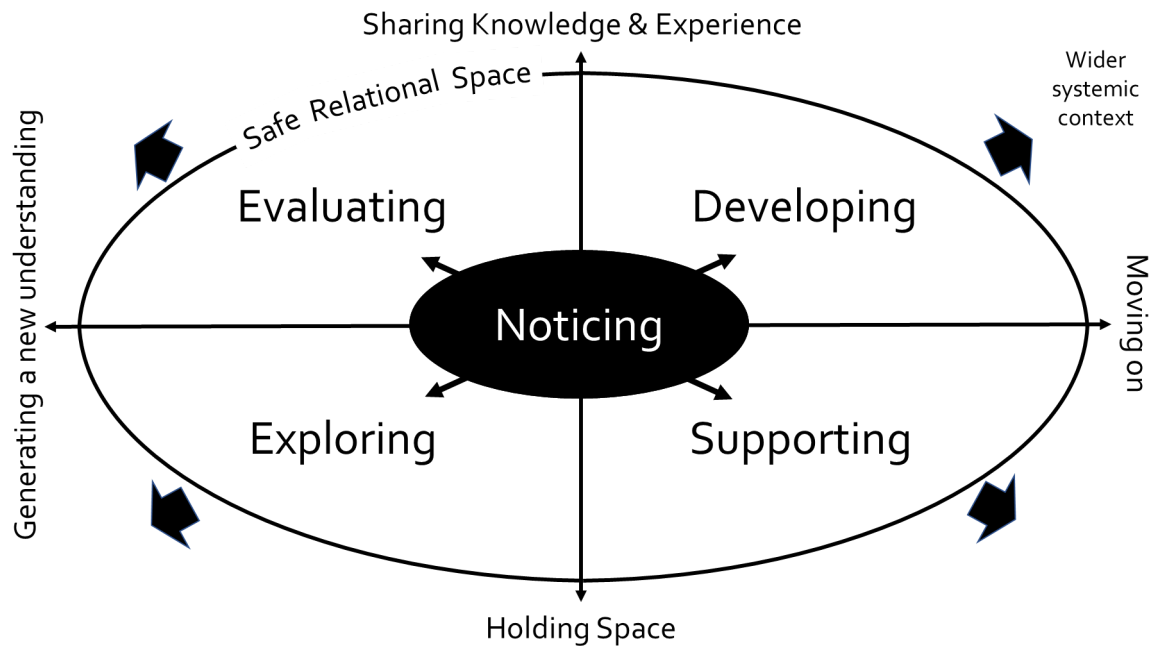
Yvette said she learns “so much” through the process of supervising others. The other research partners agreed: “It keeps me on my toes,” (Ellen); I learn “massively” (Deborah); I learn “a lot” (Ned); “I just cannot help but learn each time I sit with [a supervisee],” (Natalia).

Supporting: Yvette said supervision supports the client’s emotional challenges such as “overwhelm,” and “imposter syndrome.” The other research partners also described their methods for Supporting their supervisees: Ellen taps into “mindfulness,... slowing down,... and getting [her] clients to notice what’s going on for them physiologically ... and how they manage all of that for themselves.” Deborah offers appreciation and encouragement to build her clients’ confidence; Natalia encourages her supervisees to say what more they need from her when she feels that a Supporting intervention might be useful; Ned noted “a lot of good supervision involves ... supportive interventions,” where “the emotional aspect is more at the forefront.”

Yvette also talked about when the amount of support a client needed caused her concern about whether they were “[psychologically] fit to practice,” and challenged accordingly. Other research partners mentioned challenging their supervisees too: “I will say that I see my role as providing high support, and also high challenge. And if that support is there, then we can have that challenging, robust conversation,” (Ellen); Deborah also gave examples of challenging her supervisees when they are not fully engaged in supervision.

Figure 8 shows the renaming of Analysing to Exploring, along with the other interventions, which remained as named at the outset.

Figure 8: Revisions from themes 1, 2 & 3

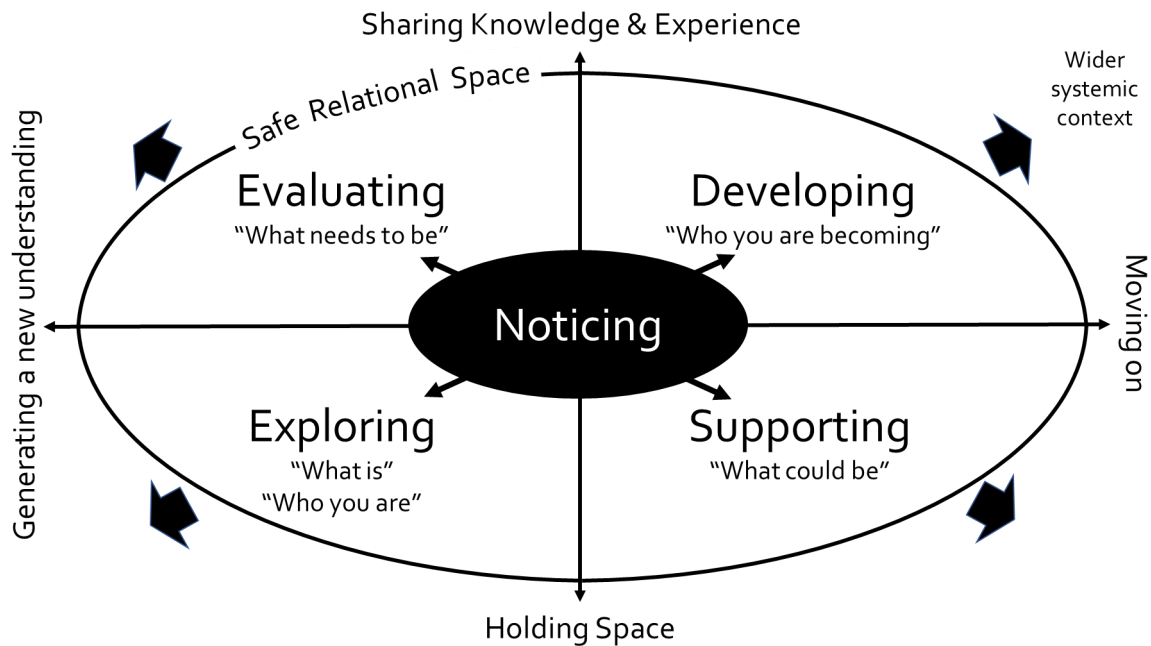


Theme 4: Clarifying the meaning of interventions

Following Ellen's interview, I introduced plain English subtitles for each of the four interventions with the intention of clarifying for the reader what is meant by each of the gerunds: Exploring^[3] 'what is;' Evaluating 'what needs to be;' Supporting 'what could be' and Developing 'who you want to be.' These subtitles resonated with the research partners, with the following revisions. Deborah suggested Exploring might also include Exploring 'who you are.' I also revised the subtitle for Developing 'who you want to be' to Developing 'who you are becoming' after Ned talked about intentionality being central to choosing interventions. He mused, "When I think of interventions I think intentionally, like what am I trying to achieve with this?" This reminded me that supervision is an ongoing process of Developing not to arrive at a single, future state, but rather to remain in the present, continually in a state of Developing, of 'becoming.'

Figure 9 shows the final conceptualisation.

Figure 9: Final conceptualisation



Discussion

The final conceptualisation represents a framework for coaching supervision interventions. Below I discuss the framework, making references to each of the four themes identified in the findings. I follow this with two further reflections:

- Why Conceptual Encounter was a useful research method.
- How the framework represents the dyad's intentions and supports the functions of supervision.

The conceptual model in Figure 9 depicts coaching supervision interventions occurring within a safe, relational space. This space is contracted between supervisor and supervisee as part of a supervision process – somewhat like Hawkins and Smith's (2013) CLEAR process model - that commences with Contracting and ends in Reviewing. The framework can be thought of a structural rather than processual description of the LEA stages of CLEAR.

This safe, relational space is quartered by two axes: the vertical axis, which represents the dyad's intention for the supervisor to hold space as a fellow practitioner, where they role model their process expertise in coaching, and share their coaching experience, acting as much as a coach mentor; and the horizontal axis, which represents the dyad's intention to generate a new understanding of the case or theme the supervisee has brought to supervision and for the supervisee to commit to some actions to help them move on.

Supervision is a key part of reflective practice

From left to right, the horizontal axis represents the move from reflection towards action, the latter representing the growing edge of the supervisee. Because a supervision session may move from left to right, from reflection towards action, the labelling of the horizontal axis might indicate the framework be used as a process map. That said, the framework is structural – the cardinal points of this axis demonstrate two aspects inherent in reflective practice, i.e., reflection *and* action (theme 2) through reflection *on* action and reflection *in* action. Deborah articulated this structural

view when she suggested supervision is the “bridge” to internalise the learning so that the coach’s practice develops and benefits their clients. This supports the model being an intervention framework rather than a process map; the revised working definition suggests the process of supervision is externalising reflective practice, whereas the process afterwards is the supervisee internalising the learning as they put it into practice.

Noticing lies at the heart of the supervisory process

Noticing (theme 1) lies at the centre of the framework. This represents how the dyad jointly notices what is happening within the safe, relational space. Noticing also involves the supervisor Noticing what supervision interventions would be most helpful based on their holding space or sharing their coaching knowledge and practical experience of being a coach. Metaphorically, the supervisor shifts into neutral between engaging gears.

The arrows that go beyond this space also represent what Hawkins and McMahon (2020) refer to as “the constant challenge” that we as supervisors “need regularly to move our attention from what is naturally in the field of our vision to the wider domains in which we are operating,” (p112). These domains include not only the client and the system in which they operate, but also wider financial, human and environmental systems such as organisation, community, society and the planet. Recognising this wider systemic context in the framework ensures congruence to supervision models that include a systemic lens such as the 7-Eyed Model (Hawkins and Shohet, 1989).

Recognising, naming and clarifying the meaning of interventions (themes 3 and 4)

The supervisor then engages suitable interventions. Initially, by jointly Exploring each case or theme the coach brings to uncover a new co-constructed reality of the situation, i.e. ‘What is’ or ‘Who’ the coach is. Naming this intervention as Exploring represents the finding that the supervisor’s intention is not to interpret, but rather to help the supervisee generate a new understanding. This idea is supported by other recent research that suggests coaches reflecting and reframing situations - as evidenced by the changing language they use to describe them - has the potential to create new interpretations in their inner world and is essential to their development (Folscher-Kingwill & Terblanche, 2019). Analysing had suggested interpreting, which in turn would imply generating some degree of certainty. Hence moving away from using Analysing to describe the intervention also supports the move away from certainty being an appropriate descriptor for the left-hand cardinal point of the horizontal axis, as noted in the findings (theme 2).

Such joint exploration leads to Developing the supervisee’s coaching practice. The findings support the view that Developing is more aligned with sharing knowledge and experience than it is with coaching. This intervention might include Developing skills and competencies or addressing who the coach is ‘becoming.’ This concept aligns with conclusions in Rajasinghe et al (2022), who suggest a coach is “always in a state of becoming.”

It may also lead to Supporting (which includes challenging) the coach through emotional challenges that arise in their practice by considering ‘What could be,’ and/or Evaluating the coach’s process against the client’s expectations of outcomes and relationship, and also what is expected of a coach (‘What needs to be’).

Why Conceptual Encounter has been a useful method

The method generated a simple model with simple language inducted from the lived experience of experienced coaching supervisors. With only five iterative interviews and revisions, the model settled when both Natalia and Ned had nothing further to add, nor could they think of any exceptions to the model. I note how each of the previous three research partners validated the

overall structure of the conceptualisation and yet also added something insightful and practical to enhance it.

The method has inadvertently created an acronym mnemonic – NEEDS: Noticing – Exploring – Evaluating – Developing – Supporting. This was unintentional and may have consequences in that it suggests a process rather than a framework, however it further supports the methodological requirement to yield a final conceptualisation that is “elegant and parsimonious” (De Rivera & Kreilcamp 1981, p8).

One of the most challenging aspects of the project was to find the right word for what became Exploring. I considered several words – examining, framing, focusing, interpreting – each inducted following a research partner interview. ‘Exploring’ was always a possibility, however I resisted it. The goal of the research to generate a conceptual framework was intended to be just that: a framework, not a process map. However, the model presented itself to several research partners as a process map. For example, Deborah likened Exploring to the ‘Focus’ stage of the Cyclical Model of Supervision (Page & Wosket, 2001). My own experience of sitting with this tension for several weeks shows the usefulness of the method as it allowed for iterative development drawing on my own reflective practice, input from research partners and a continual searching within the existing literature. Letting go of my own resistance to ‘Exploring’ became the pivotal moment when the final conceptualisation emerged.

Intentions and functions

The findings corroborate the prevailing discourse that coach development is the primary function of coaching supervision (Carroll, 2009; Lawrence & Whyte, 2014; Lewis, 2023); corroborate recent assertions (Adamson & Brendgen, 2022; Lewis, 2023) that the outcome of Developing interventions is *mutual* learning for the coach and their supervisor; and that a coaching supervisor sometimes intentionally chooses to share their knowledge and experience to help their supervisee develop their practice.

I now consider how this intentionality in a supervisor’s choice of intervention links to the Qualitative, Developmental and Resourcing functions of supervision (Hawkins and Smith, 2013). As discussed earlier, several research partners felt the conceptual framework might be viewed as a process map. This was unintentional. If a process must be gleaned from the framework, a general moving from left to right, from the intention to generate a new understanding towards the intention to help the supervisee move on, could be imbued. As already noted however, there is no compunction in a supervision session to move beyond generating a new understanding. Acknowledging that generating a new understanding and moving on are both integral to the concept of reflective practice (Hawkins & McMahon, 2020; Carroll, 2007; Strossi-Heckler, 2014; Walsh, 2021; Lucas, 2023) allows a different interpretation: that the intention and role of the supervisor is to encourage and enable the coach’s reflective practice. The revised working definition of coaching supervision recognises this.

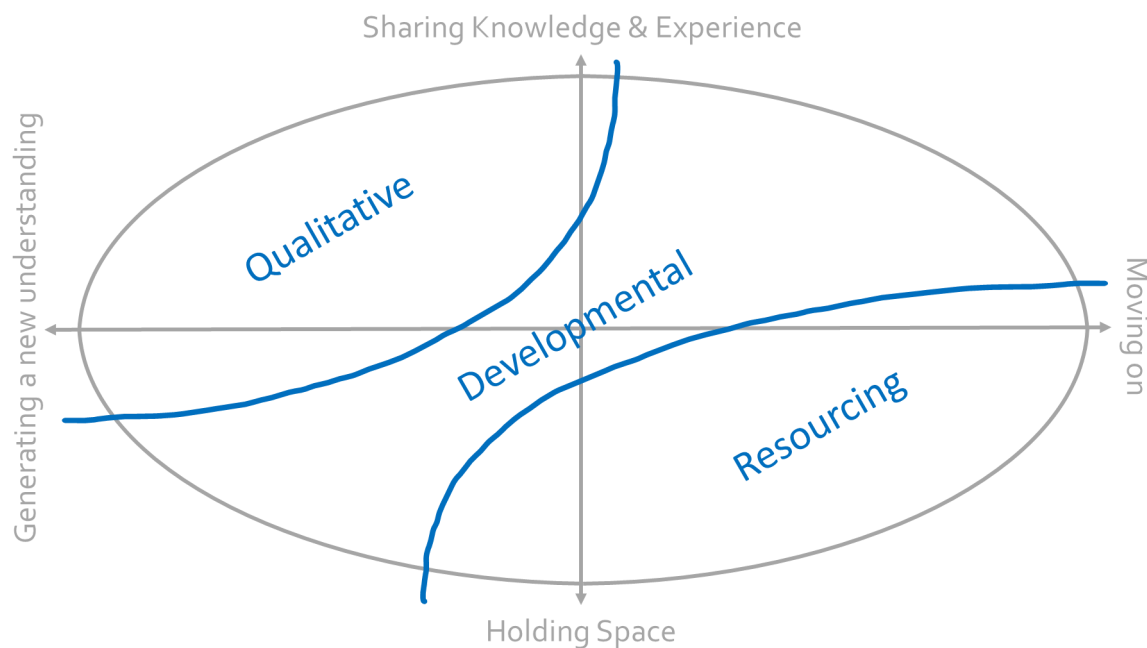
It is clear from the findings that the research partners map Evaluating predominantly to the Qualitative function. The research partners also all agreed supervision includes Supporting their supervisees through the emotional challenges they face in their coaching practice. Ellen says she notices “where people are emotionally, what support they need, [and] how to restore them back to their focused, energised, self.” When reflecting on the Resourcing function, Yvette “likes the word Supporting.” When Ned does “the restorative piece,” he feels like he has helped “hold the world together in its own little way.” As such, Supporting interventions align predominantly with the Resourcing function.

The findings show Exploring is linked with a supervisor’s intention for the supervisee to generate a new understanding. For example, Ned said, “I’m assuming my supervisees will act more

intentionally ... the more they are aware.” The resulting action could relate to their client impact (Qualitative), their own skills and behaviours (Developmental) or their own process (Resourcing). As such, Exploring interventions support all three supervisory functions.

In Figure 10, I tentatively propose a mapping of interventions to functions. This is perhaps clearer than was possible before this research project (see Table 1). This new mapping may help coaching supervisors intentionally choose interventions that directly support the functions of supervision and is worthy of further research.

Figure 10: Tentatively mapping interventions to functions



Conclusion

By illuminating practitioners' experience and understanding of coaching supervision with what Tracy (2010) termed “meaningful coherence”, this study has generated an abstract structure that expands the limited prevailing discourse on coaching supervision interventions. This is what I set out to do. The findings validate the prevailing view that the primary purpose of supervision is developmental. Indeed, it is part of a “continuous process of ongoing development” where coaches are “always in a state of becoming,” (Rajasinghe et al., 2022).

NEEDS: A Framework for Coaching Supervision Interventions has several potential uses for supervisors: when preparing for supervision, making intentional choices during supervision or as a framework for reflecting afterwards, and has potential implications for the education of coaches and coaching supervisors. It may also be a suitable framework for generating hypotheses on the value of coaching supervision for larger, quantifiable studies, for example evaluating not just the delivery of coaching against a commonly understood description of what it means to be a good coach, but also evaluating the impact on the coach's clients.

The framework sets out how coaching supervisors might intentionally choose their interventions. One particular aspect - defining the scope of Evaluating to include professional bodies' expectations as well as client expectations – highlights some divergence in the research partners' practices. Perhaps this framework encourages supervisors and their supervisees to consciously

take time to explore and reflect on their values and ethics and how they impact on their work? If so, it might help tackle the perceived lack of consistency (Turner & Passmore, 2018) in how supervisors evaluate the application of codes of ethics. This too represents an area for further research.

Further research may also address any perceived shortcomings in this study. For example, while the revised working definition includes the possibility of group work, the research partners predominantly cited their individual supervision experience: how does the NEEDS framework apply to group supervision? Also, the study was primarily predicated on a taxonomy of coaching supervision interventions described by Lewis (2023): to what extent did Part I of the interviews 'prime' the research partners to give me the evidence I sought to corroborate these descriptors? Furthermore, I interviewed coaching supervisors in their role as supervisors; while they are each experienced supervisees themselves, I did not ask them for their experience of supervision as a supervisee: perhaps the framework could be tested by interviewing supervisees as well. And finally, the framework is founded on the intentional choice and deployment of interventions: what happens to the efficacy of coaching supervision when one or more of these are overused at the expense of others?

Nonetheless, the research has moved the thinking on from nebulous descriptions of functions and tasks by conceptualising actions taken in the real world of coaching supervision. As Natalia put it in her interview, "this takes the ideas onto something much more real and based on lived experience."

Endnotes

[1] ↩

While this model was originally conceived by Hawkins (Hawkins & Shoheit, 1989), increasingly there is recognition that its development has been informed by many of his colleagues and students, including Robin Shoheit and Joan Wilmot.

[2] ↩

When capitalised in this paper, these gerunds (and their successors) refer to coaching supervision interventions.

[3] ↩

This intervention was named Analysing when I introduced the subtitle and was subsequently revised to Exploring (see Theme 3).

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