

## Reflections from the Field

# From Coach to Coach Supervisor - a Shift in Mindset. What resonates with practitioners?

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## Abstract

The seven principles of a 'Coach Supervision Mindset' were developed in 2016 when designing supervision training for internal coaches. The intention was to supplement existing supervisor competency-based models. Bluckert's (2006) seven principles of a coaching mindset were used as a framework, extending each principle for coach supervision. Grounded in practice, the Coach Supervisor Mindset principles received external validation, challenge and refinement through two conference presentations. Subsequently an action research project was sponsored by the Association for Coaching, involving 48 members. This paper captures the themes arising from this process.

## Keywords

coach supervision, action research, mindset

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## Introduction

When training internal coaches to become coach supervisors, there was an intention to broaden the learning content beyond competency models towards the inclusion of attitudinal qualities which could underpin a supervisor's work. This perspective is congruent with that of Bachkirova and Lawton-Smith (2015, p. 128) who in the context of coach accreditation, remark "it is likely that competencies identify behaviours that were successful in the past rather than addressing the mindset needed for the future". Bluckert (2006) articulates what constitutes a coaching mindset, and identifies seven principles; extrapolating from his work, Lucas (2017) considered what might constitute the mindset of a coach supervisor (see Table 1 below).

These principles were informed by the author's practice and socialised through presentations at Oxford Brookes International Supervision Conference in 2016 and South West Councils Coach Network Conference in 2020. Greater and more specific feedback was gained in 2021, through the engagement of members from the Association for Coaching. A series of 10 webinars was delivered

for members – both coaches and coach supervisors. This paper outlines the action research methodology employed to analyse the feedback provided. Consideration is given to which of the seven principles resonated most strongly with research partners. Feedback for each principle is reported in turn using anecdotes to illuminate themes. Throughout the study, feedback from the two categories of research partners has been analysed separately with areas of commonality also identified. Implications for practice are considered, additional areas of interest are discussed and some questions for further research are highlighted. While there is a high degree of resonance with most principles, the research process has highlighted the opportunity for an updated version of the Coach Supervisor Mindset principles. This will be reported separately.

**Table 1: From Coach to Coach Supervisor: a shift in Mindset**

Principle	Coach Mindset (Bluckert, 2006)	Coach Supervision Mindset (Lucas, 2017)
<b>One</b>	From Tell to Ask	From Ask to Offer
<b>Two</b>	Performance and Potential	From solution-eering to exploring
<b>Three</b>	Awareness and responsibility	From ownership to ensuring guardianship
<b>Four</b>	Building self-belief	From growing self-belief to harnessing self-doubt
<b>Five</b>	Business Context	From Single to Multiple Contexts
<b>Six</b>	A systems perspective	The parallel process
<b>Seven</b>	Coaching as a mindset	The coaching supervision mindset

## Methodology

This study has been carried out in the spirit of action research which as Koshy, Koshy and Waterman (2010, p.2) describe as:

*“... a method used for improving practice. It involves action, evaluation, and critical reflection and – based on the evidence gathered – changes in practice are then implemented”.*

The approach taken, is a co-created one, taking a phenomenological approach and exploring qualitative data. The intention of this work is to offer a framework that complements existing competency-based approaches when training new coach supervisors as well as offering an alternative perspective for the continuous professional development of practicing coach supervisors.

Research partners were located through the Association for Coaching (AC) who agreed to sponsor the research. Working with research partners from the same professional coaching body helped ensure a greater commonality in our understanding of the application of supervision. This choice also brings some limitations which are identified later. The AC advertised the opportunity for members to partner in the research. This generated interest from 178 members, which then prompted the need to clarify the requested level of contribution and to set criteria for participation (see Table 2). The criteria were based on the AC’s standards of hours of delivery to become an accredited supervisor or the number of hours of supervision received to accredit as a coach. Forty eight people consented to participation in the research form. Withdrawal could be activated at any time, without explanation, by sending an e-mail to an administrator at the AC. Table 2 shows the number of people in each research partner category at the start and at the end of the research.

**Table 2: Criteria for becoming a Research Partner, and participant numbers at start and end**

Research Participant Category	Criteria for inclusion	Numbers at start	Numbers at end
<b>For Supervisors</b>	As a SUPERVISOR and confirm I have <b>delivered</b> a minimum of 90 hours of supervision in the last two years (group or 121)	31	25
<b>For Coaches</b>	As a COACH and confirm I have <b>received</b> a minimum of 12 hours of supervision in the last two years (group or 121)	17	16

The webinars followed a consistent format. One principle was introduced at each webinar, attendees were put into random break out rooms to discuss the following questions:

1. What's making sense?
2. What's confusing?
3. What questions do you have now?

A facilitated plenary discussion followed to help clarification. Research partners were invited to consider this principle in their own supervision work. Three weeks later, a refresher on the principle was provided before putting attendees into break out rooms (according to research category) to share their experiences of holding this supervision principle in their awareness as they engaged in their supervision. Three questions helped to structure the discussion and correlated to the feedback survey.

1. What do you recognize?
2. What needs further articulation?
3. What might have been missed?
4. What else did you notice?

Following this small group discussion, research partners captured their feedback anonymously using either an online survey tool or a word document template.

## Participation rates

Sixteen of the 31 coaches and 16 of the 17 coach supervisors were active at the start. Only a handful of people formally withdrew from the research. However, across both groups, the number of research partners completing feedback by the end was less than 50% of those who started (see Table 3).

**Table 3: Number of feedback forms completed by webinar by research partner category**

Webinar Number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Coach Completions	16	15	15	13	6	9	7
Supervisor Completions	16	9	9	11	9	7	6

## Discussion of results

Q7 of the feedback survey helped gauge which principles needed most and least refinement. Table 4 & 5 show their ratings according to research group:

**Table 4: Degree of resonance amongst coaches for each principle**

Rating	Principle 1 N=16	Principle 2 N = 15	Principle 3 N = 15	Principle 4 N = 13	Principle 5 N = 6	Principle 6 N = 9	Principle 7 N = 7
Very close to my own experience	7	6	4	6	0	5	3
Quite a bit resonates	7	6	5	5	0	3	2
A little resonates	1	3	4	2	5	1	1
My experience is very different	1	0	2	0	0	0	1
Don't Know	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Ranking (combining first two categories)	2 [14 of 16]	4 [12 of 15]	6 [9 of 15]	3 [11 of 13]	7 [0 of 6]	1 [8 of 9]	5 [5 of 7]

In Table 4, the last row, which combines the first two categories of response, provides a ranking of which principles resonated most strongly for coaches. This suggests that principles six, one and

four have the highest resonance, closely followed by principles two and seven, with principles three and five resonating least.

**Table 5: Degree of resonance amongst supervisors for each principle**

Rating	Principle 1 N= 16	Principle 2 N = 9	Principle 3 N = 9	Principle 4 N = 11	Principle 5 N = 9	Principle 6 N = 7	Principle 7 N = 6
Very close to my own experience	8	5	2	9	5	6	5
Quite a bit resonates	7	4	4	2	3	1	1
A little resonates	1	0	3	0	1	0	0
My experience is very different	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Don't Know	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Ranking (combining first two categories)</b>	5 [15 of 16]	1 [9 of 9]	7 [6 of 9]	1 [11 of 11]	6 [8 of 9]	1 [7 of 7]	1 [6 of 6]

The last row of Table 5 provides a ranking of which principles resonated most strongly for coach supervisors. This suggests that principles two, four, six, and seven have the highest resonance, closely followed by principle one, and with principles five and three resonating least.

When aggregated this data appears to show that principles four and six hold most resonance for all research partners and principles three and five seem to hold the least resonance. Some level of resonance exists for all seven Coach Supervision Mindset principles with two exceptions amongst coaches (one research partner rating principle seven as “my experience is very different” and 1 research partner rating principle five as “don’t know”). Noticeably, for principle five; while six of the nine responding supervisors endorse the idea that a supervisor works across multiple contexts, five of the six responding coaches say, “a little resonates” (the assumption being that their supervision experience falls into a single context). This helps to highlight that the research partners are not in a supervision relationship with each other.

Below, more detailed results from each principle are discussed in turn. Each starts with a brief reminder of the core elements of the relevant principle. In reviewing the data, those comments which endorse, challenge or expand elements of the principle being reviewed have been selected. Each principle closes with a summary of the findings and implications for practice are considered.

## Principle One: From Ask to Offer

This principle proposes that when training to become a coach we had to “unlearn” being the expert, to stop telling and pose open questions. When extending this to supervision, there seemed a greater appropriateness to bring our experience back into the conversation.

### Themes arising from qualitative feedback

Both supervisors and coaches felt a high degree of resonance with the idea that the supervisor’s “offer” is about sharing experience as a catalyst for the coach’s learning. For example:

*“I offered to share with her an experience I had had in similar circumstance and she reported to me later that our exploration had proved very helpful in terms of modelling a way to be and generating an understanding of the many intricacies involved” [S: 082590]*

*“I also really appreciate it when she takes time to share her thoughts and experiences on what I’m working on - this stimulates my own thinking and helps move me forward” [C: 150672]*

The original article suggested that offering contrasting experiences can help ensure the supervisor is not positioning “one right way” of doing things. This approach was recognised and endorsed, for example:

*“I am aware of the power “dynamics” and the risk that the supervisee may simply “accept” the knowledge shared rather than reflect and consider. To dilute that risk, I specifically ask the supervisee to look at the pros and cons and /or how to make bespoke to them” [S: 162756]*

*“I have been mentored and the supervisor has offered me contrasting examples. the paradox is most familiar and I think this might have been deliberately used to bring out my own solutions and thinking” [C: 290606]*

The criticality of the timing of when the “offer” is given was also commented upon:

*“I’d still be asking lots of questions before offering.”[S: 010685 ]*

*“The sense of timing is also important - only offer when I have exhausted my own resources.” [C: 320823]*

One supervisor participant commented on the potential for dependency if a supervisor “offers” as a regular feature of their approach:

*“I believe that if you do give advice then they will often see this as the go to place for support - supervision for me is the facilitation of exploration not a place to wait to go to for advice” [S: 020659]*

On the whole research partners connected with the idea that in coach supervision the supervisor may bring more of their experience into the dialogue, just as a mentor might. Yet, as outlined by Lucas (2017) a coach supervisor is not synonymous with being a mentor. Interestingly, a number of supervisors commented that their “offers” were influenced by the maturity of the supervisee:

*“I work with a lot of inexperienced coaches – this no doubt frames my experience... as the expectation of these coaches is to receive advice from Supervisor” [S: 20659]*

*“More offer with newly qualified coaches I find than with experienced coaches where more a thinking partnership. With new coaches they ask and want an offer which they can think about” [S: 140151]*

When faced with a less experienced practitioner, it may be an innately human response to adopt a mentoring perspective. However, one comment (from a coach) illuminates an alternative interpretation, suggesting that the preparedness “to offer” says more about the experience of the supervisor than the coach:

*“I have paid supervision and seems mostly to be great reflective questions although sometimes ideas offered. I also receive prof unpaid supervision although more from other CS trainees – then I seem to get more offers & suggestions of e.g., ideas, concepts, resource” [C: 147963]*

Overall, there was a high degree of resonance with this principle, yet it is important to qualify that sharing experiences is not a default position. Rather it is one of a whole array of responses, and careful attention should be placed on the “how” and “when” the offer is made. We need to be cognisant of whether requests for input are a feature of the supervisor’s or the supervisee’s assumptions, their wider relationship patterns or a negotiated and explicit element of the contract.

## Implications for practice

It feels appropriate to offer guidance as part of a supervisory response. However, to avoid minimising the supervisees learning and/or increase their dependency – we need to contract carefully for how and when a supervisor brings their experience into the supervision dialogue.

## Principle Two: From Solution-eering to Exploring

The second Bluckert principle is about how in coaching we focus on our client's performance and potential. This also feels true for our supervision clients. However, coaching is often goal or solution driven and by contrast in supervision this principle emphasizes the experience of exploring. Specifically, Lucas (2017) proposes that the supervisor will slow things down to explore what it already known, and to evoke an experience that is richer and deeper.

### Themes from the qualitative feedback

There was frequent endorsement that supervision is experienced as less goal oriented:

*“I’m conscious during supervision sessions that I’m exploring rather than building up to identifying options/actions. This is explicit in the questions my supervisor asks as well as in the tone of the sessions.” [C: 041973]*

*“In coaching there is often a ‘linear’ outcome that is being focused upon, albeit there may be some excursions on the journey to that outcome. In my coaching supervision, it is the ‘deep dive’ or ‘free dive’ that is more experienced ..... the supervision space allows them to explore, with curiosity – looking backwards, forwards, and around.” S: 162756]*

That this more exploratory approach had an impact on the pace of the session was also commented upon:

*“working with my supervisor to delve into a coaching session or part of a session to really dig in and understand what was happening, sometimes when I have felt it irrelevant and brushed over it - pulling me back to explore it and get deeper/new understanding” [C: 181167]*

*“slow down to move in rather than move on was a phrase that really landed for me” [S: 010685]*

Lucas (2017) wrote that we already hold more data for inspection than we might realise, and this was also observed by some research partners:

*“in recalling a particular situation to my supervisor, she paused our discussion to reflect on and explore my language tone and body language whilst describing it. In doing so it “re-enlivened” the situation both in a way I hadn’t expected, but also draw out the lasting impact on me, which I hadn’t readily recognised”. [C: 879786]*

*“in group supervision.... Looking at the edge of learning and how exploration is not just helpful but necessary to find the boundary of the known and experienced”. [S: 290876]*

As with Principle 1, there was an observation that maturity can have an impact on the delivery of this principle. For example:

*“Whilst I hold development as an equal part of the supervision and focus on...I notice that with some less experienced supervisees they remain focused on getting a solution” [S: 140365]*

*“As I have become more experienced my supervisor has adapted and focused more on being and exploring rather than providing solutions. This was only appropriate as I became more experienced to be comfortable with this approach”. [C: 260469]*

In summary therefore, there was considerable endorsement for the idea that an implicit component of the supervisor’s mindset is one which prioritises the heightening of the supervisee’s awareness over taking specific actions. Further, that we achieve this when we slow the dialogue and explore more of what has been experienced but has yet to be attended to.

## Implications for practice

Given a key feature of this principle is the impact on the pace of a session, we may need to address the supervisee’s expectations of “how much” it is possible to cover in any one session. It might also change how the supervisor brings a session to a close – with a greater preparedness to leave things open rather than facilitating an action plan. While these topics can be explained during the contracting process, the supervisor might also need to deliberately develop skills for managing the session as they are likely to be distinctly different to the skills utilised when managing and closing a coaching session.

## Principle Three: From Ownership to Guardianship

Bluckert’s third principle identified that a core intention of coaching is to ensure that ownership and responsibility rests with the client. This is also important in supervision; however, our client is not just the one in front of us. Effectively, we are working on behalf of the supervisee’s clients and indeed our coaching profession at large. Sometimes the supervisor may be the only person in a position to notice something at odds with good practice (part of the normative role) and in those circumstances, the supervisor has a responsibility to surface and work with that noticing. This responsibility was captured as “guardianship”, a term which research partners immediately questioned. Events in our wider context meant that guardianship inferred a legal context. The alternative of “stewardship” was offered; in its definition it is described as “the responsible and careful management of something”.

## Themes from the qualitative feedback

For some stewardship was a preferable term than guardianship, but people were generally ambivalent about both terms, this comment illustrates that more thought is needed to find appropriate terminology:

*I understand and agree with the principle, however the wording does not resonate with me. [C: 3299645]*

Putting the terminology to one side there was noticeable endorsement that coach supervision is not just about the coach. Rather, its purpose is to attend to the wider system and to consider how a practitioner’s work sits within what we currently understand as good practice.

For example:

*“the key element of this principle is the recognition and acknowledgement that the supervisor is attending to the interests of the supervisee, coachees, other stakeholders and the wider coaching profession” [S: 162756]*



*I feel supervision is looking at the whole, me as a person, me as a coach, my practice, my client, my growth, the coaching community and profession, the ripple effect of the work and how we impact a community beyond the coaching dynamic. [C: 3299659]*

Perhaps prompted by the chosen terminology, a number of supervisors and coaches expressed a lack of comfort and/or acceptance that this principle might cause a power differential in the supervision relationship. For example:

*“The use of ‘Safeguarding’ as a principle – beyond guardianship has connotations of a not equal relationship” [S:260263]*

*This feels to be a hierarchical model and that as supervisee, I am formally reporting to my supervisor with the potential for ‘consequences’ and doesn’t feel to be the collaborative exploration I have experienced to-date. [C: 329961]*

Further there seems to be an assumption that when a supervisor assumes a guardianship stance, that using their own point of reference is inconsistent with being open minded and curious.

*“As a supervisor I need to be open-minded and curious, and explore the supervisee’s choice of intervention/approach, rather than judge or impose my own views or judgement.” [S: 162756]*

Perhaps these coaches see power and collaboration as mutually exclusive. However, a comment from a coach captures how this principle could be experienced when done well:

*It feels like my supervisor adopts the essence of this principle and we are working to together to reflect on what might be going considering the whole system. We explore from a position of equality and collaboration for insight and awareness. However, there are times when it feels like true exploration and other times when the supervisor is testing a hypothesis in order to pull me towards an awareness of a different view or perspective that might be held by someone else in the system or herself [C: 4067853]*

The original article explains how an escalation process could be managed co-operatively. This was given less attention on the webinars and indeed seemed to be overlooked by research partners. Nonetheless, there is clearly a gap in understanding of how supervisors would work with their role power and manage the escalation of ethical concerns:

*I don’t know how you escalate what you see unless it is dangerous and unlawful. Do you report to a governing body? where does that leave you in your supervision relationship.... [C:3299663]*

*Stewardship preferable but cannot think of examples where I would think I would need to use this. [S:140151]*

It feels like both supervisors and coaches anticipate this might only be needed in rare occasions:

*Maybe an essence of its temporary nature within the coaching supervision relationship. [S: 260253]*

*... it is hard to imagine many cases [when] that would be the appropriate next step. [C:3299663]*

Escalations may well be the exception rather than the norm. How often it happens though is not the point. It is the potential for it to happen that needs to be discussed, which inevitably brings the existence of the supervisor’s role power into the field. It is an elephant in the room – even if we choose not to discuss it, it still exists.



A coach, offered a comment which feels really congruent with the idea that Stewardship (or guardianship or any other label) can be shared:

*Stewardship is shared by Supervisor and Supervisee. And together, they are responsible for the coachees. [C: 3299655]*

Clearly this is not a consistently held view as is indicated by this contrary perspective held by a supervisor:

*My belief is that my supervisee takes responsibility for any actions as a consequence of our supervisory dialogue, not me. [S:140151]*

The position taken in Lucas (2017) is that a fundamental duty within the supervisor role is to contribute a quality assurance perspective to the work of our supervisees. At the same time recognising that if we take a punitive or “supervisor knows best” stance, we cannot expect our supervisees to be transparent about difficulties or questions in their practice. A key element of navigating this tension is to develop an escalation process that is non-judgmental, curious and managed jointly. There was a lack of evidence that research partners understood when this would be appropriate, what it would look like and who issues would be escalated to.

## Implications for practice

The diversity of responses to this particular principle may suggest that there are some significant implications for supervisor training, regarding how the supervisor appropriately steps into their role power. Additionally, there are implications for professional bodies, the process for escalating questions about good practice needs to be more expressly and clearly communicated.

## Principle Four: From Building Self-Belief to Harnessing Self-Doubt

While everyone will have a different style of coaching, Bluckert’s fourth principle encourages us to adopt the role of “cheer leader” for our clients. By this he means that we demonstrate our belief in their potential even when they lose sight of it themselves. While support may be a feature of the supervisor’s restorative role, the original article values leaning into the absence of self-belief i.e. Our self-doubt. Often it is the “niggles” that a coach brings to supervision. Rather than seeking to reassure the choices made, the supervisor’s formative role can encourage the coach to explore those moments of self-doubt in order to leverage the learning they may hold.

## Themes from the qualitative feedback

Research partners endorsed the idea that supervisees brought their doubts to supervision:

*“The aspect that particularly resonated with me was that self-doubt is frequently the catalyst for the coach seeking supervision, albeit they may describe it using different words” [S:162756]*

*“My supervisor working with me when self-doubt arises and not trying to calm it but digging into it – what could it be telling me? How could it be useful?” [C:181167]*

The notion of embracing and role modelling “not knowing” was often endorsed:

*“As I have grown in competence and competence as a supervisor, I increasingly am comfortable to embrace both my own and the supervisee’s “not yet knowing”” [S:550213]*

*“This is THE thing that I experience and appreciate most with my regular supervisor – exploring the not quite known” [C:147963]*

Some questioned the use of the word “doubt” noticing the potential for negative interpretation:

*“I wonder if ‘embracing uncertainty’ may be more impactful as it dilutes the possible negative perceptions generated by the word ‘doubt’” [S:162756]*

*“the use of the word ‘doubt’ is potentially misleading as it instantly has negative connotations” [C: 87986]*

Perhaps this implies that research partners see areas of discomfort as less welcome in the supervision space. If we take a more Existentialist perspective, we will recognise and accept that our work often causes us to question our capability. In the original article the invitation to the reader was to re-frame how we respond to the word “doubt” encouraging us to see it as a friend which holds untapped learning. Some of the research partners enjoyed this idea:

*“It has been interesting to see that a number of my supervisees have actively adopted the mantra of ‘doubt is my friend’ when understanding their reflective practice.... To explore what has triggered that doubt and how this may link to their developing sense of ‘coach intuition’” [S: 162756]*

*“Using the self-doubt as a friend – really like this and supports work I’ve been doing in my own supervision recently” [C:150672]*

While the notion of “doubt” is seen by some to hold negative connotations, many research partners welcomed a positive re-frame where the presence of doubt can be acknowledged and then leveraged in service of learning. Perhaps if the research had captured the coaching philosophies of those practitioners who feel “doubt” has negative connotations, a theoretical bias would have been identified. However, it could also be that the desire for keeping things in a more positive frame is a hangover from the “building self-belief” element of a coaching persona. In the context of supervision, where support and encouragement can form part of our restorative role; exploring self-doubt is a powerful way to access new thinking as part of our formative role.

## Implications for practice

The supervisee’s readiness to bring moments of doubt into the supervision dialogue is likely to rest on the quality of the supervision relationship and their sense of psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999). Before a supervisee can be encouraged to do so, the supervisor needs to role model a grounded-ness in how they carry their own vulnerabilities and doubts. This can be challenging if there is an assumption that the supervisor will have more experience and/or a desire to show credibility as a professional. For training schools, perhaps it would be helpful to place a greater emphasis on how supervisors share the learning arising from their experience, rather than simply legitimising the sharing of their experience.

## Principle Five : From Single to Multiple Context

The context for Bluckert’s fifth principle was that executive coaching taking place in a business setting. When extending the principle to supervision, consideration was given to the practitioner’s familiarity with a client’s content or context. While we espouse that a coach does not need to be an expert in the client’s content, in reality a coaching client, often chooses the coach who has a similar background or experience. Working with those with whom we have a shared experience, is labelled “single context”. By contrast, in 2017 coaching supervision was still emerging as a separate

discipline and so coaches sought out supervisors from other disciplines – therapy, counselling, social work, for example. This was labelled “multiple context”.

## Themes from the qualitative feedback

When this principle was presented, it was acknowledged that the coaching supervision market had changed considerably over the last five years and may therefore benefit from a fresh perspective. This was captured and then extended by one of the coach research partners:

*I understand what it is saying but it feels as though it needs more explanation now that we are in 2022 and the landscape of supervision has shifted some since 2016 in the UK. I also wonder how this principle translates outside of the UK? [C: 4157367]*

The feedback from supervisors and coaches was markedly different for this principle. Supervisors, felt a close affinity to the idea of working across multiple contexts:

*I work with coaches and clients who come from many different disciplines and situations... this feels very comfortable to me [S: 4116974]*

*This principle feels very comfortable .... It seems in my practice that it is expected that I need to work flexibly across multiple contexts. [S: not given]*

Whereas coaches reported a tendency to seek supervision from practitioners from a similar (single) context.

*Of the 3 coaching supervisors I have worked with, they all had a public sector background. The majority of my coaching is in the public sector. [C: 4157367]*

*I have worked with supervisors that have a specific focus on coaching supervision, rather than supervision generally. It wouldn't have occurred to me to look for a supervisor that wasn't AC accredited. [C:4116936]*

The original article forecasted that once more supervisors entered the market, supervisors would “niche” and therefore the requirement for coach supervisors to work across different contexts might fade. The above coach comments could be taken as evidence of this. The underlying assumption made at the time was that working in a single context would somehow be “better” more “desirable” or simply “inevitable”. However, some supervisors challenged this assumption, noticing that working across contexts brought greater perspectives and diversity, which in their experience would be welcomed and sought out. For example:

*On reflection I have also noticed from my practice that often when working with a supervisee from a different context then I am keen to work with them to 'stretch their thinking beyond their own context' to fulfil my 'Developmental' role as a coach supervisor. [S: not given]*

*The value of this different context of the coach supervisor to the supervisee – supervision of supervision for internal supervisors where it can often be the case that supervisors become (or are) locked into the 'same system' as their supervisees and maybe lose that essence of the 'Helicopter view'. [S: not given]*

Some coaches saw multiple perspective gathering as important, but associate it with their own preferences rather than something that is “true” for supervision and supervisors more generally:

*I do look for supervisors with experience that resonates or I think could challenge me but this feels like it is my personal approach to picking a supervisor rather than something that is a*

*principle of supervision. [C: 4116936]*

*I like the diversity of approaches to bring me new learnings and to stretch me in different ways. this along with group supervision and peer supervision for me supervision should be a mix of different approaches to help me see the unseen. [C: 4116976]*

Since the original article in 2017, many more coaching supervisors have entered the market globally. Yet with more choice, it seems that at least some coaches, choose supervisors from a similar context. The data gathering did not include any information about the level of experience of the coach. This may have been a helpful variable to track, as it is possible that as supervisees mature in experience, they seek supervisors with different backgrounds, to challenge and expand their awareness using alternative lenses. Prompted by the participant discussion, rather than feeling apologetic for “having to” work across contexts, supervisors could now leverage the opportunity that it presents. For example, a coach participant requested:

*“add something to reveal the richness that multiple perspectives can offer” [C: 4116972]*

Given our current context and the greater number of supervisors in the market, perhaps this principle is no longer about managing the restricted choices when selecting a supervisor and more about how different supervisors, from different contexts can be bring different value to the supervision dialogue.

## **Implications for practice**

This feels like an important element of how a supervisor contracts for bringing alternative contextual information into the supervision dialogue. Clarifying the context in which the supervisor’s experiences have been formed may help the supervisee determine how portable those experiences may be for them. Hawkins and Smith (2006) identify five areas for contracting, the third being the ‘Working Alliance’. Within that they suggest asking “What do we need to know about each other’s practice before we start supervision?” – often this is interpreted as clarifying the underpinning philosophies and models that the practitioner works with. However, these findings suggest that the explicit inclusion of each practitioner’s context (historical and current) would be helpful.

## **Principle Six: From Systems Perspective to the Parallel Process**

This principle reminds us that the executive coaching client is part of a complex environment, where changes will have a ripple effect on those around them. In extending this principle for supervision it felt appropriate to connect it to the notion of the parallel process (Searles, 1955) a regular component of supervision training. This is where the supervisor experiences in the here and now of the supervision session, dynamics which were in play in the coaching session itself. The original article emphasized the need for supervisors to have particularly good self-awareness. Supervisors need to differentiate between what is arising in their awareness as a result of their own triggers and needs, such that they could deduce what was genuinely arising from their experience of the supervisee and their client.

## **Themes from the qualitative feedback**

Both supervisors and coaches endorsed that idea that working with the parallel process was a fundamental part of supervision, predominantly by offering examples of it occurring. There were fewer comments on how the supervisor managed themselves to notice that the parallel process

was in play. However, there was some recognition of the need for supervisors to have a heightened level of self-awareness:

*“For me it is listening to myself, my awareness to my reactions and somatic responses” [S: 4164858]*

*“My supervisor sharing her insights in a light way – checking out with me – ‘this might be helpful or not’ or ‘this is what I noticed/am picking up on’” [C:4178030]*

The 2017 article proposed that the supervisor’s self-awareness is a kind of “uber-self-awareness” and that it will utilise many of our senses. This appealed to some:

*“I love this line from the handout....”The nature of a supervisor’s self-awareness is more holistic than a rational understanding” [S: 4164859]*

*“....picking up, often somatically, what is yet to be known consciously.” [S: 4164970]*

During the webinar, the analogy of using a filter was used to help us navigate the question of what, in our awareness, we bring into the session and what we leave out (because we assess that it belongs with us rather than our supervisee). One Supervisor commented:

*“Considered my ‘in the moment filter’ : empathy, relevance and emotion are the primary filters I apply”[S: 4164860]*

There was less corroboration of this aspect amongst the coach participant responses. Perhaps indicating that assessing what to bring and what not, is more of an introspective process for the Supervisor. However, one coach participant offered data which suggests her supervisor works collaboratively with what is in her awareness:

*“She will be vulnerable and share if she notices that she has been triggered, she will say that it is only my own stuff. I like us both being open and contracting that we can both share whatever comes for us, so it’s a 2-way process” [C: 4164948]*

A couple of research partners endorsed the idea of the filter and posed further questions, which could be generate additional material in a subsequent explanation.

*“I like the filter and residue. What do I do with the residue?” [S:4164869]*

*“one thing that only partly resonated was the filtering picture – in that the particles not filtered through, gave me the sense that they were left behind for good.... Perhaps it can be offered at another point.” [C: not given]*

It is possible that this principle was presented almost as a given, highlighting that the parallel process was a key component of supervision training. This may have made challenge difficult. Nonetheless, participant feedback included many examples of the parallel process in practice, indicating that it is often present in supervision.

## Implications for practice

The lack of responses sharing “how” the supervisor works with their emerging awareness, may have implications for supervisor training. It is not just the concept of the parallel process which needs explanation, additionally we need a somatic granularity of how the supervisor interprets their noticing, and how they engage their supervisees in a process of enquiry, before determining that a parallel process is indeed occurring.

## Principle Seven: From Coach to Coach Supervision Mindset

Bluckert's final principle offered encouragement to bring a coaching style to many conversations, not just formal coaching engagements. In extending this to supervision, it did not feel appropriate to encourage us to "supervise" wherever we could. Rather the original article commented upon the myriad of roles which can be brought into the supervision relationship. The analogy was offered that whereas many people may wear a coaching hat at times, in supervision we wear multiple hats depending on what we meet in the supervisee. As a result, what becomes critical is knowing where our boundaries lie and managing with awareness when we choose to cross, adapt or flex them.

### Themes from the qualitative feedback

There was general endorsement of the idea of multiplicity in our supervision role:

*The great value of this Principle that offers a flexibility into a coach / coaching supervision. The importance of ensuring that I am clear with my clients as to the 'lines that I will not cross' in our work together and explaining that should we be approaching the or one of those lines then I will signal that for my client, and we can explore what it means for us within our relationship. [S: word document]*

*I have spoken about my home experience which could be impacting my work..... I also want my supervisor to manage me and motivate me to progress as a manager would a member of staff and hold me accountable for my business goals. I seek advice and input. so much I want from my supervisors that over the years I have collected different people who meet differing elements for me. [ID200104]*

That said, one coach participant felt strongly that the supervision role should be held more cleanly and is perhaps a reminder that choosing our supervisor is a highly individual choice:

*Discussion is needed about the desirability and relevance of wearing many hats. For me, I don't like eclectic approaches. I will go to a counsellor for counselling, to a business-experienced person for business advice. I want a supervisor to stay working within a coaching supervision mindset - really milking the seven-eyed model [C: ID4200099]*

During the webinar discussion one participant (with a therapeutic background) declared a "deep-seated discomfort with the notion of blurring boundaries". Indeed, one of the additions brought to the webinar series was the inclusion of the Three C's model (Faire, 2013) which helps practitioners consider carefully what they do (or don't do) and when. The feedback indicates that this was a valuable addition:

*The key aspect is being mindful and ensuring that the relevant hat is being worn to follow the best interests of the client, rather than being worn out of the supervisor's preference. [S: 162756]*

*I think contracting is important to know the parameters of the relationship and to avoid being pulled into conversations that are outside of the expertise of the supervisor. I think it is also important for supervisors to be role models and to be able to state the hat they are wearing and their competence with this as we also need to be clear as coaches our remit and competence with clients. [C: ID4200093]*

The importance of selecting different hats and/or moving across role boundaries in a conscious way was noted:



*Clarity of role being communicated and mutually agreed- so that supervisor and supervisee both know the role and rationale for that hat being worn. [S: ID4265719]*

*to articulate more fully how broad (or narrow) the supervision experience is able to be, in the same way that coaching has a range, that supervision has or can have, a range too [C: ID4200095]*

In summary research partners seemed to notice the multiplicity of the supervision role and were conscious that doing so need to be done with awareness on behalf of the supervisor and permission on behalf of the supervisee.

## **Implications for practice**

While the adoption of different “hats” is a recognisable feature of coach supervision, it is important that this is signposted by the supervisor so that the decision on which hat is worn is a joint one. This could be achieved by careful contracting as well as active reflection on how adopting a particular hat influences the direction and/or impact of the supervision dialogue and the ongoing supervision relationship.

## **Discussion**

### **Coach maturity**

The potential for the level of coach maturity to influence the nature of the supervisor’s interventions was particularly noticeable in Principles One and Two, but also appeared elsewhere. While there is a certain logic that supervisors may respond to those early on in their journey from a more mentoring persona, it raises the question about how this eventuality is contracted for. Perhaps where there is a duty of care relating to the client, it may be appropriate for the supervisor to share personal examples of how a more experienced practitioner might work. However, while the sharing of good practice may be experienced as helpful, it may unwittingly be limiting the supervisees resourcefulness and invoke a dynamic of “teacher-pupil”. This possibility would benefit from further research as well as greater attention in supervision training.

### **Is this REALLY different to coaching?**

Lucas (2017) identified that early feedback had challenged whether these principles truly separated out differences between a coach and a coach supervisor, with considerable overlap being experienced. This challenge was also present with these research partners.

Clarifying the difference will therefore be an important element of any future descriptions of the Coach Supervisor Mindset. The matter is complicated because many coach supervisors are indeed master coaches as well, a legitimate element of coaching supervision is to “coach the coach”, and how each coach supervisor chooses to work will be a result of their own individual preferences.

### **General usefulness of working with Bluckert’s coaching framework in supervision**

As the author of the framework, I found Bluckert’s syntax of “from... to” useful to help differentiate between the two different applications of practice. However, this syntax caused confusion for many research partners, who felt it suggested binary thinking. Additionally, research partners observed that articulating a supervision mindset might benefit from less connection with Bluckert’s work so



that it could find its own space. These comments are useful to keep in mind as the framework evolves and is updated.

## Limitations

At the outset the number practitioners (n=48) consenting to be involved in the research looked favourable. However, only a proportion of people were actively involved in providing feedback consistently through the webinar series. By the end of the research numbers had dropped significantly and therefore the findings must be observed with that in mind. Additionally, research participants came from one of the many professional coaching bodies and this is only one narrow section of our wider community. Transferability of these findings cannot therefore be assumed.

In writing this article, I am the author of the original framework, the presenter of the material and the researcher analysing participating feedback. The level of subjectivity in the presented findings is high.

While criteria were established to determine the research groups, some research partners were trained as supervisors but did not meet the criteria as a “supervisor”, so participated as a “coach”. A number of entries illustrate a conflation of their experience as a supervisee and a supervisor. This may mean that the coach responses here are skewed in favour of those who are well educated in their understanding of supervision.

## Questions for further research

1. To what extent does the perceived maturity of the coach influence the amount and nature of input by the supervisor?
2. To what extent does the experience of the supervisor influence the amount and nature of input they provide and does this change depending on the perceived maturity of the supervisee?
3. Within the supervisor’s normative role how do they hold the potential for tension between their role power and the opportunity for a collaborative alliance?
4. What is the level of understanding of coaches and of supervisors about how a matter arising in supervision would be escalated?
5. What factors are significant in how a coach chooses a supervisor? When is experience from a similar or distinctly different context seen as most helpful?
6. How do supervisors notice that a parallel process may be in play, and how do they engage their supervisees with such hypotheses?
7. When is supervision distinctly different to coaching and when does it mirror executive coaching and vice versa?

## Conclusion

Participant feedback indicates that there is some degree of resonance for all seven principles, with principles five (context) and three (guardianship) needing most refinement. An updated version of the Coach Supervisor’s Mindset will be articulated in future.

There are some important questions about how the maturity of both the coach and the coach supervisor influences the supervision dialogue; how training schools prepare coach supervisors to contract when navigating our different roles appropriately; how training schools and professional bodies convey that escalation can be managed collaboratively; how supervisors are supported to both understand the parallel process as a concept, and build the skills to discuss how it may be manifesting. Additional research will be needed to address these matters.

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