

Reflections from the Field

Introducing the StEWARD framework: a perspective on the Coach Supervisor Mindset

Michelle Lucas ✉ (Greenfields Consulting Limited, Weymouth, UK)

Abstract

Building on previous research, this article identifies an acronym “StEWARD” as a framework for articulating and exploring a coach supervision mindset. The acronym stands for Stewardship, Exploring, Wisdom, Agility, Relationship and Doubt, the letter “t” is for tailor, which invites the practitioner to build on the framework capturing nuances in their own supervision approach. Each element is expanded upon in turn, describing the supervisor’s likely disposition, beliefs, feelings, and values. Consideration is then given to how this mindset will influence what the supervisor pays attention to and how they respond. Contracting is positioned as an opportunity for co-creation, each letter of the acronym invites specific consideration. Responding to feedback on Lucas (2017), particular attention is given to how these mindset principles differentiate between coaching and coach supervision practice. A discussion highlights how often a supervisor must hold the tension between potentially conflicting positions. Limitations of the concept are identified and recommendations for use for training providers, professional coaching bodies and practitioners are offered. The piece closes with two suggestions for further research.

Keywords

coach supervision, mindset, conceptual model

Article history

Accepted for publication: 10 July 2024

Published online: 01 August 2024



© the Author(s)

Published by Oxford Brookes University

Introduction

The concept of a ‘coach supervisor mindset’ surfaced in 2016 when designing a training programme for internal coaches developing their group supervision facilitation skills. Bachkirova and Lawton-Smith (2015) posited that a competency framework could oversimplify coaching practice, so it was timely to offer something separate from competency-based approaches to supervision. Extrapolating from Bluckert’s (2006) seven coaching principles, Lucas (2017) articulated seven principles for a coach supervisor mindset. Given this was a conceptual piece, feedback was sought, initially at coaching conferences and then through an action research

initiative, sponsored by the Association for Coaching. This process culminated in an overall endorsement of the seven principles (Lucas, 2024), while highlighting that some principles resonated with practitioners more than others. A critical piece of feedback was that leveraging Bluckert's thinking to initiate the framework was useful, however ongoing reference could restrict its development. Of the 7 principles proposed (Lucas, 2017), the third supervision principle (from ownership to guardianship) was understood, but its labelling was contested. While a new label, "stewardship" was offered, that too did not meet universal acceptance and continued to provoke debate. When forming the next iteration of this framework (presented here), the lack of consensus helps illustrate that StEWARD is not a formula, rather a structure which practitioners can use to explore the intention and application of their coach supervision practice.

This article begins with a summary of the StEWARD framework before elaborating each element. Consideration follows of how each element could be contracted for, along with its implications for practice. During the initial research, questions were raised challenging how a supervision mindset was different to the mindset of a master executive coach. The next section addresses this and provides a question for the practitioner's reflection.

The discussion focuses on observations which have arisen during the articulation of the framework. Recommendations for our community and recommendations for further research are also outlined.

Overview of the StEWARD framework

The acronym StEWARD has been developed, referring to the contentious label of Principle Three which emerged through the action research (Lucas, 2024). Choosing to develop a framework using an acronym based on an idea that was not universally supported felt congruent with the intention to encourage further debate.

The term "mindset" was first used in the 1930s to mean "habits of mind formed by previous experience" (Vocabulary.com; 2023). It is now defined as "a **disposition** to act in certain ways". The acronym "StEWARD" is presented in Table 1 as an overview with each element accompanied by a short description, framed as a "disposition".

Each element is then presented in more detail, using a consistent structure. The detailed description begins with a historical reference, relating back to Lucas (2017) and how the current element relates to one (or more) of the original seven principles. The element is then described in terms of the supervisor's disposition replicating the overview in Table 1. Disposition is defined by Vocabulary.com (2023) as a "complex mental state involving a combination of **beliefs, feelings and values**" and so these three items are articulated each time. Given supervision is seen as a partnership, the description concludes by offering a hypothesis of how the supervisee will experience this element.

Research partners suggested that greater granularity on "how" each element can be executed would be helpful:

"examples of when and how to move along/between ask and offer"

"clarify when the relationship will operate in this way"

"a little more body around the nature of patterns that show up"

Congruent with the definition of mindset as ... "a habitual or characteristic mental attitude that determines how you will **interpret and respond to** situations", each description contains the

section “*ELEMENT* in practice” where more practical detail is provided regarding what the supervisor will pay attention to (i.e., what they are interpreting) and how they are likely to respond.

Table 1: The elements of the STEWARD framework and the disposition which each element represents

	Label	The Supervisor’s disposition
S	Stewardship	A curiosity and responsibility for the person in supervision and all those stakeholders impacted by the work of the supervisee. A sense of being honourable and accountable for the integrity of our community at large.
<i>t</i>	<i>tailor</i>	<i>Space for each practitioner build in features that are unique to their personal supervision model</i>
E	Exploration	A keenness to discover what’s on the edge of awareness. Welcoming discussion that values divergence in thinking (and feeling and being) without the need to find solutions or create actions.
W	Wisdom	A willingness to share one’s own experience as a catalyst for the practitioner to connect with their own wisdom.
A	Agility	A recognition that “supervision” may wander into many different territories and so holding both tightly and lightly our awareness of boundaries as they are traversed.
R	Relationship	An understanding that what is happening in the supervision relationship will inform and influence the supervision and, in turn, the client work.
D	Doubt	An openness to working with hesitations and niggles (both the practitioner’s and the supervisor’s) seeing them as a friend who is offering information. A preparedness to be comfortable with discomfort.

Understanding and applying each element of the StEWARD framework

Stewardship

This element closely mirrors Lucas (2017) much debated third principle, “from ownership to guardianship”. It is proposed that to step into Stewardship, the supervisor must embrace the duality of hierarchical power that is inferred in their role while creating a collaborative working alliance. This element falls into the normative function of supervision, and while it is not an invitation to “parent” the supervisee, neither is it appropriate to locate ownership for what happens next, solely at the supervisee’s discretion.

The Supervisor’s disposition reflects a curiosity and responsibility, not just for the person in supervision, but for all those stakeholders impacted by the work of the person in supervision. With Stewardship, the supervisor holds a sense of honour and accountability for the integrity of our community at large. This comes from a belief that the supervisor may be the only person in place to be able to see something important and it is the supervisor’s duty to work transparently with what they see. As they supervise, they may feel a split, yet integrated loyalty to both the supervisee and the wider community. This potentially contradictory position is achieved through simultaneously holding the values of transparency (I will speak my truth and ask you to speak yours), respect (an assumption that all parties are working with good intent) and mutuality (a sense that success of the coaching community, of the supervisor and of the coach are all interconnected – masking concerns, for fear of conflict, will serve none of us). From the supervisee’s perspective they may feel invited to grow in ways which place being in service of their clients and the coaching profession over and above their own development agenda.

Stewardship in practice

Typically, the supervisor notices their discomfort with something in the supervisees practice and responds by voicing their discomfort with a blend of confidence and tentativeness. Their tone illustrating a curiosity and openness to hear more from the supervisee about whatever had prompted the (supervisor’s) discomfort. In turn, the supervisor offers more about what the discomfort is/was about for them; this might include an informational or educational piece, for example clarifying their understanding of good practice or highlighting potential ethical concerns.

Once both the supervisee and supervisor have exchanged more about the matter, the supervisor would check-in to see how the sharing and the discussion has impacted on both parties. From this vantage point it could be possible to agree next steps. This might be to move on, or to reflect more independently and revisit the matter next time, or to take specific actions in relation to the client or to the supervisee or supervisor.

Tailor

This element was not a feature of the original Lucas (2017) work, it emerged later. A description of a disposition is not provided as the invitation is for practitioners to tailor this framework according to their own supervision style. Some of the initial feedback recorded in Lucas (2017) was that authenticity was not explicitly included in the framework. The element of “tailor” is an opportunity to clarify that. Lucas (2017) purports that coaching supervision is more than coaching the coach. In developing a supervision mindset there is an encouragement to actively consider what is similar and what will be different as the practitioner expands their work from coaching, to coaching supervision. Rather than provide a description, what follows are questions for reflection, that may help the practitioner bring their own flavour to the StEWARD model:

- How are you different when you work as a supervisor in comparison to how you work as a coach?
- What are the key elements you feel are important to bring to your supervision? Of this, what is unique about your supervisory disposition?
- What beliefs, feelings and values guide your supervisory practice over and above those which guide your coaching practice, and beyond those mentioned here?
- How do your supervisees report experiencing supervision with you – and how does that inform your understanding of your supervision mindset?

Exploration

This element closely mirrors Lucas (2017) second principle “From solution-eering to exploring” and was strongly endorsed in the research. The supervisor’s disposition demonstrates a keenness to discover what is on the edge of awareness. They will welcome discussion that values divergence in thinking without the need to find solutions or create actions. This comes from a belief that the supervisee has probably noticed much more than they realise and that together, more can be revealed. The supervisor will likely feel a languid anticipation at what it might be possible to discover, being both hopeful and ease-ful in their communication. The values underpinning Exploration are curiosity and openness on the part of the supervisor and a respect for competence and autonomy of the supervisee. Research participants were quick to recognise the sense of “resolution” which emerges for the supervisee, feeling resourced to move forward. The metaphor used to describe the supervisee’s experience of Exploration was the idea of “stirring the pot”.

Exploration in practice

The supervisor prioritizes bringing more information into awareness without any assumption that it will provide greater clarity. They may do this through picking up on nuances in what or how the supervisee presents, eliciting greater granularity. Leveraging their own experience and intuition, they may identify a variety of possible territories for exploration. The supervision dialogue will follow the direction of the supervisees energy with the supervisor holding what has yet to be explored. There is a layered approach to the exploration as the supervisor will notice what is figural and what is in the background as this too may be information to explore.

Wisdom

This element combines Lucas (2017) first principle, “From ask to offer” which was strongly endorsed by research participants and the fifth principle “from single to multiple contexts” which was less well endorsed. While the supervisor may subscribe to a generally non-directive philosophy, both original principles called for the sharing of their experience, using it as a catalyst for the practitioner to connect with their own wisdom.

This is not used as an opportunity to showcase the supervisor’s expertise, rather the supervisor’s disposition will illustrate a generosity of spirit, sharing a diversity of learning experiences to accelerate the supervisees learning. The supervisor holds a belief that their own experience is both pertinent and insignificant. They are likely to feel both grounded in their own experience yet demonstrate a lack of attachment to its usefulness for the supervisee. This mindset rests on valuing the independence of the supervisee (respecting what, of the supervisors offer, they choose to pay attention to), congruence (a knowing that those experiences which have come into the supervisor’s awareness are likely to have significance) and diversity (a recognition that we must each weave our own particular ways of working if we are to be true to our authentic self). Through sharing both good and difficult experiences, the supervisee witnesses their supervisor as a fellow traveller, feeling seen, accepted, and understood. With multiple options brought into awareness, the supervisee notices what resonates making a choice about what to develop in their practice.

Wisdom in practice

There may be many moments when the supervisor notices an opportunity to share their own experience. Lucas (2024) suggests that we need to be cognisant of whether the offering of experience is a feature of the supervisor’s or supervisee’s assumptions, their wider relationship patterns, or a negotiated and explicit element of the contract.

Determining how much it is helpful to share is a collaborative endeavour and can be facilitated through the supervisor offering multiple practical examples. This can serve to highlight the different ways of approaching a similar situation and invites the supervisor to explain how context, and/or relationships and/or moments of learning influenced their chosen interventions. The supervisor demonstrates both credibility and an intelligent naivety through deliberately highlighting differences in content and context between their own experience and the situation in hand. This invites the supervisee to decipher what has utility for them.

Agility

This current element closely mirrors Lucas (2017) seventh principle “From coach to coach supervision mindset” which espoused that in supervision we may wander into many different helping practitioner territories. In the research webinars the metaphor was the invitation for the supervisor to wear one from any number of hats in their wardrobe. The supervisor’s disposition brings a respectfulness to the territories in which they travel with their supervisee, being vigilant of the ethical risks they could encounter should they veer away from their own competency.

The supervisor’s ability to navigate these multiple territories requires exceptional acuity as boundaries are encountered. The supervisor will be guided by a belief that they can be many things to the supervisee (supervisor, coach, mentor, critical friend, listening ear, cheerleader, sounding board) and that the supervisee will choose what they need. The supervisors emotional experience couples a desire to be of service with an assertiveness not to serve inappropriately. Underpinning values will include responsiveness to what is needed in the moment while taking care to only work within their sphere of competence, holding a deep respect for professional boundaries. Executed well, the supervisee will have the sense that everything and anything is welcome into the supervision space. They will also appreciate the limitations of their partnership, knowing that referrals are about professional safety, not rejection.

Agility in practice

Working with content that is at the edge of awareness, it is difficult to anticipate the supervisee's needs. However, the longevity of the supervision relationship allows the supervisor to develop an understanding of how the supervisee tends to use their supervision and be alert to any nuanced difference in the moment. Before intervening, the supervisor will be assessing the territory in which the presenting issue appears to lie and consider what additional issues might lie beneath it. The supervisor offers a high degree of trust in the supervisee as a fellow professional to understand the nature of support they need. The supervisor will hold in awareness and exercise vigilance when drawn to an intervention that lies on the cusp of a professional boundary. Provided that the supervisee has some capacity, the supervisor may be prepared to cross that boundary and simultaneously question the appropriateness of so doing. Often, the generous nature of allowing this, is sufficient for the supervisee to decide for themselves what they need. The supervisor will use their sharp sense of their own competence to assess whether ongoing exploration will take them to territories beyond that competence, and if so, voice the line that needs to be drawn.

Relationship

This element closely mirrors Lucas (2017) sixth principle "From systems thinking to parallel process spotting". The parallel process was identified as a common feature of supervisor training, it was easily recognised and strongly endorsed by research participants. The parallel process was first identified in the therapeutic field and was described by Searles (1955)

"processes at work currently in the relationship between patient and therapist are often reflected in the relationship between therapist and supervisor" (p. 135).

It is also captured as Eye Five (the relationship between coach and supervisee) of Hawkins & Shohet (2012) Seven-Eyed Model. Knowing that this phenomenon exists sharpens the supervisor's observation of how the relational dynamics are shaping and shifting. The supervisor's disposition welcomes the inspection of what is happening in the supervision relationship as a conduit for informing and influencing the supervision work and, in turn, the client work. This disposition is underpinned by the belief that how we are in relation to each other holds information about other relationships in the system. When in relationship with a supervisee, the supervisor will emanate a curious empathy about how it is to be together in the moment. There will be a confidence in the partnership that any shifts in how the relationship is experienced could parallel and therefore illuminate the client work. Equally, there will be a willingness to consider whether something in their partnership needs attention. Done well the supervisee will feel that they are fellow detectives, unpicking nuances to determine what may (or may not) be pertinent and for whom.

The supervisor will value objectivity (the need to avoid collusion), separateness (enabling congruence with the supervisee's own practice model, rather than emulating theirs), fallibility (seeing error as inevitable and an opportunity for learning) and vulnerability (an existential respect for the difficulties of being human).

Relationship in practice

Conceptually, the supervisor carries an understanding that what is unfolding in the supervision space may be mirroring what happened in the client space, even in a new supervision relationship. In practice, the supervisor needs exceptional self-awareness, understanding their whole-body equilibrium, knowing what can cause this to be jostled, what that jostling feels like and what it probably indicates.

Where the noticing reflects a nuanced difference in how the supervisee is presenting, this may indicate something being mirrored in the coach-client relationship. Sometimes the noticing will reflect a familiar pattern for the supervisor's own concerns, there is then an opportunity to share

their learning. The supervisor is cognisant that regardless of their super-self-awareness, it is always possible that what they are noticing is a manifestation of some unfinished business for themselves. Given this, a lack of attachment to the noticing is important, as to hold it too tightly could contaminate the supervisee's work.

What is critical here is how the supervisor holds the space as they determine who the noticing has utility for. Depending on the longevity of the supervision relationship and the intensity of what is being noticed, the supervisor may decide to withhold their sharing until they gain more data. With bravery, the supervisor may also share what they are noticing, without interpretation and simply enquire of the supervisee what they are noticing too. An analogy would be panning for gold, recognising that through the process we find many other bits and pieces too.

Doubt

This element closely mirrors Lucas (2017) fourth principle "From building self-belief to harnessing self-doubt" and was strongly endorsed in the research. The supervisor's disposition embraces an openness to working with hesitations and niggles (both the practitioner's and the supervisor's) seeing them as a friend who is offering information. In short, they have a preparedness to be comfortable with discomfort. Their disposition will stem from a belief that our doubts are useful to listen to, seeing them as the proverbial grit in the oyster, a prompt for developmental insights. Working this way can elicit some mild anxiety, akin to "feeling the fear and doing it anyway" (Jeffers, 1997) it brings a kind of edginess to the work which requires a trusting relationship, and which can reap transformational change. Despite this edginess, there will be a desire to "lean in" to the doubt and in so doing create enthusiasm for what might be discovered. The values which underpin this approach are likely to be a commitment to honesty from both parties and an unashamed acceptance of the gift of imperfection. The supervisee will feel affirmed that any doubt they are experiencing holds useful information about the complexity of the work. They will anticipate that the potential for growth is more significant than any feeling of incompetence which is evoked.

Doubt in practice

Coaching can be experienced as a lonely profession. Except for co-facilitated Team Coaching, no-one observes your client work and even when seeking a sense check with peers, practitioners must observe client confidentiality. As a result, many coaches bring to supervision something which appears to be calling for some reassurance. The supervisor needs to interpret whether the question posed is truly the core of the matter. When responding from a normative frame, the reassurance might be offered swiftly and lightly to help the supervisee feel accepted in their struggle. Once reassurance had been received, rather than move on, the supervisor may be inclined to "stay a while" with the issue exploring any restorative or formative components. The supervisor may consider whether the supervisee has previously been sufficiently grounded with similar issues. Where this is so, the supervisor's attention might move to the restorative role, becoming curious about what resources are currently eluding them. If the supervisee has capacity, the supervisor might hold off providing reassurance and encourage the supervisee to say more about the niggles and doubts they hold. Here the supervisor needs to role model uncertainty within the dialogue to help illustrate the inevitability of complexity and uncertainty in our work.

Implications for practice when working with StEWARD

Supervision is typically positioned as a collaborative and collegiate partnership, as these definitions illustrate (emphasis added)

- “Supervision is a **working alliance** between 2 professionals.....” Carroll (1994)
- “Coaching supervision is a **collaborative process** facilitating coaches (and coach supervisors) to grow their reflective practice....” Clutterbuck, Whitaker & Lucas (2016)

This philosophical stance can be achieved in practice when co-creating the contract for supervision. StEWARD offers a structure which can guide that contracting conversation, each element prompts a particular focus and is provided below. By articulating their personal interpretation of the framework, the supervisor invites a dialogue where both parties can clarify their expectations and intentions to map the landscape of supervision, together.

Stewardship: The potential for the supervisor to be prepared to “blow the whistle” on their supervisee can be a cause for concern for both parties. Therefore, when contracting for the supervision relationship, the supervisor needs to clarify how they will share any concerns, should they arise. It can be helpful to emphasize that there is equity in this position as it is also possible that the supervisee may feel it necessary to raise concerns about the supervisor’s practice. Related to this, both parties must clarify which code of ethics their practice is guided by, as well as the practicalities of the steps in an escalation process should different and unresolvable perspectives on possible ethical issues arise.

Exploration: When contracting it can be helpful to manage expectations about the likely energy and pace of supervision in comparison to coaching. It is helpful to remind a supervisee that supervision requires a more reflective energy and will likely have a slow pace. In the research webinars, this was described as “slow down to move in, rather than move on”. Additionally, it may help to position the possibility that supervision will cover fewer topics in depth and that the session may well end without agreeing an action plan.

This becomes more marked when a supervisee schedules supervision in between coaching clients – they are likely to experience a “jolt” through switching roles from listener to presenter, and they might also carry with them a more action-oriented energy. Practically it may be helpful to arrange supervision at a time that allows plenty of time either side of the session for preparation and digestion.

Wisdom: It can be tempting to explore at the outset each party’s expectations of how they will leverage the supervisor’s experience in a way that does not impede the supervisee’s independence. However, without content and context this will likely be an intellectual endeavour. It is only when the supervisee is in the grip of an enquiry that resolving the tension between offering input or not, can be truly addressed. The implication for practice is to introduce this possibility at the outset and to wait to fully contract for what is needed in the moment. Spot contracting may appear to interrupt the flow of the session and the supervisor may elect to follow their intuition, sharing their wisdom (or not) as they see fit. However, when working in the moment, this element overlaps with Exploration as the supervisee’s invitations and responses from the supervisor, hold information in its rawest of forms, from which even deeper insight may be possible.

Agility: Typically, the more extensive the supervisee’s support network, the more likely that the supervision dialogue will reside within a “pure” supervision territory. Therefore, when commencing the supervision partnership, a review of the supervisee’s support network is useful. For example, do they have a coach of their own? Are they connected to their local coaching community where they can get informal peer support? Perhaps they have a business coach or mentor? What are their other supervision arrangements – both peer and professional? Should the supervision dialogue stray away from the core of client work, the supervisee can be signposted to their wider network. Additionally, during an intake session, the supervisor could enquire how the supervisee manages their wellbeing, including whether they have a history of accessing mental health practitioner support. Where this has been the case, a conversation about trigger points, coping strategies and potential warning signs would be prudent.

Relationship: Perhaps the most significant implication here for practice is for the supervisor to consider the developmental maturity of the supervisee. Through an intake session, a narration of their coaching and coaching supervision journey might enable some hypotheses to be made.

However, this is no substitute for observing (and offering feedback) on how the supervisee uses the supervision space; their genuine maturity will become evident only through time. The supervisor needs to be adept at pitching interventions according to the supervisee's readiness. For example, the parallel process is a complex concept to understand, and even when understood may not directly illuminate what action is then needed. This can cause confusion for the novice practitioner or even the mature practitioner who has been triggered and lost some of their capacity. More transactional supervision interventions may be sufficient even when the supervisee's learning is not as comprehensive as the supervisor notices it could be. The supervisor may want to develop a system for noting those missed learning opportunities such that they can be revisited later in the supervision provision. To avoid making a unilateral judgement about the supervisee's maturity, the supervisor might use some of the models of coach maturity (Hawkins and Smith 2006, Clutterbuck and Megginson, 2011) or of reflective practitioner maturity (Butler, 2022) to engage the supervisee in a developmental discussion.

Doubt: When contracting, it can be helpful to frame supervision as a place where both struggles and successes can be brought, this provides a natural counterbalance within, and across, supervision sessions. Without this, supervision may develop a confessional tone and/or the supervisee may experience a dependency on the supervisor to gain reassurance. So often doubt elicits a downbeat energy and so, as the supervisor, engaging with a warm and more active energy, welcoming in the doubt can help maintain equilibrium. In the research webinars, a clip from *The Jungle Book* was used where Baloo shows a doubtful Mowgli how to really scratch an itch against a coconut tree. The sense of pleasure that this scene evokes illustrates the joy that exploring Doubt can hold if we let it. As the service provider, the supervisor may have a desire to present themselves credibly, yet to role model Doubt, the supervisor must create a space where neither party need perform, rather their whole "messy self" (Maxwell, 2009) is welcome. For example, the supervisor could explore, what of their espoused style will serve the partnership well and what will need to be adapted or discarded. This demonstration of vulnerability and uncertainty helps the supervisee experience how it is to be in a state of not-knowing and is an implicit invitation for them to bring their uncertainty and doubt too.

Comparisons with the mindset of a Master Executive Coach

One of the initial critiques of Lucas (2017) was whether the principles truly differentiated between the mindset of the master executive coach and that of the coach supervisor. This is difficult to prove as coaching practitioners differ, their practice will evolve over time and be adapted to client needs. It is unlikely that a practitioner will work with any one client as both an Executive Coach and as their supervisor. However, it is entirely possible that in keeping with the element of "Agility" there may be moments where the supervisor and/or supervisee work together in a "coaching the coach" frame. It is critical, therefore, that the practitioner has their own understanding of how they practice in each domain. This is precisely what the "Tailoring" element of the framework provides provocation for. Nonetheless, in response to earlier feedback, below is a consideration of the overlaps, similarities, and potential differences for each element, concluding with a question for the supervisor's reflection on their own practice.

Stewardship

For any client working in an organisational context, the two-way ripple effect of systemic influences (both the organisational impact on the individual and the individual impact on the system) is a feature for consideration. For an Executive Coach, whether this feature is explored will likely be a question of the coach's philosophy, style, contract and, possibly, experience. Nonetheless, the beneficiary of this systemic exploration is the coaching client as framed by the coaching objective.

By comparison, a supervisor's consideration of wider system influences is an ethical duty and an integral part of the supervision role. Therefore, the beneficiary of this exploration is not only the supervisee, but also all the stakeholders that the supervisee's practice touches (past, present, and future).

- When I pay attention to the wider system – what do I notice about my intentions for doing so?

Exploration: It is perhaps a myth that good coaching practice must start with a clear goal and end with an agreed action plan. Current coaching approaches are often more fluid and emergent than the GROW model (Whitmore, 1996) might imply. However, when a coach moves from exploring to action this is most often driven by the client's (individual or sponsor) agenda. There is likely to be a pre-determined focus, even if this is held loosely by both parties.

By comparison a supervisor will rarely move away from exploring unless it is driven by a matter that invokes a Stewardship consideration. Even then as described above, more reflection rather than action will often be the next step. In supervision, given so much of what is explored is on the cusp of awareness it is almost impossible to anticipate what the purpose of the exploration will be. As a result, sessions will typically have a diffuse and emergent flavour.

- When you move away from exploration – what is it that has prompted you to do so?

Wisdom: Most of the professional coaching bodies encourage a non-directive stance to coaching and may use the sharing of experience to delineate the difference between coaching and mentoring. However, in practice, a coach is often selected because of a shared background or experience, and this will inevitably inform the questions they pose. Therefore, the boundary between non-directive and directive interventions may be more fluid than coaching competency frameworks would suggest. Nonetheless, it would be good practice for a coach only to bring in their own experiences and perspectives when this is specifically contracted for.

At times a supervisor will take a "coaching the coach" approach – asking open questions and veering away from more directive interventions. However, a supervisor is expected to bring in their own experiences and perspectives as legitimate responses to all four functions of supervision (technical, ethical, personal, and commercial; Lucas and Larcombe, 2016) when this is done in service of the supervisee and/or their clients. While there may be some echoes of a mentoring approach with this element, the purpose of the supervision relationship is not to be a mentor.

- What criteria do you check upon before offering your own experience?

Agility: In coaching, the work is likely to be future-focused and the coach selected based on the client's particular coaching objective. Programmes tend to be of 6-12 months duration and typically, we can expect the Executive coaching client to begin the coaching from a resourceful space. Complex more therapeutic issues can sometimes be revealed as the work deepens and/or specific training needs may be identified. Contextually, referrals to other helping practitioners and alternative interventions are generally available and financed by the organisation. The coach can be responsive to the client's needs within clearly delineated boundaries, knowing the client has access to more support.

For a supervisor, the territory will likely be broader. While the coach may have a specific development agenda, how their client work will impact on them is unknown. The supervision relationship tends to span years not months, during which the supervisee may encounter challenges in their personal as well as their professional life. Additional complexity arises for independent coaches, hence the inclusion of the Commercial perspective of supervision by Lucas and Larcombe (2016). The territory of supervision is inevitably broader than that of coaching and requires responses that are similarly broad. Practically, independent coaches are not cocooned by a wider organisation and may have fewer financial resources to access multiple elements of

support. A supervisor's underpinning training will allow for a greater range of responses, they may therefore stay longer in a "grey zone" with their supervisee than a coach would. Nonetheless referrals are expected when the dialogue moves to a territory that the supervisor is not equipped to work in.

- How free do you feel to follow your intuition and to move into adjacent professional territories?

Relationship: According to de Haan (2008), working in a relational way is a foundational element of coaching. Some coaches may embrace the notion of "self as instrument" (Bachkirova, 2016) and use their own experience of the client as material for the coaching discussion. This is captured in some professional body's competencies (for example: Evokes Awareness, indicator 7; ICF, 2023) Whether a practitioner subscribes to this stance will depend on the coach's training (of which there is huge variety in the marketplace) philosophy and style. Only those coaches trained from a psychodynamic perspective would integrate ideas of transference, countertransference and projection and name them as such with a client.

Conversely, working in a relational way is a fundamental and consistent building block of supervision. Supervisors are specifically trained to work with parallel process, regardless of training school. Indeed, Cavicchia and Gilbert (2019) and Adamson and Brendgen, (2021) would hold that the coach: supervisor relationship generates mutual benefit and reciprocal influence. In the context of professional supervision, this brings a particular risk. While the collegiate nature of supervision legitimises the idea of being fellow learners, the supervisor must ensure that their desire for their own growth does not overshadow their supervisee's. By contrast this risk is rarely encountered in coaching assignments, where the executive coach is more clearly positioned as a service provider for the client and their organisation.

- How central is the dynamic of the working relationship in service of your client?

Doubt: While each coach will work within their own philosophies and beliefs, generally coaches will emphasize self-belief and positivity. A client's doubt may be encountered as part of the process and the coach will seek ways to counterbalance or overcome it, the intention being to manage the doubt away. Individual differences aside, it is highly unlikely that a coach would share any personal doubts they hold. They are more likely to remain steadfast in their belief of their client's potential, and silent about any personal vulnerabilities they are managing.

Conversely, in supervision, the supervisee's doubt is often the experience which has precipitated the topic brought for discussion. The presence of doubt is therefore seen as a catalyst for the work. The supervisor will embrace it and explore it keeping it more central to the dialogue. The supervisor is more likely to share their own doubts, role modelling humility and vulnerability. The intention here is to leverage doubt to fuel further exploration.

- When doubt or uncertainty manifests for your client how do you tend to work with it?

Discussion

As the detail of the elements of the framework were articulated, it was noticeable that for many of them there is a need for the supervisor to work with duality. Often there are a couple of threads which can seem paradoxical to hold simultaneously. For example, with Stewardship the supervisor must hold the authority of their supervisory status while also developing a collaborative relationship. This is particularly tricky because knowing the supervisor may be the only person in a place to be able to see something important, may paradoxically increase the possibility that the supervisee may employ strategies (conscious or unconscious) to prevent it from being seen. It is also a feature of Agility. A key role of the supervisor is to support the practitioner to manage their

boundaries well and to identify when referral is needed. However, the scope of the supervisor to enter territories other than “pure” supervision is wider than would be appropriate for the coach with their clients. So, there is tension around how the supervisor meets the supervisee’s need without implying that the supervisee should do likewise in their coaching practice. Wisdom presents similar challenges. A significant number of research participants (supervisors) suggested that newer practitioners ask and/or expect a supervisor to share their experience. While this feels like an instinctively human response, the position of this framework is that, paradoxically, this is precisely when the supervisor should withstand such an expectation. With maturity, a practitioner can weigh up another’s experience and consider which parts would be congruent with their existing approach. For a novice, without such experience they might lack discernment and attempt to emulate the ways of their supervisor. This feels unhelpful, diluting the opportunity for self-discovery and stunting independent thinking, whilst potentially creating a dependence on the supervisor. The mindset of Doubt also feels contradictory, as when faced with uncertainty the supervisor may need to both recognise the human desire for reassurance and clarity yet trust the generative power of leaning into uncertainty and of not knowing, embracing confusion as an essential part of the learning process.

The inclusion of “Tailor” in the framework becomes important when navigating these kinds of dualities. There is no absolute correct response. The supervisor must make a conscious choice in the moment based on what has been contracted for alongside both intuition and the information available. What will help this navigation is the reference back to the beliefs and values that underpin each element. When the supervisor is steadfast in their beliefs and values an authentic and empathic discussion, which embraces “both/and” considerations, becomes possible.

Limitations

That the research was done under the auspices of one of the professional coaching bodies (the Association for Coaching) undoubtedly brings some limitations. The AC is one of the professional bodies that encourages tailoring of one’s own model and requires articulation of each practitioner’s philosophy and approach for accreditation. By carrying out similar research with members of alternative professional coaching bodies, and practitioners with no affiliation to a professional body, it would deepen the perceived robustness of the framework, and may also challenge its broad applicability.

Explaining the framework element by element gives StEWARD a piecemeal flavour. However, the elements intertwine and support each other. It is important that practitioners do not see StEWARD as a formula that has to be learned and delivered. Rather, it offers a structure for further discussion and reflection. As the framework becomes more fully understood, it would be interesting to consider how supervisor and supervisee maturity, supervision topic and/or context influences what of the framework is central to the supervision work and what fades to the background. Similarly, it offers a reference point for reflective practice – considering when practitioners feel they are operating congruently with the framework and when there is dissonance with it.

Recommendations for use

StEWARD was developed as a mindset framework in the context of practitioner development. It could inform the programme content of coach supervisor training, in addition to existing competency frameworks. This would encourage practitioners in training not just to think about the behaviours they are developing, but to consider more deeply the purpose of their coaching supervision work. It could also prompt them to articulate how it is similar and/or different to their coaching work and to become more introspective and identify which of their values will help guide them towards their coaching supervision purpose.

In addition to training providers, it is hoped that the framework will be useful directly to practitioners who are journeying from practicing as a coach to practicing as a coach supervisor. It offers a structure against which to map their current developmental focus. The questions raised in the section looking at differences between the master coach and the coach supervisor may be useful for their reflective practice. The framework also has utility for supervisees – in the spirit of a working alliance, reviewing the elements of StEWARD, might illuminate which aspects of coaching supervision feel particularly important, anxiety provoking or confusing. During chemistry or onboarding conversations, the framework offers a language to help each party connect and explore each other's expectations and perspectives. The contracting points identified above, also offer an agenda, to return to over time to calibrate how the supervision relationship is evolving.

Given each element offers an attitudinal rather than behavioural perspective and there is deliberate recognition that each practitioner will have their own unique approach, this could expand the criteria of accreditation and credentialling processes. Currently, some rely on measures of whether certain skills are present or absent. We invite all professional coaching bodies to consider layering their current approach with the concept of a mindset. For example, requiring an articulation of the practitioner's approach to coach supervision, which includes consideration of their beliefs and values.

Implications for practitioners

The mindset of a coach is different to the mindset of a coach supervisor, it is important for each practitioner to know what is different for them

- The articulation of a coach supervisor's values, beliefs and feelings offers additions and/or alternatives to existing competency frameworks
- StEWARD can be a helpful framework for reflection and developmental discussions

Recommendations for further research

The elements of StEWARD have been endorsed sufficiently to move enquiry from defining content to seeking evidence of StEWARD in the supervision dialogue. This could be done for the framework as a whole or each element could be subject to inspection separately.

Given "Relationship" provides the least differentiation between the coach and the coach supervisor mindset. This might deserve particular research attention and clarify whether "Relationship" is sufficiently distinct to be part of the framework.

Conclusion

Any framework that tries to codify an emergent relational process can only provide an approximation to the rich reality of the work. It is hoped that this framework offers a common language upon which to take the education of supervisors beyond competency-based approaches. Embracing and embedding a StEWARD mindset will give greater confidence that good practice supervision behaviours will follow. By sharing the framework with supervisees, it will mark the beginning of a genuinely co-created supervision relationship. The inherently human and personalised articulation of the supervisor's mindset will manifest in how they want to "be" with their supervisee. It is hoped that this narrative approach will be more accessible than sharing a generic checklist of pre-determined behavioural indicators that have yet to be experienced by the supervisee.

Acknowledgements

With thanks to the research partners, all members of the Association for Coaching for their generous contributions and discussions

Thanks also to Dr. Carmelina Lawton-Smith for her informal peer review and insightful feedback which helped shaped my jottings into a more structured piece.

References

- Adamson, F. & Brendgen, J., (2021). *Mindfulness-Based Relational Supervision: Mutual Learning and Transformation*. Maidenhead: Routledge.
- Bluckert, P. (2006) *Psychological Dimensions of executive coaching*. Maidenhead: McGraw Hill.
- Bachkirova, T., (2016). The self of the coach: Conceptualization, issues, and opportunities for practitioner development. *Educational Publishing Foundation*. 68 (2), p. 143. DOI: [10.1037/cpb0000055](https://doi.org/10.1037/cpb0000055).
- Bachkirova, T. (2011). *Developmental coaching: Working with the self*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Bachkirova, T. & Lawton-Smith, C. (2015). From competencies to capabilities in the assessment and accreditation of coaches. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, 13(2), pp. 123 -140. Available at: <https://radar.brookes.ac.uk/radar/items/a7515cd5-e58f-4aa6-b504-a1f9c6b92268/1/>.
- Butler, H. (2022). *Exploring the experience of self-reflection and the impact self-reflection has on coaching practice: A Grounded Approach*. MSc Dissertation. Sheffield Hallam University.
- Carroll, M.F., (1994). *The generic tasks of supervision: An analysis of supervisee expectations, supervisor interviews and supervisory audio-taped sessions*. UK: University of Surrey.
- Cavicchia, S. & Gilbert, M., (2018). *The theory and practice of relational coaching: Complexity, paradox and integration*. Maidenhead: Routledge.
- Clutterbuck, D. & Megginson, D., (2011). Coach maturity: An emerging concept. *The handbook of knowledge-based coaching: From theory to practice*, pp.299-313.
- Clutterbuck, D., Whitaker, C. & Lucas, M. (2016). *Coaching Supervision: A practical guide for supervisees*. Maidenhead: Routledge.
- De Haan, E., (2008). *Relational coaching: Journeys towards mastering one-to-one learning*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.
- Jeffers, S. (1997). *Feel the fear and do it anyway*. London: Ebury Publishing.
- Hawkins, P. & Shohet, R. with contributions from J. Ryde, & J. Wilmot, (2012). *Supervision in the Helping Professions (Supervision in context)*. (4th ed.) Berkshire, England: Open University Press/McGraw-Hill Education.
- Hawkins, P. & Smith, N. (2006). *Coaching, mentoring and organisational consultancy: Supervision and development*. Maidenhead: Open University.
- ICF (2022) *Core Competencies. ICF - Core Competencies*. Accessed: 5th November 2023. Available at: <https://www.coachingfederation.org.uk/>.
- Lucas, M. & Larcombe, A. (2016). Helping independent coaches develop their business – a holistic approach to supervision or an opportunity for supervisors to exploit their position. *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching*. Professional Section. Volume IX, Article 3, September 2016.
- Lucas, M. (2017). 'From coach to coach supervisor – a shift in mind-set', *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, 15 (1), pp.11-23. (Accessed: 26 June 2024) Available at: <https://radar.brookes.ac.uk/radar/items/545bafc8-58cb-4604-83a0-a70d13296373/1/>.
- Lucas, M. (2024). From coach to coach supervisor - a shift in mindset. What resonates with practitioners? *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring* 22,(1), pp. 267-283. DOI: [10.24384/fmkb-0p73](https://doi.org/10.24384/fmkb-0p73).
- Maxwell, A., (2009). How do business coaches experience the boundary between coaching and therapy/counselling? *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, 2(2), pp.149-162. DOI: [10.1080/17521880902930311](https://doi.org/10.1080/17521880902930311).
- Searles, H. F. (1955). The informational value of the supervisor's emotional experience. *Psychiatry*, 18, pp. 135- 146.
- Vocabulary.com *Mindset - Definition, Meaning & Synonyms* [Accessed: 12th September 2023) Available at: <https://www.vocabulary.com/>.
- Whitmore, J. (1996). *Coaching for Performance: Growing human performance and potential*. Nicholas. Brealey Publishing

About the author

Michelle Lucas is an Accredited Master Executive Coach and Accredited Master Coach Supervisor (Individual and Group) with the Association for Coaching. Trained at Oxford Brookes she has a PG Diploma in both Coaching & Mentoring and in Coaching & Mentoring Supervision. Greenfields is a boutique consultancy specialising in coaching and in supervision for both internal and independent coaches. She has co-authored two titles with Routledge and has been the sole editor of two more, all in the field of supervision and reflective practice.