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The relational matrix model of supervision: context, framing and inter-connection

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Abstract: This article proposes a matrix model applicable to a wide range of supervisory relationships and settings; therapeutic and organisational. The emphasis is upon a 'relational' approach, where the term 'relational' is used to refer to two key interrelated concepts. First, supervisory issues arise as a *direct product of* situations. Second, the quality of the supervisory relationship is therefore *preconfigured by, and in itself preconfigures,* the content, process and output of the session/meeting. For these reasons we see the context of supervision as being of fundamental importance in framing both the 'what and how' of the supervision session. This article describes these proposals and the relational matrix model in more detail and discusses some implications for supervision that arise.

Keywords: supervision, relational, relational matrix model, situation, other, self.

> All entities in the natural world, including us, are thoroughly relational beings, of great complexity, who are both composed of and nested within contextual networks of dynamic and reciprocal relationships. (Spretnak, 2011, p. 4)

Introduction

The very word 'supervision' holds connotations of assessment and being overseen or managed; power is implied and notions of control evoked. And yet, the supervisory relationship is intended as a *support* for best quality work and necessary continuing professional development (CPD). For many organisational practitioners, psychotherapists, counsellors, managers, or coaches, the supervisory context is therefore unique in the sense that it brings together a multitude of roles and functions.

At the most foundational level, the supervisor acts as the ethical and legal gatekeeper to ensure professional standards and governance frameworks are adhered to. Very often, however, the supervisor's role is also one of mentoring and training and, invariably, a successful supervisory relationship is principally one of support that enables the supervisee to work at their best. The functions of this relationship are therefore both complex and intricate, especially when the supervisor may have a degree of clinical, managerial, or contractual responsibility for the work. Together with Ellis (2010), therefore, we believe that one vital element that makes this delicate balancing possible is a solid working relationship between all parties.

However, beyond the importance of the supervisory relationship itself, supervision must also pay attention to the multitude of connections and relationships it attends to and which form the context (or ground) that frame the supervisory process. Kurt Lewin (1951), in his seminal work on field theory, showed that our behaviour at any one time is a function of a multitude of influences in our lives, past and present. He called this intricate web of social, situational and psychological influences the 'life space'.

In supervision, the supervisee and supervisor each bring their own 'life spaces', their connection to others (particularly the client), and the contexts and situations in which they are all embedded. The influences and impact of each of these connections is alive in the room and needs acknowledgement and exploration at different times. Indeed, these connective dimensions have been previously well articulated in Hawkins and Shohet's (1989) 'process model' and are recognised as forming an elaborate matrix of influences that configure supervisory processes and affect outcomes.

Our own experience as supervisors, however, gathered across many years and a wide range of contexts, including coaching, psychotherapy, counselling, consulting, management, and training, has been that of foundational importance is the *context* within which the supervision is occurring. Indeed, this variable was recognised by Hawkins and Shohet in 2006 when they

included the environment in their expanded '7-eyed' model.

Our wish in this paper is to further define and nuance these contextual/situational factors and, indeed, to elevate them to the status of processes that *preconfigure* what is possible in the supervisory space. In other words, we will propose that the influence of context is so strong that it frames, defines, forms and indeed limits what is possible. We will argue that this is true irrespective of the skills of the supervisor/supervisee, the quality of their working alliance, or the field of praxis in which they are working, whether organisational or therapeutic. In arguing this, we will therefore be leaning on a deeply contextual, or 'relational' approach, proposing that we are '*of* the field/context' (as in a gestalt formulation), rather than working *within* a field (as in a systemic or 7-eyed formulation).

This article thus provides a way of viewing, exploring and working with these multiple dimensions in a supervisory context. It starts with defining more rigorously what we mean by relational and then provides an outline of a guiding model of supervision that arises from our work as relational training supervisors. In particular, the impact of the situation, culture and context in framing what occurs within sessions is highlighted. Each individual element of the model will be briefly illustrated with examples from our work in a way that helps bring the model alive and illuminates its use in supervision. Our primary intent, however, is to emphasise the interconnectedness of these elements and to flesh out and elevate the importance of situation/context in all forms of supervision.

What is relational?

The word 'relational' is becoming increasingly important and widely used in Organisational Development (OD), psychotherapy, coaching, leadership and in everyday conversation. Relational for us transcends the usually polarised view of attending to the other's need/being of service to others versus seeing the other as a resource to satisfy one's own relational needs. Rather, as described by Denham-Vaughan and Chidiac (2013), it is based on a key postmodern concept: the idea that rather than individual things or people being the main, sometimes only, focus of attention, it is the relationships existing between or amongst them that offer maximum possibility for change.

This can be viewed in supervision as a move away from only addressing client pathology or the supervisee's skill base to focusing on the relationships they have, both with others and between them, and the context in which these connections arise. Indeed, it was this focus on relational process and not pure content that initially defined Hawkins and Shohet's (1989) model. Brooks (2011), states:

> People don't develop first and create relationships. People are born into relationships – with parents, with ancestors – and those relationships create people. (p. 43)

In other words, the quality of our relationships powerfully *defines and shapes* the 'quality' of us as individuals, be that individual people, teams, organisations or communities. Indeed, neurobiological research (e.g. Siegel, 2007) reveals that our developing brains, although genetically informed, are very heavily influenced by our relationships with others throughout our lives. Similarly, it is well documented that these foundational webs of relationships and interactions within an organisation determine the emerging sense of culture and identity, and have a profound impact on resulting productivity and performance (e.g. Kotter and Heskett, 1992; Truskie, 1999; Alvesson, 2002).

At Relational Change we captured this relational paradigm in our SOS model (Denham-Vaughan and

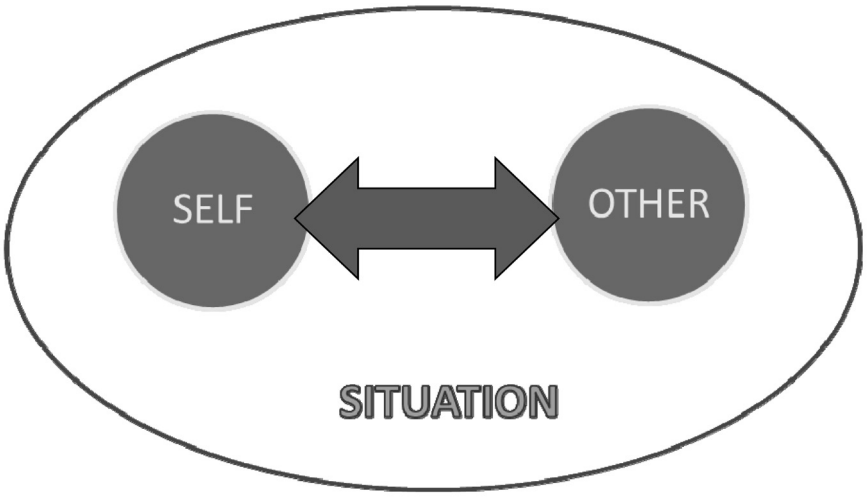

Figure 1: SOS model

Chidiac, 2013) and proposed that a relational stance is one that finds a 'situationally appropriate balance' between the three interrelated elements illustrated in Figure 1:

- Self; which can be seen as either the individual, group, community or organisation principally conducting and 'owning' the inquiry.
- Other; as the 'other' in the relationship at any given moment; when reflecting, this can be the 'other within the self' (for example, the internalised supervisor).
- Situation; here referring to the overall context/culture in which the issues are embedded.

Importantly, we believe that when the three processes of Self, Other and Situation are all operating in ways that respond to the demand qualities of the context, then we are most 'present'; able to access our fullest potential in accordance with our most deeply held values. At this point SOS becomes not just a placeholder for three separate components, but also (utilising its status as a globally recognised distress call) a metaphorical reminder that we are all interconnected, vulnerable and in need of help/support.

As with all ideas, the relational perspective relies on key philosophical and ethical assumptions. Essentially, it is a refuting of modernity and its reliance on the irrefutable foundations of reason and a leaning instead towards a postmodern philosophical stance where knowledge and reality are a co-construction which evolves in relationship. In today's world, where individualism and self-interest still largely dominate the politics at the social, organisational or individual levels, the relational position is still counter-cultural. The SOS model therefore holds ethical and practical assumptions that we are intricately and inescapably linked to each other and our environment. This recognition is fundamental and alters our perceptions of who we are, what resources we really need, and that an ethical future is based on our ability to collaborate, compromise and act together.

We would therefore propose a relational perspective as an ethical state of mind to cultivate when working on either 'side' of the supervisory relationship: whether we are in the role that identifies with potentially more power/control or less.

A relational matrix

By combining the SOS model and the dimensions of client, supervisee and supervisor, we naturally come to a matrix of possibilities to explore and be curious about. Figure 2 shows the Relational Supervision Matrix which results from such an amalgamation.

Each element of the matrix provides a specific lens for exploration in supervision. The advantage of the matrix is that it spans the individual (Self) and the systemic/contextual (Situation) whilst retaining the focus on our connection to others (Other). The matrix model also illuminates how all three components (Self, Other and Situation) configure our perception and subsequent behaviours.

Reading across the matrix, the naïve and/or inexperienced supervisee might focus on the first column (Client) and come full of detail about their client's narrative, history and presentation, unaware of their own essential role in how the therapy or coaching process, for example, is unfolding. At the other polarity lie supervision sessions that focus solely on the supervisee's process and context and thus implicitly place the responsibility of what is, or is not, happening in the relationship at the feet of the supervisee alone (middle column: Supervisee). Lastly, the supervisor's own responses, their countertransference reactions and wider contextual/governance issues are a key aspect of supervision, affecting what is brought to supervision, how it is discussed and what actions are taken (last column: Supervisor). Importantly, however, these would rarely be the primary figure of the work, or both supervisee and client issues would be missed and important relational tones effaced.

Considering the rows, we can see that solely attending to row 1 (Self – whether of client, supervisee or supervisor), takes a highly individualistic stance, wherein responsibility for both problem and solution are laid at the feet of one or possibly two individuals. In our experience, when this row is overly focused on, relational ruptures can easily explode, with individuals feeling blamed and shamed for identified issues. At the other polarity is row 2 (Other/Relational Field – whether of the client, between client and supervisee, or between supervisee and supervisor). While exploration of each of these relationships is crucial to supervision and a sense of support, solely focusing on these dimensions can avoid identification/ownership of crucial actions and a corresponding lack of personal responsibility or accountability for actions. With reference to row 3 (Situation – the client's living conditions/culture, legal/ethical/governance codes affecting the work, contracting issues and power hierarchies) these are the situational/contextual issues from which rows 1 and 2 emerge. In our model they are therefore foundational and of vital importance in framing and shaping the supervisory work.

In teaching this model, we have found it helpful to distinguish two parts within the model which can be loosely viewed as typically the 'ground' and 'figure' of supervision. In the 'L' shape formed by the Situation row (row 3) together with the other two boxes in column one (Client and Other), these five boxes (see

Figure 2, the shaded area formed by cells 1, 2, 3, 6 and 9) can be viewed as shaping the ground from which the supervision figures emerge. We suggest therefore that what is often figural in supervision (which can often feel like the 'real work') occurs in cells 4, 5, 7 and 8. We have found that this distinction supports the supervisor in being more aware of where they spend most of their time in supervision and the need to work in awareness of the relationship between figure and ground, respecting our existential embeddedness in situations, contexts and cultures.

The remainder of this paper will briefly address each individual cell of the matrix in turn and illustrate it with examples relevant to supervisory work. We recognise, however, that excellent, detailed and lengthy descriptions of the cells/lenses exist in other texts and would suggest that interested readers consider Casement (1985), Hawkins and Shohet (2006), and Carroll and Gilbert (2011) as starting points for further exploration.

Cell 1: The client in focus

This first cell focuses on the psychotherapy/counselling client, direct report or coachee themselves; how they present, what are their issues and narratives? The aim here is to support the supervisee to pay more attention to their client's *process* and the totality of the client's life/work situation.

With some client presentations, it is often too easy to focus on the 'content' of the issue, be it a conflict with a manager, a relationship difficulty or another complex ongoing situation. The issue itself becomes so figural, the story so broad and encompassing, that we do not gain a sense of the client as a whole situated in their life space. Instead, we listen to the details of the story which eclipses the wider field.

As supervisors, at times like these, we often struggle to bring the whole of the client into focus as there is insufficient ground; we have only seen their 'issue'. As relational practitioners we recognise that 'every person's life is worth a novel' (Polster, 1987), whilst also acknowledging that each story can be described in many ways. In other words, there are infinite different grounds for what appears to be the same figure.

As we know, the lens through which we look at people and situations is a subjective one which influences our interventions, the meanings that we make and the fascinations we choose to follow. We will each have a differing perspective on one client presenting with low mood following her mother's death two months ago and another client presenting similarly whose history includes severe trauma and having been actively suicidal on several previous occasions. Likewise, the coachee who describes an aggressive manager who shouted at them in a team meeting contrasted with a coachee who presents with repeated claims of 'bullying

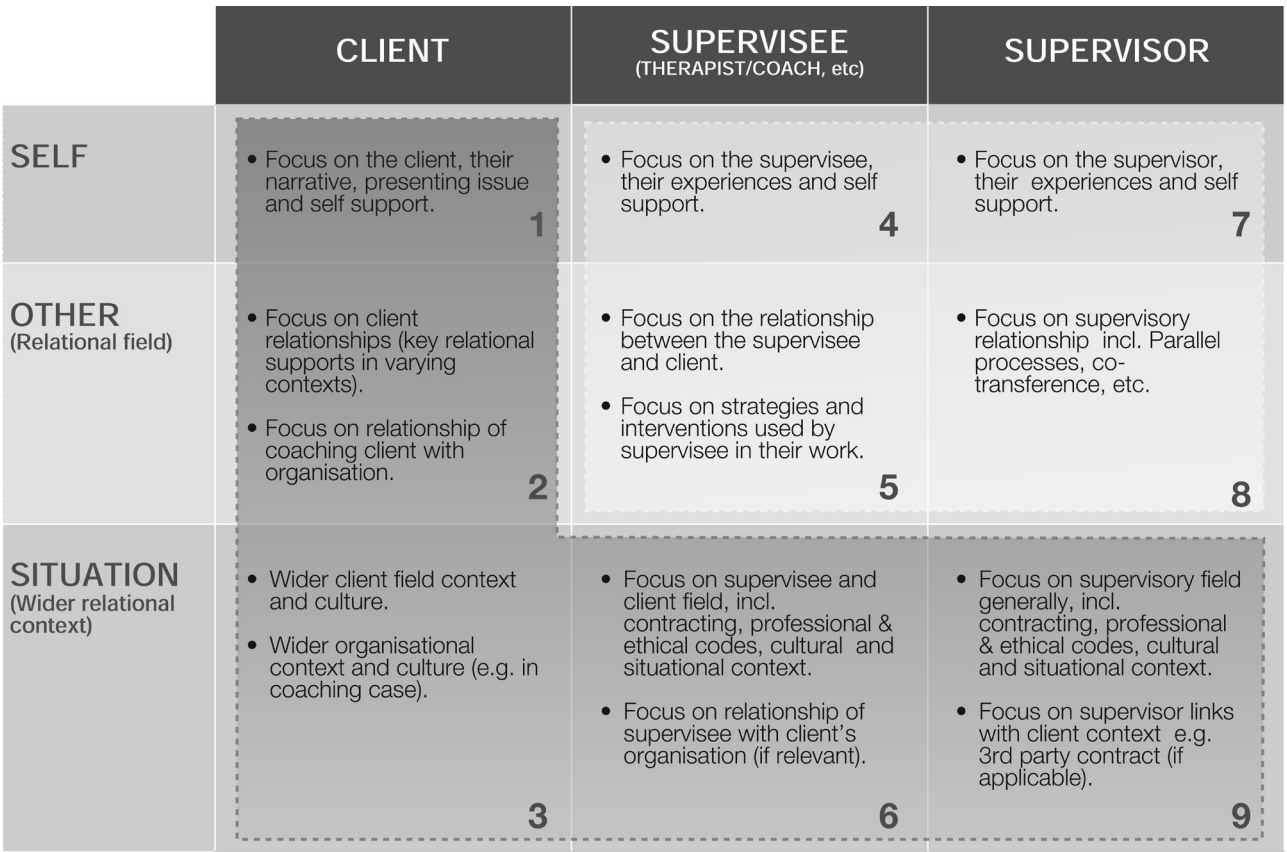

Figure 2: Relational Supervision Matrix

at work' and has left at least one previous employment for that same reason.

In these cases, asking for a detailed phenomenological assessment of the client encourages a supervisee to pay attention to their client's process; their appearance, posture, breathing, the way they sit in their chair, etc. These details all support a move towards an appreciation of process that includes an examination of ground and available supports/resources that may not have been in awareness. Indeed, Joyce and Sills (2014) devote a chapter to considering available resources and the client's willingness/ability to draw on them as necessary to provide a fuller perspective.

Cell 2: The client's key relational supports

This lens focuses on the client's key relationships both past and present. It involves exploring the nature of the client's experience of relational support – or the lack of it – in differing contexts. The nature of the relationship between the coach or client and their relevant organisation/situation is specifically considered in this cell. We are here 'mining the field' to locate key relationships with others, be they parents, teachers, managers, etc., that can be explored to assess both the ability to access relational support and the current availability of it. In this cell, we acknowledge the foundational work of Heinz Kohut in developing the notion of Self-Object transferences and classifying these as developmentally needed relationships that are vital to confidence and comfort in the world (see, for example, Kohut, 1984, 1996, for more details). These notions have been developed by two of the authors into a framework for assessing the quality of presence and performance at work (Denham-Vaughan and Chidiac, 2009).

Exploring and understanding key relational patterns of clients is an important aspect of supervision. For example, supporting a supervisee to notice that his coaching client was interpreting the absence of praise and appreciation from his manager as criticism, effacement, and evidence of not being valued, was central to working with this client. This was formulated as a lack of 'mirroring' for competence in Kohutian theory (the coachee had been insufficiently rewarded for competence as a child) and absence of confirmation in dialogic terms. Practically, this coachee needed more explicit appreciation from their manager and a sense that what they were achieving and doing well was both seen and recognised. A simple request to the manager for more positive feedback delivered a substantial change in the coachee's confidence and motivation.

Similarly, working with a high risk suicidal woman, another supervisee was able to recognise her client's relationship with her young goddaughter as an ongoing key relational support. At times, this child was an unofficial co-therapist with whom this client continued to learn and to hold hope.

Cell 3: The wider client field

Here the focus is on exploring the client's wider context including their culture; be this familial, the culture in which they currently live or the particular organisational culture in which they work. Our aim is to remain curious about the impact of this culture and its impact in forming and framing both the 'self' of the client and the presenting issue. We are therefore trying to notice our prejudices, preconceived ideas and fixed expectations which act to dampen our exploration and unhelpfully curb our intentional analysis of the impact on the client.

For example, a supervisee once brought a client struggling with the grief of a young child dying of cancer and difficulties in relating to his wife. The supervisee had not explored the client's cultural background and assumed he was middle-class and English. Given the client's unusual first name, the supervisor enquired and was told he was Jewish by the supervisee. As the work progressed, the work came to focus increasingly on the client's sense of isolation and inability to seek relational support from others. A while later, the client's father died and he travelled to an Arabic country and it transpired that this was the client's country and culture of origin. Living in the UK, married to an English woman, the client's cultural background was a predominant factor in his inability to feel understood or accepted despite years of living in the country; the relational resources and current cultural 'norms' did not support his particular way of expressing feelings or performing satisfactory rituals for marking death.

In organisational practice, this wider client field is an essential component in understanding the individual manager or indeed team behaviour. Organisational culture plays an essential role in defining what coaching or OD interventions might be successful or even worth attempting.

Cell 4: The supervisee in focus

Using this lens the supervisory process focuses on the supervisee; their professional development stage, their learning style, specific strengths and vulnerabilities, self-support and relevant theoretical understandings. All these factors, and many others, contribute to bringing the supervisee into clearer focus. Psychometric assessments, coaching tools and measures, organisational scoping and structural charts are all relevant. We wish to become intimately acquainted with the aims, presence and process of the supervisee.

For example, in a psychotherapy context, an experienced practitioner's very long-standing relationship with her previous supervisor both supported and challenged her when changing supervisors; how much difference could she welcome and tolerate? Conversely, a trainee, highly anxious to be seen to work well, arrived with prolific notes held in shaking hands.

In our experience, the supervisee's needs, hopes and fears as well as their habitual patterns walk in to supervision in the embodied presence of the supervisee, whether the supervisee is an organisation, team, manager/leader, coach or clinician. This places a specific importance on attending to checking-in at the start of supervision and thus making explicit any significant events or changes impacting the supervisee's self-support.

Cell 5: The supervisee and client relationship

This lens focuses on two distinct aspects of the supervisee and client relationship.

First, the focus is on the 'between' of the supervisee and the client. The quality and strength of the working alliance is considered and the co-created 'dance' of the relationship (Parlett, 1991) explored. When working in this cell, fundamental aspects of a co-emergent relational and dialogic stance are considered: mutual awareness raising, inclusion, attention to potential risks discussed, and repeating patterns reflected upon. Both the supervisee's and supervisor's understanding of the nature of transference, countertransference and co-transference are relevant here. In other words, what are we 'importing' or 'transferring' from one situation (the there-and-then) to the co-emerging relational space between us (the here and now)? Our experience is that an understanding and appreciation of the power of this phenomenon is at least as necessary in organisational consulting and coaching contexts as it is in counselling/psychotherapeutic ones.

For instance, a supervisee vividly described her experience at the end of a first session with a vitally attractive young woman of her own age. She had emerged from the session tired, moving slowly and with difficulty, feeling as though she was suddenly at least a decade older. Later it became clear that the client's mother, who had been absent at times in the client's childhood, was now in active competition with her attractive daughter, whom she introduced 'as if sisters'. The client's care had come from a loving but physically limited grandmother, who the supervisee had resonated with on an embodied level as she tried to connect with the client and care for her whilst building the working alliance.

In organisational work this cell may require more focused attention as the relationships between supervisee and client may be quite complex and an important aspect of the supervisee's effectiveness. If a supervisee coaching a team has, for example, a prior relationship with the team's leader, this will inevitably impact his or her effectiveness and working alliance with the remaining members of the team. Issues of trust and transparency are crucial in recognising sub-groupings and prior relationships between the supervisee and various parts of the client organisation.

Second, the focus in this cell is on the strategies and interventions that the supervisee has made. This includes exploring the effect of their interventions and exploring alternative choices. The supervisee's recognition of the balance of support and challenge with their client, consideration of future situations and possible alternative options is included in this lens. Here there is opportunity for creative supervision (Lahad, 2000), such as sculpting, constellations, sand tray work, playing with metaphors or images, empty chair work or any other form of experimentation that illumines the work. One coachee recently described how much she had learnt in supervision from 'embodying' her client and struggling to find words as she sat in her client's chair and took on her body posture, movements and breathing patterns.

Cell 6: The supervisee and client field

In this cell the focus is on the wider context or 'background field factors' that surround the supervisee and client figure. With reference to Figure 1 described earlier, this is the 'Situation' from which the supervisee/client work emerges. In our experience, this cell can be easily overlooked as it can be experienced as burdensome, restrictive or intrusive upon the supervisory figure. However, in our model, this cell is particularly important in shaping what is safely possible in the supervision itself.

Necessary work in this cell includes clarifying the details of the contract for the work both between client and supervisee, and with any other key stakeholders/involved parties such as the agency, training organisation, third-party contract holders, board, etc. The professional and ethical context of the work needs to be taken into account; for example, any particular ethical codes/guidelines, legal documents, operational policies, risk guidance. Particularly relevant here are issues of accountability and responsibility for work carried out between the supervisee and client, since in some professions, including psychotherapy and counselling, if the supervisee is not qualified, accountability for work done with the client rests, at least to some degree, with the supervisor.

Likewise, in coaching, issues of confidentiality, visibility of coaching work, reporting of outcomes, etc., will all be affected by who is the sponsor and contract holder for the work. Frequently, this is not the coachee,

but the third-party who has commissioned, and paid for, the work. As such, goals for sessions, expected outcomes, number and duration of sessions and even content of sessions can all be directly shaped by the wider field. This can create a delicate and complex boundary between the supervision figure and the wider field, which is essential to include in discussions when contracting and undertaking the work itself.

Similarly, in our experience, psychotherapy trainees beginning their clinical practice meet clients with dual diagnosis and fragile self-process more frequently than would have been the case twenty years ago. The need for relevant knowledge, grading of interventions and clear risk assessment is evident and places a demand upon the content of the supervision sessions. This 'demand' might reasonably be seen as restrictive by the supervisee but seen as 'essential' by the supervisor who has more experience of the wider field conditions and shares accountability for the work.

Cell 7: The supervisor in focus

As the previous example in cell 6 highlighted, supervisors have influence, accountability and sometimes direct responsibility for the work undertaken. Marie Adams (2014), in *The Myth of the Untroubled Therapist*, vividly describes how, at times, supervisors' personal lives bring concomitant challenges to the work which can be hard to acknowledge. In addition, having acknowledged these challenges, there remains the delicate issue of if and how to bring this to the supervisory process. Will it be helpful to the work to share our vulnerabilities, particular triggers or blind spots? Or is it necessary to 'bracket' these as best we can until, in our own supervision, we decide we can bracket no more or have to temporarily step back from work.

In psychotherapy/coaching supervision, our modality influences both our own approach and choices concerning these issues, as does our developmental stage as a supervisor. Our own 'internalised supervisor' (Casement, 1985), influenced by our experiences of significant supervisory relationships, also arrives in our supervisor's chair.

For example, during a process of long illness of a parent, a supervisor found herself working with three supervisees who were employed in hospice settings, including one junior psychotherapy trainee. Her coaches were also professionals working with a cancer care charity. In the midst of this, another organisational supervisee announced that she had a new contract to work with a social care agency providing home care for terminally ill people wishing to die at home. The supervisor's sense was of frequently being 'inauthentic' in supervisory sessions due to 'bracketing' feelings of sadness, loss and enhanced empathic resonance.

A constant theme in the supervisor's own supervision was if or how to share the situation regarding her own parent with supervisees and whether this would support their work. Interestingly, the decision with each supervisee was slightly different; some heard quite a lot of the supervisor's own situation while others heard nothing as her judgement was that it would be burdensome or intrusive. Of course, whether that would have been the case cannot be known, but the delicacy of this ethical relational boundary was highlighted for a period of months.

Cell 8: The supervisory relationship

In this cell, ongoing attention is given to the establishment and maintenance of the effective working alliance between supervisor and supervisee which underpins the work. This would, of course, be affected by how and whether the supervisor is chosen by the supervisee, is allocated or is selected for them.

Attending to this lens is important in ensuring that the relational contract is supportive and holding enough for the work to take place. And more than that, a focus on this cell can often be crucial in working through a parallel process emerging in supervision. A coaching supervisee may, for example, present in an unfamiliar way that reflects an aspect of their client's process, such as reluctance to present a client who wishes to remain unseen and unheard in meetings or whose history includes being consistently overlooked for promotion.

Working in awareness of the co-emergent relational stance means that both supervisor and supervisee must share an understanding of the importance of attending to this cell and of parallel process.

Cell 9: The supervisory field

In this cell the professional context, including ethical awareness, is fully considered. Clarity is needed both about the contract for the work and the context/field in which the work takes place.

Relevant here are, for example, issues of dual relationships where managers or more senior practitioners in an organisation may be routinely supervising the clinical or coaching work of other staff. We would describe all of these issues as ones of contracting, which relates to boundary issues such as when, where, how often, at what fee, confidentiality, visibility, etc. The three-, or sometimes four-handed contracts with the potential complexities of responsibility and communication need to be both as transparent as possible and explicitly agreed by all concerned.

Gilbert and Evans (2000, p. 37) stated clearly that 'contracts work best if they are specific and have well-defined outcomes'. We agree with this but would also emphasise the potential complexity of contracting

in many cases, so this cell highlights the need for renegotiating and recontracting in coaching/clinical work, organisational consultancy and supervision itself.

One crucial aspect of the supervisory relationship and integral to contracting is an agreed understanding of the nature of confidentiality. For example, when a supervisee discloses the severity of his depression, occasional suicidal ideation and wish to continue seeing clients, the ethical issue is apparent. An agreement of limited confidentiality can support both supervisor and supervisee to discuss choices of action.

The figure–ground dance within the relational matrix

Although each cell has been explored individually, most supervision sessions will touch upon several cells, following the figure of interest emerging from the dialogue between supervisor and supervisee and framed by client presentations as well as situational/contextual issues. The following example further illustrates the interplay between framing conditions and the figure of supervision.

A supervisee undertaking organisational consulting work with a large public sector organisation brings to supervision a serious rupture between him and his client. The supervisee hadn't been to supervision in over two months having cancelled his last 6-weekly appointment without re-scheduling.

Listening to the narrative of what has happened between the supervisee and his client, the supervisor becomes aware of feeling inadequate herself. Although she knows the client organisation, having undertaken some work there many years ago, she had not worked at a similar level of seniority as her supervisee. She became curious about her own self-support (cell 7) and decided to self-disclose. Her intervention supported the figure of supervision to shift from the narrative of the rupture (cell 1) to the supervisee's own lack of support and shame at having underperformed and let the client down (cell 4).

Upon exploration, the supervisor inquires further into the client presentation (Client column, cells 1, 2 and 3) and an intensely politicised and antagonistic client environment is slowly uncovered. There was little relational support to be found in a culture where 'reaching out' was seen as weakness. By exploring possible options for interventions (cell 5) against the backdrop of the client presentation, it became clearer that the supervisee had few possibilities for a 'successful' intervention. Furthermore, by exploring contractual elements between supervisee and client (cell 6), it was also evident that there was not enough buy-in from various members of the top team to the work being performed by the supervisee.

The figure of the supervisee's failure and feelings of inadequacy needed to be viewed as emerging from the ground of the client situation, context and culture. Shame and feelings of inadequacy were part of the client field and alive and well in the transferential field between supervisor and supervisee. Although naming these against the backdrop of the client was important, it felt equally important to the supervisor to end the session by discussing the gap in attending supervision (cell 9) and make sure that the supervisee felt supported enough to bring this difficult client to supervision. She wondered if the wider client culture of not reaching out also impacting the supervisory relationship. Renewing the supervisory contract was therefore helpful and supportive to both.

Summary

In summary, we hope we have shown that use of the Relational Supervision Matrix in a range of supervisory settings and practice applications reveals five key issues that we have listed below:

- The need for supervisory processes to move fluidly across the 9 cells and the dangers of dwelling too long, or avoiding, any cells comprising the matrix. Although these cells can be discussed individually, in practice they are interconnected. For supervisory processes to flow smoothly the possibility of access to all cells is required.
- In view of the interconnection of cells in the matrix there is a consequent need for supervisors of organisational, coaching or psychotherapeutic/counselling work to be both aware of and trained in working with the different cells.
- We recognise that different supervisors will have preferences for particular cells dependent on their style of supervision, modality, field of practice, etc. We believe further research is needed to see if in particular contexts some cells appeal more and which particular cells are more likely to be avoided.
- We have emphasised the importance of thoroughly exploring the 'situation' as outlined in Figure 1 (including key individuals/groups), as this is the ground/contextual and cultural conditions that frame what will emerge in sessions.
- Accordingly, we have proposed that there exists a relational dependence of the supervisory 'figure' (the predominant content of supervisory sessions – cells 4, 5, 7 and 8) on the framing cells (cells 1, 2, 3, 6 and 9). Our thesis is that the supervisory figure, which includes the quality of the supervisory relationship, is a direct product of these framing or ground conditions. As such, although they may seem 'peripheral' to the supervisory figure, they should be discussed explicitly early on in supervision as they are central to the process and, we propose, preconfigure what arises in supervision. As such, we argue that processes identified in cells 1, 2, 3, 6 and 9 form the relational frame or ground of supervision.

Conclusion

We hope the illustrations and descriptions of the relational matrix model we have provided here will explicitly support both supervisors and supervisees in anchoring their explorations in a relational frame that highlights the complexity of all forms of supervisory work.

We wish to acknowledge the pivotal role of Hawkins and Shohet (1989, 2006) in outlining relational processes operating between all members involved in a supervisory field/situation. We also wish to acknowledge their contribution in describing many of the individual aspects of the matrix. Likewise, we are grateful to and appreciative of Carroll and Gilbert's work (2011) in describing these aspects in ways that are especially helpful and enabling of supervisees, as well as supervisors.

What we hope we have added to the literature is a clearer definition of what is meant by a 'relational' model, a more nuanced definition of the supervisory 'environment' and clarity regarding the importance of the environment in framing, supporting or potentially limiting what is possible within supervision sessions.

In particular, we have proposed that supervisory issues arise as a *direct product of* situations: the supervisory figure emerges from the supervisory ground/frame and is *relationally dependent* on that frame. Consequently, the quality of the supervisory relationship is therefore *preconfigured by* the content, processes and context of the relational context.

Accordingly, our relational matrix model, which rests on the Relational Change SOS framework, and develops Hawkins and Shohet's (2006) '7-eyed' approach, places particular emphasis upon supervisors' abilities to attend to the frame/ground of supervision, as well as the relational process within sessions, since they are foundational to the subsequent process. We believe there are significant implications arising from this and, in particular, we find ourselves wondering if certain contexts/situations provide the necessary, let alone sufficiently 'good enough' framing conditions to support excellent work. In all too many situations with which we are familiar, supervisors, supervisees and clients are all seeming to have to battle with these framing conditions, trying to find spaces (physical and emotional) where good work can be carried out. We hope that our model makes explicit the risks and costs of attending to the supervision figure as if it were happening in an isolated bubble, without due cognisance of the relational interconnection to the wider field. We believe this raises important ethical issues relating to whether supervisors should intervene in the case of very toxic framing situations, if or how they might support requests for changes in framing conditions, and how they can help clients, supervisees and themselves avoid the potentially disastrous consequences of working in fragmented, blaming fields where relational interdependencies and connections between framing conditions and quality of work are effaced.

In this way, we hope we will contribute to further deconstruction of the individualistic myth that it is possible for people/clients to thrive in debilitating/dangerous field conditions and that therapy or a given organisational intervention is the sole mitigating factor to enable people to flourish. We find this issue often needs to be addressed directly in supervision and, in some cases, supervisors and/or supervisees encouraged to raise awareness of this view with others in the wider field. In this way, relational supervision becomes an aspect of promoting healthy field conditions and one of a suite of Organisational Development (OD) interventions.

In 1996, Carroll emphasised the need for supervisors to possess 'the ability to see problems and people in ever widening contexts …' (p. 85). The relational matrix model fleshes out more of these contexts in an explicit way and alerts supervisors to the very wide range of roles and responsibilities that impact on their task.

The model is evolving but has already been presented to a cohort of experienced practitioners in organisational and therapeutic work. Following their feedback, a second group is starting to use the model and take it out into a wider variety of contexts. We are also delighted that Jill Ashley-Jones has recently elected to use the model in her doctoral research exploring coaching supervision. Through her research we are keen to see how use of the model assists in coach development and achievement of coaching outcomes. We are also eager to see which particular cells of the model have most significance and attraction for coach supervisors. We hope to report on outcomes in due course.

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