

A Framework for Relational Supervision by Karl Gregory

'A sound working relationship is the bedrock of good supervision'
Sue Copeland

Introduction

There has been much debate about whether the therapy or the therapist is more significant in predicting the effectiveness of therapy. However research now supports the premise that the quality of the relationship between counsellor and client is central to the effectiveness of the therapy (Norcross 2002 and Elkins 2016).

Meta-analyses of studies examining the linkage between alliance and outcomes in psychotherapy (Martin et al., 2000) have also confirmed these results and also indicated that the quality of the alliance was more predictive of positive outcome than the type of intervention. So it may follow that quality of the supervisory relationship is central to the effectiveness of the supervision, not enough research has been done on supervision but it is the premise that many supervisors now take.

Yet it is not enough to say it is 'all in the relationship', what are the qualities and what happens when we focus more on the relationship? From the psychodynamic schools 'relational theory' is already developing (Frawley-O'Dea and Sarnat 2001, DeYoung 2015), Transactional Analysis (Hargaden and Sills 2002) has taken a 'Relational Turn' and person-centered moving to relational depth (Mearns and Cooper 2005). Then David Elkins (2016) argues that psychotherapy can best be understood as an expression of 'social healing' and offers a nonmedical model of emotional healing through developing a relational approach.

There is also a corresponding shift in approaches in supervision heralded by Gilbert and Evans (2000) and continued with Frawley -O'Dea and Sarnat (2001) and more recently Hargaden (2016).

So the development of a Relational Supervision approach that is offered here comes from integrating the understanding from current thinking of the different schools, approaches and models as highlighted above and more!

It is on this premise that I have based a framework for relational supervision. I ask: how do we form 'sound working relationships' with our supervisees and how do we help trainee supervisors to develop such relationships with their supervisees, so that supervision can be effective and as counsellors and psychotherapists we can be the best we can? This has led to another question: "What is effective supervision?" For supervision to be effective the supervisee has to experience it as effective. In organisational work, the organisation also needs to perceive both the therapy and the supervision as effective.

As I explored these questions in supervision I began to see a circular pattern of addressing and revisiting certain processes, eventually seeing a spiral like movement deepening the supervision relationship, which could then be reflected in the

supervisee's client work. This spiral takes on elements of depth, height and broadness with movement within a dynamic human relationship. So although represented on paper as flat (see Fig 1) in reality it is far from that! In the diagram you will also notice the heart at the centre of the spiral, (courtesy of Penny Henderson editing the Therapy Today article in 2008) representing the central importance of the quality of the relationship growing as we move round and through the processes of making authentic contact, exploring what we mean by the concept of 'useful' supervision, relating our work together to the context in which we meet and the context in which the counselling work is done, and finally creating a contract together of the relational qualities discussed then making choices of how we will work together.

'From a relational point of view a contract is not a static entity but a fluid movement created and recreated as the relationship grows' (Gregory 2008). So the contract will be revised as the relationship develops, to take into account new information, ways of working together and contextual enlightenment as we deepen contact and move through the spiral of these processes again. (See fig 1)

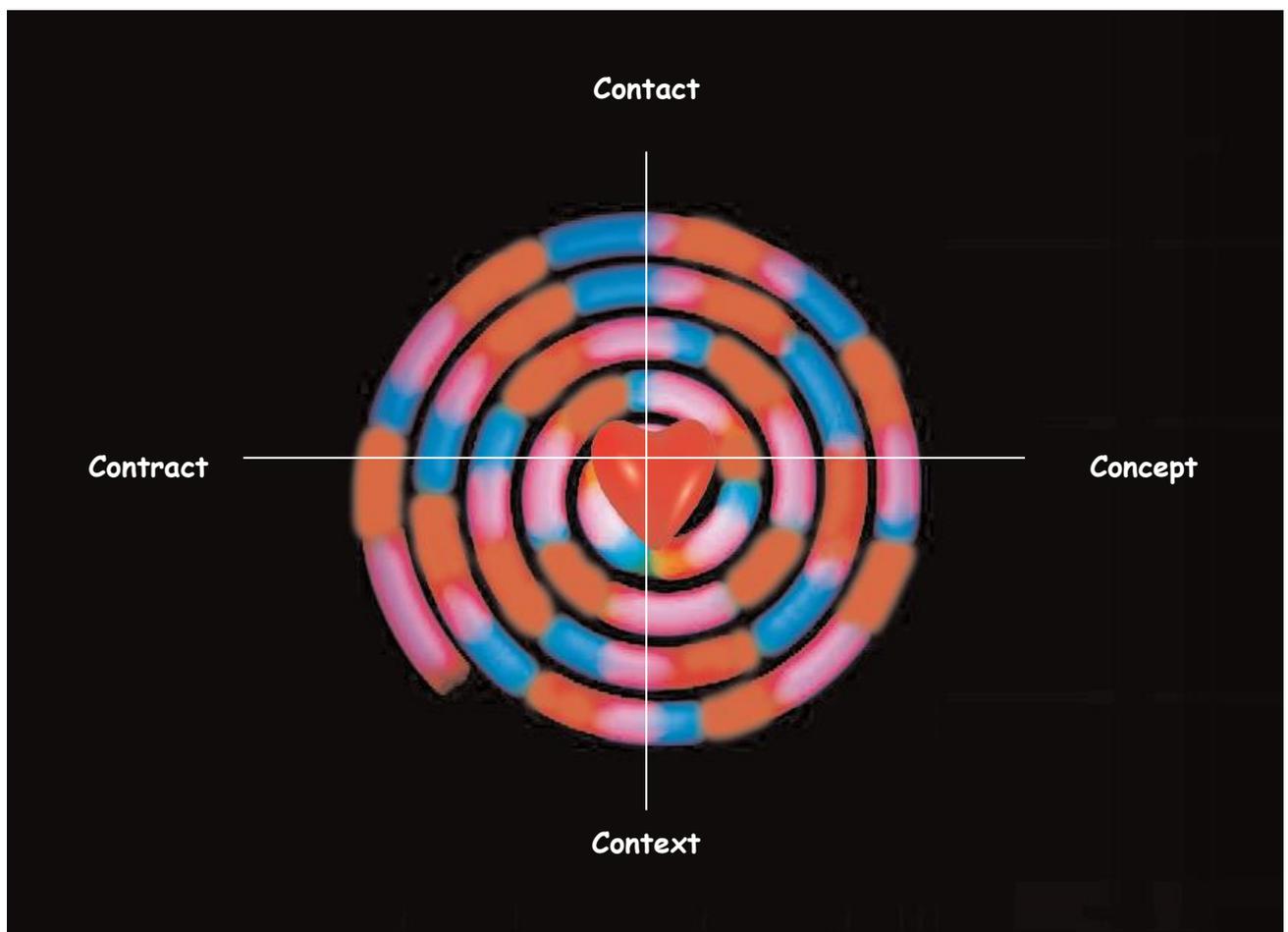


Figure1 (Gregory 2008)

In this relational framework we approach these processes with increasing depth and detail as we move together around the spiral.

Making Contact

Before anything else in the supervisory relationship, contact is made, and it is the quality of this contact that is important. Dan Siegel (2010) talks of the importance of presence, attunement and resonance.

Contact evolves and develops throughout supervision and within contact we relate to each other through professional and personal experiences, values, beliefs, attitudes which are often socially constructed (Poerksen 2004). In Relational Theory human beings are seen as part of a network of relationships, continually motivated, from birth, by the need for relationship that shapes their internal perception of their external experiences (Mitchell 1988). Disconnections in relationships create psychological difficulties. A relational approach is to establish authentic and mutual connections in relationship to others, so also in our supervisory relationships.

So some questions we might ask ourselves as supervisors as we make contact with our supervisees are:

- How is contact made?
- Who makes the contact?
- How is the supervisor chosen?
- How do we meet each other as people and as professionals?
- Does my approach help establish authentic and mutual connections with one another?
- Are we 'approachable' to each other, where are our defensive boundaries?
- What are my experiences, values, beliefs and attitudes towards supervision? Where do they come from? Being reflexive.
- Am I expected to have a relationship with a funding or training organisation?
- How are we both feeling about establishing this relationship?
- What might I do in my relationships to block/encourage contact?
- Are there any boundary issues to be explored- such as dual/multiple roles?

Relational supervision values, vulnerability, presence, empathy and authenticity. It also values making mistakes followed by the collaborative repair of ruptures and traumas, particularly from shame based experiences. The issue of being subjective and using our subjective feelings in service of the client and supervisee is crucial to relational supervision and is explored in the concept of 'inter-subjectivity' (Stolorow, and Atwood, 2002). I call this being rigorously subject together!

Concept of Relational Supervision

In supervision we need to define what we each understand and want supervision to be. As supervisors we have an understanding of supervision and these understandings have different meanings to different counsellors and for different organisations; often according to experiences and/or needs. The concept of supervision needs to be clarified, with shared understandings, in order to come to a working agreement and setting boundaries. Some themes to consider might be:

- The model of supervision, approach or framework
- The supervisee's/supervisor understanding, hopes and expectations of supervision
- Exploration of the supervisor's understanding, expectations and assumptions. How do we know what we know? Again being reflexive! Going to 'the edge'
- The supervisor as a participant observer rather than (just) an objective expert - the 'intersubjective' - and how each person may understand that.

- Whether we are all talking a 'language' close enough to some coherence and if there is a common purpose
- And the joy of, in and with supervision

Sensitivity to *Context*

All counselling is done in a context. This context will impact on the therapeutic process, according to the client's, the counsellor's, the supervisor's, and the organisation's cultural systems. Context frames the inter-relational conditions in which the counselling and supervision take place and gives supervisor and supervisee a boundary in which to work, while giving meaning to their contact. The context changes as work patterns and different understandings change, so purpose and intent may change from the original meeting. Equally the individual contexts of supervisor and supervisee will impact on the relationship.

When exploring context a supervisor and supervisee need to:

- Establish what work is brought to this supervision and how
- Establish other work that the counsellor does and where that is supervised
- Discuss the supervisee's relationship to and role in the organisation,
- Any other relevant organisations and or communities ie professional bodies
- Discuss the supervisor's relationship to and role in the organisation [and any other relevant organisations and communities]
- Attend to issues that may affect individual boundaries influencing the time together; (eg. expectations from work, family, other organisations)
- Explore some of the varying contexts of both supervisee and supervisor - how we came to be in this place together - our backgrounds and how that influences who we are today
- Who is responsible for what, to whom and where is the accountability taken
- Any organisational involvement , expectations and needs

Today most counsellors work for, in or with an organisation of some kind, so any counselling or supervision approach needs to be sensitive to the organisational context and for this to be seen as core to both counselling and supervision relationships. Counsellors who have trained on generic courses know how to be ethically and relationally sensitive within the boundaries of the client-counsellor relationship, but may be less familiar with expanding these to include the relationships within organisations - for example where team confidentiality maybe operating and dual roles are the norm rather than an exception (Copeland 2005). Confidentiality operates under the ethic of fidelity (not secrets) - honoring the trust invested in us.

Ignoring this dimension can lead to a 180 degree view rather than a 360 degree view of what is happening in the client-counsellor relationship and therefore the supervisee/supervisor relationship, which can lead to restrictive practices.

Establishing a *Contract* within the relationship and working alliance

Contracts are a fundamental aspect of counselling and mirrored in supervision. They can be explicit or implicit and also formal or informal. By addressing the above components of the framework the contract is arrived at in an informed way to help deepen and give further meaning to the supervision relationship.

Terms and Conditions

As said earlier contracts need to be flexible but clear so I will set out my terms of offering supervision (which in relational terms is not strictly a contract but are terms and conditions, see later) that set the necessary boundaries to work with in. I have found in the past that discussing these in the early sessions and verbally agreeing to be sufficient but our professional organisations are increasingly asking for written evidence these days, so I now use one that I feel can also be integrated relationally by discussing the contents and gaining the supervisee's comments on them. See (fig 2)

Figure 2

Terms of Agreement for Supervision

Terms	Supervisee's Comments/agreement
Frequency of supervision agreed	
The usual fee is £ .. per hour	
I need .. hours' notice for change or cancellation otherwise full amount will be charged	
I prefer to be paid by	
I will not charge for writing reports or references unless they are long and take more than 30 mins. Charges would then be made after discussion but would be within my hourly rate.	
I am also your supervisor between sessions so welcome contact by e-mail or phone if necessary. If the contact takes longer than 15mins there may be an additional charge which will be discussed at the time	
Arrangements for 'living will'?	
<p>Confidentiality will be maintained unless by agreement with supervisee to do otherwise or legally obligated to disclose. I also have supervision which is anonymised and confidential.</p> <p>Rider: I train counsellors and supervisees and I may use scenarios that I come across in my work. I maintain strict anonymity and change demographic information so that you or your work cannot be identified. Please state if you do not want to be involved in this process.</p>	
All records and notes will be kept in accordance with Data Protection.	
I work within the Code of Ethical Practice of the National Counselling Society www.nationalcounsellingsociety.org/about-us/code-of-ethics	
If you have any concerns or grievance with me or the way I work please let me know and if we cannot sort it out you do have access to the National Counselling Societies formal complaint process on www.nationalcounsellingsociety.org/have-a-concern	

Signed by Supervisee:

Date:

Signed by Supervisor:

Date:

Contracting

Supervision contracting as you can see by what has been written so far is different than setting the terms and conditions. The contract is about how you will work together and how this will grow and change throughout your relationship according to the deepening contact. Working together in such a fashion, will help to develop more understanding about the nature of supervision and discover the widening contexts. So this type of contracting is often done informally and from session to session as the relationship develops. Some new ways of working together might be firmed up and written but many continue to grow and change as every new contact brings a new way of working.

Once we have established sufficient contact to understand if our concepts and contexts of supervision coincide sufficiently with each other and with any organisation involve, we are ready to decide how we will work together. This will depend on style, preference and organisational demands.

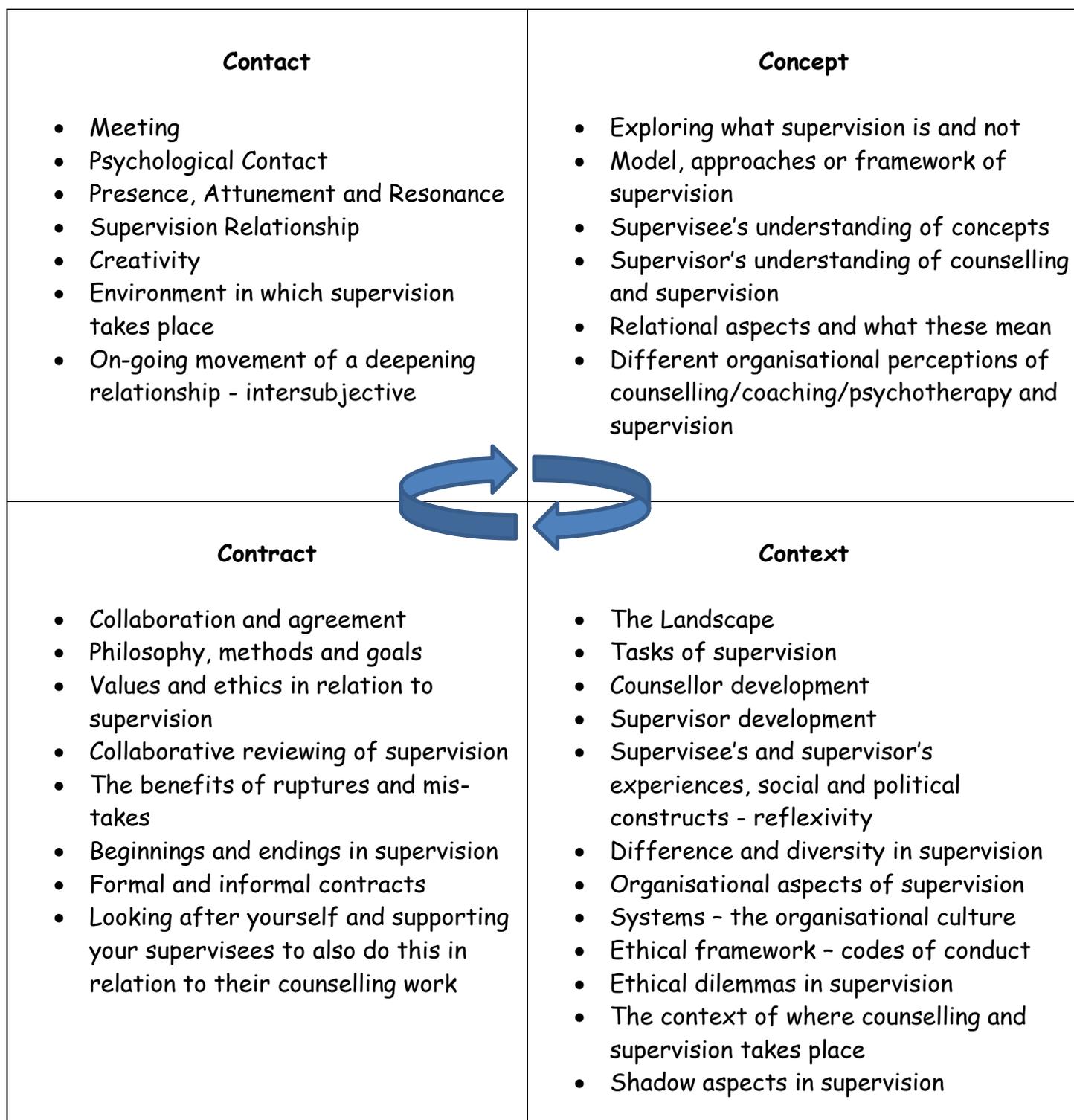
Issues that the supervisor and supervisee need to address in a contract over time may include:

- Clarity about any issues highlighted from the above discussion
- Defining the tasks of supervision - the how, what, when, where and to whom
- Clarity about the responsibilities of both parties for the work supervised and the role and responsibilities of and to any organisations or community.
- How changes and new learning, discoveries are managed
- Any involvement, meetings or reports written for organisations
- Involvement or reports for course trainers for trainees or organisation
- Reviewing how the supervision relationship is working, how long it may last and how it may end
- How flexible, trustful and open the relationship can be to experience the movement of every new piece of supervision, which can deepen and strengthen the supervisory relationship

The quality of contracting will be proportional to the development of the three previous components of the relationship (contact, concept and context) inter-linking all components of this relational framework (See fig 3.)

Figure 3

The Four C's of Supervision



The central importance of the relationship in the framework

The quality of counselling supervision depends on mutual trust. Mutuality is a fundamental aspect in which human beings relate (McGilchrist 2010). The supervisor trusts the supervisee to bring all that is necessary so that effective supervision can take place. The supervisee trusts the supervisor to provide all that has been agreed between them. How mutual trust is built will depend on the quality of the relationship emerging by working through the processes of the framework collaboratively. This trust takes time to develop and you may meet only once a month. It therefore becomes

paramount that the supervisor seeks to form a collaborative supportive safe enough relationship from the start in how contact is made. If the supervisor holds a relational perspective of supervision she can frame the tasks, role and responsibilities of supervision within that relational framework. See Fig.4

Figure 4

Function, Tasks and Roles of the Supervisor

Function (Proctor 1988)	Tasks (Carroll 1996)	Roles (Gregory and Palmer 2006)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restorative (Support) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To Counsel • To Consult 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Valuing Presence • Encourager
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formative (Educate) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning Relationship • To Teach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supportive Challenger • Reflective/reflexive
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normative (Manage) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor professional ethical issues • To evaluate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative Ethical Monitor • Consultative Practitioner

Conclusion

A 'relational perspective' means an encounter where two or more people bring their experiences and create a space in which to relate these experiences with one another. Therefore each encounter is unique and each co-created space is unique be it counselling or supervision. This is why the context that each supervisee *and* supervisor brings, is so crucial and needs to be explored, reflexively.

Working with a relational framework in counseling supervision can help articulate the process for all involved and improve the quality of the relationship (Gilbert and Evans 2000). As each component is developed, each informs the other, as in a spiral (see Fig 1) and is revisited improving the potential to deepen the relationship. This can lead to a further breadth and depth in meaning and or purpose, creating a sound working relationship!

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