

Chapter 2

Seven Simple Rules - an alternative lens

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A changing world, changing us

The focus of this book leans us toward the future of Coaching Supervision¹. What is happening now that offers insights into what might become? Throughout this book, we are invited into little-explored avenues. Here, we found ourselves inspired to examine the generative nature of Coaching Supervision as it is emerging and manifesting in these, its embryonic years. Why? Because of a bigger question: How can we (collectively as agents in the system with myriad roles) understand, and more importantly, influence developments in a way that upholds and enhances ourselves, our practice and our field, and those engaged and impacted, locally and globally - now and in the future?

We experience and recognise the world as volatile, unpredictable, complex, ambiguous (VUCA)¹. We are not alone. Increasingly, more and more people are bumping up against this reality. Our clients find themselves facing tension-filled dilemmas: desperately wanting certainty, consistency, predictability and proof of impact; yet finding increasingly, that their usual ways of thinking (simplistic cause-effect, quick fixes, change on demand) do not deliver. Our beliefs drive what we do and how we do it. This means that if our approaches are to change to better fit our complex, emerging future, we also need to think differently - we need a shift in paradigm (worldview) to open us up to those unimagined, unimaginable possibilities. Herein, lies the rub. We cannot make paradigm shifts happen just because we want them. However, we can establish conditions that might facilitate a turn.

As Coaching Supervision professionals, what is our part in all this? What do we need to be able to know, do and be, to support those we serve to survive, lead and thrive in the world as it is?

To explore these questions, we adopted an iterative, emergent inquiry involving ourselves and others. Our methodology is consistent with a complexity thinking paradigm² and informed by contemporary studies of human systems. The outcomes of our exploration comprise a radically simple contribution to the practice of Coaching Supervisors and to our emerging field. We do not have the space here to explore the wider ramifications of this statement. Instead we simply offer our thinking (thus far) as a spark, a catalyst to your own thinking. We invite you to walk into the shallows with us and if it resonates, please play with the ideas, open dialogues with friends and colleagues and see where the swim takes you!

¹ Coaching Supervision: at present there is not a distinct identity for mentoring supervision and therefore Coaching Supervision is applied in both contexts

Setting the Scene

We draw on our understanding of the nature of emergence and self-organising dynamics in complex living (adaptive) systems. We set the scene by first introducing you to the Stacey/Landscape³ diagram and the concept of Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS). This situates Coaching and Coaching Supervision in a wider systemic context. Using the theory of 'Simple Rules', we then direct our attention to the behavioural dynamics and patterns we and others recognise in and across our Coaching Supervision system. We propose, that by bringing system-wide behaviours into view, we may be able to amplify those that (re)generate and support our practice, the field and those in the wider world we serve.

Surveying the Landscape

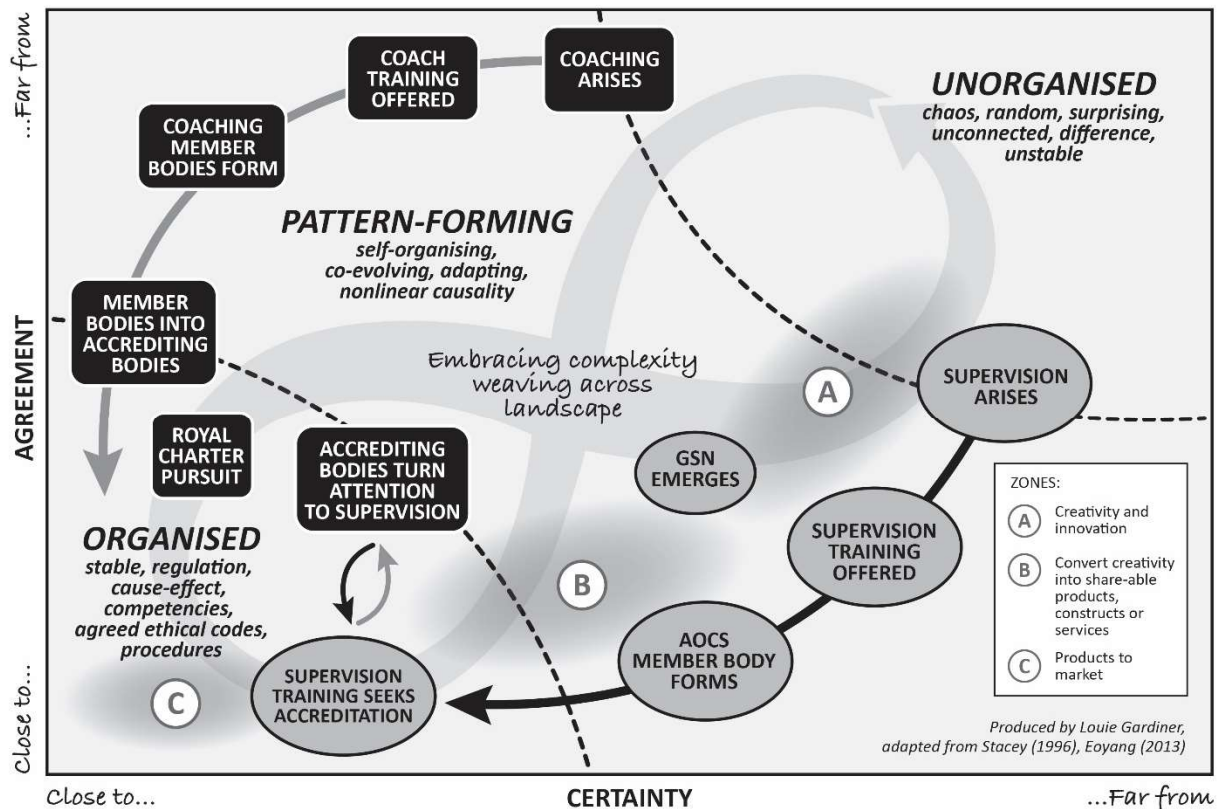
Ralph Stacey first developed a heuristic to aid people in his organisation to appreciate and understand that not all was simple, certain and controllable. Later he rejected his own model considering it too simplistic to be of value. Nevertheless, it remains in use because it serves as a useful bridge for understanding when traditional scientific thinking and approaches (objective, mechanistic, reductionist, linear) may be fit-for-purpose, and when alternative complexity lenses, with related approaches, may be more helpful. For example, Gardiner⁴ uses the Stacey/Landscape diagram to illustrate and leverage the similarities and distinctions between person-centred and goal-directed approaches to coaching, counselling and self-reflective practice. However, below we deploy it to situate Coaching and Coaching Supervision in relation to their stages of emergence.

By way of example the arrows shifting from top right to bottom left depict indicative trajectories for both Coaching and Supervision. Both will have arisen from the unorganised realm; entering the Pattern-forming realm with the arrival of training programmes and the formation of member organisations; then into the organised zone as those bodies morphed into accredited/accrediting entities. There is further convergence between some Coaching accreditation bodies around professional ethics which suggests they are 'close to agreement' (vertical axis) about the nature of certain challenges, and that they are 'close to certainty' (horizontal axis), believing their course of action will address those challenges. Whilst there is divergence amongst many professional coaching bodies across the world, there is a similar propensity to establish competencies and accreditation procedures. Some are pursuing Royal Charter Status. This would, in all likelihood, drive the Coaching profession in the UK towards increasing constraint (further into the Organised space) bringing with it, tighter controls e.g. procedural compliance, quality assurance protocols and externalised assessment. Such moves may be fit-for-purpose in disciplines that require expert skills for known complicated tasks e.g. aircraft crew emergency procedures, some HR functions; repetitive functions where high levels of variability in the organising system can be eliminated is in IT, accounting or some manufacturing processes. Competency frameworks lose efficacy in the face of 'never-experienced-before' situations typical of the VUCA world in which many Coaches, Mentors, Supervisors and their clients are operating.

As of 2018, Coaching Supervision as a field of practice is relatively young with few practitioners across the world. Its emergent, self-organising nature is illustrated by the creation of the Global Supervisors' Network in 2016 as a response to the dearth of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities for experienced, senior practitioners. Initiated by Eve Turner, the group quickly established itself and continues to expand as a self-sourcing, mutually-resourcing advanced learning network. It is simple in form and process and has few constraints. This facilitates the presence of diversity, invites reciprocity and generates learning exchanges within. Being in it, noticing the nature of what is in play and being able to consciously influence such systems distinguishes complexity-attuned from conventional practitioners.

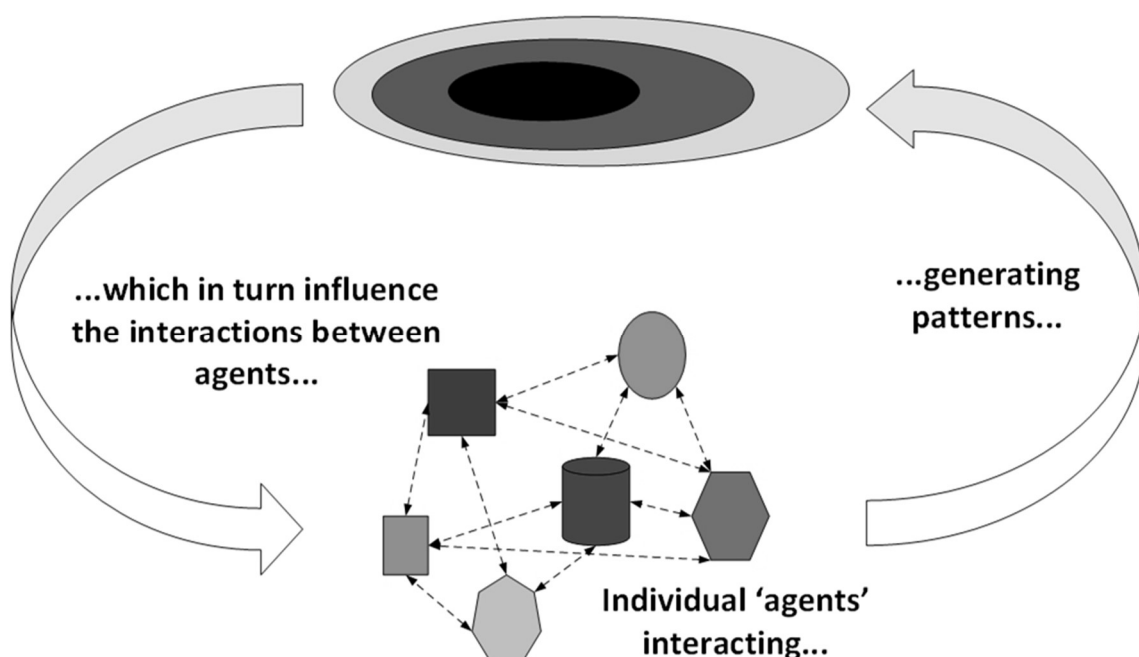
Arguably, as Coaching Supervisors, we are all called to attend to such complexity: to see, understand and act differently; to engage with not-knowing and to notice patterns and take conscious action without being attached to predetermined outcomes. As professionals in service, ours is to enable our clients to weave across the landscape of complexity (infinity symbol in Figure 1), attending to what is present and calling for attention: e.g. sensing when a shift towards embracing difference and creativity is called for; or when decisions, and time-bounded plans need to be enacted (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Emergent trajectory of Coaching and Coaching Supervision fields



To better understand the above framing, we need to appreciate that Coaching and Coaching Supervision are interdependently linked and that those of us working within them act as complex adaptive systems (CAS). What do we mean by this? A CAS comprises of similar and diverse agents (individuals) who interact; generating patterns (behavioural, organisational, cultural etc.) that come to exemplify the CAS. These patterns then, in iterative fashion, influence and shape the interactions and behaviours of the agents.

Figure 2: Complex Adaptive System (CAS) representation (re-presented from Eoyang (2013))



Referring to Figure 1, CAS tend to shift from unorganised (top right) to organised states (bottom left). If their pattern-forming abilities become overly constrained, they will die, disintegrate or erupt! What can we do to keep alive the adaptive pattern-forming propensities in coaching and coaching supervision so needed in today's reality?

According to CAS scientists⁵ and researcher-practitioners⁶, system patterns evolve in relation to certain conditions: the systems/**containers** in which we find ourselves, the **differences/distinctions** between us and the nature of our **exchanges/relationships**. When it comes to humans, our perspectives also come into play. When one of these conditions changes, the others are influenced in a nonlinear fashion. In other words, we cannot predict how all other conditions will shift, nor how this will affect the overall pattern. We only know that something will change... eventually. To influence a CAS we need only act on one variable, knowing that the others will be affected anyway.

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The theory of 'Simple Rules'⁷ illuminates the self-organising behavioural dynamics in complex adaptive/living systems like ants, schools of fish, flocks of birds and human beings. Craig Reynolds (1987), a computer scientist, found how to create computer simulations of flocking birds which he called *Boids*! He discovered that by coding a very few 'simple rules', drawn from the observable behaviour in the flock, his computer Boids would produce complex swarm patterns similar to those we see in nature.

We, as human beings, also co-evolve behavioural rules in the groups of which we are a part – usually non-consciously. We embrace and adopt those behaviours as part of being in that group - not because we are told to do so. When several of us embody the same behaviours, we find ourselves generating patterns that epitomise us as a group, system, organisation, community, school, culture etc. Becoming aware of ourselves and this process, can help us leverage our self-organising propensities. By naming and consciously embracing behaviours that show us at our best, we can amplify desirable group patterns. When as individuals we take on these behaviours as our own – as in starling murmurations – we in effect, self-organise through our peer-to-peer interactions and in the process, our group patterns become more internally coherent **without the need** for externalised control mechanisms. We again draw an example from the Global Supervisors' Network. CPD webinars are delivered voluntarily and are free to attend, and we consistently see very high attendance ratings - almost always 100%. In our experience 'free' events frequently experience high drop-out rates. We suggest there are 'simple rules' playing out in the GSN system that are generative and appreciated by group members that guide 'following through' on commitments to attend webinars.

This leads us into our inquiry. What 'simple rules' already exist in coaching supervision that support and uphold its emergence as a coherent, generative professional field and as a practice? By amplifying our generative, pattern-forming, adaptive behaviours and capacities we hope to better resource individuals and the wider system to deal with a complex, unpredictable world.

Engaging with voices in the system

In order to find the 'simple rules' at play in our system we began a reflective process. We started scoping 'what we knew' and used our own experiences as supervisors and as supervisees. We intended to bring into awareness our sense of the 'DNA' of coaching supervision, the essence. What is this activity, this 'way of being'? How would we know it when we came across it?

Starting with ourselves

We chose Eoyang's⁸ complexity tool *Radical Inquiry*, to extrapolate similarities and differences between Coaching Supervision and Counselling Supervision as a starting point. Simply, this process involved an exploration of "Doing,

Knowing and Being”². We noticed (amongst other things) a crucial difference related to the context of the overall activity. Coaching explicitly operates within a complex stakeholder environment, open to multiple systemic influences at any point in the coaching contract, process and field. This complexity must inevitably be present within Coaching Supervision.

Through this initial scoping we were able to distil our first tentative list of simple rules. We put these aside and set out to explore with a wider cohort of colleagues. Page | 5

We could have taken our distillation to colleagues asking them to confirm, deny or amend. Bringing forward concrete statements to be judged as right or wrong, would have taken our enquiry into the bottom left hand corner of the Landscape Diagram. We believed a more generative approach was required.

We engaged three further primary sources of data. Two ‘in-depth’ interviews with recognised professionals in the coaching supervision field; and one group dialogue with 20 Coaches (18 of whom are experienced coaching supervisors) within a Special Interest Group³ focusing on Coaching Supervision in a professional body.

Broad, open questions inspired dialogue with our peers that was unconstrained by our first reflections. As their data and perspectives accumulated, fresh connections and resonances appeared, enabling us to adapt and hone our original distillation into the seven ‘simple rules’ below. This represents our shift into the bottom left of the Landscape diagram.

In-depth interviews

We conducted semi-structured, recorded dialogues exploring the nature of coaching supervision drawn from personal experience.

Group dialogue

We adopted a similar semi-structured, reflective group conversation guided by a series of small prompts.

- As supervisor or supervisee, tune into a Coaching Supervision experience that for you, was ‘supervision at its best.’
- What did you feel and/or think?
- What did you notice?
- If this is supervision ‘at its best’, what is happening on other occasions?

Simple Rules? Not simple, not rules!

Simple Rules⁹ are neither simple, nor rules – the two words constitute a linguistic term that describes a set of behaviours already present in a system. These are not abstract ideals to be enforced; rather they are descriptors of current practitioner behaviour which we have drawn out from the study with colleagues.

Below we offer our distillation of simple rules already present in Coaching Supervision; generative behaviours that enhance practice. We offer a brief commentary for each and use the voices of participants as illustrations.

1. Attune to self
2. Engage with love
3. Serve the intention
4. Hold the space, work with the edges

² In this Chapter, space prohibits deeper discussion of this stage of our initial inquiry

³ Association for Coaching (AC) Coaching Supervisor Special Interest Group (SIG): comprised of AC members who are interested in supervision. The group is voluntary and has no formal standing or accountability. However, it is a vehicle through which the AC leadership team engages regularly with members.

5. Illuminate and explore what is calling for attention
6. Dare to call it out
7. Attend to the relationships, individuals and situational context

This set of simple rules equips us with a framework to apply in our own practice. It enables us to notice the patterns that arise from the interplay between these behaviours within supervision sessions, enacted by both Supervisor and Supervisee; and within the wider field when practitioners live their practice.

1. Attune to self

We noticed a focus on 'arriving' that suggested more than practical preparation. Colleagues spoke of an intentionality guiding the 'way' in which they came to the supervision space: a focus on self-awareness as an essential building block to arriving centred and available to 'self' and 'other'. This included putting aside worries, thoughts and feelings about the past, and concerns for the future, and freeing from formal knowing and certainties. Not discarding, or discounting, merely laying these to one side to be fully present in relation to the other.

How well can we as supervisors help our supervisees prepare and know what to bring and how to do it? It takes time to build a relationship.

...I had to overcome my anxiousness, my nervousness, my feeling 'you may not be so good', 'you may need to do some more training... You may need to!' But I said to myself 'keep on working', this whole light in myself. To say nothing more, nothing less. My commitment was all.

That depends on all the 'head' stuff I have at my disposal, the years of learning and training and reading and practice...and then you can fly. You learn the models and then you throw them away.

2. Engage with love

We noticed our attraction to, and our struggle with, the word 'love'. We wondered if it would be acceptable within our field and yet the way our colleagues spoke, encouraged us to stay with what we believe is true of Supervision in Coaching and Mentoring. In this practice, we believe there is a strong thread of 'love'; a deep valuing of the person, and of humanity. This was described in many ways:

I have a person in front of me, I have a soul (here)

We did some deep work... resourcing her... what was really important to me, and what I think made the work possible was a heart-to-heart connection

I think the 'Hero's Journey' comes to mind...a lot of what we are doing is helping each other to translate language, our language, the language of the soul

(Coaching Supervision is)... for me, in the truest sense of the word, spiritual. I'm not meaning religious

...the humanity of the work...where the relational piece becomes so fluid and true and honest that we get into that space where we are all one, we are all actually interconnected

And part of deepening the curiosity and the inquiry is that people start being able to self-observe, but with kindness, crucial, crucial kindness

3. Serve the intention

We chose the verb to 'serve' as used by Robert Greenleaf¹⁰ (referring to 'servant leadership'). It offers a radical shift in framing from the old conventions about leadership and followership. In serving the intention we include

identifying and clarifying the purpose of our work together, what we, in each relationship, mean by Coaching Supervision, and following through with coherent actions and ways of being.

Through 'serving the intention' we also illuminate a commitment to 'we', to the relationship and to the mutuality of learning within and from each other in the supervision relationship; to both parties being open to being changed, yet not expecting or driving for change.

We see profound and distinct patterns emerging for coaching supervision:

When I am coaching, I often get a sense I am holding up a mirror to the coachee, and when I am supervising it's like there are two mirrors reflecting back and you are seeing the infinite

... felt very intimate...being very much together, a sense of a sort of midwife to something that was being born in her.

Lightness characterises a lot of the real learning, there's a kind of humour when people get enough reflective space that they can actually see themselves.

Something about translating... whether I am translating inside myself, what I am trying to say... the other person too. The ups and downs and translating a meaning of language, feelings, emotions, what's right and wrong...and the self-limiting part. One of the things I have benefitted so much from is trusting in another. Either way, as a supervisor or as a supervisee.

Crucial to our capacity to serve the intention is to see ourselves in the other and to help them see themselves through us:

I can also get a very strong sense... of being in a hall of mirrors, but a living hall of mirrors, as the field gathers and the information gathers, and the movement of thinking and sharing and conversing happens, you start to get all these echoes, relational echoes...and you realise it is in the room with you... As the space gets bigger and bigger and yet full of these halls of mirrors, moving mirrors suddenly insight comes, emergent learning. Often, it's not me that gets it. That's not important. They get it. There's a calm at the end of it. There's a calm.

One colleague describes holding his purpose as Supervisor, despite the tension it sometimes generates in him. He talks about being committed to providing a space for the supervisee to find her own answer.

It reminded me of a very recent experience with one of my supervisees. It takes a lot of time to start feeling (and) expressing yourself...it took 50 minutes, I wanted to scream, the solution was in front of her...it wasn't for me to guide her. It was really difficult for me. She was stuck, she was stuck....and at the very end found this very simple question...she understood, she was transformed with light. Very intense. Very distinctive this supervision, and for me as well, this is the commitment that comes to my soul.

Here we see the interdependency of the simple rules. In this beautifully vivid account the supervisor also Engages with Love; and Attunes to self.

4. Hold the space, work with the edges

We create and maintain the container for the 'work' of Coaching Supervision. In this distinct space, bearing witness to another in their 'being', we also attend to intrapersonal processing and interpersonal dynamics in the context of our contracted relationship.

The space - the Coaching Supervision session or series of sessions - is held not only by process and quality but by explicit and implicit contractual, psychological and ethical boundaries. These 'edges' further define the space at any moment in time and are far from absolute. They are perceptual, contextual and – in this complex world we are embracing - forever shifting, requiring continuing mutual vigilance.

Often the 'edges' come more acutely into view as we approach them, sometimes in an ethical dialogue, a change in contract, a disturbance in the here-and-now. Bringing the edges under scrutiny enables exploration, testing and adapting, helping us keep steady yet moving. To work with the edges requires awareness of the roles of structure and fluidity in establishing and deepening safety and trust - each of us, ourselves, as well as in our relationship.

...it's rather like building a house, you've got the fabric, you've got the bricks and then you put in the windows and you let the light in.

...and it's only when you live in it that you make it a home

The trust and holding...the space...because otherwise the (my) resistance would just have been resistance but instead it moved swiftly on to curiosity...and that enabled me to go deep.

There was a 'relationship, rapport and ritual' that was very much there and that underlined ...working together for a while... the way in which we explicitly and implicitly contracted to work together.

...for me, those insights, that shift is what I am here to do, a real sense of having met the need. Curiosity, openness, development of the relationship, trust, deep trust, mutual respect. The openness enables these insights to emerge.

5. Illuminate and explore what is calling for attention

Colleagues described a process of attuning to what was spoken and unspoken, and to what was happening within the supervision relationship. With an attitude of acceptance, the exploration proves liberating and enabling.

...it was very clean...the supervision...going with where I was going and where my energy was, what my focus was, paying attention to where my attention was.... sometimes opening out, going just beyond, or just to the side...but not taking their own (the supervisors) direction

...conscious that I was processing it as we were talking

...and yes, it includes competencies... in the business world they know this phrase, it can be a little anchor for some people

We mustn't go looking for the dramatic all the time

Normalising...do this balance between knowing and not knowing. It really helps me to think 'actually, I'm doing okay here'

Sometimes it is the nuance, not a big ethical issue, not a big dramatic issue but sometimes just unhooking stuff or liberating things

The deepest attention to every subtle 'note' of the conversation, mine and theirs, to the direction of it, the feeling tone of it, something I might notice in somebody's face, something I notice in my own body. What's

that telling me? ... I am paying enormous detail, forensic attention, to every aspect of that conversation as it unfolds... I register all my own body stuff, I register the body in front of me... I can feel the conversation, the kind of rhythm of it, what it is doing, the content of course, is part of all this, but I think the real magic is in what the content sparks off in both of us and in the dialogue we are generating together. That's exciting and that's what seems to drive us both towards learning, illumination and change. Resolution has come. We sit. It is very spacious and satisfying. My work is done here today. We've got it.

In our enquiry with colleagues, they made no explicit mention of 'working with difference' – an element we included in our original distillation. In their comments, we see an acceptance of what is present, however we remain curious as to whether this is sufficient in addressing some of the divisions and unconscious bias that plays out in society which may be reflected in our practice as Coaching Supervisors.

6. Dare to call it out

Coaching Supervision is not always a comfortable conversation. Our colleagues described a willingness to be disturbed as a crucial and valued part of the exchange.

I really loved ...that I felt challenged, you know that bit of churning.

I don't think the depth of relationship happens instantaneously...we may feel a rapport and a trust but it's only when I experience that being tested does the depth come. The true connection, not only to be serious but to laugh at the human condition – and easy with the difficulty and all of the paradoxes that are there.

Each Simple Rule is supported by all the others. In 'dare to call it out' we need to be attuning, illuminating, attending, holding, working and serving with deep, broad awareness to help us move beyond our own judgements and conclusions of the other, ourselves, the situation and context. Our 'calling it out' first brings the lens of curiosity to ourselves and in doing so, liberates us to recognise what we might usefully reflect.

This 'daring' might be conveyed by staying connected to painful and challenging explorations such as the unravelling of complex ethical questions. In this example, we again see an interplay between engaging with love, serving the intention, working with the edges (in this case ethics) and illuminating and exploring what is calling for attention:

(I felt) nervous at the start...relieved, as I told the story and felt supported, not judged. Supported but challenged. The supervisor didn't make me feel that she was in any way judging (me). In fact, I don't think there was a lot said, but the body language was normalising. This gave me permission to think this *was* a pretty tricky situation (and she) challenged me not to move away from the problem....to have some thoughts about what possible conversations I could have with my coachee. I was conscious I was processing it as we were talking. We didn't even come up with a solution! Because it *was* a very difficult ethical issue...and it was how to hold the ethics *and* support the coachee.

7. Attend to the individuals, relationships and situational contexts.

In adopting the lens of complex adaptive systems, we need to consider the 'part, the whole and the greater whole'. This complexity notion enables us to see patterns across the system, displayed and experienced as fractals⁴ i.e. using the here-and-now pattern to illuminate a part greater or smaller than the current moment. We might see patterns in the supervision dyad that reflect those at play elsewhere; and we might also create and influence patterns in the system.

...my experience was the pleasure of making a felt connection after a process of following ...and trying to get a sense of what this is about, and then the shift for them into an awareness about how they have played

⁴ Repeating patterns that emerge across scales in a system / context

into the situation – they have understood something about themselves which they can take back into their coaching in the future with different clients. So, it's about how *they* as individuals affect the system, as opposed to what the client is bringing.

...the way this is all being described amongst professionals ...the sort of texture that you are getting in the conversation today...how you can project that (supervision) is not just a compliance issue but as something that really benefits them (coaches). I think this is tremendous.

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Coaches also in their own style were used to thinking fast, being solution focussed, yet you were trying to introduce a practice where the process was the thing, and the relationship was the thing, in other words the relationship became the conduit for learning

Final comments

Drawing on our reflections and experiences, and those of 22 other practitioners, we have distilled an elegantly concise articulation of Seven⁵ Simple Rules of Coaching Supervision. We do not claim this to be a comprehensive nor final list, yet we are confident in and excited by them, Why? Because we recognise them in play when we, in our supervision relationships (as Supervisors and Supervisees) are at our best; and we bear witness to them in others.

We also believe that if enough of us proactively and consciously adopt them, we will co-evolve a new way to bring coherence to our emerging personal and professional practice. To this end, we encourage you to share them with others, inviting observations and reflections in our mutual learning places and spaces.

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⁵ In this method, ideally there should be no less than three and no more than 7 Simple Rules. Each should start with a verb and be expressed in the positive. They should be general enough to apply to anyone in the system in which they manifest and specific enough for each individual to recognise how they apply them in their unique role.

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¹ (Whiteman, 1998; Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; CIPD, 2014)

² (Gardiner, PhD pending publication)

³ (Stacey, 1996; Olson & Eoyang, 2001b; Zimmerman, 2001; Holladay, 2012)

⁴ (Gardiner, 2013)

⁵ (Prigogine & Nicolis, 1971; Prigogine, 1980; Prigogine & Stengers, 1984; Holland, 1992)

⁶ (Eoyang, 2001; Olson & Eoyang, 2001a; Olson & Eoyang, 2001b; Cabrera, 2008; Cabrera & Colosi, 2008; Eoyang & Holladay, 2013)

⁷ (Holladay, 2005; Patterson et al., 2013)

⁸ (Eoyang, 2010; Eoyang & Holladay, 2013)

⁹ Chapter 7 herein offers a case in which simple rules are used in a Community-in-Practice (Gardiner, 2019)

¹⁰ (Greenleaf, 1998)

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