

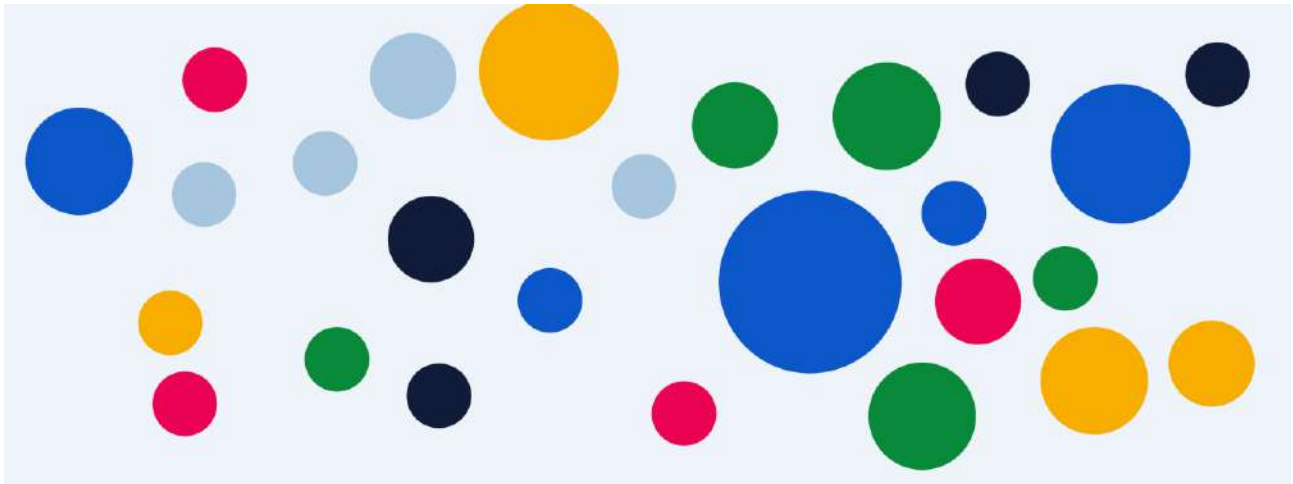
Heron's Interventions: The Sequel

Expanding your range as you move from coach to SUPERvisor

By **Clare Beckett-McInroy MCC MP ACTC ESIA MCS CSS**

As a SUPERvisor, you have a wider range of developmental approaches in your toolbox to choose from than a coach.

Your landscape of exploration spans a greater range. Your palette is creative: you can mix modalities, change texture, choose watercolour or oil paint, or even stick with a blank canvas.



Your duty of care is no longer just to the person in front of you (although that stance is arguable for those who coach systemically), but also to their clients, the systems they are part of, & the coaching profession as a whole.

A wider duty of care

This is one of the defining shifts from coaching into SUPERvision. In coaching, the primary relational contract is usually with the client, even when a sponsor or organisation is involved. In SUPERvision, the field widens. The SUPERvisor is attending not only to the SUPERvisee's development, but also to the quality, safety & ethicality of the SUPERvisee's practice with their own clients.

The Global Code of Ethics makes this wider responsibility explicit. It states that practitioners are expected to act ethically when working with clients & when interacting with fellow practitioners, sponsors, stakeholders & other professionals. It also asks practitioners to take into account the needs & expectations of other relevant parties, not only the immediate client or SUPERvisee (Global Code of Ethics, 2021). This matters deeply in SUPERvision because the work brought into the room often involves absent others: clients, teams, sponsors, organisations, colleagues, communities & professional bodies.

The Code also states that members should be guided by their client's interests while safeguarding that those interests do not harm sponsors, stakeholders, wider society or the natural environment (Global Code of Ethics, 2021, s. 2.8). This is a crucial point for SUPERvisors. It means that empathy with the SUPERvisee is not enough. The SUPERvisor also holds a normative responsibility to notice where a coaching relationship may be drifting into collusion, dependency, poor contracting, boundary confusion, conflicts of interest, unethical confidentiality practices, or harm to wider stakeholders.

This is why SUPERvision requires a broader ethical lens. The SUPERvisor may need to ask: Who is not in the room but is being impacted by this work? What has been contracted, & with whom? Where might the SUPERvisee's loyalty to the client be obscuring responsibility to the sponsor, organisation, profession, or wider system? What risks are emerging, & what needs to be named?

The Global Code of Ethics also places importance on contracting, transparency, confidentiality, professional competence, ongoing SUPERvision & the discussion of ethical dilemmas or potential breaches within SUPERvision or peer SUPERvision. These sections reinforce SUPERvision as a space where ethical complexity is not avoided, but actively explored.



So, the SUPERvisor's duty of care is layered. It includes care for the SUPERvisee as a developing practitioner; care for the SUPERvisee's clients, who may never be seen by the SUPERvisor but are affected by the quality of the work; care for sponsors & stakeholders who are part of the

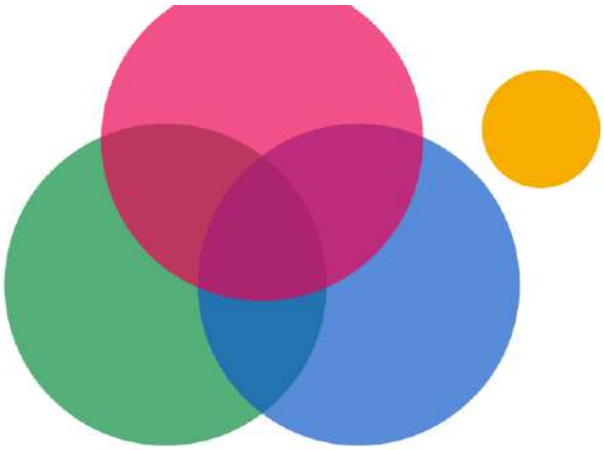
contract; care for the wider system in which the work takes place; & care for the integrity & credibility of the coaching profession itself.

This is why the SUPERvisor needs access to a wider repertoire than facilitation alone. Sometimes the work calls for catalytic questioning. Sometimes it calls for support. Sometimes it calls for information, challenge, ethical clarity or even prescription. Heron's interventions become especially useful here because they give the SUPERvisor language for moving between these stances consciously & responsibly, rather than defaulting only to the familiar coaching mode.

Three functions, plus the commercial

Your core aims are now threefold as you take on board the restorative, formative & normative functions of SUPERvision (Proctor, 1986).

Your focus also becomes more layered. In SUPERvision, you are not only supporting reflection on practice; you are holding three interconnected purposes: resourcing the practitioner, developing the practitioner, & safeguarding the work.



The restorative aspect attends to the human being behind the practice. It creates space for the SUPERvisee to process emotional load, uncertainty, depletion, ethical discomfort, confidence dips, complex client dynamics, or the loneliness that can come with independent practice.

The formative aspect supports growth, learning & professional maturity. This includes helping the SUPERvisee refine their presence, deepen their interventions, strengthen their contracting, sharpen their use of models, & expand their capacity to work with difference, power, complexity & system dynamics.

The normative aspect brings attention to ethics, standards, accountability & quality. It asks whether the work is safe, clean, well-contracted, within competence, & aligned with professional codes & the wider responsibilities of practice.

And, importantly, SUPERvision also needs to make room for the commercial realities of practice. Coaches & practitioners are not working in a vacuum. They are navigating contracting, procurement processes, pricing decisions, positioning, promotion, niche development, sponsor expectations, organisational politics, value articulation, scope creep, confidentiality boundaries & sometimes complex buyer-user relationships.

A SUPERvisee might bring questions such as: Am I pricing this work appropriately? Is this procurement process asking me to compromise my ethics? How do I promote my niche without overclaiming? What needs to be clearer in my contract? How do I hold the needs of the sponsor without losing sight of the client? Where is the boundary between service, over-delivery & self-erasure?

So the work of the SUPERvisor becomes both reflective & practical. It is developmental, ethical, emotional, relational, systemic & commercial. This is what makes SUPERvision such a rich & demanding space. It asks the SUPERvisor to hold the practitioner, the work, the client system, the professional field & the business context all at once.

From coach to SUPERvisor

All of this places a demand on the SUPERvisor to bring more to the work than coaching alone requires.

As a coach, you become adept at facilitation & at being a catalyst for the client's thinking & self-awareness. Your client is the centre of attention, & the assumption is often that the client is the final arbiter of what is right or wrong for them.

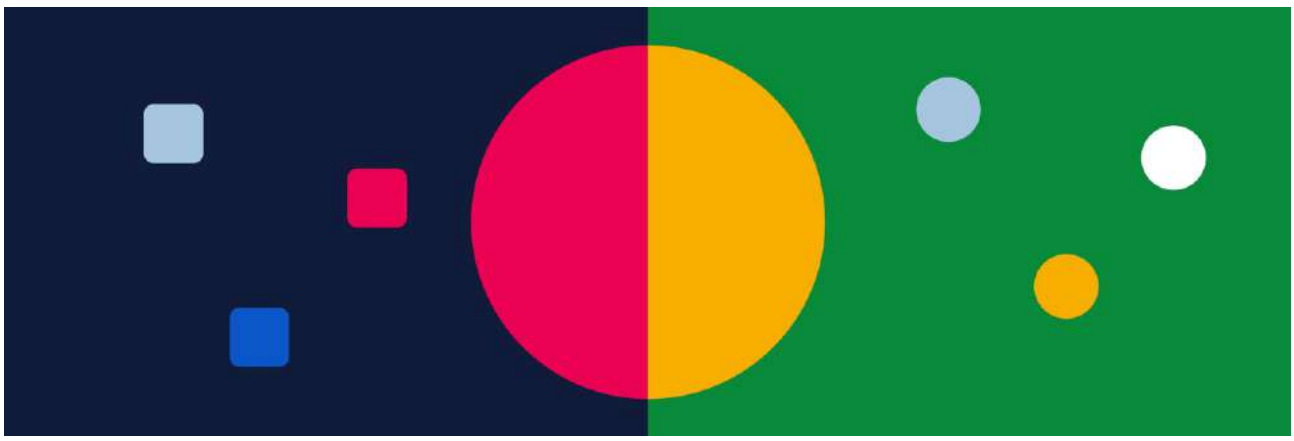
Given the new scope & responsibilities involved in SUPERvision, one of the biggest challenges a new SUPERvisor faces is expanding their range beyond the core traits of humanistic coaching.

Enter stage right: John Heron's 6 Categories of Intervention, set out in his classic book, *Helping the Client* (Heron, 2001).

Heron's 6 Categories of Intervention can help SUPERvisors wear different hats as needed & become more effective by broadening their repertoire. The model is a SUPER useful resource because it enables the SUPERvisor to notice not only what is happening in the room, but also the type of intervention most needed in that moment.

Writing from within the field of therapy, Heron identified 6 Categories of Intervention – essentially different styles of input – which he considered to cover the whole range of possible interventions in helping relationships.

Often shortened to the 6 Cats, these have frequently been co-opted for both coaching & SUPERvision, though they lend themselves to the latter more fully, as we shall see.



Used sensitively, they become a useful model for the SUPERvisor to notice where their style & approach naturally lie, & how & where they can more deliberately expand their range.

Becoming aware of our natural habits is a first step to expanding our options. The transition from coach to SUPERvisor is nothing if not expansive in terms of what we explore, how we explore it, & the responsibility we hold.

For the purposes of this article, we apply Heron's concepts to SUPERvision rather than therapy.

Heron's 6 Categories of Intervention

Heron identified two fundamental intervention styles and, within each of these, three specific approaches.

His fundamental intervention styles are:

- Authoritative
- Facilitative

The authoritative style places a greater level of power & authority with the SUPERvisor to intervene in order to enable change.

The facilitative style places greater power for change within the SUPERvisee, with the SUPERvisor acting as an agent to promote that change.

Even before we look at the specific interventions that sit within these two groups, we can see the potential challenge for coaches in transition. It can be hard to break with a deeply held commitment to facilitation in order to try on increased levels of authority. Yet there are times when this is necessary in SUPERvision.

In my experience, time & again, one of the biggest hurdles for coaches transitioning into SUPERvision is the use of, & even the willingness to accept, the authoritative interventions.

Coaches trained in the humanistic approach are taught that the client is the source of their own answers. They build their practice muscles around facilitating the client to find, trust & act on their own ideas.

The use of authoritative interventions in SUPERvision does not undermine this. Rather, it expands options by introducing a greater authoritative element in which the SUPERvisor can advise, teach, challenge & share their experiences in a more guiding manner.

Let's now explore each group in more detail.

Heron lists the authoritative & facilitative interventions as:

Heron's 6 Categories of Intervention (Heron, 2001)

Authoritative Power for change sits more with the SUPERvisor	**Facilitative** Power for change sits more with the SUPERvisee
Prescriptive Advice, direction & a proposed next step	**Catalytic** Questions, reflection & insight

Authoritative Power for change sits more with the SUPERvisor	Facilitative Power for change sits more with the SUPERvisee
Informative Models, knowledge & concepts	**Cathartic** Enabling the release of emotion
Confronting Challenge, holding up the mirror, facing reality	**Supportive** Empathy, recognition & encouragement

All of these intervention styles, bar one, work just as effectively in humanistic coaching. It is only some coaching schools' predilection for an almost exclusively catalytic approach that leaves many coaches unskilled in the wider set of approaches.

In its truest form, humanistic coaching precludes the prescriptive approach. Put simply, we do not give advice. We do not prescribe.

But, of course, in many areas of coaching, prescription is not just "allowed" but expected. A business coach, presentation coach, parenting coach or health coach may well be expected to give advice. The context of coaching is all important.

Nevertheless, many coaches will come to this model & struggle with the idea of prescription as an intervention they might use.

In SUPERvision, though, all six are undeniably useful.

Before looking at how they help expand a SUPERvisor's range, let's first get clear on each intervention type, remembering that what we mean by intervention is simply the thing the SUPERvisor does & the intention behind it.

Authoritative

Prescriptive Intervention

As we have already alluded to, the prescriptive approach is one in which advice is given, a plan of action suggested, or a next step proposed.

It is predicated on the expertise, experience & authority of the SUPERvisor, who can credibly, knowledgeably & appropriately offer such advice. The language, of course, evokes the medical model, which is unsurprising given its origins in the therapeutic field, but the prescriptive skill applies as much to the business coach & the SUPERvisor as it does the therapist.

There are times when your expertise, clear guidance & advice are needed.

Informative Intervention

The informative intervention is more detached than the prescriptive. It is the passing on of useful ideas, models, information & concepts that the SUPERvisee may find useful & may choose to use, or not.

This is where the teaching & educational elements of SUPERvision sit. It will typically be used to a greater or lesser extent depending on the experience level, context, or specialism of the SUPERvisee.

Confronting Intervention

The confronting intervention is one that many coaches are familiar with & may already use comfortably. It is perhaps the one authoritative stance that has always been a natural part of coaching.

Whether in coaching, SUPERvision or therapy, the confronting intervention is one where we help the person we are working with confront something they may not want to. We might term this "holding up the mirror", confronting patterns, seeing blind spots, or simply facing reality.

It sits within the authoritative stance because, in these moments, it is the SUPERvisor who shines the light on the uncomfortable truth.

Facilitative

Catalytic Intervention

For coaches, this is typically the comfort zone. This is what they trained to do & where they are most at risk of remaining stuck as they transition into becoming a SUPERvisor.

The catalytic intervention is the SUPERvisor as facilitator of self-awareness, thinking, ideas & decision-making. It is helping someone think through their experience, options & future through questioning, listening & reflecting.

Cathartic Intervention

The cathartic intervention certainly has its roots in some forms of therapy, but it is also useful in SUPERvision, especially when we consider the restorative function.

The cathartic intervention is one which enables a release of emotion. It may be the question that taps into the SUPERvisee's feelings, or their response to a distressing experience.

It is less about understanding the emotion than releasing it, which in turn can lead to a greater capacity to make sense of it through catalytic questions.

Supportive Intervention

The final intervention is one that many coaches will also be familiar with.

The supportive intervention is the short & humane comment by the SUPERvisor that lets the SUPERvisee know they are not alone, that they have been heard & understood, & that what they are facing is recognised. It is the comment that normalises yet does not trivialise.

Comments such as *“That must have been difficult”*, *“I can imagine that was no easy decision”*, or *“It sounds like you were doing your utmost”* all sit within the supportive style.

Expanding your range in the transition to SUPERvision

Having briefly covered each category, let's acknowledge again that a coach transitioning into SUPERvision is likely to be well-versed in the facilitative interventions. Most coaches' work is predicated upon asking questions, reflecting, listening to understand, & listening for what is not being said.

All of this is highly effective & continues to be absolutely necessary in SUPERvision.

It is the stretch into the authoritative styles where coaches often struggle. Yet it is one they must begin to make.

As they carry out SUPERvision, they must be alive to the three core functions of SUPERvision:

- The restorative function
- The formative function
- The normative function
- And the commercial aspects too

Each, moment by moment, might call upon a different intervention style.

The normative function is often where SUPERvisors feel least comfortable. It does not take much thinking to connect the dots: the normative function can call more clearly upon the authoritative stance of confronting, informing and, at times, even prescribing.

An example: the use of the authoritative stance in the normative function

Imagine, for a moment, a coach who is actively colluding with the client against the organisation paying for the coaching. Yes, it happens. The two have become enmeshed in a belief about the organisation, which means they are not acting in its interests but rather solely in the client's. The coach has adopted the client's beliefs & mindset about the organisation, even though, in this case, the only source is the client themselves.

A SUPERvisor who limits themselves to the catalytic style may know there is something wrong in the situation but feel unable to name it, hoping instead that questioning the SUPERvisee will lead to it coming out into the open.

If it does not become explicit, & the coach is unable or unwilling to see the risks & issues in the coaching, then the ethical issues in the case may remain unchallenged.

By contrast, a SUPERvisor who develops a broader range of responses might begin in a catalytic mode but realise that this is not moving where they believe it needs to go.

They might then try a confronting intervention to more boldly point out the ethical issue at stake. Perhaps the coach can see it but does not yet feel it is an issue.

The SUPERvisor could offer to share information that might change the coach's perspective & describe aspects of the coach's professional code of conduct, or some information on systemic collusion.

The SUPERvisor might take a prescriptive approach by being explicit about the actions needed for the coaching relationship to remain ethical.

For many coaches, & even some SUPERvisors, this escalation up the authoritative ladder might feel alien & alienating. Yet the art is to be able to have this conversation in a way that remains collaborative, egalitarian & respectful.

This is not about the SUPERvisor laying down the law. Rather, it is about being clear on what the "law" is, whether the coach understands how they might be contravening it, whether they care, & what is most appropriate in order to remedy it.

An example: the use of the informative intervention in the formative function

SUPERvision is not a teaching profession, but that does not mean it is never helpful to use a teaching approach.

The humanistic coach rarely, if ever, involves a teaching element, & so it can be hard for a coach becoming a SUPERvisor to allow themselves this ability.

Again, if they only remain in the catalytic space, they miss out on the rich possibilities of the informative space.

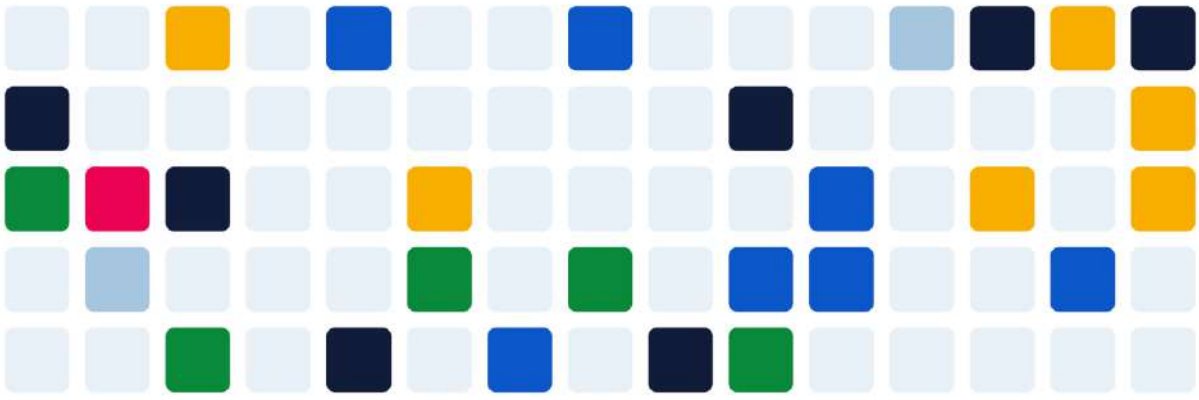
Imagine, for instance, a SUPERvisor working with a relatively inexperienced coach. They are working from a recorded session, & so the SUPERvisor has direct access to the audio element of the coaching.

As the SUPERvisor listens to the session, she hears parts where the coach clearly feels stuck. The coach confirms this & says he did not know where to go next.

The catalytic approach might be an entirely appropriate response, asking the coach what he could have done differently as he looks back, what else he might try, where the feelings of stuckness came from, & more.

But it might also be the case that the SUPERvisor feels she has a model or an approach that could help. Remaining wedded to the catalytic approach, & fearing an imposition of knowledge, might stifle an otherwise useful exploration & sharing of insight.

Taking an informative stance, the SUPERvisor might offer to share something that could help and, assuming the coach agreed, a useful & appropriate sharing of concepts could take place. Bookended by catalytic questioning, this would feel like an entirely adult approach to the authoritative style of intervention.



Using Heron's 6 Categories as a Developmental Map

SUPERvision is fundamentally a reflective space for development and, as a SUPERvisor, you will also be constantly reflecting on your work.

Heron's 6 Categories provide an exceptionally simple model for assessing your natural preferences & tendencies as a SUPERvisor, & for noticing your own blind spots.

Taking a step back & noticing what intervention styles you called upon in a SUPERvision session can open your eyes to your habits & begin to build the muscle of awareness for what else is possible.

Do you notice that you fall back on the catalytic approach almost exclusively? What triggers that? If so, consider how you might introduce another approach & explore what difference it might make.

Perhaps you notice that when you take a more authoritative approach, it triggers post-session anxiety that you overstepped the mark or you were proud of your bravery. Consider how true that is, whether you might have done it differently, or whether old beliefs about the role of a coach are imposing themselves on your SUPERvision practice.

Through reflection-on-action after the session, reflection-in-action during it (Schön, 1983), & preflection – considering how you would approach the same topic, person or group if SUPERvising them again – the 6 Categories allow us to expand our range as SUPERvisors. We get to notice our habits, create more options for action, move more fluidly around issues, & become altogether more competent & confident SUPERvisors.

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