

# **Stretching Ethical Dilemmas – A creative tool for supervisors**

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Study presented at:

7<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Coaching Supervision – Oxford-Brookes University – May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2017

7<sup>th</sup> International Coaching and Mentoring Research Conference - Greenwich University – June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2017

## **Abstract**

The objective of the paper is to explain a new methodology for the exploration and resolution of ethical dilemmas in supervision.

What is proposed is a stretching between *ethics of responsibility* and *ethics of conviction* (Weber, 1995) to find the freedom by which the intimate comfort zone of the inner ethics of the person is obtained.

The proposed approach is quite different from the existing ones because its primary purpose is not to make a choice but to find another path to escape the dilemma.

## **About the authors**

Florence Lamy is a coach, psychotherapist and supervisor. She is currently finishing learning Traditional Chinese Medicine. She is specialized in business coaching, working with people, teams and organizations. She teaches and supervises at the University Paris VIII and at the University Cergy-Pontoise. She has a private supervision practice and trains supervisors (ESQA). She has published eight books related to coaching, meditation and supervision, and also a play. She is the one who developed the approach presented in this paper.

Michel Moral has spent most of his career in an international environment as a manager and executive. In 2003 he created a coaching and supervision practice. He holds a Master degree in Science & Technology and a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology. He has published ten books related to management, coaching and supervision. He trains coaches at the University Cergy-Pontoise, supervises coaches and trains supervisors (EMCC ESQA) with Florence Lamy.

## **Introduction**

Ethics is an important part of supervision, not in terms of the time spent on this subject during sessions but in terms of the supervisor's responsibility. The supervisor, due to his experience and his training as a supervisor, is supposed to have a higher ethical maturity and, therefore, be in a leading position when ethical issues are on the table.

But are we sure that this domain is understood well enough by the professional coach and supervisor? Due to the fact that coach and supervisor trainings are quite short compared to doctor or psychologist trainings, is there is enough room to reflect about ethics?

## **Context**

Due to the number of stakeholders (coach, client, sponsor, the organisation but also stakeholders outside the coach-client-organisation system), all with different values and objectives, the coaching is

exposed to the occurrence of ethical dilemmas due to contradictory loyalties, conflicts of interest and incompatible values systems.

There are more and more contradictions due to the pressure for more competitiveness in a rapidly changing world with the emergence of new technologies such as robotics, digital and artificial intelligence.

## **Definitions**

Ethics in coaching, or more generally in helping professions, is either viewed as a set of universal principles (Oxford Dictionnary; Corrie & Lane, 2015, p. 148) or as a set of rules arising from the content of an activity and that govern a profession. Such set of rules is usually called “Code of Conduct” but in the English speaking part of the world it is also named “Code of Ethics”, “Moral Code”, “Ethical Charter”, “Ethical Code”, “Ethics Policy”, “Action Charter”, “Code of Business Condeuct”, etc...

Most Codes of Conducts in helping professions, in their introduction, refer to general ethical principles as established for instance by Belmont (1978). Brennan & Wildflower (2014) have identified several of them in the Codes of the main coaching bodies.

In some countries, for instance France, Ethics is defined as the decision process used to make a choice in a situation where values are in conflict: *“A reflective way of establishing how to act and make the choice of a behaviour which is respectful of myself and others. (Dictionnaire Littré)*

So, as a summary we can make a distinction between three notions:

**Moral:** Differentiate “Good” and “Evil”. It consists of rights, duties and virtues according to the *socius*.

**Ethics:** Decision process used when values are in conflict. It implies consciousness of an accountable societal action.

**Code of Conduct** (called “déontologie” in French): rights and duties within a profession.

## **Existing methods to analyse ethical dilemmas in coaching/mentoring**

In coaching and mentoring the ethical dilemmas fall into two big categories:

- the temptation to breach a rule of the Code of Conduct when this rule is not relevant
- the real ethical dilemmas when fundamental principles or values are in conflict

Another way to look at ethical dilemmas in coaching is to consider the persons or groups involved:

- Supervisor-supervisee: usually boundary issues,
- Supervisee-Client
- Supervisee-Sponsor
- Supervisee-Supervisee’s context
- Supervisee-Client’s context
- Client-Client’s context

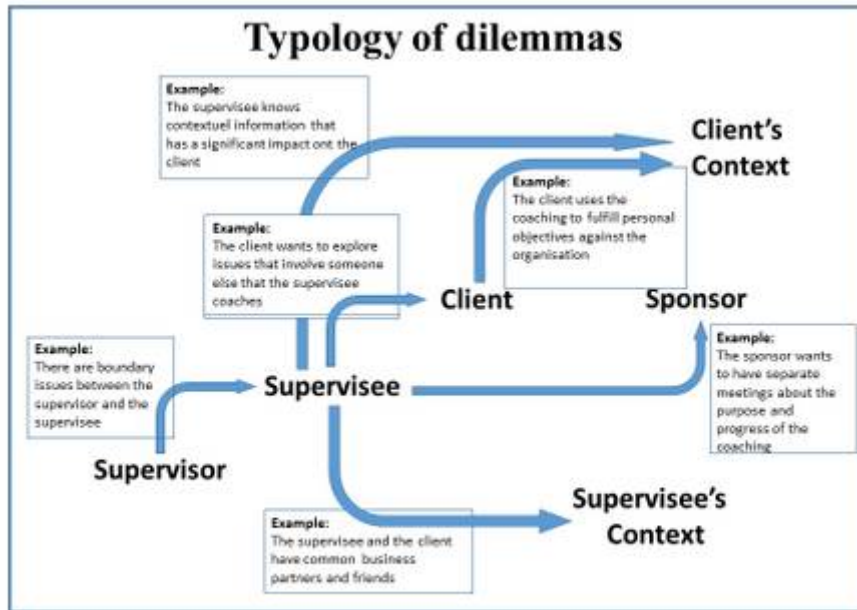


Figure 1 – Typology of ethical dilemmas in coaching and supervision

In order to analyse ethical dilemmas, it is necessary to *identify the key elements of the situation*: actors, relationship between actors, systems, values of the actors and values of the system.

For instance, if the client tries to use the coaching to fulfil personal objectives that are against the sponsor or the organisation, the actors are the coach, the client, the sponsor and maybe some other persons involved in this issue. Understanding the relationships, that is especially conflicts and the reasons for these conflicts, is also important. In this situation the coach needs to be clear about his value system. If “loyalty” is one of his/her key value, he/she has to decide “loyal to whom?”.

Once the key elements are identified, the coach needs to check if there is something about the problem in his/her Code of Conduct and if the question is to breach the Code. If yes, the question is to decide if the rule of the Code is relevant.

Many examples exist related to confidentiality. For instance, the coach knows some information that has a significant impact on the client or on the organisation. In all the Codes of Conduct there is one or several clauses about confidentiality but there are situations where silence might harm more than disclosure.

At that point, the coach and the supervisor are ready to start the analysis of the dilemma and a number of methods are available.

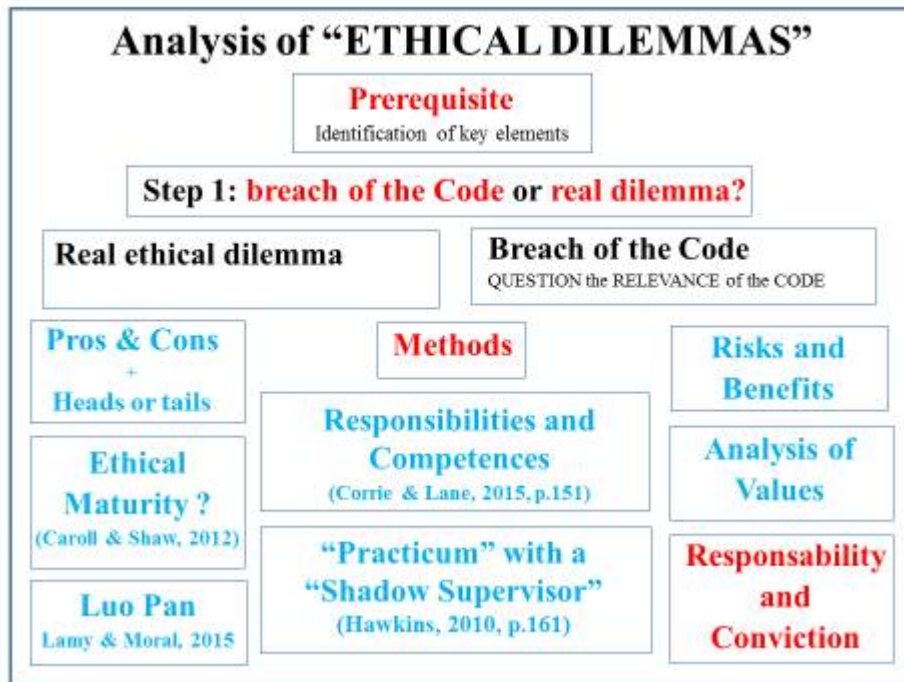


Figure 2 – Different approaches to analyse ethical dilemmas in coaching and supervision

A basic approach is to establish the lists of *pro* and *cons*. It is not very effective but it helps to outline the terms of the alternatives. A way to progress is to toss up and see the effect on the coach: relief or disappointment.

Quite a frequent approach is the *analysis of the values systems* of the stakeholders. A tool like CTT<sup>1</sup> (Cultural Transformation Tools) might be useful.

Another direction consists in evaluating the *risks* and *benefits* of each term of the alternatives and this for each stakeholder.

Corrie & Lane, 2015, p.151 place the ethical dilemma at the limit between *competence* and *responsibility*. Their recommendation to address the dilemma is to explore the universal principles, and/or the ethical maturity (Caroll & Shaw, 2012) and/or to engage in a collaborative dialogue.

Hawkins & Smith, 2010, p.295 propose to organise the supervision group in a “Practicum” where a “shadow supervisor” is in “metaposition”. Lamy & Moral (2015) have developed a similar organisation of a supervision group that is called “didactic supervision”.

Lamy & Moral (2015) have also developed a tool called LuoPan<sup>2</sup> where there is a double stretching: one between *Law* and *Relationship* and the other one between *Individual* and *Collective*. This tool is very effective when the dilemma involves groups.

All these methods proceed by stretching. Stretching is like pulling both sides of a rubber band: the middle part stays the middle part but is extended and thus revealed. But stretching is a bit more complex than that.

<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.valuescentre.com/>

<sup>2</sup> a **luopan** is a Chinese compass used by a Feng Shui practitioner to define the precise direction of a structure, for example a house.

## **Stretching the stretching – 4 ways for stretching in supervision**

Stretching cannot be applied in all situations and has some limits. The first one is related to the fact that in most situations stretching uses *casuistry*.

Casuistry is a reasoning approach used to resolve moral problems by extracting theoretical rules from particular instances and applying these rules to new instances.

For instance, while a principle-based approach might claim that breaching confidentiality is always wrong in coaching, a casuist would argue that it depends upon the details of the case and conclude that if someone is in danger disclosing is the best moral choice.

Casuistry is applicable to moral dilemmas but not to *tragic dilemmas*. A tragic dilemma is when the decision finds no moral justification. Well known examples are the “mother or child dilemma” or “Sophie’s choice”. We might believe that we’ll not face such drama in coaching or supervision. This is not sure because the recent discussion about the Google Car<sup>3</sup> indicates that the pervasion of the digital in organisations might create tragic dilemmas.

Another limit comes from the “level of reality” that will be used in the stretching. If we consider a dilemma like the choice between two jobs, it is the same level of reality and is it possible to identify a number of ethical dilemmas in coaching and supervision that involve the same level of reality.

Now, dilemmas between the individual level and the collective level, or between a universal value and a contextual value, both involve different levels of reality.

Finally, the complexity of ethical dilemmas needs to be considered along 4 dimensions:

Good---Bad.

A lot of dilemmas imply a moral element.

Inside the individual---Outside the individual.

This is another way to consider the intrapersonal on one side and the interpersonal/systemic on the other side.

Fragmentation---Unity.

This relates to situations where the whole is more than the parts. For instance, a cohesive corporate culture is on the side of Unity.

Quantic---Continuous.

Some mechanisms are quantic, that is the evolution is made by jumps, and some are continuous.

## **The proposed methodology to analyse an ethical dilemma in supervision: ETIK MAP**

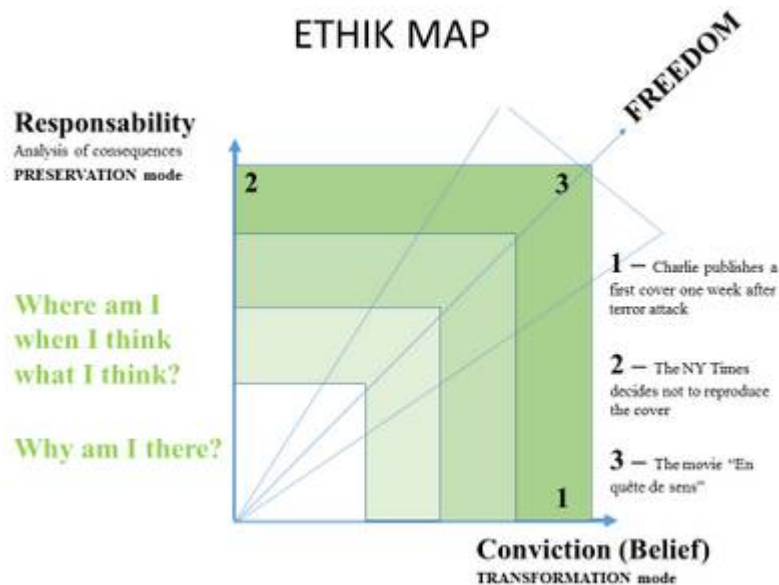
The proposed approach is quite different from all those mentioned above because its primary purpose is not to make a choice but to find another path to escape the dilemma.

What we propose is to stretch between *ethics of responsibility* and *ethics of conviction* (Weber, 1995) to find the freedom by which the intimate comfort zone of the inner ethics of the person is obtained.

This model emerged during the period of uncertainty in Paris at the beginning of 2015 after the terrorist assault against Charlie. Because of the need to define the right position about publishing or not the cover page of Charlie, the model was imagined to help people in their way to elaborate their response.

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<sup>3</sup> Because the car is driven by a robot, such decisions as « hit the old woman or the young girl if this is the only alternative » need to be taken *a priori* by the engineers.



The methodology in supervision consists of asking questions on one side (*Responsibility*, that is analysis of the consequences) and then on the other side (*Conviction*). Questions might belong to one of the four dimensions mentioned above.

In individual supervision the supervisor can use a set of pre-prepared questions. In group supervision the supervisor can ask the participants to ask questions on a theme (for instance *Individual Responsibility*) by turns. He/she can also decide to focus on, for instance, *Conviction* if the coach is glued on this side.

### **A case: Nicolas**

Context: « *I have coached the director of a nurses training centre on the following issue: she discovered after two years that she had made serious mistakes in the accounting.* »

Actions: « *I made her work on her feelings until she felt good. I used Emotional Freedom Techniques (Gestalt)* »

Request: « *I feel like I have missed something. I need to understand what* »

Supervisor's hypothesis: « *Psychological structure oriented towards Self (me! Me! ME!) in resonance with forgetting the other, the collective and the responsibility* »

**Supervisor's proposal: Work on the situation with an ETIK MAP by looking at where the director and the coach have placed the freedom gap.**

### **Conclusion**

As said before we are entering a world where Big Data and Collective Intelligence will favour many ambiguous situations. So we have to question ourselves about how we, as supervisors, are going to deal with such issues.

For instance, what is your position as a supervisor when the supervisee cannot escape from his convictions and this puts him/her in an individualistic posture? Possibly this posture can hurt or harm other people.

Therefore, we need to have several strings to our bow, that is a choice between several methods as shown in figure 2. The work to select the best method for a given type of dilemma has not been done yet and this is an open area of research.

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