

# INSIGHT GUIDE # 48

## EXECUTIVE EDUCATION

# How can I help coaches reflect on their practice within supervision?

Reflective practice can take many forms, including supervision with a qualified supervisor. As coaches, mentors and supervisors our aim is to help deliver value to others; reflective practice also helps us to improve our performance with our clients (Hay, 2007). Sometimes we will have access to a colleague or supervisor to discuss

our supervision practices, but using the 'halos and horns' model outlined here will enable you to consider your practice holistically, with or without others, to identify any underlying patterns and to create your own developmental plan in service of your clients. All you need is paper and something to write with.



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## What is the halos and horns model?

The description of this model comes from a practice first noticed in recruitment. It is defined as 'a tendency to allow one's judgment of another person... to be unduly influenced by an unfavourable (horns) or favourable (halo) first impression based on appearances' (Collins, 2019). It suggests we make quick judgements due to factors such as unconscious bias and countertransference (when something about the person reminds us of someone or something from our past). It may relate to someone's appearance, but it could also be how they speak, their body language or a mannerism, and it tends to happen very quickly. We will all have had experiences of some clients who are a joy to work with and others we find difficult, so this model can help us understand our reactions.

## Why use this model?

Often in our reflection and in supervision:

*'We bring issues to discuss relating to individual clients. This exercise treats our client work on a systemic level, seeing our portfolio as a whole.'*

(Turner, 2019: 48–9)

It is a written exercise so can be done quietly alone, or in groups, allowing our 'unknown' thoughts to surface and for us to consider themes and patterns.

In supervision it is not uncommon for coaches to only bring some of their client work and for some clients to remain hidden from view, but this way each client will get some reflective space. The hope is that it will both allow us to deal with dilemmas in our practice and also enjoy a playful approach that makes reflection fun and creative.

There are other important models, like Hawkins' seven-eyed model (Hawkins & Smith, 2013), which is widely used. It is a systemic supervision model that also attends to these systemic processes by looking at a situation from various perspectives.

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## How does it work? Using it in practice

We take the following steps using Table 1 (opposite). We don't rush – it is done reflectively rather than speedily:

- We list our clients, using whatever identifying symbol we want so we remember to whom each symbol refers. (See first column, Table 1.)
- Next, we think of a sentence that sums up our feelings about each client. This may be physical sensations, emotional reactions or a metaphor that may come to mind: animal, mineral, character from history, mythical creature etc. In Turner (2019) Gregor describes two of his clients as a 'nervous dog' and a 'sea lion' (2019: 51). (See column 2.)
- We then consider which clients we might be applying halos and horns to. Whom do we find easy to work with and look forward to? Whom do we find it harder to empathise with? (See column 3.)
- We can then draw from our understanding of transactional analysis and, using the ego state model (Stewart & Joines, 1987) of parent, adult and child, consider how we see our client and how we see ourselves in the relationship. (See column 4.)
- We might also consider what we believe the balance of each is during our sessions with the client and what we think the desired percentage is. (See column 5.)
- Some supervisees who use this also like to consider the Karpman drama triangle, using the three roles of persecutor, rescuer and victim (Stewart & Joines, 1987: 236). (See column 6.)
- Finally, we sit with what we have written and ask ourselves some questions: What makes a 'good' client for me? Are there particular types of client I find easier or harder to work with? Are there particular sectors or types of organisations that resonate more with me? These are the emergent themes. (See column 7.)

**Table 1: Analysing your client list**

1	2	3	4		5		6		7
Client	Brief description: physical sensations I have, image, metaphor, magical creature, historical character, dance we do etc	Halo, horns or unsure (would the organisation see them the same way?)	Parent, adult or child: how I see them and how I see myself in the relationship		Parent, adult or child: my balance as coach/ team leader in sessions with client/team member (e.g. P: 25%, A: 70%, C: 5%)		Karpman drama triangle: do I or the client ever step onto the triangle and become rescuer, persecutor or victim (with us/ others)?		Emerging themes
			Me	Them	Actual %	Desired %	Me	Them	

**Implications**

As my own supervisees (and I) have noticed, we have the tendency to place metaphorical halos and horns on those we meet, and we need to develop an awareness of their presence by regularly viewing our practice as a whole to check for patterns. By doing so, we may well be able to answer some of our own dilemmas, such as ‘Should I work with this client?’, and this will have an impact in our chemistry sessions and contracting as well as in our sessions.

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By undertaking this systematic reflection, we are examining what this might mean for our practice and effectiveness and also considering our next steps.



## Henley Centre for Coaching

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The Centre offers annual membership to all professional coaches, providing a virtual-learning environment where the members shape research and practice in coaching. Check out our website for details on how we can help you and your business come to life.



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Eve is an award-winning coach, supervisor, researcher and member of the Henley coaching team.

## References

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