Supervision in the Helping Professions

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Supervision in the Helping Professions

Fourth edition

Peter Hawkins and Robin Shohet
With contributions from Judy Ryde and Joan Wilmot
1 ‘Good enough’ supervision and the challenges of our time

Introduction

Whether you work with demanding and unruly students in a school, the emotional distress of those who are traumatized, depressed, existentially despairing or mentally ill, disturbed and fragmented families, the sick and the dying, angry criminals or the homeless and destitute, you are all part of the helping professions and this book is written to support you in learning, developing and doing high quality work throughout what may be a 50-year career.

As we have worked with a growing variety of different helping professions and in different countries, we have increasingly recognized that quality work by an individual professional cannot be sustained alone. We cannot rely on the learning we received in our initial training, for the needs of individuals, families, communities and helping organizations are constantly changing and so are expectations and professional best practice. We need to be continually learning, not just new knowledge and skills, but developing our personal capacity, for our own being is the most important resource we all use in our work. We also need to be continually supported and held in staying open to demands of emotionally relating to a wide range of people and needs. We need the open honesty of our colleagues constantly to attend to how we each fall into illusion, delusion and collusion in our work and develop our ethical capacity to respond to complex and competing demands. Quality work cannot be sustained alone.
The first part of the chapter presents the foundation or our thinking which has remained constant since our first edition. The second half addresses how the world has changed dramatically since then. For now the helping professions are in a world where there is more demand, with greater expectations of quality of help and with fewer resources at a time when the world is inevitably more volatile, disturbed and interconnected. We have now hit 'the limits to growth' and the economic, ecological and human crises are combining to create both a 'great disruption' to life as we have previously known it and the enormous challenges of our times.

'Good enough' supervision

The late Donald Winnicott, paediatrician and psychoanalyst, introduced the concept of the 'good enough mother' – the mother who, when her child throws the food back at her, does not overreact to this event as a personal attack, or sink under feelings of inadequacy and guilt, but can hear the child expressing his or her temporary inability to cope with the external world. Winnicott points out that it is very hard for any mother to be 'good enough' unless she herself is also held and supported, either by the child's father, or by another supportive adult. This provides the 'nursing triad', which means that the child can be held even when he or she needs to express their negativity or murderous rage.

This concept provides a very useful analogy for supervision, where the 'good enough' counsellor, psychotherapist or other helping professional can survive the negative attacks of the client through the strength of being held within and by the supervisory relationship. We have often seen very competent workers reduced to severe doubts about themselves and their abilities to function in the work through absorbing distress, dis-ease, and disturbance from clients. The supervisor's role is not just to reassure the supervisee, but to allow the emotional disturbance to be felt within the safer setting of the supervisory relationship, where it can be survived, reflected upon and learnt from. Supervision thus provides a container that holds the helping relationship within the 'therapeutic triad'.

In choosing to help, where our role is to pay attention to someone else's needs, we are entering into a relationship which is different from the normal and everyday. There are times when it seems barely worthwhile, perhaps because we are battling against the odds, or because the client seems ungrateful, or because we feel drained and have seemingly nothing left to give. In times of stress it is sometimes easy to keep one's head down, to 'get on with it' and not take time to reflect. Organizations, teams and individuals can collude with this attitude for a variety of reasons, including external pressures and internal fears of exposing one's own inadequacies.

At times like this supervision can be very important. It can give us a chance to stand back and reflect; a chance to avoid the easy way out of blaming others – clients, peers, the organization, 'society', or even oneself – and it can give us a chance to engage in the search for new options, to discover the learning that
often emerges from the most difficult situations, and to seek support. We believe that, if the value and experience of good supervision are realized at the beginning of one's professional career, then the 'habit' of receiving good supervision will become an integral part of the work life and the continuing development of the worker.

In the last 35 years there has been an enormous increase in the use of counselling and other therapeutic approaches in many of the helping professions. This has in part been fuelled by the move away from more traditional methods, including institutional containment to 'community care' for those needing help and support such as supporting old people in their own homes more often than in residential care. This move has led to an ever-increasing demand not just on families and relatives, but also on the whole range of helping professionals who have had to learn new ways of relating to the distress, disturbance and dis-ease they meet in their work. At the same time there has been an increased acceptance by the general public that most of us will benefit from some form of counselling, coaching or professional support at certain stages of our lives.

This enormous upsurge both in counselling and psychotherapy, and in therapeutic approaches within many of the helping and people professions, has brought in its wake the recognition that such work benefits enormously from supervision. In Chapter 6 (p. 60) we define supervision as follows:

**Supervision is a joint endeavour in which a practitioner with the help of a supervisor, attends to their clients, themselves as part of their client practitioner relationships and the wider systemic context, and by so doing improves the quality of their work, transforms their client relationships, continuously develops themselves, their practice and the wider profession.**

Thus the supervisor has to integrate the developmental role of educator with that of being the provider of support to the worker and, in most cases, ensure the quality of the supervisee's work with their clients. These three functions do not always sit comfortably together (see Chapter 6), and many supervisors can retreat from attempting this integration to just one of the roles. Some supervisors become quasi-counsellors or coaches to their supervisees; others turn supervision into a two-person case conference, which focuses on client dynamics; others may have a managerial checklist with which they 'check up' on the client management of the supervisees. It is our intention in this book to help the supervisor develop an integrated style of supervision. We are not only advocating integration of the developmental, supportive and qualitative functions, but also a supervisory approach which is relationship based.

Sometimes, even in the best supervisory relationships, there will be occasions of being stuck, of wariness and even avoidance. For one reason or another, fear and negativity can creep in and it is useful for both parties to be able to recognize this and have tools for going through and beyond it. This book is addressed to both supervisor and supervisees, for we think that both have some responsibility for the
quality of supervision; both form part of the same system geared towards ensuring
the quality of the work. As part of taking joint responsibility for the supervisory
relationship which we are advocating, we have given guidelines to check out the
process, especially around the initial forming of a contract for the working
relationship. This working contract can be very important as it forms the
boundaries and baseline to which both parties can refer. We emphasize how
contracting is not just something that happens at the beginning of a relationship,
or even at the beginning of each session, but is a process that needs constant
revisiting.

Before entering this relationship, however, we believe that supervision begins
with becoming a reflective practitioner and forms of self-supervision. Our reflective
practice needs to include not only reflecting on our current work but also our core
beliefs and motivations for being a helper. By doing this we can lessen the split that
sometimes occurs in the helpers, whereby they believe they have no legitimate
needs, and see their clients as only sick and needy, without their own resources. As
Margaret Rioch says: 'If students do not know that they are potentially murderers,
crooks and cowards, they cannot deal therapeutically with these potentialities in
their clients' (Rioch et al. 1976: 3).

Our experience has been that supervision can be a very important part of taking
care of oneself, staying open to new learning, and an indispensable part of the
helper's well-being, ongoing self-development, self-awareness and commitment to
professional development. In some professions, however, supervision is virtually
ignored after qualifying. We think that lack of supervision can contribute to feel­
ings of staleness, rigidity and defensiveness which can very easily occur in profes­
sions that require us to give so much of ourselves. In extremes the staleness and
defensiveness contribute to the syndrome that many writers have termed 'burnout'
(see Chapter 2). Supervision can mitigate this process by breaking the cycle of
feeling drained which leads to a drop in work standards which produces guilt and
inadequacy which leads to a further drop in standards. Supervision is not just about
preventing stress and burnout, however, but enables supervisees to continually
learn and flourish, so they spend more time working at their best than would
otherwise be possible.

Supervision, like helping, is not a straightforward process and is even more
complex than working with clients. There is no tangible product and very little
evidence whereby we can rigorously assess its effectiveness, although in recent
years more research on outcomes has been carried out (see Chapter 6). One person
brings to another a client, usually never seen by the supervisor, and reports very
selectively on aspects of the work. Moreover, there may be all sorts of pressures on
either or both of them from the profession, organization or society in which they
both work to focus on a variety of differing agendas. So, as well as dealing with the
client in question, they have to pay attention both to their supervisory relation­
ship and to the wider systems in which they both operate. There is a danger that
both the supervisees and the supervisor can be overwhelmed by the degree of
complexity and become like the centipede who, when asked which foot it moved
first, lost the ability to move at all.
Beyond ‘good enough’: the new challenges for supervision

Peter Hawkins has written this section to set supervision in the context of the challenges of the twenty-first century. Our basic position on supervision, outlined above, was developed when we first wrote on supervision 25 years ago. Today it still forms the foundation of our work and the trainings we give. Supervision that attends to the quality of the work with the clients as well as the support and development of the supervisee is, we believe, essential for all helping professions, not just at the time of training or being newly qualified, but for the entirety of one’s career. All of this is necessary but no longer sufficient.

We need to recognize that in the last 25 years the world has radically changed. In the mid-1980s, when we started writing the first edition, we lived in a world that believed that perpetual economic growth was possible and that with it would come constantly increasing resources for the helping professions, and improved quality of life for all. Although some wise and courageous writers with great foresight were already warning of the looming ecological crisis (such as Rachel Carson 1962 in *Silent Spring* and Bateson 1972) we could still pretend that it was a great way off and hopefully human ingenuity and science would find ways of avoiding it. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, this denial is no longer sustainable. Tim Smit, the founder of the Eden Project, wrote that the next 30 years are one of the most exciting times to be alive in the whole of human history, for in that time we will either discover whether ‘Homo is truly sapiens’ or we will join the fossil records. Thomas Friedman wrote in the New York Times (7 March 2008) in the midst of the economic crisis:

What if the crisis of 2008 represents something much more fundamental than a deep recession? What if it is telling us that the whole growth model we created over the last 50 years is simply unsustainable economically and ecologically and that 2008 was when we hit the wall – when Mother Nature and the market both said: ‘No more.’

The economist Kenneth Boulding (quoted in Gilding 2011: 64) went further and wrote: ‘Anyone who believes exponential growth can go on forever in a finite world is either a madman or an economist.’

We cannot blame economists, bankers, governments or regulators for either the economic or the ecological crisis. We all created it with our addiction to, and reliance on growth and we will all be living with the entwined ecological and economic crisis for the foreseeable future until we make the necessary enormous changes to our expectations, our lives and our approach to living. So what does this mean for the helping professions? There are four key incontrovertible forces that are and will continue to shape the context of the helping professions for decades to come:

- greater demand
- higher expectations of quality of service
• fewer resources
• the great disruption.

Greater demand
The world's population is still exponentially growing. When I (Peter Hawkins) was born in 1950 the global population was only 2.5 billion. In 2011 it reached seven billion for the first time. The United Nations predicts that population growth will continue at 0.7 per cent a year which will lead to a world population of nine billion in 2050. So I will probably see it more than treble in my lifetime. Some people comment that the birth rate has been falling in developing countries, but in these countries the exponential rise in life expectancy is still fuelling the growth and, what is more, the people over the age of 70 are the biggest users of the helping professions. Migration, despite political rhetoric, will continue to increase. The poorest in the world can increasingly discover the disparity between their living standards and those of the rich world and the ecological crisis disproportionately creates severe hardship in the poorest parts of the world.

Higher expectations of quality of service
Not only are there many more people to help, but the expectations of all users of the helping professions are increasing exponentially. Thomas Friedman (2008) wrote that the world was not only getting 'hot' and 'crowded', but also 'flat', by which he meant that we all know what each other is getting. The number of mobile phones in the world reached seven billion even before the world population reached that figure. Even the economically poorest parts of the world have internet access by mobile telephony so we are all interconnected in new ways. This has two major impacts on the helping professions. Propriety knowledge of the professions is now democratized and liberated so that clients can become better informed than the professionals in many areas and can know what others are receiving in different parts of the country or in different parts of the world. Increasingly we are all demanding the best and when caring services get it wrong the media and internet can ensure that everyone knows about it.

Fewer resources
Many people still believe that the current economic downturn is a temporary setback in the inevitable rise in prosperity and continued economic growth. Yet the weight of scientific evidence shows us that this is a form of dangerous collective denial. Scientists show how it would take more than 1.4 worlds to sustain human life as it currently operates. That means we are annually using 140 per cent of the world's available resources, or in other words eroding the fundamental resources year on year in a way that cannot be sustained. Economic forecasts on population growth and world consumption predict that by 2050 we will have a world that will annually run at 500–700 per cent of capacity (Gilding 2011: 51). Our wealth and
'GOOD ENOUGH' SUPERVISION AND THE CHALLENGES OF OUR TIME

Prosperity fundamentally come from the world we live in and we are massively overdrawn and we are eroding the base capital.

Combined with this we are seeing a large-scale move in economic power, with European and North American economies declining and rapid growth in the economies of Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRIC) and the N11 (the next 11 which all have the potential to overtake the current G7 leading economies in this century). Economic growth is moving south and east. In the overspent first developed countries, fewer resources in relation to the growing demand is an inevitability. We need to learn to adjust to living with this.

The Great Disruption

*The Great Disruption* is the title of Paul Gilding’s book (2011) in which he presents an overwhelming body of evidence that the world is facing an unprecedented time of challenge on all fronts. Climate change is no longer a threat but a reality and moving faster than the maligned ecologists of the last century were warning. Global warming is happening and leading to climate volatility including: increased floods, droughts, heatwaves and intense cold. Different regions will be differently and sometimes unpredictably impacted. Economic volatility is inevitable with our global interdependent economy at a time when we hit the limits to growth. We will see the price of basic food, energy and raw materials such as wood, fibre, concrete and minerals continue to rise faster than incomes.

Political challenges will increasingly be beyond the capacity of nation states to resolve and we lack the global governance structures that can address them. We only need to look at the failure of the global eco-summits, the euro crisis, or the Israel-Palestine conflict to realize the extent of this.

This means that there is an inevitable increase in human disruption, disturbance, distress and dis-ease and where will the human consequences of this be most felt? It will turn up daily in our schools, hospitals, prisons, care homes, on the streets and in our workplaces. The helping professions will be at the front line of addressing the human consequences while they will also have to adjust to fewer resources and greater demand.

How can we respond?

A few years ago I spoke to a conference of teachers from across the developed world. They were all complaining about more being demanded of them – larger classes, year-on-year improvements in the exam performance of their pupils, children and parents demanding more and giving less automatic respect, and yet no increase in resources. The more they complained, the more powerless they became. I decided to challenge the disempowering consensual collusion and presented a few demographic, economic and scientific projections. I concluded by saying: ‘It seems inevitable that you will year-on-year be asked to do more at higher quality with fewer resources in a more disrupted and disturbed world. The question is what can we do together to step up to this challenge?’
I do not believe that our choices in response to the global challenges are either
denial or powerlessness. Neither do I believe that heroically doing more, trying
harder under greater pressure, will be sustainable. The challenges are beyond indi­

gual leadership or individual coping mechanisms. We need to work on this
together and that means far greater levels of collaboration and combining than
ever before. Supervision, teamwork and staff support are more crucial than ever,
but they too have to develop and evolve far more quickly than ever before. We
cannot supervise, lead or operate teams in the way we did when this book first
came out. At that time I used to ask supervisees what they wanted from supervision
and teams what they required from their team consultant. Now, when I supervise
individuals, I ask them: ‘What is the world you operate in requiring you to step up
to and what are the areas in which you struggle to respond?’ When I work with
teams, I ask them: ‘What is the world you operate in asking you collectively to step
up to, to which you, collectively, have not yet found a way to respond?’ Contracting
needs to move from being more focused on the outside-in and future-back than
starting from the individual’s needs and the problems of last week.

The world is requiring the human species to evolve and change. What is needed
is major transformation in human consciousness, ways of thinking, behaving and
relating, both to each other and ‘the more than human world’ (Abrams 1996).
Supervision in the helping professions needs to play its part. Helping professionals
will need to be constantly increasing their individual and collective capacities to
respond and supervision needs to be in service, not just of quality assuring last
month’s work with clients, but developing the human capacity to address the
increased demands of tomorrow. In Chapter 2 we address what we see as the five
fundamental capacities that we will all need to develop to be helping professionals
who can respond fully to the great challenges of our time. Supervision will also face
increased pressures, with supervisees better informed about what they could or
should be getting from their supervisor, and supervision will have to respond to
the conflicting needs of different stakeholders. (see Chapter 9)

Conclusion

In our first edition we were building on the work of Winnicott and many others to
show how the challenges of deep emotional work with the clients of the helping
professions cannot be met alone. We saw that it requires that you are constantly
learning and developing your capacities and are yourself held and supported. Now
in our fourth edition, 25 years later, the challenge is fundamentally greater. The
argument that supervision is necessary for all helping professionals and not just for
those in training and newly qualified should now be settled. We can move on to
the bigger questions of how we support individuals, teams and organizations in a
time when more is demanded, at a higher quality, with less resources and in the
midst of a ‘great disruption’ with inevitable fallout.

When I was young, children would ask their grandfathers, if any were still alive:
‘What did you do in the Great War Grandpa?’ Our grandchildren will ask us: ‘What
did you do in the great disruption? We owe them an answer. We are certainly
daunted by the task ahead, but cannot afford to be faint-hearted, for there is much
to be done. We hope that this fourth edition of our book supports us in each
making our faltering steps towards rising to the challenges of our time.
2 The five capacities of reflective practice

Introduction

The last chapter laid out the increasing challenges for the helping professions and the need for all practitioners to be constantly learning and attending to their personal and professional development. This chapter explores five key capacities that are at the heart of good practice and are essential for supervision and in turn are supported and developed by supervision. These five capacities are:

1 Learning and unlearning.
2 Reflecting.
3 Relating.
4 Collaborating.
5 Sustaining one's own resilience.

These capacities are somewhat similar to those developed by Malcolm Parlett in his writing on the five capabilities which have informed our thinking (Parlett 2000, 2003). He describes five abilities called for in the art of living well which he names: (1) responding; (2) interrelating; (3) self-recognizing; (4) embodying; (5) experimenting. We use the term capacities as we see them as human qualities that can be constantly developed (see Chapter 6).
Learning and unlearning

Traditionally learning was seen as something that preceded action. Learning was for children and carried out in schools before you moved into independent life. Learning was for ‘those in training’ before they were accredited to fully practise. Learn first, practise second. This way of thinking has been radically changed in the last 50 years, but still lingers on in some professions. Many doctors and teachers still view supervision as something you would receive in training, but not necessary for the fully qualified and experienced professional.

One of the early pioneers of the change was Reg Revans the founder of ‘action learning’, who worked in the coal mining industry in the 1940s and then with the health service. He was struck by the gap between what managers learnt in theory and what they then encountered in practice. He also realized that with the increasing acceleration of change, much of what you learnt in your training was not relevant to the world you were working in only a few years later. He wrote the challenging formula:

\[ L \geq E.C. \]

This stood for learning must equal or be greater than environmental change. If the organization does not learn faster than the world around it is changing, the organization will cease to exist – a sort of Darwinian law of organizational survival! The same is true for the individual. Helping professionals do not just become better practitioners the longer they practise. Only if they are continuing to learn faster than the world they operate in is changing will they continue both to flourish at work and fulfil their full potential.

Most professions have now embraced the importance of continuing professional development (CPD). But for many this is focused on updating skills and knowledge. More progressive professions are recognizing that the core of one’s work as a helping professional lies in the use of oneself in the work and CPD needs to become CPPD or continuing personal and professional development (Hawkins and Chesterman 2006).

There has been a major shift towards recognizing that training and CPPD is not just something that happens when you go off to workshops or training events, but needs to be embedded in the workplace (Hawkins 1986, 2012). Many organizations have started to embrace the 70:20:10 principle: 70 per cent of professional development happens on the job; 10 per cent by attending courses; and 20 per cent by supervision or coaching which connects what is being learnt through experience and what has been learnt in more formal trainings (see Hawkins 2012).

Kolb (1984) developed the notion of the learning cycle, which has had enormous impact on how learning in adults is understood and the movement away from the overfocus on learning in the classroom to more focus on learning at work and in relation to current work. We use a simplified version of Kolb’s learning cycle based on the later work of Juch (1983) and Hawkins (1991). Learning happens at all
four key stations on the learning cycle as well as in the connections around the full cycle (see Fig. 2.1).

Different individuals have different learning styles and learn in very different ways, which affects where they are most comfortable starting on the learning cycle. Some prefer to start with practical action and then reflect on what works and what does not through reflection. Others like to have the theory and explanation before working out how to plan to apply the model in action. Honey and Mumford (1992) have developed a number of methodologies for people to ascertain their learning styles and explore how both utilize their dominant preference and expand their repertoire of learning possibilities.

As you read this book, some of you will like the models and find they open up new ways of thinking about the field. For others the models might be baffling and they will find the stories and short case vignettes the most illuminating. For others of you it will be taking the exercises mentioned and doing them for yourselves. Some people will learn best not by reading this book but by talking about it to others.

It is very useful to know about your own learning style. Otherwise it is all too easy to feel inadequate when you find that others learn far faster than you in certain types of learning situations. We all have a tendency to believe that others learn the way we do. Thus, one of us (Peter Hawkins) will provide more frameworks than most people can digest and the other (Robin Shohet) will tell stories, leaving some hungry to know how this connects with the wider theory (see also Ryan 2004). Your learning style is related to your sensory mode dominance (see Chapter 6). Some people learn to read through seeing whole words (visual), others through the phonetic sounds (auditory), while others by associating the word to a movement or feeling (kinaesthetic). So it is important to answer the questions: ‘How do you best learn?’ and ‘What have been your best learning experiences?’ Honey and Mumford (1992) have developed a number of methodologies for people to

**Figure 2.1** Action learning cycle
ascertain their learning styles and explore how to utilize their dominant preference and expand their repertoire of learning possibilities. We have used this work to develop our own model of learning short circuits to help supervisees as well as those training in the helping professions to become more aware of their stuck learning patterns (see Fig. 2.2). There are five main limited learning styles that we have identified:

1. **The firefighter – compulsive pragmatist.** This is the plan-do-plan-do trap where the motto is: ‘If what you plan does not work, plan and do something different.’ The learning stays at the level of trial and error. This person does not reflect. As van Ooijen (2003: 114) writes:

   It is not sufficient to gain experience without also reflecting on what we experience in order to learn from it. Most of us can probably think of people who, despite having been in their professions for a long time, have not been in the habit of reflecting on their experience. As a result they do not appear to have learnt a great deal and may seem rigid in their approach to work. They seem to do things out of habit, and when challenged will say this is because ‘We have always done it this way’.

2. **The post-mortemizer.** This is the do-reflect-do-reflect trap, where the motto is: ‘Reflect on what went wrong and correct it.’ The learning here is restricted to error correction.

3. **The navel-gazing theorist.** This is the reflect-theorize-reflect-theorize trap, where the motto is: ‘Philosophize on how things could be better, but never risk putting your theories to the test.’

4. **The paralysis by analysis.** This is the analyse-plan-then-analyse some more trap, where the motto is: ‘Think before you jump, plan how to do it

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**Figure 2.2 Learning cycle short circuits**
and think a bit more. Learning is limited by the fear of getting it wrong or taking a risk.

5 **The totalitarian.** This is the theorize-do trap, where the motto is: 'Work it out in private and then impose it on them.'

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**Reflecting**

Supervision develops out of the rich soil of reflective practice and in turn is a key element of supporting and developing the reflective practice of all those who work in the people and helping professions at individual, group and organizational levels.

To be a good supervisee one needs to develop one's capacity to be a reflective practitioner, not only when one is in supervision, but throughout one's working week. This includes being able to reflect before and after meetings with one's clients, and gradually develop the ability to reflect in the midst of challenging meetings, where one can be both fully engaged with the live relationship while internally stepping back and noticing the pattern that is happening, in the client, oneself, the relationship and its connection to the wider systemic context. One of the main benefits of supervision is that we develop our 'internal supervisor', or an internal witness, which can support us in not becoming reactive under pressure in difficult encounters, but to reflect on the process that is happening and develop a more thoughtful response.

Donald Schon (1983), one of the main writers to first promote reflective practice, defined it as 'the capacity to reflect on action so as to engage in a process of continuous learning', which, he suggested, is 'one of the defining characteristics of professional practice'. Schon, distinguished between reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action. The former is any activity which supports the practitioner in mulling over the work they have carried out, better understanding of the client interaction, what the work triggered or brought up for them and how they might have handled it better. This in turn supports reflection in action, the ability of the practitioner to think on their feet and be both engaged in the work while at the same time having a part of them that is witnessing the interaction, making sense of it and informing how they proceed.


**From action to reflection**

The first step to becoming a reflective practitioner is to create space in what is often a very full work schedule. That will allow us to be able to stand back and reflect on and review our actions and relationships. Without space for reflection work becomes habituated in certain patterns and the practitioner is more likely to be reactive to
clients rather than responding in a thoughtful and considered way. Supervision provides a protected space in which such reflection can take place. There are many levels and aspects to reflective practice. Peter Hawkins has developed a model of reflective practice that maps out these different levels and aspects (Table 2.1).

The first aspect is external reflection where the focus is chiefly on the client. Here the reflective practitioner takes the space to reattend to what they heard from the client, as well as what they noticed through all their senses about how the client was in the meeting. They then relate these reflections to what they know about the client’s history and context.

The second aspect is introspective reflection where they turn their attention onto themselves in the engagement with the client. They notice what they were feeling, thinking and doing and how this was familiar or different from how they are with other clients. Often when we are with clients our attention is fully absorbed with listening carefully to what they are saying, making sense of it and thinking about our next intervention. This means there is very little time to reflect on oneself and notice more subtle internal changes. Only afterwards when we stop and reflect is there the space to turn our attention inwards.

The third aspect is relational reflection where the reflection is on the interaction and relationship between the client and the practitioner. This is only possible when we have reflected both on the client and on our self. Here the reflection is on noticing the interplay between both parties to the relationship and the dance and pattern that has been co-created.

The fourth aspect is systemic reflection where the reflection is on the wider system in which the relationship is embedded. This includes: the family, social, economic

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and cultural context of the client; the professional and organizational context in which the meeting is taking place; the history and transcultural dynamics of the relationship; and the many stakeholders who have an interest in what happens in this relationship.

These four aspects of reflection become an important discipline and require the development of a reflective capacity that is somewhat like an emotional-cognitive muscle, which we use to shift the aspect and frame of our reflection from out there, to in-here, to the 'space-between' to the wider context.

There is also another whole dimension to reflection which requires another set of lenses and reflective capacity. For at each aspect of reflection there are several possible levels of reflection. These include the following:

1. **Noticing the phenomena.** This requires the important discipline of using all of one's senses to see, hear, feel, etc., without making judgements or interpretations, or emotionally reacting to what has happened.

2. **Recognizing the patterns that connect different aspects of the phenomena.** This requires us to move from phenomena and data, not to judgement but to seeing the patterns that join the dots of the various phenomena.

3. **Making sense of the patterns.** Only when we have started to see the connecting patterns is it sensible to try and understand what is emerging. The patterns exist within each of the four aspects and, most importantly, connect across the aspects, so we can see the interrelationship that is happening to the client, oneself, the relationship and the wider context.

4. **Shifting the frame of our perception.** Mezirow (1991) argues that the shift from reflection to what he terms 'critical reflection' is the key to creating transformational learning: 'The learner must view an experience in terms of a conceptual framework or meaning scheme different from that in which it was originally understood as meaningful.' This links to the distinction between zero learning – the acquisition of data; learning level 1 – making choices from within one's current frame of reference; and level II – learning being able to develop new frames of reference (Bateson 1972; Argyris and Schon 1978; Hawkins 1991, 2004).

5. **Shifting one's underlying belief system.** There is an even deeper level of reflection than transformational learning and the ability to reflect on the perspective through which you are viewing yourself and the work. This is the capacity to reflect on your core beliefs and motivations, many of which will be out of awareness and taken for granted. These provide the bedrock of how we both engage with and make sense of the world. We will explore this mode of reflection much further in the next chapter.

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**From reflection to preflection to action**

Reflective practice and supervision are not confined to the station of reviewing but should be seen as the tracks that connect right around the action learning cycle.
Having taken time to reflect, this should lead to new thinking, for, as a learning and developing professional, our ways of understanding our practice should be constantly informed and changed by the learning from our practice that has been digested through careful reflection.

This new thinking can then be creatively tried out by us imagining how we would apply it to future meetings with our current or future clients. This can be done internally or by trying out possible interventions in supervision or training sessions (see the section on preflection and ‘fast-forward rehearsals’ in Chapter 6).

Relating

Increasing your capacity to relate to and engage others

At the core of all the helping professions is the capacity to relate to others. Often these others will be people coming from very different backgrounds to ourselves and experiencing the world very differently. In Chapter 8 we write about how to work with difference in supervision, but this applies equally to our work with clients, patients, students or coaches. They become our teachers in finding new ways to expand our capacity to relate and engage. Our own family, children and friends can also be our teachers in new ways of relating, especially when we experience them as difficult.

Peter Hawkins has written about the four dimensions of relating, based first on his research on the educative capacity of teachers (Hawkins and Chesterman 2005b) and then later developed by him to look at the leadership capacity of people at all levels (Hawkins and Smith 2006; Hawkins 2011b). This provides a framework for thinking about how we can constantly widen our relational capacity.

The first is our ability to broaden the range of people with whom we can achieve rapport. Hawkins defines rapport as arriving at the place where the other person feels that you understand what they are saying and have a felt understanding of what it means to be in their shoes. Most of us can achieve a sense of rapport with those who are similar to us socially, culturally and psychologically, but to be an effective practitioner we have to work at relating well to those from a wide breadth of different backgrounds, including gender, age, culture and personality type (see Chapter 8).

The second dimension is the ability to stay very engaged with another without becoming reactive, when the relationship is full of difficult emotions. You may be verbally attacked, or restimulated by their distress or anxiety. It closely links with our first chapter where we talked about the good enough supervisor and the good enough worker, who can hear the communication of their client without becoming reactive to the client or feeling bad about themselves.

The third dimension is the ability to engage at depth. As Hawkins and Smith (2006) point out, it is important not only to engage with your clients about their problems, but also their behaviours which are both part of the problem and present in the conversation with you, their mindsets or attitudes, their feelings and reactions to the situation and their fundamental motivation or core beliefs.
The final dimension is the ability to open new windows and doors for other people, to connect them with new worlds and possibilities. At its lowest level, this is the ability to interest another in an idea. This capacity proceeds through being able to excite another about a new possibility; enthuse them about a new direction; inspire them to take on new action or create a heart and mind shift in how they engage with their work (see Fig. 2.3).

**Collaborating**

If you want to go faster, go alone. If you want to go further, go together.


Some people arrive at supervision feeling they already know what is happening in their work and how to handle it, and therefore their supervisor has either nothing to offer or is there to validate what they already know. Others arrive feeling confused and incompetent and want the supervisor to tell them what is happening and how to respond. Yet supervision is a collaborative endeavour, where the supervisee needs to bring their competence and unattached knowing, while being ready...
and open to discover more from the exploration, reflection and dialogue with the 
supervisor. This entails holding their own experience and view of their work as 
both true and not true; valid and invalid.

What we know always comes from our own perspective, coloured by our own 
personality, role, training and culture and framed by our current core beliefs and 
ways of thinking about the world and our experience of it. The system always 
contains many other perspectives and truths, which are equally valid and equally 
true. When we collaborate with our colleagues, our boss or our supervisor, we are 
inviting them to hear and recognize our perspective, while at the same time intro­
ducing us to other perspectives from different positions in the system and arising 
from different mindsets. Colleagues and supervisors do not need to ‘know better' 
in order to help us. The supervisor has the privilege of outsideness – they are not 
us, not in our role and usually not directly engaged with the client. They may also 
have a longer, wider and deeper experience of the type of work we do, but they can 
be of great value to us, even without this added benefit.

Without collaboration we cannot create generative dialogue together. This is 
the joint capacity to listen and explore together in a way that generates new under­
standing, new knowledge and new capability that arises out of the flow between us 
and which neither of us owned prior to the joint exploration (see Chapter 15).

As helping professionals we need to be more collaborative than ever before, as we 
now live and work in an increasingly complex, interconnected and interdependent 
world, where many of the issues, problems or challenges lie not in the parts or the 
individual people but in the connections between them. Increased understanding 
and greater effort by the individual will not by itself resolve such issues.

Most of those we talked to who had sustained being a flourishing worker in the 
helping professions for many years referred to the important contribution of a few 
well-chosen colleagues. Some met informally, while others were part of established 
peer groups that met regularly where they supported and challenged each other on 
their work and their development. Some of these were single gender groups, some 
mixed, some drawn from within one profession others working across a diversity 
of professional backgrounds. Collaboration is not only essential for individual 
revision or peer support, but also for effective teamwork. In Chapter 12 we look 
at how teams need to be ‘learning forums' and emotional containers and have an 
ability to create the quality of work that is greater than the sum of their individual 
efforts. This requires the team to be clear about its collective endeavour as well as 
team members being willing to give up some of their independence to better 
collaborate in achieving the joint endeavour

Sustaining one’s own resilience

Collins (2007: 256) asks a very important question. ‘What might enable some 
workers to persist, endure and thrive in their careers, compared to others who may 
become ill and sometimes eventually leave the profession?’ Collins (2007: 255) 
shows how three key coping strategies are significant: ‘positive appraisal,
goal-directed/problem focussed work and the infusion of ordinary events with meaning'. Others have shown, based on a good deal of recent research, that resilience is linked to the qualities of hope, optimism, a sense of balance and a future orientation. (see Davys and Beddoe 2010: 191–195). Furedi (2009: 658) argues that resilience is more than an individual phenomenon, but a social one which is 'inextricably intertwined with the everyday life of a community'. Ruch (2007: 666) argues that teams can play an important part in building individual and collective resilience, a theme we will return to in the later sections of this book. It is important for everyone working in the helping professions to find their own ways of resourcing themselves, building their personal resilience and ways of managing their stress.

**Stress**

Even with a wide variety of ways of renewing oneself, most people in the helping professions are stressed at some time during their careers. If we take good care of ourselves this is less likely to happen, but we think it is useful to describe some of the symptoms and causes of stress.

We become stressed when we absorb more disturbance, distress and dis-ease from our clients and patients than we are able to process and let go of. We become overburdened by the work. Stress is not only absorbed from clients but may also come from other aspects of the work and the organization in which we work. These stressors (factors causing stress) will in turn interact with our own personality and the stressors that are currently occurring in our own life outside work. We can be caught up in a negative cycle of stress, making us less effective, which leads to further stress.

Stress that is not resolved and discharged stays within the body and can emerge as physical, mental or emotional symptoms. It is important to know your own tendencies for responding to stress, so you can be alert to the build-up of tension within you. In Table 2.2 we offer examples of some of the most common symptoms of stress, but suggest that you stop and make a note of the symptoms which inform you that you are overstressed. You might also take the opportunity to ask those who work with you how they notice that you are under pressure?

Symptoms of stress can take many forms. Symptoms such as insomnia are loud warning bells. Others such as turning to drink, over-eating or over-smoking can be masked as they are part of the dominant culture at work: 'Everyone here gets drunk regularly – it's the only way we cope,' said one worker. Others such as pretending to care or avoiding some clients, colleagues or situations can be hidden for some time. We would like to make clear that we may all occasionally go through phases where we can overindulge, avoid, or dislike our client group. We all go through phases when we are putting on an act. To feel that we have to be totally congruent all the time is unrealistic, and almost guaranteed to make us behave in an incongruent way, the very thing we were trying to avoid. What we are talking about is a chronic cynicism, despair or resentment about work or human nature which saps our energy, creativity and ability to be open to new learning.
### Table 2.2 Symptoms of stress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Migraines or headaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diarrhoea, Indigestion, constipation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insomnia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over-tiredness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of appetite or desire to overeat</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mental</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inability to concentrate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compulsive worry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paranoid thoughts, seeing yourself as victim</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavioural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pretending to care, and playing the role of carer, but the actions and feelings are incongruous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding clients, colleagues or situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turning to drink, overeating or over-smoking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sudden swings in feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not wanting to get up in the mornings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Floating anxiety’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hating clients</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here is an example of addressing collective stress in an organization and the varities of personal response to the same situation.

One of us (Robin) was working as a team supervisor with a group of middle managers in a college of further education. There was considerable stress and anxiety, because many of them were likely to lose their jobs because of cost cutting, but it was not yet clear which ones. Robin started by saying that he would guess that there might be quite a lot of stress around because of the uncertainty, and he was interested to see if they were willing to share some of their habitual ways of attempting to deal with stress, e.g. attack, withdrawal, alcohol, workaholism, over-responsibility, blame, etc. Gradually they opened up and were able not only to name their own patterns, but recognize each other's patterns of coping. The level of trust in the group began to increase as they realized how everyone had different ways of coping. They became able to share specific anxieties and come up with a more collaborative strategy for addressing the period of transition.
Burnout

The term 'burnout' has become the helping professions' equivalent to what the British army called 'shell shock' or the Americans 'battle fatigue'; what our parents' generation called 'nerves' and the present generation 'depression'. They become catch-all phrases that signify that we are not coping. Burnout is not an illness that you catch, neither is it a recognizable event or state, for it is a process that can begin very early in one's career as a helper. Indeed, its seeds may be inherent in the belief systems of many of the helping professions and in the personalities of those that are attracted to them (see next chapter). Pines et al. (1981: 4) define burnout:

The result of constant or repeated emotional pressure associated with an intense involvement with people over long periods of time. Such intense involvement is particularly prevalent in health, education and social service occupations, where professionals have a 'calling' to take care of other people's psychological, social and physical problems. Burnout is the painful realization that they no longer can help people in need, that they have nothing left in them to give.

Fineman (1985) follows Maslach (1982) in saying that burnout represents: '(a) a state of emotional and physical exhaustion with a lack of concern for the job, and a low trust of others; (b) a depersonalization of clients; a loss of caring and cynicism towards them; (c) self-deprecation and low morale and a deep sense of failure'.

We would contend that the best time to attend to burnout is before it happens. This involves: looking at your shadow motivation for being in the helping professions; monitoring your own stress symptoms and creating a healthy support system (see next section); and ensuring that you have a meaningful, enjoyable and physically active life outside the role of being a helper.

In an earlier work Hawkins (1986) explored another aspect of burnout that is ignored in most of the literature, which is the apathy and loss of interest which develops in helpers who stop learning and developing in mid-career. They begin to rely on set patterns of relating to clients and patients and treat new clients as just repeat representatives of clients and patients they met earlier in their career. A preventative approach to burnout needs to include creating a learning environment that continues right through one's career as a helper.

Edelwich and Brodsky (1980) explore how unrealistically high expectations of what can be achieved can create the background for the later development of disillusionment and apathy. Many professions also encourage their trainees to develop the image of themselves as heroic helpers who can continually provide for others, solving their problems, feeling their pain, meeting their needs, while maintaining themselves strong and happy. Those who are attracted to such work may be those who contained the pain and were always helpful in their own families.

The mistaken idea that we can help everyone was illustrated when Robin Shohet interviewed the editor of a medical journal in connection with a book he was editing. He was interested in the high rate of burnout among doctors and the editor
said that some of it could be put down to the doctors’ training, which colluded with the idea that doctors were responsible for providing a cure, so any failure was their fault. Combining this belief with the idea that science can cure anything, the doctors allowed themselves to buy into an omnipotent role which was bound to fail.

One supervisee we worked with when starting a new job, idealized her new organization and heroically described her vision for what she was going to achieve. Three months later she was furious with the organization. She felt betrayed, let down, disillusioned and stressed. She complained bitterly about how the organization had not delivered what they had promised and it was impossible for her to do what she had come to achieve. It was only after much reflection in supervision that she realized how her own idealization and heroism had created the reality she felt betrayed by and had blamed on others. Since that episode she tells how she has a greater capacity to accept responsibility rather than blame others and sometimes laughs at herself or the situation.

Mapping your resourcing system

As a way of exploring your own sources and resources that enable you to flourish at work we provide the following exercise.

We would like you to start by taking a large sheet of paper (A3 or bigger) and on it draw a map of your resourcing system at work. In the middle of the paper draw a symbol or picture of yourself. Within or attached to this symbol or picture represent symbolically the inner resources that sustain you in flourishing at work. Then around this picture or symbol draw pictures, symbols, diagrams or words to represent all the external resources (things and people) that support you in learning and being creative at work. These may be the walk to work, books you read, colleagues, meetings, friends, etc. We would like you to represent the nature of your connection to these supports. Are they near or far away? Is the link strong and regular or tenuous or distant? Are they supporting you from below like foundations or are they balloons that lift you up? These are only suggestions; allow yourself to find your own way of mapping your resourcing system.

When you are satisfied with your initial map, we would like you to take a completely different colour and draw on the picture symbols that represent those things that block you from fully using these resources. They may be fear of being criticized or interruptions or the relative unavailability of these resources. It may be blocks within you, within the support, or in the organizational setting. Draw whatever you feel stops you accessing the resources you need.

When you have done this, we would suggest that you choose someone with whom to share your picture. This could be a colleague, partner, supervisor or friend, or even someone who has also done the exercise (you could get your whole staff team to do it!). When you have shared your picture with them, ask them to respond
to the overall picture. What impression does it create? Then they can ask you the following questions:

- Is this the kind of resourcing you want?
- Is it enough?
- What resources are missing?
- How could you go about developing them?
- What resources are essential for you to the extent that you must ensure that you nurture and maintain them?
- Which blocks could you do something about reducing?

**Conclusion**

In this chapter we have explored five important capacities which we believe are essential for all those who work in the helping professions, not only to have but also to constantly develop throughout their lives. These capacities are needed before we go to supervision and are also necessary to make full use of supervision and one of the functions of supervision is to nurture and expand these capacities in both parties.

If we put these capacities together into one sentence it reads like this: In supervision we *collaborate* and *relate* in order to *reflect* on the *relating* between the practitioner and their client(s), in order to *create new learning and unlearning*, that both transforms the work and increases the capacity of the supervisee to *sustain* themselves in the work.

In the next short chapter we explore further how to reflect on your own motivations and core beliefs and then in Chapter 4 we build on these capacities by exploring how the supervisee can get the most out of their supervision.
3 Reflecting on our motivations and core beliefs

Introduction

In the last chapter we explored the need for all those in the helping professions to become a reflective practitioner and described the multiple levels of reflection that are a core part of our work. In the next chapter we will look at how we take these reflection skills into becoming a proactive supervisee to ensure the best use of supervision opportunities. Before that, in this chapter, we will look at deeper levels of reflection, first by exploring some of our deeper motivations and core beliefs that we will have carried into our work within the helping professions.

Why be a helper?

We believe it is important to reflect on what led us to choose the profession and the helping role we now have. Helping and being helped is a difficult and often ambivalent process. Ram Dass and Gorman (1985) write very beautifully about the motivations and struggle to be a helper. ‘How can I help,’ they write, ‘is a timeless enquiry of the heart.’ They go on to say: ‘Without minimizing the external demands of helping others, it seems fair to say that some of the factors that wear us down, we have brought with us at the outset.’

We believe that it is essential for all those in the helping professions to reflect honestly on the complex mixture of motives that have led them to choose their
current profession and role. To do this we may need to think back to when we first started in the profession and explore some of our aware and unaware motivations. These might include a range of positive motives such as:

- I wanted to make a difference to society.
- I wanted to contribute to helping individuals take charge of their own lives.
- I wanted to help people the way I had been helped.
- I wanted to help people feel better about themselves or others.
- I wanted to understand people better.

There may be others that are not listed here. Some motivations may have come from others:

- My parents and teachers always saw me as being good with other people.
- I always played caring and helping roles in my family so it seemed natural to do this as a career.
- The careers advisor told me that I was suited to helping others.

**Shadow motivations**

Most of us have a wide range of motivations and these also include what we term shadow motives for, as Guggenbuhl-Craig (1971) writes: 'No one can act out of exclusively pure motives. The greater the contamination by dark motives, the more the case worker clings to his alleged objectivity.' He continues by saying:

> To expand our understanding . . . perhaps it is necessary to go more deeply into what it is that drives the members of these ministering professions to do the kind of work they do. What prompts the psychotherapist to try to help people in emotional difficulty? What urges the psychiatrist to deal with the mentally ill? Why does the social worker concern himself with social misfits?

(Guggenbuhl-Craig 1971: 79)

Exploring these mixed motives involves facing the shadow side of our helping impulse, and how we meet our needs through helping others. These shadow motives are not necessarily negative unless they remain unconscious and affect our way of relating to clients and colleagues out of awareness. Here we will introduce just four of the common 'shadow motives' (the lust for power, meeting our own needs through others, the need to be liked and the wish to heal).

**The lust for power**

Many of us have a hidden need for power and a sense of being in control of our lives and the world around us. This can take the form of surrounding ourselves
REFLECTING ON OUR MOTIVATIONS AND CORE BELIEFS

with people who seem to be worse off than ourselves, and a need to direct the lives of the people who ask for help or appear to us to need help. Guggenbuhl-Craig (1971: 10) also addresses this issue:

In my years of analytical work with social workers, I have noticed time and time again that whenever something must be imposed by force, the conscious and unconscious motives of those involved are many faceted. An uncanny lust for power lurks in the background ... Quite frequently the issue at stake appears to be not the welfare of the protected, but the power of the protector.

This is especially difficult to recognize, because at times of having to make decisions about clients, or their children, the worker very often feels powerless. This contrasts markedly with the power that he or she actually has or is experienced by clients as having. Here is an example of social work supervision by Dearnley (1985) that demonstrates the discrepancy in feelings of power, the value of supervision, and the relevance of understanding motives even when it initially appears irrelevant to do so:

A client with a record of considerable violence threatened to kill his experienced social worker for removing his child from home. The social worker was understandably anxious about this, the anxiety escalated and could not be held within a loose framework of supervision. I was consulted and felt inadequate to contain this life-threatening anxiety. I decided that the only way I could help was to concentrate on a thorough understanding of the dynamics of the case, although this hardly seemed to be the crisis response that was being asked for. With this focus, we began to understand the covert rivalry between the worker and the parent to be the better parent, and the murderous, unmanageable rage the client experienced when his inferiority was confirmed and concretized by the making of a Care Order. An appreciation of the rivalry served to contain the anxiety in the worker, the agency and myself by providing pointers to planning the work. This served to release the anxious paralysis. The client, I am thankful to say, responded sufficiently for the situation to become diffused. I quote this example to illustrate my point that agencies concerned with public safety, and indeed the safety of their workers ... let supervision go at their peril. (Dearnley 1985: 56)

We have come to believe that this case is not as exceptional as it may at first look. In our experience, once workers have made a shift in acknowledging some aspect of their shadow side - in this case the competition - there is very often a shift in the client right from the start of the very next meeting.

The issue concerning the potential misuse of power was put very simply by one worker: 'We dabble in people's lives and make enormous assumptions about what
we do. We don’t sit back and think about what it really means. We can create dependency, undermine the client’s worth…” (quoted in Fineman 1985). This can be done on a very subtle level. Here is an example from one of our supervisees. It comes from weekly psychotherapy where a male therapist had been seeing a female client in her mid-thirties for about 18 months.

The client’s presenting problem at the therapy session was her difficulties at work. There was a staff member there who was very offhand with her, treating her almost like some kind of servant, and she could not confront him with his obnoxious behaviour, although she very much wanted to. It transpired that this allowing him to treat her like an object even extended to his going to bed with her whenever he wanted. She did not know how to say no, and at some level they both knew this, which is why he could treat her with such contempt.

During the session the therapist suggested that she made an agreement with him, if she wanted, not to sleep with this man for three months, and see if it made any difference to her relationship with him. The following week she came back and said she had felt a lot stronger in the way she interacted with this man, and was very glad about the agreement. The therapist was pleased, but something did not feel right. He took the case to his fortnightly supervision, and realized that he had become just another man telling her what to do — perhaps with more benign intentions, but nevertheless undermining her. The fact that she had agreed to the suggestion and was happy with the outcome almost completely missed the point — namely her underlying problem in all relationships with men, which obviously included the therapist, was that she could not say no. The therapist knew that his suggestion was not a permanent solution, but had not realized how much he and his helpful suggestion were also part of the client’s process of giving power to men.

In supervision the therapist faced the fact that it was the ‘victim’ part of himself which he felt so uneasy about that had prompted his rush into this premature intervention. He came to realize that rushing into premature solutions was his way of attempting to deal with his own fear of powerlessness. In doing what he had done, he was creating an unnecessary dependence on himself for a behavioural solution instead of doing his job, which was to help explore a fuller understanding of how she repeatedly got herself into such situations.

**Meeting our own needs**

The helper’s attitude to their own needs, both of the job and of their clients, is another ‘shadow’ side of helping. In our professional trainings we are taught always to pay attention to client needs, and it is therefore often difficult to focus on our own. It is even considered selfish and self-indulgent. Yet our needs are there nonetheless. They are there, we believe, in the very motives for the work we do. As James Hillman (1979) writes:
Analysts, counsellors, social workers are all troubleshooters. We are looking for trouble, even before the person comes in to take the waiting chair: 'What’s wrong?' 'What’s the matter?' The meeting begins not only with the projections of the person coming for help, but the trained and organized intention of the professional helper. My expectations are there with me as I wait for the knock on the door . . .

Our needs are never absent. We could not do this work if we did not need to do it . . . just as our clients need help from us, we need our clients to want help in order to fulfil the self esteem we gain from our ability to give help. However we have been brought up to deny our needs but needs in themselves are not harmful. It is just that when they are denied they join the shadows of helping work and manipulate from behind as demands. Demands ask for fulfilment, needs require only expression.

(Hillman 1979: 17)

It is not the needs themselves, but the denial of them that we believe can be so costly.

The need to be liked

Another key need is the need to be liked and valued, to be seen as doing one’s best, to have good intentions, even if we sometimes have to make difficult decisions for the ‘client’s own good’: in short, to be seen as ‘the good person’. It is not easy, even after many years of working with people and attempting to face our shadow side, to accept a picture of ourselves, painted by a client, which does not correspond with how we see ourselves. It seems so unfair to be told that one is cold, rigid or misusing power. The temptations are either to alter one’s behaviour to be more ‘pleasing’, to counter-attack subtly or otherwise, or stop working with the person for ‘plausible’ reasons. The client’s ingratitude is sometimes hard to accept. We may find ourselves thinking ‘after all I’ve done for you’, words we heard from a parent or teacher and which, maybe, we promised never to repeat.

One of the best ways of accepting some of these negative feelings from clients (which usually have at least a grain of truth in them) is for us to remember how we feel when we are clients. We can also remember how in our own supervision, when we feel inadequate, we want to criticize our supervisors in order to make them feel as we do.

The wish to heal

We might feel from the above that we should give up our work as helping professionals. To think this would be to miss the point – namely that it is only the denial of needs that makes them dangerous. It is knowing ourselves and our motives that makes us more likely to be of real help. In that way we do not use others unawarely, for our own ends, or project parts of ourselves we cannot face onto our clients. We believe that the desire to help is fundamental and agree with Harold Searles (1975) that the wish to heal is basic to helpers and non helpers alike.
Exploring our core beliefs

To help us really to understand the hidden motives in our desire to do 'helping' work, we need to explore the core beliefs that underlie them. This is often hard to do as our core beliefs are often seen by us as self-evident, fundamental truths. It is not the beliefs themselves (we all have them) but the unexamined attachment to them that causes problems. Mostly we do not recognize our core beliefs as they are part of the fundamental belief system through which we experience and make sense of the world. They are part of our way of seeing and are therefore unseen.

Core beliefs are similar to that which Bateson (1972) terms our 'epistemology', Torbert (2004) describes as our 'action-logic' and Laske (2003) our personal 'frame of reference'. Helping us to recognize some of our core beliefs enables us to work with a greater range of clients and to be less reactive or judgemental. To bring to the surface these taken-for-granted assumptions is never easy and usually requires others to help facilitate some form of deeper inquiry. However, to start the process you can try completing the following sentences (try to catch your first spontaneous thoughts and quickly write them down uncensored, rather than what you think you should be answering):

- I assume that people are generally ...
- People should always ...
- People should never ...
- I have a right to be angry if ...
- Emotions are ...
- I should never ...
- I should always ...
- Clients are ...
- Psychologists/teachers/social workers/doctors/therapists, etc. (choose the profession you belong to) are people who ...
- Being responsible means ...
- Supervisors should ...

When you have completed the list you can review all your answers and try to notice some of the patterns of assumptions that they may contain. You might find it helpful to write a list of sentences that begin with 'I tend to assume that ...'

It is our core beliefs that create our resistance to change (Kegan and Lahey 2001) and prevent us from unlearning and evolving (Hawkins 2005). The ability to be reflexive and notice, first our reactions to situations and then the beliefs that support these reactions, is a central capacity to being able to work in supporting and developing others, and thus important both for helping professionals and those who wish to become supervisors. Furthermore, Mezirow (1991) argues that this ability is central to all forms of transformational learning; Issacs (1999) that being able to be reflexive helps to create generative dialogue in the workplace; and Bohm (1989, 1994) that it helps cultures to learn and evolve.
Conclusion

To be a fully effective, resilient and creative helping professional requires us to be a reflective practitioner. To be truly an effective practitioner requires us not only to reflect on our current work and relationships but to step back and explore both our motivations and our core beliefs, which, if left unseen and out of awareness, can drive unhealthy patterns, both for ourselves and the clients we work with; patterns such as overwork, unsustainable practice, poor practice or even unethical behaviour. As we will explore later in this book, deeper levels of self-reflection need to be at the heart of both our practice and our supervision.