



**101 Coaching Supervision Techniques, Approaches, Enquiries and Experiments.**  
**Developmental Transactional Analysis Chapter: Technique 68** (pages 231-233)  
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## Exploring the Potential for Collusion

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Where can this be used?					Typical Level of Supervisee Experience Required
					
Individual Supervision	Group Supervision	Peer Supervision	Individual Reflection	All levels	

### When is this used?

Sometimes a supervisor may sense that the supervisee has greater empathy with one of the stakeholders in the coaching process than may be helpful. This often occurs when working in an organisational context, where the coaching assignment has undertones of being remedial work and the system draws the coach into doing part of the job of the line manager.

Alternatively the coach may have developed a deep empathy with the individual client due to some shared history or experience and may be losing their neutrality. This approach prompts exploration of the psychological distance (see Micholt, 1992) amongst the parties and often illustrates where there is a risk of collusion.

### What is the technique?

**Step 1:** As the supervision dialogue unfolds, keep in mind what is happening to the objectivity, neutrality or curiosity of the supervisee.

**Step 2:** Invite the supervisee to draw a triangle where the points of the triangle are labelled Coach; Client; Organisation – or use 3 post-its to create a triangle – encourage them to think about what kind of triangular shape would reflect how ‘connected’ they feel to each party.

**Step 3:** Ask them what they notice about the configuration of the triangle.

**Step 4:** Explore with them any comparisons where the distance is shorter or longer than others. For example: What’s your sense of how the greater distance between you and the client (compared to the distance between you and the organisation) manifests in how you are working?



**Step 5:** Further perspective can be gained by looking at the distances from the client's and the organisation's position. Each time focusing on how that distance might be showing up in the work itself.

**Step 6:** Allow some reflection time and ask the supervisee to share what they are aware of now that may have been outside of their awareness before, perhaps enquire how this exploration might influence the work in future.

### **How to work with the technique...**

Often, as soon as the supervisee maps out the triangle, insight occurs and Steps 3-5 happen naturally. Where a supervisee maps out an equilateral triangle, it can be useful to enquire if there have been moments in the work when the triangle became lopsided in some way. Again, this typically generates insight around how different topics shift the working relationship. Occasionally, this does not provoke any further dialogue and an alternative line of enquiry will need to be found.

In most organisational situations, there may be more than three parties involved, the same principles can be adopted using oblongs (four parties) pentagons (five parties) etc.

### **What else might need attention?**

Offering this technique is often predicated by the supervisor noticing the possibility of collusion in the system. Where the supervisee does not seem to be deriving value from the technique, remember not to get too wedded to your own insight. In this moment, it can be useful to notice how this impacts on your own sense of self and the relationship with the supervisee. A parallel process could be in play and so making transparent the distance you are currently experiencing between you and your supervisee (or any other stakeholder), may help illuminate what could be happening for the supervisee and their client in the session.

### **A word of caution.**

Whilst supervisees of all levels could benefit from this type of exploration – those practitioners who are very tools-oriented and who work transactionally, may struggle to see the importance of subtle relationship dynamics. As always, there is a need for the supervisor to meet their supervisee 'where they are'.

### **What other uses are there for this technique?**

Once experienced as a supervisee, the principles of this approach could be used with any clients who wish to explore relationship dynamics. When working directly with a client, the labels may be replaced with the different stakeholders they are working with.

### **Reference:**

Micholt, N. (1992) Psychological Distance and Group Interventions. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 22 (4), pp.228-233.



**Further reading:**

Hay, J. (2007) *Reflective Practice and Supervision for Coaches*. McGraw-Hill: Maidenhead. pp. 118-120.