








101 Coaching Supervision Techniques, Approaches, Enquiries and Experiments.
Developmental Transactional Analysis Chapter: Technique 72 (pages 242-245)
 Edited by Michelle Lucas and Published by Routledge 2020.

Parallel Process

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Where can this be used?				Typical Level of Supervisee Experience Required
 Individual Supervision	 Group Supervision	 Peer Supervision	 Individual Reflection	 Experienced Supervisees Only

When is this used?

Typically, this exploration will be prompted by the supervisor since the phenomenon of the parallel process surfaces when the practitioner unconsciously recreates the client's issue and emotions within the supervisory relationship.

However, with more experienced supervisees who understand how parallel process may occur between the client system and their own system, they may then deliberately seek to explore this in supervision.

What is 'parallel process'?

Harold Searles (1955) highlighted this phenomenon which has its origin in the psychoanalytic concepts of transference and countertransference. The client's transference and the coach's counter-transference re-appear in the mirror of the supervisee : supervisor relationship.

What is the enquiry?

It is the supervisor's job to spot this phenomenon, and through questioning, prompt the supervisee to bring into awareness what is happening, and to then identify options for action.

Step 1: Listen carefully to the 'story' of the supervisee. How are they describing the client situation? What is the client's story?

Step 2: Be aware of what is happening in the 'interactional field' (the space between supervisor and supervisee) where the unconscious processes are taking place. Check your

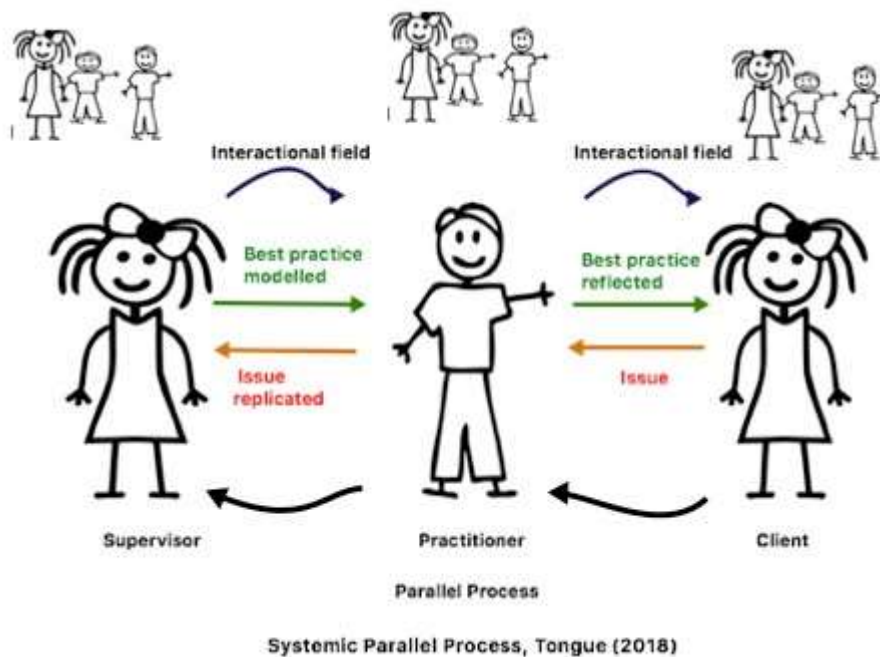


own responses to the story, including what is happening for you at a physical level. Trust your intuition to identify aspects of the process that belong to you, to the supervisee, and to the client of the supervisee.

Step 3: If you sense that the supervisee is recreating the client issue with you in the supervisory space find ways to highlight it to the supervisee. For instance, you may hear in the client story, that the client was ‘stuck’, could not decide on a course of action, and you notice that the supervisee also says *they* are ‘stuck’ with the client, ie cannot work out what happened in their relationship. You can help to bring this into their awareness by asking “Do you see any parallels in what you have just told me?” or if they are too caught in the grip of this dynamic you could offer more specific feedback for example “I notice you seem to be stuck too – might that be a parallel process?”

Step 4: Model a different way of behaving so that the more positive behaviour will be passed back through the supervisee to the client (see figure 6.7 below).

Figure 6.7: Systemic Parallel Process by Tongue (2018)



How to work with the enquiry...

The supervisor needs to be on the alert at all times for the possibility of a parallel process being present. Parallel process is sometimes easy to spot, and sometimes not. The supervisor needs to have good self-awareness and good relational awareness so that they understand what their default reactions are likely to be with this particular supervisee. Variations to that default may offer clues to a parallel process being in play. The supervisor also needs to be skilled in their own reflective process, in order to be able to stay in the “here and now” such that they do not get drawn into a ‘script’.



The parallel process can also be put to positive use. The supervisor can model different behaviour. In this example the supervisor shows they are not stuck by asking questions; those questions serve to free up the supervisee who is then well placed to free up their work with the client.

What else might need attention?

Once the supervisee realises that they have been drawn into a parallel process the next phase would be to determine actions. However, these actions are not always to do with what they next do with the client. The supervisee may instead need to work through how they manage themselves to be centred and “clean” when working with the client.

A word of caution.

It is very easy to get caught up in the parallel process as a supervisor. Take your work to supervision so that you remain at a meta-level, making choices in your interventions in the here-and-now.

What other uses are there for this enquiry?

There is a ‘systems’ aspect to parallel process. Positive ways can counter negative unconscious processes which ripple out into the work, family, friendship etc communities of the supervisor, the practitioner and the client.

References:

Searles, H. (1955) The Informational Value of the Supervisor’s Emotional Experience. *Psychiatry*, 18, pp.135-146.