

# Navigating Practice Uncertainties: the Role of Supervision

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# Key Ideas

- Health and care professionals experience uncertainty in practice
- Uncertainties occur throughout our careers
- There are behaviours and characteristics which help us anticipate, recognise and seek to resolve practice uncertainties
- Resolving uncertainties can mean making changes in our practice
- Resolving uncertainties can also involve working out which ones to tolerate and what's going well
- When the conditions are favourable, supervision is a place where we can explore uncertainties and work out how to resolve these uncertainties

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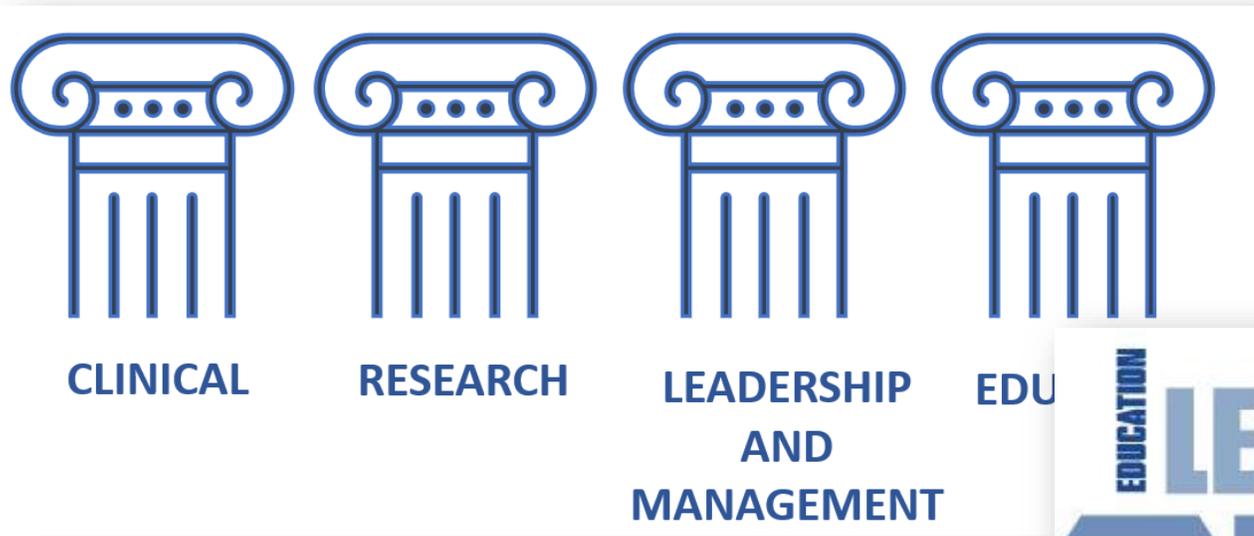


# Me and Supervision

... a slow burn!

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# Continuing professional development: dominant clinical focus



# Igniting my interest in supervision



Registration requires sign-up to Standards of Proficiency which refer to the need for the practitioner to:

*'understand the importance of participation in training, supervision, and mentoring'*

Yet, a tendency to fall out of our diaries when we are pressured clinically

# Research with Allied Health Professionals about supervision

**My main concern:**  
*Supervision*

**AHPs' main concern:**  
*Career-long practice uncertainties*

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# Practice uncertainties

- Inevitable
- Throughout career
- At all levels of experience

Knowledge +

Know-How +

Knowing How to Be

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[Unsplash](#)

# Categories of practice uncertainties

## Practice Burden

I have so much to do. I see distressing stuff in my job.

## Platform for Practice

Do I have enough knowledge, the right skills, experiences?

How do my life experiences influence my practice?

How do my preferences and personal qualities influence my practice?

## Socio-professional

Am I doing what people expect?

Is this what a therapist on this grade is meant to do?

Is this patient going to complain about me?

**Ill-defined, messy, interwoven**

# Platform for practice

**Knowledge + skills + experiences in/out of practice +  
personal qualities/preferences**

## Competence

To consistently perform to defined standards required in the workplace, usually focused on the outputs of work and observable performance. Competence tends to describe practice in stable environments with familiar problems.

## Capability

The ability to be competent, and beyond this, to work effectively in situations which may be complex and require flexibility and creativity.

# Practice uncertainties in healthcare

## Not a new idea!

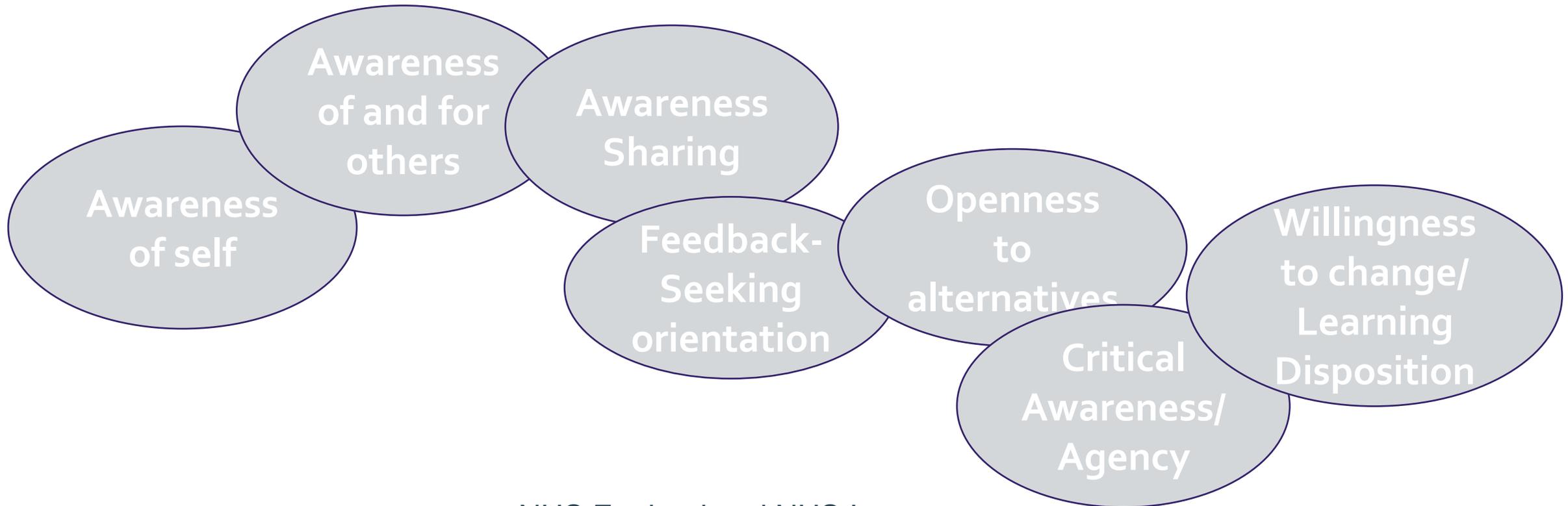
Fox, R. (1957) Training for uncertainty. In Merton R. K., Reader G. and Kendall, P. L. Eds The Student Physician. Cambridge: Harvard University Press

## Perhaps one we lost sight of in the era of evidence-informed practice?

Greenhalgh, T., Howick, J. and Maskrey, N. (2014) Evidence based medicine: a movement in crisis? British Medical Journal:348

**Anticipating, recognising and seeking to  
resolve uncertainties:  
Helpful behaviours and characteristics**

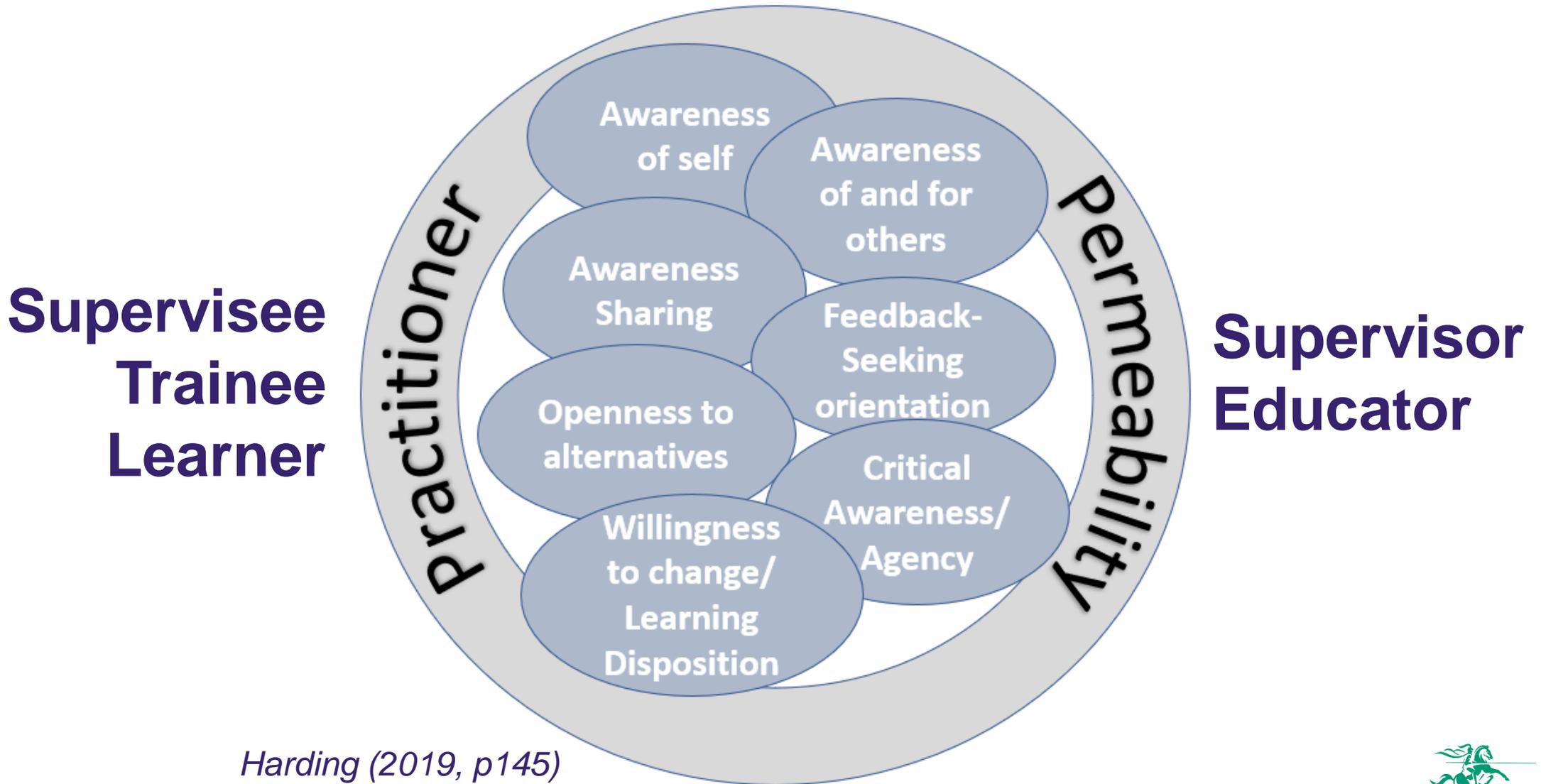
# Helpful behaviours and characteristics



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# Helpful behaviours and characteristics



Harding (2019, p145)

<https://thepermeablepractitioner.com/>



# Supervisee, Trainee, Learner Permeability

**Self aware:** Recognises own uncertainties

**Aware of and for others:** and implications for practice/safety

**Awareness sharing:** shares uncertainties with others

**Feedback seeking:** welcomes feedback

**Open to alternatives:** explores other ways of learning and doing

**Critically aware:** weighs up what works/is safe

**Willing to change/learn:** changes and implements in practice



# Supervisor, Educator Permeability

**Self aware:** Recognises own position and experience

**Aware of and for others:** uses this thoughtfully for learner benefit with an eye on public safety

**Awareness sharing:** will share concerns and celebrate successes with the learner/supervisee

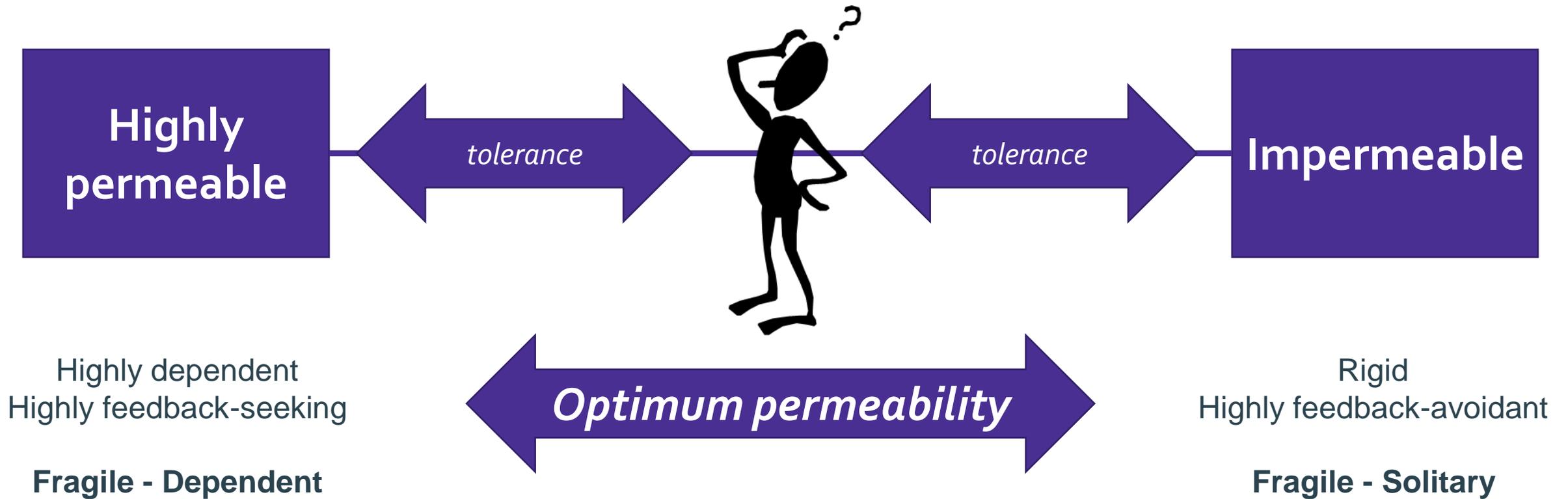
**Feedback seeking:** welcomes feedback about self as supervisor/educator

**Open to alternatives:** explores other ways of learning and doing – recognises other ways may be safe

**Critically aware:** weighs up what works/is safe

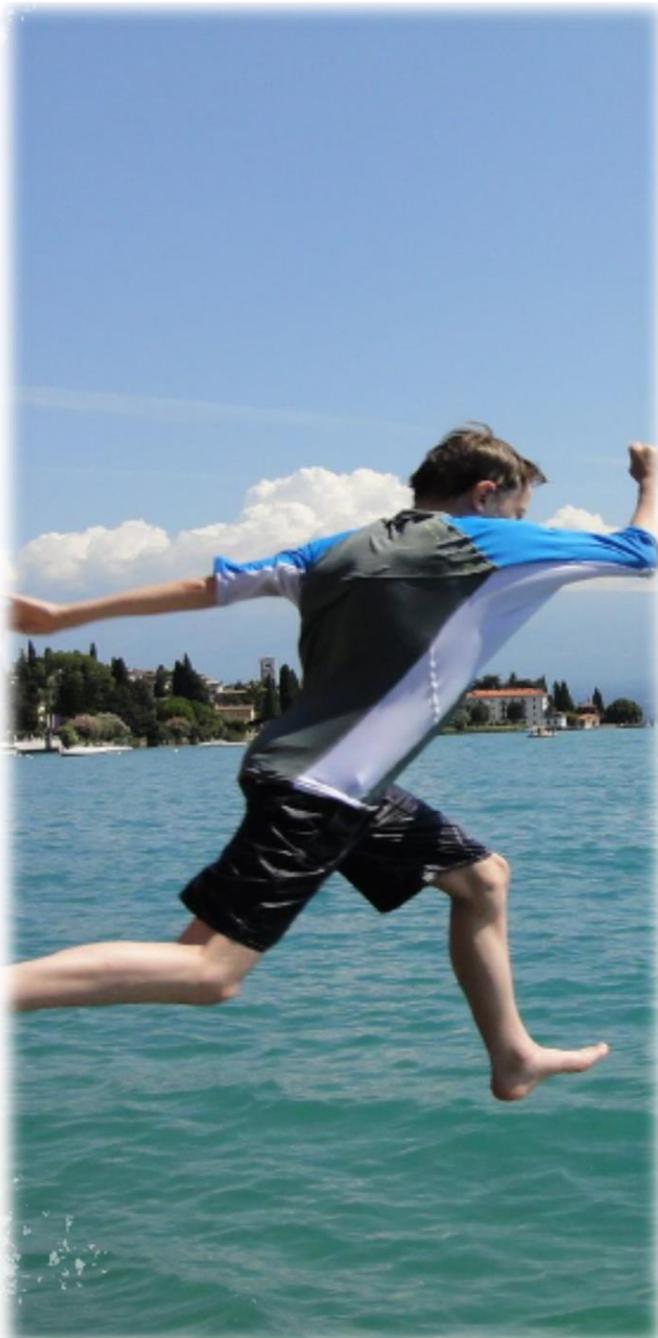
**Willing to change/learn:** continues to engage in own professional development – including education pillar

# A spectrum of permeability





**Permeable practitioners  
recognise uncertainty not  
just as a marker of risk .....**



# Uncertainty as a prompt to learn

## Not a new idea!

**Dewey J. (1938) *Experience and Education*. New York: Macmillan**

**Schön, D.A. (1983) *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. New York: Basic Books**

**Revans, R. (1983/2011) *ABC of Action Learning*. Farnham: Gower**

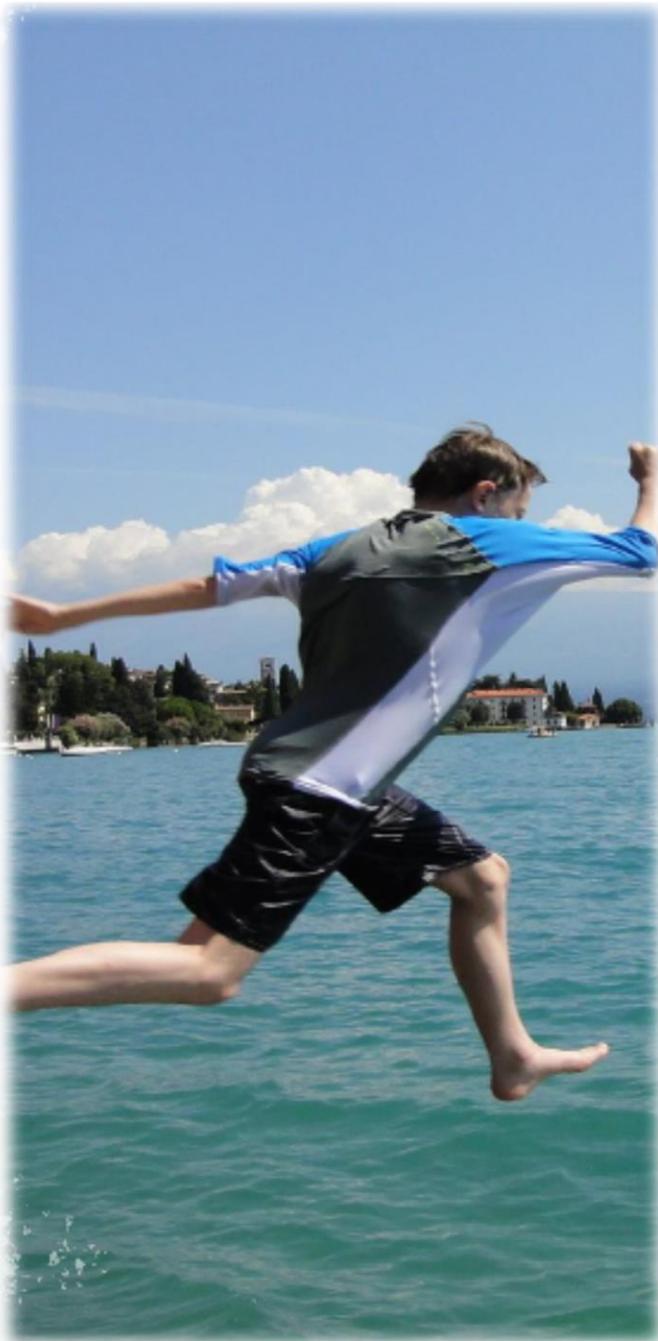
# Authentic Professional Learning

'when the professional is actively engaged in aspects of professional practice they care about, perceive is uncertain and see as novel' (p112)

uncertainty as a precursor to professional learning - uncertainty as a feature of situations where professionals report that learning has taken place

prompt conscious awareness on the part of therapists to 'think to make sense of situations' (p117)

**Webster-Wright, A (2010) Authentic Professional Learning: Making a Difference Through Learning at Work. Professional and Practice-based Learning Volume 2. London: Springer**



# Learn from uncertainty and mitigate risk?

Strengthening practice by weaving clinical, research and leadership pillars together with education and supervision



# Permeable Practitioners and the Resolution of Uncertainties

- Ad hoc discussions with colleagues
- Consult a text book
- Find latest research
- Go on a course
- Use professional social media
- Use **supervision when conditions are favourable**

Trust – dialogue – partnership – respect – supervisee focus

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# Permeable supervisors recognise

- Colleagues do stuff that doesn't always make sense to the supervisor but it might have made sense to *the supervisee*
- The need to balance risk/reward - judge when to intervene – celebrating successes
- Recognises when being competent is enough and when capability is required
- They won't have all the answers
- There will be times when they are not the best supervision fit for the presenting uncertainty; they will actively signpost to others
- Supervision is not about the creation of a practitioner in their own image!

# Permeable supervisees recognise

- The inevitability of uncertainty
- The need to take responsibility for sharing and seeking to resolve uncertainty
- The possible need to experiment with alternatives
- The supervisor may not have all the answers and doesn't have to have all the answers

**Permeable practitioner recognise that resolving practice uncertainty may involve**

**Checking**

**Assuring - *identifying and agreeing practice tolerances***

**Adjusting - *when necessary***

**Practice Recalibration**

**of knowledge, know how and knowing how to be**

# Perhaps using a model of supervision

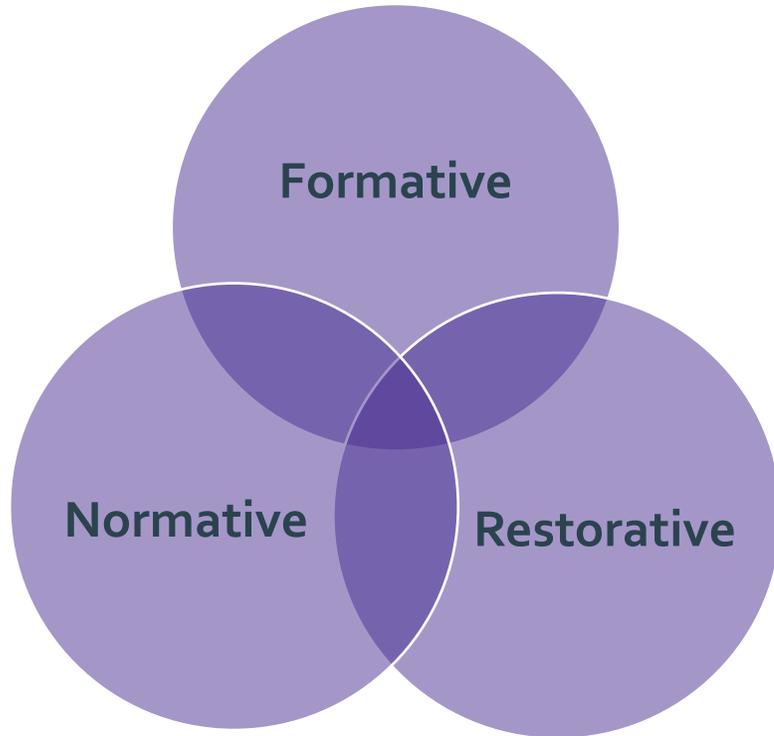
Illustrates multiple and overlapping dimensions of supervision:

**Formative:** Supporting learning and development, knowledge and skills

**Normative:** Supporting maintenance of standards of practice and care

**Restorative:** Supporting professional well-being in practice and the impact of practice demands

**Fit with categories of uncertainty**



Proctor, B. (2001) 'Training for the supervision alliance: Attitude, skills and intention' in J. Cutcliffe, T.Butterworth and B. Proctor, (eds) *Fundamental Themes in Clinical Supervision*. London: Routledge

# Supervision between permeable practitioners



- Supervisor with a duty of care to the supervisee
- Supervisor and supervisee with a duty of care to patients
- Supervisor and supervisee care about and care to resolve practice uncertainties

***practitioner well-being + professional development + governance***

# Supervision between permeable practitioners offers a place of

## Sanctuary + Meta-practice

*A safe place to share, explore and resolve practice uncertainties with a focus on maintaining and promoting professional and public safety through continuous professional learning*

(Harding, 2019, p116)

(Harding, 2022: <https://thepermeablepractitioner.com/sanctuary-and-meta-practice/>)



# Safe spaces to share uncertainty and learn are crucial because

Being a professional is

*‘a movement back and forth between supporting and letting oneself be supported; between confronting and being confronted; between pushing and being pushed’*

(Bjorbækmo et al, 2018, p18)



# Safe spaces to share uncertainty and learn are crucial because

*‘one may be cognitively aware of a need to behave differently and yet remain determined not to do so in practice.’*

*(Revans, 2011 p5)*

*guard against decay and professional tendencies to turn to ‘off-the-peg’ solutions*

*(Dall’Alba 2009)*



# Safe spaces to share uncertainty and learn are crucial because

*‘Really relating to patients takes courage, humility and compassion, it requires constant renewal by practitioners and recognition, re-enforcement and support from colleagues and managers.’*

*(Maben, Cornwell and Sweeney, 2010 p11)*

## Fundamental for professional and public safety

# Questioning the dominant clinical focus in CPD

**Educator and supervisor development has limited career progression currency**  
**Not a career development priority for individuals or employers**

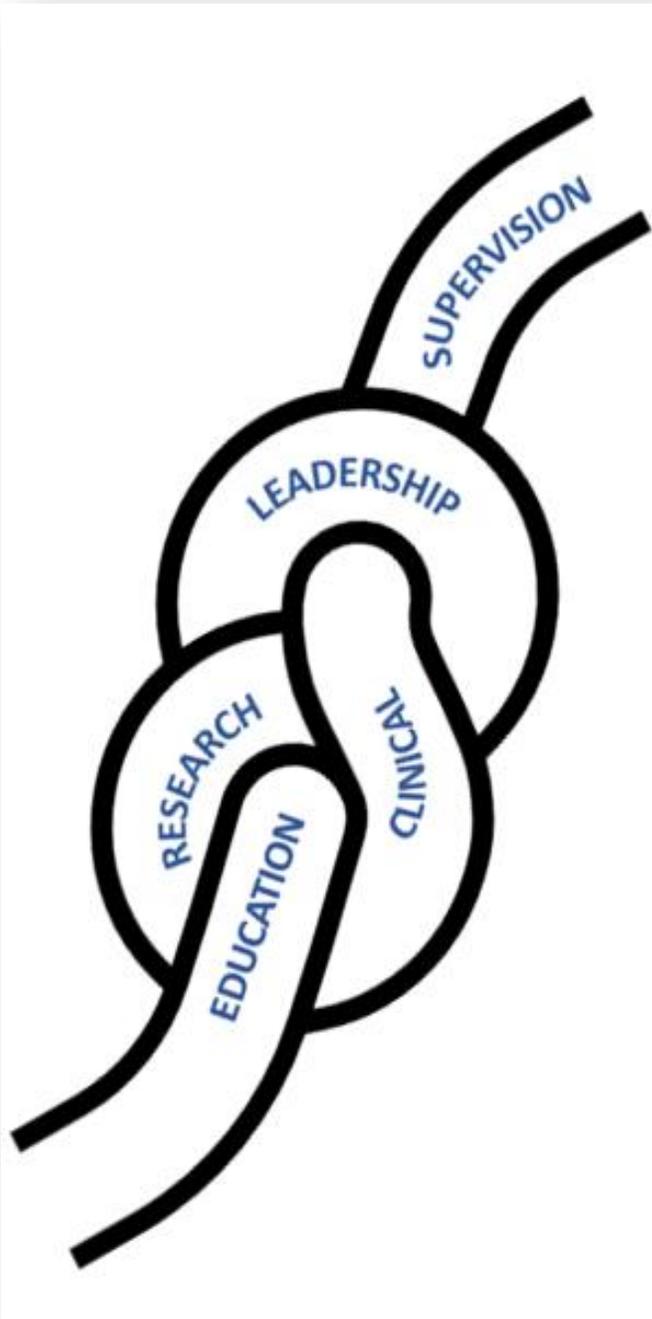


# Recognising that becoming a professional

*'involves integration of knowing, acting, and being in the form of professional ways of being that unfold over time.'*

*Dall'Alba (2009,p34)*

**Knowledge +  
Know-How +  
Knowing How to Be**



# Many practitioners I speak to about workplace education and supervision:

- have **seldom attended any specific training and development** focused on supervision or education knowledge and skills
- picked up their educator/supervisor skills **vicariously**
- adopted a **'what works for me'** approach (or avoid what didn't)
- were largely **unaware of models or frameworks** and had never read any research or literature in the field



***unthinkable for clinical competence and capability***



**Setting the bar high?**

**Asking too much of busy practitioners and a demanding curriculum?**

**Or is the education pillar simply forgotten?**



# Pushing at an open door ....

*'I just wanted to say thank you for delivering the supervision and education module, I found it extremely thought provoking and it has really stoked my interest in this pillar of ACP. Over the past couple of years, I feel I've had a conscious incompetence in relation to education/supervision practices and have just been muddling through with what I thought might have been the right thing to do. And so, I cannot thank you and the module enough for guiding the way and showing me the academic light! The module has given me so many ideas and sparks for projects within our department that will hopefully embed and promote education/supervision within our practice.'* Musculoskeletal Physiotherapist

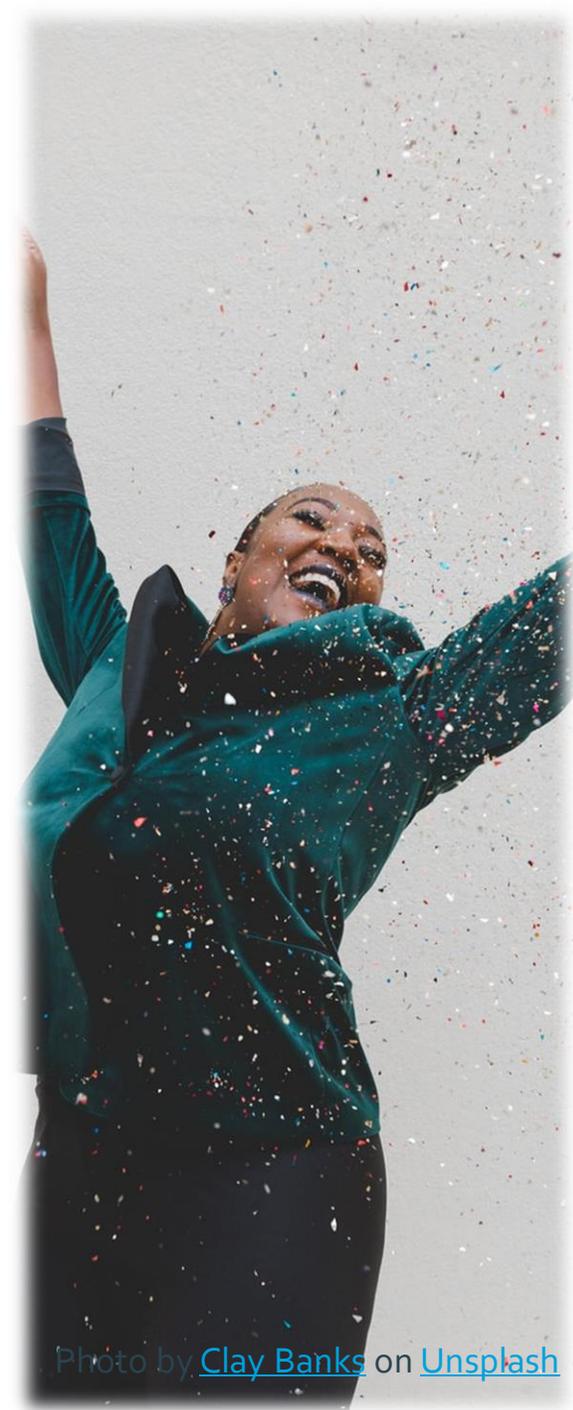


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**Something to cheer!**  
**Lots still to do**

# Find free resources at

<https://thepermeablepractitioner.co>

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- Permeability self-assessment checklist
- Platform for practice template
- Ideas and blogs

Knowledge	Skills	Experiences in and out of work	Behaviours, characteristics, personal qualities and preferences
State all kinds of knowledge here; clinical, technical, operational - think about what you put on your CV but think specifically about the knowledge you have acquired.	State all kinds of skills you have here; clinical, inter-personal, technical, operational - again you might think about your CV but focus on the skills.	<p>Use this space to capture your professional experience - again think CV.</p> <p>Capture personal experiences that influence your practice - include things which enhance your practice and things that might challenge it - like you or someone you know having been a patient ...</p>	<p>Be honest with yourself about your helpful and less helpful behaviours .... organised, a bit last minute, friendly ...</p> <p>.... and characteristics and personal qualities ..... private, chatty, perfectionist, approachable, short-tempered ....</p> <p>.... and preferences ... early bird, being active, avoiding conflict, working shifts, working regular hours ....</p>
<p>Platform for Practice for .....</p> <p>Date .....</p>			

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# Burning questions?

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