

Practice
Tool

The holistic containment wheel

It is helpful to think about containment more broadly than just focusing on emotional resilience or support. The idea of holistic containment has much to offer practice supervisors here.

The idea of holistic containment was developed by Ruch (2002) who argues that three kinds of containment are needed for practitioners to thrive.

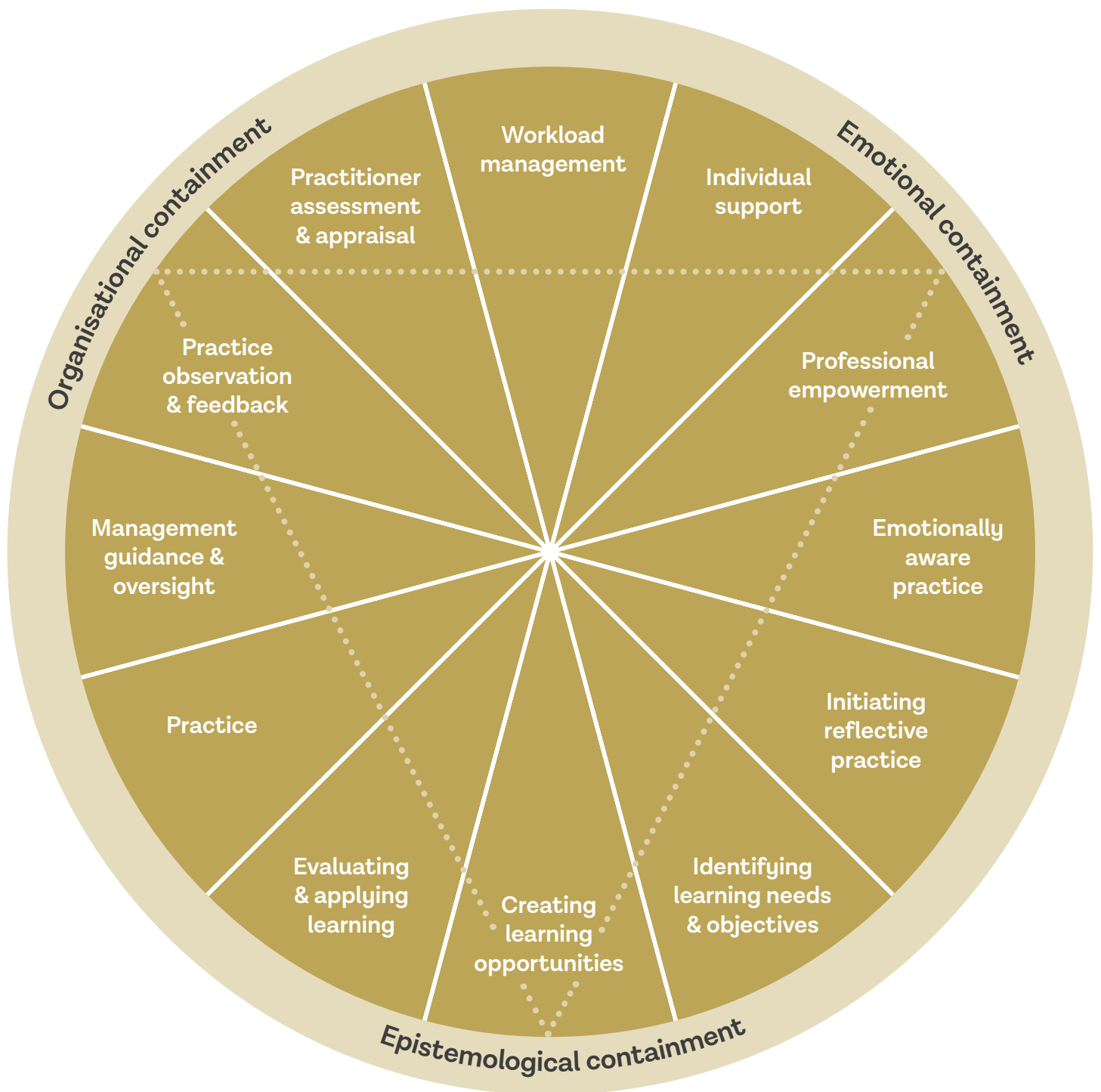
You can see these at the outer edge of the wheel.

- > **Organisational containment** – e.g. support systems for employees, appraisals, practice observations, supervision processes and policies.
- > **Emotional containment** – e.g. support, supervision and a safe space provided by the practice supervisor.
- > **Epistemological containment** – e.g. support for learning, knowledge, skill development and CPD.

This was then further developed by Fairtlough (2016) to become the holistic containment wheel.

If you look at the inside of the wheel on the next page, you can see that each kind of containment is broken down further into elements.

The holistic containment wheel



Information about each element of the holistic wheel is provided below.

Workload management

- > Allocating, or monitoring the allocation of, appropriate work.
- > Making judgements about the volume, level, and complexity of a practitioner's work.

Individual support

- > Being aware of a practitioner's life circumstances and responding compassionately to life events (e.g., illness, bereavement, and caring issues)

Professional empowerment

- > Supporting a practitioner's autonomy, and career development aspirations.
- > Understanding the barriers that a practitioner may face because of their race, sex, or other characteristics, and working collaboratively to overcome them.

Emotionally aware practice

- > Helping a practitioner to understand their emotional responses to, and relationships with, people who draw on care and support and other professionals.

Initiating reflective practice

- > Modelling curiosity and reflection in supervision discussions.
- > Talking explicitly about the importance of reflection with a practitioner and seeking feedback about what helps them to reflect.

Identifying learning needs and objectives

- > Working collaboratively to evaluate a practitioner's strengths, learning needs, and identifying objectives for further development.

Creating learning opportunities

- > Encouraging a practitioner to think creatively about how they can meet learning objectives and develop further.

Evaluating and applying learning

- > Supporting a practitioner to identify learning and integrate this into their practice.

Practice planning

- > Helping a practitioner develop clear goals and plans for work with people who draw on care and support.
- > Ensuring a practitioner is clear about how they will communicate with people who draw on care and support (and why they have chosen this approach).

Management guidance and oversight

- > Checking that agreed actions are happening, completed on time and that record keeping and written work meet required standards.

Practice observation and feedback

- > Regularly observing a practitioner working in practice. Providing feedback about the quality of practice. This should focus on strengths and successes and identify how practice can improve.

Practitioner assessment and appraisal

- > Provide feedback to a practitioner about their professional capability (e.g. at the end of a probation period or assessed year in employment).

Activity 1

Spend a few moments looking at all the different elements of the holistic containment wheel again.

Think about the supervisees that you work with and see if you can identify areas:

- > Where you are already working confidently and feel most comfortable.
- > Where you are less confident.

Activity 2

Then think about how your responses map against the three different kinds of containment (emotional, epistemological, and organisational).

- > Have you identified strengths and areas for development across all three kinds of containment?
- > Or are they clustered more in some areas than others?
- > What does this tell you about your strengths and development needs as a practice supervisor?

References

Fairtlough, A. (2016) *Professional Leadership for Social Work Practitioners and Educators*, Routledge

This tool was originally developed as part of the Practice Supervisor Development Programme (2018-2022) funded by the Department for Education.

Author: Anna Fairtlough