

## **Mistakes in Supervision**

### **A workshop led by Sheila McCarthy-Dodd at the Supervision UK Conference 2015**

In this workshop, I invited participants to explore how an enquiry into the meaning and experience of Cognitive Dissonance might help us re-evaluate how we respond to mistakes we make as supervisors.

Carol Tavis and Elliot Aronson define cognitive dissonance as 'how we systematically distort our memories and account of an event to produce the maximum consonance between what happened and how we see ourselves'.

I introduced this workshop by sharing my own experiences of mistakes I've made as a supervisor and what I noticed when I began to think about how unconsciously I may have justified and changed my perceptions of some mistakes in order not to threaten my self-image.

Something I also talked about was how our tendency towards cognitive dissonance increases as our competence and status increases. This could mean that, as supervisors, we have more invested in our self-image and reputation therefore it becomes more challenging to investigate our mistakes. A solution to this, of course, may be to value ourselves on our ability to fully acknowledge our tendency to make mistakes and take pride in our capacity to investigate them with compassion and without judgement.

In the workshop, we worked in pairs and enquired through monologue and listening into our own feelings and experiences around our mistakes as supervisors. We then shared in the large group and this sharing and discussion was rich, open and enlightening. Participants were very willing to be honest and thoughtful about their experiences of their own mistakes.

The two books I used as reading material for this workshop were:

'Mistakes were made but not by me' by Carol Tavis and Elliot Aronson

'Why we make mistakes' by Joseph T. Hallinan