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**PROBLEM REPRESENTATION OF THE THERAPISTS AT
DIFFERENT STAGES OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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Abstract

Studies show that problem representation is a crucial element in novice and experts problem solving process. We've studied clients' problems representation from the psychotherapist's point of view for better understanding their effective work and professional development. To start the process of solving specialist might represent problems elements, connections between elements and dynamics of the problem. Our hypothesis is that the representations of psychologists with longer experience differ from representations of psychologists, who started their practice recently. Two groups took part in our research: novices and experts. We used semi-structured interview to collect data. We gave case in which client and therapist discuss a problem and then asked questions about this case to find out how respondent sees the problem. For data analysis we used grounded theory by B. Glaser. Psychotherapists with different professional experience have different types of problem representation. For novices problems are often characterized as external obstacle and considered in the dichotomy of "norm-pathology", which should be eliminated/solved. Experts describe problems more detailed with the focus on their dynamic nature. They describe their activity as a clarification and understanding the problem. Our future research will show how different types of problem representations are connected with specific psychotherapeutic goals and actions.

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1. Introduction

Psychologists usually use the phrase "personal problem" to describe their work with clients. P. Heppner, T.J. D'Zurilla and their followers all over the world studied this construct in the scientific field. Since 1970s they have accumulated data on the social and personal problem solving and created theoretical model. It describes main stages and components of this process. P. Heppner, T.J. D'Zurilla et al also studied styles of solving personal problems, as well as the ability to solve problems as a predictor for physical and psychological health (Heppner & Petersen, 1982; D'Zurilla & Nezu, 1982).

A personal problem is a kind of an opposite for an intellectual problem (Spiridonov, 2006): "this opposition is not absolute, but it represents a continuum, when moving through it changes the content and other characteristics of problem situation. Comparing intellectual and personal problems can help us to organize psychological processes. People use conscious and rational procedures to solve intellectual problems (for example, certain types of reasoning). And to solve personal problems we need to appeal to human experience processes that are very vague and poorly controlled. "

In the personal problem, the main focus of attention is on the significant components of the situation. Personal problems are necessarily accompanied by negative emotional experience of different intensity (confusion, difficulty, impasse, suffering, grief, etc.). Representatives of the individual life path psychology and consultative psychologists consider such problems as significant events of inner life. Such problems are regarded as a domain of counsellors' and psychotherapists' professional activity (Vasilyuk, 2007).

One of the most important professional competences in psychologist's development is the ability to solve personal problems. It doesn't only affect the basic competencies of a specialist, but also is related to his personal effectiveness and psychological wellbeing. P. P. Heppner, B. L. Reeder, L. M Larsson (1983), conducted the study, which showed that students who perceive themselves as effective problem solvers are more curious, have a more positive self-concept and low self-criticism, less dysfunctional thoughts and irrational beliefs.

Another study involved 914 first-grade students in secondary school. This study proved that the self-efficacy and "problem-solving" tests are predictors of mental health. That is, mental health and psychological wellbeing are linked to the ability to solve problems and self-efficacy (Parto, 2011).

According to cognitive psychology, building a representation of a problem is the central part of a problem solving process (Spiridonov, 2006). Representation of a problem is also a crucial regulatory element of a person's activity in solving professional problems. Problem representations in different professional domains vary among professionals, along with their expertise development. Thus, experts can retain more elements of problem representation in their working memory, and also use them for longer time (Horn & Blankson, 2005).

Experts classify problems in accordance with the "deep" and not obvious parameters of the solution (Chi, Feltovich & Glaser, 1981). Experts have more connections between objects in their semantic memory than novices (Chi et al., 1981). If they set a goal for themselves experts solve the problem faster (Chi, Glaser & Rees, 1982). Experts are more accurate if they do not act in conditions of uncertainty (Johnson, 1988). Experts have better metacognitive abilities, for example, the self-monitoring ability (Larkin, 1983).

According to Sweller (2005), an expert can accumulate his knowledge into a single schema; such organization helps to remove the burden and to work at a higher level of generalization. Schemes also have some kind of executive function that accompanies the process of problem solving, while novices are forced to focus on researching new strategies. At the same time, the importance of expert knowledge increases with the growth of the problem field (Schoppek, 2002).

2. Problem Statement

Studying representation of client's problem on psychotherapists with different work experience is important for understanding the mechanisms of effective work and development of their professionalism. Despite the popularity of problem solving research in different domains (physics, mathematics, logic games, etc.) and in connection with expertise (Chi, Feltovich & Glaser, 1981; Sternberg & Frensch, 1991), there are no studies that would consider the growth of expertise through changes in the client's problem representation in the psychotherapeutic domain.

3. Research Questions

- Whether the representations of the client's problem in the mind of psychologists with longer experience differ from representations in the mind of psychologists, who started their practice recently?
- Which difference can we find?

4. Purpose of the Study

Qualitative study of client's problem representation features by psychotherapists with different work experience.

5. Research Methods

5.1. Participants

Two groups of psychotherapists took part in the research. Each group includes 10 people. The first group consists of beginners in psychotherapy (work experience up to 5 years). The second group consists of experienced psychotherapists (work experience more than 10 years).

5.2. Instrument

The data collection method was a semi-structured interview. Its macrostructure was aimed at obtaining a general idea about a client's problem. The microstructure goal was to reconstruct the details of a client's problem representation from the therapist point of view.

The method of data analysis was grounded theory by Glaser in its Strauss and Corbin version (1990). The goal of grounded theory method is to build a theory that is credible and helps to understand this area of study. The transcribed interviews were coded successively: first open coding, then axial and selective coding.

5.3. Procedure

The purpose of the interview was to identify the "personal problem" implicit construct.

Macrostructure.

Subject: the general idea of the "personal problem" construct, so called distant plan (Try to define the phrase "personal problem." What does "personal problem" mean? What does it come to your mind when you hear the phrase "personal problem"?)

Microstructure.

Subject: personal idea of the "personal problem" construct, so called close-up (Give an example of the client's personal problem. How do you understand that the client has a personal problem?)

6. Findings

As a result of the first phase of open coding, the following categories were identified:

Beginners:

- A personal problem as a hindrance, deadlock, barrier
- The personal problem as an internal conflict
- Problem associated with psychological perception and psychological state
- Inability to cope on their own
- Typology of problems (enumeration of particular kinds of problems)
- The role of the therapist (assistant, smoothing of internal conflict)
- Characteristics (soreness, abnormality)

Experts:

- Desire to change (change request)
- Dissatisfaction with the current situation
- Subjectivity in assessing the severity of the problems,
- Inability to cope on their own
- Typology (professional medical, psychological, large clusters, in accordance with decision strategies)
- Characteristics (subjective assessment of complexity)
- The role of the therapist (shift in perception, collaboration, work for a result, following the clients goal, maintaining the direction of work, searching happiness source together with the client)

As a result of axial coding, all categories were built around a central construct - the client's personal problem.

As a result of selective coding, all categories and their interrelations can be reflected in the following features of the client's problem representation (see Table 1).

Table 01. Categories that describe the client's personal problem

Categories	Beginners	Experts
Causal conditions (events, incidents, cases that lead to the emergence or development of a construct)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Valuable nature (something important for a person is touched) Individual characteristics (low resistance to stress) Pathological nature (deviation) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Interaction of the environment and individual characteristics, awareness of one's limitations under certain conditions Comes from a personal development history Traumatic impact Depletion of resources Imposition of the environment vs inner nature
Construct (central idea)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Psychological content Interference Internal conflict Dead end 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The desire to change something Dissatisfaction with the current situation Inability to cope on their own Inability to exist in a situation Potential for change, development
Context (the properties of the construct and the conditions under which action strategies are adopted)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Soreness 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Subjective assessment of problems severity The power of desire to change the situation Awareness / Unawareness Total / Local problem
Intermediate conditions (affect action strategies, support or restrict strategies)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Amount of time Economic status 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Amount of time Physical and social space Cultural background Economic status
Strategies designed to cope with the problem	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Psychotherapy 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Search for information Help of loved ones Psychotherapy
Consequences (results of the action)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Smoothing internal conflict Additional energy for life 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Shift in the perception of the situation System transition to new level No change Finding a solution to a problem

In the novice group, the client's problem is more often characterized as an obstacle, as a psychological barrier that arises because of an individual's predisposition or because of his vulnerability and is considered as an option of "abnormality." Subjectively, a client experiences a problem as painful. It pushes him to seek help from a specialist. Psychotherapeutic interaction leads to smoothing the client's state, eliminating interferences and clearing the way for the further functioning.

In the group of experienced psychotherapists the problem is presented as unique, exclusive for each person and arising in a situation of dissatisfaction with the current conditions. The main component of the representation is the desire of the subject to change the situation, and this is also a necessary condition for accessing the therapist. Experienced therapists emphasize the dynamic and resource nature of the problem. Interaction with the problem is regarded as clarification, deepening understanding and development. The result is a shift in the perception of the situation, a solution to the problem, but also a variant of stagnation and resistance to change. A distinctive feature of experienced therapists is their rejection of the "problem" concept and focus on motivation for change as a crucial part of the problem situation.

In general, the problem representation of novices is less detailed and is discussed in the discourse of objectifying the problem.

7. Conclusion

The study shows a significant difference in the representation of a personal problem in psychotherapists with different work experience. Experienced psychotherapists have more detailed representation of a problem; it includes more parameters related to the subjectivity of client's assessment of the problem. It is more focused on the motivational aspects associated with the problem. The problem is perceived as more multifaceted, as are the ways to solve it. The negative outcome in the dynamics of the problem situation is taken into account.

Our future research will show how different types of problem representations are connected with specific psychotherapeutic goals and actions. Identified parameters also make it possible to build a tool for diagnosing the professional maturity of specialists. Also, the results of the study can be used in educational process planning, as well as in the professional training of psychotherapists.

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