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**Professional Culture of the Specialist of the Future**

**PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL SELF-ASSESSMENT OF  
NOVICE COUNSELLORS**

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***Abstract***

Development as a professional counsellor is a lifelong process today. There are many factors influencing it such as education, professional environment and supervision. This paper analyses the results of self-assessment of novice counsellors about their professional and personal development. At the initial stage, most of all young specialists are concentrated on the experiences related to the practice of counseling. At the cognitive level, they have difficulty to see what is happening systemically, they work more situationally. At the same time, at the personal level, there is a desire for development, self-knowledge, an appeal for help to senior colleagues. They consider their own client experience as a resource for this development. A comparative analysis showed that already at the first stage of the formation of professional identity, novice counseling psychologists experienced many similarities with specialists at higher stages of professional development in an awareness of the significance of the constant growth of professional skill and the formation of personal qualities. At the same time for beginners, stressful involvement in work is characteristic, whereas for experienced specialists it is more likely therapeutic involvement. Assessing personal characteristics, beginner and experienced counselors identify similar characteristics associated with interpersonal skills. However, experienced specialists have a more differentiated attitude to use these skills when working with different categories of clients; experienced specialists have a great depth of self-understanding. Interpersonal skills of novice specialists are more generalized, they are used more superficially. These results can be taken into account in developing of training programs.

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**Keywords:** Professional development, personal development, self-assessment, novice counsellors.



## 1. Introduction

Development as a psychology consultant is a lifelong process including professional and personal progress during the education, work and supervision. Personal and psychological development of psychologists provides internal synchronization and value organization of the individual developing of the psychologists' self-awareness and achievement of personal maturity leading to professional self-realization.

It is now recognized that the most important part of the consultation process is to form the interconnection between the psychologist and the client, which is influenced by their personality (Wagner & Hill, 2015). Most of the consultant's personality researches have been reduced to finding and describing the personality traits involved in a particular counseling aspect (communicative, affective, cognitive, etc.) (Zinovyeva & Dvornikova, 2017). Some authors take up the problems of the personal and professional development of the psychologist to define the standard approaches to the competence modification of an expert occupied in the «person-person» system. Despite the undoubted advantages of this approach, which makes it possible to clearly understand how and what to teach future psychologists, how to evaluate the results of their training, it has obvious problems including the difficulty of identifying a single standard of education, reducing competencies to a set of specific skills, the need to spend a lot of time and money for achieve a certain level of competence (Kaslow, 2004). It leads to the situation when the education of psychologists realizes on a competency based approach and doesn't account for personal development. Norcross (2005) shows that the training of psychologists can be “a mechanistic and impersonal pursuit” (p.840), and chooses to retitle it as “something along the lines of helping to develop psychologists” (p.840). A deeper understanding of the personal-professional development of psychologists at different stages of their career could allow changing the nature of their training to a more personal one.

The other approach is presented in the literature along with the competence-based approach, in which the success of a psychologist is determined by subject characteristics. For example, an effective consultant's personality model (Kociunas, 1999) includes such characteristics as authenticity, openness to personal experience, development of self-knowledge, personal strength and identity, tolerance for uncertainty, acceptance of personal responsibility, and depth of relationships with other people, setting realistic goals and empathy.

Comparing of the professional identity and the image of an ideal professional between students and experienced psychologists has shown that the psychology students have absolutely unreal and overestimated image of an ideal professional (Karymova, 2017). Identification with the image of a successful professional is gone along with the internalization of norms of behavior, ethical values and giving them personal meaning. Professional identification of psychologists goes during the process of forming a bipolar rating scale between images of “a bad psychologist” and “a good psychologist”. The image of “a bad psychologist” is a negative identification model; the image of “a good psychologist” contains ideas about a positive “I”. Professional identification of a student psychologist begins more due to the denial of the “negative” personal type and behavior, which cannot be followed. The image of the “ideal psychologist” is formed only by the end of university education, and the model of a successful

professional is accepted as the goal of his own development (Miklyaeva, Rumyantseva, Tuzhikova, & Tupitsyna, 2003).

The professional identity of a psychologist has a three-level structure: the cognitive component is a professional self-image, knowledge and understanding of one's profession; emotional and evaluative component - professional self-esteem, attitude towards oneself as a psychologist; behavioral component - the search of a professional improvement, professional satisfaction. The development of professional self-awareness of psychologists is characterized by a change in the self-image, attitude to oneself, and also has a rather positive character. The professional self-concept is characterized by high self-esteem, self-acceptance, a positive attitude towards yourself as a psychologist, a rather high appreciation of your qualities as a specialist. Self-image in the future has a positive perception; there is the opportunity of further professional development and self-improvement (Petrova, 2008). The professional self-awareness of a practical psychologist consists of the three components: cognitive - a professional image of I, knowledge of one's profession; affective-evaluative - professional self-esteem, attitude towards oneself as a person and as a practical psychologist, attitude towards one's profession; behavioral - the need of self-actualization, professional satisfaction. There is a direct relationship between the level of development of professional self-awareness and the level of professionalism of a practical psychologist. The subjective criterion of the professionalism of a practical psychologist at various stages of professional activity is the level of development of professional self-awareness (Taraskina, 2005). The reaching of a more complete professional identity of a psychologist is assisted by special group work aimed at the development of professional self-awareness (Prosekova, 2002).

Thus a combination of personal and professional development is necessary for the successful professional identification and realization of a psychologist, which can be realized in the process of training professional skills under supervision. Kaslow (1986), Khamitova (2000) described the main stages of professional identity development of psychologists in the process of education and supervision. At each stage the psychologist has certain difficulties and problems in interacting with clients and the supervisor, reflecting the process of professional development.

The main problems faced by novice psychologists in the first years of their professional work were identified in a survey. There was lack of knowledge, lack of practical experience working with people, the absence of a supervisor, difficulties in writing the interpretation of the survey results, difficulties in finding clients, etc. novice psychologists pointed out following qualities that helped them in the process of professional development: love for children, for the profession, for psychology; a responsibility; perseverance; activity; goodwill; interest; interpersonal skills; curiosity; perseverance; learnability; optimism; self-presentation; stress resistance; patience; hard work; luck; planning skills; perseverance; purposefulness; extraversion; empathy; energy (Denisova, Kostakova, & Kuz'michev, 2017).

The results of the **ethodologi** of professional motivation show that more than half of beginning psychologists are characterized by constructive motivation of professional activity associated with the desire for professional and personal growth. However, about a quarter of the respondents, while maintaining constructive motivation, do not strive to improve their own professionalism, which, given the relatively small length of service, is a rather alarming symptom. The remaining subjects (about a quarter

of the sample) are characterized by the dominance of non-constructive professional motives directly related to the risk of professional burnout (Miklyaeva et al., 2003).

During 1991-2001 it was conducted a well-known study of professional development of psychotherapists by Orlinsky and Ronnestad (2005). As a research method, the development of psychotherapists Common Core Questionnaire (DPCCQ) questionnaire was used. One of the central tasks of this study was an attempt to understand what the portrait of a modern psychotherapist is, what is its professional identity, and features of professional development. This is the most significant empirical study of the professional development of psychotherapists through self-assessment. Unfortunately, such studies were not conducted on the Russian sample of professional psychologists

## **2. Problem Statement**

The current stage in the development of psychological counseling in Russia is characterized by the lack of a unified approach to the education, maintenance and supervision of the professional development of counseling psychologists. As mentioned above, there are many studies on various aspects of the professional development of a consultant's personality. However, they do not pay enough attention to the study of professional self-perception, self-esteem and identity in the initial stages of becoming a psychologist. There is not enough information about how beginning psychologists themselves assess their professional and personal characteristics and development. In this regard, it is important to examine the self-assess of professional and personal qualities among the beginning psychologists including to identify the specifics of their personal and professional development in comparison with more experienced ones.

## **3. Research Questions**

- 3.1. How do beginner counseling psychologists assess their professional skills at the initial period in the profession, after training in a tutor's group?**
- 3.2. How do beginner counseling psychologists evaluate their personal characteristics at the initial period in the profession, after training in a tutor's group?**
- 3.3. What are the differences between beginner and experienced consultants in the professional skills and personal development?**

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

Research and describe the ideas of beginner counseling psychologists about the development of their professional skills in connection with obtaining practical experience in counseling. Investigate the personal characteristics that counseling psychologists distinguish in connection with the development of themselves as a professional.

## **5. Research Methods**

### **5.1. Study location and sample**

The study was conducted at Saint-Petersburg State University psychological clinic. This clinic was established to provide free psychological assistance to university students and residents of the city. All participants (N=30, 36,6% males and 63,3% females aged 21-26 years) were young counseling psychologists, who had studied at special tutor's group, had learned basic skills and had gained initial counseling experience.

The main purpose of the tutor's group was to provide each student the opportunity to gain personal experience in the process of psychological counseling as a client, consultant and supervisor. Another goal of the tutor's group was to set the direction for self-development in this area. The creation of such a group was a response to the students' opinion, that they receive mainly theoretical education, and do not feel, at the end of their studies, their readiness to apply their knowledge and skills. Understanding the need to improve the quality of education, taking into account the needs and expectations of students (Razinkina et al., 2018) this program has been developed aimed at developing practical skills of counseling. After training in a tutor group, the most successful participants are allowed to practice real counseling under supervision, which ensures immersion into the specifics of the profession. All respondents were explained their rights as participants, such as the confidentiality of their information, the right to withdraw from the study at any time during the interview processes.

### **5.2. Main research methods**

Within the framework of this study, the following methods and research methods were used: modified questionnaire "The Development of a Psychotherapist" by Orlinsky and Ronnestad (2005), special essay. The questions of the "The Development of a Psychotherapist" questionnaire by D.E. Orlinsky and M.H. Ronnestad reflected the practical experience of the respondents, how the respondents saw themselves as a consultant, and what experiences they had during the training of counseling. The text of the questionnaire was modified in accordance with the objectives of the study.

Our version of the questionnaire consisted in five parts:

1. 'Your development as a consultant.'
2. 'Your theoretical orientation.'
3. 'Your development in the present.'
4. 'Your consulting work at the very beginning', including:
  - 4.1 Difficulties in consulting work;
  - 4.2 Coping strategies for overcoming that difficulties.
5. 'Some words about you.'

Parts of the questionnaire consistently revealed a portrait of a novice consultant and his experiences. Also, all respondents wrote an essay to answer the question "What does it mean for me to be a counseling psychologist?" The method of content analysis identified groups of statements that characterizing the ideas about the purposes and values of the consultant.

### **5.3. Experimental procedure and methods of statistical analysis**

In accordance with the criteria for inclusion in the sample, a preliminary selection of subjects was carried out. The study was conducted in the electronic form. The respondents consistently filled out a small biographical questionnaire and “The Development of a Psychotherapist” questionnaire, after that were asked to write an essay. Each of the stages of the study was accompanied by detailed instructions. At the end of the study, the respondent was asked to give data for feedback if he so desired. The results were processed using the RStudio 3.5.0 program.

## **6. Findings**

### **6.1. How do beginner counseling psychologists assess their professional skills at the initial period in the profession, after training in a tutor’s group?**

70% of respondents relied on the humanistic concept. Equal popularity had dynamic and cognitive-behavioral paradigm. The least popular was the systematic approach – it as a lead indicated only 17% of consultants. This result may be associated with students’ small knowledges about the systematic approach. In addition, the humanistic methodology assumes a lesser influence of the therapist on the client, than in other methodologies. This fact may appeal to young people as an avoidance of responsibility and as a reflection of their own position (recently they were under pressure from parents, teachers and other significant persons). Note, that 50% of respondents noted significant changes in themselves, 73% of them rated these changes as progressive. According to respondents' answers, self-development was most affected by the experience of their own consulting work (83%), attending courses/seminars (80%), observing the work of colleagues, and receiving psychological assistance as a client (76%). Least affected were: reading own lectures/seminars (33%), own research (13%). The young consultants associated their own professional development at this stage with the study of colleagues practical experience and development of practical skills, and their own research activities considered unimportant for professional development. They are more involved in the content of the consultation itself than in the work accompanying the consultation (supervision, client experience, development of training courses, etc.).

The goal of consulting work for clients to “understand their feelings, motives and/or behavior” was chosen by the current 60% of respondents, “to allow themselves to fully experience their feelings” - 53% of respondents, to “gain courage in interacting with new situations or previously avoided” - 50 % of respondents. The least chosen goals were “to realistically assess the value of certain life events” - 10%, “to realistically present the possible consequences of one’s behavior” - 6.6% and “to resolve emotional conflicts in relation to the consultant” - 3%. Thus, we see that novice consultants tend to attribute responsibility to a client. They are relying primarily on emotions and relationships in working process with the client. The emotional aspect is given more weight than the rational, cognitive evaluation of the consultation process. At the same time, beginning consultants avoid situations of confrontation with a client, that involving their own emotions.

There were described the difficulties faced by young consultants and the ways in which they overcame them. Thus, 50% of respondents at the beginning of their consulting activities did not know

which course of action would be most effective for the client. 37% of respondents were not sure that they could have a beneficial effect on the client and were afraid of losing control over the consultation process.

To overcome the difficulties encountered, 80% of respondents discussed the problem with their colleagues; 77% of respondents often consulted about a difficult situation with a more experienced consultant; 61% of respondents often simply allowed themselves to experience difficulties or unpleasant feelings. Thus, for the majority of respondents, a strategy of sharing feelings and thoughts with other consultants is typical in case of experiencing difficulties in consulting activities.

For beginning consultants, the presence of a weak development of strategic systems thinking is typical, it is difficult for them to predict what actions they are leading to. So, many interventions are conducted situationally, hence the fear of losing control. The most frequently used method of coping is sharing your experiences with others, asking for support. Virtually no one addresses the use of literature and the description of cases.

## **6.2. How do beginner counseling psychologists evaluate their personal characteristics at the initial period in the profession, after training in a tutor's group?**

Beginner counselling psychologists described feelings at the beginning of counselling career. 100% of respondents indicated that they were absorbed in what was happening and felt interested. 83% of respondents felt that they were deepening their understanding of psychological counseling. 93% of the respondents noted that at the beginning of their consulting activities they didn't feel dissatisfaction. And 53% of the respondents noted that they were very pleased with their work.

That is, beginning consultants feel satisfaction from their work and deny the presence of negative experiences associated with consultation and self-satisfaction. In fact, here we can talk about the presence of protection mechanisms. Young consultants feel themselves vulnerable and cannot openly recognize their right to experience negative feelings about their own professionalism and work during the consultation.

At the same time, 50% of respondents are satisfied with their lives, but consider their life to be stressful. The rest of the respondents do not experience life satisfaction, but they consider their life to be moderately stressful or not stressful at all.

According to respondents, the most important qualities of a psychologist are not personal qualities, but related to the development of their professional competence. It was precisely these qualities that novice specialists wanted to possess: "effective," "skillful," "tolerant." It is these qualities that they would like to possess the most. In relationship with other people, respondents more often evaluate themselves (70%) as: "accepting", "friendly", "caring", "warm" - such qualities are shown by respondents in their relationships with close people. Less often as (25%) "cold", "directive".

As their weaknesses, consultants identify a group of qualities associated with the expression of emotions or the impact on the emotional state (57%). This is, first of all, difficulties with the ability to manage your emotions, hold boundaries, self-doubt. In second place is the quality associated with the availability of theoretical knowledge: knowledge of techniques and techniques. In third place is a group related to physiological parameters (13%): fatigue, loss of attention, concentration, in fourth place are qualities associated with communication skills, sociability (6%)

That is, in fact, for novice consultants, different aspects of the emotional sphere (from qualities: sensitive, empathetic to states: fear, insecurity, etc) dominate in personal focus. We see that for beginning consultants it is typical to merge personal and professional experience. Thus, beginning consultants include knowledge of the theory and techniques of counseling as strong personal traits, and associate the most significant personal qualities with an increase in work efficiency.

According to the results of the Essay in answering the question “what does it mean for me to be a counseling psychologist” the majority indicated the answer about helping other people (67%), also, there were descriptions associated with love for the profession (33%), the possibility of self-development (27%) and self-knowledge (7%). Although the responses are mostly stereotypical (help, interest in the profession), showing a departure from deeper thinking, we can see the appearance of a focus on one’s own personality, the need for self-understanding and self-inquiry.

Thus, analyzing the data obtained in our study of the assessment of ideas about the professional and personal development of novice counselors, we note the following. At the initial stage, most of all young specialists are concentrated on the experiences related to the experience of counseling practice, which, on the one hand, brings them satisfaction, on the other hand is a source of strong emotional experiences associated with the fear of losing control of the situation. At the cognitive level, they have difficulty to see what is happening systemically, they work more situationally. At the same time, at the personal level, there is a desire for development, self-knowledge, an appeal for help to senior colleagues. They consider their own client experience as a resource for this development.

### **6.3. What are the differences between beginner and experienced consultants in the professional skills and personal development?**

We compared the research results of the personal and professional development of novice counseling psychologists, obtained by us, with similar studies of experienced counseling psychologists (Burlakova & Zaryanik, 2009). It was revealed that if beginner counseling psychologists note the decisive influence of the humanistic paradigm (73%), then experienced specialists note the influence of the psychoanalytic direction on their professional activities (58%).

Beginner psychologists more often than experienced colleagues have a sense of the ineffectiveness of their actions towards the client. In this regard, beginning consultants are more likely to experience a state of stress associated with advisory activities. Beginning consultants often experiencing a sense of tension, exhaustion, loss of attention, and try to cope with anxiety by avoiding coping strategies. Experienced consultants are more likely to have therapeutic involvement, characterized by complete personal involvement and responsibility towards the client. An experienced consultant has a high level of empathy, a sense of a perceived “flow” during sessions and its effectiveness. At the same time, we can talk about the presence of elements of medical involvement in the novice specialists in terms of the manifestation of empathy, full involvement in the process, obtaining satisfaction from working together.

For both experienced and novice professionals, counseling and psychotherapy primarily involve personal attendance and involvement as a professional. As well as experienced specialists, beginning counseling psychologists are focused on the continuous development of professional skills, consider this as part of their own effectiveness. Experienced specialists, as well as beginners, believe that the level of



professionalism is influenced by the experience of direct practice with patients, passing personal psychotherapy and case supervision.

Describing and comparing personal qualities, we can also see both similarities and differences. Both beginners and experienced psychologists pay little attention to their communicative qualities as a strong point. At the same time, experienced specialists mark their “advanced” interpersonal skills (the ability to notice the nuances of the client’s emotional reactions and to deal with them, the ability to rely constructively on their reactions to the client). Beginning psychologists focus their attention primarily on establishing contact through the manifestation of empathy and sensitivity.

In general, a comparative analysis showed that already at the first stage of the formation of professional identity, novice counseling psychologists experienced many similarities with specialists at higher stages of professional development. Apparently, an awareness of the significance of the constant growth of professional skill and the formation of personal qualities leading to an increase in one’s own effectiveness, is laid immediately after entering the profession and remains as it moves in it.

At the same time, there are significant differences between experienced and novice specialists. For beginners, stressful involvement in work is characteristic, whereas for experienced specialists it is more likely therapeutic involvement. At what point is stressful involvement replaced by therapeutic involvement and what does it depend on is the task of subsequent research.

Assessing personal characteristics, beginner and experienced counselors identify similar characteristics associated with interpersonal skills. However, experienced specialists have a more differentiated attitude to use these skills when working with different categories of clients; experienced specialists have a great depth of self-understanding. Interpersonal skills of novice specialists are more generalized, they are used more superficially.

## **7. Conclusion**

The study made it possible to clarify some features of the assessment by novice counseling psychologists of their professional and personal qualities. The importance of taking into account both the professional and personal aspects in the training of beginning specialists has been confirmed, it is necessary to give them equal attention in the course of training and further support. It was found for beginners that the fear of ineffectiveness of their own actions in working with a client, loss of control over what is happening in a session, reflected in the personality plan as a sense of lack of confidence in the physical level and fatigue. Working with the client, they prefer to reflect his emotions and lesser extent with the client's settings and attitudes. At the same time, novice counselors are characterized by the avoidance of confrontation and emotional conflict with the client. As for personal characteristics, beginner specialists, as well as experienced consultants, are focused on developing empathy and sensitivity to client reactions. However, young professionals, compared with experienced consultants, are less likely to determine what specific actions are behind this. Beginning consultants attach greater importance to the experience of interaction with the client and consider unimportant accompanying work (preparatory work, preparing their own classes, collecting additional information, etc.). In our opinion, these are key points that characterize the initial stage of entering the profession, and they must be taken into account in developing of training programs.

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