

# Importance of reflective practice in counselling



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Reflective practice refers to the capability to reflect on our everyday actions and frameworks, as well as concepts on personal experience as part of a process of life-long learning (Schon, 1983). According to this definition, Bolton (2010) termed this as developmental insight, where the emphasis is placed on the learning from our own experience rather than knowledge gained from lectures or tutorials. On a personal note, I think what is significant about reflection during the course of our practice in this subject is that I am not just looking back on events and actions that has happened to us in the past, but also I am conscious of my emotions, experiences, actions, and behavioural reactions, and thus the utilization of these factors to add on to my existing knowledge database. As such, it is to draw out new and perhaps better knowledge, and in the long run, I hope to have a higher level of understanding. These would be achievable via the few factors that would be discussed in the essay, such as questioning and reflecting on my own moral and ethical values and comparing it with the Ethics Code in situations where I am required to act extremely. On another note, by reflecting on my personality profile, I check and reflect if my ideals and passion are congruent with the test that measured my psychological preference and my criterions on decision making. By reflecting on these frameworks, I hope to shed some light on my self-awareness and hopefully gain some new insights so that ultimately, I can improve as a better human being.

### **The Ethics Code**

The Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct, in another light denoted as the Ethics Code, consists of several clause and terms which serves as a guideline as how a psychologist should behave when conflicting scenarios arise, which could possibly happen on a daily basis. The Ethics

Code, however, applies only to psychologists and their work-related activities that are part of their nature of job scope. These usually include an array of activities such as counselling, teaching, supervision, social intervention, as well as conducting assessments through the development of assessment instruments. On the other hand, the violation of the Ethics Code itself does not instantly determine whether a psychologist has violated a law and is liable for legal actions in court. When considering a professional behaviour to be conducted, psychologists must not only consider the Ethics Code, but also to put into consideration applicable laws and the relevant board regulations. Psychologists must ensure that the ethical standards are met if the Ethics Code establishes a more stringent standard of conduct that is mandatory by law. Greenberg and Shuman (1998) elucidate that although not always the case, during practice, the law would usually be compliant with the Ethics Code. If, at any point in time, the Ethics Code happens to be with conflict with the requirements of law, I feel that psychologists are supposed to remain committed to the Ethics Code and exercise caution to resolve any conflict while not violating any civil laws. Since the work of a psychologist is to develop a reliable and valid construct of information which are backed by research, and are applied with the intention of broadening our vision and knowledge on behaviour, which essentially creates an opportunity to improve conditions of interaction between society and the individual, the Ethics Code is thought to be able to provide a common set of values in which it is envisioned to offer the general principles as well as rules of decision making to ensure that most of the possible situations encountered by a psychologist can be referred to and resolved. However, Corey, Corey and Callanan (1998) argues that while it holds true that the Ethics Code provides

guidelines for ethical conducts, it was not intended to be able to provide specific guidance or solutions to each and every situations that could arise. Though I feel that the Ethics Code is very thorough in its descriptions as it covers a wide scope of possible situations, it is still nonetheless not fool-proof as in specific field such as forensic psychology, where there is a fine line between ethical practice and legal laws. This was backed up by Day and White (2008), who mentioned that ethical dilemmas would arise and explain that especially in the field of forensic psychology, it is not uncommon that practitioners are drawn into legal proceedings. Furthermore, it was brought up by Herlihy and Corey (1997) that although it may be consistent with the Ethics Code to breach client confidentiality in situations such as when a client is seen as a threat to self or others, there are many occasions when the ethically responsible course of action is less clear. As such, I feel that while the Ethics Code offers a valid guideline on actions to be conducted in various situations, psychologists should still take into considerations which are the correct and just actions to take and certainly to exercise caution in the behaviours to be taken as a wrong decision could damage a person's life or damage their reputation.

### **Field trip to Institute of Mental Health**

The grey area of applicability of ethics in mental health settings is an intriguing issue, especially with personal experience, i. e., field trip to the Institute of Mental Health. While many consider the correct course of action to be in a particular way, health practitioners and their set of code and values may present itself differently. I realized that there exist difficult and conflicting cases that may arise when dealing with people with mental

disorders. For example, the ethical standard of conduct would be to inform the clients the truth of their conditions, and avoid actions that are likely to harm clients. However, the very act of informing the clients of their conditions is likely to invoke a response, which in return would most likely aggravate their emotional suffering. An array of misconceptions was cleared when the nurses at the Institute of Mental Health provided a clear explanation of the evolution of treatment of patients changed from the past to the present. One example brought up by the nurse was the usage of straitjacket. A straitjacket is a garment which resembles a jacket, but with long sleeves and is generally used to restrain individuals who would possibly harm themselves, damage furniture, or injure surrounding staffs. Before the development of psychiatric medications, doctors did not know how to properly treat mental disorders such as depression and anxiety disorders. A variety of treatments that was deemed to be cruel by current standards were thus attempted by the doctors, and the straitjacket was one of the treatments used. However, as research allows the development of drugs to suppress the effects of the mental disorders, such treatments were stopped and disallowed to be continued to be carried out to the clients. It was very fortunate to hear from the nurse at the institute that the straitjacket is no longer in usage as it was deemed to be inhumane, and I personally think so as well. Since the drugs are now capable of suppressing the effects of mental disorders, the approach of institutionalizing the clients has been reviewed. Townsend (1976) posits that clients who are institutionalized gets convinced that they are mentally ill, and as they integrate themselves with the institutional life, it would reduce the client's ability to live outside if they were to get deinstitutionalized. Personally, I feel that dealing with individuals

who are affected by mental disorders is a tricky issue, as there are many possible ways to approach the situation. One example would be making the decision as to whether an individual should be institutionalized or not. However, as far as I would suggest, I think that it should be advocated that the criterion of institutionalizing the clients be more strict, for example, admitting only the extreme cases of mental disorders where the clients are not able to sustain normal daily life, as the said effect would cause them to rely on the institution and progressively unable to live by themselves, even if symptoms of mental disorders were to subside and doctors claim that they can be discharged from the institution.

### **Awareness Program**

Autism disorder was the focal point of the awareness program for my group, and there are several pointers in which I am ashamed that I personally have committed. Firstly, it has been found that the lack of awareness in autism disorders has been a very concerning issue, especially in Singapore. Sigman, Mundy, Sherman and Ungerer (1986) explains that many people correctly identified some of the key characteristics of autism, including difficulty communicating, difficulty making friends, love of routine, as well as obsessive behaviours. However, some other common characteristics which I realized upon research, was that individuals who are affected by autism require the need for clear and unambiguous instructions and are susceptible to being disturbed by noise and touch; these points were less well known and could develop misconceptions if the other party was not aware; these were the points in which I was unaware of and would negligibly scrutinize them if I had to repeat my words multiple times and yet they would not

understand what I would have said. Upon raising my own awareness of the particular disorder and through some reflection, I felt that many individuals with autism act differently when compared to our typical population.

Whether at school, at work or in social settings, people with autism are often taken at face value and thus misunderstood. Individuals with autism may not respond when spoken to or may avoid eye contact from the people asking the question. They could possibly behave in unusual manners in which most people do not understand. Some behaviours are so out of the norm that they were misinterpreted as poor discipline. However, people in society tend to arrive at this opinion solely based on just a brief observation, rather than putting in effort to try to look for further signs to comprehend the nature of those actions taken by these individuals affected with autism, and as such, they often suffer discrimination, intolerance and isolation. For many, that means a lifetime of exclusion from everyday society. We, as individuals, should not be doing this, but rather, embrace the difference and aid them into being comfortable with their surroundings so that they can cope with their everyday lives. Just a simple act of observing them would go a long way in creating a society in which such individuals affected by autism disorder can coexist with us. Nonetheless, the completion for the autism awareness program did not come as an easy task, as it was difficult to acquire access to the relevant institutes of interest. For example, my group was not able to gain access and direct first-hand experience of understanding how individuals with autism would behave in schools, where they are required to interact with their surroundings, and more importantly, their peers. However, this setback did not deter my group from obtaining information. Pathlight school, a school for individuals with autism, however, did release some

interactive information such as articles and newspaper cut-outs with regards to the related field, and were cooperative in allowing us to gain as much knowledge as possible despite our lack of first-hand experience. As such, the only methods we were able to procure information was through the information released by the management of Pathlight, as well as the many questions that were relayed through e-mails so that we can gain accurate knowledge regarding autism disorders, and shed some light to others who are not as aware of such a disorder. Nonetheless, I feel that even with the information amassed through research; it is still insufficient to properly account for the wide array of characteristics that are exclusive to individuals with autism.

### **Personality Profile**

Individuals who go through personal development includes going through events that improve our self-awareness, and it allows us to cultivate our talents and potential, and as such, enrich our quality of life which ultimately contributes to the realization of our passion and aspirations. Based on the MBTI, Davies (2008) proposed that it is an assessment tool used to measure psychological preferences in how individuals perceive the world and make decisions, my personality profile is INTJ. Lawrence and Martin (2001) suggested that the MBTI is a reliable and valid instrument to measure our personality. They mentioned that the test is capable of being retested and are good across age and ethnic groups, and they pointed out that the instrument is set out to measure what the test is supposed to test originally. Based on the MBTI assessment by Myers (1998), it is conceived that INTJs see things from a top-down approach, and are capable of relating new



information to overall patterns. They also find themselves readily synthesizing abstract and complicated theoretical matters, and such mind-sets would lead the INTJs to value knowledge, as well as expect competence of themselves and others. Personally, I would agree to these points as my ideals of work reside in the fact that if all of the group members are competent, we would be able to complete the work beforehand and leave time and room for improvements to be made before any actual submission is due. This is especially important as having gone through numerous group works, my belief is that the more the content is reviewed, the more insightful it gets as we gain mastery and command in the particular context of research. I feel that in aspects of productive work, even if it is a group project, I prefer to work independently and thereafter team members come together to share their points to strengthen the validity and reliability of the entire project; though I favour the notion of working independently, I would not differ from group norms and still be cooperative towards team members. This was supported by Baron and Baron-Tieger (1995), where they elucidated that INTJs prefer to work independently, and have no particular problems in meeting group requirements as teamwork is not an issue. In another aspect, I value accuracy in my work and ensure that most, if not all of my curiosity in the area I am researching in is satisfied, and, because of my values I find myself inclined to field such as science and research, particularly in fields of forensic psychology. Through the test in which also supports my ideals of inclination to abstract matters and challenges, I feel that forensic psychology is a very interesting path in psychology as it presents abstract ideas and challenges in actual situations and it is my passion, as well as satisfaction to be able to decipher the true meaning and

rationale behind human behaviour. Another technique in which I find useful in promoting my self-awareness is the Johari window. Based on what I understand, the concept of reducing the blind spot by being inquisitive about myself would help in promoting self-awareness, because by understanding how others perceive me in another aspect which I was not able to see, I would be able to reflect on my actions and determine whether adjustments to my behaviour are required. Similarly, Joseph (1969) clarifies that in order to become self-aware and develop as a person, we should know more about ourselves and be informed about what others know about us as well.

To conclude, reflection and practice can be considered a subset of the many concepts and values we can pick up along the way of gaining insight on skills that are useful and applicable in our field of study. Through various lessons and facilitation, i. e. the Ethics Code, I was able to build up knowledge with regards to identifying, accessing, as well as making evaluations of information and its applicability to actual practice. Furthermore, the development of skills in professional and personal reflection was significant, as seen I feel that I have gained the capability to identify approaches for the development of appropriate outcomes and predict the indicators of success. Furthermore, by reflecting on the various concepts brought up in the essay, as well as through the course of subject, I feel that I have gained some new knowledge about myself; for example through the concept of Johari window, I realized that to be better self-aware, I needed to be inquisitive about myself, and this is one of the crucial part of what I think helps in my personal development.

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