

Skills of counselling and consulting psychologists



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In recent years, many fields of endeavour are impacting training in schools, colleges, universities, other learning institutions, agencies, and seminaries, by setting rules and regulations, ethical and other standards that govern those who practice in such fields. They also record and suggest best practices, and create competency benchmarks that trained graduates and working professionals alike are expected to exhibit in the execution of their duties in the specified areas of work. In order to be considered proficient and competent in one's field certain defining skills must be evident in their everyday practice. Counselling and Consulting Psychologists are by no means left out. They too are governed by competency standards-defining skills-and these will be treated in this paper.

The focus of this paper therefore is to highlight those skills that are specific to Counselling and Consulting Psychologists. The author will look briefly at Counselling and Consulting Psychology as individual fields and observe the general skills these fields recommend. I will compare and contrast the defining skills-competencies of each of these fields of psychology. Then I will show the extent to which these skills are specialized to each professional area and to what extent are they shared.

Counselling and Consulting Psychology are just two of the various professions in the field of Psychology.[1]Counselling Psychology has a very long and rich history spanning several decades. Conversely, Consulting Psychology is an emerging; much younger area in the field of psychology, (Boyce, 2004). These two branches however distinct do possess some similarities in relation to the competencies of the professionals who practice

their trade therein. The term competency is generally synonymous with terms such as; ' skills sets' and ' defining skills'.

Counselling Psychology

Counselling Psychologists ply their trade in a variety of places and carryout a variety of functions, (Division 17 Brochure, 2005), including some that are related to Consulting Psychology, (Shullman, 2002, p. 244). As found in Ross (2010) Counselling Psychology is defined as a specific field of psychology that:

focuses on emotional, social vocational, health-related, developmental, and organizational concerns as they promote personal and interpersonal functioning throughout life (McMaster University, 2006). Therefore, as is stated by APA's Division 17, Counselling Psychology encompasses normal developmental issues and problems associated with physical, emotional, and mental disorders (Division 17 Brochure, 2005); (p. 3).

Consulting Psychology

Consulting Psychologists practice in a variety of locales. They also offer and perform many functions which are not dissimilar to those expected of Counselling Psychologists, (About Consulting, [www. div. 13. org](http://www.div.13.org)). Ross (2010) noted that Consulting Psychology is best defined as:

the function of applying and extending the special knowledge of a psychologist, through the process of consultation, to problems involving human behaviour in various areas. More succinctly, it is applied psychology to organizations and individuals within organizations. It is also used to

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enhance individual and organizational performance and effectiveness, (Boyce, 2004); (p. 3).

The defining skills of a Counselling Psychologist

Introduction

Counselling Psychology is a longstanding member of the American Psychological Association (APA) - Division 17 - Society of Counselling Psychology, with many years of professional experience, research and practice; an abundance of 'treasures', (Hammersley, 2009, p. 143); an extensive literature pool of trusted data sources from which we can draw empirical relevant information and examples when attempting to identify the defining skills of the trade, (e. g. Vespia & Sauer, 2006, p. 231; Shullam, 2002, pp. 242-243)

The Defining Skills of Counselling Psychologists

The skills that define Counselling Psychology practitioners are many and due to the limitations of this paper all such skills cannot be explored. However, an answer to the question of which competencies are characteristic of adequately trained; beginning, entry-/mid-level and/or senior Counselling Psychologists must be attempted. From the literature researched (e. g. Evans, 2010) it was found that these skills include the ability to establish rapport with counselees. This creates a close professional bond with the client and fosters comfort, ease and trust, (#1). Counsellors must exhibit facilitative skills such as 'warmth, primary empathy and genuineness among other skills'. S/he must have good challenging skills that incorporate 'self-

disclosure, advanced empathy, confrontation and immediacy'. Evans (2010) also stated that the ability to aid in the counselee's self-exploration of their strengths, weaknesses, limitations, concerns and feelings about the practice and process of counselling, are integral skills for effective therapeutic relationship, (#1). These practices engender a sense of relaxation and comfortableness, and they increase the possibility of continuation of the therapeutic process.

Additionally, abilities such as recognizing and handling positive and negative effect; effectively conducting intake/beginning sessions, conducting closure/ending sessions, establishing continuity from one session to another, and making referrals, are essential skill sets for practicing counselling psychologists, (Evans 2010, #1). The counsellor must also be able to analyse client-counsellor interactions with special regard to transference, counter-transference and attraction issues. The absence of these very important skills could determine whether the counsellor or the practice survives; or whether or not the counselee gets real therapy or not. Along with the knowledge of personal boundaries, Evans (2010) also listed knowledge of interpersonal dynamics, group building skills, problem-solving skills and group and counselling theories, and effectively model counselling skills, and have expertise in counselling techniques especially those targeting particular clients and certain issues such as; career development, suicidal ideation and gesture, and suicide, crisis and trauma intervention, and homosexuality, (Evans, 2010, (#1 & #3), substance abuse, family, marriage, adolescent and children issues.

Furthermore, Evans (2010) catalogues other key skills that include the counsellor's identification of themes and patterns of behaviour (awareness of meaningful client data). In addition to the aforementioned, Counselling Psychologists must be flexible, able to organize case material, formulate and test a clinical hypothesis; appreciate and engage ethical issues applicable to the client and their need. From an extensive set of skills listed on its website, O-net Online highlighted ten top skills that they thought were most important for Counselling Psychologists. These include active listening-giving full attention to what the client is saying, (Sinclair, 2005; Kracen, 2003), social perceptiveness, critical thinking, monitoring, time management, and speaking, (O-net Online, 2010). O-net Online (2010) also noted that judgment and decision-making, analyzing data, coaching and developing others, developing and building teams and consulting or providing advice to others, are important skills counsellors must possess, (see also Evans, 2010, #3 & #5).

In addition to group therapy and supervision, counsellors must engage in teaching/training paraprofessionals, and offer wellness activities; and possess good general communication skills for leading workshops and presentations, (Evans, 2010, (#3 & #5). These skills are necessary especially in the education sector where guidance counsellors are expected to also spend time teaching in classrooms, carryout behaviour modification interventions such as psycho-education, (Shullman, 2002, p. 248). They must also possess good evaluating and intervention skills on both individual and group levels, (Evans, 2010, #3). Finally, skills pertaining to stress; anger; conflict and mediation management, crisis intervention and mentoring are

also found to be beneficial to the practice of counsellors, (e. g. DRF manual, 2009).

The extent to which these skills are specialized to Counselling Psychology

The majority of the skills mentioned in the preceding section are specific to the counselling psychologist. However, aspects such as; good rapport and challenging skills, active listening, social perceptiveness, critical thinking, monitoring, time management, and speaking interpersonal dynamics, group building and group problem-solving skills and understanding of group theories are not solely counsellor-skills. Equally so are skill sets with expertise in career development, recognizing themes and patterns of behaviour; judgment and decision-making, analysis of data, coaching and developing others, developing and building teams and consulting or providing advice to others. Teaching/training paraprofessionals, offering wellness activities and having good communication skills for leading workshops and presentations, along with anger; conflict and mediation management, crisis intervention and mentoring were not found to be specific to Counselling Psychology and its practitioners.

The defining skills of a Consulting Psychologist

Introduction

Consulting Psychology is a branch of psychology that comprises several types of consultancies including; Careers, Recruitment, HR, Sports, Management, Public health, Occupational, Industrial, and Organisational (I/O) Consulting, among others, (e. g., Pardoe, 2008; Shullman, 2002, p. 243;

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Evans, 2010, #5; O-net Online, p. 1) These professionals operate and offer their services in a myriad of settings and organization types.

The Defining Skills of Consulting Psychologists

Based on extant research done by credible sources, and extensive and verifiable data that supports the effectiveness of consultation practices, approaches and strategies for problem solving, (O’Roark, 2007); the skills that define the Consulting Psychology trade are many and varied. These practitioners are expected to possess several general and specialized competencies pertinent to his/her profession. Continuing with Evans (2010), it is apparent that these skills include; knowledge of organisational theories (design and structure), and the ability to analyse and apply knowledge of global organisational trends in the everyday practice consulting. This also suggests that consultants must read a lot endeavouring to keep in touch with global business news and information, (#1, #3 & #5). Evans (2010), also states that consultants must be able to objectively assess organizations at the individual, group and organizational levels. Consultants should also have good analytical skills particularly dealing with, group roles and functions. Evans (2010) points out further, that consultants must be able to effectively lead work group and inter-group problem-solving; provide alternative interventions and/or conceptualizations of specific problems and, facilitate client brainstorming of alternatives, options and solutions, (#1).

Consulting Psychology professionals must also be prepared to evaluate interventions based on agreed objectives and, identify and address historical and current organisational marketing issues. These professionals should

support the client's exploration of feelings and concerns about the process and practice of consulting; and must have experience in effectively using consulting models, for example, EDICT or Peter Block's models of consulting, (Evans 2010, #1 & #3).

Murphy (2006) hypothesizes that exercising [good] ' judgment is the foundation for professional success', among consultants, (p. 185). He suggests that this is not simply making decisions, for-' decision making does not equate with making a difference' (p. 186). Evaluation is yet another valuable skill that consultants must possess in order to be effective in their practice, (Evans, 2010, #4). In consulting, this evaluation is concerned with various dimensions (mission, people, structure and systems) within an organization.

Cohen (2001) catalogues seven core skills that his research has shown to be characteristic of outstanding consultants. These are, (a) bedside manner-this refers to good relationship building skills, (see also Evans, 2010, #2); (b) the ability to diagnose problems, (c) the ability to solve problems (find solutions), (d) technical expertise and knowledge, (e) communication skills - including the ability to present to individuals, groups and/or organizations through the effective use of technology such as multimedia aids; (f) marketing and selling abilities and, (g) management skills, (pp. 12-14).

Other individual, group and organizational competencies for consulting psychologists include; knowledge and effective use of various assessment tools. As stated earlier, these multifaceted and optimally-rounded professionals must be able to function as Careers and Vocational Consultants

and Recruitment and HR consultants-possessing exceptional interviewing skills, employee selection, development and job analysis skills, (Evans, 2010, #5). Consultants have a level of expertise in group dynamics, formation and development; group interventions, counselling and supervision techniques and skills. They must be able to identify and address group dysfunctional behaviours; readily identify, recognise, and renegotiate roles within groups, (ibid.). Evans (2010) highlights the level of organizational savvy that consultants must possess in order to be effective at their job: Diagnosis, change, development and performance are key skills in this regard, (#5). Competencies in coaching and mentoring techniques (Brotman et al., 1998, 42-43) are other necessary sets of skills that most consultants may need to occasionally exhibit during practice. Brotman et al. (1998) term it 'executive coaching' and points out that it is 'an emerging competency in the practice of consultation', (p. 40).

The extent to which these skills are specialized to Consulting Psychology

The bulk of the skills listed under 'The Defining Skills of Consulting Psychologist' are specialized Consulting Psychologist skills except; analytical skills, leading work group and inter-group problem-solving; providing alternative interventions and/or conceptualizations of specific problems, and, facilitating client brainstorming of alternatives, options and solutions. Other areas where there is no specialty are abilities such as; evaluating interventions based on agreed objectives, possessing knowledge and effectiveness in the use of various assessment tools; exceptional interviewing skills, identification and attention to group dysfunctional behaviours; identification, recognition, and renegotiate roles within groups;

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and diagnosis, change, development, performance management, coaching and mentoring. These skills are also widely use by Counselling Psychologist.

The extent to which these skills are shared

Counselling Psychology and Consulting Psychology are two distinct fields of psychology possessing various different competencies for the practice and the effective offering service to their clients, be they an individual, group or an entire organisation. Despite these dissimilarities however, there are skills that appear to be congruent with both professions without compromising the uniqueness of, or denigrating the other. These mutual competencies are beneficial to the client-counsellor/consultant relationship if used effectively. All the skills mentioned in the sections: ' The extent to which these skills are specialized to Counselling Psychology' and ' The extent to which these skills are specialized to Consulting Psychology', are shared skills as stated therein.

Some other mutual skills include; collegial and business networking, effective writing and communication skills; research, data collection and analysis skills, (Miller, 2001, p. 8); computer literacy, cultural and social sensitivity and diversity; leadership skills, professional and ethical training, self-awareness, self-management, professional and psychological maturity and self-care, (Evans, 2010, #1 & #3; and see AGCAS, 2010; O-net Online, 2010). Effective listening skills and self-confidence (Fazio & Reyes, 2004, p. 3), and skills such as communicating respect, genuineness, and concreteness or specificity of expression, Evans (2010, #2) are also considered to be integral shared skills.

Finally, one of the main areas of difference between these areas is in the area of organizational intervention. For the consultant this is second nature, however, for the counsellor, the effective activities, approaches and strategies that must be followed and employed by consultant would leave the counsellor out of their league.

Conclusion

There are a myriad of competencies that both Counselling and Consulting Professionals must effectively exhibit in order to be taken serious in their separate career fields. The distinctiveness of the skills sets they possess by no means restrict these very close areas of psychology from marrying certain of the other competencies they both claim. Thus, these related fields may appear or become indistinguishable to the untrained eye. It is hoped therefore, that this study has made clearer-where the boundaries are-and shed some light on both professions, their practitioners and their trade skills.

Although most of the works evaluated and cited were one-sided-with the exception of, Shullman (2002) and Cooper et al. (2007); the challenge made the study even more interesting. These authors took a largely comparative view of the two areas for the better portion of their works, and it is believed they added significantly to other works such as; the ' Guidelines for Education and Training at the Doctoral and Postdoctoral Levels in Consulting Psychology/Organizational Consulting Psychology', (O'Roark et al., 2007).

Shullman (2002) at the outset of the article stated her hope to draw comparisons among the '...roles of counselling psychologists and consulting psychology domains and competencies' (p. 242). This was also the hope of <https://assignbuster.com/skills-of-counselling-and-consulting-psychologists/>

the author in this paper. Thus, the expected results from comparing and contrasting the defining skills of Counselling and Consulting Psychologists are believed to have been achieved.