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Vpliv notranjega dialoga svetovalca začetnika na vodenje svetovalnega pogovora

Influence of the novice counsellor inner dialogue on the
counselling conversation conducting

POVZETEK

Z mini raziskavo smo preverjali vpliv notranjega dialoga svetovalca začetnika na vodenje svetovalnega pogovora. Na podlagi analize polstrukturiranih intervjujev smo prepoznali veliko mero prisotnosti negativnega notranjega dialoga, ki je v svetovalcih budil negativna čustva in posledično svetovalce oviral pri njihovem delu. V primerih, ko je bil prisoten pozitiven notranji dialog, je le ta lajšal svetovalčevo vodenje svetovalnega pogovora. V času vodenja svetovalnega pogovora so svetovalci začetniki zaznavali samonadzorno, ocenjevalno, samokritično, samospodbujevalno in samosmerjevalno funkcijo notranjega dialoga.

Ključne besede: notranji dialog, funkcije, komunikacija, svetovanje, svetovalec začetnik

ABSTRACT

Based on the mini research, we have checked the influence of the inner dialogue of the novice counsellor on the counselling conversation conducting. On the basis of the analysis of the semi-structured interviews, we recognized a high level of presence of negative inner dialogue, which evoked negative feelings in counsellors and consequently obstructed them in their work. In cases when a positive inner dialogue was present, it eased counsellor's guidance of the counselling conversation. During the counselling conversation, novice counsellors perceived self-control, evaluative, self-critical, self-encouraging, and self-directing function of the inner dialogue.

Key words: inner dialogue, functions, communication, counselling, novice counsellor

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Inner dialogue

Inner dialogue, which is in average performed in the 26 % of the awake state during the day by an individual (Heavey & Hurlburt, 2008), is a subject of the researches in various scientific disciplines and sub-disciplines: psychology, sociology, social psychology, neuropsychology, linguistics, anthropology, philosophy etc. In the scientific literature, one can also perceive many different denominations of the same construct. Inner speech, personal talk, self-talk, concealed talk, silent talk, word thinking, word meditation, inner monologue, inner dialogue, inner voice, word media, image media, speech media, listening-verbal media, and reflexivity are mentioned (Alderson-Day & Fernyhough, 2015).

Inner dialogue was a subject of the debates already in the ancient philosophy. In the Dialogue Theaetetus Platon wrote that Socrates named thinking as a dialogue of mind with themselves. When a mind thinks, it simply speaks to itself, it sets questions and provides answers (Burnyeat, 1990). Russian psychologist A. N. Sokolov in his work *Inner Talk and Thought* states that in psychology a phrase “inner speech” usually means voiceless mental speech arising in the moment of thinking about something, planning, when we solve problems in our mind, recall what we read and heard, when we write, and read silently (Sokolov, 1972). In his researches, Bertau (1999) proved that the nature of the inner talk is dialogic. His idea of dialogic nature of inner talk is based on the presumptions of the dialogic and symbolic (semiotic) self (DeSouza, 2008).

The theory of the dialogic self, connects the concept of self and dialogue. The dialogic self is described as a dynamic diversity of self positions, among which a dialogic exchange can be developed. Every self has its story based on own experience and views. Self is therefore a small society, a society of numerous selves, in which processes of inner conflicts are present, inner criticism, inner agreements, and self-advocacy are present. The basis for understanding a dialogic self is James' (1890) distinction between self as a subject (“I”), which changes, and self as an object (“Me”), which is relatively stable (physical, social, spiritual self). James as well as Mead (1934) attribute self the ability of independent decision-making (Hermans & Gieser, 2012). Also, the symbolic interactionist Blumer (1973) follows Mead's principle of the independent decision-making and states that people act on the basis of meanings attributed to objects and events. Meanings arise from interaction and change during the course of interaction (Morrione, 2004). Planning of action is possible on the basis of the inner dialogue or individual's reflexivity. As the psychologist Margaret Archer says, individual in the inner dialogue or reflexivity defines and clarifies their beliefs, views, and objectives, social circumstances and defines their actions (Archer, 2010).

In the context of reflexivity – in the form of setting and answering questions –, inner dialogue assumes that the position of self is constantly changing from subject to object and vice versa. Self is a subject that sets the question in the inner dialogue, which is at the same time the object to which the subject can react. Also, a response in the form of an answer is an object to which a self as a subject reacts with a new question, whereas a new answer represents a new object, which is can again be followed by the question set by the object. This lasts until unity is reached, or the subject of conversation is stopped. In this circular process of reflexivity, individual's way of thinking is internally controlled,

and their actions are guided (Archer, 2013). In this context, Pierce (1934) asks himself who sets and who answers the questions. He differs various phases of self: (1) Present self acting alone, but in constant dialogue with (2) future self (“You”) and (3) critical self (“Me”). Critical self is a past self that consists of habits, experience, memories, and inner insights; by the present statements, it directs an individual towards future. Therefore, in self-questioning “What to do?” critical self forwards answers on the basis of the past experience or memories. Thus, we can talk about two forms of reflexivity: (1) A reverse reflexivity that relates to the past self or Mead's “Me”, and (2) future reflexivity that applies to the conversation among the present and future self, which, in the course of time, is only waking up into life, the self, which was named tuism, I-thou by Pierce. Each of the both forms of reflexivity brings 180-degrees self-awareness, but only unified they ensure 360-degrees, comprehensive self-awareness. With the help of the inner dialogue as the intermediary of the reflexivity processes, past and future can be merged in the presence, which indicates the connection of the past, present, and future self into the construct of the complex self, a comprehensive self. As such, inner dialogue also has an important influence on individual's processes of self-directing. These processes include the following: (1) Mental construction of possible functioning, (2) a choice among the possible ways of acting, and (3) behavioural implementation of the chosen operation. Thus, within the processes of self-directing, individual constructs, chooses, and implements. Primarily, the process of self-directing is located in the inner dialogue. Argument supporting this is that we can always listen to how dialogic self creates individual operation. Despite not perceiving the inner dialogue, it is thus unconscious, it still guides the choice among the possible forms of operation. When the choice is simple, the prior inner dialogue can be very short and only has the function of approving the chosen way of operation. When the choices are more complex, the inner dialogue is more complex and more systematic (Wiley, 2010).

When the need for the decision arises due to the inner conflict within self, a negotiating process is set up. In such negotiating, different self positions defend their needs, wishes, worries, fears, and expectations. The purpose of such alternate communication is termination of a conflict followed by operation (Nir, 2012). The operation itself or merely a tendency for operation can be more or less functional regarding the rationality of the inner dialogue. Cognitive-behavioural approaches define inner dialogue as a conflict or constant fight among positive and negative statements for oneself, whereas negative statements, including mental errors, represent irrational inner dialogue that guides individual toward dysfunctional behaviour or operation (Ellis & Dryden, 1997; Meichenbaum, 1977; Schwartz, 1986).

1.2 Inner dialogue in the counselling process

Counselling process as well as any other form of communication includes communication with others and communication with oneself (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988; Rober, 2002). Communication with oneself or inner dialogue of the counsellor can influence the conducting of communication with the client and vice versa. The positive inner dialogue encourages the counsellors and the negative obstructs them. Negative inner dialogue during the counselling conversation is more likely present in the novice counsellors (Nutt-Williams & Hill, 1996). Fuqua, Newman, Anderson, & Johnson (1986) who studied inner dialogue of the thirty novice counsellors during education process,

recognized two types of dialogue: the one relieving and the one obstructing counsellor's performance of the counselling process.

Nutt-Williams and Hill (1996) established that the type of the inner dialogue influences counsellor's perception of own usefulness in the counselling process and perception of client's reactions. Counsellors with negative and obstructive inner dialogue perceived themselves as less useful, and they perceived client's reactions in the counselling process as more negative. Negative inner dialogue obstructs the counsellor in productive inclusion in the process of help in resolving client's problems (Lyubomirsky & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1995).

2. OBJECTIVES AND THE PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The aim of the research was to establish whether and how the inner dialogue of the novice counsellor affects the conducting of the counselling conversation. For that purpose, we set three research questions: (1) what is the inner dialogue of novice counsellors; (2) whether inner dialogue will evoke any feelings, and (3) how will the counsellor's inner dialogue influence their cooperation in the counselling process.

3. METHOD

As the inner dialogue is a subjective experience of each individual, we have chosen a phenomenological approach that imposes understanding and explanation of many various experience of individual to the researcher (Mesec, 1998), and within that, also a qualitative method of a semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interview encompassed four short open questions on the inner dialogue during the counselling process. In that way, we have also avoided the possible suggestions regarding the function of the inner dialogue that could be represented by the closed-type questions. The participants of the survey were asked the following questions: (1) whether and to what extent you are aware of the inner dialogue, (2) what was the inner dialogue during counselling; name concrete examples; (3) did inner dialogue evoke any feelings; which ones; and (4) in what way the inner dialogue influenced the cooperation in the counselling process. Semi-structured interviews were performed directly after the finished counselling process.

4. SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

We invited fifteen first-year students of the master's degree study of Psychosocial Aid at the Faculty of Advanced Social Studies. The sample, which is not representative and cannot be generalized to population, is represented by fifteen students (N = 15) from twenty-five to forty-five years of age. The average age of participants was 29 years (SD = 5.98). All fifteen participants were female.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

Transcripts of the fifteen semi-structured interviews were coded. In the first step, we searched the key concepts in the participants' answers. In the next step, we joint the related concepts into categories, whereas categorization is understood as the definition of the overarching term or common denominators of the related concepts (Mesec, 1998).

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

All fifteen participants were aware of their own inner dialogue during the counselling process. On the Likert scale from 1 to 10, where 1 meant that the participant is almost not aware of the inner dialogue, and 10 that they are very well aware of the inner dialogue, the participants evaluated the awareness of the inner dialogue at an average of 6.79 (SD = 1.97).

In accordance with the Inner dialogue scale, the related concepts perceived in inner dialogues were grouped into four categories representing five basic functions of the inner dialogue: (1) self-directing, (2) evaluative, (3) self-critical, and (4) self-encouraging function. The self-directing function assesses general self-regulatory self-talk (e.g., giving oneself instructions or directions about what to do or say or needing to figure out what to do or say). The evaluative function refers to self-talk related to a person's social interactions (e.g., replaying something said to another person or imagining how other people responded to things one said). Self-criticism refers to self-talk regarding negative events (e.g., feeling discouraged about oneself or criticizing oneself for something one has said or done). Finally, the self-encouraging function reflects self-talk that focuses on positive events (e.g., feeling proud of something one has done or when something good has happened) (Brinthaup & Dove, 2012).

Within the self-directing function we detected the following contents: *"I have to stick to the instructions!", "Wait for them to tell! Do not interrupt!", "I have to be careful of what I'm saying!" "Did I give advice?", "I should not bother her too much! I must not embarrass her!", "Think about the questions we have learnt!", "I must be careful not to involve my own experience!", "I must be careful of how I talk about the sensitive subject so I don't cause an argument!" "What is the following question? What shall I ask? How to continue?", "Accept different views and opinions.", "One thing at the time, you don't have to hurry.", and "Continue in this direction."* Self-directing inner dialogue encouraged the participants to think calmly and wisely guide the counselling conversation: *"I take time. I think and find the right question. I allow silence.", "We can continue, despite being different.", "You have enough time, finish this calmly."*

In self-directing inner dialogues, we detected a presence of cognitive errors (Beck, 2011) in the form of requirements ("I must!", "I must not!"), which typically paralyse an individual in their adaptation of the reality and their operation. Implicitly, such mistakes point to expectation of the catastrophic outcome in case that the action dictated by the person is not fulfilled.

In all cases of self-directing inner dialogue, the participants reported on the presence of a negative feeling, fear, which additionally affected the functionality of their behaviour within the counselling conversation. *"This hinders me in conducting the conversation.", "I don't guide, I leave it to the client.", "I constantly assess the client if she is embarrassed.", "I'm afraid of how it will end.", "I'm giving up self-revealing.", "I set more superficial questions, I avoid more sensitive topics."*

The socially-evaluative function of the inner dialogue was recognized in four participants: *"How smart she is. She really thinks she knows everything.", "She doesn't like me. Don't you see she is using you?", "Come on, be more positive, do not resist!", "The client again thinks negatively."* In these cases the inner dialogue evoked negative feelings of envy and anger. Envy occurred in the case when the counsellor evaluated the client as a person who knows

everything, which affected her further communication in the counselling process. *“I’m more curt in communication.”* In case of detection of the client’s negativity, the counsellor becomes sad: *“I start thinking about my own negative and sad events. I can hardly focus on conducting the counselling conversation.”*, *“I wish I could help her overcoming this.”* In addition to social-evaluative function, we have also detected self-evaluative function of the inner dialogue in the participants, which was related to the self-evaluation of their conducting of the counselling conversation: *“I won’t be able to bring this to the end.”*, *“I am disappointed.”*, *“This is exactly the same as the relationship between my mother and me.”*, which was the reason for emergence of the negative feeling of shame. In one case that even led to the tendency of withdrawal: *“I should get up and leave.”* It hindered the other interviewee in further conducting of conversation: *“This hinders me in conducting the conversation.”* Based on the counter-transfer, the third client wants to give advice on the basis of their own experience.

In addition to self-directing and evaluative inner dialogue, which evoked negative feelings in counsellors and paralysed them in conducting the counselling process, a self-critical inner dialogue was present: *“I’m turning around one thing too much.”*, *“I don’t know exactly of what to do.”*, *“Will I know how to conduct the conversation to the end?”*, which evoked negative feelings of fear. The participants described their operation with self-critical inner dialogue as follows: *“I start thinking of how to proceed. Therefore, I allow too much silence.”*, *“I am strained and I expect of how the conversation will end.”*, *“I can’t wait to finish the conversation.”*

In contrast to the stated types of inner dialogue, the self-encouraging inner dialogue, such as *“There is nothing wrong, everything is fine.”*, *“I’m rather good.”*, *“I’m doing well.”*, evoked positive feelings of happiness and self-confidence in participants, consequently leading them to more rational behaviours: *“I’m even more actively listening.”*, *“I relax and continue with work.”*, *“I try to be supportive.”*, *“It’s easier to focus on the content of the conversation.”*

In five participants, we detected the presence of mainly self-directing function of the inner dialogue, in six participants, evaluative function, self-critical in three participants, self-encouraging in one interviewee, and in two participants. In twelve participants with self-directing, evaluative, and self-critical function of the inner dialogue, such dialogue was negative or irrational, and evoked negative feelings in participants and consequently dysfunctional behaviours or tendency for such behaviours. In three participants in whom self-directing and self-encouraging inner dialogue was dominant, it encouraged the participants, as more positive and rational, to more functional behaviours related to positive emotional states.

Based on the presented results, we can conclude that the inner dialogue had an important role in way of conducting the counselling conversation in the described population. The same as other researches (Nutt-Williams & Hill 1996; Fuqua et al., 1986), also our research proved that in novice counsellor a negative inner dialogue is present to the higher extent (80% of the participants described their inner dialogue during counselling as negative). In participants with negative inner dialogue we also detected that they were more critical or they perceived themselves as less useful, and they evaluated client’s reactions negatively.

7. CONCLUSION

Inner dialogue of the novice counsellors importantly co-creates the counselling conversation. That has also been proved in our research. The results, which cannot be generalized, are an important indicator revealing that we shall pay attention to this part of so called inner communication during counsellors’ education as this type of communication takes place parallel to the counselling external communication. In the process of education, the novice counsellors shall be encouraged, among other things, to self-reflexivity and way of recognizing, understanding, managing, and using inner dialogue for easier operation. It is important to be aware that the inner dialogue is not necessarily automatic, that individual topics of the inner dialogue in certain situations can be recognized as unnecessary and useless, and as such we can challenge them and replace them with more rational.

As it has been proved in our mini research, the inner dialogue causes a lot of problems to the novice counsellors in conducting the counselling process. Therefore, for further research, it would be wise to include also counsellors with more experience and check whether and how the inner dialogue is changing with the increase of the counselling experience. It would also be very important to research how (with which techniques and skills) the counsellors, daily helping the clients in their efforts to transform their inner dialogue, tackle the changes in their own inner dialogue.

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