

AN OVERVIEW OF COUNSELLING PROFESSION TOWARDS MANAGEMENT IN THE PRACTICE

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Abstract

This paper discuss about an overview about counseling, counseling process, counselor's role and competencies, and ethics in counseling.

Introduction

Counselling is a process of helping relationship as according to the Counsellors Act 580 under Laws of Malaysia. That is, counselling means *a systematic process of helping relationship based on psychological principles performed by a registered counsellor in accordance with the counselling code of ethics to achieve a voluntary favourable holistic change, development and adjustment of the client such that change, development and adjustment will continue throughout the lifespan of the client* (Counsellors Act 580, 1998). Specifically speaking, counselling is a formal and systematic relationship between counsellor and clients based on identified counselling goals depends on clients' needs and requirements. The relationship is protected under counselling code of ethics in order to assure not only the clients' right and autonomy but also to prevent the counsellor from falling into ethically malpractice.

An overview of counselling profession towards management in the practice would be discussed based on the definition of counselling as described in the Counsellors Act 580. First of all, steps in the process of counselling would be explored in details in the following section. Next, counsellor who plays important role in the counselling process, would be explained in more details about the professional competency in terms of different theoretical orientation background. After that, the stages of change as a result in counselling functioning would be explored in the next section. Finally, ethics in counselling services is another essential area needed to be discussed in pertinent to management in the counselling practice.

Steps in the Process of Counselling

According to Mizan Adiliah Ahmad Ibrahim and Halimatun Halalialiah Mokhtar (2006) in their book: *Individual Counselling: What and How*, there are seven steps in the process of counselling. The seven steps in the process of counselling are as follows:

- Step 1: preparing for pre-session
- Step 2: building relationship
- Step 3: exploring and analysing client's problem
- Step 4: identifying factors of the problem
- Step 5: taking actions
- Step 6: terminating session
- Step 7: following up

(Mizan Adiliah Ahmad Ibrahim & Halimatun Halalialiah Mokhtar, 2006)

First of all, preparing for pre-session means that a counsellor has to make sure whether a client come to the counselling session is voluntary, referred by others and is voluntary, or referred by others and is not voluntary. When a client comes for interview at the pre-session of counselling, a counsellor has to collect the client's basic information as well as data of personal profile in order to either easily building up relationship with the client or for the purpose of helping the client to deal with his or her issues. The basic information of client can help the



counsellor to speed up the counselling process in the sense that it provides a mental preparation for the counsellor in dealing with client's issues in the next session.

The second step in the process of counselling is to build relationship. It is comprised of three aspects, which are serving, listening and understanding. This is because of the first impression of a counsellor for a client is important in the sense that the client would assess whether the counsellor is able to help him or her on personal issues. This very first perception would determine whether the client would come for the subsequent session. The main and common way for a counsellor to build up relationship is through structuring. There are certain guidelines to take note during the process of relationship building. For instances, a counsellor has to show friendly non-verbal languages as well as the willingness to help his or her client. The counsellor is also suggested to listen to the client attentively on whatever the client is sharing as well as to understand the client's unspoken nonverbal languages. The counsellor is advised to not make any pre-assumption or judgement on client during the early session. The counsellor is also suggested to listen more than to speak during the relationship building session.

The third step in the process of counselling is to explore and to analyse problem as disclosed by the client. This is an important part of the whole counselling process. The exploration on client's problem should be carried out carefully and objectively by the counsellor. The client himself should not be separated from his problem, which means that despite of exploring the client's problems, the client's own self of identity should also be recognised and emphasised. That is a saying that, the more complicated the identity of a client, the more complicated of his problems. The counsellor and the client should explore and understand together regarding client's problems from the perspectives of client's thinking, feelings, behaviours and experiences.

The fourth step in the process of counselling is to identify factors of client's problems. Intervention may not be proceeding if client is unclear about his or her own problems. After the client has identified factors of his problem, counsellor and client can start to work out together on setting specific counselling goals for the client. Counselling goals are especially important in the sense that it decides the direction throughout counselling process. Another important concept for a counsellor at this step is to help client establish sense of responsibility against own problems.

The fifth step in the process of counselling is to take actions. A counsellor has to bear in mind that once a choice of action is made by a client, it would have been better if the choice is followed by actions. The counsellor is also responsible to further explore on the actions which are going to be taken by the client in order to ensure that the client is clear about what kind of actions are to be taken later. The improvement of client can be viewed through the manifestation of his or her taken actions. This fifth step of counselling process emphasises on available choices, pros and cons of each choices, readiness of the client to make choice, appropriate choice, inappropriate choice, and client's responsibility against his or her choice.

The sixth step in the process of counselling is to terminate session. Every process would come to an end and so do counselling session. There are several elements to be considered when a counsellor is going to make decision to end up counselling session. For example, the counsellor should first assess the development and personal growth of a client. An indication of effective counselling is through recognising that a client starts to be independent enough to deal with his own issues himself. Besides, counselling session can be considered to terminate when a client is able to make decision by her own and to recognise her own responsibility on whatever decision she has made for herself. The most importance things to be remembered during this step are client's awareness, client's knowledge or creativity, as well as client's skills in dealing with problems.

Lastly, the seventh step in the process of counselling is following up. During this last step in counselling process, a counsellor keeps on to monitor the behaviours and development of a client occasionally after counselling session is terminated. This is to ensure that the client is consistent on his changes across a period of time.



Counsellor's Roles and Competency

Counsellor means a person who provides counselling services for a prescribed fee or any other consideration (Counsellors Act 580, 1998). According to the American Counseling Association (ACA) Code of Ethics, members are dedicated to the enhancement of human development throughout life span (ACA, 2005). On the other hand, Corey (2009) stated that a counsellor is a professional who is equipped with certain theoretical background, knowledge, skills and techniques, leading to carry out effective therapeutic outcomes for client. However, counsellors are not merely an expert in the counselling profession, they are also a person who has their own identity built up through personal life experiences, educational background, social status, beliefs, values and so forth. So a counsellor should be genuine as a counsellor as congruent as his real self. It is important and contributive to build up relationship with client as well as to conduct a successful and effective counselling session. There are certain suggestions of how to become an effective counsellor as stated below.

1. Effective counsellors have an identity
2. Effective counsellors are open to change
3. Effective counsellors are authentic, sincere and honest
4. Effective counsellors generally live in the present
5. Effective counsellors recognise the influence of culture
6. Effective counsellors make mistake and are willing to admit them
7. Effective counsellors are able to maintain healthy boundaries

(Corey, 2009)

Hence, a counsellor is not only an expert in his or her field of profession but it is also essential to be an effective one through recognising and appreciating own unique identity as a person as well. No one is perfect, and so do a counsellor. So, an effective counsellor would always prepare and make decision for changes in order to grow and to develop to become better as an individual as well as a counsellor. An effective counsellor is consistent and congruent in who he is and what he is doing, who is genuine, honest and genuine enough to be relied and believed by clients within counselling relationship. An effective counsellor needs to be in the present by neither being occupied by the past events nor obsessed by the future anticipation. A counsellor who is effective can also recognise individual differences which are affected by distinct cultural background, ending up taking it into consideration in counselling practice. Everyone makes mistakes and so do a counsellor. However, the difference of an effective counsellor is that he is willing to admit the mistakes he has made and are willing to do correction and adjustment throughout the experience. An effective counsellor is capable of establishing healthy boundaries in the sense that he is able to draw boundaries between him and clients in order to not be affected by client's issues in one's own lives.

In addition, a competent counsellor is also an expert who possesses own theoretical approaches in conducting counselling session. There are various theoretical approaches such as psychoanalytic therapy, Adlerian therapy, existential therapy, person-centered therapy, gestalt therapy, behaviour therapy, cognitive behaviour therapy, reality therapy, feminist therapy, postmodern approaches and family systems therapy (Corey, 2009). A brief interpretation of each approaches are summarised in the table below.

Table 1: Brief description of each theoretical approach

Theoretical approaches	Brief description
Psychoanalytic therapy	This approach emphasises much on exploring human early experiences. A personality is believed to form through early



	development. The unconscious mind is largely emphasised in this approach.
Adlerian therapy	The goals and tasks in one's life become the centre of this approach. An individual possesses capability which can be manifested through social interaction throughout one's life. Focus is on a person's positive capabilities.
Existential therapy	The nature of human condition is emphasised. For example, it includes individual's responsibility, self-awareness, autonomy, freedom and so forth.
Person-centered therapy	This approach places a positive view on human beings. It promotes self-awareness of own abilities and self-trustworthiness in order to maintain inner-directedness.
Gestalt therapy	Emphasis is put on the wholeness of an individual. The approach also focuses on here and now. The integration of behaviour, feeling and thinking is aimed to achieve through this approach.
Behaviour therapy	If an individual develops through learning, then the behaviour demonstrated would be the product of learning. Individual is viewed as the product and also a producer in the environment. Human behaviour is highlighted in this approach.
Cognitive behaviour therapy	This approach focuses on individual's thinking and belief system as the factor contributing to one's psychological disturbances or misbehaviours.
Reality therapy	Individual's current doings or actions are examined under the assumption of this approach, which is to emphasise on personal needs and motivation leading to one's actions.
Feminist therapy	This approach emphasises on two concepts which are an individual is political meanwhile a counselling relationship is egalitarian. Women's voices, experiences and points of view are appreciated in this approach.
Postmodern approaches	The postmodern approaches concentrate on brief and simple interventions which emphasise the present and the future. The key concept is the person is not the problem; the problem is the problem.
Family systems therapy	This therapy emphasises mostly on family interaction, communication and relationship, which are believed to affect members within the family system. Family members are viewed as a contributor and also receiver of the outcomes of family interaction.



Stages of Change in Counselling

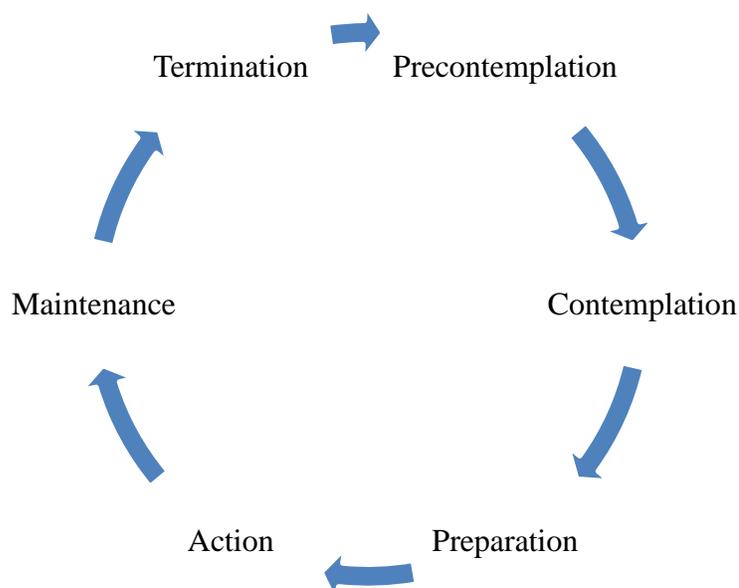


Figure 1: Stages of Change Model (Prochaska & Norcross, 2001)

According to Prochaska and Norcross (2001), there are four stages of change which are precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance. These stages of change can be applied to explain client's change throughout counselling sessions. Every client would be expected to spend different duration of time at each stage before moving into the next stage.

First of all, *precontemplation* explains the first stage of change in counselling practice. That is, a client who is at this stage shows no intention to change because of their unawareness on reasons to change (Prochaska & Norcross, 2001). For example, clients usually do not think that they have to change on anything since they do not detect or foresee about their problems. Meanwhile, people such as parents, family members, colleagues, friends or neighbours may already be aware of client's malpractice or problems.

Next, it comes to the second stage of *contemplation*. This stage might be lengthy for clients as it is a stage that problems have been aware of, however clients are not yet ready to take actions yet (Prochaska & Norcross, 2001). For example, clients start to think about the circumstances provided their problems do not exist. This provides a motivation for those clients who would like to start facing their own problems which they are not aware of at the previous stage.

The third stage of change in counselling is *preparation*. This stage is defined by a mixture of construction on intentions and behavioural actions (Prochaska & Norcross, 2001). That is, a client is aware of his or her problems consciously and continuously. Actions are going to be taken by the client, but haven't been taken by the client yet. This is a transitional stage where client prepares to take actions against his or her identified problems.

Later, it comes to the fourth stage of change, which is *action*. It is a stage where client endeavours to deal with own problems through modifying surrounding environment, personal experiences as well as own behaviours (Prochaska & Norcross, 2001). In order to realise change in one's behaviour, much efforts such like time and energy have to be repeatedly contributed across certain period of time. An indication of change happens in this stage is that client's



problematic behaviour has been changing into a more effective, productive and functional behaviour.

Besides, the next stage of change is *maintenance*. As literally, maintenance is a stage where the actions which have been taken to deal with client's problems are maintained through continuous efforts to avoid any relapse of malpractice behaviour (Prochaska & Norcross, 2001). This is a struggling process in which efforts are needed to maintain the modified behaviours meanwhile preventing any returning of the dysfunctional behaviours.

Lastly, the final stage of change in counselling is termination. This is a stage where the overall change process is completed based on the indication that relapse has no longer occurred in the future (Frasier, Slatt, Knowlowitz, & Glowa, 2001). The client who reaches this stage would appear to show more confidence and self-assurance on their ability to improve and to develop through consciously changing on problematic behaviours.

Ethics in Counselling Services

The ethics in counselling services is an essential and critical topic to discuss within the counselling profession. Ethics might not be necessary a list of statements about rules and regulations or prohibitions that must be followed otherwise would lead to problems and malpractice in counselling services. However, ethics in counselling can be viewed as guidelines for counsellors to perform optimally and professionally through balancing clients' needs and own needs in making ethical decisions (Corey, 2009). A counsellor can refer to the Counsellors Act 580 and the Board of Counselors (Malaysia) Code of Ethics in making ethical decisions.

According to the Counsellors Act 580 under Laws of Malaysia (1998), there are several implications to the practice of counsellor in the profession. Firstly, for the counsellor who practices under this act must be registered before he operates as a counsellor, uses the title of "registered counsellor", and displays any sign or other device implying that he is a registered counsellor under subsection 22(1) (Counsellors Act 580, 1998). According to the act, any person who contravenes the provisions mentioned above shall be convicted and liable to a fine not exceeding thirty thousand ringgit or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding three years or to both under subsection 22(2). This implies that counsellors must be capable to fulfil the requirement or qualification for registration which had been enacted under the Counsellors Act 580. Therefore, counselling service at national level would be carrying on and maintaining under systematic and constructive quality control.

Next, the Counsellors Act 580 implies on counsellor practice in the sense to ensure that counsellors do not violate the provisions of offence made under this act. That is, with the rise in professionalism in counselling, there will be a greater emphasis on professional ethics and delivery of services (See, Ching Mey, & Ng, Kok-Mun, 2010). Disciplinary punishments shall be imposed on a registered counsellor if he or she is found out to be convicted on offences involving fraud, dishonesty or moral turpitude, under any law relating to corruption or any other offence punishable with imprisonment or fine with terms and conditions under subsection 40(1) enacted in the act (Counsellors Act 580, 1998). Every movements or decisions made by the registered counsellor shall be cautious, deliberate, honest and acceptable in order to not be diverse far from the main objectives delivered under the Counsellors Act 580. Hence, the act does play a prominent role in overseeing the conduct, operation and practice of counsellor as well as to shape the counsellor's behaviours and attitudes, leading to steer the future direction of the overall development and improvement of counselling services in Malaysia.

Another implication of the Counsellors Act 580 towards counsellor practice is that the professional right and authority of the registered counsellors can be guaranteed under this act. The Counsellors Act 580 had restricted to that not everyone can simply be employed or operating as a counsellor unless he or she has successfully registered under the Board of Counsellors, particularly prescribed under section 22 and section 23. In the context of the act, counsellor is a person who provides counselling services in which counselling implicates a systematic process of



helping relationship based on psychological principles performed by a registered counsellor in accordance with the counselling code of ethics to achieve a voluntary favourable holistic change on the client (Counsellors Act 580, 1998). Any person who practises or takes employment as a counsellor similar to the job content and description as mentioned above, if he or she doesn't undergo proper stages of registration through the Board of Counsellors shall be considered as committing an illegal act which may be convicted on law punishment. Hence, the right and authority of counsellor profession had been protected under the act without being easily personated or counterfeited by others.

Last but not least, the role of the Board of Counsellors plays is to ensure the persistent operation of the Counsellors Act 580 in maintaining and improving the quality of counselling services in the country. In fact, Malaysia has been the first South East Asian country to require all counsellors to be regulated and licensed by a statutory body called the Board of Counsellors (See, Ching Mey, 2009). This enables Malaysia counsellors who had been organized in a body to take part in the international seminars and conferences. All of the up-to-date news and recent activities related to the counsellors can also be shared among counsellors via the Board of Counsellors.

On the other hand, the Board of Counsellors (Malaysia) Code of Ethics serves the purpose of providing framework of guidelines to counsellor practice in the country in order to shape the professional social identity. It can be a standard principle for counsellors when facing ethical dilemmas as well as during the process of making ethical decisions. This new version Code of Ethics (PERKAMA, 2011) is divided into 8 sections to address the different aspects of ethical issue in counselling. The implication of each section is not going to be discussed into details. The important is there are several fundamental principles underlying this Code of Ethics along with its implication. The implications of the Code of Ethics are salient when talking about it influences to counsellor practice in Malaysia. These implications are based primarily on the ethical principles which are justice, fidelity, autonomy, nonmaleficence, (Kitchener, K. S., 1984) and professional responsibility.

Conclusion

As a conclusion, management in counselling is essential and critical as it affects not only the effectiveness of counselling process but it is also important to maintain the reputation of counselling practice as well as the professional identity of counsellor. As what we have discussed above, the management in counselling practice is comprised of the process in counselling service, the counsellor's role and competence, stages of change in counselling as well as ethics in counselling services. All of these elements contribute to the effectiveness of management in counselling practice.

Counselling is a profession where relationship between a counsellor and a client is built. Later, it involves the interaction between both counsellor and client in striving towards the same counselling goals. The process of counselling is more or less driven by certain theoretical background of the counsellor. Nonetheless, every decisions made by the counsellor during counselling process are bound by the Malaysia Counsellors' Code of Ethics as well as the Counsellors Act 580 in the context of Malaysia.

In brief, a counsellor is not merely an expert in the mental health profession but he or she is also identified as a unique person. The counsellor's personal identity, social background, developmental experiences, and so forth influence his or her ways of carrying out personal unique style of counselling practice. No two individuals are the same and so do the counsellors; hence, no two experiences are exactly the same and so do the counselling processes. The importance is that favourable holistic change, development and adjustment of the client are achieved, then the counselling process would have reached its ultimate purposes.



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