

CT3 Paper 19: Chapter 7: Change and resistance to change in
Becoming a therapist.

Becoming a Therapist

**A MANUAL FOR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT**

**Malcolm C. Cross
and
Linda Papadopoulos**



First published 2001
by Brunner-Routledge
27 Church Road, Hove, East Sussex BN3 2FA

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Taylor and Francis Inc.
29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2004.

Brunner-Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor and Francis Group

© 2001 Malcolm C. Cross and Linda Papadopoulos

Cover design by Richard Massing

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Cross, Malcolm C., 1966–

Becoming a therapist: a manual for personal and professional development/

Malcolm C. Cross, Linda Papadopoulos.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-415-22115-3 (pbk.)

1. Counselors—Training of. 2. Counseling—Study and teaching. I. Papadopoulos, Linda, II. Title.

BF637.C6 C743 2001
158'.3'023—dc21

2001025648

ISBN 0-203-36109-1 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN 0-203-37365-0 (Adobe eReader Format)
ISBN 0-415-22115-3 (pbk)

7

Change and resistance to change

How do we know we are changing?

Therapy is about change. Change may be manifest in terms of an observable reorganisation of circumstances or relationships, or in the perspectives we take on these circumstances or relationships. The following exercises are designed to allow you the opportunity to experience the psychological and emotional processes that often accompany change. We also hope that they will provide a starting point from which to take your first steps towards some important revisions of your own personal circumstances or perspectives. Many of the exercises are rooted in George Kelly's (1955/1991) *Psychology of Personal Constructs*, and the interested reader is referred to the original source for further clarification of the theoretical constructs central to these change exercises. This chapter will deal in particular with concepts such as creativity, loosening your hold on cherished ideas or beliefs and turning insight into action.

CREATIVITY

Creativity is not just about finding novel and unconventional ways to view events; it is also about doing something with these insights. It is about the connection between thought, sense, feeling and action. The combination of insight and action requires a constant shift in perspective, a 'loosening' and 'tightening' of view. When one thinks about creativity, one is often drawn to the vision of the artist as one who generates an imaginative or ingenious 'slant' on events. Despite their diverse mediums, the painter, novelist, poet and sculptor all envision life in a particular fashion. Successful artists however have one thing in common: the skilful communication of their insight. Communication of insight requires operationalisation; that is, the putting of pen to paper, or brush and paint to canvas. The notion of loosening and tightening may be helpful in understanding processes of change. It is analogous to the generation of ideas and the implementation of strategies. What is critical here is a shift from insight to action. When one solves a problem, intellectual or emotional understanding alone

is rarely enough. The implications of this insight must be acted upon. This putting theory into practice is what we will refer to here as ‘tightening’. In this context, loose construing is the extravagant generation of ideas or perspectives, not limited by the realities of a lived set of personal circumstances.

The representation of loose construing in Figure 7.1 is illustrative of the process of circumspection, where one explores infinite possibilities undistracted by the pressure of outcomes or the need for absolute certainty. In the stylised figure the arrow can be seen exploring the contours of the circumstances that contain it.

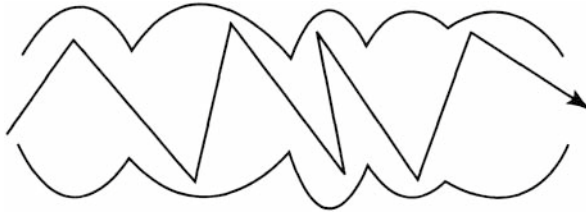


Figure 7.1 A representation of loose construing¹—meandering ideas

EXERCISE

Think of a time in your life when you were stuck, not because you could not think of a way forward, but rather you could not decide between a range of competing possibilities or options.

Make some notes to remind yourself of the circumstances.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

What were the feelings associated with this set of circumstances?

.....

.....

.....

.....

¹ The term construing is used to imply meaning-making practices such as thinking, feeling and sensing.

.....

.....

We will return to reflect on these feelings when we discuss common emotional experiences accompanying change.

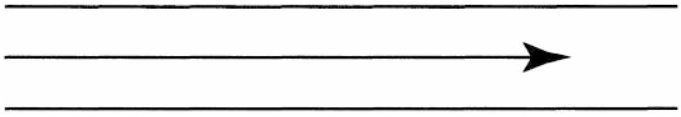


Figure 7.2 A representation of tight construing—clarity and rapid progress in the absence of obstacles

The representation in Figure 7.2 is illustrative of tight construing, or thinking clearly and unambiguously. The figure seeks to reflect the rapid progress that is made when one is able to anticipate a route with no obstacles or impediments. This style of thinking is characterised by a strong belief that you know what to do next. Seeing things in this way requires certainty and absolute confidence in your perspective.

EXERCISE

Can you recall a time in your life when you thought you were sure how things would turn out, only to encounter an obstacle or unexpected opportunity? As in the preceding exercise, make some notes to remind you of the circumstances of that time.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

What were the feelings associated with this set of circumstances?

.....

.....

.....

Seeing things too tightly or too loosely is likely to get us into trouble from time to time. It is optimal to utilise some combination or alternation from loose to tight or tight to loose if we seek to maintain the sort of active flexibility that is required to live effectively in the world. Figure 7.3 gives a snapshot of this endless shifting between tight and loose construing.

Thus when we encounter problems in our lives it is sometimes because we are stuck in one of these phases of thinking. Imagine the person who can see endless possibilities, challenges and opportunities in every set of circumstances. This is clearly a strength, but a qualified strength. If every option is to be explored in the knowledge that there are likely to be many more options not yet dreamed of, then the individual is unlikely to act for fear that a still better solution may be conceived. Here creativity can be seen as a barrier to action and a handicap to change.

Where the individual opts for a tried and true course of action, as in the case of tight construing, there is a high likelihood of speedy success (if all goes to plan). In the event of an unanticipated complication, the 'tight construer' is stuck without an alternative. This often manifests as the individual trying harder at a strategy already demonstrated to be a failure. We are probably familiar with the frustrated native speaker who raises their voice in an attempt to communicate directions or instructions to the non-native speaker. The problem here is not audibility, the tourist has no problem hearing; it is comprehension, the tourist simply does not understand the language. In such circumstances no matter how loud or how frequently the frustrated native speaker repeats themselves their efforts will be in vain. Strategies such as these, where we persist with the same behaviour despite its failure to secure the desired outcome, were described by Kelly (1955/1991) as 'hostility' or the failure to give up what does not work. The overly loose construer in such a circumstance might wrestle endlessly with which route is the best and therefore fail to offer any suggestion with the clarity and confidence the anxious traveller requires before setting out on their journey into the unknown.

We have already mentioned 'hostility', or the holding on to beliefs longer than we should, and 'anxiety' as the experience of not being able to understand what has just happened or to predict what will happen next. In reviewing the events you

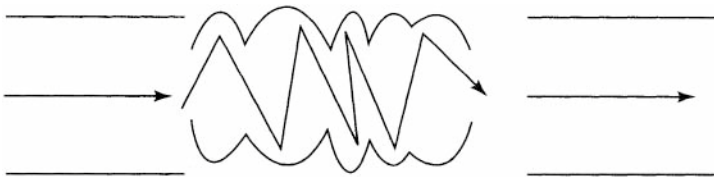


Figure 7.3 Movement from tight to loose *ad infinitum*

recalled in relation to the 'tight' and 'loose' construing exercise, did you experience any other emotions which Kelly (1955/1991) saw as commonly accompanying periods of change or transition? These emotional experiences are defined in the following exercise. Indicate which were experienced during the circumstances you previously described by placing a tick in the adjacent box.

EXERCISE

Anxiety: the experience of not being able to understand what has just happened or to predict what will happen next.

Hostility: the tendency to persist with the same behaviour despite its failure to secure a desired outcome or a reluctance to give up what does not work.

Threat: the awareness that some deeply held belief about the world, yourself or others has turned out not to be true.

Guilt: catching a glimpse of yourself behaving in ways that are not how you want others to see you or as you want to see yourself.

Aggression: a hunger or drive to explore and chart new territory involving the testing of limits or orthodox boundaries.
