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Final Reflective Report

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Facilitating sustainable, independent satisfaction of basic psychological needs through physical activity training.

Introduction

This reflective discussion focuses on a training relationship I engaged in with a client for approximately eight weeks. The commentary will start by introducing triangulation and the supporting methods utilised for reflective practice. Following on from this the discussion will provide a summary of eudaimonia, briefly compare this to hedonism and then apply this understanding within a process employed by myself as an exercise professional. The key components of eudaimonia will then be identified and connected to corresponding characteristics of the field research undertaken with the client. This discussion will then continue on to describe the unique features of the training process applied within the field research. In addition, a description of what was absent from the training process utilised will also be addressed. Finally, recommendations for application of theory within implementation and future practice will be made.

Triangulation

At the conception of the training relationship, I discovered that the triangulation of information documenting processes would be beneficial to this study. According to Bryman (2011), triangulation uses more than one approach within a study to strengthen the confidence in the research findings while providing detail and depth. This is supported by earlier literature discussing triangulation by Webb et al. (1966), as they propose that the uncertainty of interpretation within research is reduced when more than one measurement process is employed. Denzin (1970) distinguished triangulation



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into four forms; data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theoretical triangulation and methodological triangulation. As methodological triangulation is the most common form, Denzin subsequently introduced two types within the approach. They are a within-method and a between-method approach. For the purpose of this study, methodological triangulation with a between-method approach was used.

Reflective practice

It is appropriate here to discuss the features of reflective practice. Knowles, Gilbourne, Cropley, et al. (2013) promote the importance of recognising the comprehensive nature of reflective practice. Specifically, it requires dedication to practice and professional development, utilising techniques such as critical thinking and problem solving. They also acknowledge how simply engaging in certain practices will not necessarily elicit reflective learning outcomes.

Following on from this leads to a review of the classification of reflective levels discussed by James and Clarke (1994). James and Clarke note that in order to reflect at the level required to achieve the reflective purposes, the following approaches should be employed; technical, practical and critical reflective practice. Furthermore, James and Clarke describe how an effective practitioner engages in all three forms of reflective practice in order to examine and transform experience into learning that is meaningful for the individual, for practice and the field. However, Knowles, Gilbourne, Cropley, et al. (2013) recognise that operating at all three levels of reflective practice is an acquired skill that is developed over time and that possibly only one or two technical levels may be required at times.

The third point of reflective practice a practitioner must consider is that the purpose for and method of reflecting is appropriate for the research needs, instead of simply using the most available approach (Knowles, Gilbourne, Cropley, et al., 2013). This continues on to support the need for practitioners to develop and experiment with their own reflective practice approach. According to



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Knowles, Gilbourne, Cropley, et al. (2013) the best approach is the techniques that allows a practitioner to be critical and is actually valued by the practitioner themselves. This understanding contributed towards the triangulation of reflective practices I employed for my field research. I used reflective journals, a narrative of in session conversations and a reflective interview to collate the information that I sought after.

Eudaimonia and Hedonism

Eudaimonia and hedonism are theories used to study happiness, pleasure and wellness, and the pursuit thereof (Ryan, Huta & Deci, 2008). Although it may seem self explanatory, the pleasure and positive affect associated with happiness is important, as Isen (2003) and King et al. (2006) discuss, happiness represents intrinsically preferred states. Ryan, Huta and Deci (2008) support this and add that it is interrelated with functioning optimally, psychological health and pleasure. Therefore, the pursuit of happiness is congruent with the types of goals associated with physical activity and throughout general life.

Eudaimonia and hedonism are different with regard to their respective target. Ryan, Huta and Deci (2008) describe how eudaimonia is concerned with living well and the process required to pursue a happy or well lifestyle. In contrast, hedonism focuses on the outcome of the feeling, or the sensation itself. In other words, hedonism is concerned with the positive affect or pleasure associated with happiness and the absence of negative affect or pain (Kahneman et al. 1999).

Insight for effective practitioners

This literature on eudaimonia is significant as it distinguishes the importance of the process as opposed to the outcome. Eudaimonia invites an exercise practitioner to evaluate the training processes employed for achieving goals within their work. Thus, it could be suggested that



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integrating the understanding of eudaimonia is required for effective training processes within programmes.

The theories discussed have unquestionably informed my understanding as an exercise practitioner. They have led me to reconsider why I do what I do within my role and consequently extend my skill-set. However, despite the richness within the theory on eudaimonia and the triangulation of processes, a guide to matching the outcome and intent to the actual generation of process was lacking. Therefore, much of the work involved in developing an effective training process involved testing my own professional philosophy.

Key themes of eudaimonia

Let us discuss the details of eudaimonia in more depth to identify the key themes within the theory. Eudaimonia is the pursuit of depth and understanding which is intrinsically regulated and self-endorsing (Ryan, Huta & Deci, 2008). According to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, his philosophy of happiness translated by Broadie and Rowe (2002); the origins of eudaimonia focus on the following behaviours in the pursuit of wellness. The first behaviour depicts an individual striving to be their best self, which in turn expresses an authentic expression of the individual. Secondly, an individual is engaged with the content of their life through reflective practice, and self awareness is valued. This behaviour leads the individual to seek a depth of understanding and the truth in all situations, even when it doesn't necessarily feel good. The third and possibly most important feature is that an individual chooses to pursue this approach to life. Ryan, Huta and Deci (2008) suggest that pleasure and positive affect are not only correlates but also consequences of living well, of eudaimonia. Huta and Ryan (2006) provide a complimentary conclusion when they describe how eudaimonia should yield more stable and enduring hedonic states of happiness.



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Representations of eudaimonia in field research

Within the training relationship with my client, the key features of eudaimonia were mostly recognised through the final reflective interview. First and foremost, living well was the focus of the field study. In particular, the guiding research principle was; to facilitate a sustainable, independent satisfaction of basic psychological needs through physical activity training. Within this overarching principle there were several incidental goals. They were to support an increase in intrinsic regulation towards physical activity, for the client to believe in her physical abilities and to facilitate gaining skills in physical activity training. Early into the reflective interview, evidence of the accomplishment of some the incidental goals were disclosed in the following statement:

I really liked the freedom and variety training with you. I was never bored, every session was different. I learned a lot because you would take me through things really slowly and explain why or how we were doing something. (*For example*), when you told me about the type two muscle fibres. I find that really interesting because it explains why a specific exercise is good for me and what it can do for my running.

Although this statement provided feedback on the content within the training period it was not until later on in the interview that satisfaction of the overarching training relationship goal was identified. While she was describing her thoughts on moving on to her goal, starting police college training she said:

The last week I've been real in my head with what I'm doing. I've been waiting for this for like 15 years. It's been enormous, like a life goal for me. For me to be doing it now, I never imagined this moment. It's really really surreal...

This sentiment is significant because it captures the client's intention to and a sense of readiness to action her immediate goals.



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The next eudaimonic component supported through the training relationship was the development of a self-determined and self-endorsing individual. Initially the satisfaction of this need was facilitated through providing opportunities for the client to make informed choices within training sessions. However, through personal diary reflections of the training sessions it was noted that she did not actually respond to these cues. Within the reflective interview she made it clear that her autonomy needs were actually already supported on a macro level, whereby, she had chosen to engage in the training relationship.

Another aspect of the training process was to support the client in striving to be her best self. In part, this feature was established before the client engaged in the training relationship as she had already decided to extend her capacity. The training process was a tool she utilised to strengthen this aspect through gaining skills and challenging her abilities. However, the reinforcement of this was disclosed in the following statement:

This has probably been one of the best years that I've had because it's been a year of personal development. Not just in like fitness... I'm proud of that, this year I've dropped in weight and I've got fitter and all of that sort of stuff but it's not just about the physical for me as well, it is definitely about the mental.

The long term sustainability of this feature was also facilitated through exploring the transfer from the client's short term physical activity goals to her general health and wellbeing goals. Within the training relationship this area was supported by guiding the client to engage in reflective practice. For example, she was led to consider what was important to her, why it was important and how she felt about these ideas during sessions. Up until the reflective interview however, it was not clear whether she had engaged with reflective development cues let alone whether she had incorporated them beyond the training sessions. It was not until the client was invited to share about transfer that



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an insightful disclosure was made. The most surprising form of engagement in reflective practice was discovered as she said:

At the start of the year I couldn't stand being at home by myself for more than a couple of hours... Like it's actually really good to have time by yourself and I needed to be more comfortable in my own skin, just comfortable hanging out by myself... I walk now, to and from work by myself. I just find that walking is really good thinking time for me. I'm a really analytical thinker. I do a lot of thinking when I'm going from A to B. Now I'm much more comfortable with doing things by myself.

This disclosure was both surprising and exciting as it could not have been elicited without bias unless it came out organically. More importantly, the information shared at this moment in the interview was an absolute breakthrough! It could not have been predicted that this sort of psychological technique to reflect and strengthen her sense of self through walking would have eventuated.

Features of field research process

Although it would be difficult to communicate every feature of the training process used within this field research, key themes can be demonstrated through a description of their application. Firstly, competence was strengthened through sessions in different training environments, in other words, every session was held in a different place. The setting is important here because it directly connects to applications in real life. Components out of our control such as, the weather, the other people present and the environmental features of the work out environment affected every session. A reverberating question that challenged and guided my planning for every training session was; why would the client work harder on this particular day, in this particular environment rather than any other. Although I didn't always know the answer to this question, it was useful as it led me to consider how I could facilitate my client's understanding of this intrinsically.



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Next, I deliberately challenged the client's physical abilities through intensity in all but one session which focused on mobility and yoga. Throughout training I remained receptive to her energy levels and her ability to perform the tasks required of her as each session was demanding. She confirmed the challenge imposed within the reflective interview as she described the fact that she had never worked so hard before. I also deliberately applied these challenges without a measure, at least to the client's understanding. The client was instructed to perform a task to the best of her ability without any reference to any kind of measurement. This meant that her goals were never predetermined externally, she controlled that herself. In addition her goals were not constrained and her potential for achievement was limitless.

I facilitated a relationship with my client through conversations about non-training related subjects, including information about myself. This enabled her to gain a sense of connection to me. It must also be noted that this was mostly initiated by her but my recognition of this enabled us to build a sense of trust within our working relationship. Through this sense of support and trust my role in relation to her shifted. I was able to transition into more of a supporter and less of an external motivator.

Finally, as mentioned earlier I facilitated reflective practice throughout the journey. I encouraged her to consider what she thought about or how she felt, why she thought about that and what that led her to do. I supported her to facilitate self-endorsing practices. Although she did not directly address this feature in the reflective interview, she demonstrated the incorporation of this technique in her new found walking technique.



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Components absent from field research process

From here it is fitting to discuss common training components that were in fact absent from the training process employed for the training relationship within my field research. The first significant component is connected to the nature of the activity involved in training sessions. Measures were not calculated, by measures this infers; measurements of time and load, set and repetition measures, heart rate, lactate thresholds and VO2 maximum measures. In addition, repetition was absent, each training session was held at a different location, workout goals were different each time, whereby, the energy systems and the activities involved to train them were introduced in each session. The lack of measures and repetition are noteworthy as they are all consistent features of most physical activity and exercise training processes.

There were several reasons within my rationale for changing training environments. For instance, sessions were not conducted around weather, and as such the idea of good or bad weather was not even associated with training outside. We used the various training environments for the tools they could provide. Furthermore, the utilisation of the gym was also employed on the same premise. The gym equipment and environment was used when the task involved was desired, the task was not deemed by the environment itself. This is important to highlight as it is in contrast to common training practices.

The final deliberate characteristic of the training process employed within this field research was the nature of the training relationship with the client. There was neither an extreme imbalance of power between the client and the trainer nor were the activities performed by the client evaluated in reference to anyone else. Although the client participated in tasks as instructed, I remained intuitive to the client's ability to engage in new activities, energy exertion in performance and identification



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of personal limits. The client was simply expected to engage with her own satisfaction of psychological needs through each training session.

Conclusion

To conclude, I fulfilled all of the key training relationship goals forged at the beginning to an extent. Therefore, it is intended that the description of the process I used will provide practical recommendations to other practitioners in their implementation of the relevant theory in practice.

Recommendations for exercise practitioners

At this point I would like to summarise my major learning experiences as guidance for future research. To begin, I would suggest finding individual representations of the key components of eudaimonia. Not only will this support a practitioner to construct their own physical activity training methods, it will consistently lead them to evaluate what training methods to sustain, what to amend and what to disregard. In other words, this will require a professional to continually assess the effectiveness of their professional approach.

I found the triangulation of processes through multiple information gathering tools to be helpful, especially the diary reflections and the final interview. Both of these were aided through the dyadic nature of the relationship. I encourage others to employ a method that best suits their approach. This will help a practitioner to notice patterns or features that aren't working within their practice.

Another important point to remain aware of is the influence measurement has on predetermining and extrinsically regulating individuals. Finally, I encourage exercise professionals to ensure that



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training tools such as training environments and equipment are utilised as tools to support the overarching goal as opposed to a determinant of the goals themselves.



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