

Using Schema Therapy in Executive Coaching

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Background

- APS conference on psychology and spirituality as introduction to Schema Therapy
- Read a great deal – consulted with my peer mentor/supervisor
- Asked to help a senior executive with perfectionism and another with a fear of failure
- Schema Therapy provided useful

Background to schema therapy

- A schema is an organised and persistent pattern of thoughts, feelings and behaviour
- Schema therapy is an evidence based approach that aims to help individuals minimise the impact of unhelpful schema on their lives

Schema Therapy

- Schema therapy was developed by Dr Jeffrey Young for personality disorders, chronic depression, and other difficult problems
- It integrates elements of cognitive therapy, behaviour therapy, gestalt therapy and mindfulness into one unified approach

Core childhood needs

- Acceptance and praise
- Empathy
- Love, nurturing and attention
- Safety
- Protection
- Predictability
- Validation of feelings and needs



Early maladaptive schemas develop
when specific childhood needs are
not met



What are early maladaptive schemas?

- Pervasive theme or pattern
- Memories, bodily sensations, emotions and cognitions
- Developed during childhood/adolescence and elaborated through lifetime
- Dysfunctional to a significant degree

Schemas develop when

- Toxic frustration of needs
- Traumatization, victimisation, mistreatment
- Over-indulgence
- Selective internalization or identification
- Temperament or neurobiology can play a role

Maladaptive Schemas

1. Abuse
2. Abandonment
3. Defectiveness
4. Dependence
5. Emotional deprivation
6. Punitiveness
7. Unrelenting standards

Other schemas

- Approval seeking
- Entitlement
- Enmeshment
- Emotional inhibition
- Insufficient self control
- Negativity
- Self-sacrifice
- Social isolation
- Vulnerability

Schemas = Life-traps

They erupt when
triggered by everyday
events

They may not “fit” what is
needed in one’s adult life



Goal of schema therapy

To help people get their core needs met in an adaptive manner through changing their maladaptive schemas and coping styles

Steps in schema coaching

1. Establish rapport, history taking, assessment of the counterproductive behaviour pattern
2. Confirmation that client is willing to work on challenges
3. The identification of these patterns and their origins
4. Experience of full intensity of the emotions that surround their origins – coach can intervene as Healthy Adult
5. Learn to challenge the persistent thought patterns
6. The use of mindfulness to let go of the painful emotions
7. Homework to reinforce the work done
8. Follow up sessions to ensure the changes are enduring

Experiential techniques

- “Letters to parents” clients write a letter on how the parent hurt them, summarizing their memories, emotions, etc. Clients read these letters to the coach, but usually do not actually post them
- “Imagery Dialogues” - clients picture themselves with their parents in an upsetting situation and are encouraged to express strong affect about how their parents mistreated them

Flash Cards and the Schema Diary

Schema Therapy asks clients to develop flash cards which have four sections:

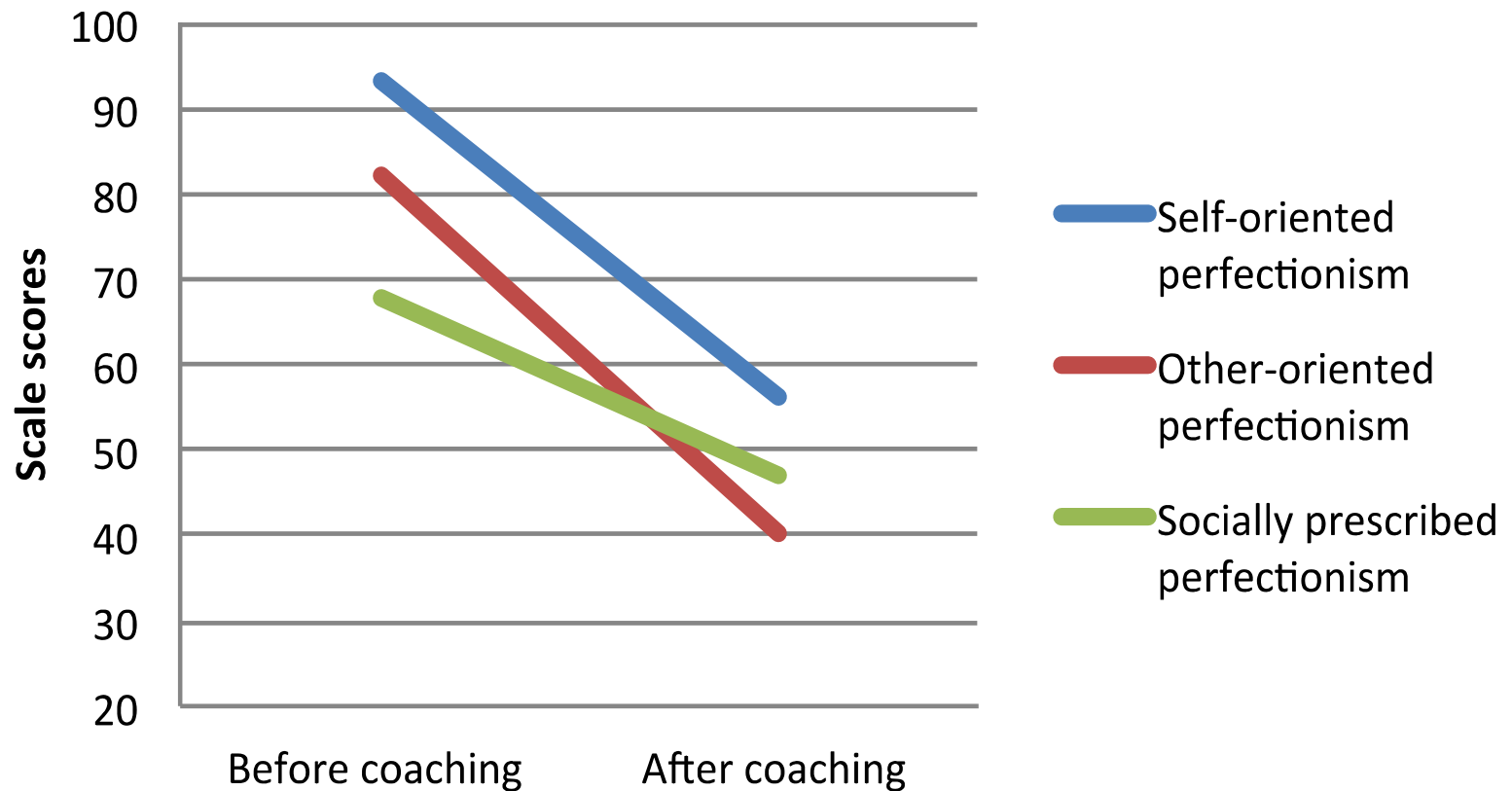
1. *Acknowledgment of a current maladaptive feeling*, such as a fear of talking to a member of the opposite sex
2. *Identification of the schema* – fear of rejection due to Defectiveness schema
3. *Reality testing* – “Just because my mother criticised me doesn’t mean I am defective”
4. *Behavioral instruction* – “I will talk to this person even though I feel nervous because I have a chance of getting into a relationship”

Assessment

Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (Hewitt, PL, and Flett, GL 1990)

1. Self-oriented perfectionism, - is a result of the client's own unreasonable work standards, however in moderate levels is associated with greater productivity, success in career, and conscientiousness
2. Other-oriented perfectionism, leads to problems of delegating to others and often being seen by others as highly critical/judgmental
3. Socially prescribed perfectionism, is associated with greater risk of anxiety and depression if the person experiences a major setback

Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale



(Hewitt, P.L., & Flett, G.L. (1990))



Scale	Before coaching	After coaching
Mindful Attention Awareness Scale score	50	57
Mindful Attention Awareness Scale score level	Somewhat lower than average	Average

Brown, K.W. & Ryan, R.M. (2003)

The client reports

- Being much better at being able to identify perfectionistic patterns
- Being able to let go of past resentments and frustrations
- Being more willing to positively receive feedback from others about possible perfectionistic actions
- Getting positive feedback from her team about being more relaxed, less demanding and less sarcastic
- Being happier with her home life

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Some content adapted from:

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