Using Deliberate Practice to Improve your Therapeutic Effectiveness

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Improving Therapist Effectiveness: What does and does not Work?

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One year ago, colleagues and I released the largest, longitudinal study of therapist effectiveness ever published. The study examined outcomes of 6500 clients treated by 170 practitioners whose results had been tracked an average of 5 years—some as long as 17 years!

The result? Clinician outcomes, on average, not only did not improve, but actually slowly and inexorably worsened with time and experience—and this, despite the fact that...
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How Effective are We?

• In most studies of treatment conducted over the last 40 years, the average treated person is better off than 80% of the untreated sample.

• The outcome of behavioral health services equals and, in most cases, exceeds medical treatments.

• On average, mental health professionals achieve outcomes on par with success rates obtained in randomized clinical trials (with and without co-morbidity).


How Effective are We?

No Improvement


• Over the last century, the best performance for all Olympic events has improved—in some cases by more than 50%!

• Today’s best high school time in the marathon beats the 1908 Olympic gold medal winning time by more than 20 minutes!

• Improvement has nothing to do with size, genetic changes, technology, or performance enhancing drugs.

How Do Therapists Develop?

• A massive, 20-year, multinational study of 11,000 therapists;

• Collected and analyzed detailed reports about the way therapists experienced their work and professional development.


The majority of therapists see themselves as developing professionally over the course of their careers.


How Do Therapists Develop?

• The effectiveness of the “average” helper plateaus very early.
• Little or no difference in outcome between professionals, students and para-professionals.


How Do Therapists Develop?

- The largest study to date on the effect of experience on outcome;
- 170 Therapists followed over 17 years;
- On average outcomes declined over time.

Do Therapists want to Develop?

• When surveyed, therapists WANT to know:
  • How to have better relationships;
  • How to better initiate change;
  • Training methods that improve their outcomes;
  • How to use reflection and self-analysis to improve their effectiveness.

How can Therapists Develop?

The Streetlight Effect
How *can* Therapists Develop?

Before: Method

After: Diagnosis

Therapy
Deliberate Practice

De·lib·er·ate: (diˈlibərit/)
- Adjective
- Done consciously and intentionally

Prac·tice: (ˈpraktəs/)
- Noun
- To carry out a particular activity regularly

Hours per week spent alone seriously engaging in activities related to improving therapy skills

Deliberate Practice

Hours per week spent alone seriously engaging in activities related to improving therapy skills

Deliberate Practice

**Zone of “Proximal Development”:**
- Reliable performance inconsistent
- Identification of errors, misperceptions
- Setting small process and outcome objectives
- Involves planning, rehearsal, reflection

**Realm of “Reliable” Performance:**
- Processes executed quickly, automatically
- Involves recognition, retrieval, execution

**Ambit of Admiration:**
- Abilities of others appear flawless, magical, dramatic
- Effort and attention focused on easily recognized, but non-causal factors and/or processes (superstition)
- Risk of failure and injury high

**Edge of Ability**
Deliberate Practice

The Building Blocks

- Individualized Learning Objectives
- Coach
- Feedback
- Repetition

Results

The only study to date documenting individual therapist improvement:

• 153 therapists;
• 5000+ clients.

Outcomes improved year after year.

Thank you!

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