

II M.Sc PSYCHOLOGY

SEMESTER - IV

18MPS41C - APPLIED COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY

UNIT –4 COUNSELLING AND TECHNOLOGY

WHAT IS TECHNOLOGY IN COUNSELLING?

Technology provides tools to help counselors accomplish their work more effectively and efficiently beyond what they can do without it. Counselors now have high-tech methods for better managing, supporting, conducting, delivering, and describing their work as before never imagined. Such power, however, comes with great responsibility. Counselors must work diligently to make certain that technological literacy and implementation is an important part of their ongoing professional development.

They must identify and plan for overcoming barriers that technology can pose, such as intrusions into personal lives. Finally, counselors must recognize how the very same technology that helps them can hurt themselves and their clients. Thus, important parts of counselors' technological literacy and implementation are understanding potentials and opportunities that technology affords counselors, evaluating how technology is used, and considering the impact that technology has on their lives.

Technology and Treatment

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Technology is having a profound impact on every aspect of life, including how people work, how they play, and even how they view the world. The introduction of technology into counseling is an evolutionary process that is happening quickly, if not always easily. Those who

grew up at a time when there were no computers have struggled to gain the skills necessary to function in a rapidly changing, technologically literate society, while those of younger generations use technology almost effortlessly, because they were introduced to it at a very early age. The most recent advances in assessment and diagnosis, counseling techniques, and career development utilize technology in one fashion or another. From Internet-based counseling to tele counseling, the range of human services provided in schools, agencies, and private practice is changing and advancing.

The Nature of counselor Technological Literacy

So what is technological literacy as it pertains to counselors? Many people have written on the subject of technological literacy. Technological literacy may be seen as having knowledge and abilities to select and apply appropriate technologies in a given context. There are three components to technological literacy: the technology of making things, the technology of organization, and, the technology of using information. Applying a Delphi technique to opinions expressed by experts, Croft evolved a panel of characteristics of a technologically literate student. Those are abilities to make decisions about technology; possession of basic literacy skills required to solve technology problems; ability to make wise decisions about uses of technology; ability to apply knowledge, tools, and skills for the benefit of society; and ability to describe the basic technology systems of society.

A theme among various attempts to define technological literacy is that technology has evolved to become a powerful medium—not only a set of high-tech tools. If technology functioned merely as a set of tools, the problem of advancing technological literacy would not be so challenging. But technology has become more than a set of devices to be picked up and used when a person decides he or she needs them.

It has become a required medium that mediates experience in most aspects of peoples' lives. Broadly speaking, technological literacy, then, can be described as the intellectual processes, abilities, and dispositions needed for individuals to understand the link between technology, themselves, and society in general. Technological literacy is concerned with developing one's awareness of how technology is related to the broader social system and how technological systems cannot be fully separated from the political, cultural, and economic frameworks that shape them.

This means that counselors who have adequate levels of technological literacy are able to understand the nature and role of technology in both their personal and professional lives; understand how technological systems are designed, used, and controlled; value the benefits and assess the risks associated with technology; respond rationally to ethical dilemmas caused by technology; assess the effectiveness of technological solutions; feel comfortable learning about

and using systems and tools of technology in the home, in leisure activities, and in the workplace; and critically examine and question technological progress and innovation.

How Counselors Use Technology in Their Work

Counselors use technology to help them be more effective and efficient in their work, ultimately maximizing positive counseling outcomes, in one or more of the following four areas:

1. **Information/Resource.** In the form of words, graphics, video, and even three-dimensional virtual environments, technology affords counselors a dynamic and rapidly growing library of information and knowledge.
2. **Communication/Collaboration.** Chat rooms, bulletin boards, virtual shared environments, video conferencing, online conferences, electronic meeting services, e-mail—technology now enables people to connect, exchange information, collaborate, and make shared decisions.
3. **Interaction/Productivity.** The maturing of software and Web-based programming has launched a new level of available tools, both off the shelf and customized for the counseling professional. These high-tech tools can help counselors build and create anything ranging from a personalized business card to a set of personalized Web site links. For example, interactive tools help counselors to process data and manipulate information, convert text to speech, create a graph, or even determine the interactive effects of popular prescription drugs.
4. **Delivery of Services.** Most controversial, yet growing in popularity, is counselors' use of technology to meet with clients and deliver counseling services in an online or virtual environment (i.e., at a distance).

Online Counseling

One area of technology that seems to be receiving the greatest amount of attention is online counseling. This type of counseling goes by names such as e-therapy, e-counseling, cybertherapy, and telecounseling. Specifically, online counseling refers to counseling that occurs across some distance instead of in an office setting with both counselor and client in the same room or office. According to Sabella, the continued evolution of the Internet offers many future possibilities and much potential for this type of counseling.

Delivery of Services

Counseling over the Internet may be a useful medium for those with physical disabilities who find traveling even a short distance to be a significant obstacle. For others who are reticent to meet with a counselor or who have difficulty with self-disclosing, the Internet may foster the counseling process. Similarly, the Net is a convenient and quick way to deliver important information. In cyber counseling, information might be in the form of a homework assignment between sessions

or bibliocounseling. Also, electronic file transfer of client records, including intake data, case notes, assessment reports, and selected key audio and video recordings of client sessions, could be used as preparation for individual supervision, group supervision, case conferences, and research.

Assessment and Evaluation

Access to a wide variety of assessment, instructional, and information resources in formats appropriate in a wide variety of ethnic, gender, and age contexts could be accomplished via the World Wide Web.

Communications

Especially via e-mail, counselors and clients can exchange messages throughout the counseling process. Messages may inform both counselor and client of pertinent changes or progress. E-mail can provide an excellent forum for answering simple questions, providing social support, or scheduling actual or virtual meeting times.

The Counseling Relationship: Counselors must keep the welfare of the client in mind and establish boundaries that make the client-counselor relationship clear. This means that clients need to understand the counseling process and have clearly established counseling goals. Records should be safeguarded and recorded in an accurate and timely manner. Professional boundaries should always be maintained, and a romantic or sexual relationship should never occur between counselors and clients. Session fees should be affordable for the client, and they should be made clear from the start.

Confidentiality and Privacy: Counselors need to safeguard the individual rights and privacy of their clients. Trust is the cornerstone of the counseling relationship, and counselors are responsible for maintaining a trustworthy partnership. Clients should be made aware if information about them has to be shared with others outside the counseling relationship, and only essential information should ever be revealed to outside parties. Counselors are required to disclose client behaviors that indicate the potential for self-harm or harm to others. Lastly, if sessions are to be recorded or observed, counselors must first get the permission of their client.

Professional Responsibility: All counseling practices and treatments should be grounded in research and accepted practice. The ACA also encourages counselors to offer pro bono work as a part of their professional activity. In order to stay abreast of the practice, counselors must understand the need for continued education and maintain awareness of changing practices and procedures in the field.

Relationships With Other Professionals: How professional counselors interact with their peers will influence what services their clients have access to. Counselors must strive to provide clients with the most comprehensive clinical and support service available, which means that they should have a basic knowledge of which additional services are available locally. All positive working relationships with colleagues should be grounded in respect, even if professional approaches differ.

Evaluation, Assessment and Interpretation: Without an accurate assessment of a client's presenting situation, the individual may not receive appropriate treatment. Professional counselors must understand the context of the client's beliefs, behaviors and cultural background. In giving a diagnosis, counselors must carefully consider whether the associated treatment and potential outcomes will do more harm than good to the client.

Supervision, Training and Teaching: Whether you are a counseling student or instructor, boundaries within your professional relationships are also important to ethical counseling behavior. Supervisors must maintain a professional relationship with their students, whether sessions are electronic or face-to-face. Teachers and supervisors must aim to be fair, honest and accurate when assessing students or supervisees. Counselor educators and supervisors must apply pedagogically sound instructional models. In addition, counseling educators should actively work to recruit and retain a diverse body of students in support of a commitment to improve diversity in the counseling field.

Research and Publication: Benefits to clients will only be realized if important research advancements in the field of counseling are shared with practitioners. Professionals have an ethical obligation to contribute to that knowledge base whenever possible and to keep aware of its current advancements.

Distance Counseling, Technology and Social Media: Current trends in technology have changed the field, and today, face-to-face interaction isn't always necessary. While distance counseling has removed roadblocks to counseling services for some, it also comes with new and evolving ethical considerations. Counselors have to understand new platforms and resources in order to determine whether they will better serve their clients. These new service delivery formats also bring increased concerns for confidentiality and privacy that professionals should be mindful of. And it may seem obvious, but confidential information should never be shared on social media.

Resolving Ethical Issues: Ethical dilemmas must never be ignored, for the good of the client, the counselor and, ultimately, the profession itself. Not only should professional counselors follow a strict personal code of ethics in their work, they should also hold peers accountable to high ethical standards. The best practice is always to be proactive and take action, and, if necessary, cooperate with any investigations into wrongdoing.

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