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# Introduction

Counselling is sought by different persons going through different issues in life. It can be described as a form of therapy aimed at helping the individual overcome his or her problems. Counsellors are therefore helpers and work to relief people of the pain and troubles they may be facing. Counselling may be sought for different reasons including marriage and family related issues, educational, career development, rehabilitation, mental health and recovery from substance abuse, among others. Counsellors may therefore specialise to help address issues in each of the various sectors mentioned. As such, different terms such as “Marriage counsellor”, “career counsellor”, etc. may be used to refer to counsellors with different specialisations. Even though all types of counselling have a common aim, that is to relieve those seeking for the counselling of their problems, the techniques, strategies or approaches used may differ from one field to the other or from one counsellor to the other. Techniques and strategies used include psychoanalysis, behavioural modification, cognitive approach, humanistic, and holistic/integrative approach. Explaining these techniques;

Psychoanalysis is based on the principle that there are unconscious forces that drive behaviour. Counsellors who adopt this approach focus more on analysing past relationships particularly childhood experiences in relation to an individuals’ current behaviour. It is believed that a revelation of past happenings is the prerequisite for healing. Behavioural modifications focus on enhancing positive behaviours and changing negative or destructive behaviours through positive and negative reinforcements. It is based on the principle that rewarding a particular behaviour increases the likelihood of occurrence while punishments decrease the occurrence of a behaviour.

The humanistic approach, unlike the psychoanalysis and behavioural approach, is founded on the belief in the goodness of all people and emphasize a person’s self-growth and self-actualization. Counsellors who employ the humanistic approach focus more on the current needs of their clients rather than focusing on the past or negative behaviours. The humanistic approach aims at encouraging individuals to achieve their highest potentials. Holistic and integrative approach, just as the name implies, involves integrating various elements of different theories to counselling. Holistic approaches may integrate both traditional and non-traditional strategies such as talk and guided imagery respectively, in the quest to address the challenges of individuals. The cognitive approach to counselling differs from the other techniques by focusing on the thinking patterns of an individual and how thinking patterns influences an individuals’ feeling and behaviour. It may however be combined with other strategies than used as a stand-alone strategy. For example the cognitive approach is combined with behavioural therapy to form the Cognitive behavioural therapy.

All techniques and strategies used for counselling have been extensively researched into and used in practice and are applied in different contexts. In this write-up however, more light is shed on the cognitive approach to counselling.

# History of Cognitive approach to counselling

The cognitive approach to counselling is based on cognitive psychology, a branch of science that investigates the humans mental capabilities; perception, learning, memory, reasoning, and understanding (Lu & Dosher, 2007). It is also related to the means by which persons acquire and apply knowledge and information.

Literature on research into human cognition dates back to the work of Aristotle in his “De Memoria” (Hothersal, 1984) with the intellectual aspects of cognitive psychology beginning with the application of cognitive approach to psychological issues at the end of the 18th century and early 19th century (Boring, 1950). The applications of cognitive psychology is however reported to have declines in the first half of the 20th Century due to the rise of behavioural studies, which involved the study of behaviours associated to observable changes or occurences without taking into account mental processes (Watson, 1913; Boring; 2015; Skinner, 1950). The failure of behavioural studies to take into account mental processes led to its decline in use, for example there was a lack of understanding of the distinction between memory and performance as well as complex learning (TinklePaugh, 1928; Chomsky, 1959). As a result, cognitive psychology was reembraced as the “Cognitive Revolution”. In the mid-1950s, researchers in a variety of fields began to create theories of mind based on complex representations and computational techniques, which became known as the Cognitive Revolution (Miller, 1956; Broadbent, 1958; Chomsky, 1959; Newell, Shaw, & Simon, 1958).

The emergence of cognitive psychology around this time was most likely due to a larger Zeitgeist in which psychologists recognized the complexity of the thinking human (and no definite date of a movement is conceivable), rather than a single group of people. Simultaneously, cognitive psychologists rejected old, unsophisticated views of the mind while clinging to scientific technique created in the early twentieth century in many cases. Cognitive psychology was the paradigm that provided a useful approach and covered a large range of intellectual themes, and it gained widespread acceptance and growth.

The introduction of the information theory by Shannon and Weaver, who used box diagrams to describe how information flow along series of stages, opened another door for cognitive psychology. Broadbent applied the information theory to describe the cognitive process as a series of operations that analyse, transform, or change mental events such as memory encoding, forgetting, thinking, concept formation, etc. (Cohen, 1986). The work of Broadbent is said to have provided a language through which the thoughts or feelings of a person could be communicated (Cohen, 1986)

Technological advances in computer science also called for a reassessment of theories on cognition. Cognitive psychologists were excited that machines could simulate human thought and computers could possibly be operating according to the same rules and procedures as the human mind. Furthermore, since computers were seen as intelligent, it required us to analyze our own intelligence so that the intelligence of a machine could be determined. As a result the hypothetical Turing test was devised to determine if observers could discriminate the output of a computer from that of human responses.

Another influence that aided cognitive psychology’s foothold was World War II. Financial support in areas of military interest became readily available during the war. Because of the military’s interest in developing and using new technology, research in vigilance, cre­ativity, and human factors was encouraged. One out­come was a seminal report in 1954 by Tanner and Swets on signal detection demonstrating that cognitive processes can have a mediating effect on sensory thresholds. Another outcome of the war was that many soldiers suffered from brain injuries. A vast amount of clinical data in perception, memory, and language was a by-product of these victims’ afflictions.

By the 1960s, cognitive psychology had experienced a renaissance. Cognitive Psychology, which systematized the new science, was written by Ulric Neisser and was published in America (1967). Neisser’s book was central to the solidification of cognitive psychology as it gave a label to the field and defined the topical areas. Neisser used the computer metaphor for selecting, storing. Recovering, combining, outputting, and manipulating information. And in 1966 Hilgard and Bower introduced a chapter in their Theories of Learning (New York) that developed the idea of using computer programs to serve as models on theories of cognition.

The 1970s saw the emergence of professional journals devoted to cognitive psychology such as Cognitive Psychology, Cognition, Memory & Cognition, and a series of symposia volumes, including the Loyola Symposium on Cognition edited by Solso and the Carnegie-Mellon series edited by Chase and others, based on the Car­negie Symposium on Cognition. In the 1970s and 1980s cognitive laboratories were beginning to be built, symposia and conferences appeared at national and re­gional meetings, courses in cognitive psychology and related topics were being added to curricula, grants were awarded to people investigating memory, language processing, attention, and like topics, new text­books were written on the theme of cognition, and uni­versities recruited professors of cognitive psychology to replace those of traditional experimental psychology. In the 1980s and 1990s serious efforts were made to find corresponding neural components that were linked to cognitive constructs. Thus, the cerebral location for a word, like hammer, as a noun, might be far different than the location for the same word if the word were used as a verb. Furthermore, influential memory the­ories (such as Tulving’s semantic and episodic memory theory) were manifest in cerebral localization experi­ments using brain imaging technology. The science of human cognition is still undergoing transformation due to major changes in computer technology and brain science. As a result cognitive psychology has converged with computer science and neuroscience to create a new discipline called cognitive science.

Finally, with the advent of new ways to see the brain (e.g. functional magnetic resonance imaging [fMRI], positron emission tomography [PET], electroencephalogram [EEG]) cognitive psychologists have expanded their operations to neuroscience, which promises to empirically display the parts of the brain involved in cognition that were hypothesized by twentieth-century psychologists.

# Foundations of Cognitive psychology

Traditionally, cognitive psychology includes human perception, attention, learning, memory, concept formation, reasoning, judgment and decision-making, problem solving, and language processing. For some, social and cultural factors, emotion, consciousness, animal cognition, evolutionary approaches have also become part of cognitive psychology.

Perception: Perception researchers want to know how we make subjective interpretations of proximal information from the environment. Separate senses (e.g., visual, auditory, somatosensory) and processing modules (e.g., form, motion; Livingston & Hubel, 1988; Ungerleider & Mishkin, 1982) and sub-modules (e.g., Lu & Sperling, 1995) that represent distinct parts of stimulus input make up perceptual systems. Current study is also looking into how these many representations and modules interact and are merged into coherent percepts. Psychophysical approaches and brain imaging have been used by cognitive psychologists to investigate these properties empirically. For many perceptual systems, computational models based on physiological principles have been established (Wandell, 1995).

Attention: In cognitive processing systems, attention solves the problem of information overload by selecting some information for continued processing or by managing resources applied to multiple sources of information at the same time (Broadbent, 1957; Posner, 1980). The study of attention has centered on how and why it promotes performance, or how it hampers performance when it is absent (Posner, 1980; Chun & Potter, 1995; Pashler, 1999). The signal-detection technique (Lu & Dosher, 1998) and the similarity-choice approach (Lu & Dosher, 1998) are two prominent approaches to identifying the mechanics of attention (Bundesen, 1990; Logan, 2004). Single cell recordings in animals have been used to investigate the impact of biased competition (Reynolds, Chelazzi, & Desimone, 1999). Attention's effects on activation in early visual cortices have been established in brain imaging studies, and the networks that control attention have been explored (Kanwisher & Wojciulik, 2000).

Learning: Learning improves an organism's ability to respond to its surroundings. Cognitive psychologists investigate how new knowledge is acquired and under what conditions it is gained. The study of learning starts with animal learning (habituation, conditioning, and instrumental, contingency, and associative learning) and progresses to human learning of cognitive or conceptual information (Estes, 1969; Thompson, 1986). The nature of procedural knowledge and the mostly automatic influence of prior experience on performance are both highlighted in cognitive studies on implicit learning (Roediger, 1990). The nature of incoming information processing, the function of elaboration, and the character of the encoded representation are all highlighted in studies of conceptual learning (Craik, 2002). Those who have used computational methods have looked into the nature of concepts that are easier to learn, as well as the rules and algorithms for learning systems (Holland, Holyoak, Nisbett, & Thagard, 1986). Those who rely on imaging and lesion studies investigate the role of specific brain systems (e.g., temporal lobe systems) for certain classes of episodic learning, and the role of perceptual systems in implicit learning (Tulving, Gordon Hayman, & MacDonald, 1991; Grafton, Hazeltine, & Ivry, 1995).

Memory: One of the most researched areas in cognitive psychology is the potential and fragility of human memory. Memory research examines how memories are formed, kept, and recovered. Memory for information, procedures, or abilities, as well as working and short-term memory capacity, have been functionally differentiated. Dissociable memory types (e.g., procedural and episodic; Squire & Zola, 1996), as well as capacity constrained processing systems such as short-term or working memory, have been identified using experimental methods (Cowan, 1995; Dosher, 1999). Memory is described as propositional networks, holographic or composite representations, and retrieval processes in computational techniques (Anderson, 1996, Shiffrin & Steyvers, 1997). Separable brain areas active during storage or retrieval from various processing systems are identified by brain imaging and lesion studies (Gabrieli, 1998).

Concept Formation: The ability to arrange the perception and classification of experiences by constructing functionally relevant categories is referred to as concept or category formation. The response to a specific stimulus (such as a cat) is governed not by the specific instance, but by categorization and cognitive linkage with that category (Medin & Ross, 1992). The ability to acquire concepts has been demonstrated to be influenced by the category's complexity in representational space, as well as the relationship between variances across concept exemplars and fundamental and accessible representational aspects (Ashby, 2000). Some notions are primarily based on resemblance structures, while others may be based on function or mental conceptions of use (Medin, 1989). On the basis of aggregation of instance representations, similarity structures, and generic recognition models, as well as conceptual ideas, computational models have been built (Barsalou, 2003).

Judgment and decision: Human judgment and decision-making are pervasive; voluntary conduct requires judgment and choice, whether implicitly or overtly. Beginning with anticipated utility theory, the historic underpinnings of choice are built on normative or rational models and optimality criteria (Von Neumann & Morgenstern 1944; Luce, 1959). Widespread failures of rational models have been observed as a result of uneven risk and reward assessments (Luce and Raiffa, 1989), erroneous probabilities assessments (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979), and human information processing limits (i.e., Russo & Dosher, 1983). For more complex scenarios, new computational approaches rely on dynamic systems analyses of judgment and choice (Busemeyer & Johnson, 2004) and Bayesian belief networks (Fenton & Neil, 2001) that make decisions based on many criteria. In cognitive neuroscience, the study of decision-making has become a hot topic (Bechara, Damasio and Damasio, 2000).

Reasoning: Reasoning is the process by which logical arguments are evaluated or constructed. Original investigations of reasoning focused on the extent to which humans correctly applied the philosophically derived rules of inference in deduction (i.e., A implies B; If A then B), and the many ways in which humans fail to appreciate some deductions and falsely conclude others. These were extended to limitations in reasoning with syllogisms or quantifiers (Johnson-Laird, Byne and Schaeken, 1992). Inductive reasoning, in contrast, develops a hypothesis consistent with a set of observations or reasons by analogy (Holyoak and Thagard, 1995). Often reasoning is affected by heuristic judgments, fallacies, and the representativeness of evidence, and other framing phenomena (Kahneman, Slovic, Tversky, 1982). Computational models have been developed for inference making and analogy (Holyoak and Thagard, 1995), logical reasoning (Rips and Marcus, 1977), and Bayesian reasoning (Sanjana and Tenenbaum, 2003).

Problem Solving: The study of how humans pursue goal-directed activity is known as cognitive psychology of problem solving. Newell and Simon's (1972) computational state-space analysis and computer simulation of problem solving, as well as Wickelgren's (1974) empirical and heuristic analysis, have established the cognitive psychology approach to problem solving. Using either algorithmic or heuristic solutions, solving a problem is defined as identifying operations to go from an initial state to a goal state in a problem space. In order to identify solutions, it is necessary to depict the problem (Zhang, 1997). Complex pattern recognition is also required for expertise in knowledge-rich disciplines (such as chess) (Gobet & Simon, 1996). Problem solving can involve perception, memory, attention, and executive function, as well as a variety of other brain functions, with a focus on prefrontal executive functions.

Language Processing: Cognitive psychology has concentrated on language acquisition, language comprehension, language creation, and the psychology of reading, while linguistic approaches have focused on the formal structures of languages and their use (Chomsky, 1965). (Kintsch 1974; Pinker, 1994; Levelt, 1989). Encoding and lexical access of words, sentence level parsing and representation, and generic representations of concepts, gist, inference, and semantic assumptions have all been explored in psycholinguistics. For each of these levels, computational models have been built, including lexical systems, parsing systems, semantic representation systems, and reading aloud systems (Seidenberg, 1997; Thorne, Bratley & Dewar, 1968; Massaro, 1998). Language neuroscience has a long history in lesion analysis (Wernicke, 1874; Broca, 1861), and it has also been extensively researched with cognitive imaging (Posner et al, 1988).

# Transitioning into Cognitive-Behavioural Approach

Behavioural approach to counselling and treatments had been around since the early 1900’s with its inception drawn from the works of Pavlov, Skinner and Watson. The approach is based in a principle that behaviour is measurable, trained and can be changed on the basis that human responses to the environment shape behaviour. The first application of behavioural therapy was experienced in the 1940s as the main approach for treating veterans of the World War 2 to allow them emotionally adjust. The beginning of the approach coincided with behavioural research on how people learn to behave and react emotionally to life situations. The behavioural approach hence challenged the psychoanalytic approach, which was popular at the time. This was referred to as the first wave of Cognitive-Behavioural Approach (CBT).

Alfred Adler, an Austrian psychotherapist, was one of the first therapists to treat cognition in psychotherapy in the early 1900s. His concept of basic mistakes and their involvement in unpleasant emotions made him one of the earliest therapists to discuss cognition in psychotherapy. In the 1950s, his work influenced American psychologist Albert Ellis, who developed rational emotive behaviour therapy (REBT). One of the oldest kinds of cognitive psychotherapy, this is today considered one of the earliest forms of cognitive psychotherapy. It is founded on the premise that a person's emotional pain is caused by their perceptions of an event rather than the event itself. During his analytical sessions in the 1950s and 1960s, American psychiatrist Aaron T. Beck found that his patients had internal conversations going on in their heads. He noticed that the clients appeared to be talking to themselves, but that they only shared a small portion of their thoughts with him. Beck understood the importance of the link between thoughts and feelings, and he coined the term “automatic thoughts” to describe the emotional thoughts that pop up in people’s minds. He discovered that although people aren’t always aware of these thoughts, they can learn to identify and report them. He found that people who were upset had negative thoughts that tended to be unrealistic, and by uncovering and challenging these thoughts, long-lasting and positive change can result. In essence, CBT helps people step outside of these automatic thoughts and test them out.

Several empirical research of how cognitions affect behavior and emotions were conducted in the 1960s. The cognitive revolution is the term for this. It is characterized as the "second wave" of CBT since it emphasizes the importance of conscious thinking in psychotherapy. Behavioural therapies were effective in the treatment of neurotic disorders but not in the treatment of depression. As cognitive therapies grew in popularity, psychologists began to combine the two approaches to successfully treat conditions like panic anxiety. Despite the fact that each of these schools of thought has a different focus, they are both concerned with what is happening to the individual right now. CBT concentrates on the client's current beliefs, experiences, and feelings. CBT has been the subject of a number of scientific studies and been applied to a broad range of psychological issues. Its use became more widespread in the 1990s and is now promoted by the NHS. As its popularity grows, the number of clinical trials into CBT is increasing and the evidence base is strengthening. It has been shown as an effective form of therapy for treating a range of conditions, including: Anxiety, Panic Disorder, Depression, OCD – Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Phobias, Irritable Bowel Syndrome, Chronic Fatigue and Eating Disorders.

# Cognitive Approach to Counselling in Practice

The cognitive approach to counselling was designed to delve into the thought process and determine how that thought process affects the patient's behaviour. The goal of this approach is to work on changing these thought processes and, in turn, changing the negative behaviour. It is commonly used to treat various mental conditions, including ADHD, Alzheimer’s and personality disorders. Counsellors who use this approach use techniques, such as guided discovery, role playing and journaling to give the counsellor insight into the patient's thought processes and helping him to change them. Cognitive therapists focus more on their client’s present situation and distorted thinking than on their past.

According to the cognitive approach, what upsets people are not the occurrences or events that happen to them, but the person’s mind-set, resulting from his/her beliefs, schemas and attitude, which affects the way information is processed and results in excitements and individual responses. Therefore, it appears that the individual’s beliefs and mind-set about a problem forms the type and severity of the concerns.

The combination of the cognitive and behavioural approach to counselling seem to be widely used than the use of either of the two techniques. Cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) is based on principles that; Part of the cause of psychological issues is faulty or unhelpful thinking. Part of the cause of psychological issues is taught patterns of unhelpful behavior. People who are dealing with psychological issues can improve their coping skills, alleviating their symptoms and allowing them to be more effective in their daily lives. Efforts to modify thought habits are frequently part of CBT treatment. Learning to understand one's thinking distortions that are causing issues and then reevaluating them in light of reality are examples of these tactics. Developing a deeper grasp of other people's motivation and conduct. Dealing with difficult situations by using problem-solving skills. Developing a deeper sense of self-assurance in one's own talents.

Efforts to modify behavioural patterns are frequently part of CBT treatment. These tactics could involve confronting rather than avoiding one's anxieties. Role-playing can be used to prepare for possibly difficult interactions with people. Learning to relax one's body and calm one's mind. All of these tactics will not be used in every CBT session. Rather, the psychologist and the patient/client work together to build an understanding of the problem and a treatment strategy in a collaborative manner. CBT focuses on assisting individuals in becoming their own therapists. Patients/clients are assisted in developing coping skills through activities in the session as well as "homework" assignments outside of sessions, whereby they can learn to adjust their own thinking, problematic emotions, and behaviour.

CBT therapists focus on the person's current situation rather than the events that led up to their problems. Although some information about one's past is required, the focus is generally on moving forward in time in order to develop more effective coping mechanisms.

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