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Implications of the polyvagal-theory for counseling, coaching and therapy and a new concept for the activation of the social engagement system

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Counseling, coaching and short-term therapy became more and more popular in Germany. The problems, wishes, requirements are varying in a wide range as well as the personalities, fates and experiences of the clients. It is challenging to build up a trustful client-coach-relationship in several hours, sort the demands of the clients, identify the main problem and root cause, find the best fitting technique and accompany the client through the process. Some clients report serious life events, negative experiences, irrational behavior and anxiety. Sometimes clients change their view on their problems, have strong negative emotions, produce transference, feel fury and become unstable during the coaching process. Although this is a progress it lowers the capability of the client for effective goal-oriented work and cost time. The Polyvagal-Theory describes the three stages of the autonomous system the frozen state (dorsal vagus nerve), the flight-fight state (sympathicus) and the social engagement system SES (ventral vagus nerve) activation. Clients exhibit a preferred activation state for example the permanent action-oriented/fight mode of workaholic. The problems which suffer a client are mostly coupled with one of the flight-fight-freeze stress reaction which means with the dorsal vagus nerve or sympathicus activation. For the coaching process which bases on positive social interaction and re-learning with positive emotions the SES state is the most effective. This state can be reached quite quickly by safety mediating instructions and embodiment techniques which activates the SES related brain nerves. In contradiction to existing procedures positive affirmations and relaxation will not be used in the beginning of the process. The paper will explain the implications of the Polyvagal-Theory for effective short-term counseling (coaching) and therapy investigations and it will present a concept for the activation of the SES in an early stage of the work with the clients.

Recent Publications

1. Howes, Ryan. "Point of View – Psycho- physiologist Stephen Porges's research on the polyvagal nervous system provides insight into the evolutionary roots of trauma and anxiety, and how therapists can effectively convey safety to clients." *Psychotherapy networker* 37.5 (2013): 67-70.
2. Maddy Greville Harris et al. (2016) The power of invalidating communication: receiving invalidating feedback predicts threat-related emotional, physiological, and social responses. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*. 35(6):471-493.
3. Porges S W (2011) The polyvagal theory. neurophysiological foundations of emotions, attachment, communication, and self-regulation (1st ed). The Norton series on interpersonal neurobiology. ISBN 978-0-393-70700-7
4. Prestele E et al. (2016) The effects of implicit and explicit affiliation motives on vagal activity in motive-relevant situations. *Motivation and Emotion*. 40(6):862-877.
5. Wagner Dee et al. (2015) Polyvagal theory and peek-a-boo: how the therapeutic pas de deux heals attachment trauma." *Body, Movement and Dance in Psychotherapy*. 10(4):256-265.

Biography

Verena Hein graduated in BSc Psychology (2014) and is presently studying MSc Psychology at the University Hagen. She has professional qualification as Personal Coach 2006, Hypno-Coach 2007 and Therapist for dolphin assisted therapy, 2012. She works in her company 4academy since 2010 as Counselor/Personal and Business Coach. She is Dive Leader and offers special coaching concepts for scuba divers. In her first profession she was a Scientist (Diploma Crystallography, University Leipzig, 1988), worked as Technical Coordinator for global projects in reliability of microelectronics. She uses her experience in industry to develop and to adapt coaching concepts for engineering offices and knowledge workers. Her special topics of interest are management complexity, encourage creativity, burnout prevention, stress and anxiety reduction.

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