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## Focusing for therapists

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### Introduction

Focusing, which can improve the effectiveness of psychotherapy, is useful not only for the client, but also for the therapist. In psychotherapy, the client's words, attitude and behavior convey numerous meanings to the therapist. The therapist accepts most of them implicitly. Accordingly, in order to understand the client fully, it is useful for the therapist to focus on his felt sense which are directly related to his experience during the psychotherapy sessions with the client, and to conceptualize the felt sense as explicit meaning. This facilitates the therapist to understand the client more deeply. Furthermore, this may sometimes facilitate the therapist to understand what kind of feelings he himself tends to be unable to cope easily with as a therapist.

Based on this point of view, I have been trying to develop a method which facilitates therapists to focus on their own felt senses which are directly related to their experience during psychotherapy sessions. I refer to this method as "Therapist-Focusing".

Therapist-Focusing comprises three steps.

The first step is termed "confirming feelings". In this first step, the focuser picks up some of his own feelings, one by one, which are directly concerned with his experience during the psychotherapy sessions with a client, and he then proceeds to confirm these feelings.

The second step is termed "deciding a direction". In this second step, the guide asks the focuser what kind of feelings he want to focus on, thereby allowing the focuser to decide the direction of the Focusing session.

The third step is termed "exploring a felt sense". In this third step, the focuser allows letting the felt sense come and he explores it. This enables him to find an experiential track of understanding the client, according to the felt sense. The process of this third step differs for each Focusing session. We have to move along a unique track in each session. However, we can only find these essential tracks, when we proceed according to the felt sense of the focuser.

In my presentation on the conference at Pforzheim, a video recorded session of "Therapist-Focusing" in which I myself guided the focuser was projected. The focuser of this session was Mr. Hideaki Fukumori. He is a student counselor, and he has many experiences of Focusing. The focuser hoped to focus on his own feelings which were directly concerned with his experience as a therapist with a young male client in this session.

### 1 The first step: Confirming feelings

In this step, the focuser confirmed three feelings. The first one was the irritation.  
 Focuser: It is kind of like irritation, but somehow it is a bit different. It's difficult to find the right words. ... It's like the feeling when things are not progressing well, when things are not going satisfactorily. ... Anyway, it's irritation. It's a kind of heavy physical feeling, I can feel it here in my body. I feel really irritated.

The second feeling he confirmed was that was as if his body were telling him to shriek.  
Focuser: What's more, I feel tension or strain across the back of my shoulders. It's as if my body were telling me to shriek. I can feel it right now. If I shriek, I feel a bit better, but of course I can't shriek during the psychotherapy sessions. Nevertheless, shrieking helps me to feel a little better.

Then, he found the third feeling after a short silence.

Focuser: Well, er... actually I do have another feeling lurking behind these two feelings. It's a sense of calm, with a slightly warm touch. ... I feel it in the core of my body. It's a warm and glowing feeling. I have just noticed it now. ... Actually it's a bit of a surprise. I just perceived it now when I was describing those other two kinds of feeling.

Guide: Is it a nice feeling?

Focuser: Yes it is. Or, er... is it? Actually, I'll have to examine it more carefully. A nice feeling? Actually it's a rather cozy feeling for me. It is inside my body, but I guess it is not actually my own feeling. It's strange, it feels weird. What on earth is it? It's cozy, but I guess I don't enjoy that feeling. ... I have an image that the boundary between myself and another person could disappear and we would actually merge as one. ... I guess this may be a problem that I've had for many years.

## 2 The second step: Deciding a direction

Guide: You've been able to confirm some of the feelings you have when you meet the client. Do you need to focus on other feelings, or shall we put an end to this step and move on to the next step? What do you think?

Focuser: We'd better put an end to it and move on to the next step.

Guide: OK. So, please open your eyes and let's discuss how to move on to the next step. What kind of feelings would you like to focus on? I guess it all depends on what you yourself are hoping to get from this Focusing session.

Focuser: I think I'd like to look more closely at the nature of this feeling of irritation. I'll try to find the right words with which to describe the nature of the feeling, and what is actually happening to me during that feeling. ... But moreover, I would also like to try to put myself in the client's shoes and try to imagine how he feels when I am feeling irritated with him.

## 3 The third step: Exploring a felt sense

The focuser hoped to move to the second position (the client's chair) to imagine how the client feels when he is feeling irritated with him, and he managed it.

Focuser: If I try to put myself in his shoes, then I'll be able to see the problem from a different point of view.

Guide: Right, you are in the client's shoes now. Please try to guess the client's feelings when he talks with the therapist. ... Please focus deliberately on the client's feelings, take your time, and when you can put it into words, tell me about it.

Focuser: It feels like there is something heavy on my back. ... This feeling of something on my back, it's a very strong feeling. I feel like I'm being pulled backward. It's like a sense of being frightened, a sense of feeling guilty. ... And then, I can feel trembling throughout the core of my body. ... It would be a sense of feeling frightened.

Suddenly, an another feeling came on to the focuser.

Focuser: Now, I have an another feeling coming on. I don't know what it is yet, because my feelings changed before I could become aware of them. What is this new feeling? I guess it's a sense of taking the initiative. It's a strange feeling. I don't really comprehend it. ... Suddenly, a feeling of security or something like that came to me, but I don't quite grasp it yet.

Guide: I have a question, though it might be irrelevant. I associate this feeling of security with the third kind of feeling you said you had when you were describing your feelings as

the therapist.

Focuser: I think the nature of it is different. Er...I'll have to examine it more carefully. ... Er... it's a bit more powerful than the third kind of feeling. You couldn't really say that it has any warmth about it. ... It's difficult to explain, but it's something like the feeling of "I've succeeded", or "I won". It's something like taking the initiative. ... I sensed the trembling or guilty feeling, and then this new feeling came to me.

The focuser hoped to go back to the first position, and he managed it.

Guide: Have you managed it? Are you back in the position of the therapist? How does it feel?

Focuser: Oh, I think I have begun to understand what it is that irritates me. I had thought that it was his roundabout way of speaking that made me irritated, but actually that might not be the case. I thought that it might be his persistence which arises from his persecution tendency that irritated me, but it probably isn't that either. I was probably irritated by the fact that I was feeling something vague like I mentioned before, but which I couldn't quite grasp.

Guide: You said that it felt like taking the initiative, or the feeling of "I won". ... Does this feeling of "I won" or "I've succeeded" come to you when you are feeling irritated with this client?

Focuser: Actually, I'll have to examine my feelings. ... Er... I guess you might be right. Yes, I can see it now. Yes, now I understand. ... The client speaks so indecisively, but perhaps he's actually quite tough. It seems as if he tries to avoid focusing on his feelings. Each session just goes along at his pace. I feel as if there's no co-operation between us. Yes, I feel that's exactly it. I think that's why I feel irritated with him. ... I don't feel that I am supporting or helping him. Indeed, I cannot function well as a therapist, and I can't really understand whether he wants me to help him or not. We just talk to each other, without really communicating. Maybe that's what irritates me.

Guide: You really feel so. You said that there is no co-operation between you, so how is it between the two of you?

Focuser: Well, he says his piece and then I say my piece. It feels as if we are getting somewhere, but in fact there's never any development. It just continues like that. ... I feel that I want to tell him my point of view. I want him to understand my feelings clearly. ... I want him to understand. It's odd for me as a therapist. But I really want him to understand my feelings.

Guide: Does it relate to your initial feelings of irritation and your urge to shriek?

Focuser: Yes, I think so. That's what I want to say. At the beginning when I first described my feelings of irritation and my urge to shriek to you, it made me feel a bit relaxed. That's because when I met the client, there were many things that I wanted to tell him, but I didn't allow myself to do so. I controlled myself. And when I did speak, I failed to express myself well. That led to this great sense of irritation. I can see it clearly now.

The guide asked the focuser how to progress this session.

Guide: I have a question. Is it enough for you to understand your feelings about your relationship with him? Or, do you need to think about how you must change your attitude in order to relate with him, because from now on, you'll be meeting him again as his therapist?

Focuser: I need something new, but I don't know whether I need to change my attitude or whether I need to look at our relationship from some other point of view. ... I may need to look at our relationship from some other point of view.

The focuser hoped to move to the third position, and he did it.

Focuser: Er... I feel this new position is a good position.

Guide: What is the new perspective?

Focuser: It's the perspective of a supervisor. It's not the perspective of an onlooker. From this position, I can make some useful suggestions. ... My first feeling is of relaxation. My body feels completely at ease. ... I feel that I was so uneasy when looking at things

from the viewpoint of the therapist. I felt great pressure that I had to do something for him.

Guide: How does the therapist seem to you, from your current perspective?

Focuser: I feel he (the therapist) is trying really hard, and he is making a tremendous effort. What he is doing is good, but as for the relationship between the two of them, I think his effort will produce no improvement. I can definitely feel that he is trying really hard. But I think his effort is completely ineffective. ... It seems as if he is feeling a tremendous sense of responsibility over his role as a therapist. I'd like to tell him to relax. That doesn't mean that he should forget his sense of responsibility, but... Er... I feel that everything should be as it should be. The responsibility of deciding what to do and how to proceed, should belong to the client himself. ... The therapist may be feeling a sense of responsibility regarding problems which are different from the original worries of the client.

Guide: May I tell you that I'm thinking now? (Yes, please.) As a therapist, if you feel a sense of responsibility regarding problems which are different from the original worries of the client, then, I think that you may fail to identify the source of the worries for which the client is in need of therapy.

Focuser: Perhaps this subject is to do with that third kind of feeling I mentioned before. Perhaps that sense of merging as one is the source for the therapy that he needs. Perhaps he wants to bring that sense of merging into his therapy session. ... I think that a therapist shouldn't undertake to satisfy such needs, but on the other hand, I also think that the client comes to therapy actively seeking this sense of merging, or sense of unification. I can now see it very clearly, when I look at things from this perspective. ... Irritating each other may stop this sense of merging from actually becoming manifest, and as such, it may be rather meaningful. But probably this sense of merging needs to be dealt with properly during psychotherapy sessions. ... If we continue to irritate each other, then the irritation will drag on and on without end, and no progress will ever be made. However, if progress is to be made, then the client's desire for a sense of merging needs to be dealt with. Well, this is quite a surprise! I just hadn't recognized this fact prior to starting this Focusing session.

Before ending this session, the focuser went back to the initial position.

Focuser: When I come back to this position, I sense a new feeling. I feel that I've been struggling all alone, I've been battling along all alone, well, not exactly battling, but anyway, trying hard. I want to say to myself "You have really tried hard alone". And I think also that if I had a supervisor like that, he would surely be a great help to me. ... I feel that the present situation, whereby I have the choice of looking at things from three points of view, that of the therapist, the client and a supervisor, provides a sense of stability, a feeling of security. I feel rather comfortable. The feeling is like being softly enveloped in warm cotton wool. It's quite different from that earlier warm feeling. When I began this Focusing session, I had no such feelings, but that's how I feel now.

In Therapist-Focusing, the felt senses which are directly concerned with the therapeutic relationship between the client and the therapist come and be explored. So, it facilitates the therapist (focuser) to understand both of the client and the therapist himself. I hope that Focusing will be used to help the therapists and to improve the effectiveness of psychotherapies.

## References

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