



Meaning-focused mediation

The application of Logotherapy of Viktor Frankl in conflict management in relationships¹

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Logotherapy, meaning in life, conflicts, mediation, Viktor Frankl, existential psychotherapy, conflict resolution, existential philosophy.

This is a new and unique conceptual platform, for applying concepts and ideas taken from Prof. Viktor Frankl's field of Logotherapy, in a process of transformative mediation in relationships.

Logotherapeutic ideas and principals have the power to be replanted, this time in the field of mediation. It is assumed that the tools used today in the transformative model² of mediation, are not enough to promote growth and development among the parties, and that complex conflicts, especially those related to close relationships, that cause great suffering, difficulties and existential concerns, there is room to expand. Hence, it is suggested to hold a discussion within the framework of mediation also in issues concerning man's existential aspects, and help him discover meaning in his life.

¹ Shaked, D. (2023). Meaning-focused mediation. Applying Viktor Frankl's logotherapy in conflict management in relationships

² Bush, R. B., & Folger, J. P. (1994). The Promise of Mediation, Responding to Conflict Through Empowerment & Recognition. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.



The approach of Prof. Viktor Frankl, the author of the book “Man’s search for meaning”³, deals with the existential questions of man. It focuses on strengthening and nurturing the healthy elements in man, and on his ability to find meaning in any situation, and to grow while facing and dealing with the challenges and circumstances of life. The “Meaning-focused mediation” model presents the application of Viktor Frankl’s Logotherapy in mediation, and offers original lines of thinking and inspiration, through integration between Logotherapy and transformative mediation. According to Frankl, in order to strive for perfection when working with people, every therapy must also include aspects of Logotherapy. This concept is at the base of the Logotherapeutic Model, proposed for application in conflict resolution processes.

The fields of research and application of Logotherapy are developing and expanding worldwide, as well as the conflict resolution profession that operates in a broad and diverse field of complex human and psychological processes. Professionals dealing with relationships and many mediators, come from a wide range of professional and therapeutic specializations, but despite the interdisciplinarity and abundant sources of inspiration, there is no mediation model that makes in-depth use of tools and ideas from the world of Logotherapy. This book fills this gap. The understanding that behind the scenes of the conflict, in the depths of man’s soul, hides a meaning that seeks to be revealed, and that the process of mediation and striving to reach an agreement do not contradict finding meaning in life, and inspiring optimism and hope. Logotherapy elevates man above the captivating reality, since not only is the signature important to man, but also the signatory.

From searching for a compromise to finding meaning

There is an essential place for discussing of issues that concern man relating to his existential aspects, to help him discover meaning in his life. Holding such discussion within the framework of mediation and conflict management processes requires

³ Frankl, V. E. (1963). Man’s search for meaning: An introduction to logotherapy.
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extending the concepts range and tools used by the mediator in his work. Setting the concept of meaning in life, as part of man's existential needs, in the center of the meditative dialogue is a challenge, since it not natural or regular in daily conversation between people. It expands the mediation discourse from seeking compromise to finding meaning, from discussing focused and practical issues to a dialogue in the spiritual dimension, striving to find meaning in life, finding meaning in suffering, realizing values and fulfilling a purpose.

The content world of conflict resolution as a field of practical and research knowledge draws on many diverse sources of knowledge, influencing the nature of the mediation process and its direction of development. Professional practices, social psychology research, social and behavioral sciences, and negotiation theories, including game theory techniques, completed and extended the scientific rational paradigm of mediation.⁴ Every conflict is characterized by multidimensionality that requires breaking it down to sub-problems and adapting diverse methods for treating each of these dimensions. The transformative model offers an alternative for the standard pragmatic model whose essence is guiding the parties and striving to reach an agreement. This approach sees a conflict between human beings, as an opportunity for development and personal growth, and mediation as a transformative platform, leading the parties to empowerment, encouragement, and recognition each other's needs.

Man's understanding that his life has meaning under any condition and in any situation, is a source of power for him when coping with suffering, adversity and crises, as difficult as they may be. Logotherapy is based on the following three main assumptions:

- Life has meaning in every situation
- Man's main motive is the desire to find meaning in life
- Man has the freedom to discover meaning in his actions and experiences and in the stands he takes

⁴ Alberstein, M. (2007). Jurisprudence of mediation. Jerusalem: Magnes.



The common models of mediation focus the discussion on integrative negotiation and on looking for solutions for needs and interests, but we understand that life also urge us to find meaning. This raises the main need for expanding the mediation model by using Logotherapy.

Anyone who works in these two fields, Logotherapy and mediation, might notice Logotherapy and mediation share a wide conceptual common denominator, as described in the book by professor David Guttman “Logotherapy for the helping professional”.⁵ Following are some examples:

- Striving for meaning is the main factor driving man
- Responsibility is the ability to respond to life’s demands at any given moment
- Man is free to choose and is responsible for his choices
- There are choices every situation, and are manifested in our attitude toward the options we have
- We are able to transcend ourselves for another individual
- Our existence in the present is determined not only by our past, but also by what we want to be in the future

Focusing on finding the meaning within the framework of conflict management in general and in relationship in particular, expand the discourse to the realization of the potential for freedom that exists in man, realizing each party’s ability to act according to their conscience and values, fulfilling their purpose and finding meaning in their lives. This allows changing man’s life from a pointless life to a life worth living in the sense of having what to live for, and if man has what to live for, he will find the how.

Areas in which the Logotherapeutic mediation can be beneficial

The principles and practice of the transformative mediation can be efficiently applied in any mediation procedure, but the beneficial and broad application, combining

⁵ Guttman, D. (1996). Logotherapy for the helping professional: Meaningful social work. Springer Publishing



Logotherapy is manifested in complex relationships conflicts, substantially affecting the quality and meaning of a man's life. These are conflicts that cause excessive concerns among the parties; make it necessary to make substantive decisions, give a sense of existential crisis, difficulty to find meaning, and a sense of worthlessness in their lives. Such complex conflicts can be seen, for example, in family conflicts, separation and divorce, guardianship and inheritance issues, conflicts related to elderly parents, conflicts involving people with disabilities and special needs, intercultural conflicts, conflicts related to work, conflicts related to family businesses, etc.

Application of Logotherapeutic tools in transformative mediation

Logotherapy is basically process oriented, a process occurring between therapist and patient, but the model shows how it is possible to apply the logotherapeutic tools and concepts when working with more than one person, for example, among couples or a number of participants on each side. It offers many concepts that expand the repertoire of tools of those who deal with conflict management and crisis management in relationships.

In the current article I will briefly mention just a few of them:

Meaning in life

Meaning is man's feeling that there is a meaning to his life, that it is continuous and that he understands it, that he acts to fulfill his purpose, and that he sees himself as valuable, and has value in the eyes of others. Conflicts are opportunities to discover meaning, through conflicts man learns about himself, about his way and the quality of his relationship with the society around him. Mediation is indeed based on past events, but it is focused on finding meaning from a view of the present and focusing on the future. The sense of meaning is like a holding peg, making it easier for man to bear the difficulties of the present and continue with his life, encourage him to change his perception of the event from an experience of a defeating event to a motivating event.



Values

The perception of values in Logotherapy is fundamental. According to it, life poses different situations and constraints in front of man, creating a conflict of values. Therefore man is required to judge and choose between them, and decide on the different meanings relating and arising from these unique situations.⁶ These decision man makes, have influence on the sense of meaning in his life. These are his moral and ethical fulcrums. Logotherapy offers three value categories constituting the main paths to discovering the meaning, which are: creative values, experiential values, and attitudinal values, the latter give man meaning by the way he relates to various situations, especially the inevitable ones.

Responsibility

Man has personal responsibility for his choices for better and for worse, and he cannot avoid it. Life requires man responsibility for finding the right answer for his problems and the challenges he faces at each and every moment. There are many decision-making points for accepting responsibility in the mediation process, that bind the parties as part of the effort to find a solution. Logotherapy promotes the perception according to which life is an ongoing accountability, and constant coping with the events and situations life constantly present him with. Being aware of responsibility means man is aware that he is the sole creator of himself, his fate, his emotions, and hence, his of his suffering. Man's responsibility can be seen as the purpose of his existence.⁷

⁶ Frankl, V. E. (2010). *The feeling of meaninglessness: A challenge to psychotherapy and philosophy* (Alexander Batthyány, Ed.). Milwaukee: Marquette University Press.

⁷ Lukas, E. S., & Fabry, J. B. (1984). *Meaningful living: Logotherapeutic guide to health*. Grove Press



Freedom of the will

This represents the freedom given to man to choose how he relates to a certain situation, to take a free stand towards his life under any condition and in any situation he is in, be it the most difficult situation. According to the existentialistic view, man is essentially free, he is “sentenced to freedom”, and is required to choose in order to shape his life himself. Since any choice involves giving up other choices, this inspires a sense of responsibility that accompanies every choice and its consequences. The burden of this responsibility for the results and consequences of the freedom of choice often cause man feelings of concern, guilt and regret. The principle of voluntariness in mediation and lack of coercion, meaning the freedom of man to endure or to leave the process, encourages the parties to take responsibility for the conflict, and to be partners in making the decisions that will affect their lives and their sense of meaning.

To take a stand

Taking a stand is linked with the ability to make decisions. It describes the way man accepts his condition, the courage he shows when dealing with the difficulty, and the way in which he chooses to act and bound or guilty. It is a virtue of courage the man demonstrates in his pursuit to realize himself as man.

Guilt and remorse

Remorse can fill the past with meaning, as it represents recognition and understanding that did not exist before. In its fulfillment there is a dimension of transcendence and exaltation. Frankl stressed that one can glean a meaning even from a sense of guilt,⁸ if man sees it as an opportunity to become better. Both regret and guilt can promote reconciliation and accelerate positive processes during mediation. They reflect honesty and overcoming and help change the narrative toward a more positive and optimistic experience.

⁸ Frankl, V. E. (2010). trotzdem Ja zum Leben sagen: ein Psychologe erlebt das Konzentrationslager. Kösel-Verlag, p.58



Self-transcendence

Self-transcendence is demonstrating humanity, it is an expression of high human quality and the openness of man to the world and the possibilities it has. Showing self-transcendence in mediation is expressed in the recognition of the suffering and empowerment of the other party by making a gesture, changing perspective, or apologizing and showing regret. This is of great importance for advancing the mediation process, making a breakthrough and getting out of a dead-end.

Noetic dimension

This is the healthy dimension of man that does not depend on anything, regardless of the circumstances. It expresses the inner intuitive knowledge of man. This is the dimension of the spiritual qualities representing man's human longing to transcend beyond himself. Applying this in mediation makes it possible to support empowering the parties, and make a free choice when choosing their stand and without fear, when facing the other party with whom they are in conflict. This is the dimension that allows personal, human and authentic dialogue. Even if it in the heat of the conflict it is seemingly hidden under a mountain of issues, problems and gaps, the mediator can stimulate those hidden spiritual resources and the powers of defiance, transcendence, imagination, intuition, creativity and love.

Additional tools

The model presented in the book describes in detail a long series of logotherapeutic concepts and tools and how they are implemented in the mediation process in practice. Among these tools one can also find techniques for use in paradoxical intention and self-distancing, referring to the voice of conscience, how to use a Socratic dialogue in mediation, and complementary tools that help map and analyze data in the mediator's work, like "logoscopy".



About the development of the model

As someone who has been engaged for many years on the practical and research level in both these content fields, mediation and Logotherapy, and out of the great importance I attribute to the promotion and development of Logotherapy as an applied approach, it was only natural for me to explore combining them together. The idea first began to develop in 2016, it was applied and tested in practice in my work, and early articles I published in the field attracted significant interest among many mediators and Logotherapy experts. As of 2018 the idea continued to develop into a theoretical model within the framework of my doctoral dissertation on the subject:

The application of Logotherapy as the existential psychotherapy of Viktor Frankl in transformative mediation for conflict resolution.

Conflicts and disputes in relationships are of concern to professionals from different fields; hence the model may be suitable for the work of anyone practicing in these fields, mediators, therapists, counselors and coaches, who can use the plethora of tools offered by Logotherapy in their work. The mediator's modus operandi reminds to a great extent the analogy Frankl made between the logotherapist and an eye doctor in his book "The doctor and the soul". According to him, the mediator can be likened to an eye doctor, that expands the field of vision of the mediated party, so that the entire spectrum of potential meaning⁹ will become conscious and visible to them. The mediator is required to have skills and ability to apply the ideas of Logotherapy, to have a meaning-centered dialogue, and at the same time to promote the process on its practical level in order to help the parties reach a more stable, long term agreement. The book describes in detail, with examples, the theoretical and practical aspects of each of the tools and concepts in Logotherapy, including a rich bibliography, a questions bank for all subjects, and recommendations for application in mediation. It also includes an introduction by Prof. David Guttman, who was Viktor Frankl's close friend, and his successor in Israel and worldwide, and I quote here only one sentence

⁹ Frankl, V. E. (1955). The doctor and the soul. An introduction to logotherapy, p.133



from his words: “I am happy to recommend this book with no reservations, and wholeheartedly. I know that my great friend, Professor Viktor Frankl, would have unreservedly joined my recommendation”.

Conclusion

It is in the power of the offered model to promote the mediation method in a way that will allow realizing the perception according to which man's basic strive is to find meaning in his life, while respecting the freedom inherent in him, to take a stand according to his conscience and values. Mediation and Logotherapy both deal with the human existence; they both promote additional perspectives and personal development through coping with difficulties, suffering and crisis. There are those who find meaning in their past, others who discover it every moment throughout their lives, and there are those who find it when looking to the future. For all of these, the model offers an appropriate process, and invites those interested in these fields to continue and develop the application of Logotherapy by continue and build tools, conduct research and developing training programs.

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