

The Use of Logo-analysis in a Student Counselling Context

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ABSTRACT

Psycho-social challenges are posing serious threats to students' well-being. Subsequently the delivery of therapeutic-related student support services has become important. Traditional therapeutic models focus on, amongst others, the development of coping strategies in order to re-establish homeostasis following psycho-social challenges. Logotherapy offers an approach, namely logo-analysis, which could assist students to move beyond merely establishing homeostasis towards meaning-centred growth. This article reports on the value of logo-analysis within a student counselling context. A case example is used to describe the treatment approach.

KEY WORDS

Logo-analysis; logotherapy; meaning; student counselling; Viktor Frankl.

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Psycho-social challenges, such as anxiety, depression and substance abuse, are posing serious threats to the well-being of university students (Pillay & Ngcobo, 2010; Van Heerden, 2005). Eisenberg, Golberstein and Gollust (2007), De Villiers and Van den Berg (2012), and Van Heerden (2005) warn that students who are affected by, amongst others, psycho-social impairments, are more likely to abandon their academic studies when compared to their, otherwise psycho-socially healthy, peers. Within the South African higher education context this could negatively impinge on already low throughput and high dropout rates, potentially leaving at-risk students disproportionately distressed (Maree, 2011; Strydom & Mentz, 2010). Subsequently the provision of student-based psycho-social support appears to be an important service if the aim is to create meaningful change in the higher education context.

According to France (2001) humans, including young people such as students (Van Heerden, 2005), require the appropriate coping strategies to effectively address the inevitable challenges that they may encounter in life. France (2001) suggests that effective coping strategies could assist humans to re-establish a sense of equilibrium or homeostasis when encountering significant life stressors. The concept of homeostasis implies that psycho-social tension has been reduced and that people can return to pre-stressor levels of functioning (France, 2001).

However, Frankl (2006) contends that life is about more than just coping with psycho-social stressors. He emphasises that human beings have the unique capacity to search for and discover meaning in spite of stressful challenges (Frankl, 2006). To discover meaning, Frankl (2006), the founder of logotherapy, indicates that humans ought to transcend beyond the mere establishment of homeostasis; they have to create a meaning-centred tension with the world and search for, as well as discover, the hidden *logos*, or meaning, of life challenges. Logo-analysis is the therapeutic modality that describes the process of discovering meaning in life (Frankl, 2006).

The aim of this conceptual paper is to highlight, outline and discuss the use of logo-analysis, its techniques, methods and accompanying interventions when working with clients, i.e. university students, who are affected by psycho-social challenges. In an attempt to locate this article within a relevant theoretical frame, Frankl's logotherapeutic conceptions, as well as a pragmatic counselling framework, will be presented in the subsequent section. To highlight the use of logo-analysis, a case example will then be included. The article is concluded by means of a reflective discussion.

THE LOGOTHERAPY FRAMEWORK

Logotherapy is based on three tenets, namely (1) the freedom of will, (2) will to meaning, and (3) meaning in life (Frankl, 2006). The concept of *freedom of will* proposes that humans have a *freedom towards*, rather than a *freedom from*, life's stressors. Shantall (2003) indicates that stress is ubiquitous in life. Marshall (2009) concurs and refers to the logotherapy concept of the *tragic triad* to describe the omnipresent psycho-social stressors of life. The tragic triad and its contents, namely death, suffering and guilt, are meant to signify the challenges that all humans encounter. Frankl (2006) argues that humans have the freedom to choose how they respond towards tragic triad, and other, challenges.

From a logotherapy perspective the concept, *will to meaning*, is regarded as the foremost human motivator (Frankl, 1988). Shantall (2003) clarifies by stating that humans want to know that they exist for a reason; that their lives have purpose, are meaningful and that they are meant to be in the world. Thus, logotherapy regards the human search for meaning as essential to human life (Lukas, 1998).

The third logotherapeutic pillar - meaning in life - proposes that life has unconditional meaning. Shantall (2003) explains that life has a demand quality and subsequently consists of a series questions. Humans have the responsibility to answer these questions. It is through

answering these existentially-based questions that humans begin to discover the potential seeds of meaning that are prevalent in all of life (Shantall, 2003). Every life situation, and subsequent question, offers an opportunity to discover meaning. Consequently logotherapeutic meaning can be described as paradoxical in nature: it transcends the dichotomous plane of positive and negative and embraces all of life as meaningful; humans have the capacity to make the choices to pursue and discover meaning notwithstanding the stressors that they may encounter (Shantall, 2003).

Meaning can be discovered in three ways, namely by realising (1) creative, (2) experiential, and (3) attitudinal values (Frankl, 1988). Lukas (1998) refers to the concept of the *meaning triad*, consisting of the aforementioned values, as encapsulating the three avenues to discover meaning.

Logotherapists indicate that meaning can never be given or prescribed to the client (Marshall, 2009). Rather, clients ought to discover meaning through a self-transcendent encounter after which their meaning awareness is given back to the world as a *gift* (Lukas, 1998). The concept of *self-transcendence* occurs in relationship with another person and/or an important task. In other words, the person becomes absorbed in a relationship and/or task that transcends beyond the narrow confines of everyday psycho-social challenges and subsequently pulls the person out of existential apathy towards the realisation of meaning (Frankl, 2006). The person moves beyond tragic triad challenges towards the realisation of meaningful living. The meaning-centred counselling alliance between client and counsellor may serve as a self-transcendent relationship that aims to empower the client to superimpose the contents of the meaning triad over the challenges represented by the tragic triad in an attempt to discover and live for a meaningful purpose.

According to Shantall (2003) the interaction between counsellor and client ought to be regarded as a unique and *once given* opportunity that exists between two, or more, spiritually alive human beings with the aim of transcending beyond the selves towards the *noetic* dimension. The noetic dimension is described as the healthy human core (Shantall, 2003). It can, however, become blocked or clouded by psycho-social pathology as well as fear of commitments and responsibilities related to the discovery of meaning (Frankl, 2006).

The aim of logo-analysis would be to redirect a client's attention away from hyper-reflecting on pathology-based distress towards a meaning-centred focus on that which is good, healthy and authentic. This does not imply that logotherapy discards pathology. To the contrary, Frankl (1988) explains that psychopathology ought to be addressed. However, logotherapists warn that pathology ought not to become the primary focus of a person's life; rather, it ought to serve as the impetus to pursue and discover meaning (Marshall, 2009; Shantall, 2003).

The discovery of meaning appears to be particularly important for the healthy development for those in the late adolescents/young adulthood stage of life (18-25 years of age range) (Steger, Oishi & Kashdan, 2009). Developmental psychologists, such as Arnett (2000) and Erikson (1968), have identified the establishment of identity, exploration of career options and formation relationships as hallmarks of the late adolescence/young adulthood stage of life. Steger et al. (2009) indicate that the search for meaning appears to be adaptive during the aforementioned developmental phases. The presence of meaning in young people's lives may also serve as a protective factor against stressors and enhance well-being across the lifespan (Steger et al., 2009).

A logo-analysis framework

Wimberley (2011) expands on a logo-analysis approach, originally proposed by Lukas (1998), which could enable counsellors to assist at-risk students, especially those in the late adolescence/young adulthood developmental phases, to search for and discover meaning. Wimberley's (2011) approach, consisting of six stages, is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Logo-analysis: A Six Step Model.

Step	Focus	Goals of session	Techniques	Homework
1	Identify the psycho-social concern	Establish the relationship Separate the client's identity from the problem Identify when the client's life is problem free	Socratic dialogue Identify logo-hints	Create a uniqueness list - clients are tasked to create a list of areas (e.g. activities, experiences and relationships) in which they cannot be replaced
2	Identify what scope of free action is available	Move client from victim role Educate on the healthy noetic core	Socratic dialogue Dereflection Attitude modulation	List making - identify possibilities, choices and consequences
3	Identify what options are available to the client	Move to the conscious what is unconscious Emphasise scope for free action	Socratic dialogue	Value profiling
4	Identify the most meaningful option	Assist client to discover the authentic self Identify resources that are available Activate the defiant power of the human spirit	Socratic dialogue	Mountain top exercise
5	Identify the options that the client wants to put into action	Reduction of symptoms Activation of meaning possibilities	Socratic dialogue 'Act as if'	'Act as if' in different situations
6	Termination	Identify the role of meaning-directed tension	Socratic dialogue Self-transcendence	Meaning-centred goals

Table 1 explains that the logotherapist/counsellor focuses on (1) establishing rapport, and (2) problem clarification and definition, during the initial consultation. Lukas (1998) explains that a comprehensive understanding of the problem will also bring about heightened insight into problem-free areas. The logotherapeutic technique of *Socratic dialogue* is used to draw insight from the client's healthy noetic dimension. Shantall (2003) describes Socratic dialogue as a technique where the logotherapist poses questions to the client in such a way as to illuminate and elicit unconscious dreams, hopes and motivations. The use of Socratic dialogue is illustrated by means of examples in the case example that follows. Shantall (2003) continues by stating that both the counsellor and client ought to focus on the meanings that present during each unfolding moment - these are referred to as *logo-hints*.

In contrast to traditional pathology-based counselling efforts that focus on a disease-orientated clinical understanding, logotherapy focuses on identifying logo-hints and building on the meaning-opportunities and tasks that clients can fulfil - in other words, the scope for *free action* is highlighted. This helps to establish a meaning-centred tension between *who the person currently is* and *who the person authentically ought to be* - this is further examined by the client via the *uniqueness* homework exercise (Frankl, 2006).

The overarching aim of the second step is to assist the client to de-reflect from a prominent problem-focussed stance towards a noetic-based focus. This is predicated through

Socratic dialogue and attitude modulation. The concept of *attitude modulation* refers to directing the client's attention towards that which is good, authentic and meaningful in life, as well as areas where creative, experiential or attitudinal values can be realised (Marshall, 2009). This logo-analysis step is akin to a positive psychology approach with its emphasis on human strengths (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Even though both logotherapy and positive psychology emphasise that which is best about being human, there is an important distinction to be made: logotherapy focusses on how humans can discover meaning amidst, or in the face of, stressful challenges, while positive psychology tends to emphasise the study of strengths within more benign contexts (Frankl, 2006; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

The options that were identified during the second step are now, in the third stage, collected without evaluation (Lukas, 1998). As homework, clients are requested to consider the values that they most cherish in life: to name, define as well as reflect on practical examples when these values were realised.

The aim of step four is to initiate the meaningful search for the *authentic self*. This refers to the self that the client *ought to be* and/or meaning tasks that could be pursued and completed. This process enables clients to uncover the defiant power of the human spirit (Wimberley, 2011). The *mountain top* homework exercise requires from clients to metaphorically view their lives from a mountain top. The people, such as role models, as well as values and experiences that were/are most meaningful to them, are identified and its impact on their lives evaluated.

In step five clients select the most meaningful options that could be put into practical action. Counsellors propose that clients *act as if* the options were already part of their psycho-social profiles. In other words, clients draw on the uniquely human capacity of imagination to envisage their lives as already dedicated to the pursuit of meanings, values and important tasks.

The logo-analysis process is concluded in step six via a reflective and meaning-centred discussion about clients' experiences, the tensions that were established between *who they are* and *ought to be* as well as future meaning-centred goals. Hutzell and Eggert's (2009) meaning-centred and purposeful goals workbook could be made available to clients in an attempt to enhance their future meaning journeys. Bibliotherapy, such as reading Frankl's (2006) book, *Man's search for meaning*, can serve as additional positive enforcement. Additionally, Vail and Crudup (2011) suggest that watching logotherapy-themed movies, such as *The company men* and *Rabbit hole* could be recommended to clients.

Wimberley (2011) cautions that the six step logo-analysis approach ought to be regarded as a guide and not as a prescribed solution when working with university students. This means that counsellors and clients may work through the process over more, or fewer, than six sessions.

A CASE EXAMPLE

Background to the case

Peter (pseudonym), a 22 year old second year student, consulted with the author, who acted in the capacity of student counsellor, regarding the numerous stressful challenges that he was experiencing. According to Peter he was in a *state of desperation* when he consulted with the author. Amongst others, he had failed his academic subjects during the first semester examination (of the year of consultation), struggled to manage strong emotions, especially anger, suffered from poor self-esteem and grappled under social challenges. Furthermore, he wanted to withdraw from his everyday responsibilities, experienced a sense of lethargy and had little energy to set and pursue life and academic goals - something that he used to cherish. Moreover, Peter experienced a strong external locus of control; he felt as if he did not have the capacity to initiate constructive action in response to psycho-social challenges, struggled to realise the meaningful opportunities embedded in his academic training (an aspect that created

a significant amount of guilt) and felt helpless against the *unfairness of the world*, specifically regarding his parents' struggling financial and social situation.

Ethical considerations

The author fulfils a dual role in reporting on this case study. Firstly, as a student counsellor, his ethical responsibility lies with the client. The role of counsellor requires an empathic stance and disciplined subjectivity to facilitate a meaningful counselling process. Secondly, as researcher who is reporting on the aforementioned process, the author is challenged to remain objective and report on the case example in an attempt to disseminate information with academic peers. In order to address his ethical responsibility towards the client, informed consent was obtained from Peter to use his case and logo-analysis experience as illustration. Peter agreed to this because, amongst others, he believed that his struggles ought to serve as inspiration for other students. A pseudonym is used to protect Peter's identity and no identifying information is included in this article. The author worked with Peter's case as part of his Intermediate level training in logotherapy, under the auspices of the Viktor Frankl Institute of Logotherapy (Dallas, Texas). As part of the mentioned training the author attended regular supervision sessions that were facilitated national and international trainers in logotherapy at the Unisa Centre for Applied Psychology. Peter provided informed consent for the use of counselling material, such as process notes and session transcripts, for the mentioned training.

Application of Wimberley's approach

The author adopted a logotherapeutic stance and regarded the interaction with Peter as a *true encounter* between two spiritually alive human beings. In other words, it was not just a haphazard or meaningless encounter, but rather a destined, once in a lifetime opportunity that beckoned both participants to speak, listen and continue the search each for their own, and for the other's, respective, meaningful connections to life. Thus, the counselling sessions were regarded as authentic encounters that were meant to uplift Peter towards the discovery of meaning notwithstanding psycho-social challenges.

During the first logo-analysis session Peter spoke openly - apparently for the first time in his life - about the challenges and problems that he had encountered. To identify a baseline for the presence of meaning in Peter's life the author asked him to complete the Purpose in Life (PIL) Test, which serves as an empirical measure of Frankl's *meaning* concept (Hutzell, 1988). Research has substantiated the validity and reliability of the PIL Test (Meier & Edwards, 1974; Zika & Chamberlain, 1992). While the PIL Test is not a classified psychometric measure, it can be used as a counselling tool by expertly trained and experienced, or under the supervision of such, logotherapists (Van Jaarsveld, 2004). Rogina and Quilitch (2010) suggest that the PIL Test be utilised in a pre-and post-intervention mode as a means of assessing the client's progress.

Peter obtained a score 82 on the PIL Test, which points a *lack of meaning* in life. The result from the PIL Test was contextualised and discussed with Peter. He indicated that he did experience a significant lack of meaningful purpose in his life. During the feedback session Peter also explained that he *felt an inner calling* that he was meant to do something important with his life; that his life, the struggles that he had encountered as well as the achievement of being a first generation university student, endowed him with a significant responsibility that he wanted to fulfil; an opportunity that he could not allow to go to waste. This indicates the importance of providing feedback to clients regarding scores obtained via psychological measures, when used as part of, amongst others, the logo-analysis, or other, processes: the feedback process enabled Peter to reflect on his life and, instead of *categorising* him, it served a meaningful goal in itself, i.e. to search for and discover meaning in life.

During session two the author used a series of Socratic questions (example, *Tell me about yourself when you are at your best*) to invite Peter to search for meaning potential in his life. The prominent logo-hint that emerged from the Socratic questioning was Peter's sense that he was meant to realise his potential in life; he hesitantly verbalised the belief that his life could not just be determined by the dire social conditions that he was born into. During this session Peter was able to create the perspective that meaning may be possible in his life; that he may be able to achieve something significant in his life. The homework assignment - to create a uniqueness list - afforded Peter the opportunity to entertain the belief that he had important tasks to fulfil in his life.

The aforementioned initiated a cognitive shift whereby Peter was able to de-reflect away from a prominent focus on psycho-social challenges towards meaning-centred opportunities. The cognitive shift was discussed and reflected upon for at least another three sessions. It was only during the fifth session that the meaning-centred realisation broke through Peter's defensive armoury.

In session five, which was still concerned with step one as indicated in Table 1, Peter's emotions broke through and he was able to express the overwhelming sadness that had characterised his life up to that point. He indicated that it was the first time that he could be *weak* (i.e. cry in front of someone) and still experience a sense of *strength* afterwards. This afforded the opportunity for the author to introduce the concept of the *healthy noetic core* as well as to initiate the shift from the victim-role as indicated in step two (see Table 1). Peter was requested to complete the list-making exercise as homework.

During session six the emphasis shifted towards the options that were available to Peter (step three, Table 1). The list-making exercise in step two provided further insight into the *scope of free of action*, i.e. his ability and freedom to make informed choices, which existed despite the omnipresence of life stressors. More specifically, Peter came to realise that writing poems, which was something that he had been engaged in as a lifelong hobby, was a form of *free action* that he could draw on to discover meaning when confronted by difficult challenges. Through this creative avenue, he could address tragic triad challenges and articulate his sadness as *experiences of meaningful beauty*. Peter completed the value profiling exercise as homework and identified three core values that were important to him, namely leadership, courage and discipline.

Peter's three prominent values served as the starting point to discuss and reflect upon his *authentic self* during session seven. In other words, the person that he was called to be in spite of the distressing challenges that he had faced in his life. Peter felt that he could make valuable contributions to other students who had been enduring similar challenges and set the meaning-centred goal to become involved with a student organisation where he could provide assistance and/or mentor other students. This goal could be considered self-transcendent in nature, because Peter's focus had shifted from an exclusive contemplation regarding self-interests towards reaching out to others. In order to concretise the growing sense of meaning-centred opportunities, Peter completed the mountain top exercise as homework. His mother emerged as a primary source of inspiration for him. She was a domestic worker who, through the act of self-sacrifice, was able to send him to university - Peter came to understand this as a self-transcendent gift from his mother. This served as the impetus to realise both experiential (expressing gratitude for the gift), creative (investing the time and energy to optimally utilise his educational opportunity) and attitudinal (success is not measured by money, but by pursuing meaningful tasks despite suffering) values.

During session eight Peter indicated that many of his initial symptoms had dissipated. He was no longer concerned with feelings of inferiority because he was trying to make a difference to the lives of others - Frankl (1988) argues that meaning becomes comprehensible when reaching out to others and/or an important task. His concerns with the unfairness of the

world had been replaced with gratitude for the sacrificial efforts that his mother made to contribute to his education. As a means of rising above his social challenges, Peter had taken a part-time job at a local restaurant. This afforded him the opportunity to supplement the meagre funding that he was receiving from his parents. He had also become aware of an opportunity to join a university-based organisation that supported students. The author challenged Peter to *act as if* he had already attained his meaning-centred goals during the coming week. He was later, subsequent to termination of the counselling process, elected as chairperson of the university-based organisation. He utilised his position of influence to, amongst others, mentor junior students and refer those in need of psycho-social assistance to the student counselling centre.

Sessions nine and ten served as the termination phase. Peter had been able to actualise the contents of the meaning triad despite tragic triad challenges. This made him aware of the meaningful opportunities and his *freedom towards* psycho-social challenges. The author provided Peter with a copy of Frankl's (2006) *Man's search for meaning* as well as Hutzell and Eggert's (2009) meaning and purposeful goal setting programme. During the final session Peter again completed the PIL Test and obtained a score of 128, which points to definite meaning and purpose in life (Hutzell, 1988). When compared to his initial score of 82, there appeared to be a significant quantitative improvement in the activation of Peter's will to meaning. He substantiated this by sharing a series of insightful experiences and realisations. What became apparent to the author was that Peter's initial external locus of control was replaced by an internal meaning-directed locus of control, which enabled him to realise his inner potential regardless of the omnipresent psycho-social stressors of life.

The use of ten sessions to complete Peter's counselling process may be regarded as problematic with a higher education context where the preference would be to focus on short-term and problem-solving counselling efforts, i.e. four to six sessions (Van Heerden, 2009). However, when considering the complexity of Peter's case - an entanglement of psychological, social and academic challenges seen against the backdrop of a first generation student who also has to deal with the transition from high school to university and address developmental tasks - the use of a longer treatment plan could be justified. Additionally, the emphasis was placed on being of the greatest possible value to Peter, i.e. the client. The author was also fortunate to have the required time and resources at his disposal to manage the longer-term logotherapy process. However, this does point to one of the challenges that student counsellors have to address: working with limited resources, such as personnel shortages, financial restraints and personal capacity, while being faced with ever increasing numbers of students who live in a country characterised by numerous psycho-social stressors (Van Heerden, 2009).

Subsequent to the termination phase Peter kept in contact with the author and informed him that he was able to complete his undergraduate degree, enrolled for postgraduate studies on a part-time basis and had obtained employment within his field of study. Peter's greatest insight was that his experiences were not in vain but served as the impetus to awaken him to the existence of meaning despite the inevitable challenges that students, and others, experience in life; that between stimulus and response, humans always have the freedom, and therefore also the responsibility, to make choices.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this article was to discuss the potential value of logotherapy within a student counselling context. Students often initiate contact with student counsellors because of problem-focussed behaviours. From a logotherapeutic perspective, student counsellors have the task of assisting them to not only effectively deal with their psycho-social challenges, but also to define it as a call to identify and pursue meaningful tasks. Frankl (2006) suggests that if we, as counsellors, only focus on people's pathologies, we make them worse. However, if

we see them as capable of addressing life's demands via their talents and strengths, we make them extraordinary. Their lives begin to embrace all the facets of being optimally human; the realisation of the meaning triad becomes possible in spite of the tragic triad challenges and they move from the periphery of life towards the centre stage by fully embracing their meaning-centred tasks and responsibilities.

The paradoxical challenge that student counsellors face is to assist young people to adequately address and manage challenges that are constantly emerging in a progressively more complex world. While it is essential for counsellors to address and attempt to assist clients to alleviate pathological symptomology, logotherapy serves as a complementary approach to endow students with the capacities to search for meaning and grow despite, or maybe even because of, the complex psycho-social challenges that they will inevitably encounter. Logo-analysis could therefore serve as a valuable approach to complement counsellors' existing therapeutic modalities, if the aim is to assist clients to search for and discover meaning in life. However, logo-analysis is a time-intensive therapeutic modality and may not always be practical or realistic within environments where resources may already overstretched.

The logo-analysis approach propounded in this article ought not to be regarded as a panacea. Rather, it serves as a guiding frame that offers structure to the, often challenging, aim of discovering meaning in apparently meaningless psycho-social challenges. Furthermore, it may enable student counsellors to reframe the psycho-social challenges, such as anxiety, depression and substance abuse, which are threatening the well-being of university students, as the impetus to search for meaning and present their accompanying awareness and discoveries to the world as gifts.

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