EXISTENTIAL DIALOGUE AS OPPORTUNITY FOR
PERSON’S PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPERIENCE
OF OWN LIFE RESOURCE AND LIFE POTENTIAL

T. Artyukhova, S. Nikulina
Krasnoyarsk State Medical University, Krasnoyarsk, Russia

Abstract

Existential dialogue is generally used in the context of searching for a way out from a difficult life situation. The article considers a novel approach to existential dialogue investigation in the context of possibility of one’s own life resource and living potential fulfillment. Drawing on their knowledge, people should be able to find more successful ways of goal achievement and reasonable health consumption and preservation in the course of active life and implementation of creative plans by means of life potential realization. It has been shown in psychological practice that an existential dialogue can serve as a resource for creation of conditions for people’s psychological experience and fulfillment of their own living potential. Understanding of one’s own resources and living potential helps to reinforce personal maturity as the basis for personal readiness to solve certain life tasks. Opportunity for a person’s psychological experience of their own life resource and living potential appears in the course of existential dialogue due to the use of various mechanisms, such as self-reflection, thinking aloud, goal-setting, and emotional response.

Keywords: life potential, life resource, person, psychological experience, existential dialogue

---

Artyukhova Tatyana Yurjevna – Candidate of Psychological sciences, Associate professor, Department of Pedagogic and Psychology, Krasnoyarsk State medical University;
Address: 71g, Kosmonavtov Street, Krasnoyarsk, 660127; phone:+7 (983) 504189;
E-mail: tartjuchova@mail.ru
Relevance

Understanding the importance of life resource and living potential of a person permeates the whole history of our civilization. On one hand, it is admitted that humans are the “paragon of animals”, on the other hand – humans are rather vulnerable, weak and most often limited in instrumental and personal capabilities in solving resource tasks which are set up by the objective reality.

A Spanish philosopher and publicist M. Unamuno most precisely describes the prospects of life resources and living potential fulfillment: “your essence, reader, mine, that of the man Spinoza, that of the man Butler, of the man Kant, and of every man who is a man, is nothing but the endeavour, the effort, which he makes to continue to be a man, not to die” (Unamuno, 1971).

State of the problem

At the present time there is contradiction between the following points. In one respect, a person needs considerable life resources to manage to understand all the innovations, to make necessary decisions, to change or take adequate measures against undesirable transformations or events in due time, to realize her/his own potential. But, at the same time, not everyone possesses the capacities necessary to cope with innovations through “discovering them for oneself”.

Drawing on their knowledge, people should be able to find more successful ways of goal achievement and reasonable health consumption and preservation in the course of active life and implementation of creative plans by means of living potential realization. The existential dialogue is considered as a resource for people’s psychological experience and fulfillment of their own living potential, the latter being defined by life maturity as relatively complete readiness of the person to solve certain life tasks.

In dictionaries, the concept of “potential” (from Latin – “power”) is provided as a set of opportunities, sources, means, inventories, etc. which can be put into operation to achieve the desired goals and complete certain tasks; capabilities of an individual, of a society.

The concept of “potential” refers to the person’s activity, but the carrier of potential is a particular person. Potential characterizes the subject’s condition with regard to its capability
to perform activities of certain types and modalities. These are determined by a complex of biological and social factors in their unity and interrelation. Activities are processes of a person’s potential implementation. A person is considered as a specialist, a professional when he or she has suitable knowledge and skills, i.e. certain potential giving him or her capability to do high quality work. And this person is expected to actually demonstrate this level of performance in his or her professional activity. It is a very important point, as potential is always associated with expectations. If the person does not meet these expectations, it means that somehow they were prevented from doing so, or that their potential was identified incorrectly (Längle, 2015; Sinclair, & Chochinov, 2012; Sanceverino, 2016; Štrancar, 2014; Stankovskaya, 2014).

The concept of “resource” describes the quantitative measure of capability to perform a certain activity and conditions which allow receiving a desirable outcome by means of certain conversions.

In contemporary psychology, the content of the concept of “resource” is rather various. Within the scope of this article, we draw on N.E. Vodopyanova’s definition of resources as “the internal and external variables promoting psychological stability in stress situations”. According to the author, these variables “are emotional, conative, cognitive and behavioral constructs emerged by the person to ensure the person’s adaptation to stressful labor and living situations”, or “means (tools) used by the person to transform the interaction with a stress situation”.

In this study, two classes of resources are distinguished: personal and environmental. Personal resources (psychological, professional, physical) represent skills and capabilities of a person; environmental resources reflect availability of instrumental, moral, and emotional support existing in the person’s social environment (family members, friends, colleagues) and material security of vital activity of people who endured stress or live under stressogenic conditions (Vodopyanova, 2009).

As a complex system endued with various life resources, a person often worsens the situation, lowers his or her personal performance and success while using these resources. To improve the situation, it is necessary to recover and develop personal resources which
have recently been being referred to as “personal potential”, “life potential”, and “life resource” in scientific literature (Wolfe, 2016; Sousa, 2015; Schneider, 2015; Gusarenko, & Tyazhelnikova, 2009; Kudashov, 2009, 2012.).

As it has been stressed by V.B. Chupina and Yu.V. Zhivayeva, it is more reasonable to consider the concept of “living potential of the personality” as a generalized system characteristic of individual, physical, spiritual and psychological capacities of a person. According to the authors, taken together, these capacities provide the person’s self-actualization within the available social and cultural space. This complex of properties is suggested to allow the person to make decisions and to control his/her behavior, considering and assessing situations, proceeding, primarily, from available life resources (Chupina, Zhivayeva, 2012).

Both life resource and living potential include categories of availability and possibility; they bring a sense and purpose of existence. For understanding/development/use of these resources a person has to realize/live/experience his/her purpose as an ultimate goal of the system development. Having achieved this goal, the person becomes capable to perform his/her activity in a certain subject domain successfully and efficiently, as well as to create a novel element in the objective reality, in “the individual life cycle of the person” following the correlation between the “person” and the “world” categories, defined by S.L. Rubenstein (Rubenstein, 2003).

**Results and their discussion**

Our study draws on the postulate that the personality as an integrity is associated with individual life as integrity. The personality existence and its changes caused by its interaction with the world is life in itself.

The person, the world and life as existential realities can be described by means of psychological categories.

Existential psychology is a science about human consciousness and subjective reality, the latter being a reflection of life in an image of an individual life experience. Consciousness allows people to correlate themselves to their own life, to set up and try to solve problems of individual existence, to realize living potential and life resource.
E. Fromm writes about it clearly and expressively: “Consciousness makes man somehow an anomaly of nature, grotesque irony of the universe. It is - part of nature, subject to its physical laws and unable to change them. At the same time he seems to be opposed to nature, separated from it, even though it is part of it... And because it has a self-consciousness, he sees his weakness and finiteness of its existence. He is never free from reflexes. He lives in the eternal bifurcation”. As Fromm points out, as a unique living being, man feels uncomfortable in nature and, consequently, needs to seek himself new solutions to the contradictions of his problematic existence (Fromm, 1994).

To overcome/decide/realize one’s identity and abilities/resources it is important to create conditions for psychological experience of these parameters.

There is a variety of definitions for the “experience” concept which are focused upon a variety of aspects, differentiating, identifying or not associating experience with emotional process at all (Ilyin, 2007). In particular, it is determined as a “special integral unit of consciousness” (Vygotsky, 2000) and “direct reflection by the subject of its own states, but not reflection of features and correlations of external emotiogenic objects. The latter is knowledge” (Vekker, 1989).

Obtaining knowledge of oneself, of one’s own vital resources and of one’s own living potential is possible in the course of an existential dialogue.

This study draws on the ideas of I.O. Loginova who showed diagnostic, developing and prognostic benefits of the existential dialogue, which provides opportunities for revealing the most probable directions of personal development at the intersection of opportunities available to the system and provided by environment (Loginova, 2010).

In view of this, during the existential dialogue conditions for introspection directed towards personal life experiences, as well as towards experience of life potential and life resources, are created. In particular, the method of understanding is highlighted: human deeds, events of life should be described and understood correctly. Interpretation is conducted by means of concepts and these concepts interrelations which belong to the researcher. Without an interpreter as a developed system no understanding is possible. A famous Russian psychologist A.A. Kronik introduced the concept of dual (causal and target) determination of
personal life events. All events take place either “in order that” or “because” (Kronik, quoted after Druzhinin, 2000).

According to F.E. Vasilyuk, experience/activity is an independent process correlating a subject to the world and solving his or her real life problems. The scientist considers experience as “a special activity for reorganization of the inner world directed to establish semantic compliance between consciousness and existence; overall objective of which is increase of life conceptualization” (Vasilyuk, 1994).

During an existential dialogue “emotionally loaded conditions and phenomena of reality experienced by the subject (as a rule, unconscious resources, potential opportunities, life resources) are concretized and objectified, starting to be considered by the subject as events of his /her own life (Vasilyuk, 1994).

Personal existential analysis creates conditions for people’s experience of their own past history. An existential dialogue actualizes the capacity of the person’s spiritual dimension to deal with their inner and external world and to find an adequate individual way of behavior in a specific situation. This process allows “to trigger” resource conditions which people could not realize before.

As masters of an existentialism note, existential analysis is aimed at psychological birth of a free and responsible person who is the active operational center of his or her own life, not just a passively reacting individual. By means of existential dialogue the person obtains intention to mobilize his or her capability of making decisions which is based on active access to emotionality in dialogic exchange between external and internal situational realities (Buber, 1973; Frankl, 1967; Jaspers, 1974).

Having made the access to their emotionality available, people get the opportunity to develop authentic mindsets both towards the world and towards themselves. Having reunited in their authenticity with their internal essence, people become themselves.

In the course of an existential dialogue, people talk about their problems and about themselves, estimating their own life resources and living potential. The therapist, in turn, tries to assure them of completeness, realness and clarity of information. In the course of problem description, the patients reexperience these problems.
Then, a detailed investigation is carried out on what the person has experienced in a specific problem situation from the present or the past, what resources he or she used. For this purpose, it is very important to consider carefully what impression was produced on the person by the situation. This impression consists of vacuum response at two levels: at the level of unconsciously arising “primary” emotion or feeling, and at the level of also unconsciously arising impulse to do some specific act immediately. This spontaneous reaction reflects the person’s subjective perception of objective facts of the situation.

Work on understanding why this particular emotion arose spontaneously in this situation; by means of what resources that particular action was made becomes an important component of the procedure. The person makes efforts to understand what the situation represents objectively. It is made for the purpose of deepening of integration of this particular experience into the general context of the person’s past and present life. The acquired understanding serves as the basis for personal assessment of the event from the point of view of conscience and, thus, for the judgmental process concerning the situation. It establishes strong foundation for adopting a personal attitude towards this experience, this attitude being the basis for the person’s capacity to face the situation that appeared irresoluble before.

Personal process of work with a life situation is completed when the person has found a way to express him or herself, that is the person has defined what and when he or she can and wants to do, as well, by what means (life resources and living potential) he will be able to implement it. It serves as the basis for personal behavior in a certain situation.

By means of the existential dialogue due to operation of various mechanisms – self-reflection, thinking aloud, goal-setting, emotional response – there is an opportunity for psychological experience of one’s own life resource and living potential.

This process triggers the person’s ability to dialogue and, respectively, his/her ability to “genuine meeting” that is reported to be the basis for the fulfillment of human existence (Buber, 1973; Scheler, 1980).

The existential dialogue is associated with deep self-reflection. When a person deeply reflects on his or her situation in the world, on life, limits and opportunities; when he or she concerns the ground of all other grounds – the person inevitably meets existence realities.
According to I. Yalom, these “deep structures” can be called as “final realities”. Moreover, “extreme experience which is associated with so-called “boundary” situations – such as threat of personal death, making an important irreversible decision or crash of basic sense developing system, serve as a catalyst of the reflection process” (Yalom, 1999).

According to Spinoza’s philosophy, all that exists is striving to continue to exist. In fact, an individual bears complete responsibility for their own world – in other words, a person is the Demiurge of their own world. From the existential point of view, to investigate deeply – doesn’t mean to study the past; it means to relegate daily worries to the background and to reflect deeply on the existential situation. It means not to reflect on how one has become what he or she is, but on the problem of what the person is. The past, more precisely, memory of the past is important insofar as it is a part of our present existence. Our past affected our current attitude towards final realities of life. In the framework of existential therapy, the primary tense is “the future - becoming – present” (Yalom, 1999).

The person finds oneself in tension of boundary determination demanding situations. According to K. Jaspers, existential philosophy is designed to reestablish lost communication between human consciousness and life: it uses all objective knowledge and thinking bringing the person out of knowledge limits to help them become themselves: “It awakens what it does not itself know; it elucidates and gives impetus, but it does not fixate” (Jaspers, 1991).

Conclusion

In view of this, it is possible to conclude, that

1) Existential dialogue in psychological practice can be used to create conditions for person’s psychological experience and fulfillment of their own living potential;

2) Understanding of one’s own resources and living potential promotes strengthening of personal maturity as the basis of personal readiness to solve certain life tasks;

3) In the course of an existential dialogue by means of various mechanisms such as self-reflection, thinking aloud, goal-setting, emotional response, an opportunity appears for person’s psychological experience of their own life resource and living potential.

Following the ideas of Joseph Brodsky, declared by him during his Nobel Lecture, “Regardless of whether one is a writer or a reader, one’s task consists first of all in mastering
a life that is one’s own, not imposed or prescribed from without, no matter how noble its appearance may be. For each of us is issued but one life, and we know full well how it all ends. It would be regrettable to squander this one chance on someone else’s appearance, someone else’s experience, on a tautology - regrettable all the more because the heralds of historical necessity, at whose urging a man may be prepared to agree to this tautology, will not go to the grave with him or give him so much as a thank-you” (Frängsmyr, Allén, 1993).

References


