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„When I Found Myself in Times of Trouble...“

- Bringing Back Meaningfulness and Joy to Our Workplaces

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Overview

• Challenges of the 2010’s
• The Concept of Psychological Flexibility
• Results of a Survey
• Conclusions
We live in times in which the health care system is going to be basically transformed. It shall be changed from a social practice into a health market. Concepts that were developed for the industries are nowadays applied to almost every area of society.

G. Maio 2014
Rising economic pressure in health care

Rising utilization of mental health services but limited manpower resources

Enormous acceleration of information, processes and knowledge with "Digital Age"

Challenges of the 2010's

Pic.Source: http://www.aerztezeitung.de/
To stay healthy in mental health care...

- How to cope with
  - Feelings of time pressure
  - Worries about economic pressure
  - Thoughts of not doing/knowing/engaging enough
  - Fears of falling short
  - Frustration about systems and authorities that seem to push people around .... .... ....

?
• People with stronger resilience
  • are more connected to their personal and meaningful values
  • are more driven by intrinsic motivation than by external factors
  • are more likely to stay healthy (endurance, capacity to relax, pain tolerance)


Resilience and Values Orientation
• Sense of coherence
  • Comprehensibility
  • Manageability
  • Meaningfulness

(Antonovsky 1997)
What works better to stay sane?

• „Be always happy“ or „Allow yourself to be angry“
• „Hold on“ or „Give up“
• „Push through“ or „Cave in“
• „Care for oneself“ or „Care for others“
The Concept of Psychological Flexibility

- To do what is necessary to achieve meaningful goals in a given situation (Values/Context)

- That can mean to cave in or to push through depending on the context

- To be aware of thoughts and feelings in the here and now (not as a goal for itself but a requirement)
Psychological flexibility: „Let it Be“

- Mindfully open up to thoughts and feelings
- Define your values and engage in values-oriented actions
• PF is closely related to the concepts of resilience and the salutogenic model
• PF is a position and attitude but also a skill that can be trained

The Concept of Psychological Flexibility
• The core target of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is to strengthen „Psychological Flexibility“

• Core aim of ACT is to help people to live a rich and meaningful life – even in the face of difficulties

• What we teach our patients: is it useful for ourselves?

• Previous studies with ACT training show promising results (Biglan et al. 2013, Frögely et al. 2015, Flaxman et al. 2013)

ACT promotes Psychological Flexibility
• 1 psychiatric ward and 2 day-treatment-centers of the KEH (Berlin) work with multiprofessional ACT manuals
• All team members received training in ACT (at minimum 6*2h curriculum + ongoing supervision)
• Anonymous survey with 5 questions on a 5 point NAS of the teams of 2 day treatment centers in 06/2017
A survey of 2 teams working with ACT (results)

„I apply the ACT principles not only to the patients but also to my personal life“

N=17
"...I am more mindful in my daily life"

Since I work with ACT ...
"...I am more open towards difficult thoughts and feelings"

\[N=17\]

Since I work with ACT ...
"...I am acting more in line with my personal values"

Since I work with ACT ...
"...I can cope better with work-related stress"

Since I work with ACT ...

Fully Agree: 5
Undecided: 5
Strongly disagree: 2
N=17
"To work with ACT has a positive impact on our work as a team"

N=17

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fully Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
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• 82% of team members stated to apply the ACT principles not only to patients but to their personal life

• Applying a psychotherapeutic method that promotes Psychological Flexibility to patients seem to have a positive impact on health care-professionals self-perceived resilience:
  • Mindfulness and acceptance (mean 4,17/5 NAS)
  • Coping with work-related stress (mean 3,11/5 NAS)
  • Intrinsic motivated action by personal values (mean 4,47/5 NAS)
  • Team building (mean 4,05/5 NAS)

Discussion (I)
Applying ACT to the team members personal lifes was not a training intention but a „side effect“ of their daily work with ACT.

The positive findings of our survey were particularly interesting in the mirror of 3 main barriers:

- Both of the teams underwent severe restructuring processes during the last 12 month
- One of the teams had to substitute the absence of a full-time team member over more than 6 month
- The survey was done during the time when the new german-wide financing system for psychiatry („PsychVVG“ – analog to the DRG´s in somatic medicine) was introduced to the department

Discussion (II)
• Cirtizism of the resilience concepts point out that employers might be taught to tolerate too much and to function under inhuman circumstances: „Neoliberalism in psychotherapy“ (Ottomayer 2013)

• On the other hand values orientation means also to fight for ones valued goals and to contribute in shaping social environments in line with ones meaningful values- even in the face of difficulties (Frankl 1972)
• In times of harsh and rapid changes to health care systems, health care professionals face a lot of challenges that demand resilience and psychological flexibility.

• Psychotherapy interventions like ACT that promote psychological flexibility in psychiatric patients bear also the potential to be beneficial to health care professionals.

• A naturalistic survey of two teams working with ACT show promising results but larger well designed studies are needed.

Conclusions
Thanks to the ACTeams!