

Strategic approaches to managing the development of the counselling profession in Hong Kong

Pui Chi TSE¹

The counselling profession in Hong Kong has developed for nearly half a century, but it is still like a young child. The lack of government and public recognition has created a lot of difficulties. The demand for counselling is continuously increasing while its recognition as a unique profession remains low due to its generic nature and the cultural context. This paper discusses the strategic approaches appropriate for the Hong Kong Chinese culture in the development of the counselling profession. This study begins with the historical review of Hong Kong's counselling development as the ground for further examination. The related concepts in management, such as strategic thinking and planning, values, power, and training, are put forth as stimulation for thoughts and action plans for counselling leaders. Managing the strategic plans and options for successful development demands clearer attention and strategic commitments from the leaders and professionals.

Keywords: *Counselling, Regulation, Education, Representation, Supervision.*

Managing counselling professionalization

Professional status and identity are critical developmental issues for many professionals. Deliberately long discussions on professional identity within the counselling profession have taken place in the United States since the 1980s (Fitzgerald & Osipow, 1986; Watkins, 1983; Watkins, Lopez, Campbell, & Himmell, 1986). Promotion of a core identity as a counsellor has been the prominent challenge for decades. Professionalization is an evolutionary process for occupational groups to improve their social professional status (Pavalko, 1971) for the protection and security of professional members (Goode, 1960). The word "profession" carries esteemed and privileged connotations associated with social and occupational status (Pavalko, 1971). Professional issues, including training and education, accreditation and licensing, professional membership and identity are all crucial for the advancement (Romano, 1992; Simpson 1993).

The training of counselling professionals is a marvelously complex process. It possesses a pedagogical nature which provides counsellors platforms and/or shelters

to strengthen their competitiveness and competencies by continuous refreshment of their skills and knowledge through formal training. Counselling professional development in Hong Kong is even more sophisticated because of the constraints from Eastern culture on a Western health discipline and other specific stumbling blocks in the past years.

Before moving on to the discussion of the applicability of strategic management of development in this field, I will start off the discussion with the historical development of counselling education in Hong Kong for a contextual understanding. The pace of historical change constitutes the unique rhythm of professional development. And then I will use some of the essential components of the strategic approach in counselling education to assist in the discussion of counselling education management here in Hong Kong.

Contextual understanding of counselling professional development in Hong Kong

History, culture, and changes

Hong Kong was a British colony for almost 150 years. "As many historians acknowledge, Hong Kong was not a typical colony" (Sweeting, 2007, p. 91). Hong Kong, in terms of its roots, has a deep, long-standing and well-established Chinese culture. In the early days, Hong Kong was mainly a Chinese migrant society, with most of its population coming from the South China

Corresponding Author: Dr. TSE, Pui Chi Email: pctse@hksyu.edu
¹Hong Kong Shue Yan University

region. The Chinese have their own means of sustaining and enhancing mental health. There is no concept of counselling in Chinese culture. At first, counselling was a totally imported product. Foreigners played a dominant role in the procurement of early counselling services. Up to now, the development of counselling in Hong Kong has only spanned 40-50 years.

Although the history of counselling in Hong Kong is short, the emerging profession of counselling and psychotherapy was unique in this community. In order to understand the development of counselling education in Hong Kong, a look at the historical and sociopolitical context is needed.

The Chinese still embrace collectivism while the West clings to individualism; the effects of globalization have brought forth the erosion of boundaries. The basic value orientation of two cultures is different. Western individualistic worldviews and the collectivistic Eastern worldviews clashed with each other. This laid the foundation for the difficulty in counselling education in Hong Kong. Individualism stresses individual initiatives, a greater focus on the self and emotional independence (Hofstede, 1980). It also emphasizes self-reliance and freedom of choice, rights and duties, and personal growth. In contrast, collectivism emphasizes group goals over personal goals, stresses conformity and in-group harmony, and defines the self in relation to the group (Triandis, 1995). There is no emphasis on personal growth, but only group fame. The individual is difficult to survive for one's own sake. Social pressure, such as family and peer groups, will attack a person when he or she strives for his or her own growth.

Besides, seeking help may reveal one's inadequacy and dependency (Nadler, 1990). There is a Chinese adage: "Problems within the family should not be discussed outside the family." It hurts the "Mianzi" if one's psychological problems are revealed to others. Social stigma attached to mental health service needs to be taken into consideration in Chinese culture. Mianzi literally means face in the Chinese language. Symbolically, having mianzi is the representation of one's access to power and privileges. Losing mianzi undermines one's power and social network. "Mianzi" serves the function of perceived social position and prestige within one's social network (Hwang, 1987). To talk to a stranger, a so-called counsellor, about one's own personal issues can be very threatening to a Chinese person. To gain mianzi is a common important goal among Chinese people. This is one of the major causes of the difficulties in counselling development in Chinese assimilated Hong Kong culture. If a culture does not openly accept counselling, there will be less demand in the market and counselling education thus has a poor ground to grow from.

Furthermore, Chinese people often downplay the severity of mental illness and choose to focus on the situations that generate the condition rather than the problem itself (Kleinman & Lin, 1981). It takes a very long time to cultivate the concepts of counselling among Chinese people. Culturally speaking, the efficacy of counselling and psychotherapy needed a long process of integration with Chinese traditions for local people to accept it. These cultural barriers have had an adverse effect on counselling development in the Chinese community. However, the trend of globalization could also facilitate the process of connection of this profession in the Hong Kong Chinese culture.

Huy & Mintzberg (2003) stated that there are three types of change: dramatic, systematic and organic. Dramatic change descends from the top management, systematic change is generated laterally, and organic change emerges from the grass roots. These three forces interact dynamically. "Change

has no meaning unless it is juxtaposed against continuity" (Huy & Mintzberg, 2003, p.79). Changes sometimes facilitate but sometimes hinder its development. The rise of globalization, aside from the expansion of trade and investment across borders, has opened the door to cultural interchange.

Globalization is not the product of a single action, like switching on a light or starting a car engine. It is a historical process that has undoubtedly sped up enormously in the last ten years, but it is a permanent, constant transformation. (Sadler, 1993, p. 29).

Influx of Western knowledge as well as social movements has sped up the opportunity to provide counselling services for local needs.

Struggles, difficulties, and challenges

The counselling movement began as an attempt to meet society's developmental needs to resolve the widespread social discontent originating from two social uprisings and disturbances, which were spawned by the Cultural Revolution in China in 1966 and 1967 (Leung, 1999; Yu et al., 2010). These changes precipitated a series of social and political reforms instigated by the British government. The Hong Kong Government started to rely on voluntary organizations to provide related services for the community and crisis intervention. "Links between politics and education provide the bases for many of the mysteries of this period" (Sweeting 2007, p.13). The disturbances in the 1960s paved the way for expansion of social services to meet the social needs. According to Leung (1988), the first informal counselling service in Hong Kong was offered in 1967 at the Yang Memorial Social Service Center. In 1969 the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups started an experimental counselling programme staffed by an American trained counsellor in Hong Kong. We can say that organic change emerged from the grass roots in the community which provided fertile ground for the birth of counselling in Hong Kong. Organic change, which often proceeds as a challenge to authority, involves messy processes and tends to arise from the ranks without being formally managed (Huy & Mintzberg, 2003). However, Leung (1988) stated that at that time counselling was like an adopted child who came from a very different background trying to fit into a new family in Hong Kong. Counselling faced a lot of challenges at this earliest stage. This child had not been nurtured properly. Publicizing counselling services was major work of the early counsellors in the 1970s (Leung, 1988).

In addition, with regard to the issue of professional identity, the role of counsellor in Hong Kong had no clear demarcation from social workers, clinical psychologists, and psychotherapists. The functions of a counsellor, however, are shared by various types of helping professionals, such as teachers, clinical psychologists, educational psychologists and social workers (Goodyear, 1984). They also provide counselling services in a variety of settings. Striving for a collective identity is not an exclusive issue for Hong Kong counsellors. The counselling identity confusion acts as a great hindrance to its development as a unique profession.

Counselling education in this early stage was scattered, unsystematic and Westernized. Prior to 1971 there were no formal training programmes on counselling in Hong Kong. The first formal counselling course was offered in 1977 at master's degree level at the Chinese University. The programme was academically oriented rather than focused on professional training (Leung, 1988). The government lacked a proactive

strategy to face the changes in society and had not made any effort to assist the professional growth of counselling. Of course the government's ignorance of the professional identity was one of the major factors. The government only recognized the social work discipline and registered social workers as part of the social service system. The professional identity of counselling graduates has not been recognized by the social service agencies. They could not find jobs and even when the government or an NGO employed them, they would be allocated to the social work system and positioned as lower than social workers. This discriminatory practice indeed affected the morale and professional esteem of counsellors.

In Hong Kong, education policy is usually subsequently developed from relevant economic developments and the policy-makers' foresights are often questioned (Sweeting, 2007). Long-term planning in the field of education is devalued, and counselling education is no exception. Counselling services are time-consuming and money consuming. Counsellors spend hours and hours, listening and serving individuals, which is not economical use of resources in such a pragmatic society like Hong Kong. The provision of counselling services is regarded as very expensive. The government therefore neglected counselling education.

All the above struggles and difficulties have been significant contributors to the slow development of the counselling profession in Hong Kong.

Threats, dilemmas and opportunities

Change is a natural process in society. Crises, blows, and distress are general features of the changing world and symbolize hardship and distress. Crises and threats can sometimes be viewed in functional terms as facilitators (Rosenthal et al., 2001).

Since its return to China, Hong Kong has undergone more changes, and the confusion over the professional identity of counselling has seen no major improvement under the government's social service hierarchy. A few critical policy changes have brought benefits as well as threats to counselling development since 1997.

Social services encountered a great change when entering into the year 2000. The reform consisted of three parts: a Service Performance Monitoring System (SPMS), the Lump Sum Grant subvention policy (LSGS), and opening up service contracts to business enterprises for competitive bidding alongside non-profit organizations (NPOs) (Lee, 2005). The essential features of the LSGS for subsidizing social welfare, which became effective on 1 April 2000, are a flexible funding model based on a one-line vote, in which NPOs have the flexibility to decide their staffing structures, salary levels, and other items of expenditure. NPOs can carry over unused funds to the next financial year (Social Welfare Department, 2000). Ninety percent of the social services in Hong Kong are offered by NPOs that are largely subsidized by the government. About 346 NPOs receive 70% of their major funding from the government, with the total public funding amounting to 2.4% of the total public expenditure, or 0.5% of GDP (Lee, 2005). These government-subsidized NPOs employ many staff, including trained professionals, welfare workers and child care workers. The launching of this governmental subvention policy has brought a dramatic change to social service agencies, arousing for and against voices among service operators regarding their resources management. This alternative structural implementation of resources certainly

brought chances and opportunities for counsellors. It created a lot of worries for social work training staff but rekindled hope for counselling graduates. The flexible funding model allows more freedom of choice in staffing. Counsellors thus have more chances to be employed and receive fair pay according to their competence and effort.

Prior to 2004, all counselling training programmes held by universities were master's degree level. Hong Kong Shue Yan University is the only university to offer the Honours Diploma in Counselling and Guidance since 1977. In 2004, Hong Kong Shue Yan University was successfully accredited the proficiency to provide undergraduate training in counselling psychology in Hong Kong. It was a great stride forward in the history of counselling education in Hong Kong.

Although this big leap is an indicator of the better acceptance and recognition of the need for counselling training in the community as well as the community urge for counsellors, Yu and his colleagues conducted a survey on the public's understanding of counselling in Hong Kong in 2010 which revealed that the majority of respondents had no knowledge of counselling and no interest in this service. The counselling profession has undergone slow evolution in Hong Kong. Their research result

"confirms the tough reality that the counselling profession in Hong Kong is still in an early stage of development and faces a number of challenges. The next step is to use our findings to identify opportunities and devise strategies to remedy some of these issues." (Yu et al., 2010:48)

The increasing employment rate as counsellors in schools and agencies as reported by the graduates from the Counselling and Psychology programme is evidence that contributes to the success of accreditation. However, primary school counsellors, who are hired by tender and posts, are often awarded to the lowest bidders (Ngo & Zhao, 2016). The counsellors are critically underpaid with overloaded work. This is a total contradictory phenomenon.

Entering 2018, another sudden blow occurred in the counselling profession. This was of major concern regarding the development of the counselling profession. The Education Bureau of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region has recently issued a memorandum to primary schools about the implementation of the "one school social worker for each school" policy (Secretary for Education of the Education Bureau, 2018), leading to the termination of the financial allowance to hire school counsellors. Only social workers are instead employed to handle the counselling cases in school. This policy has not only aroused the attention of many existing school counsellors but also social workers who anticipate a far greater workload than they are currently facing (Ngo & Zhao, 2016). The relevant policies ignore the role and opinions of the counselling industry and are not moving towards optimizing the "comprehensive student guidance service".

Positively speaking, challenges can either be viewed as burdensome and oppositional but also as opportunities. On one hand, this policy has caused a great blow to the counselling profession especially for those who are working in schools; on the other hand, this is a chance to arouse the public attention of the counselling profession. In response to this change, the Asian Professional Counselling and Psychology Association (APCPA) has initiated the gathering of scholars, counsellors, teachers, principals and school counsellors, and the leaders of social services together to hold discussions in an open forum

on “Guardian Counselling, Professionalism, and comprehensive school Counselling System”. This also united counsellors together to hold press conferences and make noise in society, expressing the importance of the role of counselling services. As a result, this movement attracts more social attention. The journey of professional recognition is tough and there is still a long way to go.

Instead of feeling upset and frustrated about the development of the counselling profession, good strategic plans with proactive actions to tackle these challenges are significant.

Strategic approaches to counselling education management in Hong Kong

Management is a business concept which refers to the process of administration or the people who perform the act of management. It has its primary function of getting things done in a properly effective way. “Management” was a very bad word for voluntary nonprofit organizations (Drucker, 1990). Similar reactions are found in the education field. Management means “business” to them, but educators and social service providers did not want to treat such a meaningful mission as “education” or “social service”, as “a business”; thus, most of them believed that they did not need “management”. Actually, the functions of management consist of indispensable aspects such as creating policy, organizing, planning, and regulating resources and human behaviour in the organization. The economic, social change and political developments do affect counselling education, creating opportunities or constituting threats. Educational management is a field of study and practice concerned with the operation of educational organizations (Bush, 2003). Bolam (1999, p.194) defines educational management as “an executive function for carrying out agreed policy”.

Strategic management is a concept about how to improve profitability and competitiveness in the business field. The original meaning of the word derives from the Greek “strategia”, which is the ability to employ available resources to win a military conflict (Mitreanu, 2006). Planning, formulation and implementation of strategies are primary tasks of leaders and administrators. The concept of “strategic approach” is not new in counselling and psychotherapy fields – we have strategic approaches in treatment and intervention for difficult cases or paradoxical situations.

As revealed in the past history of the counselling development in Hong Kong, the trajectory has encountered a lot of difficulties. Lack of resources has been a cause of the slow development, matching the notion of strategy in management which implies a strong focus on competition or struggles for resources.

“Strategy is a highly complex concept and attempts to define it adequately within the compass of a sentence or two are almost certainly going to miss out some key elements” (Sadler, 1993, p.3). Hofer and Schendel (1978, p.4) delineate strategy as “the basic characteristics of the match and organization achievers with its environment”. Successful management requires a clear link between aims, strategies and operations (Bush, 2003). To maximize the available community resources and cultivate new resources, strategic management may open up new horizons for counselling educators.

The notion of strategy is a means to a specific end and goal; it implies temporary success and becomes arguably

inappropriate when success has to be indefinitely sustained (Mitreanu, 2006). Counselling education is the breeding ground for novices in the profession to continuously grow and serve the community. Besides, they function to create the counselling culture of sustainability. In order to achieve true sustainability, continuing education plays a significant role in the participatory processes, and forms a crucial part of the general strategy (Wong, 2003). But how to enhance the professionalism and sustainability and how to put these into practice and transformation are important topics to be considered. Ultimately, development of professionalism is a long-term strategy which runs contrary to a business. However, strategic management is to be operated differently across stages and situations. Short-term strategy may be operated simultaneously for the purpose of long-term strategy.

How can we strategically change the trend of counselling development? This is a good question. No matter how difficult it is, instead of being the “prisoner of the past” (Williamson, 1999), bound by the limitations and realities, strategic management has been recognized as the critical approach of survival in a tumultuous environment.

The rapid social and political reform in Hong Kong is a critical moment in spreading its development. The leaders in counselling education could create a portfolio of options strategically, starting with a broader vision of the counselling profession, set goals by creating meanings, and direct actions through eliminating uncertainty or ambiguity. Williamson (1999) suggested that with strategic options on the future, one will be able to reposition oneself faster than the competitors that have focused all their investments on “doing more of the same”. This requires alteration of the traditional processes and inputs of new thinking about how planning and opportunism interact with each other in determining strategies. Below are five dimensions for consideration in strategic management to be discussed:

Strategy as leadership strengthening

Leadership is one of the frequently discussed and significant topics in the social sciences (Bass, 1990; Bennis, 2007). Leadership is generally agreed as a process of influencing group activities towards the achievement of goals (Khanka, 2006).

Rosenbach, Taylor, & Youndt (2012, p.2) state, “Leadership is all about getting people to work together to make things happen that might not otherwise occur or to prevent things from happening that would ordinarily take place.”

Actually, a consequence of globalization is the emergence of generic or ubiquitous expectations of leaders (Brundrett, 2003). “A central element in many definitions of leadership is that there is a process of influence” (Bush, 2003, p.5).

Basically, counselling professionals are more competent in their counselling room with therapeutic practice. The scope of counselling training focus falls mainly on how to facilitate individuals to resolve their personal or interpersonal issues. The knowledge, formal qualification and skill-set are not formative on the dimensions of professional and organizational management. Counsellors’ influences largely target the individual level or small group level. The inclusion of the essential element of “concept of Leadership” in the mindset of counsellor educators was prominent in the twentieth century. The competency of drawing people together to develop social strength should be another dimension of the attention of the leaders in the counselling field. This serves

significant constructions of relationships in the community and society, which are not recognized by the public and government.

A huge amount of theories, models and approaches were propounded to help leaders to understand how to achieve different goals with different leadership styles (Sajjadi, 2014). "Over the last 30 years, transformational leadership has become one of the most prominent theories of organizational behavior" (Sajjadi 2014:11). Hodgetts and Luttans (2000) point out that transformational leaders are capable of motivating their people to work together to achieve goals.

At this stage of counselling professional development in Hong Kong, the major imperatives of the leaders are to (1) share their counselling vision among counsellors, such as promoting the mental health of the community; (2) develop professional identification, including ethical, culturally-inclusive and quality-assurance practices among counsellors; (3) attract public attention and understanding of the counselling profession and its idiosyncratic nature and powerful contributions to the community's psychological health; and (4) master political practice in government and political settings as well as administrate conducive social policy for psychological welfare. These are strategically significant tasks for counselling leaders; thus, the inseparable relationship between leadership and management needs to be implemented. Planning guides action and management towards their mission. Effective strategic planning articulates goals with action to make progress successful.

Strategy as thinking and planning

Leaders are expected to be more proactive in both leading and managing resources. Cuban (1988) provides one of the clearest distinctions between leadership and management. He linked leadership to change and management to maintenance activity. How to plan? What to plan? How long should the plan be? Who are the planners? The government, or the counsellor educators? Who are the leaders among these? The counsellor educators? The processing of laying out a planning model focuses on setting objectives, external and internal analysis, strategy evaluation and operationalization and planning. Haines (1995, p.1) states, "We must become architects of the future, not defenders of the decline".

According to Tracy (2014), leaders have roles as strategists and planners, which enables their engagement in long-term vision and big picture planning. Mintzberg (1994, p.107) distinguished the difference between strategic planning and strategic thinking. He suggested that strategic planning often spoils strategic thinking, causing managers to confuse real vision with the manipulation of numbers and this confusion lies at the heart of the issue: the most successful strategies are vision, not plans. He (1994, p.107) claimed, "Strategic planning isn't strategic thinking. One is analysis, and the other is synthesis". The breaking down of a goal or set of intentions into steps, and formalizing those steps for implementation is "analysis". On the contrary, strategic thinking involves intuition and creativity, which is an integrated perspective on strategies. He also stated that sometimes strategies must be left as broad visions, not precisely articulated, so as to adapt to a changing environment.

Facing a scarcity of resources, the most central strategic question, whether using a competition or corporate strategy, has to be considered among universities, associations and other counselling education providers. For instance, an identity problem is the "twice-told" issue of the counselling field.

Counsellors have always been frustrated by not having a clear and distinct professional identity. This kind of primitive / outdated disturbing thought also discourages leaders from planning ahead. Thoughts guide direction of reaction. Strategic thinking strengthens intellectual capacity. It enhances the exploration of opportunities and future planning.

How to open new capabilities and opportunities is one major task of strategic management. To think strategically, there are two notable dimensions: first of all, whether anybody can become counsellors, such as the clergy, teachers, social workers, and peers. What does this mean for the counselling profession? From a strategic point of view, the counselling culture has already been built up all through the strata in society. Acceptance by the general public demonstrates that there is a market. This market naturally evolved from customers' needs which created the demand for counsellors. This widespread adoption to popularize the profession is a medium which counselling educators can utilize in the process of bettering the profession. In addition, instead of making alignment with medical or pathological models, we could also maximize the worthiness of the "growth model" which has always been our focus in counselling. The market for enhancing healthy "normal growth" is much greater (Gale & Austin, 2003). To enhance personal growth and a healthy relationship are parts of the eco-awareness. Using a growth model to empower deficits / pathologies are significantly beneficial to the community. Environmental consciousness is a current trend in this global age. This is a connection with the world trend. Why do we have to stick to the bitterness of having confused boundaries with other mental health professions? Counselling has many more resources and capabilities to create contributions beyond our expectations if we can think out of the box. This is strategic thinking in counselling education and what Gale & Austin (2003) called "work to create market demand".

People may argue about the gatekeeping functions of counselling educators or supervisors. To open the door to the public means the popularization, or "secularization" of the profession. It would affect its professional image in a negative way. Chandler (1962) identified four stages in the life cycles of companies and institutions. The first stage is the initial acquisition of resources, i.e. vertical integration. The second is the drive for the efficient use of these resources through a functional organizational structure. The third is another period of growth involving new product lines and/or diversification. Finally, there is a second shift in structure to a divisionalized form. This developmental approach to understanding the growth of a company clarifies the stages/circumstances of development for the counselling profession. Acquisition of resources as well as setting up of markets and channels is the very fundamental stage in an organization's development. The control of quality and enrichment through more and more education comes after people's understanding and recognition.

Client education, such as promotion of health, is a set of planned educational activities separate from clinical patient care. The primary focus of these activities includes acquisition of information, skills, beliefs and attitudes, which impact on health status, quality of life, and possibly healthcare utilization (Burckhardt, 1994, p.2, cited in Coates, V., 1999).

Strategic thinking in management of the counselling profession enables the realization of a growth model and releases us from becoming prisoners of existing constraints. We need to build new capabilities. "Real strategic change requires inventing new categories, not rearranging old ones". (Mintzberg,

1994). The radical changes have permeated every aspect of our life in the dynamic era; we have to seek new ways to unleash new perspectives.

Strategy as a value implementation process

Bush (1998, p. 328) links up leadership to values or purposes while management relates to implementation or technical issues. When we talk about strategic management in counselling development in Hong Kong, we must ask: "Why do people choose to enter into the field of counselling and not other professions?" People's decisions and choices are largely determined by values. "Planning represents a calculating style of management, not a committing style" (Mintzberg, 1994, p.109). Nowadays, commitment is not enough for counselling leaders. They need to spend time on focused strategic thinking and planning on a regular basis. It leads counselling educators to think about the meaning and value of counselling to the community.

Kluckhohn (1951, p.395) states that "a value is a conception, explicit or implicit, distinctive of an individual or characteristic of a group, of the desirable which influences the selection from available modes, means and ends of action". The spirit of the counselling profession lies in its honour of human values, and its recognition as a "deep need within human development" (Stripling, 1983, p.206). Carl Rogers' necessary and sufficient conditions, such as respect, unconditional positive regard, and empathy carried the most profound influence in the counselling movement. Rogers (1957) identified that a congruent and integrated relationship is one of the most core conditions for constructive personality change to occur. This highlights the value from the individualism.

The commitment to professional development originates from the sharing of its values. The sociologist Philip Selznick (1957, cited in Mintzberg, H., 1994) claimed that strategies take on value only as committed people infuse them with energy. It is a matter of how to communicate the mission lively. With an attempt to arouse the attention of the counselling value and its significance to modern society, Tse (2010) delineates the value of counselling in terms of the concepts of human capital. She mentions four dimensions of the counselling nature: developmental, curative, relationship enhancement and psychoeducation, which are crucial to the formation of human capital. She alerts governments and economists to pay special attention to the role of counselling in terms of human capital development. A huge amount of money is put into it each year by the government in an attempt to decrease the mental health problems in the community. These are extremely valuable to the community and organization in the twentieth century for enhancing self-understanding, facilitating problem-solving life issues, enabling human relationships and the provision of knowledge relating to psychological health. Prevention is always more strategic and cost-effective than intervention.

How do the leaders in counselling education exert influence on the community? To talk about strategic management and the facilitation of the growth of the counselling profession, we must not neglect its substance of value. The collective value of the Chinese emphasizes that an effective way to get things done is through interpersonal relationships. And it is more effective to resolve disputes through negotiation and compromise rather than confrontation. "Counselling relationship is the heart of counselling process. It supplies the vitality and the support necessary for counselling to work" (Nystul, 2003, p.54).

Counselling can also be named the "Relationship profession", to help people build intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships through professional helping relationships. Relationship building is perceived as the capacity to relate to others, which is a necessary domain in counselling. Crucially, the individual must develop the capacity to relate to the external world. How do the counselling educators and leaders cultivate a counselling culture and communicate these values of the counselling profession in Hong Kong? The art and heritage of relationships in the Chinese culture will facilitate the integration and promotion of counselling education. Multicultural compatibility is certainly an important topic in strategic management.

Understanding the cultural and sociopolitical context of the value system is essential. The strategy for implementation of counselling values somehow is the implication of the integration of the Western and Eastern cultural connotation of mental health.

Strategy as a commitment to lifelong learning

Strategy is an emergent process. People other than members of top management can trace strategies back to a range of actions and decisions. After a process of learning over time, formulation and implementation start to emerge. Strategies are found as patterns from the past, and later as plans for the future or as perspectives to guide overall behaviour. Strategies therefore are found throughout the organization. The role of leadership is to manage the process of strategic learning (Sadler, 1993).

Learning is truly a self-reinforcing, self-regenerating dynamo (Samoff, 1996). The process of learning is exhilarating and energizing. As referred to as concepts by Ellyard (1998), counsellor educators can promote a learning culture to monitor the development of the profession. Ellyard's model of learning comprises eight elements which are (1) lifelong learning; (2) learner-driven learning; (3) just-in-time learning; (4) customized learning; (5) transformative learning; (6) collaborative learning; (7) contextual learning; and (8) learning to learn. This model sheds light for counsellors in the widening of their learning horizons.

To manage the counselling profession, we need to activate learning modes in both trainers and trainees by setting up systematic planning for the acquisition of knowledge or promoting the mindset of lifelong learning. Counselling educators or supervisors act as the facilitators of the learning culture, and the provision of different learning strategies is a form of management of the qualities of the profession. Learning can be customized to the individual needs of different learners. Learning can be collaborative as a way to learn from fellow counsellors, other professionals from other disciplines, or other organizations. Learning can also be found from exposure to different contexts and situations. Transformative learning is practised through a consistent revision of the working experience or the experiences of supervisors.

With reference to the medical profession in Hong Kong, the implementation of the Hong Kong Doctors Union (HKDU) Continuing Medical Education (CME) programme, which was launched in July 2000, aimed at maintaining a credible and equitable record of GPs/FPs participation in approved quality assurance education activities. CME points can be earned from attending talks, reading articles and also doing distance-learning courses. Under this programme, each doctor has to earn a minimum of 90 CME points in a 3-year cycle before he/ she can obtain the CME certificate (HKDU, 2001).

In the counselling profession, supervision is one of the critical lifelong learning components across the professional trajectory (Falender & Shafranske, 2004). After institutional formal training has been completed, in-service training in the form of seminars and the tradition of ongoing clinical supervision is the major emphases and heritage in lifelong counselling education. Norcross, Prochaska and Farber (1993) found that clinical supervision was the second most frequently reported activity among members of the APA's Division of Psychotherapy. Meyer (1978) found that counselling skills decline after training without supervision. Usually, the reasons given for low levels of supervision relate primarily to budget constraints, high workloads of staff and supervisors, higher priorities, and lack of available supervisors (Ladany, Ellis, & Friedlander, 1999). Employers, registration boards, and professional bodies are increasingly acknowledging the importance of good supervision in contributing to the maintenance and enhancement of high-quality clinical practice. Both hours of attending counselling-related talks and seminars, and hours of supervised counselling are elements for credible adjudication for quality assurance.

Learning is a permanent process which results in opportunities, challenges, unexpected situations at work, and any previous experience being turned into a learning experience (Torokoff & Mets, 2005). Ellyard (1998, p.62) claims that a learning culture is necessary for success in the 21st century and learning is the "most powerful instrument for shaping the future". Grey (2004, p.21) said, "Yesterday's knowledge and skills are vulnerable to obsolescence, and future success requires flexibility, responsiveness and new capabilities". Fong (1997) stated that it is not ethical to practise counsellor education and supervision without updated knowledge. The first step in commitment to professional development is the recognition of areas needing growth. She stated that, ethics aside, being current and contemporary is a necessary requirement of our careers. Counsellors have to continuously focus on professional development. Facing clients from various strata, diversified problems and issues in different life stages and lifelong as well as life broad learning will equip counsellors with the tools to deal with all kinds of clients. Counsellors are challenged by a constantly changing world. Their learning needs are increasing.

Through commitment to lifelong learning practice, counsellors progressively increase their self-awareness, acquire more advanced counselling skills and techniques, and master theoretical knowledge. Learning schools can be said to be the groundwork of management. All learning is integrated into a personal and professional identity as a counsellor – a growth process that is continuous and ongoing across the counsellor's professional lifespan (Borders, 1989:9). A good foundation for the profession lies in ongoing learning attitudes.

Strategy as power administration

Power can be said to be the ability to influence. "The concept of power is as ancient and ubiquitous as any that social theory can boast" (Dahl 2007, p.201). "Everyone recognizes the need to be organized in order to plan activities, assign responsibilities, and identify a common goal to be reached. Once everything is in place, power must be used to give direction and control the process." (Seperich and McCalley, 2006, p.14). This is a central concept in social and political fields which can explain many different social phenomena (Menge, 2018).

Dahl (2007, p. 201) defines power as "a relation between

people, and is expressed in simple symbolic notation". Power can be said to be "the driving energy" (Seperich and McCalley 2006, p.15) of an organization or community. The process of power execution in management is always complex. Different powers have different sources and different consequences. Social psychologists French and Raven (1959) proposed a classic study in regard to five categories of power, reflecting the different resources and influence that power holds: coercive, reward, legitimate, expert and referent power.

"Expert power" to the community is the typical "power" addressed in a profession. This means the person's power, which derives from one's skills or expertise. This type of power is specific and limited to a particular trained area. Achieving professional status has always been a significant issue in the counselling profession. Professional status and social recognition is a form of expert power. Max Weber (1968, as cited in Rosenbach, Taylor, & Youndt, 2012) delineated an influential distinction between different sources of authority. According to Weber, tradition is one of the identified sources that represents power and authority based on what has been inherited, established and practised in the past. Leaders in the counselling field mostly follow this practice. The leadership power comes mainly from the experience and expertise in the profession. However, it does not mean that people who are an authority in the counselling profession are good administrators or competent leaders.

With regard to strategic management, Sadler (1993, p.20-21) distinguishes two types of power, "micro power" and "macro power". He states,

The former relates to the exercise of power within the organization in connection with the processes of strategic management. The latter is to do with the exercise of power by the organization in its external relationships.

Within an organization, there are battles among managers and staff for resources, power, status and promotion. Externally, it may involve rational or illegitimate means to create pressure on the government over policy making or resources. Strategy formulation is shaped by organizational and political powers. Other than professional knowledge, counselling educators have to deal with many other management-related issues which require the skilful use of the earned or unearned power in the social position.

The expertise and experience of counsellors help counsellors to establish their own professionalism and identity, as well as related authority within the counsellor circle. But it is also important to consider one social dimension: who has the power to recognize professional status? Professional bodies or the government? Certainly, recognition from both sides is of the same importance. Professional identity confusion will likely be found if professional bodies are not recognized or their work is ignored by the government. The leaders could utilize strategies to face these problems.

Lukes (1974), the political theorist, developed a three-dimensional model of political power as something overt, covert or latent. The government has the overt power to offer recognition to a profession but actually may not have the knowledge for credentialing the profession. They may employ a professional body and set standardized criteria for assessment and codes of ethics for professional guidelines, to offer accreditation. The most commonly noted criteria used to evaluate whether an occupation has evolved to the status of a profession include there being (1) a specialized body of knowledge and theory-driven research, (2) the establishment of a professional society or association,

(3) control of training programmes, (4) a code of ethics to guide professional behaviour and (5) standards for admitting and policing practitioners (Caplow, 1966; Glossoff, 1993). The covert power to determine the status lies in the hands of the professional body. Thus, it is very important for professional leaders to develop clear guidelines and ethics for practitioners before it can become a trustworthy profession. Professional education shares the common aim of providing membership of a professional body and indicating capability in a professional role.

However, simply by obtaining the certificates or membership of a professional body does not guarantee expertise. Gale & Austin (2003, p.3) argued,

Differences in training, specialization, professional affiliations, and credentialing have challenged professional counsellors' sense of collective identity.....Paradoxically, achieving professional status has done little to promote professional counsellors' sense of collective identity or to distinguish counsellors from other mental health professionals.

They pointed out that the achievement of professional status has led to the creation of greater diversity and less unity among persons who identify themselves as professional counsellors. One of the reasons for such diversity is counsellors' lack of confidence to secure their professionalism owing to the generic nature of this helping profession. Besides, different orientations of training, licenses and membership from different professional bodies may contribute to conflicting codes of ethics. There are two sides of the coin. More effort should be devoted to solve the potential problem in this area. The rationale for strategic management is vitally important. Firstly, thinking out of the box is a form of cognitive power, which will help us to find our way whenever we are blocked. Power devoted to strategic thinking is crucial to leaders. Counsellor leaders, as strategic leaders, need to engage in strategic thinking and planning with the big picture in mind and anticipate crises and potentials in the professional field. Secondly, counsellors' ongoing effort in the self-development of counselling competence and high-quality counselling practice will enhance the professional self-esteem as well as accumulation of expertise power. Thirdly, counsellors who join together as a union will form a strong, united voice to effect real changes in their workplaces, their profession and even the broader community. The famous Gestalt saying, "The whole is greater than the part", reminds us that what one can do, many can do better. Things will become much better than if piecemeal. Collection of power that comes from within will help us to utilize the external resources.

Conclusion

Counselling educators, in order to meet the speedy changes, progressive challenges of the world's demands, new standards and prevalent good quality service delivery, must be well prepared. In Hong Kong, the emerging counselling profession has gone through a series of difficulties. It is pragmatically expected that market demand influences the development of a profession in a situation like Hong Kong. Financial stringency in the public, education and nonprofit sectors poses constant constraints on development plans. The input of the strategic approach in education management has triggered a huge controversy owing to its loaded concepts from the business world. However, the business of being counselling educators is both complex and exposing. The counselling profession requires strategic leadership, thinking, planning, marketing and cultural

awareness of the implicit and explicit values and development skills. Success in counselling management depends on various endogenous and exogenous factors. Counsellor educators and leaders have a responsibility to promote professional growth in terms of lifelong learning and engagement in high-quality supervised professional practice. The atmosphere of changes can be transformed into more options with opportunism through strategic management. A positive attitude to strategic approaches and good use of potential power in counselling development and management is like having an important tool. Whether we can use it or not depends on how much we know about it. All the difficulties and challenges are parts of the journey along the professional evolution.

Bio

Dr. TSE, Pui Chi

Assistant Professor

Program Director

Department of Counselling and Psychology

Hong Kong Shue Yan University

Founder of Asian Professional Counselling and Psychology Association

Address: 10 Wai Tsui Crescent, Braemar Hill Road, North Point, Hong Kong

Phone: 852-21048275,

Fax: 852-28068044

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