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Comment on the Report of the Task Force on Remote Analysis in Training

Dear Colleagues,

First we would like to thank the Task Force (TF) and its members for the stimulating report which presents valuable and controversial topics for discussion. In the following, we would like to comment on the report, referring especially to the training analysis as the heart of the training.

Comments to "Introduction"

We are impressed with the amount of work done by the TF and the process that is described. In particular, we share the view that it cannot be a matter of being for or against remote analysis or Training out of prejudices. For this very reason, we miss a reflection on the background in which the TF's mandate was embedded and what impact this embedding might have had on the report. After having read the report, we wondered

- how free the TF was to continue to leave remote training in the existing status of a necessary exception in view of special or exceptional conditions
- and how strong an underlying pressure or tendency there may have been to develop a new 'tele-based' training system.

The report points out how important remote capabilities can be in times of need like during the Corona pandemic, that it would therefore make sense to be familiar with remote capabilities and that many colleagues and candidates have now learned about the advantages of digital technology. However, the Corona Pandemic also shows the health impairments and psychological dangers of the loss of relational experiences in person in all areas of life, especially for children and adolescents, and for the emotional well-being of people in general.

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The experience of the Corona pandemic also shows that many colleagues and candidates who were initially very relieved, some even excited, about the digital en possibilities due to the emergency and fear situation as well as because of a feeling of digital modernity, now find these possibilities rather depriving and emotionally emptying. Interestingly, the ongoing dependence on digitally mediated communication reinforces the awareness of the enormous importance of in-person contact.

Comments to "Chapter 1: Survey Report"

It is interesting to note from the documented feedback that remote training and especially remote training analysis does not play a significant role, if any, under normal training conditions. It seems to be rather the case that the real situation largely corresponds to the procedural code, which defines remote training analysis and remote training as a necessary exception to the standard of training analysis and training in person.

On this background, we miss a rationale for why the normality of this reality of analytic training should need change. On the other hand, we can well agree that in the face of emergency and exceptional situations such as the Corona pandemic, in which analytical contact can only be secured in this way, it makes sense to pay more in-depth attention to remote analysis and training and to explore the question of how we can equip ourselves to best handle remote analysis and training in more depth.

Comments to "Chapter 2: Summary of Meeting with International New Groups (ING) "

What seems remarkable to us is the contrast between Europe and Latin America. While remote training seems to have no relevance in Europe, it is conceivable that the Latin American Psychoanalytic Institute (ILAP), due to expansive activities, or other Latin American IPA societies could have a strong interest in upgrading remote training. How strong a similar interest is in North America has unfortunately not been surveyed or reported.

It is regrettable that the TF has not explored the longstanding experience of the China Committee's training program of the IPA and therefore cannot share the reasons why the China Committee's training program has chosen to recognize only the periods of training analysis in person for training. This would have been an important information.

It would be equally interesting to be informed about the reasons of the European Psychoanalytic Institute (EPI) to refrain from remote training, although EPI would have been allowed to do so. We suspect that this abstention was also, if not primarily, analytically justified.

Comments to "Chapter 3 Meeting with Psychoanalytic Education Committee" (PEC)

Among the many relevant points raised in the meeting with the Psychoanalytic Education Committee (PEC) we miss one highly significant point, that should be a necessary point of discussion: the technical configuration of the digital medium as a third object that co-structures or even pre-structures the analytic situation and the relation between analyst and analysand. There seems to be a blind spot in this regard.

Comments to " Chapter 4 Evaluation of the Current IPA Regulations on Training Analysis"

We cannot agree with the view that in the procedural code the presence and place is given an *arbitrary* priority at the expense of continuity and intensity. It is true, there is a priority in the Procedural Code for analytic training in local presence or in person. Since this has been a self-evident consensus in the IPA, it has not needed to be justified further so far. It is irritating when what has hitherto been a well-justifiable consensus, and for that very reason one that must not be formulated, is lost to the extent that it is now confused with arbitrariness.

For the report itself, "presence" and "place" remain the critical categories for the recommendations of the three modalities: "on-site," "off-site with travel," and "off-site without travel". There are merely different wordings of the same facts. Thus, this reasoning is in a way self-contradictory,

It would be very unfortunate, however, if we were to take the many references to the inconsistency, arbitrariness, and flaws of the procedural code solely in terms of an argumentation strategy that attempts to de-legitimize it. Therefore it would be important to follow up on the critical indications, but on the same time, there will always be a portion of arbitrariness in every procedural code. The report itself has a certain inconsistency in this respect, when for instance the report itself suggests leaving open something it has criticized regarding the existing procedural code (e.g. page 26: "We arrived at a consensus that the requirements should not be too narrowly defined").

Comments to " Chapter 5 Contrast: In-person Psychoanalysis and Teleanalysis

We absolutely agree with this fundamental assumption of the report " Every aspect of psychoanalytic work is affected by moving from an in-person modality to a technologically mediated one" (page 18). Subsequently, numerous limitations and impingements of the standard psychoanalytic situation in essential dimensions fundamental to an analytic encounter are presented in a thought stimulating manner. How in the case of a 'teleanalysis' an analysis of transference and working with counter-transference can develop the necessary density of affect for change and at the same time provide sufficient holding, e.g. in the case of negative therapeutic reactions or in the case of the regressive activation of otherwise well compensated pathological personality organisations, is hardly conceivable for us.

While for us this led to the conclusion that 'teleanalysis' cannot be a fully valid psychoanalysis, but should remain an exception for exceptional situations also because of the limitations and restrictions covered by the report itself, we were surprised that the report interprets the impairments positively as challenges and states somewhat succinctly that doing 'teleanalysis' cannot be precluded.

But the question remains: Even if 'Doing teleanalysis' might be possible in this technical sense, does this also enable 'Being in analysis' for the analysand as well as the analyst? Or is 'Being in analysis' disturbed and diffracted in a fundamental way, as we believe, when the technical configuration intervenes as a third object in the analytic encounter and co- or pre-structures it in "every aspect of psychoanalytic work", particularly in the case of too long a period?

What we missed was not only a more in-depth discussion of the technical configuration as a third object, but also a discussion of the technical configuration as an extra-analytical framework that dominates the analytic frame. In the case of technically mediated 'teleanalysis', analyst and analysand do not meet as usual in the analyst's consulting room, which represents an analytic home for both of them and is designed to invite a highly emotional and personal process of getting in touch with and surrendering to one's own unconscious and to the unconscious of the other.

Instead, they meet in a technically generated site, in a virtual place, in which the personal encounter is reduced to the contact of two-dimensional images of oneself and the other (video) or to a one-dimensional and isolated listening/speaking modality (telephone). Moreover, the technical generation of a virtual place of meeting requires that analysand and analyst both have to accept the constraint that the technical configuration as a third object intrudes the respective privacy and emotional habitat of both.

Furthermore, if we consider Bleger's approach about the frame, the question suggests itself what analyst and analysand unconsciously deposit into this technically dominated frame in order to be able to continue to have the impression of doing analysis as an analytic couple, despite the limitations and disturbances caused by the technical configuration as a third object.

Is it rather a kind of illusion of an analysis deposited in the frame, so that both might to a degree mistakenly believe that they are in something similar to an analysis in person, instead of acknowledging that a fully valid analytical standard situation cannot be established? Is this why it takes such a tremendous psychological and emotional effort and personal adjustment for doing analysis in the 'telenalytical' setting? Does the report have to develop so many suggestions for a (post-) qualification related to a 'teleanalysis', so that the feeling and the impression could remain that the analyst can still be an analyst, although this is fundamentally questionable, due to the effect and impact of the technical configuration as a third object structuring the situation?

According to the regulations of the IPA, there can be no training analyst who became an analyst and training analyst entirely on the experience of 'teleanalysis' only. As a consequence, any evaluation of 'teleanalysis' has to take into account that the effects of a 'teleanalysis' are not caused by 'teleanalysis' itself alone, but always include the analytical experience and qualification of the analyst based on the experience of and qualification by an analysis in person.

These personal experiences and qualifications by analysis in person might counteract the impairments, disruptions and impingements of the analytical situation by the technological configuration. Therefore, we do not and cannot yet know what negative or even destructive effects the technological configuration would have on the analytic experience if there were only analysts trained in the 'telenalytical' mode. But this would be exactly the requirement and the experimental situation we would have to enter to figure out the question of the 'pure' effects of 'teleanalysis' in an empirical way. But do we really want to go down this road to a 'teleanalytical' world?

That there are no purely 'teleanalytically' trained analysts who could conduct pure 'teleanalysis' remains a limitation to the validity of empirical research related to the effect of digital technology, particular in comparison with analysis in person. Nevertheless, this limitation does not necessarily imply a renunciation of empirical research as such, which can certainly provide important stimuli for further reflection.

However, we consider more promising the strategy of investigating by analytical thinking more deeply the experiences made in the 'teleanalytical' or remote mode, particular under clinical, metapsychological and epistemological aspects in order to have sufficient validity for the analytic situation and process.

Comments on "Chapter 6 Results and Discussion"

We would like to highlight that the TF openly admits that it did not have valid information on analyses conducted without in-person meetings. Anecdotal information (page 24) should not be mentioned in a qualified report as it has no argumentative value. Inasmuch as the TF states not to have information on analyses conducted without in person meetings, the conclusion "that teleanalysis is similar enough for it to be a part of the minimum conditions necessary to graduate competent analysts" (page 26; also page 27) is far from being comprehensible.

We consider it unnecessary for the TF to have extended its mandate beyond the topic of remote analysis and to develop proposals for a completely different system that dissolves the current distinction between regular standard, i.e., analysis in person, and exception to the standard, i.e., remote analysis. The distinction between standard and exception to standard on which the procedural code is based is a qualitatively and fundamentally different view of psychoanalytic training than a more superficial view that distinguishes only descriptively between 'typical' and 'un-typical'.

It is regrettable and unreasonable that the essential value of analysis in person as the heart of analysis and training analysis, of any psychoanalytic experience at all, is reduced to its empirical occurrence as one type of two, and thus devalued.

This abandonment of the primacy of analysis in person continues in the tendency to devalue shuttle analysis and condensed analysis as training models. Both training models, despite the associated

exception from the standard, nevertheless remain bound to the standard of analysis in person and thus confirm its primacy.

Comments on "Chapter 7 Recommendations"

The categorization of the three training models "On-site", "Off-site with travel" and "Off-site without travel" seems to us misleading. The three proposed models would be more accurately described as training in person, hybrid training, and digital training.

For the "Digital Training/Off-Site without Travel" training model, we see no rationale throughout the report that could justify this model as an analytical training. We consider training as an analyst without training in person to be irresponsible. It would be more like a simulation of analysis and would have a strong tendency towards a virtual rather than a real analysis.

The training model "Training in person/On-Site" largely corresponds to the current standard training model. In this model, from our point of view and experience, training without personal meetings is generally and usually not necessary. Here, the analysis in person would remain standard.

With the "Hybrid Training/Off-Site with travel" training model, the TF proposes to convert the current remote analysis model from the status of an exception to the standard model to a model equivalent to the existing standard model.

We find this to be too far-reaching and also not necessary for reasons already mentioned, since with the models of remote analysis, shuttle analysis and condensed analysis, training models already exist that permit training practices that deviate from the standard model without diminishing or devaluing the importance of analysis in-person. It is the latter that seems to us to be the case in the TF proposals regarding the "Hybrid Training/Off-Site with travel" training model.

Finally, we would like to state that we cannot follow the implicit logic of the report, which is to treat analysis in person, hybrid analysis and 'teleanalysis' as if two training models represent only two polarities in a similar or homogenous dimension (analysis in person vs ,teleanalysis') and the third training model (hybrid analysis) is located in the middle as a compromise of both polarities.

Although this logic has the attractive charm, at least to some, of making the relationship between analysis in person and digitally mediated 'teleanalysis' appear conflict-free, but it negates the primacy of training and analysis in person that we consider indispensable.

Concluding remarks

We thank the TF for a challenging report, whose argumentation, conclusions and recommendations we unfortunately cannot follow in substantial parts. Our primary objections relate to **a.** empirical and clinical evidence, **b.** analytic reasoning and justification, and **c.** institutional consequences.

a. Empirical and clinical evidence

There is no empirical and clinical evidence mentioned in the report that supports the fundamental revision of psychoanalytic training that the TF proposes in the direction of 'teleanalytic' training. Rather, empirical observations and clinical experiences so far indicate that a digitally mediated contact is in great danger to be accompanied by severe impairments, restrictions, and disruptions of the analytic situation by digital technology.

b. Analytical reasoning and justification

We miss in the report a sufficient analytical reflection on digital technology and its use:

- as an artificial third object co- and pre-structuring the analytic situation and at the same time negating it,
- as a fantasy object triggering specific unconscious psychodynamics, phantasms and defenses that might be difficult to analyze due to their deposition in the digitally dominated analytic frame, and
- as transforming medium, that creates a virtual space of contact to which the analytic couple must actively adapt in a way that at the same time impairs or even negates the potential of the transformative processes inherent in the analytic encounter.

Consequently, we think that there is no sufficient analytical justification for the proposals made in the TF report.

c. Institutional consequences and proposals

It should be apparent from our previous comments that we do not consider fundamental changes to the procedural code based on the TF report to be appropriate at this time. Instead, we propose to maintain the established system with a primacy of analysis in person and to research the applicable exceptions to this, i.e. also shuttle and condensed analysis in addition to remote analysis, more intensively and in depth in an analytic, clinical and empirical way.

Since the mode of remote analysis in particular overlaps with the increasing digitalization of all areas of life, not only the use of digital technology in psychotherapy/psychoanalysis, supervision and teaching/training should be a topic, but also the impact of digitalization on human relationships and the psychological state of subjectivity, especially in children and adolescents since they will be the analysands in the future. Will they need more digitally mediated communication or more contact in person?

In doing so, it might be possible to recognize more deeply what an attractive, healing, and truthful alternative the analytic experience, based on personal presence and on the presence of the personal, is in an increasingly technologically structured world.

Yours respectfully, submitted,

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