Chapter 2
Faceless Counselling: Trend of Technological Development

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ABSTRACT
This chapter advances what can be done by therapists in the absence of opportunity to observe the verbal and non-verbal cues of the clients during online counselling sessions without undermining the capability and workability of the online counselling mode as a creative and innovative therapeutic medium. This is an attempt to make sure that counsellors/therapists are still able to perform creditably and help alleviate the problems of their clients, without being stripped of their skills due to introduction of technology into the art of counselling.

INTRODUCTION
The rate and speed with which technology has become an integral part of all facets of modern day living is astounding. It has virtually permeated all human endeavours. It is difficult to imagine contemporary lifestyles and ventures without computers, mobile phones, and the Internet—all by-products of technology. It is the reality of the increased use of technology in everyday life that has made the recognition of its potential beyond recreational and business use. This also confirms the possibility for its use in counselling and therapeutic processes. As in the medical field and engineering, the impact of technology is noticeable and fast spreading into every other profession. There is always a need for the use of an aspect of technological development.

In the area of psychotherapy, Santhiveeran (2004) dated the use of computers to 1972, and that is with the advent of bulletin boards and online support groups. The success of these ini-
Faceless Counselling initiatives established the potential of computers as a vehicle for the discussion of sensitive personal issues (Skinner, 2006). In the same token, the first Web-based mental health advice site went live in 1986—the “Ask Uncle Ezra” website offered an advice site for students at Cornell University (US) and is still operating today. In addition, the International Society of Mental Health Online was established in the late 1990s to promote the use of online technologies among mental health professionals (Chester & Glass, 2006), while around this time guidelines were established regarding ethical online counselling, such as those created by the American Psychological Association in 1997, American Counselling Association in 1999, and in 2005, the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy.

It is worth knowing that the use of online counselling methods to resolve social, educational, and psychosocial problems is innovative, and it is occurring at a time when, globally, there is a dire need for it. This is a novel introduction of modern technological application into the arrays of human endeavours wherein computer technology is being incorporated and integrated into counselling psychological practices. Online counselling of clients is the art of practising counselling and psychotherapy through the internet. Just as many professions have part or some aspects of the operations of their professional practices on the net; if not their operations in totality.

The move to practise counselling online, looking at modern trends of events in all spheres of life endeavours, will always have its advantages and disadvantages. Among the advantages is that there will be increased accessibility, for example, for rural and remote persons (although limited by bandwidth and availability of carriers), single or at-home parents, people with a disability, in cases of fear of violence or intimidation, people who are relocating but want to work with the same therapist. It will be a solution to palpable shortfall in psychotherapy services since available practitioners are not enough. It would allow for an enhanced self-reflection in the case of asynchronous communication while clients can revisit treatment communications from therapists on their own time. It will also allow clinicians time to be freed up for others and reduce the number of face-to-face sessions. It will allow for increased flexibility of services and the Counsellor/Therapist will have the opportunity of responding to specialist areas of concern, regardless of geographical location. In addition, when email is used by clients, the written word and sentences would be such that the content would have been well thought out, expressive, and reflective before sending. Internet counselling on the sides of both the clients and the counsellor would allow for anonymity, privacy, and convenience, since sessions can often take place in the comfort of one’s own home. There will therefore be no inhibition and internalisation, that is core issues would get to be addressed more quickly and matters would be expressed more freely.

In spite of the advantages discussed above, the move, without doubt, would have its own challenges. Some of the challenges of online counselling would expressly include the concern for how therapeutic conditions will be fostered in an online environment; the ability to transfer and integrate theoretical knowledge of the Counsellor/Therapist into the art of counselling online on one hand, and also, the practical and technical abilities of the Counsellor/Therapist to use the computer technology components on the other. These, include the required counselling skills, adaptation of theories, and computer literacy level. Older people and those from a different cultural background may feel less comfortable, especially practitioners from developing countries where internet usage levels are very low. Brief examples of such challenges may rear their heads when there is a time delay between client’s contact period and counsellor response in an asynchronous communication, and unfortunately, there is no time and opportunity to then deal with emerging crisis during counselling sessions. The capacity for this would have been eroded by online counselling environment. Also,
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