



New Trends
in Psychology

Demonstrate the Use of Guided Reflections in Addressing Workplace Anxiety, Cultural Conflict, and Career Dissatisfaction

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Abstract: This case study exploits the application of guided reflections as a therapeutic intervention to address workplace anxiety cultural conflict and career dissatisfaction in a 32-year-old software engineer Adekunle. Rooted in his upbringing and societal expectations Adekunle faces internal conflicts between his career in tech and his passion for storytelling. Guided reflections provided a structured approach to enhance self-awareness, challenge limiting beliefs, and align actions with values. This report outlines the implementation process and discusses outcomes alighting its potential for similar cases.

Keywords: career counselling; cultural conflict; guided reflections; workplace anxiety; self-awareness

1. Introduction

Workplace anxiety and career dissatisfaction are prevalent issues, particularly in culturally diverse workplaces, often resulting in decreased productivity and well-being (Bryson et al., 2017). Liddle (2023) mentioned in his book that these issues often manifest in the form of persistent worry, fear of failure, or feelings of inadequacy, which can hinder employees' ability to perform effectively. Similarly, career dissatisfaction, on the other hand, arises when individuals feel unfulfilled in

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their roles, experience limited opportunities for growth, or perceive a lack of alignment between their personal goals and organisational objectives (Budjanovcanin & Woodrow, 2022). This distinction emphasises that while workplace anxiety is often driven by internal emotional challenges (Hayes, 2023), career dissatisfaction typically arises from external factors such as unmet expectations and a lack of alignment with personal or professional goals (Ogunleye, 2020; Abga & Bello, 2023). Research has demonstrated that guided reflections are a useful approach for tackling these issues because they improve self-awareness and the ability to regulate thoughts and feelings (Merkebu et al., 2023; Bucknell et al., 2024).

Case Conceptualisation: Adekunle is a 32-year-old software engineer living in Lagos, Nigeria, who worked for a multinational tech company. He mentioned that he has been struggling with persistent anxiety and dissatisfaction at his place of work. During a recent team meeting, his manager publicly accused him of not contributing enough to discussions. Although Adekunle perceived the criticism as unfair, he felt too embarrassed and hurt to respond. Instead, he remained silent as he was raised to respect authority figures and avoid confrontation. This incident instilled in him a dread of team meetings, apprehensive of additional criticism and investing hours in reevaluating his contributions, wondering where he's gotten it wrong. His anxiety has adversely impacted his work, resulting in insomnia and an increasing feeling of inadequacy. Adekunle frequently perceives himself as an outsider among his team, predominantly composed of foreigners, struggling to establish his presence due to cultural disparities and the unfairness of being misunderstood. Simultaneously, he is confronting a persistent internal struggle. His fervour resides in storytelling and creative writing, yet he opted for a job in technology to fulfil his family's expectations. His father, a former civil servant, often cautioned him during his upbringing that creative pursuits "*won't put food on the table*" - that is, won't provide sustenance.

Consequently, he has an ability; however, he is interested in securing a job that his family takes pride in, but that leaves him feeling unfulfilled and disconnected from his true self. This conflict has begun to strain Adekunle's relationships. He avoids discussing his frustrations with friends and family, fearing they will judge him as ungrateful for his opportunity. He has grown distant from his younger siblings, who rely on him for financial and emotional support. Feeling overwhelmed by their dependence, he often ignored their calls or responded with irritation, leaving them hurt and confused. Despite his hidden passion, Adekunle only writes short stories

secretly, occasionally posting them anonymously online. While his work often receives praise, he feels guilty for spending time on what his father dismisses as a “wasteful hobby”. During a recent family gathering, his uncle praised him for his prestigious job in tech, but Adekunle felt a pang of sadness knowing his heart wasn’t in it. One of his close friends who knows about Adekunle’s love for storytelling at the college invited him to a poetry slam, but he declined, fearing it would remind him of the career path he had abandoned. Feeling trapped and increasingly disconnected from both his work and his relationships, Adekunle finally decided to seek therapy after a colleague suggested professional help might offer clarity and relief.

2. Presenting Complaints

1. Persistent workplace anxiety and dissatisfaction; 2. Insomnia and feelings of inadequacy; 3. Apprehension and dread of team meetings; 4. Perceived cultural and interpersonal challenges at work; 5. Conflict between his creative passion and current career path; 6. Strained relationships with family and friends; and 7. Guilt over pursuing personal interests (storytelling) due to familial expectations.

3. Case Analysis

Case analysis in psychotherapy often utilizes the 4Ps framework—Predisposing, Precipitating, Perpetuating, and Protective factors—to gain a comprehensive understanding of a client’s challenges (Bolton, 2014). This model is widely used in clinical practice as it provides a structured approach to exploring the underlying causes, triggering events, maintaining factors, and strengths or resources that influence an individual’s mental health (Onyekwere et al., 2015; Whiteley, 2023; Sampogna et al., 2024). The 4Ps framework is rooted in the biopsychosocial model, which emphasizes the interaction of biological, psychological, and social factors in shaping mental health and well-being (Engel, 1977; Ogunlesi & Ogunwale, 2020). This was also applied to the case of Adekunle as shown below in Fig. 1:



Figure 1. 4Ps framework

4. Therapeutic Goals

Adams and Grieder (2004) mentioned in their book that therapeutic goals provide a roadmap for addressing a client's challenges, offering structure and direction in therapy. These goals are typically categorised into short-term goals, which focus on immediate symptom relief and skill-building, and long-term goals, which emphasise deeper, lasting changes aligned with the client's values and aspirations (Maister, 1999; Cooper, 2024). Setting clear therapeutic goals is crucial, as it ensures that the

client and therapist work collaboratively toward shared outcomes, enhancing engagement and the likelihood of success (Bordin, 1979; Kazantzis, 2024).



Figure 2. Therapeutic goals

In this context, the therapeutic goals for Adekunle are informed by evidence-based practices, with Guided Reflections serving as a key intervention tool. Guided Reflections are designed to foster self-awareness, help the client process emotional experiences, and reframe negative thought patterns, supporting immediate and long-term growth.

5. Guided Reflections as an Intervention Tool

The therapist utilised guided reflections as a key intervention tool to help Adekunle process his experiences, identify core beliefs, and align his actions with his personal values. “Guided reflections encourage individuals to critically examine their experiences and beliefs, fostering greater self-awareness and emotional resilience (Ardelt & Grunwald, 2018; Kohn, 2024). This approach has been particularly effective in culturally diverse and high-stress environments (Tikkamäki et al., 2018; Akiri et al., 2024).” Below is an account of the steps taken to restore Adekunle’s psychological well-being:

a) Establishing a Safe Environment: The therapist began by creating a safe and non-judgmental space where Adekunle felt comfortable sharing his thoughts and feelings. This step was essential in building trust and rapport, particularly as Adekunle had avoided discussing his frustrations with others.

b) Encouraging Self-Exploration: Through structured guided reflection sessions, Adekunle was encouraged to revisit critical incidents, such as the team meeting where he was criticised publicly. Adekunle was asked to describe how he felt, what thoughts crossed his mind, and how these experiences connected to his deeper values and beliefs. The therapist used open-ended questions to prompt introspection, helping Adekunle uncover the impact of his cultural upbringing on his reactions to authority figures.

c) Identifying Core Beliefs and Patterns: The therapist helped Adekunle identify recurring patterns in his thoughts and behaviours, such as his tendency to internalise criticism and avoid confrontation. It was revealed that his father's emphasis on financial stability and disapproval of creative pursuits had reinforced beliefs about the inadequacy of following his passions. Adekunle also recognised how these beliefs influenced his career choices and sense of self-worth.

d) Challenging Negative Thoughts: The therapist worked with Adekunle to challenge his negative thoughts and assumptions. For instance, the belief that "creative pursuits won't put food on the table" was explored in depth. Together, we examined evidence that contradicted this belief, such as the positive reception of his anonymously posted stories and the potential to pursue writing alongside his current career.

e) Aligning Actions with Values: Adekunle was guided to reflect on his personal values and passions. The therapist facilitated exercises that helped him articulate his desire for storytelling and creative expression as integral parts of his identity. Discussions were held about practical ways to integrate these passions into his life without jeopardising his financial stability, such as attending creative writing workshops or gradually transitioning to a writing career.

f) Developing Coping Strategies: The therapist introduced Adekunle to coping strategies for managing workplace anxiety and criticism. Techniques such as mindfulness, assertive communication, and cognitive reframing were practised during sessions. For example, Adekunle rehearsed how to respond constructively to

feedback in future team meetings, emphasising his contributions while addressing misunderstandings.

g) **Reinforcing Positive Changes:** As Adekunle began implementing these changes, the therapist reinforced his progress by highlighting his successes. For instance, when Adekunle accepted an invitation to a poetry slam, it was framed as a significant step toward reconnecting with his passions. Similarly, when he initiated open conversations with his siblings, the therapist acknowledged his efforts to improve his personal relationships.

6. Outcomes and Indicators of Progress

Outcomes represent the desired changes or results achieved through specific efforts (Kazdin, 2007), while progress indicators are measurable signs showing the extent of these achievements (Brandt & Straub, 2024). Together, they provide a framework for monitoring and assessing effectiveness, ensuring that strategies are impactful and sustainable. Tracking these elements helps stakeholders evaluate success and identify areas for improvement.

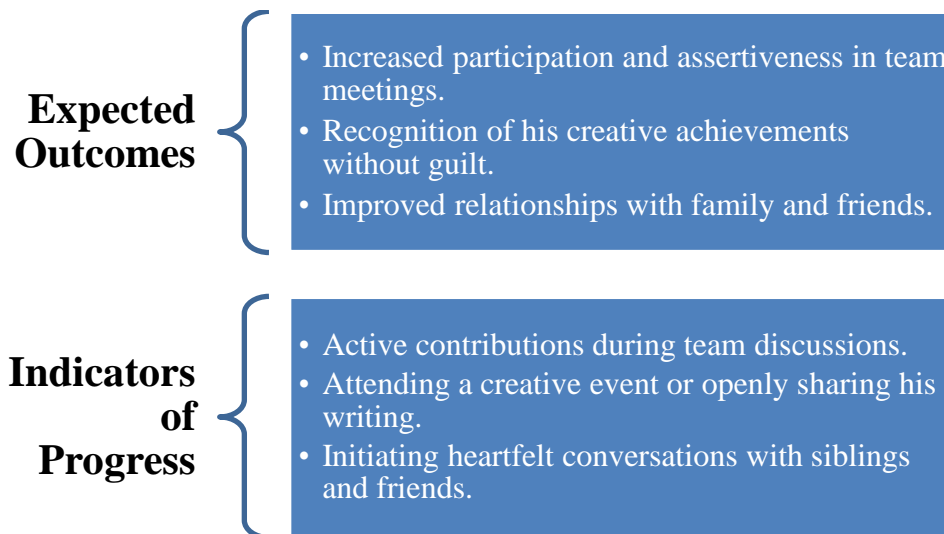


Figure 3. Outcomes and Indicators of Progress

7. Discussion

This study demonstrates the application of guided reflections as an effective therapeutic intervention for addressing workplace anxiety, cultural conflict, and career dissatisfaction. The findings highlight how a structured approach, centered on self-awareness and value alignment, fosters meaningful outcomes. Adekunle's case exemplifies the challenges associated with cultural expectations, unfulfilled passions, and interpersonal workplace dynamics. Through guided reflections, the client identified core beliefs, reframed limiting thought patterns, and developed practical coping strategies, such as assertive communication and mindfulness. These findings align with Tikkamäki et al. (2018), who underscore the efficacy of reflective practices in reducing stress and enhancing self-efficacy in high-pressure environments. The broader implications suggest that tailored interventions like guided reflections can significantly improve workplace well-being, particularly in culturally diverse and high-stress professional settings.

8. Conclusion

In this case, the application of guided reflections underscores its potential to address complex issues such as workplace anxiety, cultural conflict, and career dissatisfaction. Guided reflections emerge as a powerful tool in therapeutic practice by facilitating self-exploration, challenging negative beliefs, and promoting action aligned with personal values. Ethically, this study adhered to principles of confidentiality, cultural sensitivity, and informed consent. Adekunle's pseudonym ensures anonymity, while interventions were tailored to respect his cultural background. This case contributes to the growing body of evidence supporting reflective practices in psychotherapy and highlights the need for further research to explore its applications in diverse contexts.

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