

THE BENEFITS OF FOCUSING: A Qualitative Analysis of Thirty Interviews with Focusers

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ABSTRACT

Focusing contributes to numerous fields of study and endeavor. It has resulted in new forms of counseling and psychotherapy, and it is widely practiced as a form of self-help. Even so, the benefits which we Focusers experience are complex, intertwined, and difficult to list. Focusing teachers introducing Focusing to new audiences would have an easier job if we could more clearly articulate the purpose and benefits of Focusing practice. That is why I started a program of research and interviews in 2008. My purpose was to ask 30 international Focusers what benefits they personally gained from Focusing. I found the following:

- *The benefits cited by interviewees could be organized within three meta-categories: 1) The Focusing experience itself. 2) Benefits brought to therapy, working partnerships, etc. 3) Benefits for practicing psychotherapists.*
- All benefits in the first category—the Focusing experience itself—could be categorized as: *Felt Shift, Healing, Self-understanding, Authenticity, Forward Movement, Improvement in Relationship, or Creativity.* (The precise nature of these benefits will be discussed in detail below.)
- The benefits cited varied depending upon how long a Focuser had been practicing. More experienced Focusers named more positive and more basic benefits compared with novices. The latter tended to stress relief from immediate difficulties and pain.

I hope that what I have learned and will share in this paper will help us to conceptualize more clearly the benefits of Focusing and facilitate the introduction of Focusing to new audiences.

Focusing is a little door. Some people want to give the name “focusing” to everything they find through this door. No, focusing is just attending to the bodily uneasiness of a problem (Gendlin, 1996, p.303-4).

Focusing is a psychological self-help practice originally enunciated by Eugene Gendlin (1969, 1981). According to Gendlin, Focusing involves just “spending time with, the at first unclear body sense of a problem, so that new steps come” (Gendlin, 1996, p.303). Despite such apparent simplicity, Focusing has found application within diverse fields including psychotherapy, education, creative activities, and community wellness. That, I think, is because

what exists “through this door” is *so* rich and beneficial. I call it “the benefits of Focusing”, but what, *precisely*, are those benefits?

I have been practicing and teaching Focusing and practicing Focusing-Oriented Psychotherapy for 18 years, and I know from personal experience that it has powerful effects and benefits. However, when a person who is new to Focusing asks, “What are the benefits of Focusing?” it is somehow difficult to articulate them. This is not satisfactory. When bringing Focusing to new audiences, we need to be able to clearly articulate the purpose of and benefits of Focusing practice. Thus my research question: *What are the benefits of Focusing?*

AN INITIAL SEARCH FOR AN ANSWER

Looking first to Gendlin himself for an answer, we learn that Focusing facilitates a “carrying forward” (1964), or “felt shift” (1981), or “experiential step”(1996). All of these involve a felt, bodily process of interaction between experience, meaning, and symbols, and Gendlin explicates its benefits using terms like “Self-propelling process”, “Personality change”, or simply “Process”. These expressions certainly make sense once one has had Focusing experience and a real felt shift, but they are pretty opaque for the new-to-Focusing people.

Ann Weiser Cornell, a world wide Focusing teacher for many years, tells us that Focusing “can be used for so many purposes that it is impossible to list the whole range of purposes”. (Cornell, 1993 /1996, p.13) However, she notes some particular practical benefits such as *knowing one’s real needs and wanting, having a comfortable relationship with one’s feelings, getting unstuck, and decision making*. Cornell does not attempt any systematic account of Focusing’s benefits.

More promising, perhaps, is Neil Friedman’s article titled, “Benefits of Focusing” (2000, pp 109-119) in which he lists 10 benefits he personally obtains from Focusing. They are presented under the headings: “My preferred way of self-therapy”, “A realm called ‘inside’”, “Head → body”, “Get a handle on feelings”, “Physiologically good”, “Source of insight”, “Strengthen real self”, “Self-empowerment”, “Authentic action”, “A door way to altered states”, and “Personal change”. However, this is still just a personal list without system or a research basis.

In summation, the benefits being attributed to Focusing by Friedman and Cornell tend to the personal and miscellaneous. If we look to Gendlin for guidance, then we find only his evolving terminology and philosophy of the Implicit. Nothing here offers a satisfactory source of answers when new-to-Focusing people ask about the benefits and purpose of Focusing. All one can do is invite them to try it for themselves and discover their own answers, and although this is certainly the most *direct* way for people to learn the benefits of Focusing, there are situations where it would be helpful to be able to outline the benefits beforehand such as when introducing Focusing in the classroom or in the big professional conferences. I needed to look further.

Digging deeper into the literature, I examined what is said about the benefits of Focusing in introductory Focusing books and DVDs available in Japan. (Gendlin, 1981; Cornell, 1993/1996; 1996/1998; Murase et.al., 1995; Murase, 1997; Friedman, 2000; Hikasa, 2008, in Japanese; Murayama et.al., 2005) I listed and coded the benefits cited, then used the “KJ-Method” (Kawakita, 1967) to obtain a structure for representing and categorizing them. (The KJ-Method is a process for qualitative analysis briefly described in an appendix at the end of this paper.)

The results of this more systematic exercise were as follows:

I) The benefits of Focusing can be divided into three major categories

- 1) The benefits of the Focusing experience itself
- 2) The benefits which Focusing practice brings to therapy, working partnerships, etc.
- 3) The benefits which Focusing practice offers to psychotherapists.

II) The *main* benefits of Focusing all belong in category “1” (The benefits of the Focusing experience itself), and they can be presented using six subsidiary categories as in Figure 1.

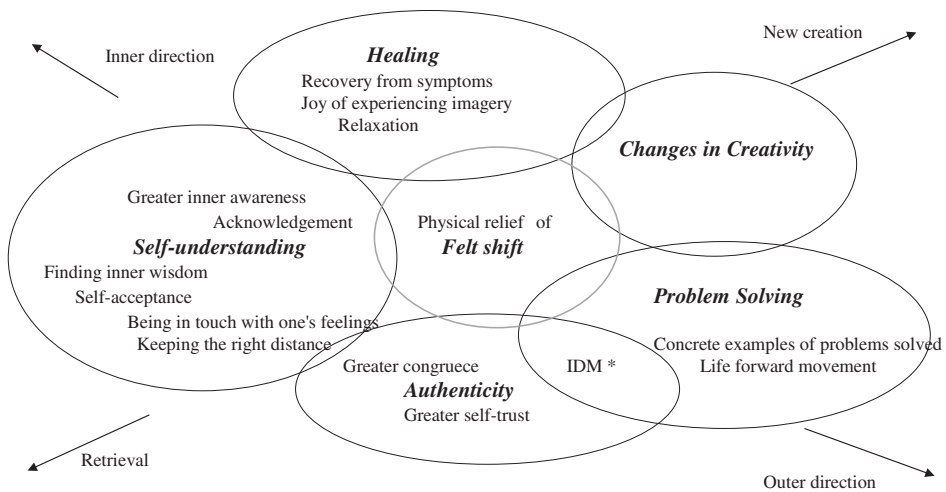


Figure.1: ‘The Benefits of the Focusing Experience as determined from Introductory Materials’

*IDM is short for “Improved decision making”.

This Figure was developed using the KJ-Method. The categories are spatially arranged on the basis of similarity and detail is added later. The axis upper-left to lower-right represents an “Inner-Outer” continuum. The “Inner direction” end (upper-left) lies between *Healing* and *Self-understanding* while the “Outer direction” end runs in the direction of *Problem Solving*. There is a second axis running lower-left to upper-right which represents a “Retrieval-New creation” continuum.

In the centre of Figure 1 is the physical relief experienced in consequence of the *Felt Shift* which is the core of Gendlin’s change process (1981). Around the felt shift there are then five further categories: *Healing*, *Self-understanding*, *Authenticity*, *Problem Solving*, and *Creativity*. (As will be discussed later, there are differences between these categories and those which emerged in subsequent research.) This representation of the benefits of the Focusing experience occupies a two dimensional plane and involves *continua* rather than *fully separable* categories. The possibilities for personal change and growth represented one the plane should *not* be thought of as reducible to such categories as “mental”, “psychological”, “physiological”, “spiritual”, “personal”, “relational”, etc. They are *holistic* changes involving the growth of the whole of the person and involving all their interactions with their environment.

III) Focusing offers what I think of as “micro-benefits”, “short-term benefits” and “long-term benefits”. Micro-benefits are felt at the same time as a shift happens. They are *cotemporaneous* with the felt shift and involve “physical relief” or “relaxation”. Short-term benefits are felt after *one or more sessions* and involve, for example, “spiritual experience” or “improved decision making”. Then there are the long-term benefits requiring *multiple Focusing sessions* and much Focusing practice to find, for example “self-acceptance” or “finding inner wisdom”.

Because this schema of benefits was extracted from introductory Focusing literature and DVDs, it might be just an artifact of the things Focusing teachers say in order to promote the training they offer. Or perhaps there are more subtle biases at work. In order to check how genuinely representative the schema is, I needed to conduct empirical research in which individual Focusers get to speak about the benefits of Focusing as they experience them. That is why I set out to interview a diverse sample of Focusers about their experience of Focusing and the benefits of their Focusing practice. I would then be able to ascertain whether the benefits experienced by my sample Focusers were similar to the benefits schematized above and whether benefits are in any way dependent upon how long a person has had a Focusing practice.

ASKING FOCUSERS

The interviewees

The interviewees are 30 international Focusers as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: 'The Interviewees'

Group	Years of Focusing practice (average)	Number of interviewees (male)	Age range (average)	Nationality
Novice	Less than 6 years (2.9)	10 (4)	27-62 yrs. (43.8)	U.S.A., France, Japan, U.K. etc.
Medium Experience	9-18 years (12.2)	10 (0)	30-68 yrs. (54.3)	Japan, U.S.A., Netherlands, Italy, Greece, etc.
Long Experience	more than 20 years (25.9)	10 (2)	55-76 yrs. (63.9)	U.S.A., Canada, Japan, Netherlands, etc.

Interviewees were recruited at International and Japanese conferences, Focusing retreats, and from graduate school students interested in Focusing. Interviews were conducted during the author's sabbatical year which facilitated the acquisition of international data. The interviewees themselves were divided into three groups:

- 1) **Novice Group:** Each had less than 6 years (2.9 years average) experience. Their professions were varied. The group included a carpenter, a sculptor, language teachers, and graduate students.
- 2) **Medium Experience Group:** This group included 7 Focusing professionals and 3 non-professional Focusers with a range of experience of 9 to 18 years (12.2 years average). 5/10 were coordinators of the Focusing Institute. The three non-professional Focusers were a writer, a nurse, and a school teacher.
- 3) **Long Experience Group:** All were experienced psychotherapists or Focusing teachers with more than 20 years of Focusing experience (25.9 years average). All but one were certifying coordinators of The Focusing Institute.

Data collection

With the agreement of the interviewee a semi-structured private interview was conducted by the author. The interview was digitally recorded and written notes were made during the interview. Out of the questions around which the interviews were structured, five were eventually used as a data-source and supply the findings presented here. They were:

- 1) What are the benefits of Focusing for you?
- 2) What were the benefits of your very first Focusing session?
- 3) What were the benefits of your most impressive session?
- 4) What would the benefits of your most recent Focusing session?
- 5) What effect does Focusing have upon your the daily life?

All the questions were asked in a Focusing manner. Interviewees were encouraged to take their time and answer with reference to felt sensing. The interview itself gave the interviewee a chance to reflect upon their Focusing life. Taking question 2 as an example, the interviewee was first asked to remember their very first Focusing session and to talk about the session if they wished. Then the interviewer asked, “What is the sense of it right now in your body?” When that sense was established, the main question came as, “Ask yourself what were the benefits that experience brought to you?” In this way, it was hoped to get a fresh and concrete description of the benefits from the Focuser’s own perspective.

Data analysis

Step 1: Using the notes and audio recordings, each benefit referenced by an interviewee was coded into short phrases.

Step 2: Thee codes were then grouped together into categories using the schema obtained earlier. When a coded description from an interview matched an existing category, it was placed in that category. When a coded description did not fit any existing category, a new category was established and named.

Step 3: Within each group of Focusers, the number mentioning each kind of benefit and category was counted. This was done so that differences related to the length of Focusing experience might become apparent even though the samples were too small for statistical examination.

QUALITATIVE RESULTS

Result 1: Categorization of the benefits of Focusing

The same three main categories were evident as when I used the KJ-Method on introductory Focusing materials, namely:

- 1) The benefits of the Focusing experience itself
- 2) The benefits which Focusing practice brings to therapy, working partnerships, etc.
- 3) The benefits which Focusing practice offers to psychotherapists.

Result 2. The benefits of the Focusing experience itself

Consistent with the approach I adopted earlier, I will continue to concentrate on the first category of benefits. These are shown in Figure 2a below. Like Figure 1, Figure 2a was developed using the KJ-Method. In the middle is the *Felt Shift* which is surrounded this time by six categories: *Healing*, *Self-understanding*, *Authenticity*, *Forward movement*, *Changes in relationship*, and *Changes in creativity*. The names of these categories are self-explanatory. In addition, Table 2 (also below) lists the *sub-categories* mentioned by interviewees accompanied by shortened examples of how the interviewees actually referred to the benefits they experienced. (I will say more about sub-categories below.)

In Figure 2a, two *new* categories appear which are not present in Figure 1. This is because although interviewees spoke of benefits related to their every day lives which were located—diagrammatically and according to the KJ-Method—in the same *place* as *Problem Solving*, no interviewees actually *spoke* of “problem solving”. Instead, their responses demonstrated a need for two separate categories occupying the same part of the two-dimensional plane as *Problem Solving*. For example, interviewees said things such as, “Focusing shows the right direction” and, “With Focusing, I can find the right next steps.” Benefits like these are better represented by the new category *Forward movement*. Interviewees also spoke of benefits that could be characterized as part of a second new category: *Changes in relationship*.

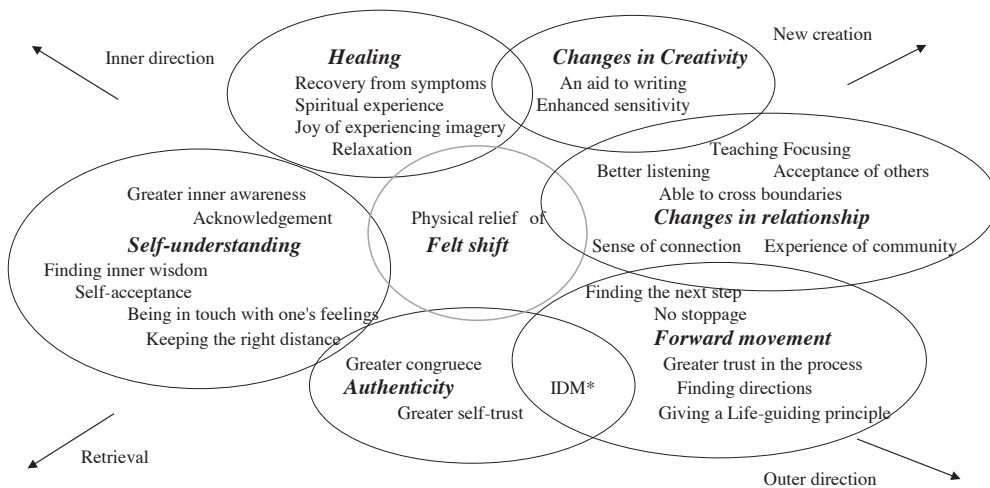


Figure 2a: ‘The Benefits of the Focusing Experience as determined by Research Interviews’

*IDM is short for ‘Improved decision making’

Result 3: The need for sub-categories

In addition to the *categories* discussed above, the need for a number of *sub-categories* emerged from the interviews.

In respect of *Forward movement*, the sub-categories generated by the interviews were: “Finding Direction”, “Finding the next step”, “No stoppage”, “Sense of forward movement”, “Greater trust in the process”, and “Giving a Life-guiding principle”. *Forward movement* is a more accurate description of these benefits than *Problem-solving*, and it has a more positive and constructive flavor. Focusers found that Focusing is useful not only when there are “problems” to solve but also in carrying forward their ordinary daily lives.

The other category unique to the interviews was *Changes in relationship*, encompassing the sub-categories: “Better listening”, “Greater sense of connection”, “Being able to cross boundaries”, “Greater acceptance of others”, “Improved relationships”, “Experience of community”, and “Teaching Focusing”. These benefits were all listed in introductory books, but they were not cited sufficiently frequently to make a category using the “KJ-Method”. However, from the actual Focusers came many rich descriptions of Focusing’s capacity to improve relationships. Perhaps this is indicative of the fact that human beings are inherently social animals and that relationship is a big issue in our lives.

Result 4: Similarities of structure

As with the results obtained from introductory Focusing materials, the results obtained by interview can be placed in a two dimensional plane with an axis upper-left to lower-right representing an “Inner-Outer” continuum, and an axis lower-left to upper-right representing a “Retrieval-New creation” continuum.

Looking at the first of these axes, the “Inner direction” between *Healing and Self-understanding* (upper-left) yields benefits for the inner experiencing of the person. The “Outer direction” involves *Forward movement* and *Changes in relationship*. These are benefits experienced by Focusers interacting with their environment. Looking at the second axis, “Retrieval” (down-left) is the direction of a Focuser’s own authentic self and involves *Self-understanding* and *Authenticity*. The other end of this axis, “New creation” (upper-right), involves *Changes in creativity* with, perhaps, some *Changes in relationship* and *Forward movement*. This two dimensional representation of the benefits of Focusing in their entirety corresponds with all aspects of a human life.

Result 5: The time factor

Consistency between the Focusing materials results and the results obtained by interview also extends to the division of benefits into “micro-benefits”, “short-term benefits”, and “long-term benefits” depending on the length of time needed to acquire them. (**An initial search**, result III.) Accordingly, in Figure 2a, each sub-category of benefit is positioned

within the two-dimensional plane according to the length of time involved in its acquisition. More precisely:

- The closer a benefit is to the centre of the plane, the more immediate its acquisition.
- The further a benefit is away from the center of the plane, the greater the time involved in acquiring it.

In consequence, it is the distance from the center of the plane to a particular benefit which indicates whether it is “micro”, “short-term”, or “long-term”. Therefore, because the physical relief involved in a felt shift is the most immediate benefit, *Felt shift* occupies the very center of the plane. *Felt shift* is what I call a “micro-benefit”.

Now consider the category *Healing*. “Relaxation” (as in the statement that “Focusing brings us calmness, peacefulness and a safe feeling.”) is the most “micro-benefit”, and it is closely related to the physical relief of the *Felt shift*. The “Joy of experiencing imagery” (as in “One can enjoy imagery.” and “Feeling the open space.”) could be either a “micro-benefit” or a “short-term benefit” coming after one or more Focusing sessions. “Spiritual experience” also comes as a “short-term benefit”. “Relief of symptoms” and “Self-healing” are usually experienced as “long-term benefits” requiring many sessions or a lengthy Focusing practice.

The same logic applies throughout Figure 2a: each sub-category of benefit is distanced from the centre according to the length of time needed to acquire it, and that distance indicates whether it is a “micro”, “short-term”, or “long-term” benefit.

Result 6: A comprehensive table of benefits

Table 2, below, provides a comprehensive list of the sub-categories of benefits revealed by interview. The length of time required for acquisition of each benefit is indicated as follows: \triangle denotes a micro-benefit, \circ denotes a short-term benefit, \odot denotes a long-term benefit. Table 2, also provides examples of the ways in which interviewees spoke about each sub-category.

Table 2: 'The Benefits of Focusing revealed by Interview'

categories	nature of benefits	sub-categories	time scale†	examples from interview data
Felt Shift				
	Physical relief of Felt Shift		△	"Aha!" experience. Relieved and relaxed.
Healing				
	Relaxation		△○	F brings a feeling of aliveness. Satisfaction.
	<i>Peace</i>			It brings us calmness, peacefulness, and a safe feeling.
	<i>Ease</i>			Helps to relax. Feeling of easiness. Do not need to be perfect.
	<i>Freedom</i>			One becomes free. Liberated. Feeling of not being restricted.
	The joy of experiencing imagery		△○	One can enjoy Imagery. Feeling the open space.
	Spiritual experience		○	Feeling of "I am more than me". Beautiful, sacred experience. It feels like a gift.
	Relief of symptoms		○◎	Relief from panic attacks. F calms down the sadness of grief. Less worries.
	<i>Physical symptoms</i>			F helps me to notice physical problems. Coping with the cancer, pain or symptoms.
	<i>Self-care</i>			Can take care of oneself. Promoting one's own health.
	Self-healing		○◎	I feel healed.
Self-understanding				
	Greater inner awareness		○◎	Connection with inner self. Awareness of the energy inside oneself.
	Acknowledgement		△	Acknowledgement of one's situation. Noticing the situation as it is brings relief.
	Self-knowledge		△○	Notice the things one has not seen before. Deeper self-understanding.
	<i>Expanded view</i>			One can have a different view. Notice alternative possibilities. Broader view.
	<i>Clarity</i>			More clarification. One can see the situation more clearly.
	Being in touch with one's feelings		△○	Easy to be with feelings. Respectful to feelings. No need to oppress feelings.
	Keeping the right distance		△○	Able to set aside a long-held troubling issue. Not overwhelmed. Able to see things with humor.
	<i>Space</i>			Able to have space. Space for experiencing is given.
	Self-acceptance		○◎	Feeling OK as it is. Less criticism. Less self-blame. Able to cherish oneself.
	Finding inner wisdom		◎	Connection to the inner resource. Having a mentor or listener inside oneself.
Authenticity				
	Improved decision-making		○	Good decisions fit the situation. Able to know one's own wanting.
	Greater congruence		△○	Congruence between feeling and knowing. Able to be real. Authentic self.
	Greater sense of authenticity		◎	Being empowered. Confidence. Centered.
	<i>grounding</i>			Grounded. Being stable.
	Greater self-trust		◎	Trust in oneself, body, or process.
Forward Movement				
	Finding direction		○	F shows the right direction. Able to face life crises without being overwhelmed.
	Finding the next step		△○	Able to find the right next steps. F leads to the action steps.
	No stoppage		△○	Not stuck. Able to ride the flow. Life goes on more smoothly.
	Sense of Forward movement		○	F brings changes and evolvment. F brings new movement. Feeling of "Let's do it".
	Greater trust in the process		○◎	Able to behave naturally and easily. Following intuition in the moment.
	Giving a Life-guiding principle		◎	A way of living. A handrail for life. An easy way to be.
Changes in Relationships				
	Better listening		△○	Able to listen to others, empathically.
	Greater sense of connection		○◎	F deepens the relationship with others. Open to others.
	Being able to cross boundaries		○◎	Communication beyond boundaries. Dissolving conflicts.
	Greater acceptance of others		○◎	Acceptance of others. Being non-judgmental and accepting.
	Improved relationships		○◎	The relationship with others changes. Improved communication.
	Experience of community		◎	Connected with gentle and loving people. Rich and better community.
	Teaching Focusing		◎	Wanting to teach Focusing to others. Teaching.
Changes in Creativity				
	Enhanced sensitivity		△○	Increased sensitivity to the arts. Enjoying the art works fully.
	An aid to writing		○	Helpful tool for writing. Being able to express from a deeper place.
	Enhanced creativity		○◎	F promotes creative activities. Able to make art works from a cleared space.

† △ : micro effects ○ : short-term effects ◎ : long-term effects

Note: Within some categories there is a sub-category that has been underlined. These sub-categories may be considered *equivalent* to the *categories* within which they fall. Although that may seem initially illogical, there is good reason for it. While some interviewees clearly broke a given category into sub-categories, others tended to treat the same category as one whole thing. (For example, while some interviewees broke *Self-understanding* into sub-categories, others treated it as a single whole, thus giving us the apparent sub-category, “Self-knowledge”.) To avoid confusion between levels, the names of categories and equivalent sub-categories have been made slightly different. (Thus the category *Self-understanding* contains the sub-category “Self-knowledge”.)

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

Frequency of mention

Table 3, below, shows the numbers of interviewees mentioning the benefits of each sub-category. (It also provides additional information which will be explained below.)

Table 3: 'The numbers of people who mentioned the benefits in each sub-category.'

	numbers of statements	numbers of participants			comparison			
		from all participants	① Novice	② Medium Experience	③ Long Experience	① v ②	① v ③	② v ③
Numbers of participants in each group		30	10	10	10			
<i>Felt Shift</i>		9	6	2	3	1		
Physical relief of Felt Shift	9	6	2	3	1			
<i>Healing</i>		84	25	8	9	8		
<u>Relaxation</u>	37	22	5	9	8	<	<	
Joy of experiencing imagery	6	4	0	1	3			
Spiritual experience	6	5	1	2	1			
<u>Recovery from symptoms</u>	31	17	7	8	2	>	>	
Self-healing	7	6	4	2	0	>		
<i>Self-understanding</i>		204	30	10	10	10		
Greater inner awareness	18	13	4	3	6			<
Acknowledging	21	11	4	5	3			
<u>Self-knowledge</u>	70	24	10	7	7			
Being in touch with one's feelings	30	14	7	5	2	>	>	
<u>Keeping the right distance</u>	28	19	8	5	6			
<u>Self-acceptance</u>	37	18	4	8	6	<		
Finding the inner wisdom	3	2	0	2	0			
<i>Authenticity</i>		80	26	8	9	9		
Improved decision-making	14	10	2	5	3			
<u>Greater congruence</u>	30	19	5	7	7			
<u>Greater sense of authenticity</u>	22	17	5	6	4			
Greater self-trust	15	11	3	5	3			
<i>Forward Movement</i>		106	27	9	9	9		
Finding Direction	9	6	3	1	2			
<u>Finding the next step</u>	23	15	4	5	6			
No Stoppage	11	8	2	3	3			
<u>Sense of forward movement</u>	20	15	3	6	6	<	<	
Greater trust in the process	22	12	2	6	4	<		
Giving a Life-guiding principle	24	12	2	4	6		<	
<i>Changes in Relationship</i>		77	23	8	9	6		
Better listening	8	6	1	2	3			
Greater sense of connection	24	12	2	5	5	<	<	
Being able to cross boundaries	13	10	2	4	4			
Greater acceptance of others	9	7	2	3	2			
Improved relationships	6	5	2	3	0			
Experience of community	10	7	2	2	3			
Teaching Focusing	7	5	1	2	2			
<i>Creativity</i>		14	8	3	3	2		
Enhanced sensitivity	2	2	0	0	0			
An aid to writing	5	5	1	3	2			
Enhanced creativity	7	4	2	2	0			

Although they are not statistically significant because of the small sample size, the following details exhibited by Table 3 are still suggestive:

- 1) Out of the 7 main categories, *Healing*, *Self-understanding*, *Authenticity*, *Forward Movement*, and *Changes in Relationship* are mentioned by most (more than 2/3) of interviewees.
- 2) *Felt Shift* and *Creativity* are mentioned by only 6 people, and 8 people respectively, out of 30 research participants.
- 3) All participants mentioned benefits from the category *Self-understanding*. The total number of statements citing benefits from *Self-understanding* was 204. That is more than twice the number of citations for any other category.
- 4) The same 9 sub-categories are mentioned by more than half the interviewees. (In Figure 2b, below, the categories and sub-categories mentioned by more than half the interviewees have been underlined.)
- 5) Within *Healing* “Relaxation” and “Recovery from symptoms” are mentioned by 22/30 and 17/30 people respectively. Within *Self-understanding* “Self-knowledge” (24/30), “Keeping the right distance” (19/30) and “Self acceptance” (18/30) are the most popular categories. Within *Authenticity*, “Greater congruence” (19/30) and “Greater sense of authenticity” (17/30) are the most popular. Within *Forward Movement* “Finding the next step” (15/30) and “Sense of forward movement”(15/30) are the most popular.

Figure 2b, below, is a modified version of Table 2a which highlights the “most popular” categories with underlining—“most popular” being defined as “mentioned by more than half the interviewees”. As before, “IDM” is short for “Improved decision making”.

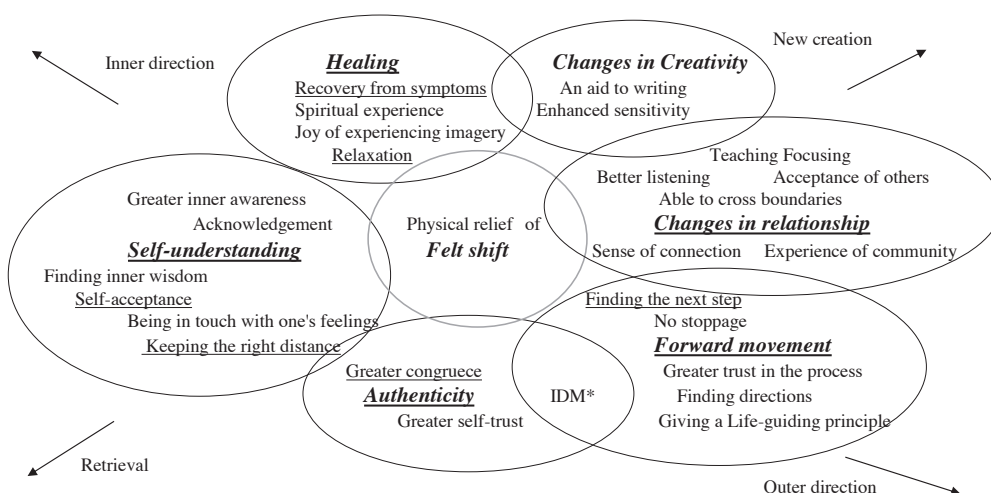


Figure 2b: ‘The Benefits of the Focusing Experience as determined by Research Interviews with the Most Popular Categories underlined’

*IDM is short for ‘Improved decision making’

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN EXPERIENCE-LEVELS

I examined the numbers of people who mentioned each of the main categories for a correlation with the experience-level groups discussed above (**The Interviewees**). I found none. In every group, references to *Felt Shift* and *Creativity* are rare, and most people, irrespective of experience-level, mention the other categories.

However, in respect to the *sub-categories*, there *are* differences between the groups which are noteworthy but not statistically significant because of the small sample size. To indicate the nature of these differences, signs of inequality were put into the “Comparison Column” of Table 3 (above) when there is a difference of more than 3 between experience-level groups. Here is a summary of what Table 3 reveals:

- “Novice” Focusers cited “Recovery from Symptoms”, “Self-healing”, and “Being in touch with feelings”. Such benefits evidence recovery from negative experiences and ways of living.
- By contrast, “Medium Experience” Focusers cited “Relaxation”, “Self-acceptance”, “Sense of forward movement”, and “Greater trust in the process”. These kind of benefits represent the more positive side of Focusing practice.
- “Long Experience” Focusers cited “Greater inner awareness” and “Giving a Life-guiding principle”. These are benefits consequent upon the integration of Focusing into daily life. It would not be surprising if they required lengthy practice to achieve.

In general, among the novices—and despite their average years of experience being 2.9 years—relief from immediate difficulties is the most salient consequence of Focusing practice. Perhaps this is because it was those difficulties that initially brought them to Focusing. Furthermore, these are the kind of benefits which more experienced (Medium Experience and Long Experience) Focusers might well take for granted. Or perhaps more experienced Focusers have been free from such difficulties long enough that they are starting to notice the more positive aspects of Focusing practice. After a *sufficiently* extensive practice, Focusing seems to become integrated into a Focuser’s daily life and turns into the life-guiding principle spoken of by Long Experience Focusers.

These differences point toward a natural developmental process involved in the practice of Focusing. However, here I need to admit the possibility of sample bias. In this research, *all* of the Long Experience Focusers and $\frac{7}{10}$ of the Medium Experience Focusers are either practicing psychotherapists or otherwise employed as Focusing professionals. This compares with only such person among the Novices. There are also age differences that may be relevant. The groups average ages are as follows: Novices—43.8 years, Medium Experience—54.3 years, Long Experience—63.9 years. These differences in professions and age might be the source of the differences between groups.

THE “MOST POPULAR” *BENEFITS*

Paying attention to only the *benefits* mentioned most frequently by interviewees, it can be said that Focusing results in:

- 1) *Healing*—especially by encouraging “Relaxation” and promoting “Recovery from symptoms”
- 2) *Self-understanding*—especially through “Keeping the right distance” from troubles and fostering Self-acceptance”.
- 3) *Authenticity*—especially in promoting “Greater congruence”.
- 4) *Forward Movement*—especially through “Finding the next step”.
- 5) *Changes in Relationship*.

EXAMPLES FROM AN INTERVIEW

In order to provide concrete examples of how the categories and sub-categories relate to the words actually spoken by an interviewee, here is a summarized version of the interview data of A__, an English carpenter in his 40s who has been Focusing for two years. He is a “Novice” who has found Focusing very helpful and is enthusiastic about partnerships and attending workshops.

Q1. What are the benefits of Focusing for you?

Healing “relaxation”: *I found the real deep stillness in myself. Something in me worries about work, money . . . all those things, and I can hold all of those and be with them . . .*

Healing “Recovery from symptoms”: *I used to have separation anxiety disorder. I had panic attacks and I could not function. Since I came to know Focusing, I don’t have panic attacks anymore. There is less anxiety, and when the panic happens . . . occasionally . . . I can hold it . . . I don’t have a fit anymore.*

Self-understanding “Keeping the right distance”: *I became emotionally stable. All my life was about managing my emotions. Now with Focusing, I do not manage them. I just allow them . . .*

Healing “Joy of experiencing imagery”, “Spiritual experience”: *Allowing my emotions to just be, they manage themselves. I do not have to do anything. Just offer them presence and allow them to be there, everything, every part of my emotions is sacred.*

Q2. What were the benefits of your very first Focusing experience?

It was about the separation from somebody in an unhealthy relationship. Focusing’s benefits were . . .

Forward Movement “Finding the next step”: *I came to a resolution that this relationship is relationship unhealthy. On the train from the session, I decided to split . . . For me this was an action step.*

Authenticity “Greater sense of authenticity”: *She and I were in an enmeshed relationship and it did not allow me to be as I am . . . Being separate, I got unhooked from the enmeshment . . .*

Changes in Relationship “Improved relationship”: *Focusing is very good at carrying forward . . . being free of a stuck relationship.*

Q3. What were the benefits of your most impressive session?

The session was impressive because of the image of my two parts . . . the introvert . . . the shy part, and outgoing clown part . . . being in the same the same room . . . together.

Self-understanding “Self-knowledge”: *I realized that the very shy and scared part and the controlling part are brothers. There always used to be filters between me and world before . . . then I could not see . . .*

Authenticity “Greater sense of authenticity”: *Before, a lot of energy was needed to separate those two parts. When those two parts collapsed, it allowed me to operate with integrity for myself, for the first time. Now I can tell . . . communicate . . . my feelings to others.*

Self-understanding “Self-acceptance”: *I was given a gift called “life”. All my life, I was in a survival mode before. Now I can live. I was given a life and I would like to honor this life. I have now come to the stage where I can be happy.*

Forward movement “Sense of forward movement”: *My process used to be going away from something. Now I am moving toward something. Now I embrace what is there and can wait for what is next.*

Q4. What were the benefits of the most recent Focusing session?

It was about a relationship with somebody who just told me the relationship was finished.

Self-understanding “Being in touch with one’s feelings”: *I feel hate. Before Focusing, I never hated. I do not hate her, but I hate what she did. There was a lot of bitterness, anger and Focusing allowed me to be with a lot of hatred.*

Changes in relationship “Improvement in relationship”: *I came to know that there was a limitation in the relationship.*

Q5. Are there any other influences of Focusing in your life?

Forward Movement “Giving a Life-guiding principle”: *I now function from there . . . (Focusing).*

Self-understanding “Self-acceptance” and Changes in Relationship “Greater Acceptance of others”: *Acceptance of my own physical pain, acceptance of other people’s annoying behavior.*

Authenticity “Greater sense of authenticity”: *For years I was like a leaf blown by the wind. With Focusing, I became a tree, even though I may not be such a big tree. Being a leaf, you do not have any sense of who you are. You are dealing with the wind of emotions.*

Authenticity “Greater self-trust”: *I have been in therapy for years, but managing myself and looking after myself is not dependent upon my therapist . . . but it is dependent upon my reflecting upon my situation.*

A__ is representative of the interviewees, and these excerpts are representative of the interview process which touches upon “popular” benefits such as: “Relaxation”, “Recovery from symptoms”, “Self-knowledge”, “Keeping the right distance”, “Self-acceptance”, “Greater sense of authenticity”, “Finding the next step”, “Sense of forward movement”. (There is only one popular sub-category which is not mentioned: “Greater congruence”).

Additionally, A__ mentions all three categories typical of the Novice Group (which is consistent with these categories being cited when Focusing is used to overcome present difficulties.) However, there is also a mention of benefits more commonly referenced by experienced Focusers: for example, A__ touches upon “Relaxation”, “Self-acceptance”, “Sense of forward movement”, and “Giving a life-guiding principle”. Here, A__ is providing evidence that he is integrating Focusing into his life and making it a life-guiding principle.

One final characteristic to note is that A__ cites “Improved relationship” twice. This is consistent with the major new finding of this research compared with the introductory Focusing materials: accurately representing the benefits cited by interviewees requires introducing new categories and sub-categories. “Improved relationship” is an example of a new sub-category, belonging within a new category that is clearly important to A__.

FURTHER DISCUSSION

The unity of Focusing benefits

Although the core of change, the felt shift, is rarely cited as a benefit in itself, its influence extends across the whole of the two-dimensional plane used to model those benefits. This, I believe, is a natural consequence of Focusing being an innate, primary, and *holistic* way for humans to process experience. Thus, the felt sense is both *inner* (Inner direction) *and* about the whole situation and the *outer* world (Outer direction). The “Inner-Outer” axis is a continuum involving twin aspects of one process. Similarly, the “Retrieval-New creation” axis is a continuum whereby at one end of it the felt sense is *found*, and at the other end we can say that the felt sense is *made*. Campbell Purton explains this as follows:

We can say that we *find* the felt sense when we turn our attention to what we feel. However before we Focused our attention, there was not this *specific* feeling. It only emerges as specific, as a ‘this,’ through the impact of our attention. So we could also say that the felt sense is made in the interaction between our feeling-process and our attending to that process. It is impossible to draw a sharp line between ‘finding’ and ‘making’ here, but this is so whenever we are concerned with creativity (Purton, 2004, p.176).

Just as the two axes imply not strict separation but process, so the categories and sub-categories of the benefits of Focusing are not separate entities but discernible aspects of one

living process which can, for purposes of our understanding, be individuated. Sometimes, because of personal circumstances, certain aspects of Focusing will be particularly prominent for a Focuser. Perhaps, too, some people are more inclined to notice the inner aspects and benefits of Focusing while others tend to notice the outer aspects and benefits. Even so, these aspects and benefits are part of one whole thing and flow one into another.

COMPARING THE INTRODUCTORY MATERIALS AND INTERVIEW DATA

As demonstrated by Figures 1, 2a, and 2b, the structure provided by analyzing introductory Focusing books and DVDs proved largely appropriate to categorizing responses elicited through interview. The one significant exception to this was the need to establish the categories *Forward movement* and *Changes in relationship* in place of *Problem Solving*. In consequence—and this seems a significant finding—I find that the introductory Focusing materials emphasize the intra-personal benefits and changes represented by *Healing* and *Self-understanding*. Contrasting with this, the Focusers I interviewed were more appreciative of tangible changes in their external lives and the impact that Focusing had on the way they interacted with others and with their environment.

TIME AND THE EXPERIENCE OF BENEFIT

As discussed above (**Result 5: The time factor**) some Focusing benefits are immediate and others seem to build up over time. The terminology and associated time-scale I have used to represent this—“micro”, “short-term”, and “long-term”—are an entirely personal attempt to understand what I believe I have myself experienced and am noticing others experience. I am *not* claiming any rigor for it. Empirical quantitative data could be sought in order to better understand the precise relationship between time and particular kinds of Focusing benefits, but this research does not provide that data.

AN INVITATION

It was rewarding for me to receive so many comments offered by interviewees at the conclusion of their interview which might be summarized as: “This interview gave me a good chance to look back at my Focusing and personal history.”

I would like to invite you, the reader of this paper, to ask yourself these interview questions. They may offer opportunity to reflect upon *your* Focusing life.

FURTHER DATA

In the interviews I conducted I also asked questions about the effects of Focusing partnerships, attending workshops, and using Focusing within the practice of psychotherapy. I asked, “What is the distinctive feature of Focusing compared with the other self-help practices?” The analysis of the responses to these questions is not yet complete and may yet become the subject of a further publication.

To the beginning Focuser

In conclusion, I would like to offer a summary that conveys the benefits of Focusing for beginners, as I believe them to be revealed by this research project.

Focusing takes us to the core of our life process. Its benefits are felt across the broadest aspects of our lives, and the process is applicable to most, if not all fields of human endeavor.

Focuser's find that Focusing benefits their inner and spiritual lives. They have listed "Relaxation", "Self-healing", and "Self-understanding" amongst its effects. They have found that Focusing is especially helpful when there is a need for "Keeping the right distance" between ourselves and our feelings, helping us to achieve "Self-acceptance".

Focusing helps us find a "Greater sense of authenticity" and "Greater congruence". It assists us in dealing with the outer world, "Finding the next steps" and creating a "Sense of forward movement". Focusing promotes beneficial "Changes in relationship" and enhances creativity.

These are clearly evidenced benefits that more than two thirds of the interviewees have mentioned. Some of these benefits are noticed immediately, during (or right after) a session. Some need time to develop and become noticed.

Everyone I interviewed found that Focusing enhances *Self-understanding*. So let us try to practice "Being in touch with our feelings" while "Keeping the right distance". That is the essence of the Focusing practice. Focusing changes lives and deeply enriches us in the process.

APPENDIX: THE K-J METHOD

(Adapted from <http://www.mycoted.com/KJ-Method>, accessed 2011-09-19.)

This development of the “Snowball Technique” concentrates “groups of ideas pertaining to the same problem” and then assigns a recognizable “theme” (what Focusing would call a “handle”) to each group. Developed in Japan, it has become one of the “Seven management (New) tools” of modern Japanese quality management. The **Basic Cycle** is similar to mind-mapping but utilizes nested clusters rather than a tree structure:

1. **Card making:** All relevant facts and information are written on individual cards or pieces of paper and collated. This generates a supply of ideas.

2. **Grouping and naming:** The cards are shuffled, spread out, and read carefully. Cards that look as though they belong together are grouped together and any ‘oddities’ ignored. For each group, an appropriate title is written out and placed on top of its group of cards. This process is repeated using new titles to create a diminishing hierarchy of groups until there are less than 10 groups.

3. **Redistribution:** This step is skipped by a person working alone as the researcher did.

4. **Chart making:** Once there are less than 10 groups, some of which may contain sub-groups, sub-sub-groups, etc., they are arranged in a spatial pattern that facilitates appreciation of the overall picture.

5. **Explanation:** The researcher now tries to express what the chart *means*, writing notes and being careful to differentiate personal interpretations from the facts contained in the chart. Ideas for the solution are often developed whilst explaining the structure of the problem to others.

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