

## Psychological interventions online

Dr David Daniel Ebert, who was given the Comenius Early Career Psychologist Award during the conference, has become well known for his online and mobile-based interventions. With the ability to reach a far wider client group and to treat those who may otherwise feel unable to seek help, Ebert made a striking case for embracing technology in what we do.

One of these interventions, the GET.ON Mood Enhancer, consists of six guided self-help lessons, each followed by feedback from a psychologist, or 'e-coach'. Clients also receive push notifications with reminders for homework and ultra-brief training exercises such as muscle-relaxation techniques.

Ebert wanted to assess whether it was possible to halt the development of major depressive disorder in participants whose scores were just below the clinical range. After they used the GET.ON platform he measured the time it took for this disorder to appear in its clinical form in 406 people (with a control group just receiving psychoeducation). Indeed, it was shown it was possible to reduce a person's risk of developing major depressive disorder using this approach. An adapted version of the platform was also useful in helping people with diabetes

tackle depression, an effect which was maintained at one-year follow-up.

Another pervasive problem, work-related stress, also responds to this kind of online treatment. GET.ON Stressed, another programme developed by Ebert,



Dr David Daniel Ebert

### Testing communication styles

We've all met leaders who can't help but seem aggressive, or those who brim over with enthusiasm. While much research has been carried out on leadership styles, little has looked into communication styles and how these might affect employees' productivity. As part of her master's research Charlotte Malz (University of Zurich) developed, and tried to validate, a scale that would capture and assess different communication styles among leaders.

While Malz explained that

leadership research has seen communication as a strategy of leaders not much has looked into this on its own. She said there was a need for a short, feasible scale to assess this in leaders, one that could be used in research on the links between leadership and communication styles.

She developed a scale that covered six communication styles – expressiveness, preciseness, supportiveness, aggression, determination and inquisitiveness – and tested a Swedish and German version on almost 500 participants. Students were later recruited to help validate the items on the scale.

While the scale worked in both Swedish and German the determination and preciseness articles were not fully validated by the student participants. Malz said she hoped to develop this work further, as well as exploring leadership and communication style links in the future.

### Award for British psychologist

British Psychological Society member Professor Dave Bartram (University of Sussex) was the first ever recipient of the EFPA Robert Roe Award for Outstanding Contribution of Psychology to Society. The award is aimed at those who have brought psychologists from across Europe together, and Bartram has done so throughout his 30-year career developing standards of psychological testing across the continent.

Bartram, who was nominated jointly by the BPS Division of Occupational Psychology and the European Association of Work and Organizational Psychology, said he was particularly honoured to receive the award at the opening ceremony: 'Robert Roe was a friend, colleague and inspiration, and it is very special to have an award named after him... I was surprised to get the nomination and even more surprised to get the award!'

which taught problem-solving and emotion regulation helped to reduce perceived stress, which continued at six- and 12-month follow-up, and it also helped reduce depression and emotional exhaustion. As Ebert said, people struggling with stress at work may not be willing to go into a specialised depression treatment programme, but this stress intervention helped depression as well. He and colleagues also saw a reduction in absent days and a lowering of the costs associated with absenteeism.

Many of those who suffer with work-related stress, perhaps unsurprisingly, experience insomnia, and only around 1 per cent get treatment for this. A new intervention GET.ON Recovery uses classic CBT for insomnia with feedback from a psychologist, delivered online, and teaches users about sleep hygiene and other methods for better sleep. In a randomised control trial with stressed teachers Ebert found a strong effect size, further backed up by replications. Once you remove the psychologist from the equation, however, the treatment is less effective.

These treatments offer hope that one day we might be able to treat massive amounts of people across the world in a number of conditions in a brief, relatively cheap way. But would they work for everyone? Ebert and his team carried out a meta-analysis of internet-based treatments of depression and found the treatment to be effective for all of the subgroups he examined: those with severe depression, younger and older adults and those with different levels of educational attainment. Although, Ebert pointed out, there are potentially moderators for the effectiveness of these interventions he and his team are yet to find them.

Some studies have associated these treatments with harmful or negative effects, and it's important to consider that some individuals may struggle with implementing psychological strategies into daily life thus leading to further hopelessness, lower self-efficacy and potentially a deterioration of symptoms.

Ebert has also examined rates of deterioration in symptoms in some subgroups and found that internet interventions generally reduced the risk of deterioration apart from on one group. Those with lower levels of educational attainment had a larger risk of symptom deterioration compared to controls – while this effect wasn't significant it suggests a trend for some participants struggling with this type of intervention.

These interventions can be effective in treating a number of disorders and can be helpful to those who don't have time for face-to-face therapy or those who feel their conditions are stigmatised. Ebert ended by saying that now we can conclude it's possible to deliver interventions online: he's interested in how we can go further beyond face-to-face therapy using technology to improve psychological interventions. He suggested that using wearables to identify behaviour patterns, and machine learning to inform what would be the best treatment at the best times, are very real possibilities.

From January to June 2018, the UK hosts the European Semester of Psychology

Background at [www.efpa.eu/psy-and-europe](http://www.efpa.eu/psy-and-europe) and details coming soon at [www.bps.org.uk](http://www.bps.org.uk)

We pride ourselves on showcasing the work of psychologists worldwide, and this is a particularly good opportunity to include our European colleagues across the continent.

Get in touch with topics and potential authors/interviewees, on [jon.sutton@bps.org.uk](mailto:jon.sutton@bps.org.uk)



While much research has been carried out on leadership styles, little has looked into communication styles

