PSYCHOLOGICAL E-VOLUNTEERING AMONG RUSSIAN SPEAKERS

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Introduction

An ethical message is delivered to society, into the mind and into daily life and behavior, by traditional educational and legal ways. This task may be realized by a novel way of e-volunteering.
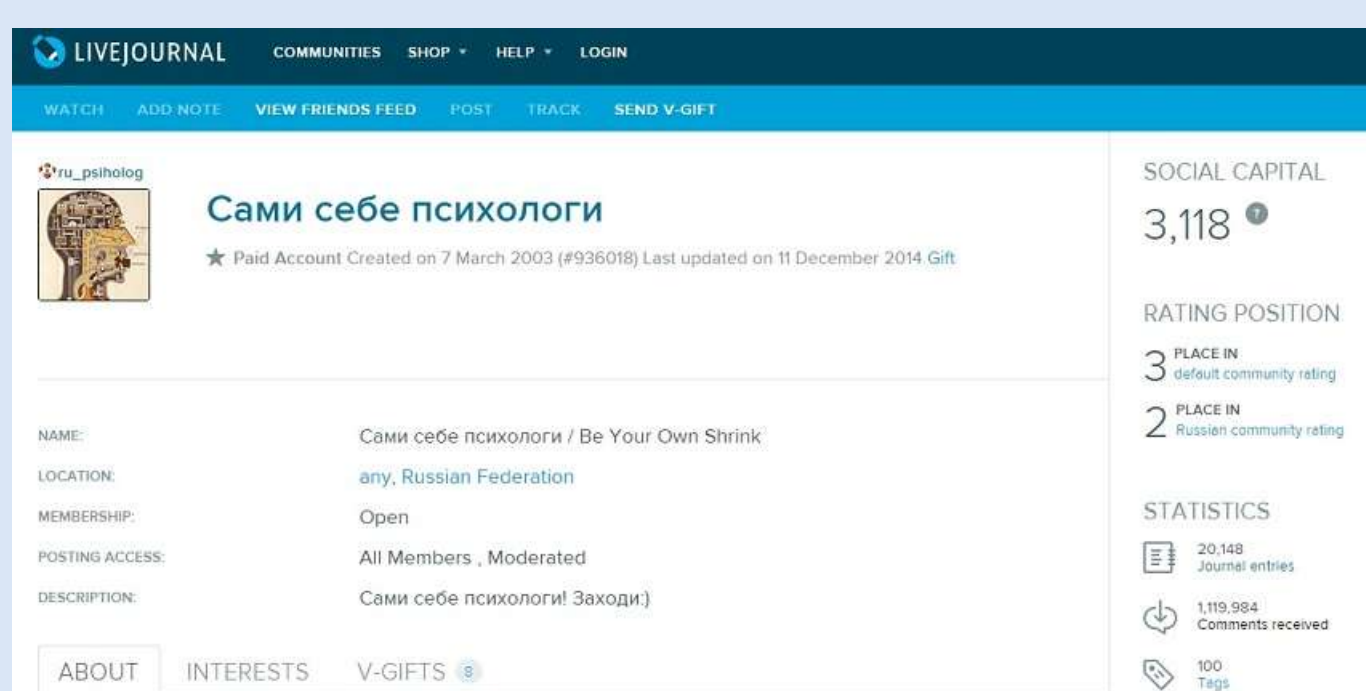
An online volunteer is a volunteer who completes tasks, in whole or in part, via Internet. Currently there is no organization tracking the best practices in e-volunteering, amount of people engaged in online volunteering or how many organizations involve online volunteers.

We report about setting, psychotherapeutic effects, management issues, ethical dilemmas in our work, based on seven years practice of co-directing the community "Be Your Own Shrink" on Live Journal.

ru_psiholog.livejournal.com

Thousands of Russian speakers from 65 countries engage in collaborative work online that provides psychological support and psyho-educational help nonstop.

An archive of transcripts counts 20,000+ group discussions, subdivided into 100 categories.

Picture 1

During the last twelve years the amount of participants has grown significally, and now there are 30,000 Live Journal users, 120,000 participants from other social networks, more than one million comments on the site.

We have about 400 posts and 2,8 million watches of post's discussions per month.

Setting

As we have written in our papers [1,2], communication in *ru_psiholog* is built according to the rules of psychotherapeutic encounter group. Anonymous participation is allowed both for topic starters and for commentators [6,7]. E-therapy is an area, that is actively investigated accordingly to high standards of evidence based practice in psychology [4].

Participants

Online communities depend upon the commitment and voluntary participation of their members [3,5]. Community design influences how people become attached to the community and whether they are willing to expend effort on its behalf [8].

Whereas community is divided to readers and writers, we have analyzed active participation only. Duration of co-working in community *ru_psiholog* is shown in figure 1.

How Long Are You Reading the Community, Whatever Daily or Sometimes?
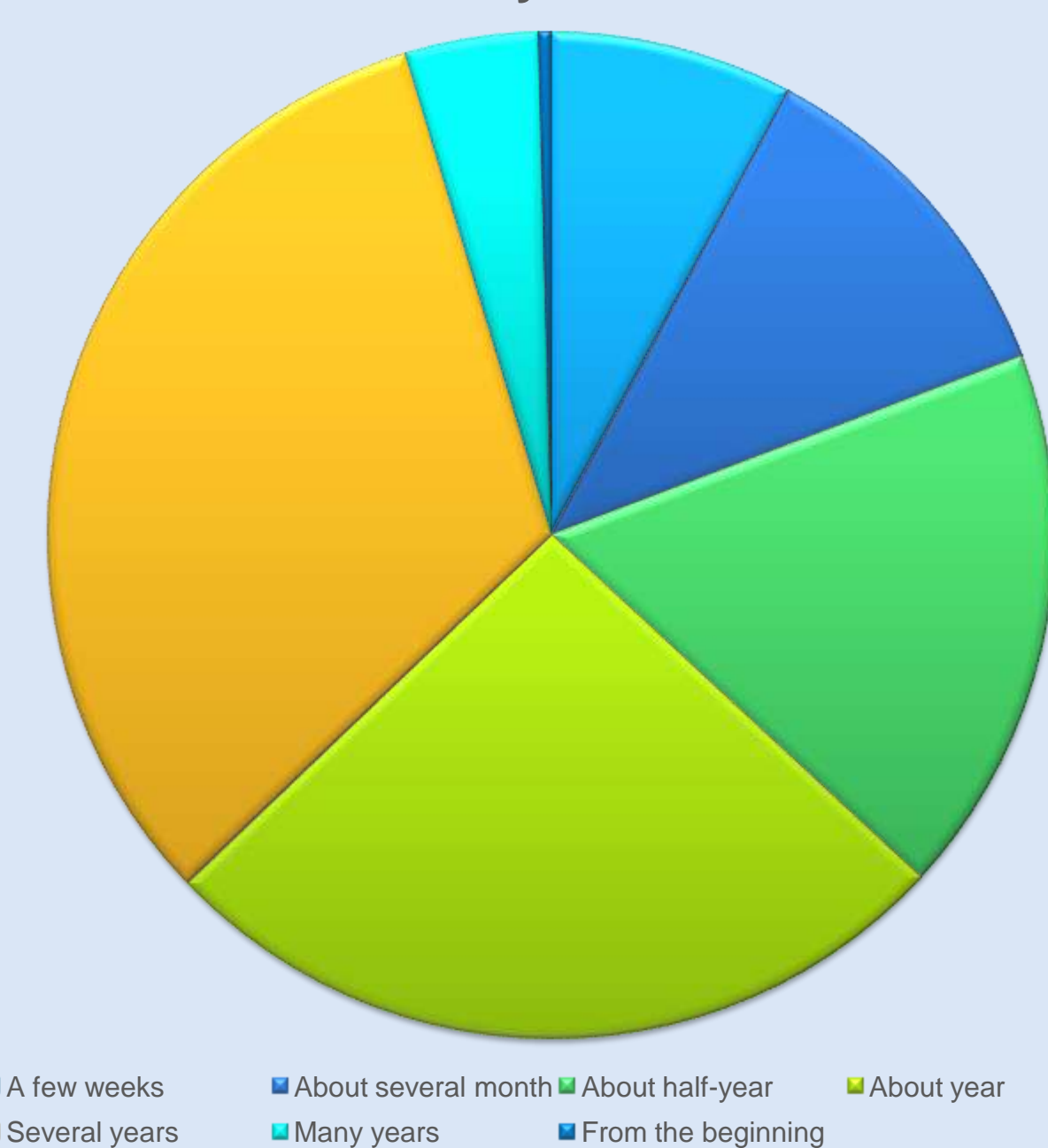
- A few weeks
- About several month
- About half-year
- About year
- Several years
- Many years
- From the beginning

Figure 1

Group dynamics ravels are never-ending story online. Looking through psychological glasses, within the community a group of trolling people, a work group and a basic assumptions groups (according to Wilfred Bion, 1970) of dependency, fight-flight and pairing are involved in the complex interplay. Maintainers put group dynamics into discussion in Processing post weekly.

Ethical Attitudes

We have also faced the phenomena of polyphony of ethical attitudes which are brought into e-volunteering. For more than twenty five centuries European culture has formed the number of rules and principles, so today four positions on this matter co-exist in the social-cultural reality. Their prototypes have come from medicine and may be viewed in historical sequence as follows:

Model of Hippocrates (460 B.C. – between 377-356 B.C.), the principle "first, do not harm", - puts in the forefront cautiousness and scientific verification of the help giver's acts, requires the awareness about the fact that any drug may be a poison, but any poison may be a drug.

Model of Paracelsus (1493-1541), the principle of doing for good, - based on analogy between macrocosm (physical universe) and microcosm (human), which implies the necessity to check the actions of the help giver with higher moral concepts of good and evil, and keeps the belief that helper is the transmitter of the God's power only.

Model of Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), the principle of utility, - basically means paternalism, because the help giver takes on himself the full responsibility for the life of the one asking for help and because gives to himself the right to decide, would his actions bring to others happiness or suffering.

Bioethics by Van Rensselaer Potter (1911-2001), the principle of respect for human rights and personal dignity, - postulates that the one who asks for help, accepts responsibility for his own life, a help giver accepts demanding to respect decisions of the person, to whom his help is given, and at the same time, provides an opportunity to informed consent.

The most discussed topics in psychological e-volunteering are dealing with 'conflicting loyalties' situation. We find that the process of decision making in such case increases within the person the contradictions between different internalized ethical attitudes. Ambitendency leads to emotional discomfort, which could be worked through.

Who Are Community Maintainers?

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