

Clinical RFT: Building Meaning and Motivation

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Clinical interventions

RFT principles

Building Meaning and Motivation:

Establish inexhaustible sources of reinforcement through hierarchy and augmenting

Identify broad qualities of action and overarching goals

Derive inexhaustible sources of reinforcement from specific actions and goals

- Comparative- What about this action is more rewarding than that action?
- Distinction-Why this goal and not another?
- Coordination- What do all of these actions/goals/interests have in common?
- Analogical-How is the function of this action similar/different from this other action's?
- Conditional-If you achieved that goal, how would your life be improved?

Use opposition to flip negatives into positives

- In what ways would your life be better if that burden was removed?
- What would be different now if your wife was still alive?
- What do you want more of?
- If pain was one side of a coin, what do you think you'd find if you flipped it over?

Create sources of reinforcement with conditional questions

- If you had all the time in the world, what would you be doing?
- If you had a billion dollars to donate/invest, where would you put your money?
- What if anything were possible?
- In no one was watching, what would you be doing?
- If your life got bigger, what would you have room for?
- If you could write your own epitaph, what would you want it to say?

Shift perspectives to expand possibilities

- When you were holding your newborn baby, what did you wish for her?
- When you were a kid, what did you imagine for yourself as an adult?
- If you could time travel and visit yourself in 10 years, what would you want to see?
- If I asked your best friend what matters most to you, what would they say?
- If you were (someone client admires), how would you act differently?
- Take me back to a time in your life when you were most satisfied.

Practice:

Identify broad qualities of action and overarching goals

Key Observations:

What worked well:

Areas for improvement:

I have questions about:

I'd like formative feedback on:

Potential Clinical Targets for Deliberate Practice:

- Competing contingencies or goals
- Values “conflicts”
- Lack of purpose or meaning

Building Meaning and Motivation: Establish broad patterns of meaningful actions

Build the base of the hierarchy with actions linked to lasting sources of reinforcement at the top

- Hierarchical framing to derive parts from a whole
 - What are the things you could do that would be part of living a peaceful life?
- Conditional framing to identify steps toward broad qualities of action and overarching goals
 - If you were being compassionate, what would you be doing?
 - What is one action you could take now that would take you closer to that goal?
- Perspective taking to increase awareness of potential actions
 - If you look back on your life one year from now, how will you know if you were living with compassion?
 - Who is the most patient person you know? What do they do that makes you admire their patience?

Develop variability at the base of the hierarchy

- Analogy to discover a range of actions with a common higher function
 - What other things could you do in the service of...?
- Distinction to discover alternative actions if certain behaviors seem impossible
 - What would still be possible if you were sick and could not do...?
 - How could you act with love toward your spouse even if you didn't feel loving?

Practice:

Establish broad patterns of meaningful actions

Key Observations:

What worked well:

Areas for improvement:

I have questions about:

I'd like formative feedback on:

Potential Clinical Targets for Deliberate Practice:

- Client identifies goals or outcomes, but not actions, linked to top of hierarchy
- Client feels hopeless or lacks a sense of self-efficacy
- Client is attached to a specific action or outcome, which seems (or is) impossible
- Actions are limited due to factors outside the client's control

Building Meaning and Motivation: Sustaining Motivation

Track and augment reinforcement

Link actions to overarching goals and qualities of actions

- How is doing ... in the service of? Can you tell me again why you want to do...?
- I remember you told me that doing... meant a lot to you because...

Help client observe and describe the consequences of meaningful behavior

- Formulate consequences in terms of positive reinforcement (e.g. avoid negation)
- Formulate consequences to be relatively independent from social approval
- Draw out a range of meaningful consequences

Identify and overcome barriers to action

Use functional coherence

- Normalization of barriers
- Assessment of effectiveness to meet goals and serve higher purposes

Transform them into cues for action

- Criticism from partner as an opportunity to enact compassion
- Urges to act impulsively as signal to act with consideration and care

Transform them into values markers

- That's like muscle soreness after lifting weights; a sign of gaining strength.
- Psychological pain as a sign of caring

Transform them into progress markers

- You showed a lot of (value) when you (action) in the presence of (barrier).
- What a (value) dad to (action) in spite of (barrier).
- Only a very (value) partner would (action) even though (barrier).

Practice: Sustaining Motivation

Key Observations:

What worked well:

Areas for improvement:

I have questions about:

I'd like formative feedback on:

Potential Clinical Targets for Deliberate Practice:

- Overly compliant client
- Client avoids thinking about potential barriers to action
- Client is discouraged by failed attempts at change
- Client too narrowly focused on one goal or action

How to Continue Improving

Alas, doing something again and again does not improve performance. Practice must be deliberate, with specific learning objectives, repeated practice, and formative feedback.

Recipe for Deliberate Practice:

1. Choose a specific learning objective. One at a time works best.
 - Formulate a complete functional description of your objective: “In (specific context) I will do (specific behavior) in order to (desired outcome)”
2. Set a practice schedule.
 - Remind yourself of #1 and #3 before every practice (this is the deliberate part)
3. Track your performance goals.
 - Think SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-Bound
 - How will you know if you improve? What will mastery look like?
4. Get feedback every time you practice.
 - Track your own performance in a systematic way (quick self-ratings are fine)
 - Client measures (e.g., if you’re working on your skills to target defusion, track client defusion measures)
 - Peer or expert observation (audio, video, live) with specific feedback

Expert Practice Tips:

- Practice the same scenario again and again. Notice subtle differences. Notice what remains the same. Where do your responses seem stuck? Where do you show signs of flexibility?
- If you don’t know what the “right” thing is to do, go with your first response (even if you know it to be “wrong”) and track what works and what doesn’t work. Go back to the point that didn’t work and try something different. Track what worked and what didn’t. Compare to the first attempt. Repeat.

My Deliberate Practice Plan

What skill will I work on? In what situations? How often?

How will I measure my skill development? How often will I measure my skill development?

How will I track the impact of my skill development? Clients? Peers? Experts?

Where information or resources do I have (or need) to support my skill development?

What opportunities do I have to practice and receive formative feedback on this skill?

RESOURCES for learning more about RFT

Clinical Consultation on Applying RFT Principles in Psychotherapy

Individual or Small Group Consultation available by phone or Skype

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RFT Clinical Training Courses with Matthieu Villatte

Using Relational Frame Theory in Experiential Practice (1 CEU)

On-Demand course that will play with slides and synchronized audio in your browser

<https://practiceground.org/packages/view/44>

Mastering the Language of Therapy: Strengthening Your Clinical Practice with RFT (12 CEU)

Live, interactive web-based course. Information and registration at www.practiceground.org

US Pacific: 8 Tuesdays beginning October 1, 12pm-1:30pm

Bibliography

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- McHugh, L., & Stewart, I. (2012). *The self and perspective taking: Contributions and applications from modern behavioral science*. Oakland: New Harbinger Publications.
- Dymond, S. & Roche, B. (2013). *Advances in Relational Frame Theory: Research and applications*. Oakland: New Harbinger Publications.
- Villatte, M., Villatte, J., & Hayes, S. C. (expected Spring 2014) *The language of psychotherapy: Strengthening your clinical practice with Relational Frame Theory*. New York: Guilford Publications.

Web resources

- RFT presentation: <http://contextualpsychology.org/rft>
- RFT tutorial : http://contextualpsychology.org/rft_tutorial
- RFT ACBS SIG: http://contextualpsychology.org/rft_sig_information
- RFT ACBS listserv: http://contextualpsychology.org/emailing_lists#RFT
- RFT facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/165048130196121/>
- RFT IRAP research: <http://irapresearch.org/>
- Hundreds of papers on RFT: <http://contextualpsychology.org/publications>