



Interface between Acceptance and Commitment Therapy and Strategic Therapy

Carina Magalhães, Joana Silva & Miguel M. Gonçalves
University of Minho, Portugal



Introduction

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is based on the premise that psychological problems result and are perpetuated by clients' attempts to avoid or attenuate unpleasant emotions, which frequently prevents their movement toward valued goals. Strategic Therapy (ST) assumes that problems are produced and maintained by rigid and repetitive behavioral sequences that may limit clients' movement toward adaptation and change. These models share some assumptions, but until now have not been properly explored.

Objective

Compare the main aspects of ACT and ST, including treatment components and processes.

Method

- Theoretical review of books and main papers of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy and Strategic Models.
- Reflection about convergence points.

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

ACT is grounded in functional contextualism where all actions have meaning only with in reference to their context (Hayes, Villate, Levin & Hildebrandt, 2011). It is also linked to empirical research into human language and cognition – Relational Frame Theory (Barnes-Holmes Y., Hayes, Barnes-Holmes D., Roche, 2000).

Psychological problems are caused by the tendency to become entangled in cognition, assuming thoughts literally and remaining in a problem-solving solution mode when is not helpful (Hayes, Villate, Levin & Hildebrandt, 2011). Emotions, thoughts, memories and bodily sensations are perceived as distressing and intolerable (Luoma, Hayes & Walser, 2007).

The target of change is not content of thoughts and feelings, or why it happens, but instead the function of events and the relation of individuals to them (Hayes, Villate, Levin & Hildebrandt, 2011).

The central aim of ACT is enhancing psychological flexibility, in order to reduce the influence of psychological experiences on individuals' behavior, and expand their choices (Hayes, Luoma, Bond, Masuda, & Lillis, 2006)

Therapeutic work aims to: 1) Promote Acceptance of the experience that the client has tried to modify, without success. 2) Help clarify client valued directions, so that can act according these values even if face negative experiences (Hayes,2004).

Strategic Therapy

ST derive from the work of Gregory Bateson and Palo Alto Research Group projects (1952 -1962) who applied science of cybernetics to family communication patterns moving the focus from the individual to social context (Goldenberg & Goldenberg,2012).

Psychological problems are the result of a dysfunctional or *pathogenic perceptive-reactive system*. When a problem or difficulty arises, the individual tries to resolve it, but if these strategies do not work the natural tendency is to reiterate them, giving rise a complex feedback processes mainly positive of retractions which maintain or exacerbate the problematic situation (Nardone & Portelli, 2005).

The strategic therapist is not interested in discovering why the problem exists but what it is maintaining in the present, so as to interrupt the vicious circle (Nardone & Watzlawick,2005).

The goal of ST approach is to produce flexibility in individual perceptions and reactions to their personal and interpersonal reality (Pietrabissa et. al, 2016).

Each therapy strategy consider the individuality of the system and the circumstances it deals with. The therapy is short-term, focused on a solution usually associated with behavioral change (Haley& Richeport-Haley, 2004).

Commonalities ACT&ST

- Behavior cannot be understood in isolation from its context;
- Psychological problems result from the “ attempted solutions” of everyday living challenges that become a problem;
- Clinical conceptualization centered on contextual change in order to stop what is not working, blocking what is part of the problem;
- Functional dimensional approach : focus on what is occurring rather than why is occurring.
- Promoting flexibility through tailored interventions;

Conclusions

By exploring the commonalities between ACT and ST intervention strategies we found that they both imply a functional approach, focusing on what is occurring rather than why is occurring. Moreover, both models have a conceptual framing that privileges the contextual change in order to stop clients' usual pattern of functioning namely by blocking the features that are part of the problem. **“We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them”. Albert Einstein**

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