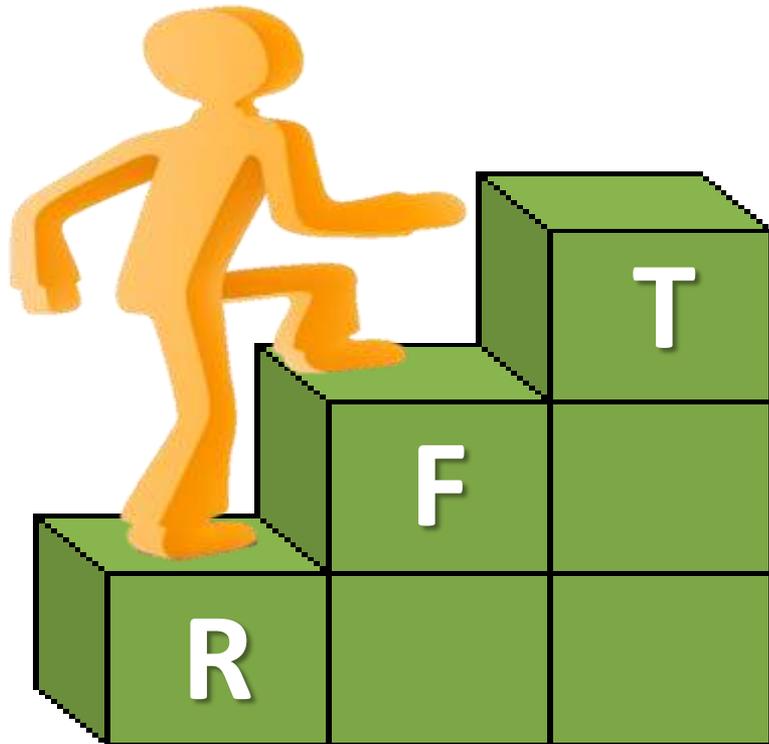


Using the Heart and the Head



How to empower your experiential practice with RFT

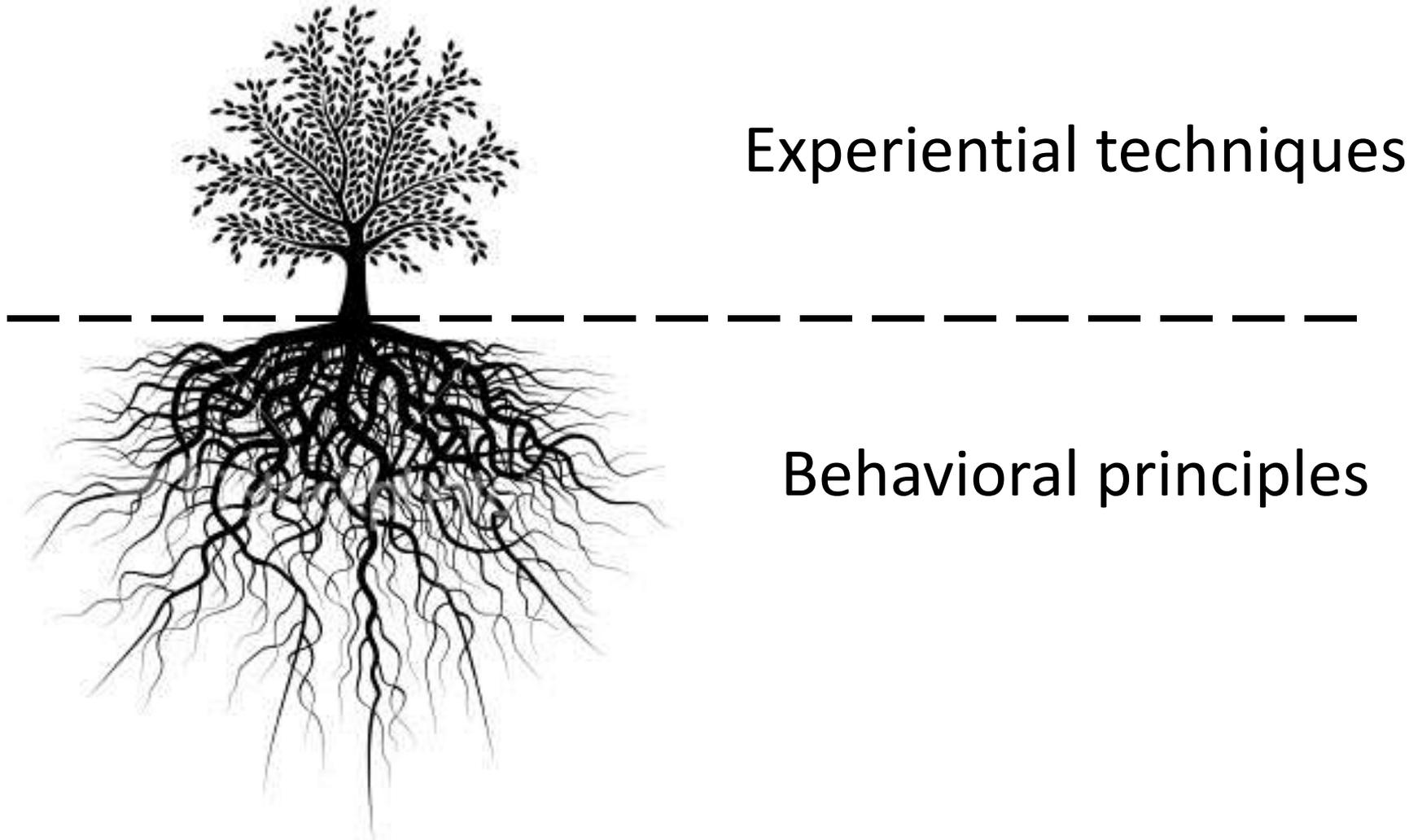
Matthieu Villatte, PhD



The heart and the head of ACT?



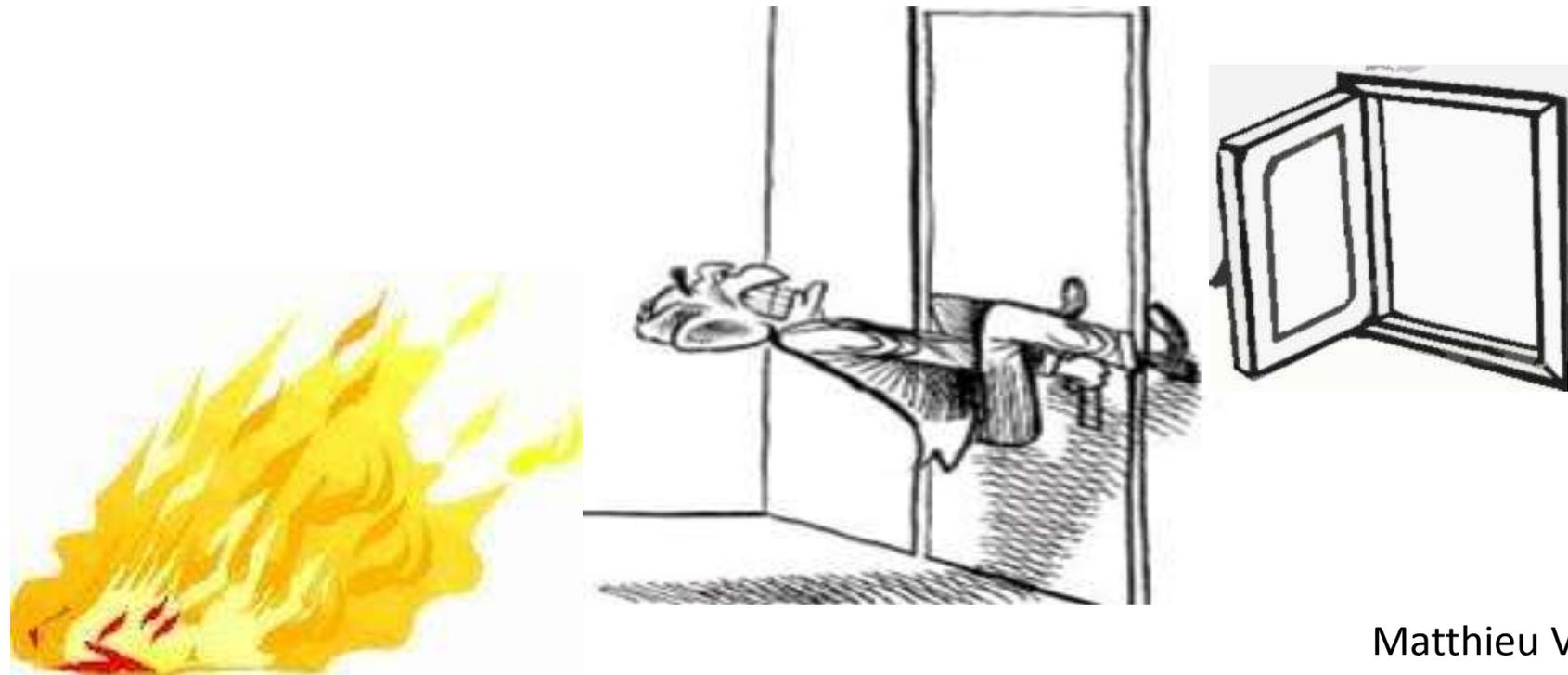
Matthieu Villatte, PhD



Experiential techniques

Behavioral principles

Clinical psychology deals with persistence of ineffective behaviors.



Two main variables are responsible for ineffective persistence.

Short term reinforcement



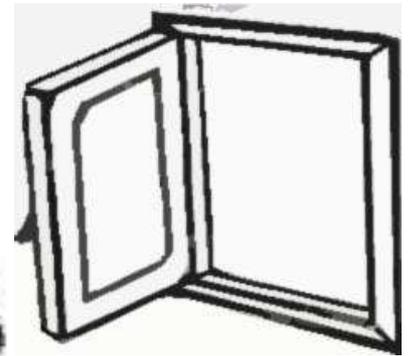
Variable reinforcement



1-Deceptive direct contingencies

Matthieu Villatte, PhD

Two main variables are responsible for ineffective persistence.



2-Verbal contingencies.

Experiential practice alters the influence of these variables in order to change behaviors.



HOW?

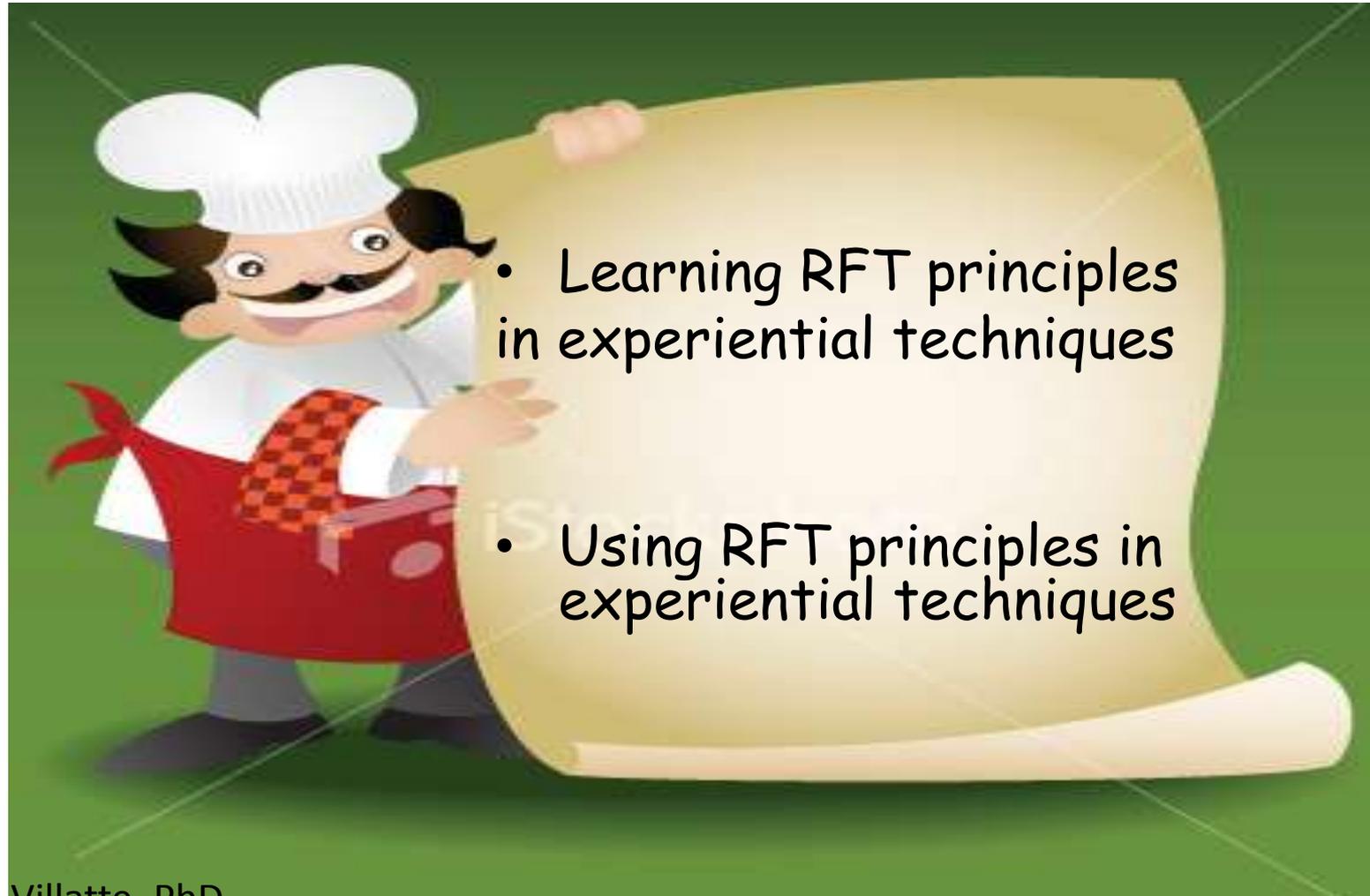
- Altering sensitivity to direct and verbal contingencies
- Fostering a sense of workability and autonomy
- Shaping new effective behaviors



What does RFT bring to experiential practice?

- RFT allows understanding how language influences behaviors
- RFT can guide *our use of language* in therapy
- In experiential practice, RFT can help us use language to
 - Alter sensitivity
 - Foster workability and autonomy
 - Shape new effective behaviors

What are we going to do today?

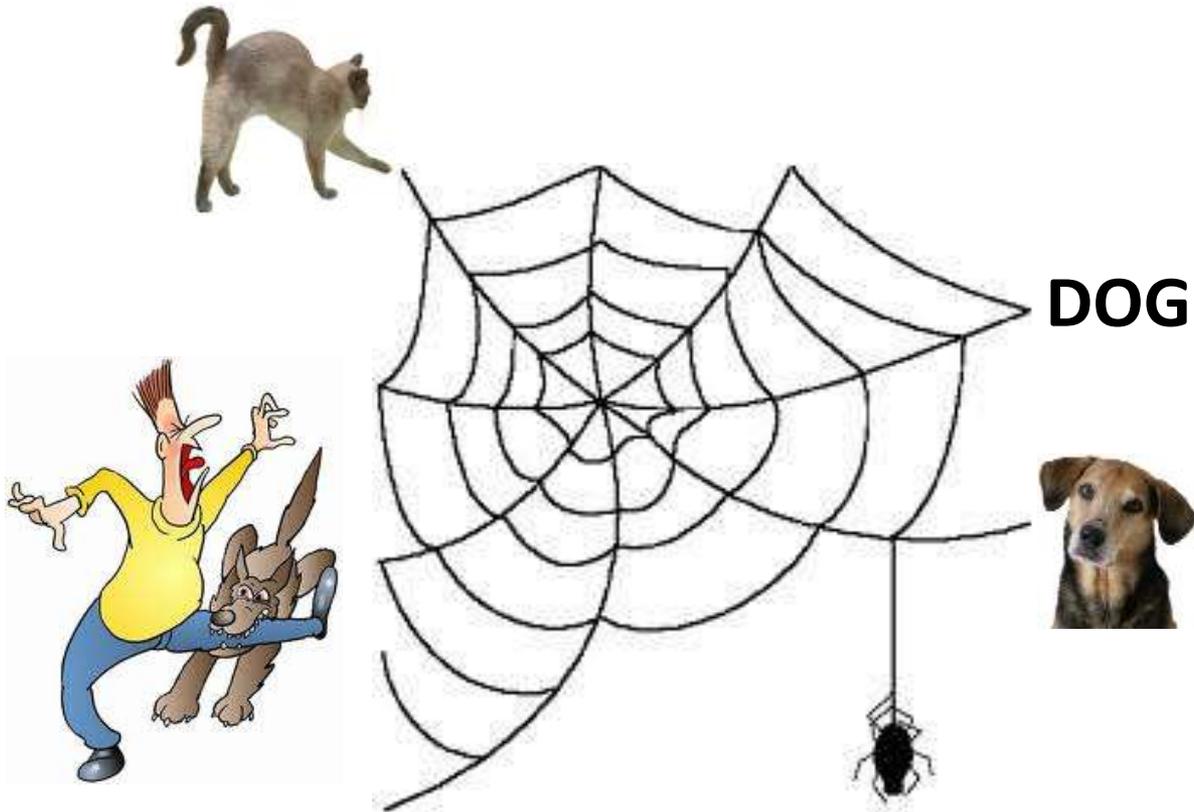


Thinking from an RFT perspective



Thinking from an RFT perspective

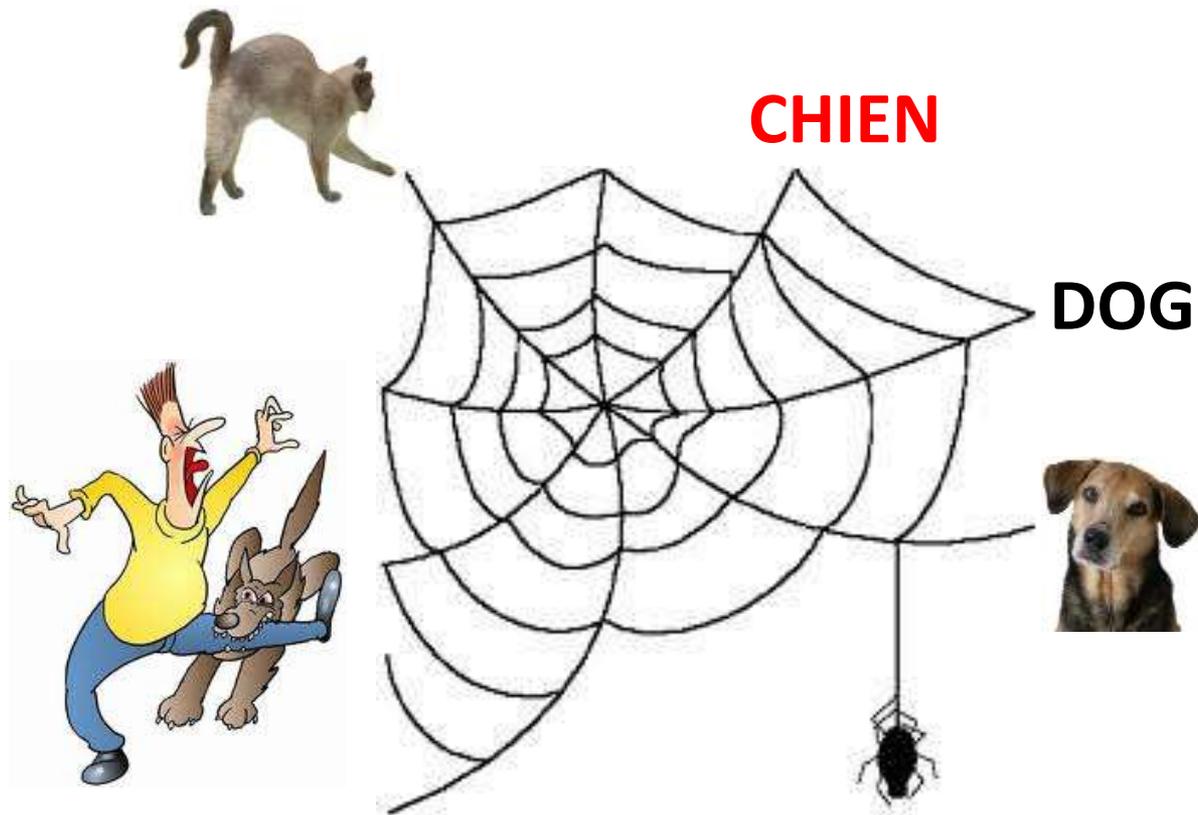
1: Language is a behavior



Understanding and building relations among events

Thinking from an RFT perspective

2: Language changes our environment



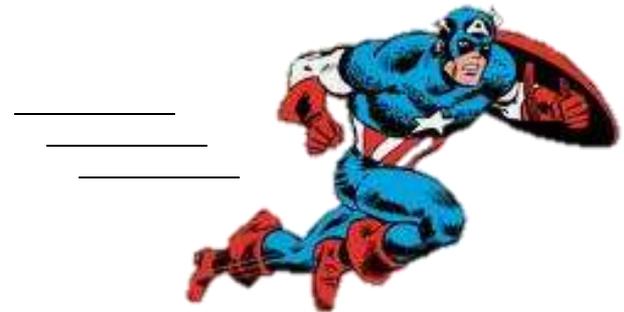
Relating transforms the function of events.

Thinking from an RFT perspective

3: Language influences our behaviors

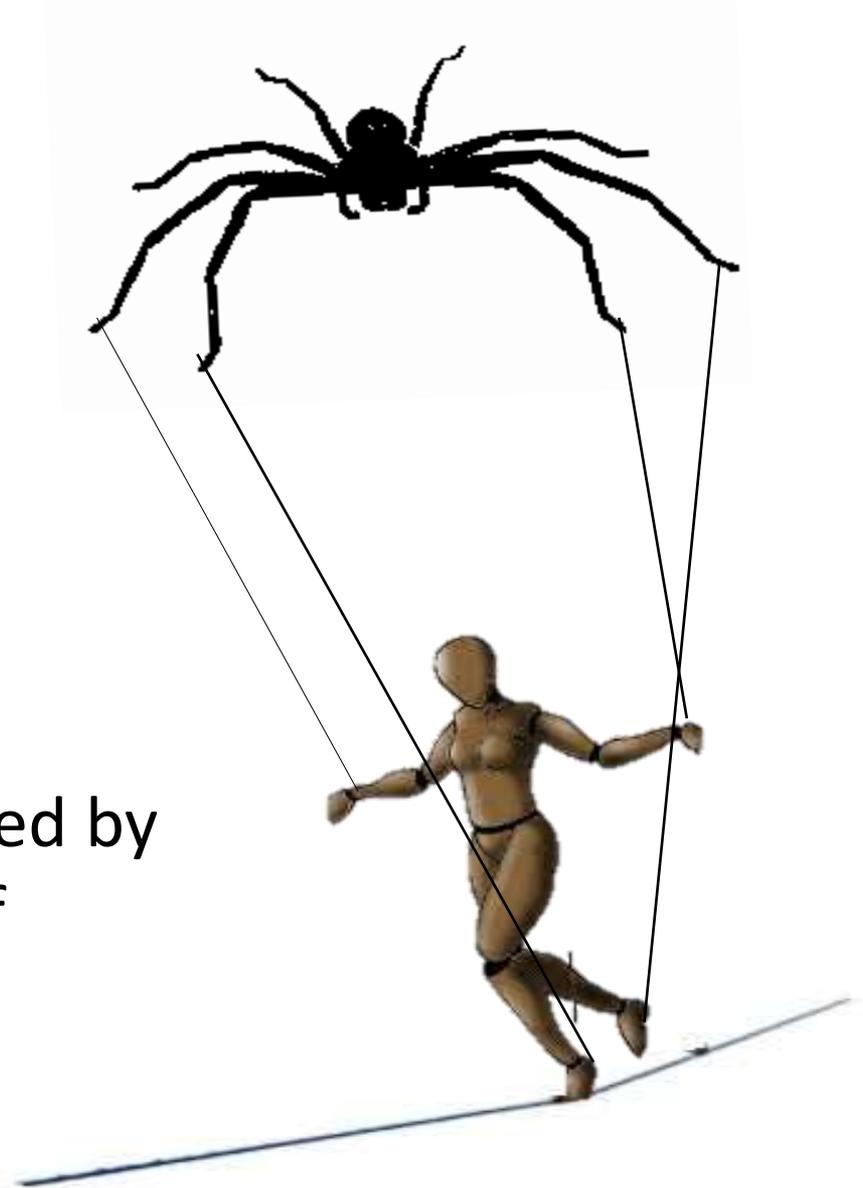


Attention
au chien!



Our behaviors can be controlled by the verbal functions of stimuli surrounding us

RFT = Language is a behavior that influences behaviors.



Human behavior is influenced by direct **and** verbal sources of control.

The battle among verbal and non verbal sources of control



When it turns well...

“Sides effects of chemo are part of the treatment that will cure my cancer”



- It **limits** the influence of **detrimental** sources of control
- It **increases** the influence of **useful** sources of control

When it turns bad...

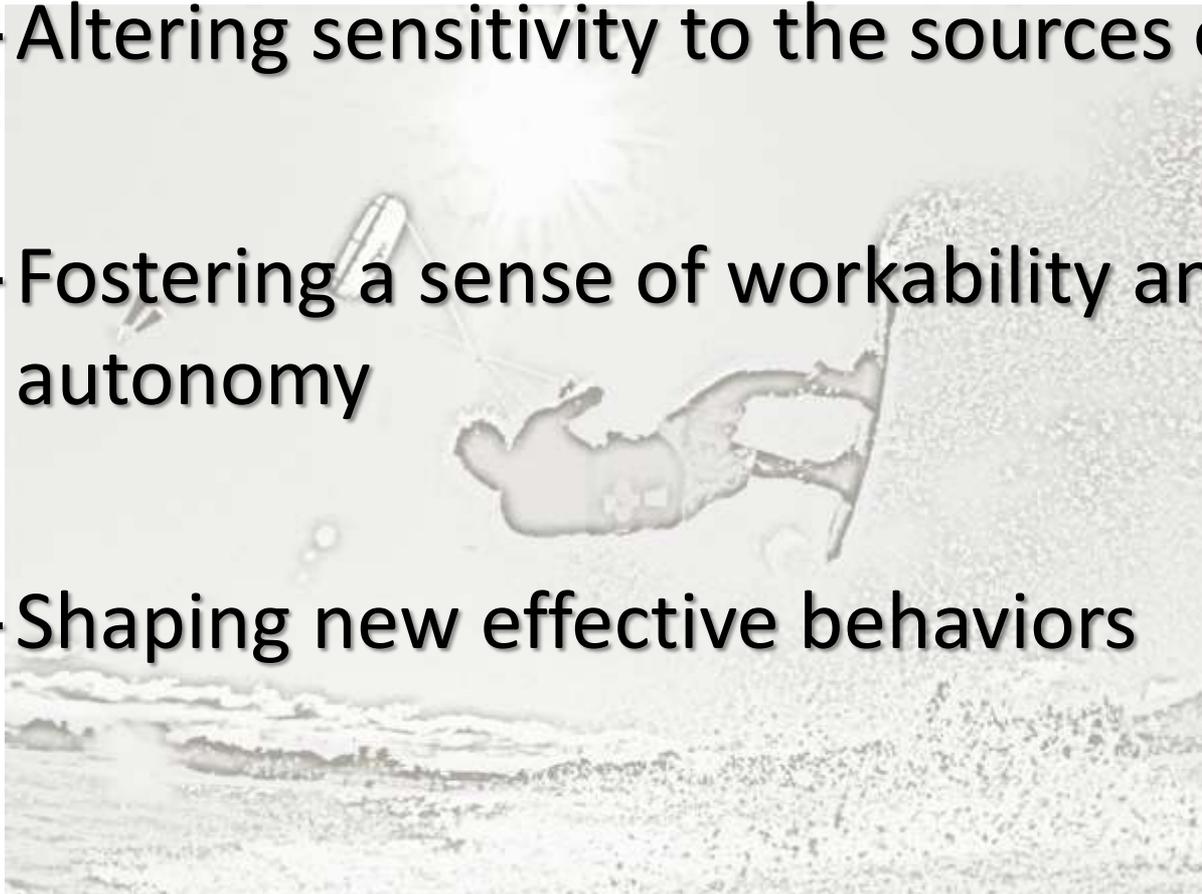
*“Sides effects of chemo are terrible.
It is not worth going through the
treatment”*



- It **limits** the influence of **useful** sources of control
- It **increases** the influence of **detrimental** sources of control

Turning these processes at the client's advantage...

- Altering sensitivity to the sources of control
- Fostering a sense of workability and autonomy
- Shaping new effective behaviors



VERBAL



NON VERBAL

Altering sensitivity



Sensitivity to the dog increases

Sensitivity to the thought decreases

The girl stops responding to the thought

Increasing and decreasing sensitivity to sources of control

Altering sensitivity

Some typical experiential techniques

- 
- Attentional control
 - Changing the context of events
 - Experimenting
 - Metaphors
 - Physical metaphors
 - Perspective taking
 - Augmentals

Altering sensitivity

Attentional control



Training attention increases sensitivity to alternative sources of control.

Altering sensitivity

Changing the context of events



Verbal

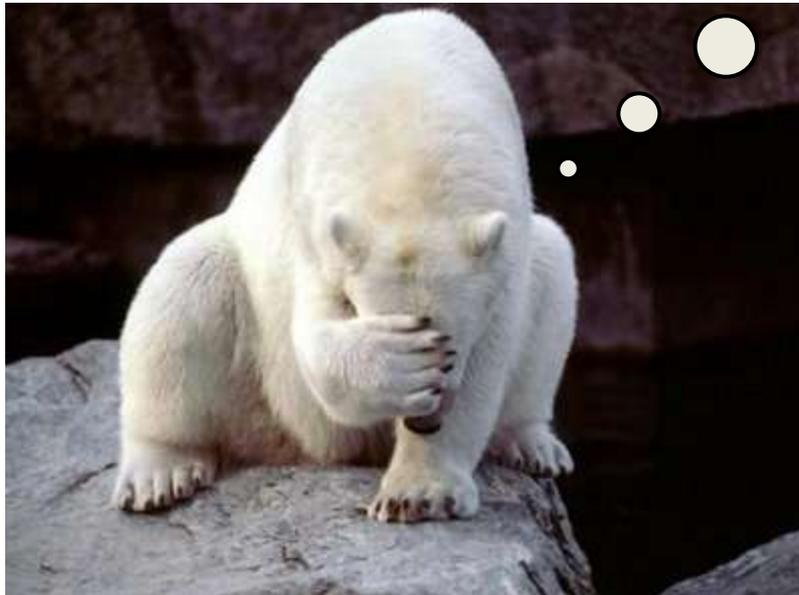


Non-Verbal

As the word is repeated again and again, non verbal control (sounds) takes over verbal control (meaning).

Altering sensitivity Experimenting

From:
*"I need to stop
thinking of..."*



Don't think of a
white human!

To:
*"When I try to
suppress my
thought, it
becomes more
frequent..."*

Experimenting a strategy and observing the consequences
increases non-verbal control.

Altering sensitivity

Metaphors



Concrete situations increase sensitivity to non verbal sources of control.

Function:

Counter-productive

**Struggling in
quicksand**



Conditional Relation



Sinking even more

Most effective behavior:

*Increasing contact with the
sand, not struggling*

Function:

Counter-productive

**Struggling with
anxiety**



Conditional Relation

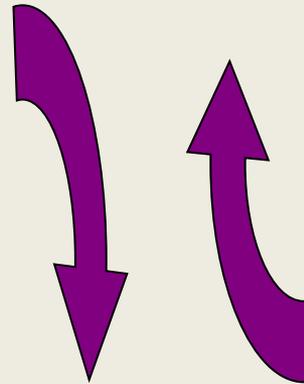


Feeling even more anxious

Most effective behavior

*Accepting the emotion, not
struggling*

Relation of equivalence



Altering sensitivity

Physical metaphors

Verbal rule: *“I need to win the struggle against my thoughts”*



Non verbal observation + new rule: *“The struggle never ends”*

Evoking physical sensations increases sensitivity to non verbal sources of control.

Altering sensitivity

Perspective taking

From: *"I am what I think about me"*



To: *"I am the perspective on what I think about me"*

Deictic relations can decrease sensitivity to sources of control about the self (= Self-as-Context).

Altering sensitivity Augmentals

*“Thank you for taking
good care of your
health when you were
young”*



Augmentals can increase sensitivity to distant
and abstract consequences (= values & actions).

Altering sensitivity

Some typical experiential techniques

- Attentional control
- Changing the context of events
- Experimenting
- Metaphors
- Physical metaphors
- Perspective taking
- Augmentals



Fostering a sense of workability and autonomy



- Once the client is sensitive to alternative sources of control, he can choose more effective behaviors
- How to make this choice?

Fostering workability and autonomy

Mastering the use of rules



- Tracking: Following a rule to contact the consequence described by the rule.
- Pliance: Following a rule to be reinforced by the rule giver (what happens besides that doesn't matter).

Fostering workability and autonomy

Mastering the use of rules

Clients engage in behaviors because they are effective



Clients learn to choose their behaviors without the therapist

Encouraging tacting and tracking.

Fostering workability and autonomy

Mastering the use of rules

- Clearly defining behaviors and contingencies
- Taking into account variable and short term effects



Formulating precise tracks to make sure that rule following is effective.

Vignette: Tacting and tracking

*It was hard to focus on vs
observing my
thoughts.*

*What was that like to
do the meditation
exercise?*



The client starts describing his experience.

Vignette: Tacting and tracking

I kept getting distracted because I have so much on my mind.

What was difficult exactly?



The therapist encourages him to be more precise.

The client is more precise. He notices that he was distracted.

Vignette: Tacting and tracking

Hmm... That was quite upsetting. I felt stupid that I can't even focus for a few minutes.

How did that make you feel to find the exercise difficult?



The client expresses the feeling and the thought he had.

The therapist encourages the client to notice his feelings in order to keep exploring his experience.

Vignette: Tacting and tracking

I tried to think of something else. I hate that feeling.



And what did you do when you started to feel stupid?



**The client notices that he tried to think of something else.
(Note also the implicit rule!)**

The therapist encourages the client to notice his behavior when he felt upset and stupid.

Vignette: Tacting and tracking

*For a little while...
Then I thought about
work and it made me
feel horrible too.*

*Did it work? Did you
stop thinking that you
were stupid?*



The client notices the short term and the long term effect.

The therapist encourages the client to notice the effectiveness of his behavior.

Vignette: Tacting and tracking

Yeah...

So, first you had that unpleasant thought, and then you tried to get rid of it...

The client confirms that the track matches his experience.

The therapist reformulates the client's experience as a track. He only initiates the formulation to encourage the client to do it progressively by himself.

Vignette: Tacting and tracking

Yeah... For a moment I was able to think of something else.

And it worked for a little while...



The client confirms and completes the rule.

The therapist keeps reformulating, but slowly, as a way to encourage the client to take the lead.

Vignette: Tracking

Not really... It worked for a while.

Would you say that it worked to stop thinking of being stupid?

The client draws his conclusion with relative precision (short term effect is identified).

The therapist wraps up this observation by adopting the perspective of workability. He lets the client draw conclusions himself.

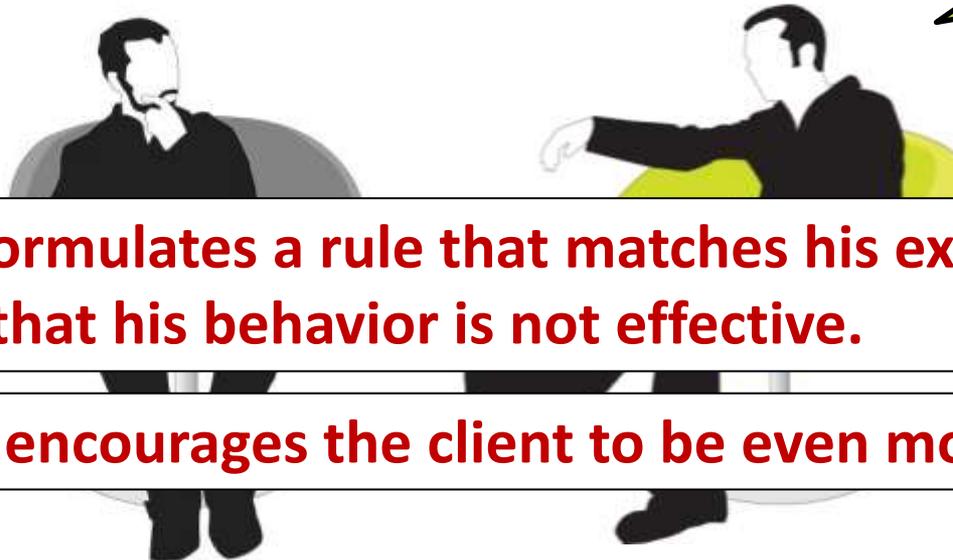
Vignette: Tacting and tracking

It seems like it. I try to think positive but I feel worse and worse.

Do you mean that thinking of something else helps you only in the short term?

The client formulates a rule that matches his experience. He notices that his behavior is not effective.

The therapist encourages the client to be even more precise.



Fostering workability and autonomy

Connecting behaviors to lasting satisfaction

A criterion for
workability and
autonomy:

**Lasting
satisfaction**



Assessing the
capacity of
behaviors to bring
lasting satisfaction.

Vignette: Connecting to lasting satisfaction

That was weird. Pretty sad...

How did that make you feel to imagine yourself in the future?



The client expresses a feeling.

The therapist encourages the client to explore his own experience.

Vignette: Connecting to lasting satisfaction

*I don't know...
Thinking that I might
not have anything to
thank myself for...*

What was sad?

The client notices the source of his feeling.

**The therapist encourages the client to further explore
this feeling.**

Vignette: Connecting to lasting satisfaction

Yeah... It feels like nothing I do makes a difference.

You mean that it was sad to think that what you do now may not have a positive effect in the future?



The client notices the consequence of his current action. It doesn't bring lasting satisfaction.

The therapist reformulates the client's experience to highlight the connection between his behavior and lasting satisfaction.

Vignette: Connecting to lasting satisfaction

Reconnecting with my kids. I feel like I don't know them anymore.

What could make a difference?



The client identifies an action connected to lasting satisfaction.

The therapist encourages the client to explore actions that would work better to bring lasting satisfaction.

Vignette: Connecting to lasting satisfaction

If I could spend more time with them, maybe?

What would you do for example?



The client finds a concrete action

The therapist encourages the client to identify this action more concretely.

Vignette: Connecting to lasting satisfaction

Absolutely.

Would that make a difference? Is it something you would thank yourself for in the future?



The client confirms this connection

The therapist helps the client make a clear connection between this concrete action and lasting satisfaction.

Fostering workability and autonomy

- Encouraging tracking and formulation of tracks (tacting)
- Formulating precise tracks to make sure that rule following is effective
- Connecting behaviors to lasting sources of satisfaction



A bit of practice

- Use an experiential technique and encourage tracking and formulation of tracks
- Connect to lasting satisfaction.



Shaping new effective behaviors



Experiential techniques create opportunities to evoke and reinforce effective behaviors.

Shaping new effective behaviors

Connecting the room to the life outside



Noticing and evoking functional similarities between what happens inside and outside the therapy room.

Matthieu Villatte, PhD

Vignette: Connecting the room to the life outside

Ok.

th
th
lie

*I would like you to
imagine that you are
walking in the desert.
Try to picture that in
your mind.*



The therapist presents the metaphor as a genuine experiential exercise, almost like a role play.

Vignette: Connecting the room to the life outside

That's scary... I would feel pretty panicked.

You are walking in the desert and suddenly, you step in quicksand. How do you feel at this moment?

The client notices how he feels.

The therapist uses the present tense and encourages the client to notice his feelings as if he was actually in the quicksand.

Vignette: Connecting the room to the life outside

I... I think I'm going to try to get out of it.

And what do you do now?



The client notices his urge to escape the quicksand.

The therapist encourages the client to notice his behavior in this situation.

Vignette: Connecting the room to the life outside

I don't know... I mean, I know that if I try to escape it, I will sink even more.

Ok. How do you do that?

The client expresses a rule about struggling in quicksand. It is a rule that matches the actual consequences.

The therapist encourages the client to tact his behavior with more precision.

Vignette: Connecting the room to the life outside

Even if I know that it's going to make me sink more, I can only think of getting out of the quicksand.

I see. So what can you do?



The client notices his urges to struggle despite what he knows about the consequence.

The therapist encourages the client to explore alternative behaviors.

Vignette: Connecting the room to the life outside

That makes things worse.

Ok. You feel like getting out, and if you try...



The client completes the track.

The therapist initiates the reformulation of the client's experience as a track.

Vignette: Connecting the room to the life outside

I want to do something to feel better. I don't want to be overwhelmed.

When you start sinking in your anxiety, what do you feel like doing?

The client expresses notices his urges when feeling anxious.

The therapist goes back to the client's situation using the vocabulary of the metaphor and asks the same question as about the quicksand.

Vignette: Connecting the room to the life outside

Yeah... Like in the quicksand I guess...

Do you try to escape it?

The client is making the connection between the metaphor and his situation.

The therapist encourages the client to notice his behavior.

Vignette: Connecting the room to the life outside

Yeah. I never seem to find a way to calm me down when I am anxious.

It is similar to what happens with your anxiety?



The client notices the consequence of his behavior outside the room.

The therapist encourages the client to explore this connection with more precision.

Vignette: Connecting the room to the life outside

It feels like it, yeah...

Do you sink even more?

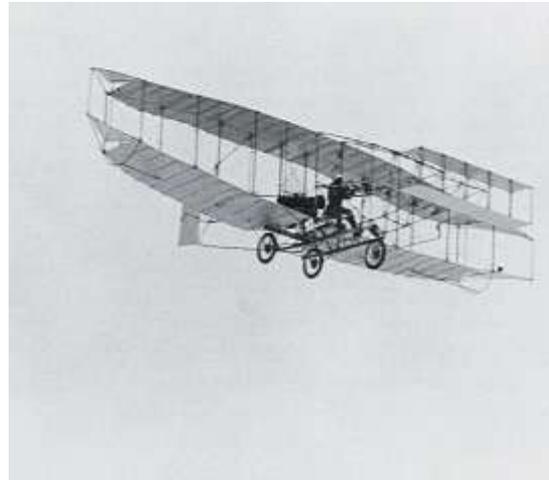


The client is becoming more aware of the consequence of his behavior outside the room

The therapist uses the vocabulary of the metaphor to underline again the connection between the two situations.

Shaping new effective behaviors

Reinforcing progress



- Noticing steps toward effective change
- Favoring contact with beneficial consequences

Vignette: Reinforcing progress

I tried to practice mindfulness but I didn't think it would help me. I don't see how observing my thoughts is going to change anything.

You started an exercise and the thought that it was not useful came up?



The client expresses a rule stating that mindfulness practice is not useful.

The therapist reformulates the client's experience in a way that helps notice the occurrence of a thought.

Vignette: Reinforcing progress

Yeah. I have so much to do... I didn't want to spend 10 minutes on this without being sure that it would help.

It's interesting that you were able to notice that. Did you have a similar thought as you were coming to see me today?



The therapist reinforces the client noticing this thought and tries to make a connection between outside and inside the room.

The client expresses a thought he had while considering practicing mindfulness.

Vignette: Reinforcing progress

Well... I think so... It's not that I don't trust you but I have so much to do... I hate thinking I am wasting my time, you know...

So as you were on your way here, you were having the thought that it was not worth?



The therapist reformulates the client's experience to help him notice the thought.

The connection is there. The client had a similar thought as he was coming to therapy.

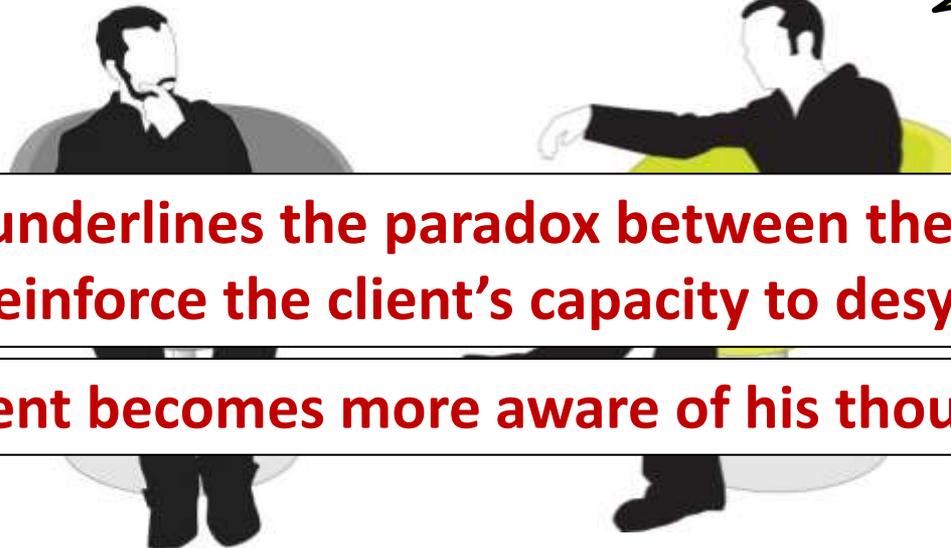
Vignette: Reinforcing progress

*Something like that,
yeah.*

*And you still came.
Was that difficult to
do that while thinking
it was not worth?*

The therapist underlines the paradox between the thought and the action to reinforce the client's capacity to desynchronize.

The client becomes more aware of his thought.



Vignette: Reinforcing progress

Yes, it was hard. My days are going by so quickly. It makes me really anxious to waste my time.

I understand. What do you think motivated you to come despite these thoughts?



The therapist encourages the client to connect his action to an augmental that motivated his action despite his thoughts and feelings.

The client notices his feelings as he came to therapy.

Vignette: Reinforcing progress

I just can't keep going like that. I need to do something. If I drop therapy now, I'm never going to get better.



So you reconnected therapy to what matters to you?



The therapist reformulates the client's experience to strengthen the connection between the action and the source of motivation (augmental).

The client expresses a source of motivation to come to therapy.

Vignette: Reinforcing progress

I guess so... I thought it was important to give it a chance, even if I have serious doubts.

Do you think it is something you could do with mindfulness exercises?



The therapist encourages generalization to mindfulness practice.

The client becomes more aware of the augmental that motivates his behavior.

Vignette: Reinforcing progress

You mean give it a chance?

Yeah... See what happens when you keep doing the exercise even though you feel like it is not worth it.

The therapist wraps up in a way that underlines the natural consequence of the new behavior (limits piance effects).

The client makes a step toward trying a new behavior.

Vignette 2: Reinforcing progress

I guess I could try.



Shaping new effective behaviors

- Connecting the room to the life outside
- Reinforcing progress



A bit of practice

- **Notice and evoke functional similarities**
- **Reinforce progress**



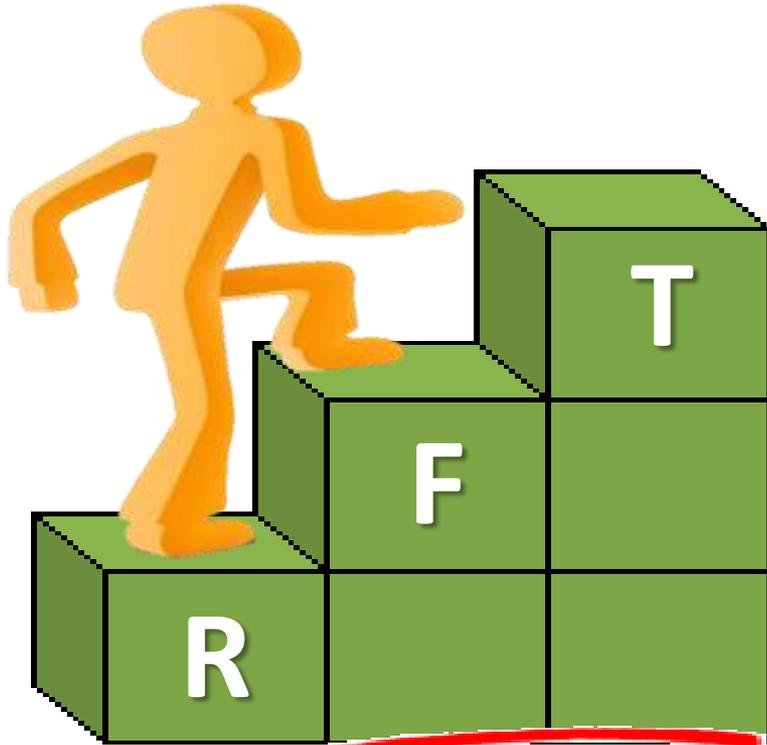
Final exercise: putting all principles together

- Altering sensitivity
- Fostering workability and autonomy
- Shaping new effective behaviors

➤ **Role-play**



Using the Heart and the Head



How to empower your experiential practice with RFT

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