

ACT Basics

What is ACT? It is an approach to creating human flourishing. ACT is about building psychological flexibility which is:

...‘living in accord with your values and in a way that is more open and accepting of your history as it echoes into the present, that’s more self-affirming, self-validating and values- based.’ - Steve Hayes

More than 20 studies have shown that psychological flexibility predicts a wide-range of work-related outcomes – including work attitudes, wellbeing, job performance and absence rates {Bond, 2013}.

ACT interventions have been shown to both increase psychological flexibility and:

- Reduce work-related emotional distress {Bond, 2000}
- Increase productivity {Bond, 2000}
- Increase innovation {Bond, 2000}
- Increase transformational leadership behaviours {Bond, 2011}
- Improve team leadership leading to increased organisational commitment and profit {Bond, 2011}
- Reduce unplanned absences from work for employees with chronic health problems {Dahl, 2004}
- Increase the application of new learning to the job {Varra, 2008}
- Increase job satisfaction {Bond, 2003}
- Increase the benefit of job redesign {Bond, 2008}
- Increase motivation {Keogh, 2006}
- Improve performance {Keogh, 2006} {Bond, 2003},
- Increase resilience {Flaxman, 2010}
- Decrease the incidence of burnout {Vilardaga, 2011}{Hayes, 2004}

A fundamental difference between doing ACT and other approaches is that, whereas many other approaches try to change the *content* of thoughts, ACT aims to change the *relationship* people have with their internal experiences which then frees them up to choose to behave in line with their values.

When you are just starting to learn ACT and trying to combine it with others approaches a good way to check if what you are doing is ACT consistent or not is to ask yourself:

1. Am I trying to change the *content* of the coachees thoughts and inner experience or am I trying to change the *relationship* they have with those with inner experience?
2. Is what we are doing in the service of helping the coachee to live freely chosen values?

(Now, of course, it isn't 'right' to be ACT consistent and 'wrong' not to be! But it is helpful to have a sense as to whether you are doing ACT or not and it can be confusing for coaching clients if we give them mixed messages.)

Some Definitions

Like any technical approach, ACT has its own jargon. We will try to avoid jargon as much as possible in this workshop but there are some words that it might be helpful for you to understand if you are to 'get' what this is all about (Also see the ACT Advisor for a quick guide).

1. Values

In ACT the word 'values' has a particular meaning:

'Values are intentional qualities that join together a string of moments into a meaningful path' {Hayes 2005}

2. Fusion is where we get entangled with our thoughts. *'Your thoughts dominate you; they dominate your awareness or your actions or both'* (Russ Harris). When we are fused we tend to focus our attention on the contents of our mind (our thoughts, memories, assumptions, beliefs, images etc) rather than what we are experiencing through our five senses. We then make decisions and take actions based on our internal experience (thoughts, memories etc) rather than what is really going on in the world.

3. Defusion is where we can observe our thoughts and see them for what they are - just products of our busy minds.

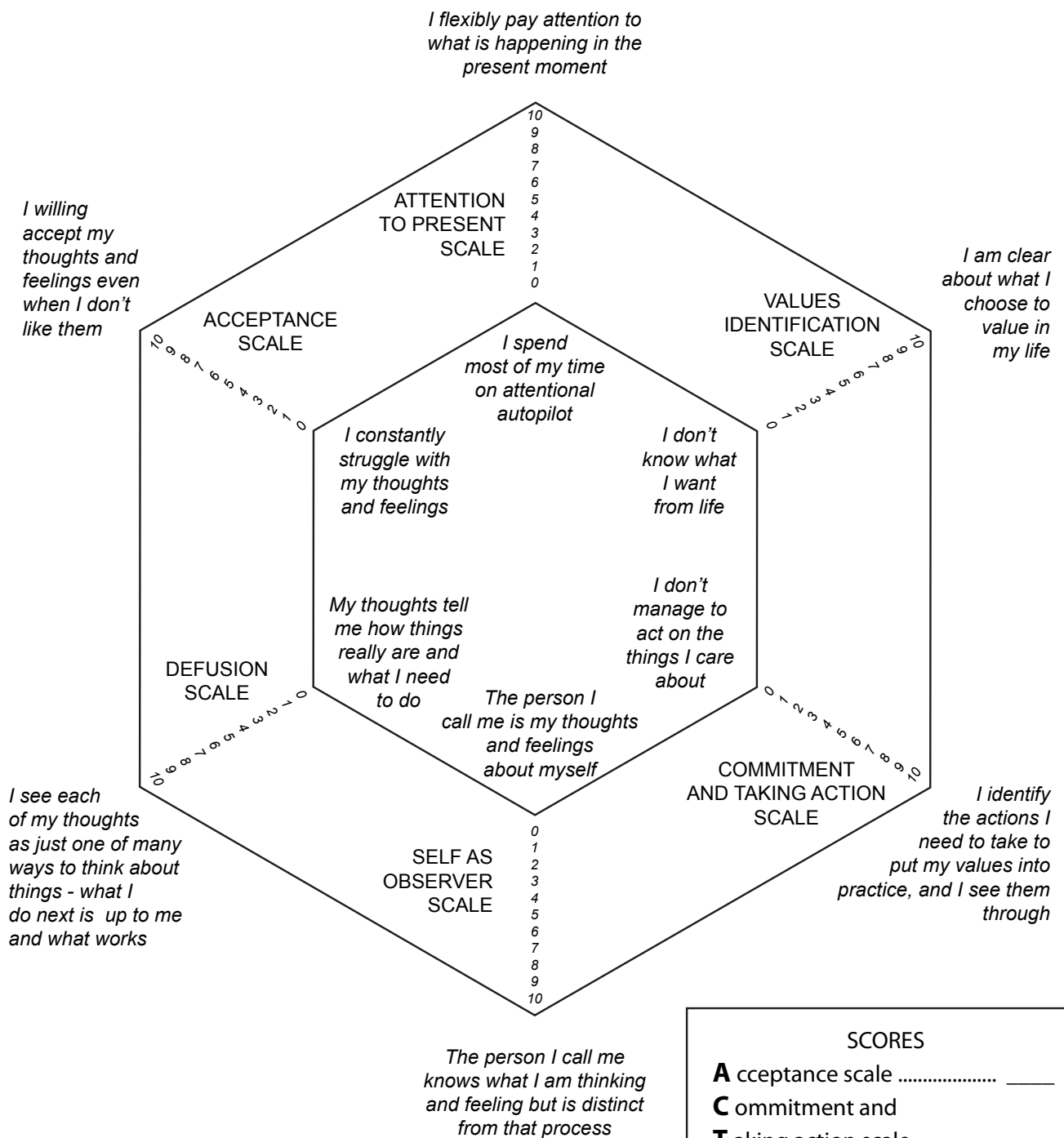
3. Experiential Avoidance is where we focus on trying to control, avoid or get rid of unwanted thoughts and feelings and as a result avoid taking actions that are important to us.

4. Acceptance and Willingness involve choosing to adopt an open, curious and receptive attitude to internal experiences (such as thoughts, emotions, memories and urges) as they arise, even when they are unpleasant or unwanted.

The theory in ACT says that it is fine to try to change thoughts and feelings as long as:

- It is actually possible (which is usually in low stress situations!)
- It doesn't get in the way of doing what matters and living a full life.

Kelly Wilson suggests willingness involves deciding, *"Where you want to go in life and then heading off in that direction, even if that means feeling some pain along the way"*



SCORES

A cceptance scale ____

C ommitment and
T aking action scale ____

A ttention to present scale ... ____

D efusion score ____

V alues
I dentification scale ____

S elf as
O bserver scale ____

R esulting Psychological
Flexibility Total Score ____

Targeting Different Processes

Present moment awareness	Mindfulness of breath and body Mindfulness of 5 senses Mindfulness of thoughts and emotions The matrix
Flexible perspective taking	Future you, Past you GROW questions How would x see this? Role play – swapping roles backwards and forwards Sky and weather metaphor 3 senses of self The matrix
Noticing and untangling from your internal barriers (Defusion and Acceptance)	John Forsyth's Dance Hand as talking mouth (Steve Hayes) Mindfulness of thoughts, emotions and urges Physicalising lite Mindfulness of internal experience 3 senses of self The matrix
Choosing Values	Compass card sort Retirement party VIA signature strengths test Values-based 360
Taking Committed Action	GROW Goal setting & action planning The matrix

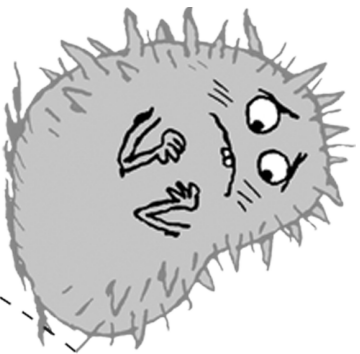
VIA Strengths Questions

1. *Tell me about a time when you expressed this value? How did it feel? How does it feel in general when you express this value?*
2. *Do you ever over use this value? Tell me about a time when that happened? What would you prefer to do instead in a similar situation in the future?*
3. *How could you express this value more in your life? (Start in general terms then move into specifics)*

Compass Card Sort

(Used by kind permission – Joanne Steinwachs. The Compass cards are excellent and can be purchased from: <http://www.lifecompasscards.com/>)

1. As quickly as you can sort the cards into two piles: **Important to Me** and **Not Important to Me**. Discard the Not Important to Me pile
2. Sort through the **Important to Me** pile and divide into 3 piles
 - I. Qualities you chose because they would solve a problem - **Problem Solving**
 - II. Qualities you think you should have - **Shoulds**
 - III. and **What is left**
3. Now explore the cards in the **Problem Solving** pile. What are the problems you are trying to solve with these qualities? If you didn't have that problem would that value still be important to you? If yes, then move it back to the **Very Important** pile. If no - is adopting that quality actually helping the situation? Are you using it flexibly in response to what is needed?
4. Consider exploring the **Shoulds** pile. What does it feel like to put those values on one side? How do you feel when you express that value in your behaviour? If no one knew whether you adopted this value or not, would you choose it? If yes, then add it back to the **What is left** pile
5. Sort the **What is left** pile into 3 piles - **Very Important, Kind of important** and **a Little Important**
6. Take the **Very Important** pile and sort again into - **Very Important, Kind of Important** and **a Little Important** (it is okay to combine cards if they mean very similar things to you).
7. Repeat step 6 until you have 7-15 cards
8. Arrange your remaining cards in a way that makes sense to you
9. If something seems missing go back to your **Problem Solving** and **Should** piles and look through
10. Take a photo of your chosen values cards
11. Convert those values into a one paragraph statement



5 SENSES
EXPERIENCE

AWAY

STRUGGLE ACTIONS

SUFFERING

COMMITTED ACTIONS

VALUES

TOWARD



VALUED DOMAINS

INTIMATE RELATIONS
FAMILY
PARENTING
LEISURE
WORK
SOCIAL RELATIONS /FRIENDSHIP
TRAINING/CULTURE
CITIZENSHIP/COMMUNITY
SELF-CARE/HEALTH
SPIRITUALITY

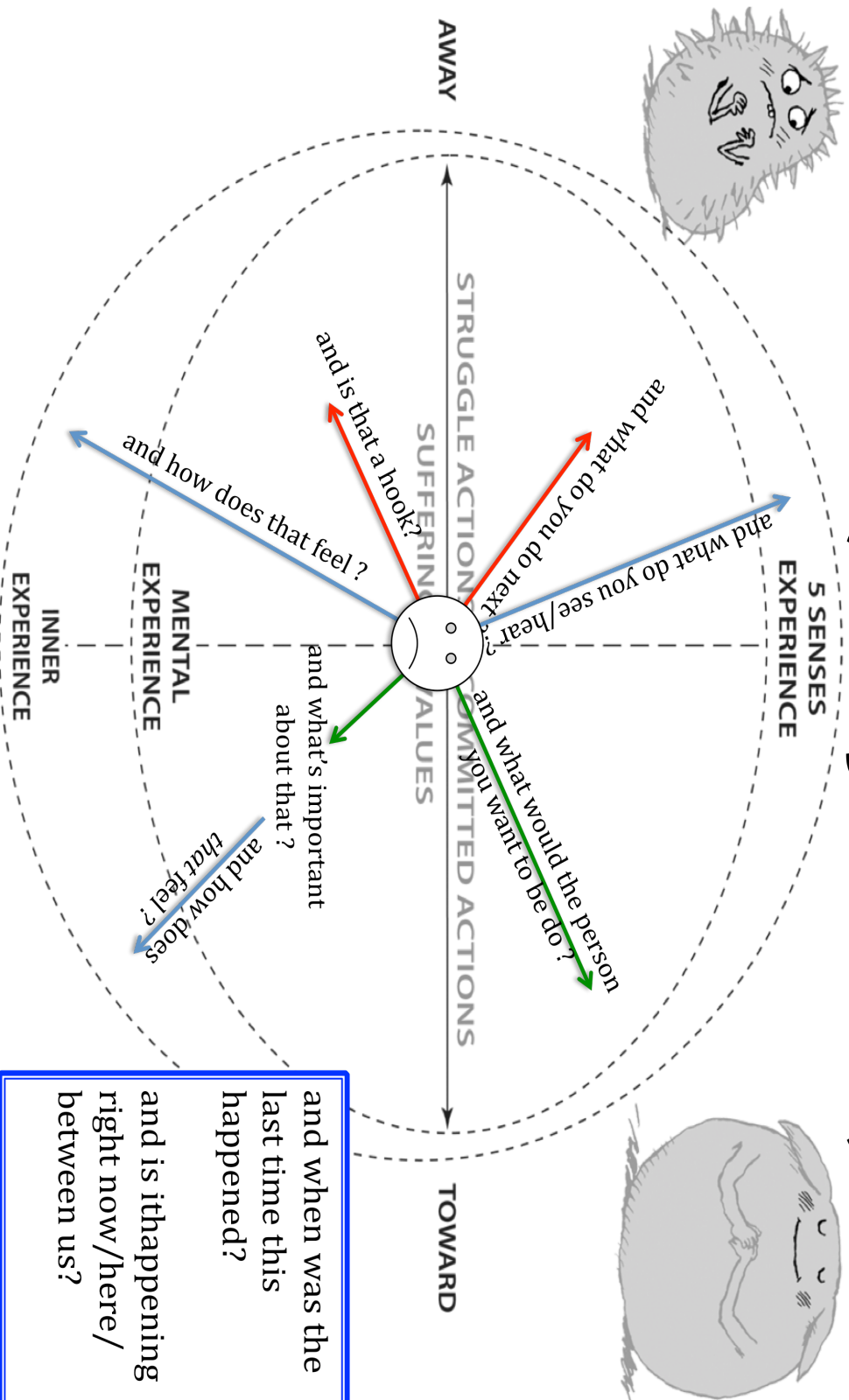
MENTAL

EXPERIENCE

INNER

EXPERIENCE

YES, and... (coming in context)



RFT Basics

RFT has one central idea: '*Human languaging and cognition consists of a specific kind of learned behavior: A particular way of relating stimuli*' - Niklas Törneke {Törneke, 2013 #787}

When we are little, other people teach us that symbols can represent things in the real world and that those symbols can be equivalent to each other. For example we learn to treat a written word (e.g. Ball), a spoken word ('Ball'), a picture of the thing and the actual thing as if they are functionally the same. We not only learn to relate these 'stimuli' to each other but we also learn the more general skill of relating one thing to another.

Once we learn this skill of relating then we learn other more and more complex relations.

Relational Frames

Coordination (Sameness, $A=B$)

Comparison (More than, Less than, Better than, Worse than, Bigger than, Smaller than)

Opposition (Is opposite to)

Distinction (Is different to)

Hierarchy (Contains, is a member of, or belongs to, in this category)

Analogy

Contingency/Conditional (If...then)

Perspective

- Deixis (I v You; Here v There)
- Temporality (Now v Then; Before v After, Now v Later, 5pm v 3am)

An ACT/RFT Consistent GROW Process

Goal

(Committed Action/Values)

What is the goal you would like to achieve?

If you achieved that goal, how would your life/work/this situation be different?

(Conditional)

Why is that important to you? (Coordination, Hierarchy – values)

How does this goal link to your values? (Increase reinforcement through transformation of stimulus functions).

Coach states understanding of the key points, acknowledging both content and feelings

Reality

(Present Moment Awareness/Defusion/Perspective Taking)

Ask questions to encourage observation and description (a collaborative functional analysis)

Tell me more about the situation. Exactly what happens and when?

Look for specific details rather than generalities (Present moment awareness).

Explore the details of

- Their goal,
- The issue,
- The past and present circumstances.

Encourage the coachee to focus with more attention than usual.

Seek descriptive not judgmental answers.

What did they experience through their 5 senses?

Encourage the coachee to question assumptions.

See if you can draw out the rules they have in relation to this. Are they workable and are they applying them flexibly? (The ladder of inference* can be useful here).

Ask questions to help the coachee become aware of their own thinking and reasoning and become curious about others thinking.

What is the data behind that statement? (5 senses experiencing)

Does everyone agree what the data is? (Perspective taking)

Can you run me through your reasoning?

When you said...did you mean...? (Perspective taking)

When Jody said...what do you think she meant? What else could she have meant? (Perspective taking)

What assumptions do you think Jody is making about this situation? (Perspective taking)

What have you done so far to achieve this goal? (5 senses experiencing)

What was the impact of that? (Conditional, Comparative)

If you had your time again what would you do differently? (Perspective taking)

What happens if you do x or y? (Conditional, Comparative)

What else happens? Anything you didn't expect? (Conditional)

What are the circumstances in which x seems to work? (Conditional, Deictic)

What are the circumstances in which you are more likely to do x? (Comparative)

Have you been in a similar situation before? (Temporal)

How did you approach it then? What worked? What didn't work? (Conditional)

What were the factors that shaped your decision? (Temporal, Perspective taking, Comparative)

You have said and I am just wondering if there are any ways that the opposite could be true? (Opposition)

How do others see this? (Perspective taking)

What are some of the other steps you believe would be useful but haven't followed?

What prevented you from taking those steps? Look for both internal and external blocks (Problem solve external blocks; use ACT for internal blocks).

What resources do you have or need to deal with this?

Coach states understanding of the key points, acknowledging both content and feelings

The ladder of inference - Chris Argyris

We tend to believe that:

- Our beliefs are true
- The truth is obvious
- Our beliefs are based on real data
- The data we select is the real data

The ladder of inference encourages people to dig from the top (our generalizations) down to the bottom (what we experienced through our 5 senses).

The ladder:

4. Broader generalisations they are making about the situation
3. Their attributions about what caused or is causing the data
2. The meaning they have attached to that data – their inference or interpretation
1. Data – what we have seen, heard or read

Options

(Present Moment Awareness/Defusion/Acceptance/Perspective Taking/Acceptance/Committed Action)

What ideas do you have about options for reaching your goal? (Broadening options)

What else could you do?

What would you do if you had the resources/support you need?(Conditional)

Is there any of that you could do any way?

What do you think would happen if you did x? (Conditional)

If we could time travel and bring 'you' from 5 years time into the room now and ask his or her advice, what would he or she say? (Perspective Taking)

How is this issue like...a bubble/a tree/a journey etc? (Analogy) Does thinking about it in that way suggest any new options?

*What do you think....(a person whose opinion they trust)...would suggest?
(Perspective Taking)*

What are the advantages and disadvantages of these options? (Comparative)

Which are most likely to get you to your goal? (Comparative)

How will you deal with any barriers? (Normalising Barriers, Conditional)

*How will you know that you are stuck or heading in the wrong direction?
(Conditional)*

Coach states understanding of the key points, acknowledging both content and feelings

What/When/Who/Which **(Committed Action/Acceptance/Values/Defusion)**

Which options are you going to pursue? **Develop a written action plan**

Clarify detail – *exactly who is going to do what by when?*

Could you approach this as an experiment – try things and see what results you get?

(Coordination - willingness to make mistakes)

Break the plan down into small, high-leverage steps

If not already explored - *What blocks or difficulties could arise?*

Again look for internal and external difficulties. Use ACT for internal difficulties
problem solving for external difficulties. *How will you deal with them?*

Who needs to know? (Perspective Taking)

What support do you need? (Normalise need for support)

Is there anything else we need to consider? (Perspective Taking)

On a 0-10 scale how likely are you to take these actions – if less than 7 - break into smaller steps, review deadliness, priorities, whether the goal links to values. Also look for avoidance of painful thoughts and feelings or entanglement with unhelpful inner experience.

What is your mind likely to do as you take these actions? (Normalise internal barriers)

How will you respond to that? (Self Compassion). *What will be the signs that you have been hooked by those thoughts?* (Conditional)

As you take those actions what qualities do you want to express? (Coordination with values)

How will you know that you are starting to make progress (Conditional - Encourage tracking)

Will this plan meet your goal? If not, do we need to change the plan or modify your goal?

When are we going to meet to review progress?

What will you have done by then?

Goal

Reality

What/when/who

Options

What are we trying to achieve with these questions?

We are trying to build psychological flexibility - 'the ability to notice and react to thoughts, feelings, and behaviour in order to give one the opportunity to take action towards important ends.' {Törneke, 2013 #787}

These questions do this by helping the coachee to:

1. Notice the difference between an evaluation and a description and notice which is more helpful in informing choices about behaviour.
2. Observe their own behaviour and notice more clearly how effective it is.
3. Start to track the triggers and outcomes of their behaviour (antecedent - response- consequence).
4. Start to group behaviours according to function rather than form (e.g. Working hard to deliver an excellent result can sometimes be a move towards values and at others it is a move to avoid inner self-critical thoughts. We want clients to start to notice this difference).
5. Start to notice the problematic consequences of certain groups of behaviour (such as away moves).
6. Notice self instructions and rules as they arise.
7. Notice when they are following internal rules rather than responding to the environment/expressing their values through their behaviour.
8. Notice the circumstances where following a particular rule works and the circumstances where it doesn't work.
9. Notice their own internal responses, become more accepting of those responses, and view those responses from the perspective of the Observer self. So that internal responses have less impact on behaviour.
10. Transform uncomfortable internal events from triggers to unhelpful behaviour into reminders to take valued action
11. Broaden the behaviours the coachee sees as options in a given situation. So that their behaviour becomes more flexible and responsive to the demands of the situation.
12. Help the client identify unlimited sources of motivation for goals and actions by linking them to values and purpose.

For a more detailed explanation of the practical applications of RFT, download the handouts to the following Pre-Conference Sessions from the ACBS 2013 Conference:

Steve Hayes, Matthieu and Jennifer Villatte - Integrating RFT principles in clinical practice

Niklas Torneke - RFT for Clinical Use

They can be found at:

http://contextualscience.org/worldcon_xi_in_sydney_preconference_workshop

(available free to members of the ACBS)

5 Session ACT Consistent Coaching Process

Pre-Session & Session 1

Assess client readiness

Assess and try to improve the context

Build trust and confidence in coach

Agreement around confidentiality

Agreement around how coaching will work. What will happen in the sessions.

Initial values activity – Retirement party/ Values-based 360

Session 2

Meet with manager and facilitate a feedback conversation

1:1 with the coachee:

- Analyse any feedback/assessments
- Choose values – compass card sort
- Choose coaching goals & committed actions – Coachee to then check with manager that these are both aligned with organizational need and workable
- Agree committed actions the coachee will take between sessions
- ACT Advisor Case conceptualisation

Session 3 onwards

The Matrix

Review committed actions – NB curiosity!

Other ACT interventions as needed (drawn from your list of techniques to target processes)

Skill building, problem solving etc as needed

Where appropriate use ACT consistent GROW process

Session 5/Final Session

Acknowledging together what the coachee has achieved and also what is still to do.

Give honest and genuine positive feedback about what you see in the client and how it has been meaningful.

Make a plan to build on gains and avoid backtracking.

Also meet with the coachee and their manager and facilitate a discussion to review progress against the goals

Between sessions

Agree committed actions between each session

Session review questions



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