Tutorial

Triadic Model - Dynamics of Behavior Change

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Triadic Model

Dynamics of Behavior Change

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THE TRIADIC MODEL

In the psychotherapeutic model, the professional specialist interacts with the patient. Various strategies have been invented to purify this dyadic interaction, and, indeed, it is the aim of psychoanalysis to recreate in this dyadic arena all of those behavioral and emotional proclivities which constitute the patient's "mental illness." The therapeutic dyad--doctor and patient--derives from medical organization, and is comfortably consistent with the consulting-room pattern by which disease is treated.

A different model of practice has emerged naturally from the assumptions of the behavior therapies. In behavior modification techniques, the professional specialist need not have the direct interaction with the "patient." Rather, he may instruct, or advise, or consult to other individuals who bear some normal role relationship to the "patient". This is not always the case, nor need it be, but in the majority of situations we see that the more powerful reinforcers are in the hands of someone other than the professional consultant. The logic of behavior modification dictates that those individuals who do indeed possess the reinforcers should occupy a position intermediate to the consultant and the patient who is the ultimate target of behavioral intervention. Thus for behavior modification the basic model is not dyadic, but triadic. The three positions are those of the consultant, the intermediary, and the target.

The consultative triad, then, may be seen as the organizational convergence of the thrusts of behaviorism, or deprofessionalization, and the utilization of natural relationships. A careful analysis of each of the positions of the triad can guide both organization and the techniques for intervention. Such an analysis is intimately related to the issue of the multiple sources of reinforcement as well.

In this pure form of the consultative triad, as shown in Fig. 1, all effects proceed to the target via the mediator, none directly from consultant to target. This analysis describes functional positions, not the people who occupy those positions. For example, any number of individuals occupying any number of social roles might serve as mediator: father, teacher, sister, minister, mother, employer, friend, and psychotherapist. Indeed, the same is true of the functions of either consultant or target (see the following tabulation).

Consultant	Mediator	Target
Psychologist	Teacher	Predelinquent
Behavior analyst	Father	Mental patient
Social worker	Employer	Employee
Mother	Wife	Husband
Teacher	Psychotherapist	Mother
*Anyone with the knowledge	*Anyone with the reinforcers	*Anyone with the problem

In examining these possibilities, we see that the sole criterion for the function of consultant is possession of knowledge. In the use of other theoretical systems, for instance, in traditional child-guidance work, the social worker may be consultant to the parent of the patient.

Anyone with the problem can be considered the target: autistic children, schizophrenic patients, adult neurotics, delinquent adolescents. The target, then is anyone whose behavior the consultant contracts to modify.

The position of the mediator is perhaps less clear. As defined above, the mediator is the individual who is in direct contact with target. He is the intermediary of the consultant. He receives instruction from the consultant, which he uses to affect the target.

FIG. 1. The consultative triad.

But there are five or ten or a hundred potential mediators in the social network of any given target. The mediator(s) will be in contact with the consultant for the purpose of affecting the target. We can immediately see, then, that the selection of the mediators is crucial. An examination of the selection procedures also moves us directly into a discussion of the theory of intervention, because the mediator in fact may be anyone with the reinforcers.

THE CHOICE OF MEDIATORS

The basic contingency-management technique is simple and immutable: rearrange the contingencies so that desirable behavior is reinforced and undesirable behavior is not reinforced. The reinforcing events and/or stimuli are reorganized so that beneficent contingencies result. Control of the reinforcers becomes the paramount issue. Working in the complex and stubborn natural environment always brings difficulty of control, so that discovering the agent who controls the reinforcers which, in turn, control the behavior of the target becomes essential. Thus is the mediator defined and selected: he must (1) possess the target's reinforcers, and (2) be able to place them on contingency.

Some reinforcers which the consultant may believe to have particular power for the target may not be possessed by the mediator. For instance, the assessment may reveal that a particular predelinquent child might respond most with the reinforcement of cash. This is well and good if the mediator of choice has cash. For many cases, of course, even an extra expense of ten cents per day is simply not possible (and would bring considerable negative outcome from other family members). The lack of availability of the reinforcers is also an issue when the choice is an interpersonal event: it is well enough for the consultant to instruct a mediator to dispense "maternal attention" on contingency, but this instruction is of little consequence if the mother-mediator is a cold woman who does not have it in her repertoire to extend the kind of warmth which is high in the target's reinforcement hierarchy. It is worthless also to suggest to a mediator the dispensing of aversive stimuli consequent on undesired acts (e.g., punishment) if the mediator of choice has a lack of ability to dispense this contingency due to a hiatus in his own behavioral repertoire. Many passive fathers would be unable to carry out such a suggestion.

Other parents are unable to carry out suggestions for dispensing aversive stimuli because of the poor control which they have over hostile outbursts. For these indi-

viduals, it would be very unwise to suggest an action which might rapidly escalate to proportions beyond the desire of the consultant. This consideration returns us to the second criterion of mediatorship: the mediator must possess the reinforcer (the material, or the action in his repertoire), but he must also be able to dispense it on contingency, to control it. The "ability to place on contingency" becomes a most complex issue. In order to pursue it with maximum clarity let us now return to a discussion of the multiple sources of reinforcement.

THE SOURCES OF REINFORCEMENT

We may divide the social sources of reinforcement into two: the chosen mediator and others. By "others" we mean others than mediator. For example, even if a particular plan for behavior modification used a history teacher as the mediator, both the target's arithmetic teacher and his gym supervisor will continue to affect the target's behavior, although not according to any particular instruction from the consultant. As does all the world, these other teachers will be responding to the child's changing behavior, and dispensing their own reinforcers in the usual automatic ways that they have always praised, punished, ignored, etc., any child's behavior. These reinforcers may well be as powerful as those which are being systematically controlled by the consultant and mediator. The distinction illustrated in Fig. 2 is this: the mediator's use of reinforcers is according to specific direction by his consultant; others are not in direct interaction with the consultant.

Because of these uncontrolled sources then, we must choose as mediators those individuals who will maximize the control over the target's reinforcers. Multiple mediators must frequently be employed in order to maximize. This is not always practical though, and the use of too many mediators may create organizational difficulties more serious than useful. Although this discussion will become more complex later, let us continue to treat the simple case of the single mediator. He should be chosen in such a way that the resolved contributions from all sources will be in the required direction. Usually this direction should be positive: the sign of the combined reinforcing outcomes from others and mediator should be +. For example, a target who is asked to turn his homework in promptly may have this behavior reinforced by the mother (mediator) with tokens-toward-a-movie-ticket (+); his gym teacher

FIG. 2. Target's sources of social reinforcement.

(other) may hear of the child's improvement and praise him (+); and these two positive outcomes may be sufficient to outweigh his sister (other) mocking him for studying (-). If so, the resolved sign of the reinforcing event will be +, and homework behavior will increase.

With this typical example, we can further refine our criterion for mediatorship as follows: the mediators should be those individuals who have control over the most powerful of the available reinforcers, since these mediator-controlled reinforcers must frequently outweigh outcomes to the target of an opposite sign.

If we take seriously the triadic analysis, with its accompanying "sources of reinforcement" concepts, we can immediately see that it must apply to the mediator as well as to the target. Indeed, not only does it apply but it increases one step in complexity.

As illustrated in Fig. 3, the mediator's behavior will be controlled by the same source of social reinforcement as will the target's: (1) that reinforcement which is

under the control of the consultant; (2) from others surrounding the mediator (his wife, employer, other children, etc.). The identical analysis may be performed upon the mediator as was achieved above for the target: if the mediating behavior is to continue or increase, the resolved sign of outcomes for mediating must be in the positive direction.

But when the mediator is the focus of analysis, we see that there is yet a third source of reinforcement to the mediator, and that is from the target. The modification of the target's behavior is a reinforcing event for the mediator. This source must be carefully balanced with the other two, and the resolved sign of all sources must be positive.

In theoretical analysis, it becomes apparent that the central issue must become the maintenance of the mediator's desired behavior. Since the key agent for control is the mediator, the target's behavior is a near-strict function of the effectiveness of the mediation. Therefore, behavior modification in the natural environment stands or falls on the effectiveness of the behavior of the mediator.

Fig. 3. Mediator's sources of social reinforcement.

THE MEDIATOR AND THE TARGET

It is very important that the reinforcing consequences of actions suggested to the mediator be carefully weighed. This is quite obvious when one has reference to the reinforcing value of a particular stimulus with reference to the target: it is equally important with reference to the mediator himself. The most effective combination, of course, is that in which there would be positive-positive value. This would be the case in which a mediator would be instructed to reinforce the target with an activity or an object, the presence of which would be equally rewarding to the mediator himself. We have found this particularly effective, for instance, in instructing husbands to reinforce their wives by taking them out to dinner. This, however, has clear limitations when the financial problems of the family are so severe as to make entertainment outside the home an expense which is punishing to the mediator. A more subtle condition, however, can and does frequently arise. This is the instance in which, although the preferred reinforcing stimulus (going to a movie), is also reinforcing the mediator, the offering of a reinforcement to the wife is aversive for the husband.

Let us elaborate. Most instances of "disturbed" behavior are so because they are disturbing to society, usually the family. Thus undesirable behavior, when it has persisted long enough to come to the attention of

the consultant, has already partially alienated the potential mediators from the target. This is particularly salient in marriage counseling work. A "symptomatic" wife, by the time she reaches the counselor, has in more instances than not managed to make herself aversive to her husband. The mediator-husband might find the act of offering positive reinforcement to his target-wife aversive.

In such instances, we have found it more effective to reverse reinforcement as follows. Withdrawal of a reinforcer from the target may be positively reinforcing to the mediator. Of course, if such antagonism existed as would make this statement always true, this relationship would not be a practical one to use for mediating purposes. However, it is frequently possible, through withdrawing the presence of the mediator, to establish this aversive-reinforcing combination. For instance, one of the most effective control techniques is that of having the mediator withdraw his presence from the target when undesired behavior is emitted. This has been especially effective in cases in which the wife's negligence or vituperation is the problem under consideration, and we have encouraged the husband (mediator) to withdraw when evidence of this behavior first presents itself. This "leaving the scene" is at the same time aversive to the wife and negatively reinforcing for the husband. In many instances, his preferred response is indeed "leaving the scene" and, by placing

this response on contingency much more effective methods of interaction can be established.

These same issues may be considered in relation to any target. When children are misbehaving so badly in the home or in the classroom as to make mediators angry with them, it may be difficult for the mediator to institute a program of positive reinforcement. Many, indeed, are inclined toward punishment. Assessment of the behavioral repertoire of the mediator must take these issues into account. The repertoires of mediators, as of any organisms, are highly individual and will vary with cues given by the target.

Nevertheless, there are certain commonalities of behavior repertoires which may be predicted grossly by use of the concept of role. In general, society reinforces parental and teacher behaviors which are nurturant and controlling to the child. It would not necessarily reinforce the same mediator's behavior if he were nurturant and controlling toward the spouse. Thus that intervention procedure which may be most effective in dealing with the disturbed marriage may not be effective when the relationship at issue is pupil and teacher, or mother and child. Social-psychological role theory provides a framework for classing together behaviors which have a high probability by virtue of the individual's occupancy of a given social position. The same individual may occupy the two positions of uncle and father. If he were asked to mediate in two separate cases, the one target being his son and the other target being his nephew, he might not be capable of the same intervention program in the two instances. Teachers should never be asked to engage in antiteaching behavior; nor should psychoanalysts be asked to take their patients to a movie. But a psychoanalyst-mediator might well be instructed to take his problem daughter to a movie, on contingency. Mediator-behavior which is consistent with role-repertoires is an astute choice of the consultant because it has a high initial probability of occurrence. Of course, any assumptions made about role-behaviors must yield to careful analysis of the specific individual's own repertoire, and a measure of idiosyncrasy always exists. Regardless of these variations, however, the wise consultant will rarely ask any individual to violate his own particular role-organized repertoire. The rule is as follows: the consultant should select behaviors which are consistent with the role position which the mediator holds vis-a-vis the target.

In summary, then, the ability to dispense a given reinforcer on contingency always involves (1) the pos-

session of the reinforcer; (2) the presence in the repertoire of the acts of consequence; and (3) the potential presence of a resolved + in the events which follow mediating-behavior.

THE TARGET AND THE MEDIATOR

In the case of the misbehaving child, the consequences to the mediator of the child's behaviors are frequently so punishing that virtually all interaction stops, or great vacillation and alternation of the behaviors of the adult toward the child occurs. In many ways, the child's effects on the parents and teachers serve to modify these mediator's behaviors into a topography which intensifies the child's bad-acting. These processes do not cease upon intervention. The third source of reinforcement to the mediator--from the target himself--continues to modify the mediator's behavior and to affect the ability of the mediator to apply reinforcers contingently.

This source of reinforcement to the mediator's behavior could be described as "not controlled" by the consultant, along with reinforcement from others. Yet, the modification of mediator behavior is crucial to success of enterprises in the natural environment. So even these sources must be brought under indirect control.

INDIRECT CONTROL OF THE SOURCES OF REINFORCEMENT

Let us examine a particular behavior: a mother is chosen to mediate the intervention plan for her child, the target. The child may be exhibiting two undesirable behaviors, refusal to make her bed in the morning and tardiness to school. The mother is instructed to enter a mark on a wall chart when and only when the child behaves properly, and later to redeem a preestablished number of marks with a mother-daughter excursion. The mother believes this system to be beneath her dignity. The father is disinterested and mildly pokes fun at the wall chart. The consultant's presence and personality is pleasing to the mother, and she wants to gain the consultant's respect. Thus sign of reinforcements will be:

Other -
Consultant +

A simple inquiry of the mother will disclose the resolved sign: "Will you begin the system?" If she agrees the resolved sign may be hypothesized as a "weak +," or perhaps a "weak -." In this situation, the consultant may have little confidence that mediation-behavior (entering marks and redeeming them) will occur

with sufficient frequency. With such a borderline reinforcing event, the third source of reinforcement--from the target--becomes crucial.

We now come to the issue of indirect control. We can arrange that the change in the target's behavior is positively reinforcing to the mediator, creating a resolved sign as follows:

Other	-	
Consultant	+	Resolution = a strong +
Target	+	

This indirect control can be gained by choosing an initial behavior in which a change will be immediately and positively reinforcing to the mediator. In our example, we should definitely choose making-bed behavior rather than school-prompt behavior as the initial response to strengthen. To choose "reducing tardiness" (1) would not be as visible to the mediator, (2) would require the establishment and perfection of a complex notification system from school to home in order for the mediator to perceive the effects, and (3) would remove less "sandpaper" from the mother-daughter relationship than would the choice of bed-making. The latter, we might suppose, is a source of irritation and additional work for the mother. Even one morning's made bed could make for a more pleasant day for our mother-mediator.

The reinforcement from the target can be brought under control, albeit indirectly, by the astute choice of targeted behaviors. Once mediating-behaviors have been shaped and increased in the mediator, the mediating repertoire can be expanded. Once the mother is "hooked" on modification techniques by the reinforcing value of bed-making, she will persist more in mediating other plans, including that of tardiness-reduction.

This strategy is also exemplified by the work of Ayllon and Michael, 1959. Out of the wealth of problem behaviors of the schizophrenic patients, those of most concern to the nurse-mediators were initially chosen for modification.

The reinforcement from others is also subject to this same kind of indirect control; the possibility for punishing responses to the consultant's instructions. Two examples: A teacher may be reluctant to reinforce a child's school achievement with poker-chip tokens because other teachers would mock her, or because the principal might frown at such an "irregularity." At a child's home, a mother might be constrained from reinforcing her daughter by spending some time in teaching her sewing skills, because the father would be jealous of time spent away from himself. The careful consultant will design an intervention plan which will contain a minimum of such punishment. If a token system is needed, it must be created with the participation and approval of the principal, and with a minimized likelihood of mockery from the mediator's associates. With attention to such issues, they can ordinarily be solved with a minimum of compromise. Beyond that, there is yet another strategy for achieving indirect control which the second example can illustrate. The modified behavior of the target should be made reinforcing to those others who control the reinforcers of the mediator.

In Fig. 4, if source A is positive, source 2 is more likely to also be positive. If the daughter's improved behavior allows the father (other) to sleep more easily at night, then he will be more likely to positively reinforce (encourage, not obstruct) the mother's desirable behavior (spending the reinforcing time with the target). Therefore the consultant should choose behaviors which will produce a + sign from sources 2 and 3. He must give this same consideration to source A.

Ideally, then, sources 2, 3 and A are all positive. It will occur to the reader that one is seldom so fortunate. The critical source of reinforcement, the one that most often will tip the balance toward one resolved sign or the other, is source 1--reinforcement from the consultant.

Fig. 4. Indirect sources of reinforcement to the mediator.

THE MEDIATOR AS THE TARGET

We have referred to source 1 as controlled; that is, the consultant who designs the intervention directly interacts with the mediator, and directly consequences the mediator's mediating behavior. The consultant praises the mediator, ignores him, gossips with him, or gives him some assistance, or a piece of gum, or a letter of recommendation. Through a process of shaping and stimulus control, effective mediation must ordinarily be taught to the selected mediator, and the consultant must employ the standard laws of learning in modifying the behavior of the mediator, just as the mediator must do likewise with the target. As we have previously argued that the target's modification is attributable to mediator-effectiveness, so we can now state that the mediator's modification (and effectiveness) is attributable to the consultant-effectiveness. It is also clear that if the problem-person is the target of the mediator, the mediator is the target for the consultant. (see Fig. 5).

This is the essence of the triadic model. The professional (consultant) attention is to be directed to the modification of the mediator behavior. The consultant will choose mediator behaviors as goals which will result in the desirable modification of the actions of the target; but the consultant operates upon the mediator, and he must not forget it. If he does forget, and attends directly upon the target, he will have made two serious errors. First, he will have failed to modify the maintaining stimuli for the target's misbehaviors; thus the target would revert to misbehavior upon the withdrawal of the consultant. The second error is much more visible: in all likelihood, the erring consultant would fail to alter the behavior of the target, since the mediator is the individual who controls the reinforcers most powerful for the target.

Such an analysis reveals the inherent limitation upon a dyadic model such as psychotherapy.

FIG. 5. Indirect sources of reinforcement with the mediator as target.

THE CONSULTANT AS THE TARGET

As we have changed focus, we have seen that any individual in the social system can be seen as the "target" of attempted modification. The consultant himself is not excepted, and he must apply it to himself (see Fig. 6). For the modification and shaping of consultant behavior, there are the same sources: the mediator-source (3) is analogous to the way in which target behaviors reinforce mediator actions. If the mediator responds with "good" mediation, that action taken by the consultant which resulted in the mediator improvement, is more likely to reoccur in the consultant. If the mediator improves, the consultant will continue the methods of consultation which preceded it. Sources 1 and 2 are analogous. Various consultant-behaviors will be affected by others (his peers, his associates, and the like).

In addition there may be a source 1 for the consultant as well; in most settings and organizations there are supervisors for those occupying the consultant role. The supervisor will then become the source 1 for the consultant.

We are now prepared to consider the various elements of the paradigm simultaneously. Thus, we can see that there are the same sources of reinforcement for the supervisor of the consultant as well. Indeed, by extending the diagram off the right side of the page we observe that the target himself will no doubt be engaged in a mutually influencing relationship with some other individual.

The consultative-triad analysis can be applied to any three individuals in the chain. In the diagram, there are suggested individuals who might be represented by the circles above. But it is vital to understand that the "Consultant -- Mediator -- Target" pattern may be superimposed upon any three consecutive circles in an endless chain, as illustrated in Fig. 7. This superimposition is determined by the problem which locates the target. That individual who, under the direction of the consultant, operated directly upon the target is known as the mediator, and so forth.

FIG. 7. The consultative triad embedded in the social environment.

CONSULTATION TO THE COMPLEX SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

It can be observed that the triadic model offers guidance to intervention in the problems of institutions, as well as to those of individuals. For example, a "target" may be considered an entire class of students, an entire hospital ward (as in token economies), or indeed as any unit of a complex organization of whatever size, so long as that unit is boundaried by behavioral commonalities and common reinforcers. In such instances, a consultant to an institution would be guided by the triadic analysis to attend directly, not to the target(s), but to the mediator units (nursing staff, second-level supervisors, Board of Directors, etc.). The Sources of Reinforcement may be grouped as described above, and the same considerations applied to their management. Indeed, the consultation of any complex social environment will require interpenetration of the individual target analysis with modification at the institutional level.

SUMMARY

In the present section, we have suggested a model by which the principles of learning may be systematically applied to the natural environment. The basic technique is contingency management; that is to say, a positively reinforcing event must follow desirable behavior, and must not follow undesirable behavior. A positively reinforcing event is defined as that outcome in which the resolved sign of all sources of reinforcement is +. The task of the consultant is to select mediators and behaviors which will maximize the positive resolution. The task can be facilitated by attending to the role positions and the specific available reinforcers for each individual in the chain. Each individual in the chain must attend to the primary task of modifying the behavior of the next individual in the chain, not the target's behavior. That behavior should be chosen for the next individual, which will then ultimately maximize the behavior correction of the target.

Appendix: The Program in Behavior Change