ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF

Relationship Awareness Theory

a personal note by Elias H. Porter, Ph.D.

Relationship Awareness Theory is based on the premise that one's behavior traits are consistent with what one finds gratifying in interpersonal relations and with concepts or beliefs one holds about how to interact with others to achieve those gratifications. Although many personality theories are about people, this theory was meant for people. It was intended to provide an effective means for understanding one's self and for understanding others so that interpersonal relationships could be mutually productive and gratifying. The theory was planned to help people organize their concepts of themselves and their concepts of others around three basic motivations: wanting to be of genuine help to others, wanting to be the leader of others, and wanting to be self-dependent.

Statement of Theory

Relationship Awareness Theory is a theory of interpersonal relationships rather than a theory of intrapsychic relationships (although the theory promises to bring a new view to the phenomenon we call personality).

FIRST PREMISE: The first major premise of the theory is that behavior traits are not conditioned responses or reinforced behaviors, as B.F. Skinner would imply, nor are they primary personality factors as Raymond Cattell stated (1971). The theory assumed, as does Tolman's theory, that behavior traits arise from purposive strivings for gratification mediated by concepts or hypotheses as to how to obtain those gratifications (Tolman, 1967). Put in simplest terms, behavior traits are the consistencies in our behavior that stem from the consistencies in what we find gratifying in interpersonal relationships and the consistencies in our beliefs or concepts as to how to interact with other people in order to achieve those gratifications.

As we become increasingly aware of the gratifications we are seeking from others and examine our beliefs and concepts as to the best way to achieve those gratifications, we open ourselves to feedback on the efficacy of the behavior in which we engage, with the result that old patterns of behavior may be readily modified or even abandoned for more effective behavior patterns.

As we become increasingly aware of the gratifications that others are seeking from us, their behavior becomes more understandable to us and opens new avenues for the achievement of mutual gratification and the avoidance of Unwarranted Conflict that may arise when one person presumes that another person equally shared his beliefs and motivations.

Relationship Awareness Theory avoids the unspoken assumption underlying so many approaches to understanding human behavior that the world impinges upon the individual in a more or less uniform and undifferentiated manner so that, if one is able to assess an individual's "primary personality factor," one is able to predict, within the error of measurement, the pattern of the individual's behavior in most, if not all, situations. Relationship Awareness Theory holds this assumption, so often left unspoken, to be faulty and misleading.

continued on page 2

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS ON

Reliability & Validity

EDITOR’S NOTE: The following text is from Dr. Porter’s original study. The results of a subsequent validation study (N=564) in 1988-89 confirm the validity of the Strength Deployment Inventory. Details on the study are provided in the Relationship Awareness Theory Manual of Administration, Ninth Edition.

Having no evidence nor belief to the contrary, in constructing the Strength Deployment Inventory it was assumed that when things are going well for people, one third of them will score highest on the Altruistic–Nurturing scale, one third on the Assertive–Directing scale and one third on the Analytic–Autonomizing scale. The items on each scale were written, tested and rewritten until successive samples yielded approximately equal distributions of populations among the three scales. This manipulation brought the means for each scale to approximately 331/3, the center of the Interpersonal Interaction Triangle, under the conditions of "when things are going well." The standard deviations for each scale were also quite similar (A–N=12.33, A–D=15.03 and the A–A=11.88) and judged to be close enough to establish rules-of-thumb for interpretive purposes.

As it became clear over time that the Motivational Value system of persons scoring relatively equally on all three scales differed from the motives (if not the behaviors) of persons scoring higher up on one of the A–N, A–D or A–A scales, it became necessary to establish a “boundary,” continued on page 3
SECOND PREMISE: As a second major premise, Relationship Awareness Theory holds that there are, at the very least, two clear, distinguishably different conditions in the stimulus world that affect patterns of behavior. One of these conditions exists when we are free to pursue the gratifications we seek from others. The second condition exists when we are faced with conflict and opposition so that we are not free to pursue our gratification, but must resort to the preservation of our own integrity and self-esteem. The behavior traits we exhibit under these two conditions truly differ. When we are free to pursue our gratifications, we are more or less uniformly predictable, but in the face of continuing conflict and opposition we undergo changes in motivations that link into different bodies of beliefs and concepts that are, in turn, expressed in yet different behavior traits. We are predictably uniform in our behavior when we are free, and we are predictably variable as we meet with obstructing conditions in our stimulus worlds.

THIRD PREMISE: The third major premise is directly from Fromm: a personal weakness is no more, nor no less, than the overdoing of a personal strength. An individual operates from personal “strength” when he behaves in a manner that enhances the probability that an interpersonal interaction will be a mutually productive interaction. An individual operates from personal weakness when he behaves in a way that decreases the probability that an interpersonal interaction will be a mutually productive interaction. To act in a trusting manner is a strength; it enhances the probability of mutual productivity. To act in an overly trusting or gullible manner is a weakness; it decreases the probability of mutual productivity and increases the probability of a destructive or, at least, a nonproductive outcome for one or even both of the individuals concerned. The same things can be said for being self-confident and its nonproductive form, being overly self-confident or arrogant. To be cautious is a strength; to be overly cautious or suspicious is a weakness.

When the premise that behavior traits are purposive strivings for gratification is coupled with the premise that weaknesses are strengths overdone, a new dimension in understanding is open to us as facilitators. Whether a given individual is operating from his strengths or from his weaknesses, we should be able to assess the gratifications for which he is striving and, as psychotherapists or facilitators, help the individual assess the effectiveness of his beliefs and concepts about how to interact with other people to obtain the gratification he seeks.

FOURTH PREMISE: A fourth premise relates to two distinctions that can be made among personality theories. First, the concepts inherent in some theories are remote and distant from how one experiences one’s self, but the concepts inherent in other theories approximate how one experiences one’s self. The second distinction is that in some theories the concepts used amount to labels, while in other theories the concepts lead to further self-discovery.

Erik Erikson, in Childhood and Society (1974), writes, “In introjection we feel and act as if [emphasis mine] an outer goodness had become an inner certainty. In projection, we experience an inner harm as an outer one: we endow significant people with the evil which actually is in us.” I intend in no way to discount the validity of Erikson’s assertion, but I do want to point out that the person who is engaged in introjection or in projection does not experience himself as doing so. These concepts are distant from immediate experience. For example, when I am engaging in projection, I need to have someone point out and more or less prove to me that I am projecting. The concept of projection does not serve me very well as a heuristic device; it does not lead me to much self-discovery. It may have heuristic value to me as a facilitator or therapist observing and discovering the behaviors of others, however.

Transactional Analysis offers a set of concepts much closer to how we experience ourselves, which serve as rather effective devices for self-discovery. One can rather readily grasp the concepts of “Parent,” “Adult,” “Child,” and “transactions” and understand many of one’s relationships with others in these terms. These more experience-proximate concepts not only lead more readily to self-discovery, but also point to what can be done to change one’s behavior for more effective interpersonal relationships.

The fourth premise, then, is simply that the more clearly the concepts in a personality theory approximate how one experiences one’s self, the more effectively they serve as devices for self-discovery. The more a personality theory can be for a person rather than about a person, the better it will serve that person. By implication, were the concepts in personality theory sufficiently close to how we experience ourselves, psychotherapists might well become trainers and the concepts become healers. I don’t think we are there, as yet, but I think that concepts in Relationship Awareness Theory are closer to that possibility than Fromm’s concepts of receptive, exploitative, hoarding and marketing orientations, closer than Karen Horney’s concepts of moving toward others, moving against others, and moving from others (Horney, 1950), and closer than the concepts of Parent, Adult and Child of Transactional Analysis.

Experience-Proximate Concepts

The FIRST SET of concepts of experience-proximate concepts of Relationship Awareness Theory relates to the first premise, that behavior traits are purposive strivings for gratification. According to the theory, there are three distinguishably different basic strivings in relating to others. The first is the striving to be nurturant of another – wanting to be genuinely helpful to the other person and to see the other person do well – and we all experience ourselves as wanting to be helpful in some of our relationships. The second is the striving to be in the position of directing events – to set goals and be the leader – and we all experience at times wanting to be the person in charge. The third is the striving for autonomy, self-reliance, and self-sufficiency, and we all experience at times wanting to do things for ourselves without help or direction from others. For some individuals, one of these motivations may be predominant.

The SECOND SET of concepts relates to the second premise, that there are two distinguishably different conditions in the stimulus world that affect patterns of behavior. When an individual is free to pursue his gratification, the nurturant motivation takes the form of actively seeking to be helpful to others, the directive motivation takes the form of self-assertion and seeking opportunity to provide leadership (in the conventional sense of leadership), and the autonomizing motivation takes the form of actively seeking logical orderliness and self-reliance.

In the face of conflict and opposition, the nurturant motivation is expressed in efforts to preserve and restore harmony, the directive motivation is expressed in efforts to prevail over the other person, and the autonomizing motivation is expressed in efforts to conserve resources and assure independence.
as it were, to define the “Hub” area. We set the boundary more or less empirically at 11 points above and below the mean (331/3) on each side (approximately 1 standard deviation above and below the mean). We have since learned that this may have been too loose since some studies have indicated statistically discriminable differences between INNER–HUBs, RED–HUBs, and GREEN–HUBs (from 1/2 SD out to 1 full SD from the mean). At present, however, we see no reason to press for such greater precision in what can best be an arbitrary boundary setting exercise.

No assumptions were made as to where the means of the scores ought to be under conditions of conflict and opposition, since the handling of conflict is so culturally determined. As one might very well expect, there is a big drop on the Altruistic–Nurturing scale (9 points) and increases on the other two scales (A–D up 6 points and A–A up 3 points). To the social psychologist interested in identifying cultural differences, these results may have meaning, but to the trainer or to the educator, they are of little or no assistance in helping an individual gain insight into the way they act as an individual.

**Test–Retest Reliability**

One hundred subjects were retested within six days to two weeks. The Pearsonian coefficients of correlation between the test and retest scores were for each scale as follows: A–N, r=.78; A–D, r=.78; and A–A, r=.76.

**Retests Over Long Periods of Time**

Over the past two decades enough experience has been gained with people who have retaken the SDI after a span of 2 to 20 years to raise the question, “Does scores change over time?” There can be no doubt about one thing: it is easy to change one’s scores, if one wants to play games. Work with the SDI has shown that when taken seriously without intent to manipulate scores, a high degree of consistency is found no matter how long the intervening length of time between test and retest.

The amount of fluctuation in scores over time is usually less than 6 points, which is not statistically significant. Any change within a range of 6 points (1/2 Standard Deviation) may be interpreted by the non-sophisticated as a big change, when to the psychometrician it is inconsequential. This type of change is referred to as “error of measurement.” When scores from initial and later testings are plotted on the same triangle, more often than not it is clear that both vectors would be interpreted in essentially the same manner.

There are times, however, when changes in scores are real. This second type of change is not within the “error of measurement” category. They are a result of improper instructions given by the trainer. The SDI or PVI scales for “when all is going well” (items 1-10) are intended to get at how one acts that makes one feel worthwhile about one’s self. Some trainers, not understanding that the pattern of the answers are used to infer underlying motivations, have asked participants to limit their answers to how they behave “on the job.” This emphasis on “the behavior related to the job” rather than “the behavior related to when things are going well for me” causes people who are unhappy on their jobs to describe what is probably a Mask Relating Style. Later, under proper instructions, retaking the SDI gives a different set of scores more in line with the person’s Valued Relating Style.

Another reason for a change in scores involves a Mask Relating Style. If a person first takes the SDI or PVI when they are wearing a mask, the scores will not reflect their true Valued Relating Style. On retaking the Inventory, if the person has dropped the mask, the true Motivational Value System will be demonstrated. The converse is also possible. Someone, due to an environmental demand begins wearing a mask, and may, upon retesting, answer the items in the SDI or PVI based on their Mask Relating Style.

Experience has shown that one whose score has changed is likely to report that they have gone through a major life change, or experienced a significant trauma that has caused them to re-evaluate their life. In any event, exploring with a trainee what has been going on in their life and what was going on in their life when they first took the SDI or PVI may shed light on the shift.

**Validity**

In considering the matter of validity, there is one very important matter to take into account. The Strength Deployment Inventory and the Personal Values Inventory were not designed to be tests even though they are in the traditional format of a test. These inventories were designed to be educational instruments and must be judged by that standard. An inspection of the format shows immediately that no effort was made to avoid any halo effect. There is no doubt in our minds that anyone with any insight could manipulate his or her answers to achieve any profile of scores he or she wanted. This does not mean, however, that the scores of a person who answers the items honestly have no validity.

**Validity as Internal Consistency of the Scales**

Since many Inventory users like to discuss individual items with their clients, it will be of interest to them to know the level of confidence to be placed in each. Each item ending was analyzed to determine the extent to which it discriminated between high scorers on a scale and low scorers on a scale, using the Chi-square method (N=100). The level of confidence with which each item ending discriminated are listed in the table below.

**Internal Consistency of the Scales**

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**Validity as Congruence with External Reality**

In Table 1, it is quite clear that the items in each scale have a high degree of internal consistency; that is, what each scale measures is being measured with high consistency.

The next questions are, “Does the Altruistic–Nurturing scale measure altruistic–nurturing behavior, does the Assertive–Directing scale...”
The THIRD SET of concepts is based on the third premise, that a weakness is the overdoing of a strength. Here the concepts are those of actual overdoing and perceived overdoing of strengths. The actual overdoing of a trait, for example, is trusting to the point of being gullible, being self-confident to the point of being arrogant, being cautious to the point of being suspicious, and so on. Perceived overdoing occurs, for example, when someone in whom the nurturing motivation is high interacts with someone in whom the directing motivation is high. When the latter acts quickly with self-confidence, ambition and directness, the highly nurturant person may well perceive him as arrogant, aggressive, overbearing and rash. Perceived overdoing is somewhat akin to projection as described by Erikson, but it seems to be more over-reacting to behavior in others that would be considered inappropriate for one’s self.

The FOURTH SET of concepts is based on the fourth premise, that when the concepts in a personality theory are more closely related to how we experience ourselves, they serve as more effective heuristic devices for self-discovery as well as for understanding the behavior of others. For example, if one knows where he is “coming from” (the gratification he seeks) and he knows where another person is “coming from” (the gratifications the other person seeks), he may assess whether a conflict is unwarranted or real. If it is unwarranted, he may devise strategies for achieving win-win (mutually gratifying) solutions; if the conflict is real, he may attempt to develop a limited relationship or decide to terminate the relationship. Whatever one decides to do may be done with insight and without violating his integrity or the integrity of the other person.

Relationship Awareness Theory seeks to provide first and foremost an effective means to understanding one’s self and understanding others, to the end that interpersonal interactions may be made as mutually productive and gratifying as possible or, where they cannot be mutually productive, that destructiveness of individual integrity be minimized.

REFERENCES


GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS ON Reliability & Validity continued

To answer such questions, one must go to those spots in nature where the phenomena are supposed to occur and then determine whether or not the instrument yields scores congruent with the presence of the phenomenon. When one does just that, one sometimes finds that the phenomena don’t occur where one thought they would.

We went to the nursing profession where we expected to find a lot of Altruistic–Nurturing behavior. Except for some nurses who were in administrative positions, the Inventory scores were quite congruent; the great majority scored highest in the Altruistic–Nurturing scale.

We administered the Inventory to number of social workers. Again, the Altruistic–Nurturing scores were mostly congruent with a helping profession.

We administered the Inventory to a group of students majoring in business administration. Again, the scores were congruent, i.e., tending toward the Assertive–Directing scale.

We administered the Inventory to a group of engineers and found them scattered but, as a group, highest on the Analytic–Autonomizing Scale.

One of the surprises came when we gave the Inventory to a group of cadets in a police academy and to a group of police sergeants with 3 to 5 years of police experience. Most members of both groups were clearly in the Hub. We had, as most people do, predicted they would be highest in the Assertive–Directing scale. One group of women deputy sheriffs who were on the staff of a women’s jail, did have very high scores on theAssertive–Directing scale.

We administered the Inventory to a group of about 80 young men (17 to 21 in age) incarcerated in a state school for boys. The average of their scores charted in the Cautious–Supporting area when all is going well and near the Judicious–Competing area in the face of conflict and opposition. The director, a professional social worker, affirmed that this was a very accurate description of his charges. Shortly thereafter we gave the Inventory to a group of youths in the same age range chosen by the Catholic Diocese to be group leaders at a summer retreat. The average of their scores was clearly in the Altruistic–Nurturing region when all is going well and, in the face of conflict, moved into the Cautious–Supporting area almost to where the incarcerated youths’ scores fell.

We found another kind of validity as well: cases where people were in jobs which called upon them to behave in ways that were incongruent with their inventory scores. We have had reports from some people who subsequently changed to jobs more congruent with their Inventory scores and who claimed to be much more gratified in their work.

Validity as an Educational Instrument

Since the Inventory was not designed to be a test, but to be an educational instrument, we can ask whether or not it is effective as an educational device. We have only experience to go on as to its effectiveness. In our experience of other users of the Inventory, it is quite common for participants to report:

▼ a sense of exhilaration and personal gain,

▼ understanding themselves and others better,

▼ liking and respecting themselves and others more,

▼ feeling freer to be themselves and try new ways of relating to others,

▼ feeling less locked-in to behaving according to how “They” say one should behave, and

▼ an increased ability to be open and honest with others, to give and receive feedback from others.

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