

Working With ACT

How Using ACT in the Workplace Could Transform....Well, Almost Everything

ACBS World Conference

Parma 2011

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Session structure:

1. Why is ACT needed?
2. What are the ways in which using ACT in these settings is problematic and how could we address that?
3. What's next?

Introduction

We, (Rob and Rachel), are committed to delivering the best empirically supported interventions for our organisational clients. Our reading of the evidence is that ACT is at the cutting edge of this work and so, in order to both provide our clients with an excellent product and do work which is meaningful to us, we tend to focus much of our work on using ACT principles to build psychological flexibility. However, there are some challenges in this. This session explored those challenges and suggested possible options for how to manage them.

1. Why is ACT needed?

ACT is needed in the workplace because the **evidence** is compelling and it is **relevant** to everyone.

1.1. Evidence

The evidence for using ACT in the workplace is compelling. In particular it is:

- ✓ Proven to improve performance and health.
- ✓ Enhances other interventions.
- ✓ We understand not just **that** it works but **why**.

And it can be trained. Some of the key research studies showing ACT's effectiveness in the workplace are below, and more can be found on our blog, www.workingwithact.com.

- Bond, F., & Bunce, D. (2000). Mediators of Change in emotion-focused and problem focused worksite stress management interventions. *Journal Of Occupational Health Psychology*, 5, 156-63.
- Varra, Hayes, Roget & Fisher (2008). A randomised control trial examining the effect of ACT on clinician willingness to use evidence-based psychopharmacology. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 76, 449-458.
- Hayes, Bisset, Roget, Padilla, Kohylenberg, Fisher et al (2004). The impact of Acceptance and Commitment Training and multicultural training on the stigmatising attitudes and professional burnout of substance abuse counsellors. *Behaviour Therapy*, 35, 821-35.
- Bond, Flaxman, van Veldhoven & Biron (2010). The impact of psychological flexibility and ACT on health and productivity at work. In Houdmon & Leka (Eds). *Contemporary occupational health psychology: Global perspectives on research, education and practice*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Bond & Flaxman (2006). The ability of psychological flexibility and job control to predict learning, job performance and mental health. *Journal of Organisational Behaviour management*, 26, 113-30.
- Bond & Bunce (2003). The role of acceptance and job control in mental health, job satisfaction and work performance. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88, 1057-1067.
- Bond, Flaxman & Bunce (2008). The influence of psychological flexibility on work redesign: Mediated moderation of a work reorganisation intervention. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 93, 645-54.
- Kashdan, T., & Rottenberg, J. (2010). Psychological flexibility as a fundamental aspect of health *Clinical Psychology Review*, 30 (7), 865-878.

<http://workingwithact.com/what-is-act/act-in-the-workplace-research-references/>

1.2. Relevance

ACT is particularly relevant in today's workplace because it is applicable to many of the problems organisations and workers face.

Distraction, Disengaged, Distressed

The amount of information we must process daily has doubled in the past 20 years and **71%** of white-collar workers feel **stressed** about this, with **60%** feeling **overwhelmed**. (The Institute of the Future, Menlo Park).

Distracted

- Data overload means we have less time to process each event and so we try to multitask. Unfortunately multitasking is largely inefficient because there's a cost to refocusing all the time. John Medina's *Brain Rules* shows how poorly adapted we are to multitasking – we take roughly twice as long and make three times as many mistakes when we multitask. Distraction is estimated to cost \$160bn p.a. in the US alone.
- “People who regularly **juggle several streams of electronic information** do not pay attention, control their memories, or switch from one task to another as well as those who prefer to focus on one thing at a time. Heavy media multitaskers are **paying a big price**”. *Stanford Report*, 8/24/2009, Study by Clifford Nass, Eyal Ophir & Anthony Wagner
- Distraction also tends to make us less happy. A recent study by Gilbert and Killingsworth (2010) showed how we are distracted nearly half the time and it is in these moments we are least content. From sport to gardening, activities which lead to ‘flow’ have been consistently shown

to enhance long-term wellbeing. In contrast, our distraction leaves us less 'present' in what we're doing and more **disengaged** from the world around us.

Disengaged

Engagement can be defined as "A positive attitude held by the employee towards the organisation and its values. An engaged employee is aware of the business context, and works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organisation." (Institute of Employment Studies).

However:

- 70% workers are not truly engaged in what they do (Towers Perrin / Gallup)
- 20% of all workers are actively disengaged from what they do – and those with lower engagement scores have around 18% lower productivity. Macleod report: <http://www.bis.gov.uk/files/file52215.pdf>
- [The Conference Board reported](#) recently that just 45 percent of workers are satisfied with their jobs, down from 61 percent in 1987.

Distressed

Distraction and disengagement can rob work from the meaning and absorption that we need to deal with stress effectively. Unsurprisingly, in a world where uncertainty is common and workloads are large, this leads to distress:

- Work is the biggest influencer on happiness, yet only 20% of us are happy at work (Roth and Harter, 2008).
- 1 in 6 UK workers are experiencing a common mental health problem at any one time. http://www.fph.org.uk/uploads/ps_mental_health_and_work.pdf
- Recent surveys conducted in the United Kingdom indicate that between 25% and 40% of workers in various occupations could be diagnosed with a minor psychiatric disorder (such as anxiety and/or depression) (Hardy, Woods, & Wall, 2003; Stride, Wall, & Catley, 2007; Wall et al., 1997).
- Stress-related illness costs UK businesses £26bn p.a.

Top 10 Work Stressors

1. Lack of control
2. Lack of communication
3. No appreciation
4. No feedback
5. Career and job ambiguity
6. Unclear policies
7. Mistrust, unfairness, office politics
8. Pervasive uncertainty

9. Random interruptions
10. The treadmill syndrome

Bill Wilkerson, CEO of The Global Business and Economic Roundtable on Addiction and Mental Health

2. What are the ways in which using ACT in these settings is problematic and how could we address that?

- *Problems with Creative Hopelessness (see 2.1)*
- *Combining ACT with problem solving (see 2.2)*
- *Getting 'hooked' by politics, status, groupthink etc (see 2.3)*
- *ACT sounds weird (see 2.4)*

ACT is showing promise as an intervention in organisations but using ACT in this context poses particular problems, for example:

2.1. Problems with creative hopelessness

The section on creative hopelessness (CH) in the 1999 ACT book states the following:

'If a person has exerted so much effort and yet is coming for treatment, one of two things must apply: (1) The person has not found the right way to fix the problem, or (2) the model for change is flawed and unworkable.' (Hayes, Wilson, Strosahl 1999), and

'ACT attempts to clear the field of these cultural rules and instead appeal to the client's actual experience, which is quite different.' (Hayes, Wilson, Strosahl 1999),

The client is said to be operating under an ineffective rule – 'if I could get rid of my bad thoughts and feelings, my life will improve'. The ACT therapist aims to organize 'most of the client's solutions into a "control of private experience = successful living" class' so that the 'workability of that entire class is challenged.'

In corporate settings the situation is often quite different. The majority of people who are in employment (60-75%) are not currently suffering from a mental illness (Hardy, Woods, & Wall, 2003; Stride, Wall, & Catley, 2007; Wall et al., 1997) and are certainly not seeking 'treatment' from an organizational initiative. They often view their lives as going well. On average, people living in Western democracies rate their level of satisfaction with their 'life as a whole' as 7.6/10 (Diener et al, 2000). The average for employed people is probably even higher. Many people consider that things are going well for them because of their successful use of the control agenda.

In organisational settings there is often some 'groupthink' around the control agenda. The organisation is likely to have spent a lot of money on speakers who have convincingly described some version of the control agenda:

'Perhaps most important of all, you know that you become what you think about most of the time. You therefore discipline yourself to think continually about the things you want and keep your mind off the things you don't want'

Brian Tracy - Create your Own Future

*'We observe, we tell a story, and then we feel. ...Since we *and only we* are telling the story, we can take back control of our emotions by telling a different story.'*

Patterson et al Crucial Conversations p. 99

'We must be able to believe with our whole heart and soul, even when there is no proof...We need to develop absolute belief... Absolute belief enables us to keep believing when no one else does, when the science says it's wrong... Absolute belief is an essential part of any massive achievement'

(Andrew Meikle - Win now Win later p. 49)

In clinical settings CH validates people's experience that problem solving their internal experiences doesn't work – they feel validated and it confirms something they have experienced. In non-clinical settings, people are often very clear that positive affirmations, managing self talk, managing emotions, relaxation etc 'work' for them.

In a corporate setting, if I try to challenge this 'class of responding' ("control of private experience = successful living"), participants will give examples of how changing their thoughts has helped them to handle a challenging situation more effectively.

So if I believe the research that the control agenda is problematic and I want to provide my client with a better approach, what do I do?

1. Remember that the goal is increased psychological flexibility – this is what the research is suggesting leads to improved outcome for our clients.
2. Remember that some people in the group will be quite psychologically flexible already – I can draw this out.
3. Demonstrate psychological flexibility about this – make increased discrimination around workability the focus of this aspect of the intervention.
4. Use a needs analysis
5. Don't make people wrong – look for the ways in which they are right
6. Explain how ACT interventions work and the research to support their effectiveness in corporate settings
7. Explain the elegance and efficiency of the approach – instead of having to challenge every thought you can change your relationship with all your thoughts. Instead of having to change your emotions you can learn to act effectively even in the presence of painful emotions.
8. Explain that ACT is a new cutting edge approach – *you may have been advised to...the latest research is suggesting that a better approach may be to...*(and then give some examples of the research)

What does this look like?

1. Remember that the goal is increased psychological flexibility

Psychological flexibility is: “contacting the present moment fully as a conscious human being, and based on what the situation affords, changing or persisting in behavior in the service of chosen values”.

Most people can see the advantages to doing this. Explaining what it is, what the research says about the relationship between psychological flexibility and wellbeing (and also psychological flexibility and outcomes that matter to organisations – sick leave; handling change, leadership behaviours etc.) creates interest in a different approach.

3. Demonstrate psychological flexibility about this – make increased discrimination around workability the focus of this aspect of the intervention.

In this setting, it is more workable to increase levels of discrimination around control strategies rather than challenge the whole class. I ask (hopefully with openness and curiosity!):

- What are the circumstances in which these strategies are effective?
- Are there any times when they are unhelpful? Are there any times when these strategies seem to move you away from what is important?
- What are the circumstances in which these strategies work best?
- What sort of people do these strategies work best for? (It can be helpful to quote the research re positive self statements lifting mood in people with high self esteem and lowering mood in those with lower self esteem. Managers may then understand that advising their less confident staff to repeat affirmations may not be effective).
- Are there any times when taking action in the presence of painful thoughts and emotions has worked for them?

4. Use a needs analysis

The core of CH is:

‘A dialogue focused on three primary questions:

- (1) What does the client want?
- (2) What has the client tried? and
- (3) How has that worked?’ (Hayes, Wilson, Strosahl 1999),

These questions form the basis of my initial interaction with my client.

Often I need to explore the answer to Q1. My client may say – *we want people to be less stressed, or more confident or more positive about the upcoming changes*. Then I ask – why is that important to you? What would you hear and see if people were less stressed?

Flexibility is important as I explore Q2 and 3. I need to genuinely be interested in what they have done and what has worked and be open to the idea that control strategies may have sometimes been workable. I need to demonstrate mindfulness. If I have a secret agenda to *prove* that what my client has been doing is wrong then:

- I don’t think I am actually doing ACT (as I am inflexible and fused)
- I will lose any alliance with my client.

These three questions form the basis of my **needs analysis** and **objective setting**.

The needs analysis involves repeating this process of mindfully exploring these questions with each new group/person I interact with in the organisation– I do it at the initial briefing with the HR manager and manager; repeat it in 1:1 interviews and repeat it at the start of workshops.

5. Don't make people wrong – look for ways in which they are right

In this setting CH can seem to be making people wrong, I therefore tend to focus on increasing my client's level of discernment and finding the places where what they are doing demonstrates psychological flexibility (and is working for them) e.g. Workshop participant, Peter, explains a stress management strategy he has found helpful: *'When I leave work I just switch off and don't let myself think about work until the morning'*

Rachel: What do you focus on instead?

Peter: My family?

R: And being present for them is important to you?

P: Yes

R: So you have some values about being present with your family and so when you get home from work, you bring your attention to this minute now with them? Because that is really important to you?

P: Yes

R: If you have had a particularly stressful day do you find thoughts of work creeping in?

P: Sometimes

R: What do you do then?

P: Tell myself – I won't think about that now

R: And bring your attention back to what is important in that moment...your family?

P: Yes

R: Do you ever get angry with yourself when you find your thoughts keep on going back to the problem at work?

P: Sometimes (laughs)

R: Our minds can be so good at telling us off. Do you ever respond to these thoughts with kindness, recognising that you have had a tough day, so it is not surprising that thoughts of the day will sometimes grab your attention?'

P: Yes

R: Which do you find most effective in terms of returning your attention to this moment now- the first or second?

P: The second

CPD Question 2: Identify how ACT can be used effectively without creative hopelessness

Answer: In these populations more workable approaches include:

Increasing discrimination around when control strategies get in the way of valued living

2.2. Combining ACT with problem solving

It's easy to forget when doing ACT, that problem solving is still the primary method of improving productivity and workplace health. Therefore, the ACT practitioner's primary task is to **integrate** their approach with other interventions that have a primarily problem-solving focus e.g. decision sciences, business process redesign, job design.

Whilst there is always a problem solving element to my client's problem, it is also true that there are limitations to the effectiveness of problem solving, and the most effective response is to help clients explore this, gently. We are building a library of ways in which this can be done, but this table provides examples:

Value of problem solving	Limitation of problem solving
Changing processes to improve job control boosts health & productivity	People need help noticing new opportunities and learning new skills
Psychometric tests help identify the right career for me	Having a 'type' can restrict our sense that we can grow, develop or adapt
Categorising people as 'talent' helps us direct resources at the best	Categorising people as talent tends to alienate those who aren't talent
Having a set of organisational values helps us embed desired behaviours	Organisational values often lead to cynicism
Risk management reduces our risks	Risk management still leaves risk
Safety procedures have cut workplace accidents	Most accidents are not caused by poor procedures, but mindlessness.
It helps to know my strengths so I can build on them and improve weaknesses	Strengths mean nothing without context.
We need to stick to our plan	No plan survives contact with the enemy
...Outside the skin (most of the time)	...Inside the skin (most of the time)

Both problem solving and acceptance-based interventions should be explained with care so as not to contradict each other. In addition, we have learnt that people are being TAUGHT to problem solve emotions, and our experience is that in a corporate setting people who have control strategies working tend to be very vocal – others reluctant to admit that it doesn't work for them (even to themselves). It's imperative not to alienate these people from your work.

CPD Question 1: Name three ways in which ACT can be combined with problem-solving methodologies.

1. Don't forget problem solving is the main way in which problems are solved in organisations! Most people are heavily fused with the idea that they can solve all problems. Don't alienate these people by fusing too rigidly to the ACT approach.
2. Help people exploring the limits of analysis, categorising, judgments and evaluations. Distinguish between problems inside the skin and outside the skin.

3. *When doing problem solving work, do so in a way which is consistent with your later stance. Talking about problem solving as a way of 'de-risking' a decision is better than talking about it as solving the issue or eliminating risk.*

2.3. *Getting 'hooked' by politics, status, groupthink etc*

An organisation is a complex system – politics, group dynamics, issues of power and influence – all need to be managed effectively. When using any sort of psychological approach, including ACT, in an organisational setting it isn't enough to be good at the approach. There is also a need for skills and knowledge in understanding organisations, management and team dynamics.

The best approach to identifying and managing these issues starts with a well conducted needs analysis.

The **Needs Analysis** involves finding out:

- What key stakeholders are wanting to achieve through the intervention
- The level of current knowledge, skills and ability (KSA's) in the learners and the magnitude of the gap between this and the desired KSA's
- The likely attitude of participants to the intervention
- The likely dynamics in the group
- What level of resources the organisation are prepared to give to this issue (time, money, people)
- How will the intervention be evaluated (Saks & Haccoun 2007)

From this exploration, objectives can be developed and decisions can be made about the best way to deliver the intervention.

Done well, the needs analysis builds rapport and commitment with stakeholders; ensures the intervention is well targeted and delivers the outcomes needed and ultimately makes my job easier.

As mentioned earlier, our experience suggests that a proper needs analysis is the training equivalent of establishing creative hopelessness in individual therapy. Done well it establishes why a different approach is worth exploring. And like creative hopelessness it can be easy to rush through it – and the outcomes suffer if you don't take time to do it well.

Key questions to ask

- What concerns led to you considering this session?
- In what way is this problem/desired outcome important?
- What have you tried already to address this problem?
- What did and didn't work?
- What relevant learning experiences have this group had before, what has worked well with this group in the past and what didn't work?
- What do the workshop participants 'know' already?
- How will this training be of personal benefit to the learners?
- What is their likely attitude to this training? Do they see it as valuable or are they attending because they have to? Are they likely to be interested or cynical?
- What other issues are relevant?
- Who are the key people who need to be on-board for this to be an effective intervention?

- Who needs to be pleased with the outcome of this training?
- Who can influence the outcome but isn't going to be directly involved in the session?

Are this group an intact team or drawn from different areas of the organisation? Do they get on? Are there any unresolved resentments etc between participants that are likely to be played out in the group? (Saks & Haccoun 2007, Barbazette 2006)

You may need to talk to a range of people or send out a brief survey to get the information you need.

If you want the session to be effective don't make the mistake of being 'underly' political. You are usually a stranger in a tribe that has a hierarchy and strong norms. If you don't spend some time working out how the hierarchy works and what the norms are, then your ACT-based intervention is likely to flounder.

Practitioners may tend to focus on the following strategies to build influence:

- Do good work and hope it will be noticed and rewarded
- Avoid political manoeuvring
- Show humility
- Have open, honest, up front agenda's
- Genuinely seeking feedback

To be effective in highly political systems, we may also need to use these strategies:

- Find out who is powerful and work to get their buy in
- Be aware of people's perceptions and take them into account when we deliver an intervention*
- Find out how the system works and be prepared to work with what is rather than how we think things should be
- Excel at the way we present and package our interventions
- Be verbally disciplined – know when to be open and when to be more cautious
- Be prepared to 'sell' our solutions

Based on 'Survival of the Savvy – High Integrity Political Tactics - Richard Brandon & Marty Seldman (2004)

Nadler (1988) proposed 4 steps to manage the political dynamics of change:

1. Ensure or develop the support of key power groups
2. Use leader behaviour to generate support for the proposed change
3. Use symbols and language to encourage and show support for the change
4. Build in stability by using power to ensure that some things remain the same.

Session Design

Good session design is essential. A session can contain great information but if not designed well it will be unlikely to achieve good results.

When designing the session consider the following theories about adult learning (hold these theories lightly – they seem to be useful – they may or may not be 'true').

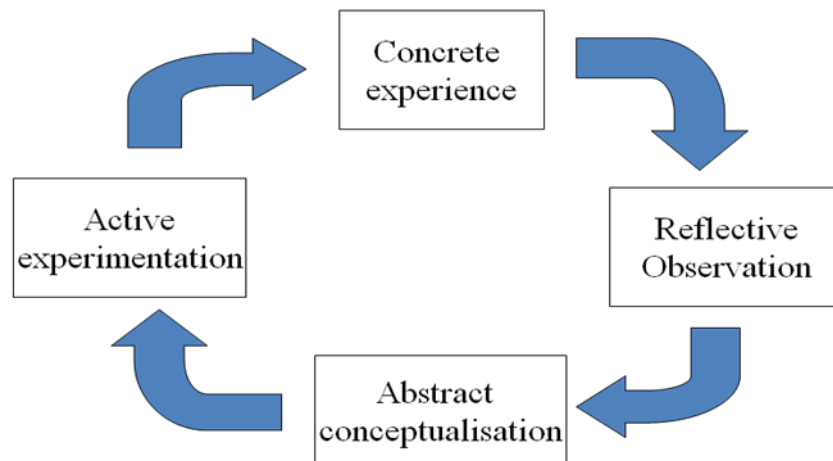
The core assumptions of **Andragogy** (Knowles, Holton, Swanson in Laird 2003) are:

- Adults need to know why they need to learn something
- Adults prior experiences provide rich resources for learning
- Adults become ready to learn when they experience a problem they need to solve
- Self-direction is important for adults self-concept
- Motivation to learn is internal rather than external

What this means in practice:

- Throughout the session keep coming back to the WIFM of the learners – What problem will this session help them to solve? What desired outcome will it help them achieve?
- Treat participants as the experts on themselves and their situation
- Ask participants what they know already – e.g. What works in dealing with stress? What doesn't work? Where appropriate it can be helpful to show how their responses demonstrate psychological flexibility. (e.g self affirmations are often only one step away from values – find the value in the affirmation and then confirm that the evidence suggests that connecting with our values at difficult moments is very helpful, when someone says “ I decide not to think about it’ ask them what they focus on instead – this is usually present moment awareness combined with values action.) Throughout the presentation, call back to participant’s ideas often.
- Be very careful not to create situations where participants are likely to feel wrong or stupid.
- Find the problem they want to solve – preferably in the needs analysis before the session. It could be stress, burnout, motivation, engagement etc. Then decide with the client if ACT could effectively address that problem for them. I tend to have a stance that ACT would not be the only way to approach that problem – but it is one that they might not have come across before and ACT has good evidence to support it.
- Don't try to convince or persuade them. I am just showing them something that I think is cool that has some good evidence to support it. This is a time to demonstrate my own psychological flexibility and hold things lightly.
- I mix ACT with other ACT consistent ideas that build psychological flexibility.
- Motivation to learn is all about WIFM. I need to demonstrate how increased psychological flexibility, acceptance, defusion etc will help my clients to be more effective in ways that matter to them. Quoting the research on the benefits of psychological flexibility can be very helpful.

Use **Kolb's Four Learning Styles** (Delahaye & Smith 1998) to design the session.



- Concrete Experience – learn through personal practical experiences
- Reflective Observation - learn through observing and then reflecting
- Abstract Conceptualisation – learn through formulating concepts and principles
- Active Experimentation – test theories in new situations.

What this means in practice:

1. Alternate activities with presentation. Don't talk too much. Don't try to cover too much. I need to remind myself - this isn't about me, this is about my client's needs.
2. Write a comprehensive workbook with references. I don't give them the slides- I make the slides 'presentation zen' like.
http://www.garreynolds.com/Presentation/pdf/presentation_tips.pdf
3. Make sure there is a good balance between experiential and theoretical approaches. Do some mindfulness- for some groups for whom the term 'mindfulness' may be a problem other terms such as 'getting centred' are more appropriate. I might talk about how we can lose contact with now when we are in stressful situations and our response becomes more about our own thoughts and feelings than what is actually happening. I often explore how getting in touch with what is really happening in the present moment is a more effective stance.
4. Effective learning sessions include activities relating to each type of learning. You can start at any point in the cycle. For example –
CE – Do the sweet spot
RO –Ask them to reflect on how that memory relates to what is important to them
AC – Build that into some values statements - principles they might want to use as they live their lives. Link to some theory on values
AE – Give them an opportunity to test applying their values statements to different situations. This might be using a case study.

Session Delivery

1. If the session is a half day or more, I usually start with 2 minutes developing some ground rules. *What do you need from me? What do you need from each other?* I raise likely problems e.g. lack of balance in contribution. I ask how they want to handle it and ask for permission to follow through on their suggestions. If any problems occur with learner's behaviour I return to the ground rules. This means I am not the 'teacher' controlling the class, instead I am a facilitator supporting the group. This explicit 'norming' helps to avoid later problematic 'storming'.
2. I focus on what the session will do to help them solve their problem.
3. Room set up is important – when I arrive, I often move the room around.
4. Keep an eye on the energy in the room. I try to remember that I am moving around and enlivened by presenting – and so I may be feeling quite engaged when participants are feeling tired and sleepy.
5. For extroverts - really watch the balance between you talking and the group doing activities/talking etc.

6. Tips in facilitating large group discussions

- **NB** A large group discussion is usually a large group watching two people (usually the facilitator and a series of participants) have a discussion. Don't make the mistake of thinking that you are engaging the whole group by holding a 'large' group discussion. Small group or paired discussions do this more effectively. However large group discussions can be very useful to get a sense of where people are at and to bring everyone to the same place.
- Strategies from Functional Analytical Psychotherapy are very effective at encouraging helpful contribution and discouraging problematic interactions
- Encourage contribution by listening attentively when learners speak:
 - Nonverbal attention and minimal encouragers
 - Paraphrasing
 - Positive statements '*Thanks Jenna*' '*David, that's a great question*'
- Attribute to source - by learners name. If you don't know them, then ask them to wear name tags.
- Create a visible record of contributions – usually a whiteboard summary. People feel acknowledged and also they tend to be less repetitive.
- Start with easy questions to warm people up and build confidence
- Consider a paired activity first to give them a chance to test their ideas in a lower risk situation
- Ask people to jot their thoughts down before starting the discussion
- Balance how you form people into groups. If it is a high risk activity involving a degree of personal disclosure let them choose who to be with. If it is lower risk then form then into different groups for different activities. Line ups are a good way to randomise groups – simply form a line based on random stuff like when did they last go to cinema – quick, fun, useful to randomise & raise energy.
- If a question is asked that the group are likely to know the answer to, then relay it back to them

– ‘Has anyone else had that experience – how did you deal with it?’

- Probing –Ask follow up questions to clarify. This shows interest, but don’t get bogged down in a discussion with just one person.
- If they are reluctant to talk, do paired then small gp discussions first. (Delahaye & Smith, 1998).

7. Responding to inappropriate or incorrect statements

- Don’t get into an argument where you try to prove that you (or ACT) are right and they are wrong
- Acknowledge contribution
- Ask for clarification
- Focus on the correct part
- Ask probing questions
- Ask others to comment
- If the behaviour is inappropriate - refer to the ground rules

2.4. ACT sounds weird

Language and metaphors commonly used in ACT can appear highly unusual – and strange – in organisational settings. Therefore, our approach often needs to be adjusted to better fit with the context. We are trying to build a list of terms which can be substituted and used in organisational contexts. This is a starter for ten and we keep our list here:

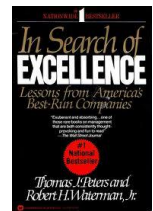
Acceptance & Commitment Therapy	Acceptance & Commitment Training
The 6 processes of ACT	Mindfulness / values-based action
AAQ-2	WAAQ
Stress management	Resilience
Self as context	Your resilient self
Mindfulness	Noticing attention
Defusion	Noticing thoughts, focusing on behaviour
Acceptance	Willingness Self-compassion
Present moment awareness	Getting present / Presence
Values	Commitments / What’s important?
Unwanted private events	Intrusive thoughts, painful feelings and memories
Creative hopelessness process	Needs analysis process
Control agenda	The limitations of problem solving
Mental toughness	Mental flexibility
Contacting the present moment fully as a conscious human being, and based on what the situation affords..	Needs to be explained in segments or ‘Flexible thinking’

3. How Using ACT in the Workplace Could Transform Almost Everything...

Many organisations have been doing a version of values work for some time. This can mean that people assume that they know about working with values. However, few organisations understand values in the ACT sense and this can cause problems. Equally, this is an opportunity for us to extend ACT's reach and to improve the lives not just of hundreds and thousands, but millions.

How Values Work is Currently Done

The picture below shows how values are done in organisation – the top team will generally identify the top set and then cascade downwards.... rolled out across the organisation via behaviours which are enforced through competency frameworks. People are then generally asked to start demonstrating these behaviours.



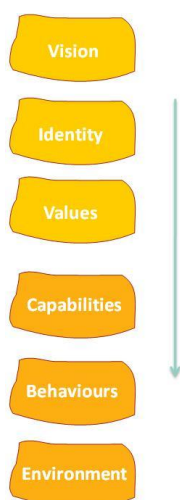
Even serious organisations like the CIPD in the UK define organisational values in these terms:

*“Successful organisations are characterised by **strong values** that communicate **what behaviour is appropriate** and what is not”. CIPD*

Organisational values are therefore rarely ‘freely chosen’ and values often feel imposed and inauthentic.

This tends to:

- Produce ridicule and / or cynicism.
- Produce ‘plys’ – or rigid, rule-based modes of behaviour which lack vitality and kill engagement.



Because of this, organisations are often left having to sell their values to people. They tend to be just aspirational, and have no real traction when things get difficult and they generate no proper willingness to pursue.

In addition, this view of organisational values is also reinforced in management schools, where the leaders of tomorrow are taught:

“Organisations must have a sound set of beliefs on which it premises all its procedures and actions...To meet a challenging world, it must be prepared to change everything about itself except those beliefs”. In Search of Excellence, Peters and Waterman.

In other words, leaders are being encouraged to fuse

Source: Robert Dilts

with certain beliefs, irrespective of context and workability.

We ask how workable this view of organisational values has proved?

Has it led to engaged and committed workforces?

Has it led to flexible, effective leadership?

Or has it led to inauthentic leadership, financial crises, moral outrage and the worst form of short termism?

The ACT view of Values

This is perhaps our greatest opportunity in organisations. An ACT-consistent definition of values can:

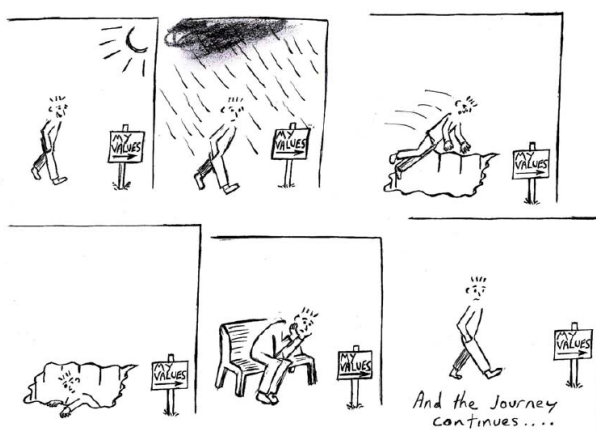
1. Bring people into contact with their values and
2. Help prepare people for the 'messiness of real life' and develop willingness to return to their direction.

At the moment there is no exploration of peoples' willingness to maintain a valued direction and certainly no training to help people defuse from difficult feelings. This we know how to do very well.

By identifying ACT-consistent definitions of values that can be used in organisations, we have the potential to resolve this and influence more people than ever.

1. Help everyone explore their own values
2. Then coach leaders and managers to 'knit' these values to the context of the team, and what it is trying to achieve. For example, what do your values look like in the context of this team and what we are trying to achieve this year? Scaling individual values upwards takes willingness to live in ambiguity, or to compromise or to experience value conflicts. The question becomes what are you willing to experience in order to still make progress? We need to get better at coaching people to do this, but if we can scale this to teams, then we can scale to whole organisations...
3. Gone are the days of defining values top down and cascading. Yes, we need an exciting mission, but we need a model of values which is bottom up too, because that is the only thing that has the capacity to engage us and make our lives meaningful.

And if we can show people how to knit personal values to organisational, then we can start knitting together disparate groups, based not on coercion but on flexibility, and compassion.



"You can whip people into line with fear, but you can't get them to build any of the great human accomplishments. That takes aspiration, which I think means values".



Hank Robb

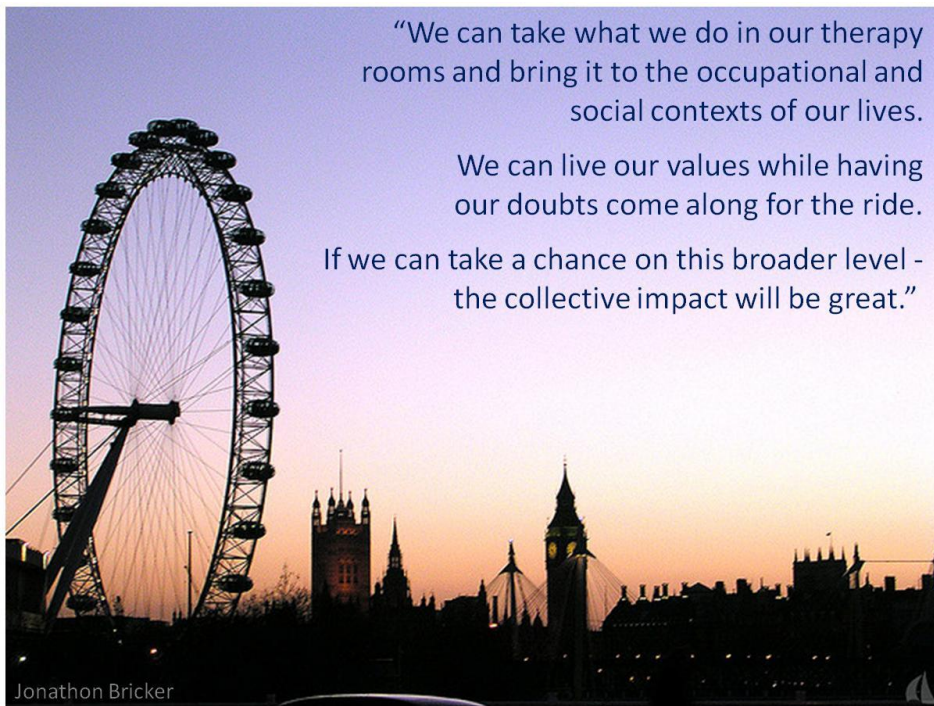
If we can bring the vitality back to people in work, then we have a chance to bring about enormous change, which goodness knows we need.

But this isn't some airy fairy tale notion of happiness or engagement...this is about willingness. This is psychology for the real world, not the world we read about in happiness lectures or even in business books. But if we can build willingness of organisations to move towards what they value even if this is difficult, then we will be scaling ACT.

"You need low enough experiential avoidance that you do not run from the pain that empathy will give you."



Finally, if we can scale act by changing the way values work is done we can take it to where it really matters.



Question 3: *What can we do to work with values more effectively in organisations?*

1. *Coach leaders to help their staff identify their values using ACT consistent definitions (i.e. freely chosen)*
2. *Coach leaders to help their staff 'knit' their own values to the team's. This should be in the context of willingness and returning to your intention.*
3. *Help organisations to scale values upwards, 'bottom up' so that they truly engage staff.*

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