Processing Experiential Activities Using the DNA-V Model

SOURCE:
Louise L Hayse & Joseph Ciarrochi; <u>The Thriving Adolescent</u>; New Harbinger: 2015

OVERVIEW:
The DNA-V model was developed as an application of Contextual Behavioral Science for use with adolescents. It merges components of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy with Positive Psychology.

DNA represents metaphors symbolic of psychological processes / perspectives.

- D = Discoverer – represents the process of exploring and testing the world (trial and error learning)
- N = Noticer – represents our direct experience of our body, feelings, and sensory experience without analysis or judgment. It is a *neutral observer*
- A = Advisor – represents our inner voice, our judgment. Its primary role is to keep us safe and secure and to figure out what might work based on our past learning experiences

V= Values – Awareness of what is important, which helps to guide more intentional actions in the world and responses to thoughts and feelings.
- Because the DNA-V model is designed with adolescents in mind it is a developmental model which assumes that values are not necessarily well formed. The assumption is that clarification of values emerges from the interaction of the DNA functions. We test out our assumptions about what we value and <u>notice</u> what works and does not work, in the process we <u>discover</u> and refine our values.
- Though it is generally assumed that most adults have a better understanding of their values, it has been my experience that our values are in formation, transition, and development throughout our lives. Significant events like illness, loss, or disability often demands a reconsideration and prioritization of our values.

USING THE DNA-V WITH EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISES:
Any task, challenge, or collaborative process is likely to elicit an array of DNA-V functions. Some tasks are going to be better designed to emphasize particular functions. For example, problem solving will tend to elicit Advisor functions, applying past experience to generate possible solutions. Task based problems which require trial and error learning will tend to elicit Discoverer functions. Noticer functions are present in any conscious experience but may remain unconscious unless emphasized in some way. This makes a DNA approach extremely flexible. Just about any team building, problem solving, or experiential exercise you have ever encountered in your life can be used to illustrate and explore DNA-V concepts. This makes the approach wonderfully playful, creative, and engaging.

Simply defining the DNA-V processes and using experiential exercises to illustrate how these processes shape behavior and transform experience immediately places clients in a position of mindful awareness of their inner processes (self-as-context). Naming and cultivating awareness of these processes allows for more flexibility to choose one's perspective and intentionally adopt a way of experiencing the world. Without this structure these functions are largely unconscious, functioning automatically and reflexively to influence behavior, form perspective, and elicit emotional reactions.

- The aim of this work is to help people become aware of these functions moment to moment so they can maintain a more objective relationship to internal experiences and greater capacity to choose perspectives which result in a more flexible and effective response in any given situation (increasing psychological flexibility).

CULTIVATING & DEEPENING AWARENESS:
There are a variety of types and levels of awareness to target when using a DNA-V model. These are not necessarily sequential and many are interdependent.
- Simple understanding of the DNA-V definitions
- Linking terms to basic experiential examples and metaphors
- Using terms to label experiences clients talk about (e.g. – so your **advisor** told you it would be better not to trust; I'm glad you **noticed** that, what else did you **notice**?)
- Capacity to discriminate between different internal experiences and accurately label these experiences using the DNA-V terms (e.g. – when you were in the noticer role what do you experience in your body?)
- Awareness of the dynamic interactions between the various processes and common patterns (e.g. - Advisor functions suppressing the Discoverer functions to avoid the risks inherent in trial and error learning).
- Noticing the benefits and drawbacks that are a part of each function leading to a greater acceptance of the necessity and limitations of each function. (e.g. – did you notice that your advisor gave you helpful advice / advice that held you back?)
- Awareness of the competitive nature of the different functions leading to different perspectives (e.g. - When one is fully engaged in the Noticing function they are often less in contact with the Advisor functions).
- Awareness of the dominant internal experiences associated with each function.
  - Discoverer – playfulness, curiosity, openness, action orientation, etc.
  - Noticer – calm, detachment, interest, alertness, present moment focus, etc.
  - Advisor – judgment, thinking, comparison, concern, problem solving, etc.
  - Values – vitality associated with value consistent experiences. Loss, pain, and guilt as possible indicators of behavior which might be inconsistent with values.
- Body awareness of the different functions (e.g.- What do you notice in your body? What words might you use to describe your body experience?)
- Behavioral awareness / behavior as metaphor (e.g. – From this perspective can you show me how your body would walk, dance, stand, sit… If you were to turn this experience into a noise what noise would it be?).
- Create a metaphor (e.g. – If you were to create a metaphor for the way your Noticer relates to the Advisor what would you say that relationship is like?)
- Awareness of what it is like to shift from one function to another (e.g. – In the context of this issue, what would it be like if you were to approach it from the perspective of your Discoverer?)
- Awareness of what it is like to intentionally adopt the perspective of a function (e.g. – OK, so you natural tendency is to jump into your advisor to try to problem solve this issue. If you were to choose what perspective to take, what might work better for you?)

CREATIVITY:
Learning how to be more skillful in how you use language, behavior, and activity to elicit and explore DNA-V concepts is ultimately a creative process that requires trial and error learning. It may be helpful to start with some suggested processing questions or activities that can be found on the Morita School Website. Your own style and approach to elicit and explore these ideas will emerge as you play with these ideas.