

Cognitive-Shifting

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Cognitive shifting is a method used in awareness management describing the mental process of re-directing one's focus of attention away from one fixation and toward a different focus of attention. This shifting process can be initiated either by habit and unconsciously, or as an act of conscious volition.

In the general framework of cognitive therapy and awareness management, cognitive shifting refers to the conscious choice to take charge of one's mental habits--and redirect one's focus of attention in helpful, more successful directions. In the term's specific usage in corporate awareness methodology, cognitive shifting is a performance-oriented technique for refocusing attention in more alert, innovative, charismatic and empathic directions.

Origins in cognitive therapy

In cognitive therapy, as developed by its founder Aaron T. Beck and others, a client is taught to shift his or her cognitive focus from one thought or mental fixation to a more positive, realistic focus--thus the descriptive origins of the term "cognitive shifting". In "third wave" ACT therapy as taught by Steven C. Hayes and his associates in the Acceptance and Commitment Therapy movement, cognitive shifting is employed not only to shift from negative to positive thoughts, but also to shift into a quiet state of mindfulness. Cognitive shifting is also employed quite dominantly in the meditative-health procedures of medical and stress-reduction researchers such as Jon Kabat-Zinn at the University of Massachusetts Medical School.

This coined term first seems to have appeared in print via psychologist John Selby in articles, lectures and radio interviews, and then in his formal text titled Quiet Your Mind. Cognitive shifting has since become a common term among therapists especially on the West Coast, and more recently in discussions of mind management methodology. More recently the term, as noted above, has appeared regularly in medical and psychiatric journals etc.

Examples of usage

In research: The term has become fairly common in psychiatric research, used in the following manner: "Neuropsychological findings in obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) have been explained in terms of reduced cognitive shifting ability as a result of low levels of frontal inhibitory activity."

In therapy: In therapy (as in the work of Steven Hayes and associates), a client is taught first to identify and accept a negative thought or attitude, and then to allow the cognitive shifting process to re-direct attention away from the negative fixation, toward a chosen aim or goal that is more positive--thus the "accept and choose act" from whence comes the ACT therapy name. Cognitive studies of the elderly refer to "...Impaired cognitive shifting in Parkinsonian patients on

anticholinergic therapy..." etc.

Everyday usage: Books such as *The Way Of The Tiger* by Lance Secretan, and *The Creative Manager* by Peter Russell have shown how cognitive shifting principles apply to everyday life. Decades ago Rollo May taught the process of conscious choosing and cognitive shifting at Princeton in his psychology lectures. And in books such as *The Emotional Brain*, Joseph LeDoux clarified the power of consciously shifting from a negative to a more positive emotional focus. In John Selby's writings, most notable in *Quiet Your Mind*, the term appears frequently.

In business: The term is being introduced and used in large corporate training systems, as shown from this quote from an online training system:

"By saying to oneself carefully selected words that establish clear psychological or emotional intent, a person can immediately redirect the mind's focus toward acting on that intent. This is called cognitive shifting, or 'psychological judo' in that it involves an effortless action that employs natural positive human inclinations to empower quick mental and emotional shifts."

In meditation: Among the first references to the general mental process of focal shifting or cognitive shifting (the term cognitive is a relatively new term), the Hindu Upanishads are probably the first written documentation of the meditative process of redirecting one's focus of attention in particular disciplined directions. Cognitive shifting is the core process of all meditation, especially in Kundalini meditation but also in Zen meditation and even in Christian mysticism where the mind's attention is re-directed (or shifted) toward particular theologically-determined focal points. Recent books have spoken directly of cognitive shifting as a meditative procedure.

Specific term roots

In a recent NPR interview with Michael Toms, and elsewhere in his writings, John Selby attributes his initial introduction to the process of cognitive shifting to his early spiritual teacher Krishnamurti, and also to his training with Rollo May at Princeton. In the NPR interview Selby says he is almost certain that he first heard the actual term from a lecture by the '60s philosopher Alan Watts during his "Expanding Christianity" lectures at the San Francisco Theological Seminary in 1972.

From these various professional origins, the descriptive term cognitive shifting has emerged - first into limited psychological jargon, then in medical research, and now into more common parlance.

Focus phrase methodology

The primary cognitive technology that is used for cognitive shifting is called "focus phrase" methodology. This term has emerged from the actual process in which cognitive shifting is encouraged or even provoked in a client or any other person. The person states clear intent

through a specially-worded focus phrase--and then experiences the inner shift that the focus phrase elicits. The term "focus phrase" first appeared in print, related to cognitive shifting, in the business-management text *Take Charge Of Your Mind* written by Paul Hannam and John Selby.

Another term sometimes used for focus phrases is "elicitor statements". In some methodologies focus phrases are said as a set of 4 to 7 statements, fairly quickly and to oneself. In other techniques a single focus phrase is held in the mind during a whole morning or day, and perhaps changed each new day during the week.

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