

Three-Chair Cognitive Consolidation

In line with models of retrieval competition (Brewin, 2006) and recovery-orientated cognitive therapy (Grant et al., 2017), cognitive consolidation seeks to strengthen positive cognitions which counter individuals' negative cognitions. Rather than restructuring problematic thoughts and beliefs, the aim of consolidation is to elicit and elaborate evidence in support of adaptive appraisals.

Process of dialogue:

1). A negative cognition is identified and rated.

Facilitator: "It sounds like you often think that your performance at work is inadequate. Is that correct? [Individual nods]. How much do you believe that thought on a scale of 0-100?"

2). The individual is encouraged to separate from the negative cognition by moving from seat A to seat B.

Facilitator: "I'd like you to move over to this second chair [introduces a new seat] and, as you do that, try to leave this negative thought about your performance behind. [Individual changes to seat B]."

3). Remaining in seat B, the facilitator encourages the individual to identify a positive cognition which contradicts the negative cognition in seat A. The positive cognition is rated.

Facilitator: "Rather than seeing your performance at work as poor [gestures to seat A], how would you prefer to see your performance? What thought or belief would help you perform at your very best? How much do you believe this alternative perspective?"

4). The individual self-distances by either standing or moving to seat C. The facilitator reinforces this change in perspective by adopting third-person language.

Facilitator: "Let's take a look at this positive perspective from an objective point of view. Please stand with me so that we can see Matt from a distance. [Both stand]."

5). The facilitator encourages the individual to identify evidence which supports the positive cognition from the new, self-distanced perspective.

Facilitator: "Looking at Matt over there [gestures to seat B], I wonder if we can identify any evidence which supports the idea that he performs well at work? Can you think of anyone who would support that perspective? What would they say?"

6). Once evidence supporting the positive cognition has been elicited, the individual returns to seat B and rates how much they believe the positive perspective.

Facilitation notes:

- Evidence supporting positive cognitions can also be generated through interpersonal interviewing. This involves the facilitator interviewing persons in support of the positive cognition, who are enacted by the client (Facilitator: “Nice to meet you, Natalie. I understand you’re a close friend and colleague of Matthew’s. In what ways do you think his performance at work is adequate?”).
- Three-chair cognitive consolidation is readily combined with self-complexity dialogues and the strengthening of positive core beliefs (see other guidance).

Further Reading:

Pugh, M. (2019). *Cognitive behavioural chairwork: Distinctive features*. Oxon, UK: Routledge.

Citation:

Pugh, M. & Bell, T. (2020). Three-chair cognitive consolidation: Facilitation guidance. Retrieved from www.chairwork.co.uk.

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