



Metacognitive Training (MCT)

MCT 1 A – Attribution Blaming and Taking Credit

© Moritz, Woodward, Stevens & Hauschildt (12|21)

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Attribution: Blaming and taking credit

Attribution = working out causes for events. (e.g. blaming ourselves/others or giving or taking credit for things that happen)



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We often overlook the idea that the same event can have very different causes.

What causes could have contributed to the following situation?

You arranged a meeting with your friend, but he does not show up.



Explanations

Why did your friend stand you up?

Possible causes for this behaviour ...

???



Explanations

Why did your friend stand you up?

Possible causes for this behaviour ...

- I'm not important to him. He wouldn't have dared to do this with someone else.
- He's forgetful – he just lost track of time.
- His car broke down.



Explanations

Why did your friend stand you up?

Possible causes for this behaviour ...

... myself

I'm not important to him.

... others

He's forgetful – he lost track of time.

... a situation or
chance

His car broke down.



Blaming and Taking Credit

As the example shows, events can have many different causes.

In most cases, several factors contribute to a situation.

Nevertheless, many people have a preference for only one type of cause (e.g. blaming others instead of oneself or the reverse).



You're discharged from hospital without feeling any better.

Explanations ...

... myself

... others

... a situation or chance





You're discharged from hospital without feeling any better.

Explanations ...

... myself:

(can be changed to some extent)

- I wasn't motivated enough to change
- I didn't believe in my recovery

(more difficult to change)

- I'm incurable
- I have *bad genes*

... others:

- The medical staff did not care about me

... a situation or chance:

- Maybe I would have recovered better if I hadn't shared my room with 6 other patients
- If the hospital was better equipped, I would have recovered
- Sometimes the recovery process takes more time





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- Sometimes the recovery process takes more time

Caution: one-sided explanations!





You're discharged from hospital without feeling any better.

Now, please come up with some answers that involve a variety of causes (i.e., others, the situation & myself)

???

???

???





You're discharged from hospital without feeling any better.

Now, please come up with some answers that involve a variety of causes (i.e., others, the situation & myself)

- “The medical staff didn't have much time, but I could have requested more support and should have attended group sessions more frequently. That might be why my stay wasn't as successful as it could have been.”
- “Maybe I should be more patient regarding my recovery. I'm confident that in the future I can be helped by competent staff.”





Effects of certain attributional styles on negative events!



If you had played better, the other team wouldn't have scored a goal.



Self Attribution

(e.g. “That was really my fault. I owe an apology to the fans!”)

Disadvantage: ???

Advantage: ???

Others/Situational Attribution

(e.g. “But where was the keeper?”; “Anything can happen in a football match.”)

Disadvantage: ???

Advantage: ???



Effects of certain attributional styles on negative events!



If you had played better, the other team wouldn't have scored a goal.



Self Attribution

(e.g. “That was really my fault. I owe an apology to the fans!”)

Disadvantage: reduces self-confidence

Advantage: regarded as noble to take responsibility (“good sport player”)

Others/Situational Attribution

(e.g. “But where was the keeper?”; “Anything can happen in a football match.”)

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Disadvantage: reduces self-confidence

Advantage: regarded as noble to take responsibility (“good sport player”)

Others/Situational Attribution

(e.g. “But where was the keeper?”; “Anything can happen in a football match.”)

Disadvantage: pushing the responsibility onto others is considered impolite

Advantage: self-confidence is not threatened



Effects of certain attributional styles on negative events!



If you had played better, the other team wouldn't have scored a goal.



More balanced responses (i.e. combining influences from self, others, and situation; offer different explanations):

???

???

???



Effects of certain attributional styles on negative events!



If you had played better, the other team wouldn't have scored a goal.



More balanced responses (i.e. combining influences from self, others, and situation; offer different explanations):

“My performance was weak in this game but I will improve in time. Remember that I did stop some of their best goal scoring opportunities.”

“On other days I will play better and so will my teammates, and hopefully things will come together for some big wins.”



Effects of certain attributional styles on positive events!



<p>Self Attribution (e.g. “Like you said before, I am exceptionally talented.”)</p>	<p>Disadvantage: ???</p> <p>Advantage: ???</p>
<p>Others/Situational Attribution (e.g. “I owe everything to my mentors and my parents.”)</p>	<p>Disadvantage: ???</p> <p>Advantage: ???</p>



Effects of certain attributional styles on positive events!



<p>Self Attribution (e.g. “Like you said before, I am exceptionally talented.”)</p>	<p>Disadvantage: self-praise seems arrogant Advantage: increases self-confidence</p>
<p>Others/Situational Attribution (e.g. “I owe everything to my mentors and my parents.”)</p>	<p>Disadvantage: ??? Advantage: ???</p>



Effects of certain attributional styles on positive events!



<p>Self Attribution (e.g. “Like you said before, I am exceptionally talented.”)</p>	<p>Disadvantage: self-praise seems arrogant Advantage: increases self-confidence</p>
<p>Others/Situational Attribution (e.g. “I owe everything to my mentors and my parents.”)</p>	<p>Disadvantage: self-confidence is decreased by playing down one’s achievements Advantage: You are deemed to be modest, and a real “team player”</p>



Effects of certain attributional styles on positive events!



Congratulations on winning the award.
How did you do it?

More balanced responses (i.e. combining influences from self, others, and situation; offer different explanations):

???

???

???



Effects of certain attributional styles on positive events!



Congratulations on winning the award.
How did you do it?

More balanced responses (i.e. combining influences from self, others, and situation; offer different explanations):

“I am very proud, but I’d also like to thank my parents and the team. Also, Thomas Alva Edison once said: Genius is one per cent inspiration, and ninety-nine per cent perspiration.”



Why are we doing this?

Studies show that many people with **depression** (but not all!):

- tend to blame themselves for their failures
- tend to give others or the circumstances credit for their successes

This can lead to low self-esteem!



Why are we doing this?

Studies show that many people with **delusions** (but not all!):

- tend to blame other people for negative events and failures
- tend to think that all events are beyond their own control

The first attributional style in particular may lead to interpersonal problems!



How one-sided attributions promote misinterpretations during psychosis – examples

Event	Explanation during psychosis	Other explanations
People laugh while you are speaking.	People don't actually care what I say; they're just making fun of me.	Pure coincidence – someone else has made a joke at the same time; people are amused by your black humour.
You have gained weight.	That cheapskate doctor has prescribed me cheap medication.	Side effects of medication are possible, but inactivity and poor nutrition are also possible causes.
Your bike tyre is flat.	Vandals are in the area; I'm being targeted.	You forgot to pump up your tyres; there could be a nail in the tyre.

Can anyone contribute a short personal experience?



Attributional Style

Goal of today's session:

- Consider different possible causes of events
- Don't rush into accepting only one explanation
- Discuss the consequences of certain attributions

We should try to be as realistic as possible in our everyday life:

We should not always blame others for our failures, nor should we always blame ourselves when things go wrong.



The stall holder refunds the entire purchase price.

Why does the stall holder refund the entire purchase price?

What is the main reason for this event?

Yourself?

Another person or other people?

Circumstances or chance?





When you enter a room everyone stops talking.

What might have caused people to stop talking when you entered the room?

What is the main reason for this event?

Yourself?

Another person or other people?

Circumstances or chance?





Someone says that you don't look so good.

What made the person say this?

What is the main reason for this event?

Yourself?

Another person or other people?

Circumstances or chance?





You fail an exam.

Why did you fail the exam?

What is the main reason for this event?

Yourself?

Another person or other people?

Circumstances or chance?





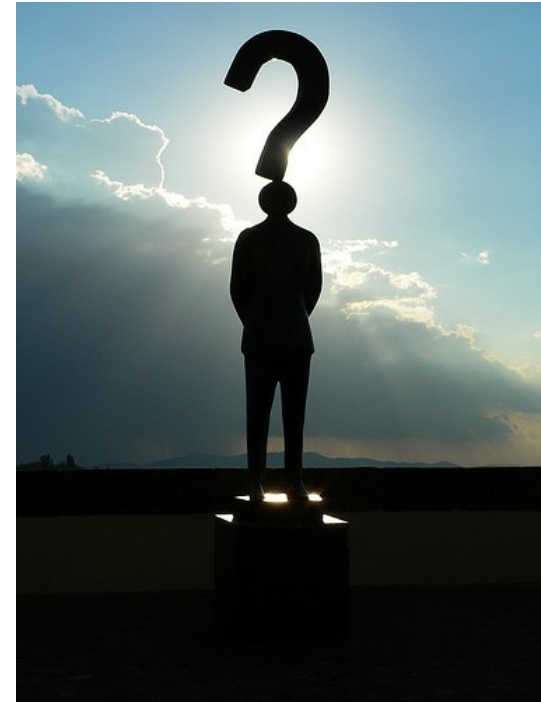
Come up with your own examples!

What might have led to the situation?

Yourself?

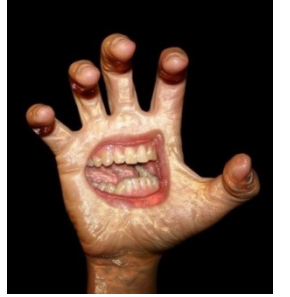
Another person or other people?

Circumstances or chance?





An inner voice tells you that you are no good.



Reasons ...

... yourself

... others

... situation/circumstances



An inner voice tells you that you are no good.



Reasons ...

... yourself:

- “Unfortunately, I constantly blame myself. This seems to be some kind of hidden self-hate.”
- “I am going insane.”
- “It seems *as if* someone else is thinking. But I do know that these are my own thoughts.”

... others:

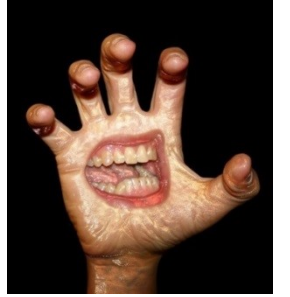
- “Something got implanted into my brain.”
- “I don’t know how this could happen, but someone took control of my thoughts.”

... situation/circumstances:

- “I am feeling stressed these days. That is why I experience everything more intensely, including my thoughts.”
- “My ears are ringing from listening to loud music.”



An inner voice tells you that you are no good.



Psychosis: the inner voice is attributed to other persons/powers:

- “Something got implanted into my brain.”
- “I don’t know how this could happen, but someone took control of my thoughts.”



Hearing voices

Own thoughts or remote-controlled?

Pros and cons



Why do you think the voices are inserted from outside?	Are there perhaps other explanations for the assumptions expressed on the left side?
<p>“I can hear it clearly. In contrast, my thoughts are completely silent!”</p>	<p>???</p>
<p>“These thoughts are not under my control. When I try to counteract it, it gets worse. This shows me that someone really wants to put me down.”</p>	<p>???</p>
<p>“I would never have such evil thoughts. I could never do any harm to anyone. But still, I constantly have these aggressive thoughts.”</p>	<p>???</p>



Hearing voices

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Why do you think the voices are inserted from outside?	Are there perhaps other explanations for the assumptions expressed on the left side?
<p>“I can hear it clearly. In contrast, my thoughts are completely silent!”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approximately 15-20% of the general population hear such voices from time to time • Intense thoughts are sometimes almost audible (e.g. catchy tunes, ruminating, hearing a friend’s voice while reading his or her e-mail)
<p>“These thoughts are not under my control. When I try to counteract it, it gets worse. This shows me that someone really wants to put me down.”</p>	<p>???</p>
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<p>“These thoughts are not under my control. When I try to counteract it, it gets worse. This shows me that someone really wants to put me down.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our thoughts are not fully controllable – otherwise there would be no such events as sudden inspirations, brainstorming, or rumination • If we try to counteract these thoughts, they automatically become stronger → Experiment: Try not to think of the number 8 You will not succeed. It will pop into your mind more strongly than ever
<p>“I would never have such evil thoughts. I could never do any harm to anyone. But still, I constantly have these aggressive thoughts.”</p>	<p>???</p>



Hearing voices

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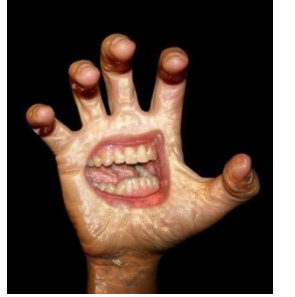
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<p>“I would never have such evil thoughts. I could never do any harm to anyone. But still, I constantly have these aggressive thoughts.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We often have thoughts that are opposite to our usual way of thinking. Thoughts do not equal action! 20% of the general population have passing thoughts about committing suicide, but they don’t act on them. Even when it comes to people we love, we sometimes feel aggression (e.g. a mother and her crying child)



Hearing voices

Own thoughts or remote-controlled?

Pros and cons



The explanation that strange thoughts are somehow being controlled remotely raises a lot more questions than it answers, e.g.:

- Is it technically feasible?
- When and where did the implantation take place?
- Who would be interested in harming you? Who would have the time and money to do so?
- There are easier ways of harming someone. Why would such a complex (perhaps impossible) method be chosen?



A friend invites you for dinner.

Why did your friend invite you for dinner?

What is the main reason for this event?

Yourself?

Another person or other people?

Circumstances or chance?





A policeman stops your car.

What caused the policeman to stop your car?

What is the main reason for this event?

Yourself?

Another person or other people?

Circumstances or chance?





You win in a game.

Why did you win?

What is the main reason for this event?

Yourself?

Another person or other people?

Circumstances or chance?





When approaching your car, you notice a scratch in the paint.

What could have caused the scratch?

What is the main reason for this event?

Yourself?

Another person or other people?

Circumstances or chance?





The doctor discovers that you have high blood pressure.

Why do you have high blood pressure?

What is the main reason for this event?

Yourself?

Another person or other people?

Circumstances or chance?





A friend refused to help you with your work.

What caused your friend not to help you?

What is the main reason for this event?

Yourself?

Another person or other people?

Circumstances or chance?





A friend has surprised you with a gift.

What caused your friend to give you a gift?

What is the main reason for this event?

Yourself?

Another person or other people?

Circumstances or chance?





A friend says you are stupid.

What caused your friend to say this?

What is the main reason for this event?

Yourself?

Another person or other people?

Circumstances or chance?





Your neighbour's baby starts crying when you pick it up.

Why is the baby crying?

What is the main reason for this event?

Yourself?

Another person or other people?

Circumstances or chance?





A friend says that he does not respect you.

What caused your friend to say this?

What is the main reason for this event?

Yourself?

Another person or other people?

Circumstances or chance?





Transfer to everyday life

Learning objectives:

- Always consider different factors that could have contributed to the outcome of an event (i.e. yourself/others/circumstances).



Transfer to everyday life

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- Always consider different factors that could have contributed to the outcome of an event (i.e. yourself/others/circumstances).
- We should try to be as realistic as possible in every-day life:
It's not justified to *always* put the blame on others, just as it is not *always* our fault when things go wrong.



Transfer to everyday life

Learning objectives:

- Always consider different factors that could have contributed to the outcome of an event (i.e. yourself/others/circumstances).
- We should try to be as realistic as possible in every-day life:
It's not justified to *always* put the blame on others, just as it is not *always* our fault when things go wrong.
- Usually, many factors contribute to an event.



What does this have to do with psychosis?

Many people with psychosis tend to explain *complex* events with one single reason only. Sometimes, other people alone are blamed for one's failure.

Example I: Anna falls while walking.

Own belief: Her uncle causes this by sending pulses through electrodes in her head.

Alternative explanation: She has an ear infection which affects her sense of balance. In addition, it has been raining for weeks and the streets are very slippery.



What does this have to do with psychosis?

Sometimes, other people carry *partial* responsibility, but other important factors have to be acknowledged as well.

Example II: Paul relapses into psychosis!

Own belief: The relapse was caused by the intrusive thoughts of terrible childhood memories; he was often beaten as a child.

Additional factors: This could be one possible reason, but there are other factors, too: Paul stopped taking medication and he had a fight at work which led him to fear he could lose his job.



Thank you for your attention!

for Trainers:

Please hand out worksheets. Introduce our app COGITO (download free of charge).



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