

Awareness and Discounting: New Tools for Task/Option-Oriented Settings

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Abstract

In this article, two new tools are presented: the awareness-discounting matrix and the awareness action sequence. The first is a variant of the discounting matrix developed by Mellor and Schiff (1975); the second is completely new. Created for task-oriented and option-oriented functions—which occur in many contexts, particularly educational and commercial settings—the new developments are specifically designed to deal with the different emphases needed in such settings compared with the predominant requirements of contexts in which personal resolution or growth and development are primary. The tools are each defined and described. Helpful relationships, guidelines, and principles related both to the way these tools work and how they can be used are also discussed and illustrated. The tools have been applied in a wide variety of settings, including the information technology (IT) education field, from which many of the examples in this article are drawn.

This article presents two new tools for recognizing and dealing with discounting: the awareness-discounting matrix (ADM) and the awareness action sequence (AAS). These tools were developed to meet the requirements of people in settings in which the completion of tasks is the main goal, for example, in educational, business, and commercial situations. The tools arose out of attempts to apply the discounting matrix (Mellor & Schiff, 1975) in task-oriented settings, attempts that quickly revealed that promoting successful task completion in any setting, including therapeutic ones, usually required different basic orientations from those best suited for effective diagnosis and evaluation in psychotherapeutic or problem-solving contexts.

The creation of these tools by Macefield and Mellor is a testament to the capacity of transactional analysis to bridge a gap of generations and continents between two TA practitioners. It is also an example of the creative possibilities still available through using the precision of the powerful, simple language of transactional analysis.

Background

Macefield and Mellor came to their joint project from different, although overlapping, backgrounds. The separate evolution in their thinking and practice provides significant context to their subsequent collaboration and what they produced together.

Macefield is a specialist in information technology (IT) teaching and learning, with a career spanning both academia and commerce. For the last 12 years he has held senior university lecturing posts and directed a successful IT education consultancy. During this time, he developed and researched the adaptive IT learner model (Macefield, 2005). This helps individuals to acquire general transferable skills that better enable them to learn new IT systems. As part of this initiative, he noticed many clients exhibiting behavior that indicated they were discounting and that this was limiting their learning. Macefield turned to the discounting matrix (Mellor & Schiff, 1975) to find solutions to these problems. However, he found the discounting matrix to be framed in ways that limited its applicability to his work. In particular, the emphasis on problems was not directly relevant to his educational context, whereas concentrating on opportunities—for example, the advantages of learning new IT skills—was much more productive. Given this, he went on to “reengineer” the discounting matrix into what he called the discount-recognition matrix (Macefield, 2002) in which he removed the problem column, kept the option column, and

made some new inclusions, the most notable having to do with a person's "ownership of response." He had recognized that people need to take responsibility for their parts in learning and that if they do not, they are likely to underachieve. Macefield's work also resulted in the idea that a sequence of actions can sometimes be broadly specified to address common discounting patterns. This was primary in the development of the awareness action sequence.

Mellor was first alerted to the need to understand learning and other tasks in 1969 when working with new arrivals to Australia. While doing research in that field beginning in about 1970 (Mellor, Walters, Cox, Taylor, & Tierney, 1973), he developed practical ways of understanding tasks (pp. 2-5) and identified eight necessary conditions for their successful completion. At that time, he also defined options in relation to tasks (later published in Mellor, 1980). This material was repeatedly tested with adult new arrivals and later with university/college students when he joined a university/college faculty in the early 1970s. Also, when working at Cathexis Institute from 1973 to 1975, Mellor was primarily responsible for developing the discounting matrix (shown in Figure 1), which was designed specifically for psychotherapeutic and problem-solving contexts (Mellor & Schiff, 1975). From his previous work, he understood that the solutions to all problems required the completion of tasks, and that considering options (what could be done) was fundamental to identifying solutions. At the time of writing the 1975 article, reflecting this, he foreshadowed some of the changes presented in this article, including considering information as a type of stimulus and relabeling the columns of the matrix to suit the context in which he was working. The discounting matrix was clearly relevant to the requirements of psychotherapy, which often needs to take a subjective or problem-oriented approach when diagnoses and evaluations are undertaken. But Mellor quickly discovered that the matrix needed adapting when task-related activities were involved—in both psychotherapeutic and other settings—because a task/option-oriented approach was more suitable then. Mellor confirmed this further when he was also working in

the IT field in the 1990s. His work was primary in the development of the awareness-discounting matrix.

What brought Macefield's and Mellor's solo endeavors together to produce the two new tools presented in this article was a process of shared creativity in which they discussed and honed each other's ideas, often finding themselves surprised by the parallels in their previously separate experiences and conclusions. For example, they independently shared similar emphases on awareness, on the importance of clients taking personal responsibility as part of securing effective action, and on how the final outcome of any intervention depended on completing certain tasks.

The awareness-discounting matrix is now described as a prelude to describing the awareness action sequence.

Awareness-Discounting Matrix Model

The awareness-discounting matrix (ADM) enables practitioners to map people's conscious awareness, their discounting, and their awareness in relation to their discounting. The emphasis on awareness in this matrix is fundamentally important when practitioners seek to change people's perceptions and actions, for it is what people are aware of with which practitioners can work, not what they are discounting. At the same time, the equally significant emphasis on discounting is fundamental, for this is what needs to be dealt with if people are to change what they are doing. The parallel emphasis on the two makes possible more precise and balanced assessments of what needs to be managed than would otherwise occur. Practitioners can then use an awareness action sequence (AAS) to complete the task or tasks that need to be completed to produce desirable change.

To explain the ADM further, it is important to explore the phenomena of awareness and discounting.

Awareness

People are aware, in the sense in which the word is used in this article, when they have knowledge or perception of a situation or fact and consciously know or understand that they

do. Knowledge has to do with learning and experience, bodily perception has to do with both external sensory and internal sensate data, and other kinds of perception have to do with cognitive and emotional understanding. In relation to the matrix, what people are aware of—the content of their awareness—is called data.

Awareness of data, options, and responsibility is the central key to using the ADM effectively. In fact, the importance of awareness applies to the use of the discounting matrix as well, but the point was neither highlighted in the original presentation nor fully understood. At that time, primary attention was given to the discounting aspect of people's processes, not to their awareness. Only a secondary emphasis was put on identifying what had been missed or distorted by the discounting: "The [next] step is for the person to get in touch with his or her investment in the discounting, so that investment can be re-directed and the person become aware of things as they are" (Mellor & Schiff, 1975, p. 295).

Discounting

The ADM is based on the same understanding of discounting as the one presented by Mellor and Schiff (1975). In summary, this is:

The person who discounts believes or acts as though some aspect of the self, other people, or [the] reality [situation] is less significant than it actually is. . . . Discounting is an internal mechanism which is recognized through transactional and behavioral cues. . . . Such factors are the external manifestations of discounting; they involve discounts but are not, in themselves, discounts. This distinction is important. (p. 295)

The reasons behind people's discounting are also usually significant:

It is often important to distinguish between two different causes of discounting. The first is a person's investment in playing games or furthering his or her script. [The second is] when [people] do not have information or experience necessary to determine significance. (p. 300)

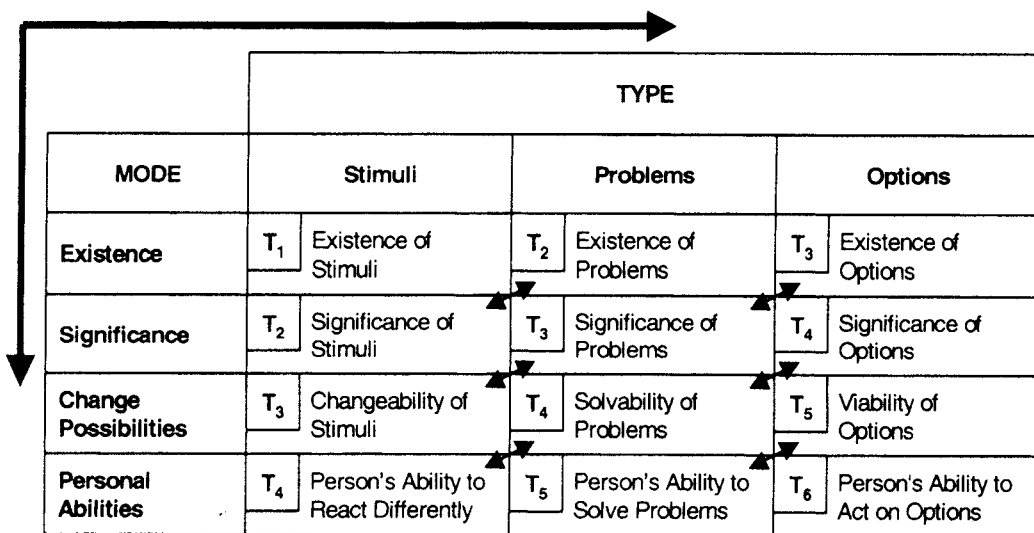


Figure 1
The Discounting Matrix

The Awareness-Discounting Matrix

The ADM is similar to the discounting matrix in that it presents three types and four modes of discounting; it is also different in some ways. The differences are noticeable in the three types: data, options, and responsibility; in the four modes: existence, general significance, specific relevance, and personal abilities; and in the inclusion of the notions of prompt and agreed task(s). A comparison of Figure 1 and Figure 2 will show these differences clearly.

In the following sections, each of the elements of the ADM will be discussed.

Prompt: The ADM is always used with a purpose, or cue for change, which is known as the "prompt." Before using the ADM, it is important to clarify the reason for doing so, for the prompt becomes the guiding beacon to whatever action follows. The prompt is also properly understood to be what is stimulating the use of the ADM: problems, tasks, options, situations, issues, events, planning, learning, or something else.

Agreed Task(s): The main point of using the ADM is to bring about change of some sort,

which is achieved by the people involved acting differently from the way they have previously acted. Also, what practitioners need to do with clients to promote required change depends on how clearly the clients understand themselves, other people, and the context or situation in which they are operating. The ADM enables practitioners to map this understanding. In fact, it is from a combination of this understanding in relation to the prompt that the agreed task(s) are arrived at. The next step, after practitioners map a client's consciousness with him or her, is to define the agreed task(s) clearly. This involves identifying what needs to be done, who will do it, when it will be done, how it will be done, and who else might need to be involved. Then, only when the task(s) so defined are completed—that is, when the clients have taken responsibility and have acted effectively—is the intervention process truly over.

Data: Data include statistics, quantities, descriptive or defining characteristics, and reports of events. Data are the bedrock of all efforts to use the ADM to help people to complete tasks, old or new, practical or therapeutic. People

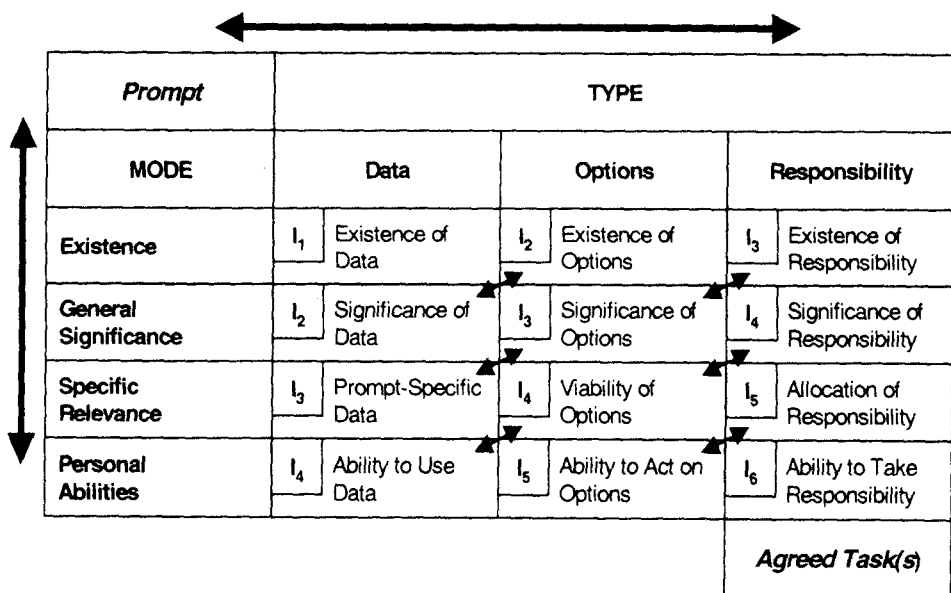


Figure 2
The Awareness-Discounting Matrix

need data to know what is going on, to consider what to do, and so they know whom or what is responsible for any action that was taken or is to be taken.

For example, the authors have both encountered many people who were blocking their awareness (were discounting) the increasing importance of IT. These individuals did not want to know and so kept acting as if it was not significant. In one situation, the owners of a printing business steadfastly refused to change their outdated communications with their customers (snail mail, couriers, and telephone messaging) and continually lost the business of those who began to rely on up-to-date technology (e-mail systems, the digital transmission and reception of data files, and mobile/cell telephones). Those who block their awareness of the role of IT in today's world might say things like, "Oh, IT is just a fad; it'll pass soon enough."

In terms of the ADM, these responses discount the existence of the data. With the data all around them, these people are not aware of what is actually going on. Yet to adapt to any situation requires that people be aware of the salient facts: "Oh yes, things are changing rapidly." Once they become aware of the data, people then need to be aware of the general significance of the data, that is, the overall meaning or importance of what is going on. Such significance may not affect them personally, but it is an active ingredient in the situation: "Others are using new technology, and it's changing how things are done." Prompt-specific data refer to information relevant to the prompt and to the person or people directly involved: "We're losing business and could stop the losses by using new technology." Such data must be accounted for because it contributes directly to what those involved will need to do: "We need to get a new, affordable computer installed with a user-friendly e-mail system." Finally, people need to be aware of their abilities to use data: "I understand some of what you have said, but not all," or "Yes, I'm sure I can learn to use that new system."

Options: An option is anything—any task—that is possible. Anything that is not possible is not an option. Also, a possible task need not be

helpful, relevant, worthwhile, or disruptive for, while reading a book is the best thing to do under some circumstances, and jumping up and down in the middle of the room is not helpful, both are options because both are possible.

Awareness of the existence of options is crucial because it impresses on people that action is possible, even if they cannot immediately do things to deal with what they are facing: "Something can be done" is very different from "Nothing can be done." At the same time, the options of primary interest are those that relate in some way to what is prompting the use of the ADM, that is, the options that can help us to complete important tasks. These are the significant options, and it is important to develop awareness of the ones that could help or have helped others with similar tasks: "I know others have read a very good book on this subject." Within the collection of significant options are the viable options. These are the ones that are directly relevant to the people involved and would produce the desired result: "I can ask a consultant to recommend a book containing the information I need that would be easy for me to read." Clearly, if people are to perform what is needed in order to deal with what they are facing, the options they consider need to be within their personal capacities; so they need an awareness of their ability to act on options as well: "I can do only part of that and will have to learn how to do the other part."

Responsibility: Responsibility has to do with whose job it is, or was, to act in a situation. In this sense, many responsibilities are not optional; they are states of affairs that exist regardless of people's preferences or choices. For example, once people reach adulthood, we properly regard them as responsible for what they do, unless they are genuinely experiencing diminished responsibility through, for example, some sort of physical or mental incapacity.

People who are aware of the existence of responsibility at the broadest level realize that those individuals involved in any activity, including themselves, carry the responsibility for what they have done, are doing, or will do. They are also aware of their responsibility for what they have knowingly not done, are not doing, or will not do. They realize that someone

is responsible. To honor this truth, they describe events using people's names or personal pronouns: I, my, me, he, his, she, her, you, your, we, our, they, and their. When discounting the existence of responsibility, people are simply unaware of responsibility or attempt to shift it outside themselves to some specified or unspecified agency. They often use the word "it" to do this, for example, "It just happened" or "It didn't work." No human involvement is mentioned. Compare "The computer lost my work" with "I forgot to press the save button, and I lost my work."

When considering the significance of responsibility in a situation, three factors warrant attention: the way people are taking or not taking responsibility, because this usually influences the relevant tasks and options; who generally does what and who is generally responsible for taking action (not necessarily the same people); and the consequences of someone failing to do what is required. For example, a student recognizes that he is responsible for doing an assignment unaided, but he completes the work having plagiarized large portions of it from other people, fully aware at the time that he was cheating. As a result, he fails the course. It subsequently becomes apparent that he is unaware that the consequence of his plagiarism would be failure. So, it is then clear that he is aware of the existence of responsibility and is discounting the significance of his responsibility both to produce all his own work and not to steal another person's work.

Awareness of the need for allocation of responsibility enables people to move one step closer to taking full responsibility in any situation. Clarifying allocation issues involves specifying who is responsible for doing what will be required to take up the options under consideration. Awareness of the need to clarify this allocation leads people to seek relevant information if they do not have it: "Whose job is this?" "What do I need to do?" "What does he need to do?" "What responsibilities are shared and what are individual?" The allocation of responsibilities also needs to take account of the personal capacities of those who might be involved. Who could do what is the issue. It is unrealistic to expect people to take responsibility

for tasks that are beyond their capacities. Anyone learning something new is likely to be in this position in relation to performing what he or she is learning, so it is especially relevant to consider these issues in learning environments. For example, the members of a small group of students given a joint assignment were aware that they were responsible for the assignment (existence), were aware that their entire group might fail if the assignment was not completed to the required standard (significance), but were so disorganized that they discounted the need to allocate responsibility for the various tasks within the assignment and failed to get it on time.

The ability to take responsibility looks at personal capacity or ability from "inside" the people involved. "Who could do what?" becomes "Do I have the capacity to do what is required, and will I get involved and do it?" In other words, assessments need to be made both of people's abilities and their commitments. To do this, each person needs to be accurately aware of what his or her abilities are and willing to commit to doing what is necessary: "I will take on the database development, but I'm not good enough to do all the graphics work required; someone else must do that." When discounting the ability to take responsibility, however, those involved may try to take on too much or may try to hide from themselves what they are already capable of doing. For example, a group was given an extension for a joint assignment and identified who was going to do what. But they still ran into problems: One student claimed to be able to do more than she actually could, while several others seemed to commit to their agreed upon parts in the assignment but had not actually done so. The group still did not complete the assignment because these members were discounting their ability to take responsibility.

Using the Awareness-Discounting Matrix

The ADM is a powerful assessment/diagnostic device. Its use can quickly lead to precisely focused and carefully delivered interventions designed to open up awareness, deal with discounting, and secure effective action. It also provides a map of what is going on in the

people concerned, a map of their awareness and unawareness and any distortions. The practical usefulness of this tool comes from the great value of the information that the different elements of the matrix reveal and how the hierarchical nature of awareness/discounting reliably helps to guide practitioners through the terrain of their clients' inner processes. It is recommended that readers refer to Figure 2 regularly during the following discussions.

Vertical hierarchies: When awareness related to a prompt is identified in any type/mode of the matrix, prompt-related awareness is likely in every type/mode above it. For example, awareness of prompt-specific data usually means people are aware of the significant data and the existence of data. At the same time, when discounting related to a prompt is identified in any type/mode in the matrix, discounting is likely in every type/mode below it. For example, discounting the significance of options usually means people are also discounting viability of options and ability to act on options. These hierarchies are represented by the vertical double-headed arrow on the matrix.

Horizontal hierarchies: Similarly, when awareness related to a prompt is identified in any type/mode of the matrix, awareness is likely in every type/mode to the left in the matrix as well. For example, related to a prompt, awareness of significance of options is likely to indicate awareness of significant data. At the same time, when discounting related to a prompt is identified in any type/mode, discounting is likely in every type/mode to the right in the matrix as well. For example, related to the prompt, discounting prompt-specific data is likely to mean discounting of viability of options and allocation of responsibility. These hierarchies are represented by the horizontal double-headed arrow on the matrix.

Diagonal hierarchies: There are six intervention diagonals (I-diagonals) in the ADM; these are designated as I_1 to I_6 . They are specifically identified because awareness and understanding each of the types/modes of awareness/discounting along these I-diagonals depends on and is enriched by awareness and understanding of the others. Each one mutually supports and helps to clarify the others to a

significant degree. The I-diagonals are shown as starting at the top left of the matrix and ending at the bottom right, with the I_1 diagonal and I_6 diagonal each having only one type/mode.

By considering these I-diagonals along with the vertical and horizontal hierarchies just described, two diagonal hierarchies are revealed. These are of primary importance in using the ADM in practice. First, when awareness related to a prompt is identified in any type/mode of the matrix, awareness is likely in every type/mode on, to the left of, and above the I-diagonal along which it is found. Similarly, when discounting related to a prompt is identified in any type/mode of the matrix, discounting is likely in every type/mode on, to the right of, and below the I-diagonal along which it is found. These hierarchies are important during intervention.

Intervention

When intervening, practitioners need to work from the top left of the ADM to the bottom right, that is, from the prompt down through the various layers of awareness/discounting found in the I-diagonals to the agreed task(s). This progression helps to ensure that the order of what is done is most likely to make the interventions successful because the practitioners will be working with a client's awareness.

The core of the process involves dealing successively with the six layers of awareness/discounting identifiable in the ADM. These layers are as follows:

1. After defining the prompt, the first step is to encourage awareness of the available facts related to the prompt (existence of data). This is fundamental to achieving any worthwhile results and establishes a first layer of awareness along the I_1 diagonal.

2. The second layer involves awareness of the interaction of what people need to consider among the available facts (significance of data) and whether or not anything can be done (existence of options), which establishes a second layer of awareness along the I_2 diagonal.

3. The third layer involves awareness of the combined contributions to understanding of the facts specifically related to the prompt (prompt-specific data), the possibilities of doing

something that could or might help (significant options), and how the client understands responsibility applying to the situation (existence of responsibility), the layer along the I_3 diagonal.

4. When dealing with the fourth layer of awareness, attention is given to the combined contributions of the capacities of those involved to use information (ability to use data), what is available that would actually produce the desired or required results (viable options), and the general responsibilities of people involved in the same kinds of situations (significance of responsibility), the layer along the I_4 diagonal.

5. The fifth layer involves combined awareness and understanding in the client of his or her ability to do what is required (ability to act on options) and of possible ways to share the tasks that need to be completed (allocation of responsibility), the layer along the I_5 diagonal.

6. The last layer involves awakening awareness and understanding about the client's ability to do what is required and his or her commitment to doing it (ability to take responsibility), the layer along the I_6 diagonal. This step

immediately precedes the defining and completion of the agreed task(s).

To repeat: It is important that practitioners remember to work with the awareness of clients. Whatever a practitioner does that either reinforces a client's lack of awareness or discounts a client is basically wasted effort. For example, talking to a man about how to use a personal digital assistant (PDA) and its potential value to him is a waste of time if he does not know what a PDA is (I_1 —the existence of data): "Do you know what I'm talking about?" "No, what's a PDA?"

Eight Steps of Intervention. When thinking of intervention, a rearrangement of the rows of the ADM helps to clarify what is involved (see Figure 3). The purpose of the rearrangement is to bring the I-diagonals into horizontal alignment so the related types/modes along each diagonal are easier to see. This realignment also makes for a much easier presentation of material related to the awareness action sequence, which is presented later. By doing this, of course, the I-diagonals are no longer diagonal, so they are more properly called I-levels.

Step	Route Through Types/Modes					
1	<i>Prompt</i>					
2	I_1	Existence of Data				
3	I_2	Significance of Data	I_2	Existence of Options		
4	I_3	Prompt-Specific Data	I_3	Significance of Options	I_3	Existence of Responsibility
5	I_4	Ability to Use Data	I_4	Viability of Options	I_4	Significance of Responsibility
6			I_5	Ability to Act on Options	I_5	Allocation of Responsibility
7					I_6	Ability to Take Responsibility
8						<i>Agreed Task(s)</i>

Figure 3
Eight Intervention Steps Using a Realigned ADM

In Figure 3, the eight distinctive steps in intervention are clearly seen:

Step 1: Intervention starts with practitioners clarifying the prompt that is stimulating their involvement and with making formal or informal agreements with clients about dealing with the important issues (contracting). This sets the scene for the rest of what follows.

Steps 2 to 7: Intervention then involves moving in sequence from the first I-level, I_1 , through the other I-levels until the last, I_6 , is reached. Any one of the types/modes of awareness/discounting on each I-level may be the initial target of intervention, and, as already mentioned, the others would also usually need to be considered.

Step 8: Intervention ends when clients have followed through and have completed the agreed task(s) for which they agreed to take responsibility.

Intervention Principles. Four principles provide useful guidelines for intervention.

Principle 1: The full understanding of the issues on any I-level in relation to a prompt comes from an integrated understanding of all types/modes of awareness/discounting on that I-level. This has to do with the important linkages between the types and modes of awareness/discounting along each I-level, as already discussed.

Principle 2: Choose interventions so they are within the client's awareness and are formulated to create further awareness. In this way, practitioners can move from awareness to awareness with clients and so ensure that clients do not discount what practitioners do. Thinking of the hierarchies already mentioned, it is important to ensure that interventions target people's awareness on or above the I-level along which some awareness is identified, and it is important to avoid making interventions on or below an I-level along which discounting is identified. Practitioners acting otherwise are likely to have their efforts discounted.

Principle 3: On any I-level, first target the type/mode of awareness/discounting in which a client is most aware and consider the other types/modes by using the awareness of the first as the basis for what is done. For example, at the I_3 level, an individual may express more

awareness and understanding of existence of responsibility issues than of the significance of options or of prompt-specific data; in that case, it is optimal to start by discussing responsibility issues and then to consider significance of options or prompt-specific data in relation to those responsibility issues. Specific illustrations of this are given in Figures 6, 7, and 9.

Principle 4: Allow the client's awareness/discounting to lead the interventions, and accept the need to move up and down the I-levels in response to what arises, even if the issues seem to have been dealt with previously. Awareness and discounting are rarely black and white or all-or-nothing phenomena; they involve many layers and intricacies. As a result, an aspect of some issue may seem settled only to reappear when a related aspect comes to the surface as a result of later interventions. Having reappeared, it then needs to be dealt with again.

Awareness Action Sequences

As already discussed, the ADM helps practitioners to map a client's awareness/discounting in relation to a prompt. Also, using the realigned matrix shown in Figure 3, eight clear steps are identified as necessary for navigating from the prompt to the completion of the agreed task(s). Furthermore, using the principles and the map together helps practitioners to find specific routes through the terrain of the client's consciousness. In fact, there are 36 possible routes, so there are always many choices.

An awareness action sequence (AAS) is a specific route through the ADM used to move from the prompt to the agreed task(s) during an intervention. Figure 4 shows one of these routes. The routes are specified by listing the types/modes of awareness/discounting on each of the I-levels that were the primary targets of the activity on each I-level. As already mentioned in Principle 3, this is the type/mode in which the client has most awareness and understanding on a particular I-level. Also, as mentioned in Principle 1, during intervention, consideration will usually need to be given to the other types/modes not "drawn" in the AAS. The target types/modes are simply the starting points.

Figure 5 is the same AAS as in Figure 4 but drawn on the ADM. Note that in this instance

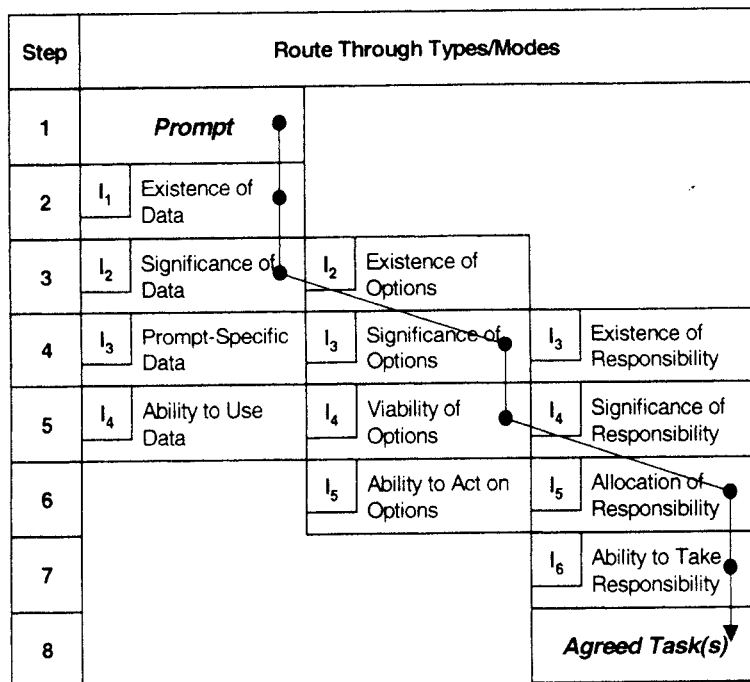


Figure 4
A Possible AAS (Route from Prompt to Agreed Task(s))

the route is clear. However, many of the 36 possible routes are not clear when drawn on the ADM. The authors chose the realigned version, as shown in Figure 4, for the AAS because it solves these presentation problems as well as highlights the eight intervention steps.

At times, in practice it is also useful to “draw” the AAS as in Figure 4 accompanied by brief descriptions of the prompt, what was discounted at each level, and the agreed task(s). Two examples are given in Figures 6 and 7.

Creating an Awareness Action Sequence. Practitioners can develop an AAS either during or in advance of interventions: a dynamic AAS and a specified AAS respectively (see Figure 8). A dynamic AAS is developed “on the fly” while engaged with a client and is arrived at by using what is discovered at the time. This method is essentially an on-the-spot response to the client’s awareness/discounting processes. The intervention process involves finding a route using general guidance about both direction

and “terrain”—the four principles and the eight steps. It does not involve foreknowledge of each specific step from previously established familiarity.

Alternatively, a specified AAS is developed in advance of intervention by a practitioner who uses information already available. This type of AAS can arise in two general ways. The first, a client-specified AAS, arises when specific clients are known to practitioners and their patterns of awareness/discounting are clear. Once a practitioner knows a client, it is often possible to identify the optimal AAS to use with him or her under certain circumstances because practitioners can quickly get to know the types and mode of awareness/discounting in which their clients are most open and most closed at each level of intervention. Figure 6 is an example of a client who was a successful businesswoman.

The second is a context-specified AAS that arises when people encountered in certain contexts have regular patterns of understanding and

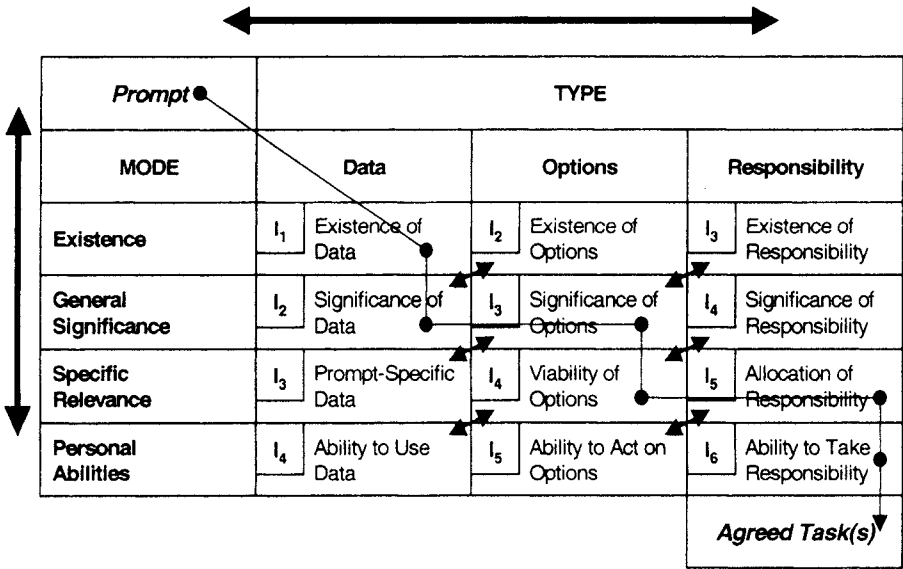


Figure 5
The AAS from Figure 4 on the ADM

Step	Route Through Types/Modes					Prompt, Discounts, and Agreed Task(s)
1	Prompt					Proposal for opening up a new sales area
2	I ₁	Existence of Data				Known demographic information of prospects
3	I ₂	Significance of Data	I ₂	Existence of Options		Company has the resources and would benefit
4	I ₃	Prompt-Specific Data	I ₃	Significance of Options	I ₃ Existence of Responsibility	Her job is to expand sales and the customer base.
5	I ₄	Ability to Use Data	I ₄	Viability of Options	I ₄ Significance of Responsibility	Lots is possible without expensive changes.
6			I ₅	Ability to Act on Options	I ₅ Allocation of Responsibility	Staff members are available to do what is necessary.
7					I ₆ Ability to Take Responsibility	The necessary people are capable, experienced, and committed.
8			Agreed Task(s)			Do pilot test to determine viability of the proposed sales campaign

Figure 6
Client-Specified AAS for a Successful Businesswoman

Step	Route Through Types/Modes					Examples of Prompts, Discounts, and Agreed Task(s)	
1	Prompt					Eating well supports health.	
2	I ₁	Existence of Data				Much information is available about this connection.	
3	I ₂	Significance of Data	I ₂	Existence of Options		The many different, well-tested diets available	
4	I ₃	Prompt-Specific Data	I ₃	Significance of Options	I ₃	Existence of Responsibility	Up-to-date research results validating the link between diet and health
5	I ₄	Ability to Use Data	I ₄	Viability of Options	I ₄	Significance of Responsibility	Practitioner decisions have a major impact on patients' lives.
6			I ₅	Ability to Act on Options	I ₅	Allocation of Responsibility	Feels held back by past organizational practices
7					I ₆	Ability to Take Responsibility	Thinks others are uncommitted and inept
8						Agreed Task(s)	To get information and commit to using it if it is well tested

Figure 7
Example of Context-Specified AAS in One Health and Welfare Setting

responses. Macefield noted this in IT teaching and learning contexts (see an example in Figure 8), while Mellor noted the same in health and welfare, educational, and business contexts (see an example in Figure 7).

Of course, the occurrence of regular patterns does not mean that everyone in such a context or group will adhere to such patterns. However, by responding in a preplanned fashion to a group in which general patterns are observed, considerable time and energy is often saved. For example, a context-specified AAS is often useful in (mass) education and other large group contexts because it would be too time consuming for the practitioner to develop program plans that involved engaging in one-to-one transactions with each client in order to develop a dynamic AAS for each of them.

Macefield has used the context-specified AAS in organizational settings to structure educational programs so that they systematically dealt with the prevalent patterns of his clients.

He has found that this has resulted in useful efficiencies in his teaching by producing better outcomes without his getting caught up in trying to identify individual patterns in large groups. To help deal with the variety in some groups, Mellor has identified two or three context-specified AASs for each group that were based on the distinctive patterns he observed in subgroups of the overall client groups. He then used these multiple AASs both to formulate presentations and to manage discussions during the interventions he undertook.

As a general rule, practitioners using context-specified AASs are wise to remain aware that a single AAS is not likely to be appropriate for all individual group members in any context. Both Macefield's and Mellor's experiences indicate that significant variations exist between individuals within most contexts. Appropriate levels of caution are therefore advised when using a specified AAS. However, a set of context-specified AASs can often define the

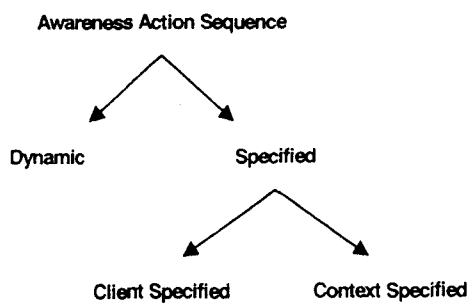


Figure 8
Types of Awareness Action Sequences

optimum cost-benefit potential for addressing awareness/discounting in, for example, mass education settings.

Example of an Intervention Using an AAS. Figure 9 is an example of a full intervention starting from the prompt, moving through the I-levels of awareness/discounting, and ending after the completion of the agreed task(s). This presentation simply lists the target types/modes without “drawing the route” and is a more useful way of presenting an AAS under many circumstances than using the style adopted in Figures 6 and 7. It is also worth noting that, in this example, discussion was the most frequently used intervention. In practice, however, practitioners can choose from myriad possibilities when deciding how best to stimulate awareness and understanding; for example, strategies from transactional analysis, neurolinguistic programming (NLP), rational emotive therapy, reality therapy, bioenergetics, gestalt therapy, and task analysis could all have a place.

Summary and Conclusions

The discounting matrix was first presented in 1975 as a powerful tool for assisting practitioners who were working in psychotherapeutic and personal problem-solving settings. Recognizing the value of this tool in other situations, the authors subsequently applied it in “purely” task-oriented and option-oriented contexts, such as teaching and learning settings, and found

that different emphases were needed—notably an emphasis on awareness and a shift of attention onto data, options, and responsibility. Their separate efforts led to changes in each of their approaches that were so remarkably consistent that they allowed for an easy and fruitful integration of their insights.

Combining their experiences, Macefield and Mellor produced the awareness-discounting matrix (ADM), which shifts attention onto both awareness and discounting and away from the previously almost exclusive concentration on discounting that was assumed in the use of the original discounting matrix. In addition, they changed the matrix so its types became data, options, and responsibility, with responsibility being the major change. Its modes became existence, general significance, specific relevance, and personal abilities. The three areas of discounting—self, other, and situation—continue to be relevant and are not specifically discussed in this article. Two further components were included in the new matrix: the prompt and the agreed task(s). The prompt is whatever is stimulating the use of the matrix, and the agreed task(s) refer to what clients agree to do during intervention in order to deal with the important issues related to the prompt.

With tests of the ADM and its precursors extending over 30 years, the authors are confident of its usefulness in many settings, including psychotherapeutic, problem-solving, and task/option-oriented contexts. It is a powerful tool for mapping clients’ consciousness in relation to their need to complete tasks or to consider options. With its parallel emphasis on awareness and discounting, the ADM can provide a map that includes what people know and do not know (data), the action possibilities of which they are or are not aware (options), and consideration of their own and other people’s responsibilities, including those they do or do not understand (responsibility).

The ADM also underscores the fundamental importance of ensuring that interventions take account of the awareness clients have, so they can proceed from awareness to awareness instead of becoming blocked either by their own discounting or by a practitioner’s discounting influencing what he or she does.

Step	Route Through Types/Modes	Prompt, Discounted Awareness and Related Intervention, Agreed Task(s)
1	Prompt	A man challenged by the increasing use of IT has a new computer put on his desk at work, which he is expected to use. Agreement: To explore what was involved in relation to work and formulate an effective plan for dealing with recent developments
2	I_1 Existence of Data	Discount: "What do you mean businesses now rely on IT? I can't see why we can't do things the way we always have." Intervention: Presented and discussed continued developments in IT and how quickly new developments are occurring
3	I_2 Significance of Data	Discount: "Yes, IT is now key to our business. But, my job's safe; I'm a manager. IT skills are more for secretaries and administrators." Intervention: Given the new awareness of ongoing change, discussed how employers are using many new options now available and are firing senior staff who do not have IT skills
4	I_3 Significance of Options	Discount: "I really need to learn about computer stuff, but going on an IT course just doesn't work for people like me." Intervention: Given awareness of the vulnerability of his position, the client was encouraged to reevaluate this assessment by finding out that others, like him, had attended courses and benefited, and that people in his position have significant responsibilities to guide the use of IT in their companies.
5	I_4 Viability of Options	Discount: "I wish I had time to go on an IT course; it would really be useful." Intervention: Having realized the importance of doing something, discussion proceeded to what was viable for him by discussing the consequences of not allocating time for this kind of training, particularly as this related both to the nature of his responsibilities in the company and to his likely ability to learn in an IT context because of his prior experience on other courses.
6	I_5 Allocation of Responsibility	Discount: "I know my job and I'm struggling with all the new technology, but my boss won't send me on a course." Intervention: Now that he was aware that something viable was possible, discussion moved to the way he was shifting responsibility to his boss and that he could decide both to take responsibility for himself by enrolling himself in a course and to do whatever was necessary to succeed. After some resistance he accepted that it was ultimately his responsibility.
7	I_6 Ability to Take Responsibility	Discount: "They keep advertising all these IT courses at work, but I guess I'm just one of those people who never gets around to things." Intervention: Attention was given to "the things" he consistently "got around to" in other areas of his work, and he realized that his reluctance to do an IT course had to do with his resistance to learning about new and potentially revolutionary technology like computers.
8	Agreed Task(s)	Client arranged to take an IT course, after first asking for his employer to pay for or subsidize him; he decided to pay for himself when his request was refused. The practitioner checked after the course to ensure the client had completed the course and found him delighted with what he had learned and with his daily use of his new computer.

Figure 9
Example of an Awareness Action Sequence with Intervention Steps

With the new conceptual map available, the authors became aware that optimal intervention involves finding the most productive route through the map from the prompt to the agreed task(s). The authors then developed another tool, called the awareness action sequence (AAS) to perform this function. Based on the ADM, an AAS involves eight steps that practitioners need to take from the beginning to the end of an intervention. All these steps must pass through six intervention levels (I_1 to I_6) that are involved in awakening and reinforcing awareness and dealing with discounting. The levels were revealed when the columns in the ADM were realigned slightly.

An AAS specifies the type/mode of awareness/discounting on each level that is the most accessible to intervention, the one in relation to which the client has most awareness and understanding. The steps taken during intervention are guided generally by the use of four principles that enable practitioners to locate and work with clients using their awareness as the foundation for dealing with their discounting.

Two general types of AAS were identified: the dynamic AAS and the specified AAS. A dynamic AAS is developed "on the fly" during intervention, while a specified AAS is developed in advance of intervention once a client's patterns are known or once general patterns among groups of clients encountered in particular contexts are known. A specified AAS related to a specific client is called a client-specified AAS, and one related to a general context is called a context-specified AAS. The identification of these two types can help practitioners to act systematically in relation to known clients and client groups, thus increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of their interventions.

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