

COURSE UNIT TITLE:	CONTROL AND CONFLICT IN EVERYDAY LIFE AND CLINICAL SETTINGS
LEVEL OF UNIT:	3
CREDIT RATING:	20
COURSE LEADER:	DR WARREN MANSELL & DR SARA TAI
SEMESTER:	1
PRE-REQUISITES:	NONE

COURSE OVERVIEW

Psychology is accused of many things: being a ‘soft’ science; being too abstract; using ‘folk’ terms with ambiguous meanings (e.g. beliefs, attitudes, personality, etc), creating a ‘little man inside the head’, ‘homunculus’ or a ‘ghost in the machine’; and being overinfluenced by certain individual’s global views, such as Freud, Skinner, Eysenck and Beck.

This course is about taking explanations of normal functioning and applying them to clinical settings, and much more. We will go back to the roots of psychology to examine not only the psychology of everyday behaviour, but also explores the nature of well-being and how to tackle the diverse problems experienced by people with mental health problems.

Students will be asked to explore the concept of ‘control’ as a property of living systems and how control is achieved in mechanistic terms. They will be asked to consider how conflicts between different personal goals are inevitable, yet the management of these conflicts is the way that people adapt to new challenges and changes within themselves and their environment. Perceptual Control Theory (PCT; Powers, 1973; 2005) will be introduced as the most detailed and applicable theory of control in humans. PCT developed from the Cybernetics movement of the 1940s and 50s, and its author W. T. Powers continues to develop and illustrate its applications today. These range from robotics and ergonomics, to understanding stages of child development and improving techniques within psychological therapy (Method of Levels). Students will be encouraged to consider and develop their own applications too.

This course will particularly appeal to students who have one or more of the following: a desire to use psychology to apply clinical skills in practice; a drive to integrate psychology with wider disciplines; a desire to learn how to provide psychological therapy that is immediately empathic and empowering; a motivation to draw on any existing knowledge of biology, engineering, computing or mathematics they may have; a fascination with how people control or fail to control.

Dr Mansell and Dr Tai are both clinical psychologists and cognitive behavioural therapists who provide clinical training throughout the UK and abroad. Dr Mansell received the Faculty Teacher of the Year Award in 2008.

AIMS

- To appreciate the importance of control in determining mental well-being
- To understand how control can be achieved in mechanistic terms
- To appreciate that conflict between different goals best represents the problems to which humans need to adapt
- To understand the principles, mechanisms, implications and applications of Perceptual Control Theory (PCT).
- To develop experience and an understanding of Method of Levels as a psychotherapeutic technique.
- To develop key transferrable skills in critical and analytical thinking, reflectivity, team working, writing skills, communication, oral presentation and personal development.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of the course, the student should be expected to:

- Have a good understanding of the nature of control and how it is vital for well-being
- Have a good knowledge of PCT including its strengths and applications, limitations and potential extensions
- Have experience in Method of Levels and develop an understanding of how it may help people deal with their problems and manage their life

COURSE OUTLINE

The following topics will be covered:

1. What is Control? Introduction of the principles and mechanisms of control within engineering, biology, cybernetics and psychology.
2. What Causes Conflict and How is it Managed? A discussion of conflict across wide domains including practical demonstrations and everyday examples.
3. Hierarchies. An explanation of how personal goals are organised and controlled hierarchically.
4. Reorganisation. An explanation of how people change and adapt to new challenges from skill acquisition through to recovery from mental health problems
5. Improving Your Understanding of PCT. Students will receive detailed constructive feedback and advice on their first assignment.
6. Revisiting Psychology. A collaborative attempt to revisit key areas from the perspective of control, such as operant conditioning, cognitive psychology and neuroscience.
7. Psychological Processes. An explanation of how familiar concepts within psychology sit within PCT, such as: automaticity, awareness, learning,

memory, language, beliefs, emotion, imagination, personality, and cognitive behavioural therapy.

8. Introduction to Method of Levels: An introduction to a psychotherapeutic technique for facilitating intrinsic change or “How to do psychotherapy without getting in the way”
9. Applications of PCT. The further uses of PCT within robotics, human factors, education, sociology, and psychology.
10. Method of Levels: Further training including an opportunity to practice a therapeutic technique and to develop listening and questioning skills.
11. Future Directions of PCT. Student’s perspectives on how PCT could be explored, utilised, and modified.

MODE OF LEARNING

The course involves 11 x 2 hour sessions. It is supported by the Blackboard Virtual Learning Environment. All students will be registered on the system, which provides discussion boards, powerpoint slides, references, web links, images, glossary and computer simulations. All sessions will involve a mixture of lectures, team working, practical group tasks, audio, video or computer demonstrations, and open discussion. The principles of PCT suggest that the best conditions for learning are those which match the motivations of the students and help them to become aware of the areas in which they require further information, experience or practice. The lecturer will endeavour to match mode of the learning with these principles, and appreciate feedback from students if it diverges from these principles!

ASSESSMENT

Assessment will be divided between

- a 1000-word essay explaining Perceptual Control Theory (PCT); 25% of the mark; handed in during the fifth week and used as a formative assessment
- a problem-based group learning exercise involving a group oral presentation to the class; 25%
- a 2000-word individualised essay providing an implication, application or test of PCT; 50%; handed in during 10th week

SUGGESTED READING

Marken, R. (2002). Looking at behavior through control theory glasses. *Review of General Psychology*, 33, 260-270.

Powers, W. T. (1973; 2005). *Behavior: The Control of Perception*. Benchmark Publications.

Powers, W. T. (1998). *Making Sense of Control*. Benchmark Publications.

Cziko, G. (2000). *The Things We Do*. MIT Press. Full text available at <http://faculty.ed.uiuc.edu/g-cziko/twd/>

Mansell, W. (2005). Control Theory and Psychopathology. An Integrative Approach. *Psychology and Psychotherapy: Theory Research and Practice*, 78, 141-178.

Carey, T. (2005). *Method of Levels: How to Do Psychotherapy without Getting in the Way*. Living Control Systems Publishing.

Further references and further information available at:

www.PCTweb.org