Learning RFT: An Introduction to Relational Frame Theory and Its Clinical Application

By Niklas Törneke MD

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Relational frame theory, or RFT, is the little-understood behavioral theory behind a recent development in modern psychology: the shift from the cognitive paradigm underpinning cognitive behavioral therapy to a new understanding of language and cognition. **Learning RFT** presents a basic yet comprehensive introduction to this fascinating theory, which forms the basis of acceptance and commitment therapy. The book also offers practical guidance for directly applying it in clinical work.

In the book, author Niklas Törneke presents the building blocks of RFT: language as a particular kind of relating, derived stimulus relations, and transformation of stimulus functions. He then shows how these concepts are essential to understanding acceptance and commitment therapy and other therapeutic models. **Learning RFT** shows how to use experiential exercises and metaphors in psychological treatment and explains how they can help your clients. This book belongs on the bookshelves of psychologists, psychotherapists, students, and others seeking to deepen their understanding of psychological treatment from a behavioral perspective.

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Editorial Review

Review

"There is no better place to start learning about RFT than this excellent book. Törneke teaches the principles of RFT simply and elegantly, using a wealth of clinical examples to make it accessible and stimulating. I wish a book like this had existed when I first learned about RFT; it would have saved me many hours of hard work, frustration, and confusion."
—Russ Harris, author of *The Happiness Trap* and *ACT Made Simple*

"Since RFT first appeared in the experimental literature, it has been hailed as a breakthrough in our scientific understanding of language and cognition with direct and important implications for clinical psychological practice. Yet, descriptions of RFT, written largely for technical audiences, have been, at best, curiously baffling, and at worst, maddeningly incomprehensible. In this book, Törneke has solved the puzzle of RFT! He summarizes the history of RFT, its key features, and its clinical implications with language that is user-friendly and easily understandable. I believe this book will make a huge difference for clinicians who wish to understand RFT and its implications for clinical practice. It also may be a useful learning tool for researchers and RFT experts themselves who wish to learn and see a beautiful example of how RFT can be presented clearly and comprehensively."
—Jonathan Kanter, associate professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and director of its Depression Treatment Specialty Clinic

"For years, clinicians have asked me for recommendations about what they should read to learn RFT. There was really no good advice I could give except 'be persistent.' Finally, I have a better answer. If you want to understand relational frame theory, this is the place to start. Törneke's RFT primer is both masterful and accessible."
—Kelly G. Wilson, PhD, associate professor of psychology at the University of Mississippi, coauthor of *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy* and author of *Mindfulness for Two*

"At times, while reading Törneke's book, I have felt as though I were in the middle of a thriller about the psychopathological behaviors of humans. Clues to unraveling the mystery embedded in complex concepts like 'arbitrarily applicable relational responding' have alerted me, as the reader, to what is coming up next. Our ability for relational framing and for rule-governed behavior may at first glance seem fabulous—a gift from the gods—but darkness lurks around the corner. Our ability to problem-solve is the villain. This book helps me make sense of it all."
—Maria Midbøe, M.Sc., candidate in psychology at Stockholm University in Stockholm, Sweden

"Until now, explanations of relational frame theory have remained largely esoteric and even impenetrable to all but the most specialized scholars. For the first time, this extraordinary book provides a highly accessible account of relational frame theory, including its larger context within psychology, the current research in the field, and its many potential applications. Törneke strikes a fine balance between doing justice to relational frame theory and making the theory, research, and its implications readily comprehensible to the non-expert. This unique book is a must-read for scholars of human cognition, as well as clinicians, educators, others seeking to harness the power of basic psychological principles in their applied work, and anyone interested in the renaissance of modern behavior analysis."
—James D. Herbert, PhD, professor of psychology at Drexel University in Philadelphia, PA, and director of Anxiety Treatment and Research

"On rare occasions, the skills of writer, therapist, and theorist combine to give the field a sophisticated yet highly practical book. This much-awaited translation shows relational frame theory as an accessible, powerful tool for all who use talk therapy. A must-read for those interested in contemporary behaviorism."
—Kelly Koerner, PhD, creative director at Evidence Based Practice Institute in Seattle, WA

From the Publisher
Relational frame theory (RFT) is a theory of language and cognition that upends traditional cognitive paradigms and forms the foundation of today's cutting-edge therapies, including acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT). **Learning RFT** makes RFT accessible to clinicians for the first time and explains how RFT principles can be directly applied in clinical work.

About the Author

Niklas Törneke, MD, is a psychiatrist and has worked as a senior psychiatrist in the department of general psychiatry in his hometown Kalmar (in the southeast of Sweden) from 1991 until he started private practice 1998. He earned license as a psychotherapist in 1996 and was originally trained as a cognitive therapist. Since 1998 he has worked mainly with acceptance and commitment therapy, both in his own practice and as a teacher and clinical supervisor. His clinical experience ranges from psychiatric disorders such as schizophrenia to common anxiety and mood disorders with high prevalence in the general population.

Dr. Dermot Barnes-Holmes is foundation Professor of Psychology at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth, and served as the Head of Department of Psychology from 1999 to 2008. He studied under Professor Julian Leslie at the University of Ulster before taking up a teaching position at University College, Cork, where he founded the Behaviour Analysis and Cognitive Science Research Unit. After nine years at UCC he was appointed to his current post. Dr. Barnes-Holmes has published over 200 scientific articles, book chapters, and books, and he was recently ranked as the most prolific author in the world in the Experimental Analysis of Human Behavior during the period 1980 to 1999 (Dymond, 2002). He has served on, or is currently serving on, the editorial boards of the following journals: Experimental Analysis of Human Behavior Bulletin; Journal of the Experimental Analysis of Behavior; Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis; The Behavior Analyst; The European Journal of Behavior Analysis; The European Journal of Psychology; The International Journal of Psychology and Psychological Therapy (Associate Editor); and The Psychological Record. Dr. Barnes-Holmes has graduated 25 doctoral research students and has been directly involved in attracting over 1,000,000 euro in competitive research funding. He served on the Health Research Board from 2002-2005 and was elected to the Council of the Psychological Society of Ireland from

2004-2007.

Steven C. Hayes, PhD, is Nevada Foundation Professor and director of clinical training in the department of psychology at the University of Nevada, Reno. An author of forty-one books and nearly 600 scientific articles, his career has focused on analysis of the nature of human language and cognition, and its application to the understanding and alleviation of human suffering and promotion of human prosperity. His work has received several awards, including the Impact of Science on Application Award from the Society for the Advancement of Behavior Analysis, and the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies.

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