Diagnostics of Motivational Conflicts Through Thinking Activity

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ABSTRACT
This paper is devoted to the battery of projective techniques which allows to investigate tension and inconsistency of motivation structure through particularities of thinking.

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DIAGNOSTICS OF MOTIVATIONAL CONFLICTS THROUGH THINKING ACTIVITY
Discovery and exploring of the structuring function of motives is one of the main achievements of the O.K. Tikhomirov's psychological school. It is now followed by a range of investigations dealing with the interrelationship between personal and cognitive, intellectual processes. In some cases thinking peculiarities are conditioned by motivation, which may have organizing or destructive influence on thinking process [1].

When the problem, which the subject is solving, is related to the zone of current motivational conflict, appears the phenomenon of rational distortion [2]. To investigate this phenomenon we use a special battery of techniques. Applying this battery allows to make conclusion about the content and intensity of the motivational conflicts, and make prognosis about preferable solution of the subject.

The battery includes eight techniques: Sentence Completion Test (SCT), Complicated Analogies Test, Odd Fourth Test (classification test), Pictograms Test, The Family Drawing Test, The Non-Existent Animal Drawing Test, Luscher Color Test and Proverbs Interpretation Technique.

Sentence Completion Test is one of the widespread projective techniques. It is a descendant of Free Association Technique. Verbal form of stimulus is considered to determine subject's responses more than drawings or inkblots. One of the main advantages of SCT is an opportunity to modify it due to the researcher's needs. Different variants of the test are based on different approaches of their authors. In Russia the most popular variant for working with adults is the test made by J.M. Sacks and S. Levy. Unfortunately, the last translation and adaptation of the test was made more than 20 years ago, and some of incomplete sentences lost their applicability. That's why in the current research we use modified variant of SCT, where several sentences are reformulated without change of their topic. The scheme of data retrieval also differs from the "classical" one: not only content is taken into account, but also such parameters as handwriting and grammar particularities, time of the response and non-verbal emotional expression are considered. Such type of analysis combines standard scheme and clinical approach. Applying of SCT helps to elicit areas of personal problems, which may stay unconscious or not completely conscious, and make conclusions about personal traits such as egocentricity, adaptiveness, mental and social maturity and some others.

SCT is conducted at the beginning of the survey because its data allows to develop hypotheses about current motivational conflicts of a person. These hypotheses can be clarified during the clinical conversation. This helps to select cues for Pictograms and Proverbs Interpretation Test.

Complicated Analogies Test is used for checking ability of understanding logical connection, observing distinctions between different types of logical relations and transferring it from one group of elements to another [3]. The test consists of 30 pairs of words and 6 pairs that mark 6 categories of relations. The subject has to classify the pairs

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385

of words according to the type of relation between them. This test helps to make a selection of subjects who are able to solve tasks, which require highly developed conceptuality (abstract thinking).

The Odd Fourth Test is designed for checking abilities of generalization and abstraction [3]. The cues of this test are pictures with the groups of four things (e.g. scissors, threads, thimble and pipe). The subject is asked to choose an odd thing and explain his choice. To eliminate "the odd fourth" the subject needs to make a group of three things. Many pictures provide opportunity for two or more answers based on different principles of grouping. This principles mark the different levels of generalization: conception thinking will lead to other classification than thinking in chain complexes etc.

We should also mention that the result of this test is sometimes influenced by the personal meanings of the pictures. It happens when subject somehow relates the content of the picture with his personal experience. Such phenomenon of rational distortion is a manifestation of current motivational conflict.

Initially Pictograms Test was a method for investigation thinking and memory and only afterwards it developed as a projective technique [4]. This method reflects emotional traits and current state of the person, his meaningful themes and cognitive properties.

The test is introduced to the subject as a memory control. He needs to remember 12-16 words and phrases, which are dictated to him. He is also given with a pencil and a sheet of paper. Instruction says that he should draw pictures which help him to remember given phrases, but he cannot write down anything, only drawing is permitted. Experimenter may vary the complexity of the cues from concrete things to abstract ideas. Also the test may include phrases related to the current problems and motivational conflicts of a person for whom the list of stimuli is made.

When the subject completes the last drawing, the paper is taken away and during the next hour he makes easy tasks not related to the test. After that the experimenter returns him the paper and asks to remember the phrases. The lacunas and mistakes in retrieval are taken into consideration, but the most interesting part is the drawings themselves. In the final part the subject is asked to tell what he has drawn and how it helped him.

Obtaining the data means analyzing content and appropriateness of drawings, whether they are abstract or concrete, and how do they relate to the life events of their author, special attention is paid to the rare and unusual images. The drawings may be processed according to the main principles of drawing methods, such as "Drawing a Man" technique. Another aspect of analysis is the reference of the conclusions to the data obtained from the other techniques.

The Family Drawing Test, The Non-Existent Animal Drawing Test and Luscher Color Test can be used to fill up the gap between drawing and retrieval in the Pictograms test.

The applying of Luscher Color Test on the former Soviet area has a long story. In Russia currently most of psychologists use a modified version, which is the second subtest of the original one. This test provides a quick opportunity to get information without disclosing anything to the subject. It is an effective instrument for supporting hypothesis about the current state of a subject and his personal traits.

The Family Drawing Test is focused on the family relationships. Adult subjects make a drawing on the standard sheet of paper using an ordinary pencil. Processing includes comparison between the drawn family and the real amount of family members, the type of activity of the people on the picture and the order of drawing family members. When the drawing is completed, the conversation is held: it is necessary to find out who is present at the drawing, what he is doing etc. Usually the conversation helps to clarify the subject's attitude toward family members. Figures may also be examined according to the "Drawing a Man" principles of analysis.

The Non-Existent Animal Drawing Test was initially made for the work with children, but later spread as an effective psychodiagnostic method for adults. The subject has to think of imaginary animal, draw it and tell a fairy tale about his life. The subject is expected to identify himself with the animal, and metaphorical character of the image helps to display the features which remain blurred in more straightforward tests.

Application of proverbs in psychological research has a long history. In psychology of thinking proverbs are traditionally used to examine thinking, in particular to find out what levels of conceptualization are apprehensible for the subject [5]. Using proverbs in speech allows to convey the meaning without naming the situation, and the same proverb may become both blame and excuse [6]. Other important function of a proverb is regulating: its authority as a "folk wisdom" helps subject to handle with difficulties, to direct his thoughts and activity.

It was investigated that the interpretation, which the subject gives to the proverb, may sometimes reflect the current motivational conflict. Elements of particular interest are cases for rational distortion, such as egocentric interpretation, aggression, evaluative speech and some others. In spite of understanding the proverb correctly, the subject may give the bizarre interpretation, which has no relation with the wide-spread and commonly accepted one.

Applying Proverbs Interpretation Technique for investigating motivational conflicts differs from a traditional way of using it: here we discuss dynamics of meaning and conceptualization processes.

Other important advantage of the technique is a variety of proverbs and their content which provides the opportunity to choose proverbs for every subject, according to the hypothesis of the motivation conflicts and contradictions which are currently important for him. Proverbs are relatively seldom used in everyday speech, but, according to the paroemiological studies, it doesn't prevent the subject from understanding the meaning even when they meet an unknown proverb inbuilt into the context, when he can find relevant situations in his own experience.

Further we give an example of a research made with the abovementioned techniques. This research was made to investigate the phenomenon of identification, which manifested in the Proverbs Interpretation Technique. This phenomenon appears when subject switches from solving a given task to the attempt of solving his own conflict, and creates a personage – participant or experiencer of this conflict. Conditions of the task and the way of solving reflect the dynamics of inner contradiction and conflict process. Personage - participant or experiencer of the conflict may vary from well-developed (for example, non-existent animal on the drawing and in the story) to undetermined "somebody", described with a pronoun: "he", "someone" etc. In the interpretation of proverb or a drawing the subject often uses a hero of this proverb or drawing and enriches him with his own senses and feelings. Such process of identification in TAT was described by H.Murray [7]. Here we see how objective logic is substituted by a subjective process of meaning production. It is externalized in the decrease of the conceptualization level, distortion in understanding the problem conditions, change of emotional expression and other features. Proverbs Interpretation Technique is a perfect material for clarifying this phenomenon due to the dichotomical structure of the proverbs and culture-determined way of using proverbs, which stimulates subject to refer the situation described in the proverb with the events of his own life.

Our research included two parts. The first, preparatory part was held with two purposes: examination of the thinking of test subjects to select the ones who are able to complete tasks with the high level of conceptualization. For that purpose we used Sentence Completion Test, Complicated Analogies Test, Odd Fourth Test and Pictograms Test. The second purpose was to determine the current motivational conflicts of a person. That was made according to the data of Sentence Completion Test, Pictograms Test, drawings and Luscher Color Test.

The second part was conducted with the selected subjects, whose ability to cope with difficult tasks such as interpretation of the proverbs was checked during the preparatory part. Proverbs given for interpretation were especially selected due to the current motivational conflicts of every subject, in order to provoke identification. Another part of the proverbs was common for all subjects which

allowed making conclusions about the difference in provocative strength of different proverbs.

In our research we used common Russian proverbs which are included into vocabularies for schools. All the volunteers were raised in Russia and were expected to have the educational level high enough to cope with all the tests. The amount of common proverbs was 10, and 10 other proverbs were selected especially for every subject. The cases of identification (170 cases) were pointed out according to the main criterion: creation of the personage, and compared to the results of the other techniques and the interviews.

Cases of identification were classified according to the intensity and content of interpretation discourse. It was discovered that on different stages of conflict different kinds of identification appeared.

Many authors emphasize that motivational conflict is a complicated phenomenon which sometimes cannot be investigated using self-report or questionnaires, especially before it slips or turns to the critical stage. The choice between two alternatives is painful for the subject, and even after the moment when the decision is made, it can be denied. The proverbs provide the material for the safe embodiment of the decision and for the evaluating of its result. The relationship between the conflict situation and the proverb may vary: proverb may support or belittle one of the alternatives, may embody the struggle of two motives or reinforce the chosen one which looks like a conclusion or a lesson.

The existence of the motivational conflict usually begins from the unconscious contradiction between two motives of approximately equal strength. Sometimes the subject is aware of one motive, while the second remains unclear. At this period the sense of a proverb may be changed to the opposite during interpretation, without clarifying the alternatives. Two main tendencies of this period are aggravation and smoothing of the contradiction: the subject may be ready to develop the conflict or he can try to escape the unpleasant necessity of making a decision. In the case when one of the alternatives remains unconscious and for some reasons cannot be realized, there appears the phenomenon of anti-identification, or denied identification [7]. That means that the subject depicts the personage which looks extremely disagreeable and distasteful from his point of view. This personage embodies the underlying motive which the subject cannot accept. Denied identification is related to the sour grapes mechanism which can be classified as a defense activity.

When the contradiction is aggravated to the conflict, the critical stage begins. At this stage the interpretation of the proverb related to the conflict looks like the embodiment of the struggling motives in the heroes of the proverb or in the personages of the situation which the subject describes. Often the proverb which looks like an impersonal phrase becomes the reason to describe the subject's experience,

and the heroes appear from his own discourse. In any case interpretation at the critical stage contains two opposite tendencies. The subject shows the signs of strong emotional tension, which seems inadequate to the simple, childish task.

At the final stage, when the decision is already made, the subject tries to support the chosen alternative and diminish the importance of the refused one. It is often mentioned then that the proverbs have a reputation for wisdom. The subject may agree or disagree with the proverb, regarding it as an advice which is good or bad for him. Identification at the final stage appears when the fact of the conflict eliminates from the conscious part of the subject's mind. In this case actions and feelings of the personage are described in the past.

Besides the current stage of the motivational conflict, the interpretation is influenced by the characteristics of the proverb itself. Such characteristics are: emotional richness of the images of the proverb; its resemblance to reality or its fantastic content; mention of certain personages (e.g. animals, people, things) or impersonal phrase; description of an attitude or an activity; encouragement or warning against the certain type of activity.

It is important to separate cases of rational distortion from the incapacity of abstract thinking, and it refers not only to the proverbial interpretation, but to many types of tasks which may somehow involve the motives of the subject. For example, cases of identification resemble concrete thinking. To make a difference it is necessary to take into consideration the results of several tasks related to different topics and pay attention to the emotional reaction of the subject.

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