

D'Zurilla T J & Goldfried M R. Problem solving and behavior modification.
J. Abnormal Psychol. 78:107-26, 1971.
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Problem-solving theory and research were reviewed for possible applications in behavior modification. 'Real life' problem solving was conceptualized as a five-stage cognitive-affective-behavioral process that is important for social competence. Guidelines for the clinical application of problem-solving training were discussed. [The *Social Sciences Citation Index*[®] shows that this paper has been cited in over 240 publications, ranking it among the top 10 ever published in this journal.]

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"The subject of this paper occurred to me during the late 1960s. At that time, Marv Goldfried and I were working on a research project in which we were attempting to develop a behavioral method for assessing social competence.¹ Our subject population for the study was college freshmen. We were identifying problematic situations related to college life and work and asking subjects to report their likely responses to these situations. We were struck by the wide differences among subjects in the effectiveness of their responses and speculated that some of the freshmen were better problem solvers than others.

"Although it is obvious that humans are problem solvers, we realized that this fact had been sorely neglected in our theories of social competence and psychological adjustment. Moreover, the potential value of training in problem-solving skills as a means of facilitating social competence and psychological adjustment had not been recognized in the field of behavior modification. We decided then to prepare a paper that we hoped would help bridge the gap between

problem-solving research and applied behavior modification.

"We wanted to reach as many empirically oriented clinical psychologists as possible, so we submitted the paper to the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*. We were nearly frustrated in our efforts to get the paper published in the *Journal* but were saved by the good judgment and foresight of the new editor-elect, Donald R. Peterson. The paper was first sent to two reviewers, both of whom returned it after some delay saying that they would be unable to review it. A third reviewer commented that the article was very interesting and stimulating, but since it was devoid of data it was inappropriate for a prime data journal. Fortunately, Peterson disagreed and decided to publish it anyway.

"I think that the paper has been cited so often because it was published at a time when mental health professionals were beginning to explore ways in which clinical interventions might be improved through placing a greater emphasis on facilitating the social competence of persons who seek help in dealing with emotional or adjustment problems. It was also a time when the *Zeitgeist* within behavior modification was beginning to shift from *therapist-controlled, behavioral interventions, to self-controlled, cognitive-behavioral interventions*. A quote from Michael Mahoney in 1974 reflects the excitement that developed within the field of behavior modification about the potential value of problem solving: 'The potential relevance of problem solving to both clients and therapists needs little elaboration. In terms of adaptive versatility and the ability to cope with an ever-changing array of life problems, these cognitive skills may offer an invaluable personal paradigm for survival. Their potential contribution to therapeutic efficacy and independent self-improvement will hopefully become an issue of priority in future empirical scrutiny.'²

"In a recent book chapter, Arthur Nezu and I have reviewed empirical studies on the outcome of problem-solving training over the past 10-15 years that contribute support for this approach as a treatment technique, a maintenance strategy, and a prevention method.'³

1. Goldfried M R & D'Zurilla T J. A behavioral-analytic model for assessing competence. (Spielberger C D, ed.) *Current topics in clinical and community psychology*. New York: Academic Press, 1969. Vol. 1. p. 151-96.
2. Mahoney M J. *Cognition and behavior modification*. Cambridge, MA: Ballinger, 1974. p. 212.
3. D'Zurilla T J & Nezu A. Social problem solving in adults. (Kendall P C, ed.) *Advances in cognitive-behavioral research and therapy*. New York: Academic Press, 1982. Vol. 1. p. 201-74.