Behavioral Contracts (aka Contingency Contracts)

Definition: A formal (written) statement of behavioral contingencies, which is negotiated by two or more persons.

Components:
  Task:
   Who: Individual responsible for task performance
   What: Definition of task and performance criterion
   When: Deadline for task performance
  Consequence:
   Who: Individual who evaluates performance and delivers consequences
   What: Description of contingency (consequences)
   When: Schedule of measurement and consequences

Other Considerations:
  All components must be described clearly
  Contracts may accommodate multiple contingencies
  Performance criteria and deadlines should be realistic
  Success depends on control by rules, delayed consequences, and/or various mediators (e.g., reminders); therefore, requires extensive verbal skills
  Implementation facilitated through client input

Mann (1972) “The behavior-therapeutic use of contingency contracting to control an adult behavior problem: Weight control”

General focus: Therapeutic behavior management in “normal” adults

Difficulties:
  Discovery of or control over reinforcers in natural settings
  Measurement of behavior and timely delivery of consequences

Solution: Contingency contracting in which
  Reinforcers are supplied by subject
  Contingency is applied to an outcome measure (weight)

Study 1

Participants: N=6, physician approval, 16+ lb weight loss targets
DV: Body weight (M, W, F measurement by S and E)

Contract contingencies (Note: both Sr+ and response cost):
  Immediate: \(\pm 2\) lb (cumulative) \(\rightarrow\) 1 item returned (-) or lost (+)
  2-week: Min lb lost \(\rightarrow\) 1 item returned (or lost)
  Terminal: Final weight goal \(\rightarrow\) Designated item(s) returned
  Drop-out \(\rightarrow\) All items lost

Experimental designs:
  Reversal (ABAB): Immed. & 2-wk contingencies removed during reversal
  Changing criterion: Criterion shifted in 2-lb and 2-wk increments

Results:
  Table 1: All Ss lost wgt during B; gained during reversal
  Figure 2: Mean lb lost/wk = 2 (B1), 1 (B2)
  Figure 1a: Note criterion line, trends, fines (representative S?)
Study 2
Participants: N=3
DV: Same as Study 1
Contract contingencies (Note: both Sr+ and response cost): Same as Study 1
Experimental designs:
Same as Study 1 (BAB), except that only cost component of immediate & 2-wk contingencies removed during reversal
Results: Same as Study 1

Implications and Extensions
Major contributions:
  Contract convenient (?) for managing contingencies
  “Behavior trap”: Simple entry response, then trapped by contingencies
Limitations:
  Behavior change unknown (diet, exercise)—major limitation
  Possible reinforcement of inappropriate behavior (laxatives, etc.)
Extensions:
  Contracting extensions to other problems (alcohol, cigarettes)
  Other indices related to weight control (exercise, diet, fitness)
  Identification and use of natural reinforcers for weight control