

Wisdom of the Ages

Historical & Theoretical
Basis of
The Kolbe Concept™



K O L B E
C O R P

OVERVIEW

The Kolbe Concept™, developed by Kathy Kolbe, has been field tested throughout the United States within business, government, and educational organizations for over ten years. The Kolbe Conative Index™ (KCI) has been refined through research and statistical analysis with the assistance of case studies and respondents from ages 4 to 88 years old, including various ethnic, racial and socio-economic backgrounds, all geographic areas of the country, and coming from all job classifications identified by the Dictionary of Occupational Titles. Due to vocabulary requirements, two versions evolved, using the same pattern of questions, one for youths and one for adults. The adult version is used with those 15 years of age and older. The educational level for those taking the adult version are 8th grade through postgraduate work. The reading level for the student version is 3rd grade. Cultural biases for foreign populations have been studied but not in sufficient numbers to be reported at this time.

The Kolbe Conative Index has been proven valid and reliable in Alpha and Beta research at sites including: accounting, banking, insurance, law, manufacturing, health care, advertising, professional sports, architecture, theater, communications, publishing, engineering, computers, public utilities; government at the city, county, and state level including law enforcement, economic planning, budgeting, management; in associations such as: community leadership, volunteer services, professional and financial planning, business owners, service clubs; and educational situations including: state university, private colleges in all regions of the country by students in specific areas of study such as business law, psychology, journalism, education, liberal arts, administration, and environmental studies, as well as learning disabled and regular classroom programs.

THE WISDOM OF THE AGES

A. Three Faculties of the Mind

The Kolbe Concept™ is based on historical, philosophical and psychological research. The following is but a summary for those who wish to put the significance of this breakthrough in-identifying conative Action Modes™ in to its proper perspective.

That the mind has three distinct parts is the “Wisdom of the Ages.” The Ancient philosophers Plato and Aristotle spoke of the three faculties through which we think, feel, and act. George Brett in his “History of Psychology,” said, “Augustine was not far from the same standpoint...his language at times suggests the same three-fold division of knowing, feeling and willing.”

Like Plato’s Rationalism, Spinoza’s Homic philosophy focused on an understanding of the three-faculty concept as a necessary prelude to the quest for ideal self-actualization.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, the trilogy of the mind was the accepted classification of mental activities throughout Germany, Scotland, England and America. In the first half of the 20th century, it was American psychologist William McDougall who was its primary proponent.

As Ernest R. Hilgard notes in “The Trilogy of Mind: Cognition, Affection and Conation” (1980), McDougall “assumed that his reader was familiar with the classification of cognitive, affective and conative, as common-sensical and noncontroversial .”

In McDougall’s “Outline of Psychology (1923), he refers to the three-faculty concept as “generally admitted.” He said, “We often speak of an intellectual or cognitive activity; or of an act of willing or of resolving, choosing, striving, purposing; or again of a state of feeling. But it is generally admitted that all mental activity has these three aspects, cognitive, affective and conative; and when we apply one of these three adjectives to any phase of mental process, we mean merely that the aspect named is the most prominent of the three at that moment. Each cycle of activity has this triple aspect; though each tends to pass through these phases in which cognition, affection and conation are in turn most prominent; as when the naturalist, catching sight of a specimen, recognizes it, captures it, and gloats over its capture.”

The Latin “conatus”, from which conation is derived, is defined as “any natural tendency, impulse or directed effort.” As a faculty of the mind, conation is defined by Funk & Wagnalls Standard Comprehensive International Dictionary (1977) as “the aspect of mental process directed by change and including impulse, desire, volition and striving”, and by the Living Webster Encyclopedia Dictionary of the English Language (1980) as: “one of the three modes, together with cognition and affection, of mental function; a conscious effort to carry out seemingly volitional acts.” It is also in *The 1000 Most Obscure Words in the English Language* as: “the area of one’s active mentality that has to do with desire, volition, and striving.”

In his “Analysis of Personality Theories,” Albert Mehrabian (1968) says, “The traditional set of distinctions which have been made regarding the individual relationship to people, objectives or events in his world are cognitive, conative and affection. Cognition., refers to the ways in which an individual knows various aspects of his world. Conation refers to an individual’s relationship of wanting, wishing or their opposite, toward various aspects of his world. Affection refers to an individual’s relationship of positive versus negative feeling toward various aspects of his world.”

Stanford University’s Richard E. Snow, writing an editorial entitled “Intelligence for the Year 2001,” (1980) sums up the situation well when he says, “It is not unreasonable to hypothesize that both conative and affective aspects of persons and situations influence the details of cognitive processing . . . A theoretical account of intelligent behavior in the real world requires a synthesis of cognition, conation and affect. We have not really begun to envision this synthesis” (P. 194 “Intelligence for the Year 2001”).

Among the early statements of the three-faculty concept were Moses Mendelssohn’s (1729-1789) “Letters of Sensation” (1755) in which he said that the fundamental faculties of the soul are understanding, feeling and will.

Johann Nicolaus Tetens (1736-1805), sometimes called the “Father of Psychology” because of his introduction of the analytical, introspective method to psychology, believed that the three faculties of the mind not only existed, but were an expression of an underlying “respective spontaneity of the mind.”

Immanuel Kant’s tripartite division of the mind gave psychology the support of the most influential philosopher of his day. In his “Critique of Pure Reason” (1781), “Critique of Practical Reason” (1788), and “Critique of Judgment” (1790) he discussed them transcendently rather than empirically. In his classificatory scheme, pure reason corresponded to intellect or cognition; judgment to feeling, pleasure or pain, therefore affection; and practical reason to will, action or conation.

He said, "There are three absolutely irreducible faculties of the mind, namely, knowledge, feeling, and desire. The laws which govern the theoretical knowledge of nature as a phenomenon, understanding supplies in its pure a priori conceptions. The laws to which desire must conform, are prescribed a priori by reason in the conception of freedom. Between knowledge and desire stands the feeling of pleasure or pain, just as judgment mediates between understanding and reason. We must, therefore, suppose that judgment has an a priori principle of its own, which is distinct from the principles of understanding and reason."

Later, the three-faculty concept showed up in Scotland. In 1854, Sir William Hamilton said, "If we take the Mental to the exclusion of material phenomena, that is, phenomena manifested through the medium of Self-Consciousness or Reflection, they naturally divide themselves into the three categories or primary genera; the phenomena of Knowledge or Cognition the phenomena of Feeling or of Pleasure and Pain, and the phenomena of Conation or Will and Desire."

Concurrently Britain's Alexander Bain (1818-1903) was writing of "The Senses and the Intellect" (1855) and "The Emotions and the Will" (1859), which became the standard textbooks for 19th Century British psychology.

Bain said, "The phenomena of mind are usually comprehended under three heads:

- I. FEELING, which includes, but is not exhausted by, our pleasures and pains. Emotions, passion, affection, sentiment are names of Feeling.
- II. VOLITION, or the Will, embracing the whole of our activity, as directed by our feelings.
- III. THOUGHT, intellect, or Cognition."

There is now research into the physiological aspects of brain functioning which reinforces the time-honored three-faculty concept. The micro genetic theory of action as constructed by Gary Goldberg, Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, Temple University School of Medicine, Moss Rehabilitation Hospital, Philadelphia, PA, for "The Behavioral and Brain Sciences" (1985), describes in detail the Supplementary Motor Area (SMA) and its role in the cortical organ of movement as viewed by neuroscientists. His research provides evidence which suggests SMA is the significant factor in the development of the intention-to-act and the specification and elaboration of action through its mediation between medial limbic cortex and primary motor cortex.

Reviewing Goldberg's work, Jason W. Brown, Department of Neurology, New York University Medical Center, N.Y., (1985) states, "The clinical material demonstrates that frontal systems correspond with successive movements in action microgeny. . we can infer that an action has a dynamic and hierarchic structure... the internal context of the action is established through links with limbic cognition, a stage of symbolic and conceptual organization in which drive fractionates to partial affects. Space is volumetric; an external world is not yet present. There is incipient purposefulness attached to the action; it becomes goal directed as its object undergoes simultaneous differentiation. The final specification into articulatory and (asymmetric) digital movement concurs with the analysis of object form and the phonological encoding of emerging lexical representations. Cognition is relatively affect free. Action and object space exteriorize together. The feeling of volition requires perceptual exteriorization; volition is the feeling that actions lead outward to a world of stable objects."

That neuropsychologists have only recently taken a closer look at the crucial role the SMA plays in the volitional process might be seen, according to Antonio R. Damasio, Department of Neurology, University of Iowa College of Medicine, Iowa City, Iowa, in his commentary "Understanding the Mind's Will" (1985) . . as the fate of higher—order integrative systems."

Piaget, many years earlier, had referred to conation as the mental domain most difficult to differentiate and, thus, he laid it aside as, until now, have the neuropsychologists. Piaget used his concept of disengagement to refer to the degree to which cognitive activity is independent of affective and conative relationships. But as Damasio points out, the "...anatomical and functional knowledge about the SMA and its vicinity will permit us to model the neuronal substrates of the will (his emphasis) and thus overcome a persistent objection of those who favor a dualist position regarding mind and brain."

As Snow says, "Historically, the concept of 'conation' was coordinated with cognition and affect, the three comprising the main domains of mental life. There has been recent interest in the interaction of cognition and affect... But the conative seems to have dropped out of modern psychology's consciousness. It deserves reinstatement and research."

B. Conation

I. The Action Domain

Plato's Being, Brentano's Psychological Acts, Wundt's Processes, the transitive status of James, the purposefulness of Stout, the propensities of McDougall and cathexes of Freud are all variants of a common recognition of the mind as active. All separate the conative part of the mind from passive thinking and feeling.

In the Encyclopedia of Psychology "Motivation: Philosophical Theories," says, "Some mental states seem capable of triggering action, while others —such as cognitive states — apparently have a more subordinate role [in terms of motivation] ... some behavior qualifies as motivated action, but some does not."

Hume in his "Treatise of Human Nature", Book II, Part III, Section II, argued that intellectual awareness or "reason" cannot move us to do anything.

Locke in 1690 said:

"Volition or willing is an act of the mind directing it through to the production of any action, and thereby exerting its power to produce it... He that shall turn his thoughts inward upon what passes in his mind when he wills, shall see that the will or power of volition is conversant about nothing but our own actions terminates there; and reaches no further; and that volition is nothing but that particular determination of the mind, whereby, barely by a thought, the mind endeavors to give rise, continuation, or stop, to any action which it takes to be in its power."

Further, from the introduction to B. S. Woodworth's investigation into volition: "An impelling interest attaches to the study of Human Volition. No other of man's activities reaches so far in its consequences, both to the individual and to society, as does that of his Will. History is a record of its strivings and achievements and failures. The social and ethical sciences are founded on it. Its importance in education can scarcely be exaggerated. Culture, civilization itself, depends on the regulated volitions, repressions, and inhibitions of individuals and nations. All these activities come under the meaning of the term "Will" as it has been sanctioned by long and universal usage. It is vital, therefore, that our knowledge of Will-activity should be as exact and scientific as possible. Yet there is no field of psychology so slightly tilled as that which deals with volition."

For many of the early philosophers and psychologists conation was the instigation and regulation of behavior. It was what impelled action, whereas, the cognitive compelled.

Spinoza, Hobbs and Descartes were all involved in a goal-directed theory of motivation. An essential part of that theory was Spinoza's delineation of conatus as basic endeavor. He said it was the source of all striving, longing, ambition and self expression. It was the tendency for person to persist against obstacles. For these philosophers, conation was the very essence of the person, for, as Spinoza said, it was through conation that one persevered in one's own being.

C. F. Stout (1913) said conation, as goal-directed striving or purposive activity, involved two meanings of the goal or end of the striving. "One is the obtaining of means and the other making affective [sic] use of the means."

Kurt Goldstein (1963) included conation in his concept of "Coming to Terms with the World." He called conation "self-actualization," the matrix of all motivation of "basic drive" which accounts for all human activity.

In Freud's theory of the conative nature of character, he recognized what great novelists and dramatists had always known. That, as Balzac put it, the study of character deals with "The forces by which man is motivated." That the way a person acts, feels and thinks is, to a large extent, deemed by the specificity of his character and is not merely the rational response to realistic situations. That ~-man's fate is his character."

2. Conative Modes - Instinctive and Distinctive

Eric Fromm in his work on "Human Ethics," discussed the conative nature of man by saying the way man achieves virtue is through the active use he makes of his powers. Uncertainty (the cognitive) is the very condition to impel man to unfold his power. If he faces the truth without panic, he will recognize that there is no meaning to life except the meaning man gives his life by unfolding his powers, by living productively; and that only constant vigilance, activity and effort can keep us from failure in the one task that matters — the full development of our powers without the limitations set by the laws of our existence.. to be himself and for himself to achieve happiness by the full realization of those faculties which are peculiarly his — of reason, love and productive work."

Psychologist McDougall's definition of character (1923) was: "The system of directed conative tendency exemplified by the finest type is that which is complex, strongly and harmoniously organized and directed toward the realization of higher goals or ideals."

The unifying thread over the centuries as philosophers have looked at conation is the thought that "by your acts ye shall be known," and by placing it as the dominant mode in determining character: "actions speak louder than words."

A good man for Aristotle was a man who by his activity, under the guidance of his reason, brought to life the potential specific of man. In the consistent use of the term productivity to mean the use of one's powers or one's capacity, there has been an underlying assumption that this capacity was both inherent and definable.

From Fromm's "productive orientation" was "a fundamental attitude, a mode of relatedness in all realms of human experience. It covers mental, emotional and sensory responses to others, to oneself and to things. Productiveness is man's ability to use his powers and to realize the potentialities inherent in him ... he must be free and not dependent on someone who controls his powers... he can make use of his powers only if he knows what they are, how to use them and what to use them for... they [must not be] masked and alienated from him."

That man's conation, productivity, character or mode of doing comes in modes that are both instinctive and distinctive has also been a prevalent thought among philosophers and psychologists. Michael Malone in his book "Psychotypes," said, "One of the ways a person can become neurotic (that is, unable to realize his own potentialities) is by failing to develop his natural typology. Furthermore, it is difficult for people to develop happily when their natural typology is not recognized or respected by others. By providing a language for experience, a theory of psychotypes enables us to communicate across our typological worlds and thereby come to understand and accept the validity of our differences."

In "Endeavors in Psychology," Henry Murray uses conation to denote each persistent effort (intention, volition, act of willing) to attain a specific goal. "Conations," he said, "are perhaps a long integrated series, deriving their force from one or more needs...the general motivating factor is need — tension— but the chief integrating factor is the conation which directs the organization of muscular and verbal patterns toward the attainment of a definable effect, or subeffect."

Murray goes on to say, "the personality is almost continuously involved in deciding between alternative or conflicting or tendencies or elements...the most pressing and demanding are conflicts between different conations. Since conations (purposes) derive their energies from needs...or alternative goal-objects, conations are specific in respect to goal-place or goal-object.

In the late 1940's, Raymond Cattell attempted to explain conational modalities in a complex set he called the "dynamic lattice." What McDougall had called instinct or propensity, Cattell termed an "erg." An erg, Cattell said, was an innate psychological/physical disposition, or inborn disposition, which permits its possessor to acquire reactivity to certain classes of objects more readily than others, to experience a specific emotion in regard to them and to set on a course of action which ceases more completely at a certain specific goal activity. His dynamic lattice analyzes the interconnections among "ergs" (conative) and sentiments (affective) to show purposive sequences.

His philosophy of dynamic psychology stressed the importance of motivation or fundamental energy in psychic life. Only by looking at man in dynamic rather than static conditions did he feel conation could play its appropriate role.

In the context of our rapidly changing environment, conation becomes a key element in the interpretation of human behavior. For centuries, philosophers and scientists have talked about it, but the dynamic requirements which lead us to strive under ever more challenging conditions has required an entrepreneurial mind to not only research the historical perspective of its existence, but to produce operative models with practical applications.

As to proving empirically the existence of specific traits, Albert Mehrabian in Analysis of Personality Theories says: "One cannot observe a habit, a need, or a trait. One only infers these from observable behavior...conceptual labels subsume several classes of behaviors...factor analysis makes it possible for theorists to evolve a set of habits which satisfy these assumed properties... to identify clusters of behaviors."

Jung's type theory (1912) involved four subclasses—thinking, feeling, sensation and intuition—which cut across his major categories of introvert and extrovert. Freudian writers Friedman and Goldstein found this classification arbitrary and had difficulty in "operationalizing" the function type constructs.

The difficulty, it would seem, arises from a lack on Jung's part of incorporating the conative as a clearly delineated aspect of the mind. That may well be why his main distinction between introversion and extroversion has been the more lasting contribution of his work.

Chanin and Schneer found Jung's personality dimensions (1923) particularly germane to this question of mode predisposition as they reflect an individual's preferred mode of perception, decision making, approach and orientation.

As Kilmann and Thomas (1975) note, this set of personality dimensions is similar to the process model of conflict. For instance, Pondy (1967) said "...individual differences in psychological tendencies toward these processes [can be] expected to influence the conflict-handling modes which the individual chooses in a given situation."

McDougall, as so many others aware of conative traits, expressed the need for giving them specificity. "...at the standpoint of empirical science, we must accept these conative dispositions as ultimate facts, not capable of being analyzed or of being explained.

When, and not until, we can exhibit any particular instance of conduct or of behavior as the expression of conative tendencies which are ultimate constituents of the organism, can we claim to have explained it (the purposive process).”

The case has been made for defining Modes within the conative domains. That Jung and others have not separated out the conative and that, therefore, instruments based on such theories have not thoroughly measured such Modes may have to do with the very conative nature of those philosophers and psychologists who have held the mind as their domain. The conative Modes of most Ivory Tower philosophers and psychologists, those who could strive in the research environment, would lead to this bias.

For as Baken put it: “...there is a fact concerning human functioning that is rarely taken into account: that human beings make use of their generalizations concerning the nature of human functioning in their functioning.”

C. Three-Faculty Concept- Retreat From Discussion

Hilgard traces the retreat from discussion of the three-faculty concept directly to McDougall:

“With McDougall the history of the trilogy of the mind appears to have ended...”

Hilgard goes on to say, “When we look at contemporary psychology from the perspective of cognition, affection, and conation, it is obvious immediately that cognitive psychology is ascendant at present, with a concurrent decline of emphasis upon the affective-conative dimensions... some price has been paid for it. Information processing and the computer model have replaced stimulus-response psychology with an input-output psychology. In the process, some dynamic features such as drives, incentive motivation, and curiosity have been more or less forgotten.”

B. S. Woodworth in his statement relating to the study of volition said, “We have nothing in this line that can compare with the immense amount of work done on the relation of perception to the stimulus perceived, or... that can compare in completeness with the work done and still being done in all departments of sensation.”

But the 20th Century interest in the cognitive cannot fully explain the retreat from discussion of the conative, for it was back in 1878 that Mark

Hopkins, who served as president of Williams College wrote “An Outline Study of Man” (1878) in which he expressed concern about an over emphasis of cognition.

“Until the intellect is placed by the community where it belongs; and made subordinate to the sensibility and the will, we shall find that mere sharpness, shrewdness, intellectual power, and success through these, will be placed above those higher qualities in which character consists, and success through them.”

So it was over a hundred years ago that others were saying that success could be interpreted as the freedom to be oneself. How, then has the intellectual community turned its back on the Wisdom of the Ages? Was it because as Malone said, McDougall—the modern-day champion of conation—stood outside of scientific responsibility and was regarded as an anachronism and menace? Or was it because now McDougall’s contemporaries were delving deeply into the cognitive domain, which was thought to be the key to differentiating personnel roles to be played in the military effort?

Perhaps it was in part McDougall’s associating the innate nature of conation with extrasensory perceptions (he went from Harvard to Duke where he studied such phenomena) and the preservation of psychologists with cognition.

The Kolbe Concept™ builds on the historical, philosophical and psychological foundations to place conation in its proper contemporary perspective by identifying the individual’s Kolbe Conative Modes™.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Hilgard, E. R., 1980, p. 108.
- 2 *ibid.*, p. 114.
- 3 *ibid.*, p. 114.
- 4 McDougall, W. 1923, p. 266.
- 5 Mehrabian, A., 1968, p. 12.
- 6 Snow, R. E., 1980, p. 194.
- 7 Hilgard, E. R, 1980, p. 108.
- 8 *ibid.*,p. 108.
- 9 *ibid.*, p. 107.
- 10 Stewart, D., 1854, p. vii.
- 11 Hilgard, E. R., 1980, p. 111.
- 12 Brown, J., 1985, p. 588.
- 13 Damasio, A., 1985, p. 589.
- 14 Mehrabian, A., 1968, p. 94.
- 15 Damasio, A., 1985, p. 589.
- 16 Snow, R. E., 1980, p. 193.
- 17 Encyclopedia of Psychology, 1984, p. 403.
- 18 *ibid.*, p. 403.
- 19 Goldberg, G., 1985, p. 601.
- 20 Woodworth, B., 1925.
- 21 Malone, M., 1977, p. 428.
- 22 *ibid.*,p. 18.
- 23 *ibid.*, p. 56.
- 24 *ibid.*, p. 45.
- 25 *ibid.*, p. 426.
- 26 Wertheimer, M., 1945, p. 83.
- 27 *ibid.*, p. 83.
- 28 Malone, M., 1977, p. 5.
- 29 Murray, H., p. 219.
- 30 *ibid.*, p. 219.
- 31 Cattell, R. B., 1950, p. 199.
- 32 Mehrabian, A., 1968, p. 88.
- 33 Malone, M., 1977, p. 414.
- 34 Chanin, M. and Schneer, J., 1984, p. 863.
- 35 *ibid.*, p. 864.
- 36 McDougall, W., 1923.
- 37 Snow, R. E., 1980, p. 195.
- 38 Hilgard, E., 1980, p. 114.
- 39 *ibid.*, p. 115.
- 40 Woodworth, B., 1925.
- 41 Hilgard, E., 1980, p. 112.

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