INTRODUCTION

In 1987, Brad Keeney created Recursive Frame Analysis (RFA) as a conversational tracking system for psychotherapists.

Since that time, he and Ron Chenail have developed RFA into a qualitative research method for mapping change-oriented discourse.

The basic RFA steps and latest visualization techniques will be shared so you can begin your first RFA's.
Bradford Keeney wanted to create a way of understanding therapeutic discourse based upon Gregory Bateson’s notion of an “ecology of mind” (Bateson, 1972, p. xxiii):

“ Idea” as “a difference which makes a difference” or as a “’bit’” of information (Bateson, 1972, p. 272)

“ Minds” as “aggregates of ideas (Bateson, 1972, p. xxiii)

“Ecology of mind” as a way of thinking about these relationships among ideas (Bateson, 1972, p. xxiii)

“Steps” as “benchmarks towards creating an ecology of mind (Bateson, 1972, p. xxiii)

Since 1987, Keeney has been taking his own steps to create a system to understand the ecology of ideas in human conversation. This system is called Recursive Frame Analysis (RFA) (Keeney & Keeney, 2012; Keeney, Keeney, & Chenail, 2012).
BATESON’S 1972 SCIENCE TASKS DIAGRAM

**“Raw” Data**
- Transcripts
- Recordings
- Artifacts

**Heuristics**
- “Ego”
- “Anxiety”
- “Purpose”

**Fundamentals**
- “Eternal Verities”
- “Laws of Physics”
With the aid of such a diagram, much can be said about the whole scientific endeavor and about the proposition and direction for any particular piece of inquiry within it.

“Explanation” is the mapping of data onto fundamentals, but the ultimate goal of science is to increase fundamental knowledge. (Bateson, 1972, pp. xxvi-xxvii)

Keeney wanted to remove the heuristics or “dormitive principles” clouding therapists ability to understand conversations in psychotherapy and focus on the fundamentals.
Because

Human thoughts are combinational (simple parts combine)

and

Human thoughts are recursive (parts can be embedded within parts)

Breathtaking expanses of knowledge can be explained with a finite inventory of mental tools. (Pinker, 1997, p. 360)
KEENEY’S SCIENTIFIC DEFINITION OF RFA

“Raw” Data
- Spoken Words
- Written Words

Fundamentals
- Combinational Thoughts
- Recursive Grammar
RFA FUNDAMENTAL TOOLS

Draw a distinction to identify one idea from another

Try to understand one idea in relationship with the other ideas

Try to understand the other ideas in relationship to the one idea

Repeat
As the observer draws a distinction in the discourse noting a new idea (i.e., a difference that make a difference or a new “bit” of information), the observer considers the meaning of the idea from the perspective of the other ideas and the other ideas from the perspective of the new idea. In RFA, this recursive process is called framing. In this fashion the observer utilizes a metaphoric proposition or device for framing or seeing something in terms of some other frame. “It brings out the thisness of a that, or the thatness of a this” (Burke, 1969, pp. 503-504)
FUNDAMENTAL RFA
STEP-BY-STEP

1. Listen and/or read talk.
2. Note idea from talk.
3. Note next idea from talk.
4. Consider the meaning of the “next idea” from the perspective of the “other idea” and consider the meaning of the “other idea” from the perspective of the “next idea.”
5. Listen and/or read talk.
6. Note the next next idea.
7. Consider the meaning of the “next next idea” from the perspective of the “other ideas’ perspectives” and consider the meaning of the “other ideas’ perspectives” from the perspective of the “next next idea.”
8. Repeat.
FUNDAMENTAL RFA EXERCISE

Insoo Kim Berg’s 1997 Couples Session with Leslie and Bill:

Irreconcilable Differences: A Solution-Focused Approach to Marital Therapy

004: Insoo Kim Berg - I understand, Bill, you are working where? What kind of a job, what kind of work do you do?

005: Bill - I'm an attorney.

006: Insoo - Uh-huh.

007: Bill - Oh, I do taxes primarily for corporations.

008: Insoo - Do you?

009: Bill - Yeah.
004: Insoo Kim Berg - I understand, Bill, you are working where? What kind of a job, what kind of work do you do?

005: Bill - I'm an attorney.

006: Insoo - Uh-huh.

007: Bill - Oh, I do taxes primarily for corporations.

008: Insoo - Do you?

009: Bill - Yeah.
010: Insoo - Uh-huh. I understand this is where the big money is?
011: Bill - (inaudible) (crosstalk)
012: Leslie - We don't see any of it.
013: Insoo - You don't see. You don't see. (crosstalk)
014: Bill - Oh, yeah.
015: Leslie - Uh hmm.
016: Insoo - Is he. (crosstalk)
017: Bill - I, I think over the, in the next few years out.
018: Insoo - Yeah?
019: Bill - I'll be up to a fairly decent income. Right now, I'm trying to, to build up, (crosstalk)
020: Insoo - Uh-huh.
010: Insoo - Uh-huh. I understand this is where the big money is?

011: Bill - (inaudible) (crosstalk)

012: Leslie - We don't see any of it.

013: Insoo - You don't see. You don't see. (crosstalk)

014: Bill - Oh, yeah.

015: Leslie - Uh huh.

016: Insoo - Is he. (crosstalk)

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018: Insoo - Yeah?

019: Bill - I'll be up to a fairly decent income. Right now, I'm trying to, to build up, (crosstalk)

020: Insoo - Uh-huh.
021: Bill - build a clientele.
022: Insoo - Yeah, right.
023: Leslie - He tries very hard. He sees so many people in terms of building up that clientele.
024: Insoo - Yeah.
025: Leslie - He's trying very hard.
026: Insoo - Is he?
027: Leslie - Hmm.
028: Insoo - Is he good? Is he good... (crosstalk)
029: Leslie - Hmm.(ph)
030: Insoo - ...in, at, ah, at what he's doing?
031: Leslie - Well, you probably should ask some of the ladies that he sees so much. You know, that he was with his "clients." Excuse me, those are his "clients."
032: Insoo - Yes.
033: Leslie - But, ah, he's out every evening, so I guess, he must be good.
034: Insoo - Uh-huh. Uh-huh. (crosstalk)
035: Bill - I'm, I'm in a stage of, of trying to develop a partnership and I'd like to be a partner in this firm.
036: Insoo - Right.
037: Bill - So I spend a lot of hours...(crosstalk)
038: Insoo - Right.
039: Bill - ...with a lot with clients, (crosstalk)
040: Insoo - I see.
041: Bill - ...and a lot of them are women. A lot of women are in corporate America today. So, (crosstalk)
021: Bill - build a clientele.
022: Insoo - Yeah, right.
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040: Insoo - I see.

041: Bill - ... and a lot of them are women. A lot of women are in corporate America today. So, (crosstalk)
042: Leslie - Which is really our problem, a part of our problem...(crosstalk)

043: Insoo - Right.

044: Leslie - ...because, uhm, I know that you have to spend time at work. He spends an awful lot of time out of the house...(crosstalk)

045: Insoo - Right.

046: Leslie - ...so that I have the primary responsibility for our children. My question and my concern is and that's one reason that I wanted us to come here so that maybe, through talking, he could come to understand that he has some responsibilities too... (crosstalk)

047: Insoo - Right.

048: Leslie - ...and ah, (crosstalk)

049: Bill - Yeah.

050: Leslie - ...ah, they don't... (crosstalk)

051: Insoo - Yeah.

052: Leslie - ...include spending evenings out talking to women who are not always your clients, Bill. (crosstalk) Responsibilities

053: Insoo - Okay.

054: Bill - This is.
042: Leslie - Which is really our problem, a part of our problem...(crosstalk)

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051: Insoo - Yeah.

052: Leslie - ...include spending evenings out talking to women who are not always your clients, Bill. (crosstalk) Responsibilities

053: Insoo - Okay.

054: Bill - This is.
HEURISTIC RFA

“Raw” Data
- Conversations
- Transcripts
- Recordings

Heuristics
- Theories
- Conceptualizations
- Models

Fundamentals
- Recursion
- Framing
HEURISTIC RFA EXERCISE
HEURISTIC: RELATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Observe the conversation and note those instances where one spouse made an observation about the other spouse.
RFA 4: RELATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Wife’s Relational Definition of Problem

Part of Our Problem

- Wife’s considers husband’s work as a problem
- Wife considers husband’s lack of understanding as a problem

Lot of Time | Attorney | Working | Trying Hard | Spending Time | Out Evenings | Clients | Women

Understand He Has Some Responsibilities for Our Children
RFA AS QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHOD

Content Analysis: Sequential, Semantic, and Pragmatic

Discourse Analysis

Conversation Analysis

Narrative Analysis

Ethnographic Analysis

Phenomenological Analysis
RFA AS A PUZZLE

RFA is like a jig-saw puzzle with no pieces or pictures.

As you observe a conversation you piece the puzzle together piece-by-piece to create your picture of the conversation.

RFA helps you to create your own ecologies of mind.
REFERENCES


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