



Person-centered Approach in Organizational Relationships¹

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Abstract. In this article the author asserts and justifies the idea that Client-Centered Therapy and Person-Centered Approach are different. In particular it is especially clearly can be demonstrated by organizations. Relationships at work are not helping relationships. In therapy, the client gives the therapist money. In exchange, the therapist uses congruence, empathy, and unconditional positive regard on behalf of the client. In organizational relationships, the person, the self uses congruence, empathy and unconditional positive regard on behalf of the self, not on behalf of the other. In CCT the therapist uses congruence, empathy and unconditional positive regard as core conditions to create a climate in which the client can pursue her own therapeutic goals, in her own way. This is necessary and sufficient for therapeutic change to occur. In Person-Centered Approach the self uses congruence, empathy and unconditional positive regard as core skills to achieve, effectively and efficiently, the goals of the self in relation to another. These skills are necessary and sufficient for the successful conduct of relationships. Success is the achievement of the goals of the self. The other might use Person-Centered Approach skills to achieve, effectively and efficiently, the other's goals. Business organizations are the dominant institution in our civilization. They will create the social inventions of the next 35–40 years. There exists a significant opportunity to influence these social inventions with Person-Centered Approach, now. As the demand for therapy worldwide diminishes, client-centered therapists represent a resource block. This block is needed in the world of business organizations.

Keywords: Person-Centered Approach (PCA); empathic listening: congruence; empathy; unconditional positive regard.

Introduction

Client-Centered Therapy (CCT) and Person-Centered Approach (PCA) are different. CCT came first. It was the root stock of PCA. Carl Rogers described it in 1957 as necessary and sufficient for therapeutic change. Carl, himself, moved beyond therapy. He quit doing it. He focused on world peace, education, personal power, personal partnerships and other applications. He stopped doing therapy himself. He would continue to train therapists. He changed from Client-Centered Therapy to Person

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Centered Approach. I notice that Brian Thorne in his articles noted Carl’s shift in his later years.

In recent years, I have had the benefit of wise criticism, for which I am grateful. The basis of criticism has been how closely my work adheres to the work of Carl Rogers. Carl’s work froze in many minds as he was in 1957, when he was at the height of his work in therapy. My work is not in the realm of therapy. It is in organizations. The therapeutic model of Carl does not work in this setting. Relationships at work are not helping relationships. In therapy, the client gives the therapist money. In exchange, the therapist uses congruence, empathy, and unconditional positive regard on behalf of the client. In organizational relationships, the person, the self uses congruence, empathy and unconditional positive regard on behalf of the self, not on behalf of the other.

Differences

There is confusion in the legacy of psychologist, Carl Rogers. He is the most influential psychologist of all time. His psychological system is more widespread and has had more impact than any other. This influence occurred without the support of any institution of our civilization, not government, not church, not education, not business, not family. It was like Topsy, it “just grewed.” The confusion is this. Many folks use the terms that he used (Client-Centered Therapy and Person-Centered Approach) interchangeably. In the La Jolla conference room, in the early ‘70’s, I watched Carl shift from the former to the latter. No one else in the room shifted with him, including me. We began to use the term, “Person-Centered Approach”. We did not perceive his shift. He moved from a special model for the therapeutic relationships. He turned to a general model for all relationships. His vision broadened. However, the confusion remains. A table 1 below compares Client-Centered Therapy and Person-Centered Approach. Take a look at it for a while and then I will say more about it.

Table 1. Differences between Client-Centered Therapy and Person-Centered Approach

Client-Centered Therapy	Person-Centered Approach
Special model for therapeutic relationship Therapist <=> Client Helping relationship Core conditions used on behalf of client	General Model for all relationships Self <=> Other Everyday (non helping) relationships Core skills used on behalf of self
<i>Necessary and sufficient conditions for therapeutic change</i>	<i>Necessary and sufficient skills for successful conduct of relationships</i>
1. Psychological contact (in relationship)	1. Relationships are internal, no «relationship» exists outside each other. (Primary = I - Thou) (Secondary = I - You or I - It)
2. Client is not congruent	2. Other’s congruence, or any use of skill, is irrelevant (except in community)
3. Therapist is congruent (willing and able)	3. Self may choose congruence (if able)
4. Therapist is empathic (willing and able)	4. Self may choose empathy (if able)
5. Therapist regards clients unconditionally positive (willing and able)	5. Self may choose unconditional positive regard (if able)
6. Therapist communicates 3, 4, & 5 to client	6. Communication of 3, 4, & 5 to other is not necessary.

Client-Centered Therapy and Person-Centered Approach are fundamentally the same and fundamentally different. Both deal with congruence, empathy, and unconditional positive regard. CCT is a special model for the therapeutic relationship. It is between a therapist and her client. It is a helping relationship. The client pays the therapist money and the therapist uses congruence, empathy and unconditional positive regard on behalf of the client. PCA is a general model for the all relationships. It is between a sovereign self and a sovereign other. It is not a helping relationship. The other does not pay the self money. The self uses congruence, empathy and unconditional positive regard on behalf of the self, not on behalf of the other. Relationships are internal. The relationship of the self with the other exists within the skin of the self, for which the self is totally responsible. The relationship of the other with the self exists within the skin of the other, for which the other is totally responsible. This and the “behalf of” rubric are the most difficult for CC Therapists to understand. It takes a lot of spaced repetition before it becomes clear. Once the practitioner makes the effort, and achieves insight, then this practitioner can be comfortable in both realms.

In CCT the therapist uses congruence, empathy and unconditional positive regard as core conditions to create a climate in which the client can pursue her own therapeutic goals, in her own way. This is necessary and sufficient for therapeutic change to occur. In PCA the self uses congruence, empathy and unconditional positive regard as core skills to achieve, effectively and efficiently, the goals of the self in relation to another. These skills are necessary and sufficient for the successful conduct of relationships. Success is the achievement of the goals of the self. The other might use PCA skills to achieve, effectively and efficiently, the other’s goals. PCA assumes health. CCT assumes non-health. CCT helps the other. PCA helps the self. It avoids such issues as dependency, co-dependency, victimness, powerlessness, wallowing and insipidity. It focuses on the self and its competence — full functionality.

There are a number of PCA practitioners educated in this process. It is a fairly lengthy process, involving about four years of intensive spaced repetition. There is an international group of some of these practitioners who meet every few months in different countries. A milestone of this group is to impact a critical mass of the world’s businesses. They share what they know with one another, about PCA and other relevant topics, for free. Each one pays one’s travelling and dwelling expenses. The working name of this group is the Pajaro Group².

Business organizations are the dominant institution in our civilization. They will create the social inventions of the next 35–40 years. There exists a significant opportunity to influence these social inventions with PCA, now. As the demand for therapy worldwide diminishes, client-centered therapists represent a resource block. This block is needed in the world of business organizations. Below is a short descriptions of four basic PCA skills which together are necessary and sufficient means for the successful conduct of relationships.

The Strategic Future of PCA

Person Centered Approach stands at the cusp of its most incredible opportunity. The tension between “high-tech” and “high touch” is at its highest point in history and getting higher. People feel the tension. They feel the alienation and the potential. We, practitioners of PCA, are able to make an incredible contribution to our civilization. This contribution will not be made in therapy or CCT. It will be made in our everyday lives. It will be made at work, in primary relationships, in seeking

² The Pajaro Group is a support group of practioners of the Person Centered Approach to relationships in business and organizations. The Pajaro Group meets biannually to share ideas and work on professional and personal development. URL: <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/pajarogroup/info>

peace, on the Internet. Lets look at how this is so.

During the fifty thousand or so years of hunting and gathering there were no assets. Assets were discouraged. If Grog brought home an extra mastodon or so, his peers, affected by the stench would mention it to him. During the three or four centuries of agriculture assets became possible. Also came the possibility of someone stealing them and the notion of protecting those assets — using violence. There arose specialists in violence who would protect assets, for a fee. The best specialists became governments, feudal, mostly. People swore a dependable oath of chivalry to their liege lord. The entrepreneurs, the kings, and lords owned these governments. It was to their strategic economic advantage to have high taxes and low expenses. That made for wealth.

Then comes the industrial age and the nation-state. During this time citizens swore an oath of citizenship to the nation-state. Individual citizens do not have as much power as did the lords negotiating with the king. This was an age of effectiveness in the use of force, not efficiency. Wars were met with overwhelming force, not lean, mean fighting machines. The governments were owned by the employees of the government, congress, bureaucrats, receivers of transfer payments (employees, without the requirement that they go to work). It was to their strategic economic advantage to have high taxes and even higher expenses (because the expenses went to the employees) — deficit spending.

Now we are in the biggest change of all — the information age. Governments can no longer compete with private services offered on the internet. Citizens become customers — sovereign individuals. The governments become owned by the customers. Customers strategic economic advantage lies in low taxes and low expenses. The skilled get richer and the low skilled get poorer. You must have something others value to offer, or you will be left out. PCA is the only necessary and sufficient system which provides for the successful conduct of relationships. Only those skilled in “high tech” and in “high touch” will be prepared for the perilous times ahead for the sovereign individual.

Four Skills of the Person Centered Approach for Organization

Empathic Listening

First in a set of Four Skills of the Person Centered Approach. Empathic Listening is the most useful skill of the Person Centered Approach. It is the one you will use most often. It is the easiest to learn. So, it has the quickest payoff for an organization. Carl Rogers, the founder of PCA, did not distinguish between Empathy (which is the *following* of another while they go through growth and development) and Empathic Listening (which is used when you want *understanding* of an other). He used them interchangeably. Here we are separating them. PCA is an approach between the self and another. Empathic Listening can be described in four steps:

1. *Decide to listen.*

If the self has something going on in side, then be congruent.

If the other has something going on, then listen.

If both have something going on, then adjourn with an agreement when to come back together.

2. *Clarify the verbal message of the other.* What are the words? What do they mean to the other? Find out. You have permission for this step.
3. *Guess at the experience of the other.* Guess at the experience, which might be behind the

experience. This involves more risk. If you connect at this experiential level, the result is more intimacy. If you try and do not connect, the result is more distance. Permission cannot be assumed. It must be continually renewed.

4. *Validation*. Listener cannot do this. To say, “I heard you.” Is not validation. Validation comes from the sender, the other. The other confirms your clarification or guess. Validation has a sense of finality or closure to it. The voice goes down. If the voice is tentative or goes up, validation is incomplete. Self may have part of it, or might be close, but there is still something not received. Maybe it was sent and missed or perhaps not even sent.

Because you work with others and there is a natural competition for airtime, the simple arithmetic of the situation requires that Empathic Listening is appropriate more of the time, than sending. When you are uncertain which PCA skill to use, pick this one. It is the one most often appropriate. It is a fair substitute for each of the others skills. Whenever you are in a hole, at least this skill will help you “stop digging”. It is possible to Empathic Listen your way out of most difficult situations. As with the other skill, Empathic Listening is for you to use when you choose, not when you ought, or when others want.

Congruence

Second in a Set of Four Skills of the Person Centered Approach. The purpose of Congruence is manifesting your experience in the world through language. Synonyms are: centered, genuine, authentic, and real. If you, the self, send a congruent message, the chances of receiving a defensive response diminish. If you send an incongruent message the chance of receiving a defensive response increases. There are two levels to the skill of congruence.

Level one has four steps:

1. Experience — that flow of what is going on inside of the self at any given moment. It flows. It changes from moment to moment.
2. Awareness — it is tapping into the flow, and bringing it into consciousness, know that it is there.
3. Non-Verbal Language — if left untempered, the body will naturally communicate a combination of experience and awareness. If you want to know what the nonverbal language of the other means, ask the other.
4. Verbal Language — you, the self, speaks about the experience of the self, not about the situation of about the other. Pure congruent language contains no “he”, “she:”, “it” or “you”.

Level two is taking full responsibility for your experience. There is no blaming the other or the situation for your experience.

For example:

Level 1

From: “You are untrustworthy”.

Knowing WHAT is going on in the self.

To: “I am suspicious”.

Level 2

From: “I am suspicious of you”.

Knowing THAT your experience is going on IN you and that you are totally responsible.

To: “I am suspicious because I am a suspicious person.”

Trying to make others or the situation responsible, is a decision to be powerless. In an organization, it makes for gaps in responsibility. Congruence makes for overlaps in responsibility. One of the first things you will notice, as you become proficient in this skill, is that you will eagerly seek responsibility. You will not want to let any responsibility get away from you. Jackie Hicks, of Camelot, writes, “Just because you are not to blame, does not mean you are not responsible”. Ever since humankind got the ability to choose, its history has been an attempt to escape the responsibility of choice. This is why it will be difficult to learn this skill. Keep after it. It will come.

Empathy

Third in a Set of Four Skills of the Person Centered Approach. Empathy is following the other, while the other leads you on a journey through the other’s experience. Empathy is the skill of choice when the other wants to grow, learn or develop. It is not useful when the self wants the other to grow, learn or develop.

In order to use empathy, it is necessary to be secure in one’s own experience. When one enters the world of the other, it is important that the self be able to return to ones own experience at will, not to get lost in the world of the other. This security is also necessary, because the self chooses to set his or her own experience aside. Both the self and the other are focused on the experience of the other. If the self becomes aware of something other than the experience of the other, and the self chooses to set that aside and refocus on the other’s experience, then empathy continues. It is OK to keep an experience of the self, it is only no longer empathy.

The self continues to be empathic until the other has utilized his or her own resources to reach the growth, learning or development he or she seeks. The self is like a catalyst. The self does not enter into the process of the other, only accompanies. If the self were to enter the process, for example to give advice, then the other must build a phagocytic-like barrier around the advice (similar to an invading organism). If the other utilizes their own resources only, then their solutions are automatically integrated. They fit. They are immediately available to the other. Carl Rogers regarded empathy as the driver in client-centered therapy. Empathy is a very powerful tool in organizations. It’s impact on individual and work team growth cannot be overestimated.

An empathy event is finished when the other has grown, when they have achieved their goal. It can last 90 seconds or several hours. I prefer to be with the other until the end has been achieved and then some. I follow the other through the end. It is common for therapists seeing clients to allow the end of the 45 or 50-minute session to interrupt empathy to be rejoined next time. At work, it is possible to continue, if conditions warrant. The result of empathy is a more fully functioning person. Such a person is a fit member of a fully functioning work team. The demands of business suggest that whenever someone is not fully functioning, a time investment is indicated.

An agreement, at least tacit, precedes an episode of empathy. The other must want to grow and the self must be willing and able to be with them while they grow. Find a place where you will not be interrupted. The rewards for both are great. The other grows. The self gains a more fully functioning person with whom to relate.

Unconditional Positive Regard

Fourth in a Set of Four Skills of the Person Centered Approach. Unconditional Positive Regard is by far the most difficult to learn. The Responsibility portion of congruence is the next most difficult. This is imbedded in Unconditional Positive Regard. This one will require your best work. Don’t give up on it. This one is the most personally rewarding. The power you feel will not always be appreciated by the other. It is for you.

Unconditional Positive Regard is a mouthful. If one shortens it, then PCA is no longer a necessary and sufficient skill set for the successful conduct of relationships. So, alas, it must remain. Unconditional Positive Regard can be looked at from three vantage points.

The first is the suspension of judgment. Judgment is the shutting off of information and the attribution of “good” or “bad”. The brain cannot operate fully in the presence of judgment. Judgment happens in 6/10,000 of a second – too fast to prevent. Something must be done with the judgment. What is to be done, is, convert it into congruence (from a “you” message to an “I” message, for which I take full responsibility).

The second vantage point is that of looking at a sunset. Carl Rogers used to say that one does not try to change a sunset (a little darker blue over here, please, and perhaps less orange there, and certainly more pink and red overall). One regards a sunset just as it is. People are like that. They are just fine the way they are now.

Finally, there is a paradox. We cannot cope with this, which by definition, cannot make sense, in the presence of judgment. The paradox is this. You must remain totally committed to your own integrity, while at the same time prize the gift (not the other, but the gift) of the other which threatens your integrity. You move from pushing the gift away — remaining stuck, to embracing it as a jewel of great price — precious! The threat becomes my valued friend. I prize it. I don’t just understand. I don’t just accept it. I don’t just prize it. I prize it unconditionally. I am now able to work with it. I am not longer stuck. I am moving again — powerful — free.