A Model of Congruency, A Personal Coaching Philosophy

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A Model of Congruency, A Personal Coaching Philosophy

Abstract
Consciousness gifted us a singular conundrum - One must think! Spectacularly, Nature receded from unconscious control, and let man be. The quest ever since has been that of reason and raison d'être!

Muse we shall just for an ephemeral moment: Of many myths and legacies of human thought, the Hellenic era is usually credited for rationality; Socrates, Plato and Aristotle formed the bedrock of suppositions that continued to pique the curiosity of Homo sapiens. Greeks, as a civilization, delivered us from superstition to observation, from unknown, we began to explore the known realms of the environment by experiments, drafted laws...created reality and its understanding(s). This was new to man. Thinking, and thinking about thinking.

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Coaching
A Model | Applications | Reflections

By Amrita V. Subramanian

Consciousness gifted us a singular conundrum - One must think! Spectacularly, Nature receded from unconscious control, and let man be. The quest ever since has been that of reason and raison d'être!

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I. History of Human Thought

Philosophy & Meaning

II. A Model of Coaching

The Theories, The Model, The Process

III. The Application

The Story and its lessons

IV. The Critique

V. The Self

Metaphors

References

Meaning, understood this way, is the primary human motion, irreducible.

Robert Kegan
Nature helped with all her mysteries. We asked why, how, what, who, when...it incessantly fed the creative conjuring of reasons that were oft eclipsed by lack of transcendantal application, theorems, zeitgeist and thus continued the saga of evolutionary truce in both hemispheres of this world.

The Eastern realm was mostly land bound. The horizon, rarely visible. There was no straight line between heaven and earth. The logic, non linear. The interrelations and interconnections, the nexus of relationships defined the whole. The giant world with its giant web of life. It was always in relation to something that anything made sense. West classified, East mystified. Each geography of thought reached its own conclusions, own myths, own collective unconscious, own homeostatic socio-cognitive systems - in it, Man of East and West, continued his jaunty ride in the dominion of natural selection. Unknowingly in league, they precipitated an equilibrium of views - Reductionist and the Holistic.

At the heart rested Cognitive Processes, surrounded by Epistemology, ensconced in Metaphysics, established in Attention, manifested in Social Structure, resultant Economy and Ecology of the mind.

(Fig. 1 - Schematic model of influences on cognitive processes)

Human consciousness made meaning. It had to, within multitude of prismatic constructs, it strove to make sense in a context.
This makes me wonder. What must I as a Coach (in-making) seek to understand? Does my Rogerian cornerstone suffice? How will my Existentialist weltanschauung (worldview) enable the dissolution of my client’s quandary? Do I realize that my myriad heuristics put me in a double-bind? The Existence, Relatedness and Growth of that human being will be affected by how I enable a comprehensive understanding of her response-ability, choices and her immanent capabilities? That, Time does not exist in my mind - except when I have an appointment or a deadline?

I ask of myself these, and many more questions. Each time I chance upon a revelation, I consider its serendipity, then in floats Herr Jung’s voice that synchronicity is not an illusion! The orbit of such reflections have incited conversations with myriad august minds and their works. In their presence, at Van Pelt and Fisher libraries, I have often been in day long brown studies, dozed off, woken others up with my erudite snores and then jolted myself awake. Then, wrote in a frenzy lest I forget all that my mind had viewed when my physical self slept soundly, safely in company of treatises. The three, that I keep circling back to, are Kurt Lewin, Robert Kegan, and Gregory Bateson. I don’t get the math; I get the abstract behind it. I get the meta. It stokes my curiosity to sniff out the chronological progressive proofs their followers furnished. Its quite akin to kindred souls, garbed as Sherlock Holmes of their own approaches, transcend their subject’s boundaries, and attempt to wonder at the wholesomeness of an operant reality of a single unit - a human who, in my context, will also doubles up as a coachee for a coach.

My doodles of late are all circular, so are my mind maps; I connect back after an expedition across works of thinkers to a germane spark. At those moments, I look for cognition in eyes of my fellow learners - often, I hear empty uh-hmm, and when someone gets it - we rejoice our nerdiness!

Everything I write is intentional. This paper is much briefer, clearer, crisper. The writer, a little more resolved. Though more intense in its scope, in comparison with the last paper of DYNM 602, where I had expounded an instinctive model of coaching.

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**Escape Velocity** is the speed needed to escape Earth’s orbit, from its gravitational pull. I use the same idea to enable my client to escape her current orbit and step into an altered one!
The present one substantiates its theoretical underpinnings and its acclimatization in the actual world - in a client’s universe, offers a critique, and its internal reverberations that I observe unfolding in myself.

Kurt Lewin’s concept of *contemporaneity, interdependence and complexity*, are the understructure of the model steeped in the *Rogerian* sense of *Congruency*. (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3)

Field Theory in Social Science, states in principle, when looking at an individual’s *field or life space*, the observed behavior (B) is a function of the person (P) and the environment (E), i.e. B = f (P, E).

The model believes that behavior depends on neither the past nor on the future but on the present field - this aspect is documented in Lewin’s theory, “*this present field has a certain time-depth. It includes the “psychological past,” “psychological present,” and “psychological future” which constitute one of the dimensions of the life space existing at a given time.*”

Interestingly, Astrophysicists, Geneticists, Cyberneticists, Microbiologists, Neuroscientists and Neuroimmunohistobiologists of today would all agree!

In an absolute elemental stage, a physicist sees the world as a giant void with atoms in them. Thus technically form (as we usually understand it - solid, liquid, gas) does not exist, and there is no linear sequence to *being*. You just are as much a part of the animate world around you as the inanimate, at a cellular level. In Ecology of the mind, Gregory Bateson said just because the *hand faces resistance in inserting itself in a matter we label as solid, does not accurately articulate the correct differences in us and the table*. If we know that at a basic unit, we are made up of the same atomic structure, then the awareness of this interrelationship presents a crisis of perception, does it not?

In outward adherence to subsistence, our bodies or man made structures show signs that we use verbal syntax to express time - for instance - birth, growth, fruition, depletion, gradual destruction, birth from destruction. For Mother Nature, its cyclical. There is a construct of cosmos amidst the *interdependence* between space and mass. On this planet an observable evolutionary process encompasses creation, preservation and destruction, *all at once*, performing their symphonies at multiple levels, as it interacts with a grander scheme of the environment. So naturally does the human, in her designed system of society, with subsystems of family, community, organization. Viewing an undesirable outcome (the *why* of the need for a coach) that repetitively recur becomes the locus of attention.
It is the pattern of *incongruence* (Fig 4) that we see in a certain context where it seems to manifest enough times for a merit of the label “a repeatedly observed pattern.”

In isolation, one could take a reductionist view and analyze the public persona- and there are numerous theories that are very effective in eradicating the symptoms, at least for a while. It’s just that they go away to surface elsewhere - in a different *form*; with different *noise*; different *context*; and a different *vernacular*. The solution becomes the problem, and the interaction of symptoms become more difficult to read. It further cues us to a fluent ambit where multiple points of origin make the map of causality. This directly affects the internal ‘*actualizing tendency*’ that Rogers speaks of in his Client Centered therapy. That in turn colors the understanding of the coach when the client speaks from her *zone of mediation where meaning is made*. An artful investigator asks at this point: yes, but does the Coach get the meaning making mechanism of the client?

The Model of Congruency supposes that the client is not insane and that each behavior is *meaningful within the context*. It also believes that the client is deeply resourceful, self-aware, with a healthy instinct for survival (with *Unconditional Positive Regard*). It considers the resistance from the client a vital slice of data about her thinking-feeling-meaning spectrum, about this world, and her place in it. These reckonings inform the *process* (Fig 5) that becomes the functional crucible. Achad Haam speaks of a certain *slavery within freedom*. It mounts to an unwitting obedience to anchors, emotional and intellectual, that drive our meaning system. Without understanding the client’s *Golden Rule (what is right)* one cannot progress beyond a cognitive colloquy. For instance, we know health is critical, yet bow to processed food with chemicals that are noxious! Obesity has become America’s largest threat, and is set to topple as #1 reason for *avoidable mortality with preventive care!* From cancer.

So, who is the problem - the obese human or the system she lives in? *Her meaning model? Her self regulation? Her temperamental reasons? Her embeddedness in the choices that operate out of her shadows? Where does this trail lead?* A key point is to remember the fine line between elephant in the room (psychopathology) and your relationship to it as a coach.

The model of Congruency represents my view of the world. The view of my client will be different and just as unique. For a brief time that our lives intersect on an even keel for an identified range of goals. Lewin has an interesting diagram of direct and indirect routes we take to reach the same destination (Fig 6).
In the case of the Congruent model, the client’s universe and its meaning making model would guide the application. The intent is to arrive at self-sufficiency and self-generative competence by the end of the process - be it recognizing choices, navigating consequences, adapting healthily, permitting - discerning-exercising influence of / over the environment and then etching the capabilities within her and her milieu to generate alternate versions of desirable reality.

The need for individuation of the client is held in high esteem. Unconditional Positive Regard (UPR) is a key tenet. Schein’s truism, people don’t mind change; they just don’t want others to change them ....is the key - to reframe the change process as a helping process and to turn the change target into a client. It holds water, be it a consulting or a coaching process. Whether the aim is transformation or status quo (fig 7) the model will be able to uphold its application and its structural flexibility to assimilate the client’s organic reality and operate with the values that hold ground in their internal system’s hierarchy of needs and order, communication and control.
In order to arrive at what you are not;
You must go through the way in which you are not.
And what you do not know is the only thing you know
And what you own is what you do not own
And where you are is where you are not.

TS Eliot

B = F (P, E)

The Story and its lessons

Background:
I was honored to be welcomed into my client’s universe. I met her as a part of my support group where we were learning the process of a 360 perspective. I have her permission to share the overall context of the story, my application of the model and its consequences. In her external world, she is one of the most successful, highly functional, highly ambitious senior geneticist working with Penn Medicine.

Initial hypotheses:
I rounded up to her world being right on the edge of chaos, teetering on bare thin line of her desperate need to believe in normality. She was recreating the familiar pattern of scarcity, self-reproach, over-responsibility and utter self-deprecation that she had known as a child in her family of origin. The story of her life is one that Janet Woititz, the author of Adult Children of Alcoholics, writes is the norm, for all families that are still reeling with alcoholism and substance abuse by either parent. She was born into this reality, and in it she experienced traumatic paucity of care and nourishment, physically, emotionally and intellectually. While this had resulted in a congenital disorder, it was nothing compared to the slew of psychological ones that continued to plague her adolescent and adult life.
Yes, therapy had made its dent, yet, only slight. It was abandoned. It was during her brief therapeutic recovery my client made intellectual connections between repressed memories and her vague sense of perpetual foreboding; constant sense of catastrophe in every minor incident; projection of shame and guilt in her interaction with others in her world - yet she literally lived and carried herself around as if apologizing for existing.

All operated within this context, and that explained her constant state of terror! That the 360 exercise would exorcise all the demons in the closet and the floodgates would open and destroy her and whatever little, precious stability, she believed existed in her current life. Everyone will know that she is not real and she is something that everyone should be ashamed of. Acutely isolated, and deeply pained, she maintained a facade of “oh! I am ok, it’ll pass,” her life was screaming for help. In all of it, she juggled 3 jobs and her roles as a mother, spouse, friend, and colleague.

Going in:

I did not know then that I would end up being her choice for a coach. I was just plain concerned for I sensed something else, deeper. Her first line when she met me after having missed the second day of Rod’s class: “I am terrified...I’ll never be able to catch up...oh! I so wanted to graduate on time...this is so important...oh! I am terrified.”

Eventually through that conversation as I asked her about the meaning of her terror, she revealed that she has a learning disability and cannot hear and respond to verbal or densely written instructions well, so she needs to draw every link, every connection. Her terror at missing a day long of download in a class hyped to be “very heavy and arduous” made complete sense. Its one of the many instances prior to the initiation of our actual coaching relationship.

My journal entries reflect numerous instances of her fearsome intellect, her mastery at sensing and reading people, her empathic sensitivity, her natural sense of balance...these and other strengths that somehow she never acknowledged.

“ I am never going to be good enough” was the most frequently aired sentiment. Early in my relationship, I observed that she responded well to dissociation, so with her I’d automatically get into describing any undesirable feeling in third person. Then, we began to be purposeful about this when the coaching sessions became a near certainty.

My model, its technique, method and background needed to be synched with her operant reality. Thus, everything was co-created. You’ll sense from the hand drawn maps, that accompany each phase of our interaction, in deeply functional way.
I followed the whole process of getting her to articulate and conduct a thought experiment for her gestation, once I presented the model and explained its genesis. She wasn’t too high on theoretical narrative, but was very curious about the meaning-feeling based frame (a prototype) that I had created, for her, by combining strands of thoughts from Carl Jung, Robert Kegan, Kurt Lewin and Erik de Haans. We walked by Schuylkill and calibrated our understanding of what we were about to do, a sunset ahead of our first coaching session.

The 360 report was in, and she knew the beauty-and-the-beast of it. Here is where I deviated in my method from the rest of the class. I needed her fully, in a place that was sacred and safe for both of us. I was as cautious as her, and thus my heart raced when she loved the spot I picked. Room#222, second floor, Fisher Bennett. It was empty on Sunday. We both came out different four hours later.

I will present just the first session, in slight detail, which is of complete relevance: Themes at home, at work, in love:

I. Lack of Self Care

II. Overdrive for perfection, its never good enough

III. Overworked with no boundary for her own time

The model in its motion (as it moved fluidly through the stages):

The curtain raiser came in few minutes of initial talk and she went deep into the heart of the matter. She admitted that she may have a drinking problem herself! I wanted to call it off, right then. Yet, I knew there was a way to deal with the structure of what lay in front of us. She hadn’t had breakfast, and you can’t have critical conversations hungry. Thus with food in her belly, we drew ourselves near the blackboard that ran across the walls of the room. Everything that happened that day: the story in the hand drawn map is absolutely absorbing. I made it as she wrote and wrote on the board in a near frenzy. I have her written permission to share 2-3 pages of the several, with you, for this paper and its intent. (ref: supplementary data)
**Structural sequence:**

I. Divided the room spatially. The far end of the room (opposite the blackboard) was the space to stand and detect pattern and meaning. The other half (flanked by the blackboard) was the zone to draw and write.

II. On the board: I created a starting frame, and drew the life line of my client’s life as if God almighty was talking and was in full control. The view was that everything was intentional and a consequence of choices my client made after she became a responsible adult. She wrote what the world meant and how it felt at different age junctions as it comes to her. I let her bracket age and fill up the rest.

III. Then, after drawing her whole life, punctuated by events, meanings and feelings, till the present moment, she walked back to the end of the room, and together we detected the patterns. What surfaced, quintessentially, was that she was still (unwittingly) perpetuating the cycle of shame, anger, embarrassment, conflict avoidance and making a martyr out herself at each possible instant. This was a recurring pattern at work, home, and in her relationship with her husband.

IV. Thus began the reframing with her preferred lens of reflection: what now? Do we wish to replace these? If yes, what do we replace these feelings with? What do we choose to feel? Can this ability to repeat the pattern be made to work to our advantage? Can we transform this into a virtuous cycle with positive affirmations and behavior? What would be the scaffolding needed to sustain the pattern? How will be constantly aware of our habits? What somatic signs must we watch out for? What do we do when we succeed at each tiny attempt? How do we reinforce our resolve? What is the new frame? What will be the metaphor, henceforth?

After that, my client arrived at the metaphor of a **mighty river**. One that has depth, calmness, quiet confidence, and moves with a state of grace. Where she has forgiven herself, her past and herself; where she begins to heal, slowly, the wounds of time. Her face looked 10 years younger for she kept saying *Oh God! why didn’t I see this before...I was destroying myself!!*

What gave my heart solace is that her language had already moved to past tense and she was using much future tense in her reflections. Her choices seemed to have opened up. Her energy levels were unusually high as was her concentration. She made the blackboard her canvas and there she arrived at her future vision of her life. She worked out the very initial whats, hows, whens, what ifs. Then, we rested. This took 4 hours. We completed our first coaching session, and achieved a major breakthrough.
Figure 5:

The Process

1. Check for Congruence
2. Case for Change
3. Establish an Anchor
4. Create a Vehicles’ Scaffold
5. Maye-Dounsel/J/Murphy’s Laws
6. Thought Experiments
7. Review that!
8. Go LIVE
9. ID

Model of Congruency
Thus far:

The remaining sessions focussed on her work agenda, professional demeanor, setting of boundaries for herself and the various roles she wore, her realm of relationships. We are still working on it, and it goes beyond this semester. I anticipate few more months of work before she is ready to end the coaching sequence. At this stage, everything is following a deliberate, intentional and mindful adherence to her commitments.

After Action Review:

Each session completed, and we kept our pact of reviewing her case as coaches. I present our joint commentaries as we evaluated the model:

1) The choices manifest through the Self of the client. Despite being a social creature, my client had to make these decisions alone

2) The choices operate in a continuum. They often coalesce, with a primary choices emerging out of the need of the context. A secondary or tertiary voice is always present

3) The more mindful my client was learning to become, the more unselfconscious were segues into the tributaries of our exploration, she was learning to apply the steps as her own coach and as a human donning just as many roles

4) The application of model transcended the realm of coaching, and encompassed the realm of being. Mere profane application will be superfluous; it asserts a wholesomeness only when the client fully internalizes it and becomes alive to its design and content, can it become a part of her gestalt.

Robert Kegan
The Critique

I wondered with my client, as fellow-coaches, on the steps, theories, techniques, frames that worked well; how the model can be honed in multitude of context, especially competing ones. I will not be a Nietzsch but I will not gloss over this step:

1) **Self as an instrument**: The phenomena of transference and counter-transference is fascinating. Had I not been into wool gathering, and holding theaters in my mental chambers, I would not know to visualize the morphing of the transferred emotions as a disparate event, and get inevitably enmeshed in them. The ability to dissociate *my* theatre from that of *my client’s*; letting her voice chisel a unique entry in my emotional awareness, turned up the ante.

- Yet, there is always the danger of over-familiarity and a certain benign narcissism. That can lead you to make confirmation heuristics that end up winding up in frustrating cul-de-sacs. I have had to anchor each blink of an eye and long exhalation to stop myself from "*knowing ahead of turn.*"

- Ability to bypass my intellectual and emotional hyperlinks was a zone of serious conscious incompetence. Ability to waltz with my very vocal intuition posed a threat as well, for I often caught myself preempting her discoveries in my mental chambers. I had to slow down the whole sense of causality and saunter away from my personal beliefs and those of the groups that I belong to (e.g. *Karmic* circles of life and death; way of *being* in Buddhism). I had to listen and sync the *meaning* in her context.

- The parallel processing between my client and my role as a coach often jolted me. I could see her nearly getting me to validate her beliefs. Thank God for Sylvester!!! He squeaked and yelled and I froze internally for a split second before I exhaled and sustained my silent listening...my client moved on. As did I.

- The Model gains *prana* through the coach’s navigation. The inner processes of the coach must learn to be silently vigilant. It requires rehearsal of a different and sustained kind. The suppression, repression, ignoring tactics won’t work and your body will end up showing the nervous energy in ticks, lip licks, pen clicks, restless knee or facial punctuations. The pressure to be in the *role* of a coach and its stereotypes could be an urge too!

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*Prana - a term in yoga for breath of life*
2) The **Rogerian Unconditional Positive Regard** is a constant continuum. The *person centered* approach creates an unmistakable veracity in your relationship with your client and the members in her orbit. Yet, it needs supplementary scaffolding. Application of tenets from Cognitive Behavior Theory, Cognitive Dissonance Theory, Family Systems, Psychodynamic theory and Psychiatric questioning bolstered the resilience of the model. As much as they added, they also posed their own limitations. For example, when looking at yourself as a part of the whole, and if the whole is fairly large in the client’s mind, she can indulge in a cognitive process that will foster learned helplessness and dependency. It would behoove a practitioner to astutely internalize the internal schematics of the theories with their methods and ways of looking at data…it always operates under the overarching ethic of **do no harm**. I am at a developmental stage of learning and have years before me, academic reinforcement by way of research in practical application is an imperative. I used Clayton Alderfer’s Theory centered application for professionals. *(ref: supplementary data)*

3) The **nascency** of the Meaning-Feeling framework showed up in many places as I stood on the transient border of human psyche and the endless trails in her wilderness. Alone in the classroom with my client, I was distracted by my own fleeting sense of inadequacy, “...I am not a therapist..do not know this...Why am I feeling confused...she (client) is opening up the whirlpools of her life...its her story..why am I thinking this way? Whose need is this?? (silence)...ok, this need is mine and not my client’s so stay still. She knows that I am her fellow classmate who is operating as a coach-in-making, and our teachers have gone blue telling us the difference (coaching versus therapy). Stay where you are and let her walk the story of her life. See your framework, apply what you know for certain, and see if it carries the weight.” Reading books on therapy and the publications of the American Psychological Association has granted deep respect for the prodigious danger of forgetting the distinction. I am still working through this as I turn to copious literature where various frames can help nourish the need of my client in a productive way. I know in another 6 months, the model would have matured further, and come to coexist with all other diagnostic tools that I am learning simultaneously in context of own personal evolution and understanding of this world where I share life with many in this noble craft.
“We recognize that the poet or even the musician must find some sort of ‘external’ equivalents for their internal experiences. So too must the draughtsman; but the strength of the position or the difficulty he has to face, according to one’s viewpoint, is that the draughtsman’s external equivalents acquire an objectivity from drawing surface and substance even whilst he is shaping them. They take on an independence...this objectivity will always compare itself to the subject’s (client) claim to external reality...will always challenge the artist, requiring things of him which are not required of the poet or the musician....(artist) is driven either by his own critical faculty or by the demands of his patron (client) to complete the conceptual realization of a motive in a way which can do - and has frequently done - violence to the truth of his inner feelings. ...this has become the ideal of the whole of nonfigurative art in the west - to reach the “essential” by omission of the “inessential”....this must measure up to our ontological vision”

The appreciation of the arts / Drawing / Philip Rawson (1969)

As a learner, the metaphor that unerringly draws the relationship and meaning to all that I have poured is Rhythm. It has twin aspects - first, as a unit of measure and equivalent to the musical metronome, tells me the work is unified and intelligible. Second, the rhythmic interventions shape my work, riding through me, its chief instrument, as I apply what I learn, contemplate my sense of coherence - the very tenor of my being is emergent in it’s meaning. I sometimes am the medium, sometimes the message, and at times the audience too.

In close friendship with rhythm is Space that I have begun to sense. They are both interdependent, the one does not exist without the other. Space is not a thing to be grasped, neither is it a mystical entity. The rhythms play out the patterns in space. That is as much within as without. There is a blur that reminds me of the boundary but I travel across, inside and outside of me. For perspective, I oft head back to the central point from where I had begun to read my space - there I can see the contours better, and then I zoom back out again to see the overlaps and back-steps, when one outline of a notion crosses another. At that cloverleaf, they contradict, juxtapose, coalesce and join in a fluid equipoise.
There are many characteristic idiosyncrasies that I am letting go and they, of me; all of mutual accord. Quite akin to an iambic pentameter that lets go of the 6th syllable it no longer needs and it isn’t that part of the poem anymore. It did what it had to, when it had to. Now, its purpose is over. It must rest, as must I. The bargain of my soul has expired its statute of limitations. They no longer own me, and I am not anyone’s mortgaged mind. My existence and essence breathe in this space. I am as free as I let myself be.

There is an unvarnished awareness of my limitations - in a clearer, kinder, keener way - as are my strengths. I am becoming a person of an altered kind. The weltanschauung (world view) seems to mutate and organize itself, with indeed no conscious help from me. I often find myself peering, poetically askance, for I cannot yet name this amorphous state of my being. I am learning to flow with the ‘-ness’ of it. That unnamed state has a redolent grandeur that I feel inside. The metaphors will change as I will transform; yet in the now they become my leitmotifs and give me a deep sense of evolutionary truce.
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