

On Metamorphosis: Experiencing and Embodiment

Some Remarks on Process-orientation in
Counselling, Coaching and
Psychotherapy

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Abstract

This paper explores the interplay of interaction, change, and stability in personal and organisational contexts, emphasising the importance of relationship and embodiment in facilitating change from the vantage point of humanistic psychology. Individual transformation labelled as metamorphosis is transposing the state of being as second-order change in comparison to alter states as first-order change. A focus on epistemology in psychology is needed how we come to knowledge regarding human behaviour, mental and experiential processes. Thus it embrace the foundations of psychology as a science, paying attention to what constitutes valid evidence beyond common sense rationalism in order to investigate a new understanding of human behaviour. Here the contribution of Gregory Bateson (1904-1980) is delivering an access path towards the unfamiliar realms for someone trying to understand the complexity of human behaviour. The groundbreaking work of Paul Watzlawick et al (2011) in their book 'Pragmatics of human Behaviour' can be viewed a substantial 'game changer' related to a creative thinking in theoretic and applied psychology. A long-standing collaboration between Carl Rogers and Eugene Gendlin at the University of Chicago paved the way for the foundation of the Person-centred and experiential-oriented approach in the the field of counselling, coaching and psychotherapy. The core issues and observations here are focusing on two crucial processes in relating to an alter ego: 'I-you' (Rogers 1959) and 'I-me' (1962) regarding personal development and therapeutic change. This is widely known as 'First-person approach', which encompass a systemic-oriented and experiential-oriented personal inquiry into one's own consciously accessible experience in private and professional life. A further crucial point in that undertaking might be as well a thoughtful study of Eugene Gendlin's 'Process Model' (1997) and

'Philosophy of the Implicit' (2017). An added value here might be the 'Buddhist Approach to Psychology' (Trungpa 2005). Therefore in this viewpoint an overall reference is made to basics of humanistic psychology, systemic and cybernetic perspectives and pragmatics of human behaviour.

Keywords

Humanistic Psychology, Epistemology, Meta-Communication, Mind and Body, Experiencing/Focusing, Philosophy of the Implicit

Introduction

Life requires interaction on all levels, both inter- and intra-personal. It applies to people as well as organisations, that stability (sustainability) and change (development) continuously move structurally and dynamically in an operable exchange. Consistency and change offer only one temporal access point and that is the respective moment. Humanistic psychology calls this the here-and-now principle. With this perspective, the past can be repaired and the future might be prepared in a different way, beyond established repetitive routines and habitual patterns.

Within the framework of psychotherapy research, Carl Rogers (2003) and Eugene Gendlin (1997, 2017) defined the necessary and sufficient conditions for change, which apply independently of therapeutic schools and methods: empathy, unconditional positive regard as well as congruence. Another condition that such a relationship takes hold on and has an effect requires an engagement with the other person and oneself; authenticity and openness to one's own thoughts,

feelings and bodily felt resonating related in dealing with another person. This applies to those seeking advice and professional support alike.

Here is where the wheat is separated from the chaff: professional, more in-depth work with others is not possible without ongoing efforts to understand oneself in the related encounters. Unconditional positive regard, empathy and authenticity will guide to an altered understanding of one's own narratives and its structural and dynamical influences, continuously observable in the present moment. It will become evident, that the conditions of change related to the foundation of the self are corresponding to those of its development.

Humanistic Psychology

Humanistic psychology has developed since the first half of the last century as a reply to the deterministic and mechanical understanding of human beings in psychoanalysis and especially in the cognitive behavioural approaches (behaviourism). Both, in the classical psychoanalysis and in cognitive behavioural therapy the question about what makes the individual different from other living beings is neglected or ignored. In addition and in definition to the conception of human beings as a 'black box' in behaviourism and as a physiological entity driven by uncontrolled impulses or instincts in Freud's psychoanalysis, humanistic psychology is defined by acknowledging the inherent human. Thereby it sets the specific human of the individual in the main focus of all the considerations and observations. Thus, humanistic psychology is rooted in existential philosophy, which has evolved since the 20th century and is linked to Søren Kierkegaard in Denmark and in the frame of phenomenology to Wilhelm Dilthey and Edmund Husserl in Germany.

At the same time, according to the circumstances and possibilities, we examine the aspects mentioned so far as Experiencing (later since 1975 defined as Focusing) developed by the Viennese philosopher, psychologist and psychotherapist Eugene Gendlin, who - after his family fled Vienna from the Nazis - later became a professor at the University of Chicago, where he collaborated with Carl Rogers, the co-founder of humanistic psychology. Both shared the desire to strengthen people, to support their self-development in order to pave the way for desired changes in life.

The main human state is defined as freedom of fundamental decision-making implicating the opportunity of self-realisation of the individual, emphasising the development of personal capabilities within the frame of the society and its social conditions. Thereby the research of creativity and self-realisation lay the cornerstone of humanistic psychology, which in particular Abraham Maslow (1908-1970) made a subject of his studies.

Through logical thinking, self-reflection and presence of awareness the individual alienates from other animate beings and hence differs from animals: human beings incorporate both: animalistic instincts and rationality. Instinctive motives of man do not any longer determine entirely his experience and behaviour; the individual consequently gains the freedom of decision-making:

1. Loss of the animalistic character and instincts
2. Future-oriented and ceaseless productivity
3. Awareness of time limits regarding his span of life
4. Span between potentials and their realisation
5. Existential desolation and existential loneliness
6. Freedom of decision-making and creative self-realisation

As a 'third force', alongside with psychoanalysis and behaviourism, humanistic psychology in difference to the topographic model of the psychoanalysis ('ego'-'id'-'superego'), places the 'self' of the individual in the centre of interest and practice, and is focused on the present, while at the same time is process- and future-oriented. Narrow scientific and deterministically oriented thinking - nowadays so-called evidence based - basically neglects the human being as an individual person determining it's own fate. That reduces a human being to the chemical, neurobiological and physiological processes, which in no case can appropriately or correctly explain the individual. Humanistic psychology is focused on the creative possibilities of the development of an individual and thus gets over and ignores the somehow pessimistic attitude of psychoanalysis and the mechanical, adaptive thinking of behaviourism and cognitive science.

There are scientists - many of which emigrated to America from Nazi Germany - like Charlotte Bühler, Abraham Maslow, Erich Fromm, Fritz Perls and Eugene Gendlin who, like Carl Rogers, fundamentally reformed the image of man in psychology and then founded consequently in 1962 the Association of Humanistic Psychology. The central assumptions of humanistic psychology are defined as follows:

1. Individual experience is the main focus not theorising or searching for objectivity
2. Non-reductionism emphasising the basic human abilities related to self-actualisation and creativity
3. Meaningfulness in the sense that theory and research must be reasonable related to the core question if this all makes sense for human existence and
4. Dignity as the aim to support those forces, which safeguard a dignified life of a human being.

It was particularly Carl Rogers (1902-1987), who in the thirties of the last century argued against the 'zeitgeist' and made processes of human experience and behaviour the main subject of his scientific investigations at the University of Chicago. Carl Rogers and Eugene Gendlin view an individual as a living system that is in an ongoing interaction with his social environment and with himself, therefore adjusts and changes constantly. Carl Rogers (1959) defined this as a reproductive process, as an inherent force of the organism, which is characterised as a tendency towards self-actualisation. That is the vital force, biological driven, that motivates human beings and is to be considered as a self-supporting and self-sustainable principle of the organism.

The individual's harmonic and creative development is conditioned by the structure and dynamic of the self-boundaries that exert a restrictive influence concerning the tendency of self-actualisation of the organism. The adult self reflects the personal history and the connectedness with the society of the individual. Therefore this considers the development of the self and personality in connection with the experience in childhood and youth.

The experience acquired in one's childhood in the family and social environment with its significant peer groups as well as the society play a relevant role in understanding the development of the structure and dynamic of the 'self', that already was developed structurally and formed in one's childhood, while emerging in everyday encounters and relationships.

At the same time the experience and behaviour in the concrete interactions with other people are keys in understanding both one's own and common limitations and potentials. Autonomy and the ability to relate to others are shaped during the development of one's personal upbringing and consequently manifesting themselves in significant moments of one's private and professional life.

Thus we have received a pattern and model of an individual enjoying a substantial autonomy of decision-making, even when the individual at the beginning of his lifetime gets totally dependent on his environment.

Similarly, as a matter of fact, the human beings remain all their life in a social dependency, which in the best case promotes his self-actualisation, autonomy, communication abilities and search for personal meaningfulness.

Hereupon humanistic psychology emphasises the inseparable unity of the individual. This bilaterally configures influences bodily, cognitive and emotional processes of the experience and behaviour. Thus logically the individual and his organism are characterised as a psychosomatic entity, a unity of mind and body. The individual's perception in the frame of humanistic psychology is present-oriented, optimistic and focused on developing latent potentials in the future. The self-determination of human beings, the freedom of decision-making and their responsibility, dignity as well as well searching for meaningfulness in their life determine the relationships with other people both in private and professional spheres. By constantly referring to their own experience at any moment of their existence comprise the ability to learn and understand from the past and being able to arrange the future creatively. The individual is viewed as a living bodily process and acting ongoing in an 'I-you' interactive field (Carl Rogers) as well as in an 'I-me' relationship with oneself (Eugene Gendlin).

Humanistic psychology recognises that though human beings are potentially capable of creativity and self-realisation, these capabilities and potentials are sometimes nevertheless weakly expressed and modified by material and social conditions as well as by the particular society or political system (Heuman 2011).

Abraham Maslow (1970) on the basis of his studies and researches developed a hierarchic theory of personality and motivation. The essence of his motivation theory distinguishes basic and meta needs. The latter can be

developed only in case the former ones have been met. Unsatisfied basic needs bring about a deficiency and low motivation, which tends to vanish, while its elimination can only give rise to the meta needs.

Meta needs arise only if there is individually no lack of basic needs. Provided that there are social, individual and society related conditions to meet the basic needs, a personal challenge and sometimes controversy with the creative aspects of the tendency towards self-realisation starts.

Abraham Maslow's scientific work and his studies of human beings, who managed to design their lives in a self-determined and creative way, guided him to further logical conclusions that the individual actually dwells in two radically contradicting states of consciousness, which he defines as deficiency-oriented and growth-oriented.

The deficiency-oriented motivation originates from the unsatisfied basic needs and involves (see chart below in conclusions):

1. Physiological needs
2. Safety needs
3. Social needs and
4. Self-esteem needs.

The meta needs or growth-oriented needs are characterised as follows:

1. Aesthetic needs
2. Potential of self-actualisation and
3. Strive for self-realisation

Human beings under conditions of the deficiency motivation are interested merely in covering the basic needs, for only the growth-oriented existential motivation can push open the door of their own life purpose and enable self-realisation as postulated by humanistic psychology.

Innumerable conclusions can be drawn and profound knowledge regarding learning and teaching can be acquired, which provide practical recommendations for the realisation of learning and teaching processes. Thus, with the help of the knowledge of humanistic psychology, an unduly too often investigated search for rationalistic cause-oriented thinking are substituted with a search for solution-oriented thinking.

Meta-Communication

Gregory Bateson's magical formula of content and frame can be explored in everyday life: every communicative act simultaneously has a content and a relationship aspect. Paul Watzlawick (2011) speaks to this in his book 'Pragmatics of Human Communication', that has shaped the 'zeitgeist' of the last few decades and is now part of the standard repertoire for everyone, who is working with people. At the same time, an authentic relationship described by humanistic psychotherapy - empathy, unconditional positive regard and congruence - are the inter- and intra-personal 'fuel' or basic requirements that open the door for change and transformation.

Relationship defined as a mutually interdependent and carrying forward processes - whereby the path is the goal - transcend methods, techniques and rational, theoretical assumptions. Beyond ideologies of superiority, such a lived relationship leads to changes in general. In addition, a 'change through understanding' and being able to authentically engage in a relationship - depth psychology speaks of the ability for introspection - is only possible, if a bodily felt resonance is taken into account. Cognitive behavioural therapy (Greenberg et al 2014) now takes this into account and emphasises the importance of embodiment - without anchoring by experiencing a bodily felt

resonance, cognitive strategies and appeals to reason will lead eventually in known patterns, repeating habitual patterns.

With this knowledge, a meta-principle can be stated: the 'how' dominates the 'what', the relationship aspect gives the content its essential, individual meaning. A fixation on the ratio, reason alone does not lead to any lasting changes. For participants, patterns that lead to crisis and illness are served without making an effort to friendship themselves or to encompass their own bodily resonance. Summarised the perspective and the frame are providing the meaning of a situation. Moreover, thinking that binary or dichotomous approaches are contributing to solutions is utmost questionable. Does it make sense to try this in order to step into unfamiliar territory?

When it comes to ingrained processes, routines and patterns, this interweaves with a dual world view (e.g. 'yes-no', 'right-wrong', 'pleasant-unpleasant'), where all problems and solutions are binary in nature. We call it the 'Samsara principle' leaning on Buddhist psychology that describes this duality trap as samsara from which there is no way out if an exclusively binary or polarised thinking in feeling, sensation and action is maintained. Thus, suffering, blockage and despair would be inevitable, since it is based on polarising like 'black-and-white' or 'either-or-thinking'. Passion, aggression and ignorance are the underlying core issues in that frame of reference (Trungpa 2005).

The quote that has meanwhile become a well-known saying, 'when the solution is the problem', proves often true. Against this background, in workshops and coaching we strive for an 'as-well-as' approach and view an 'either-or' as a 'trap', which unfortunately all too often leads into a dead end.

An experiment: What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the following: "In everyday life we often function in a dual mode of 'yes or no', 'right or wrong' and 'pleasant or unpleasant' - is there another option?" Focus inwardly with your attention to your first reaction, hold on to it and let yourself be surprised.

Before we come to the practical implementation, regardless of intellectual requirements, an 'entrance ticket' must be purchased, as a minimum level of non-existent identification with an ongoing topic. What does that mean? If circumstances - like a worry about something or a defined problem - has merged with me, it doesn't work because in such a state I can no longer relate to the given. There must be a 'freedom of thoughts, feelings or sensations', which make it possible to perceive, observe and resonate.

It takes the willingness to engage with one's own 'inner bodily anchored resonance', which can be observed with an inwardly oriented attention. If I remain in a state of identification and do not experience that I can do anything about it, I only react or do not react at all, if the latter is possible in general: I cannot 'not-communicate'. So, I remain internally and externally dependent and then the whole thing does what it wants with me. This is where the 'law of least resistance' comes into play or: 'If you don't take life into your own hands, life will do what it wants with you and you won't do what you can with life.'

One solution is to bring these supposedly mutually exclusive polarities together and thereby make the promise of 'both-and-also' concretely verifiable. How this might be working out? I have to experience it in order to understand or sense how it operates and where it leads. It is only through experiencing that we can begin to get an inkling or understanding. Take two opposites and focus on them

internally without wanting to make a difference or changing anything. You will find that a 'self-tuning-process' sets in!

A 'both-and-as-well-as' removes being caught in two contradictory opposing polarities. In the end it all depends on your own vantage point. This is the beginning of the path of 'working on yourself - from the known to the unknown'.

Our procedures aim to make suggestions individually and concretely verifiable, how to bring the personal with the professional in an acceptable balance, so that friction and the associated energy losses are reduced or eliminated. If this will be successful, the basis is created for pursuing a sustainable handling in a way that is bearable and also includes creative vitality. 'If you do what you enjoy, you won't have to work your whole life' is a saying that wants to be thoroughly considered.

The common thread in this work on and with oneself thus connects the already mentioned personal with the relevant, professional aspects of communication theory and complements other offers e.g. such as burnout prevention, resilience, meta-communication, ethical imperative as well as negotiation techniques.

Meta-communication includes understanding the structure and dynamics of content and the respective possible perspectives and frames of reference, described by Gregory Bateson (1972, 1980). Together with Heinz von Foerster (2003) and others, they were the founding fathers and scientists of a cybernetic and systemic understanding of human experience and behaviour. Furthermore and at the same time, effective and systemically well-founded work with people is only possible if an authentic relationship is offered and can be perceived by both people involved into a mutually agreed upon relationship.

Heinz von Foerster's 'ethical imperative' states, that we can strive to constantly create more opportunities for actions than sometimes appear to be available at the first glance. This aims at 'out-of-the-box' thinking or in other words 'making-the-pie-bigger' than it presents itself. We are concentrating on the daily bread of professional orientation, namely developing constructive attitudes, ensuring creative personal responsibility and striving for solution-oriented undertaking.

Business behaviour is mainly based on knowledge and rational perspectives but should be amplified by professional empathy. What does professional empathy implies? It is more significant in the interaction with the social and business partners what and how my counterpart understands what I have said or meant, sometimes independently from what I really want to tell him. In no case I can assume that my companion the same way perceives my comments, remarks or statements as I have meant. It becomes especially obvious when there are different opinions, arising conflicts and not bridgeable judgments regarding the same matter. If during an interactive event it occurs that one partner fails or does not want to understand the other one, so it's time to stop and consider the situation. There is a possibility to place oneself in the position of the other one and to try looking at the whole situation from his vantage point. Thus both have to slip into the shoes of the other person in order to move forward concerning a certain issue. This is precisely what professional empathy means.

Sometimes the communication with others happens to be impossible because these skills and abilities are restricted by one's own knowledge and one's own state of mind. The extent one can become aware of it, observe it less subjectively and more reflectively will show up as a necessary and

professional attitude towards influencing it intentionally and solution-oriented.

1. You must first check and observe yourself. If you do not truly want to understand others or if you are insincere, professional empathy will be not possible or work.

2. Communication is more than words. You must be sensitive to times when the expressed thoughts and feelings are not congruent. You must be sensible for the non-verbal signals as well as for the verbal ones.

3. Take your time in order not to react too quickly or inattentively to inaccurate statements of fact. Listen carefully to the feelings and emotions beneath the statements before rushing into correct facts.

4. You must allow the person to express the emotional or individual truth, which may include feelings about you. You must be ready to explore openly such a feedback.

Paul Watzlawick et al (2011) wrote one of the most influential books of the last century in psychology and related fields. His 5 axioms concerning fundamental aspects of human communication are so to say the core of interactive skills both in the private and professional field:

1. 'One cannot not communicate.' This simply means that every behaviour or 'non-behaviour' such as keeping silence is highly communicative.

2. 'Every communication has a content and a relationship aspect such that the latter classifies the former and is therefore a meta-communication.' It's sometimes more informative and important how we speak then what we are talking about.

3. 'The nature of a relationship is contingent upon the punctuation of communicational sequences between the communicants. Every communication consists of a sequence of events.' Nothing happens out of

nothing. This axiom says that the outcome depends on where we start to observe and how we construct the sequence. The outcome such as who is responsible e.g. depends on the events taken into the frame of observation.

4. 'Human beings communicate both digitally and analogically. Digital language has a highly complex and powerful logical syntax but lacks adequate semantics in the field of relationship, while analogical language possesses the semantics but has no adequate syntax for the unambiguous definition of the nature of relationship.' For example, a digital watch gives us an exact time but the analogue watches more the feeling of time. In sports, the digital result of a race gives a clear order, whereas the photography of the finish gives a very different thus an analogical impression.

5. Interaction is defined as symmetrical and complementary. Interactions are on one hand based on equality (symmetrical) or on the other hand unbalanced in power (complementary). Examples might be escalating conflicts (symmetrical) and co-dependence in a relationship (complementary).

However we'd like to use this opportunity to introduce 'active listening' and 'saying back' as core communicative skills, firmly grounded on an appropriate attitude. Professional empathy cannot unfold without attentive or mindful listening. This so-called 'active listening' and 'saying back' are necessary and significant in two ways, i.e. you should be able listening to yourself, and so you'll find numerous reasons being open-minded regarding other people. You will never be able to understand other people if you do not pay attention in understanding yourself.

1. Listen patiently to what the other person has to say, even though you may believe it is wrong or irrelevant. Indicate simple acceptance or respect, which in no way means that you agree.
2. Limit the expression of you own views, since these may distract or limit what the other person wants to say.
3. Avoid direct questions and especially arguments about facts. Allow the other person to express her point of view.
4. Focus on the particular message and avoid trying to think about your next statement until the person is finishing reporting.
5. Strive to understand the feeling the person is expressing. Listen for what is not said. Read in between the lines.
6. If necessary and in order to keep things going restate the other person's feeling and thinking briefly, but accurately. Here you simply serve as a mirror and encourage the other person to continue talking.
7. Try to ask only open-ended questions and avoid questions that can be answered by 'yes' or 'no' - 'how', 'when', 'where', 'what' instead of 'why'.

Additionally, referring to a 'train-the-trainer' framework, exercises and group assignments have to focus on the particular work environment in order to take into account the individual background of the participants. Therefore one must abandon a detailed description of assigned exercises and group tasks as a standardised manual. This, on the one hand, would contradict a 'tailor-made' approach and understanding. On the other hand, it will enable to prevent any stereotypes, non-reflected use of these experience-related and action-oriented rules and instructions. In case these exercises and instructions for an interactive oriented training do not consider a certain context, they aren't helpful as a powerful process-oriented toolbox.

Conclusion

The topics that are not addressed or talked about openly are often important ones. In addition, it is not what I say that is important, but what my counterpart draws or understand from it. It applies to all of us that sometimes we don't know what to do, how to act or decide. But nonetheless we have to understand that without an ownership approach, nothing essential will change and cannot solve without our active participation, while continuously staying in touch with our felt bodily resonance in that particular moment.

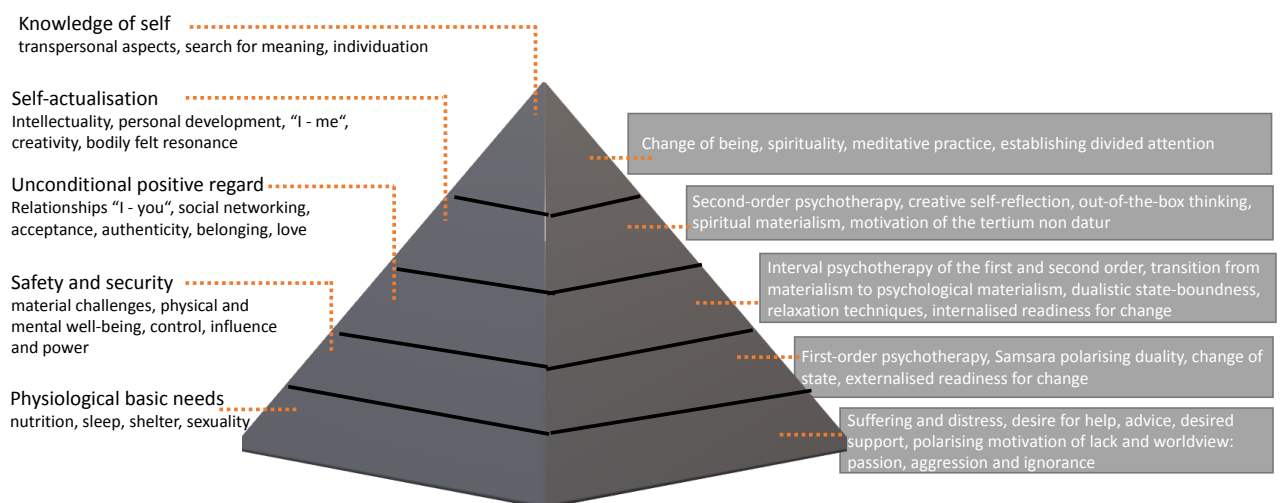
Thus it is important to see and understand that a constructive attitude and professional empathy in the workshops and encounters with others, as well as dealing continuously with one's own reacting and resonating as a response to what is perceived. It makes no sense and is not effective to deal mainly with the behaviour and externalising statements of others. Often diagnostic categories and statements in everyday life situations are reflecting one's own inability to deal with the given. In addition, these is only triggering off what is also a part of me - at least on the second thought: what is not a part of me cannot resonate in me. A profound knowledge of the structure and the dynamics of transference and countertransference belongs as well in one's own professional toolbox.

Nevertheless the crucial point will remain a bodily felt sense described by Eugene Gendlin as *Experiencing* (1962) and later on as *Focusing* (1978) in the frame of his 'Philosophy of the Implicit' (2017) and his principle of 'Interaction first' (Gendlin 2017).

Nowadays embodiment has received the accolade of cognitive behavioural therapy, although having been investigated and proven

already in studies on change processes in psychotherapy, counselling and coaching since the 1960s (Greenberg 2014).

An unsolicited advice as finishing off: always and everywhere strive to find your own voice in order to avoid sailing under the flag of someone else - and stay in touch with your bodily felt resonance.



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