

Chapter 9

The Interpersonal Relationship at Work: The Preconditions of Transformative Communication

I have learned, however, that realness or genuineness, or congruence—whatever term you wish to give it—is a fundamental basis for the best of communication.

Rogers (1980, p. 15)

This chapter focuses on:

- Factors that make up a constructive climate and why it is crucial
- Qualities and skills that facilitate a constructive climate and progress at work, including listening for understanding, a nonjudgmental attitude, respect, facilitative openness, and inclusion
- How these qualities are perceived by team/group members, what tendencies they usually invoke, and which problems may occur despite the constructive intent to provide these qualities at the workplace
- The directions managers and team members tend to develop in a person-centered climate
- What person-centered managers often struggle with, such as external regulations, conflicts between team members, lack of transparency of stakeholders, tight, rigid schedules, and an incompatible culture of the encompassing organizational unit or system
- Coherence, or lack thereof, between the organization's or project's objectives and person-centered attitudes.

9.1 Introduction

Much has been written about what furniture, shape, size, and arrangement of tables, room size, color, light, food, smell, etc., contribute to shaping the atmosphere of a room. Far more sophisticated, though perhaps less visible, is the contribution of people and their relationships on creating a constructive atmosphere. In this chapter, we shed some light on the oft concealed factor of interpersonal relationships and their essential contribution to keeping people motivated and making meetings and

Table 9.1 Directions of transformative communication

The direction of change is from	To an increase in
Rigid organizational structure	Flexible structures, based on flow of communication
Rigid policies	Policies interpreted according to particular challenges
Rigid personnel policies	Flexibility to account for unique situations
Personal considerations being discouraged	Personal considerations being encouraged
Individual achievement only encouraged	Group achievement also encouraged
Sharp boundaries between boss and employee	Individuals being supported to move to their level of potential
Customers on the other side	Customers being seen as partners
Strictly fulfilling the contract	Customer satisfaction

projects succeed, or, equally, on the opposite side—leading projects to failure. Intriguingly, for example, in the realm of IT projects, the predominant problematic factors are not methodological or technological issues but rather people issues such as lack of clear goals, missing executive support, and poor or inadequate communication among project stakeholders and the project team (Standish 2016).

In order to reveal the essentials of a constructive, collaborative atmosphere, we are going to take up the ubiquitous challenge of good listening. This is because, first, it is still lacking in so many people (see also Chap. 17). Second, its function is being repeatedly underestimated and not taken seriously enough, in particular in hierarchical organizations that believe in maintaining strict control. Third, we have some evidence that young managers, in particular, consider it a key issue and perceive listening well to be a challenging yet crucial component of competent leadership (iCom Team 2014) needing perfection!

The second part of this chapter focuses on interpersonal qualities and skills that facilitate a constructive climate and progress at work. To illustrate and appreciate the impact of these qualities, several concrete cases and dilemmas from the work context are provided aiming at useful, personal insight for both managers/leaders and team members. The resulting direction of changes by transforming communication to encompass the qualities discussed in this chapter is sketched in Table 9.1.

9.2 Active Listening in the Workplace

Before recalling Rogers' groundbreaking work on active listening, let us share some excerpts from students' reactions to Renate's recent course on communication and soft skills at the masters level of computer—and service science.

“An activity that I appreciated the most was ‘active listening.’ From my own experience, I can tell that it is applicable in every area of life, when there are problems in communication. I am a bit introvert and I never had high confidence in communication with people or in presenting some topic in front of the crowd. I was expecting that it could improve in this course somehow, but I didn’t know how much. Now after completing this course, I can honestly say that it did work.”

“I would probably say that the most valuable skill is active listening—it’s part of all the other skills and very useful in both personal and professional life.”

“I have learned a lot of interesting stuff, like the importance of active listening and that the spoken words are just a minority of information revealed.”

“I hated/liked the active listening activity. I hated it because it was by far the hardest thing from the whole course. I have terrible listening skills and I have to try REALLY hard to listen. If I think of something else, or even just look elsewhere I’m lost in the conversation. But I know it’s not polite to ignore, and it isn’t even good for my learning abilities, so I liked it because I had the opportunity to work on it, realize how bad I am at it, and now I know I have to work on it later too. We often shared how important we experienced it to be even in other aspects of our lives.”

“We processed very good topics, and we gained a lot of knowledge from each topic. We learned how to listen, how to speak, how to empathize with people, how to become a leader, motivator... It’s very hard to choose only one thing. But if I have to choose I will choose listening. The REAL careful listening is most important and best way to communicate with other people.”

Almost half a century ago, Carl Rogers and Richard Farson published their famous article on active listening in a business journal (Rogers and Farson 1987). In their article, they present the attitudes as well as do’s and don’ts in a most compelling fashion. This is why the Resource Box 9.1 heavily draws on Rogers’ and Farson’s work.

Resource Box 9.1 Attitudes, do’s, and don’ts of effective active listening at work

Active Listening: Attitudes, insights, do’s, and don’ts

- To be effective at all in active listening, one must have a *sincere interest* in the speaker. We need to convey the idea: “I think that what you feel is important. I respect your thoughts and, even if I don’t agree with them, I know they are valid for you. I feel sure that you have a contribution to make and I want to understand you.”
- If we are only making a pretense, the speaker will quickly pick up on this.
- Developing an attitude of sincere interest in the speaker can happen only by willing to *risk seeing the world from the speaker’s perspective*.
- Active listening tends to lead to *constructive changes* in the listener. It is a source of rich information and deep, positive relationships. For the speakers, it makes clear what they are feeling and thinking. It need not

pose a threat to the individual's self-image. He or she does not have to defend it but can freely explore it and then may be in a position to change.

- To ensure *good communication between associates* up and down the line, every person who feels the responsibility can set a pattern of active listening and the tone of the interaction. The behavior exhibited by one person will eventually tend to influence similar behavior in the other person.

To do:

- *Create a climate* which is neither critical nor evaluative nor moralizing. It must be one of equality and freedom; permissiveness and understanding; and acceptance and warmth. It is a climate in which the individual feels safe enough to assimilate new experiences and new values.
- Listen for the *total meaning* of the message for greater understanding. Besides the content, it entails the underlying feeling or attitude that gives the message meaning.
- Get inside the speaker's point of view and try to *understand* what they are communicating. The speaker can get a sense that we are seeing things from his or her point of view.
- In some instances, the content is less important than the feelings underlying it. In those cases, to catch the full flavor of the meaning, one must *respond particularly to the feeling* component.
- *Note all cues*. Besides verbal expression, we need to become aware of several kinds of communication such as voice inflection, points of hesitation, facial expression, body language, eye movement, and many more. In online communication, these cues are reduced and in part substituted by various symbolic expressions.

To avoid:

- Avoid trying to *change* the other's way of looking at things the way we see the situation.
- Avoid passing *judgment*, whether positive or negative, as it makes free expression difficult.
- Avoid fast and easy *advice*. Advice is often seen as an effort to change a person and thus serve as a barrier to free expression. Moreover, such advice is seldom taken, unless explicitly asked for, and based on prior listening and effort to understand the often complex situation of the person seeking advice.

To provide readers with an up-to-date perception of junior leaders of IT teams, Table 9.2 lists the potentials as well as problems of active listening as recalled by a group of 14 team leaders during an international workshop on person-centered communication in spring, 2015.

Table 9.2 Potentials and problems of active listening as indicated by junior team leaders

Potentials/benefits of active listening	Problems of active listening
Establishing connection	May seem artificial
Getting deeper understanding	May not be rewarding for the listener
Better insight as a basis for a solution	Hard, if little interest in the subject matter
Feeds patience	Costs time
Speaker gets space to express himself/herself	Can be exhausting
Improved relationship	
Feeling valued	

It is over half a century since Rogers and Roethlisberger wrote about barriers and gateways to communication in the renowned journal, *Harvard Business Review*. Nowadays the value of active listening is widely acclaimed. Nevertheless, there remain several challenges to good and effective communication at work. Resource Box 9.2 summarizes some evocative ideas.

Resource Box 9.2 Active listening in business: Necessary but not sufficient. Items in part inspired by John J. Graham’s retrospective commentary to Rogers and Roethlisberger (1991).

Active listening in business: Necessary but not sufficient.

- In a time of tough competition and job insecurity, the process of establishing trust is not as linear as opening up and being listened to by the manager. When one fears losing a job and the others are obliged to downsize their teams, open conversation would rather be avoided by either side.
- Establishing trust happens through a complex process in which a person’s behavior, character, managerial competence, etc., all play a role beside their capacity to listen. Thus, whether or not an employee opens up depends on several aspects of confidence.
- An ever-increasing barrier to good communication is the pressure of time. In a culture with emphasis and valuing of speed, we need to embrace this criterion and learn to communicate effectively in particular when time is of the essence.
- We need to appreciate that understanding is essential for decision-making and conflict resolution. However, understanding does not necessarily mean a good decision or resolution. Furthermore, it is a mutual more than a one-sided understanding that is needed. Thus, we are always dependent on the other side and their capacity for understanding as well as on capacities for decision-making, conflict resolution, collaboration, negotiation, etc.
- Managers, in particular, face a double challenge. On the one hand, they need to be able to listen nonjudgmentally; on the other hand, they are

constantly called upon to evaluate and make judgments about projects, budgets, strategies, etc. Thus, they crucially need the capacity to live the two-agenda metaphor, namely to be capable of non-evaluative listening while also being able to judge and make good decisions based on all the evidence gained from their multiple senses and information channels.

But how well does listening work in today's organizations? In a recent study (see Part 4 of this book), the vast majority of human resource professionals experienced deficits in listening in their workplace. A telling sample response was: "If I've really got a problem, there's no one to turn to."

While positive examples tend to inspire constructive attitudes, often realizing what's going wrong and making the problem evident from the viewpoint of an observer can be illuminating too. It has the potential to illustrate adverse behavior from the safe perspective of an observer and hence can avoid personal defense mechanisms to block out the experience as something threatening our self-image. Thus, we invite you to participate in the following three vignettes:

Vignette 1: Different frames of reference, standpoints, and paths to reach the goal or "Whom should I trust more, an experienced colleague or myself?"

As an experienced manager in the USA, you have invested lots of energy and time into a gifted, junior marketing expert—let us call her Tina. In the past, she had worked with you on a project that went quite well, but in your view she could have done even better, if you had had more experienced colleagues to support the marketing. Tina is responsible for the marketing strategy of your new event-management system that shall be rolled out soon. While you are convinced that the major market for the system is going to be your company's contacts and the close surroundings, she thinks differently. She is very sympathetic with Asian culture and wants to market the system in the Far East, assembling evidence that this would bring much more revenue. She is really eager to travel to a fair in Shanghai and present the system there. She seems bored with the local market and stakeholders, arguing that the new system is just a tiny bit better than others, and hence, she is not sure she could convince local customers to buy it.

So, how to deal with the dilemma? Recently, each day you come to work you feel some tension about the difference. While you cooperate successfully on other issues, you feel the difference is always there, "remains in the air," and is consuming some of your mental resources. A solution needs to be reached soon.

Vignette 2: Rigid external requirements or things turn out to be different than originally perceived

A project proposal for a project with seven international partners was accepted. Each partner contributed to putting the proposal and the work-breakdown structure together, based on the best of every partner's knowledge. Throughout the project,

slight adaptation of the proposal needed to be made in order to meet the prospects of reality. For example, skill-training exercises had to be implemented, not just interlinked, since existing ones were found to be missing some key criteria. Due to extra work, at the end, time became very limited and the project needed to be validated. One partner started validation in time and strictly based on the project proposal, since this would be the only way to finish the validation process on time. However, other partners optimized the validation process to better suit the adaptations made throughout the project and claimed that their validation protocol needed to be followed by all partners! No one was prepared to step back from their position, since that would have rendered part of their work irrelevant and they could not validate the product.

As a consequence, some partners were upset at the others and stopped communicating, since they felt the others did not hear them and were harming the project's success.

It is not hard to find variations of the examples given above in managers' practice. We assume that you will have your personal reaction and tips on how to go about resolution. But before we share our thoughts; let us turn our attention to the following conversation between a team member and his manager.

Vignette 3: Running out of time—a problem-solving dialogue


- | | |
|-------------|---|
| Manager | We need to deliver the code tomorrow; otherwise, we will have to pay a penalty as it is written in the contract. Any ideas? |
| Team member | Yes, tomorrow is the scheduled date of delivery. No doubt, we could deliver the software and mask a few mistakes that we won't manage to fix till tomorrow. So we're going to fulfill the formalities. However we'll need much more additional time for re-installations and bug-fixes once the system is delivered and this affects both the customer and us. I guess it would be wise to talk to the folks at the customer and let them know that we'd need two more days for thorough, systematic testing that would help to save time in the longer run. Would that be an option for you? |
| Manager | Not quite, since they arranged everything for the installation and the training to happen the next few days. So they might really be annoyed to hear about the delay on such a short notice and insist that we pay the difference |
| Team member | Right, I haven't considered that.—O.k., [pause] let me see if there isn't an option to run the training on our servers— for the training. the software is fine and an occasional bug could be tolerated and logged. So part of our team could still work on fixing the sophisticated bugs and we wouldn't block our customer. What do you think? |
| Manager | This starts getting a bit complicated and definitely bears some risk on our side. Hmm. [pause]—But why not, it really does make sense! Well, ... if you think this would help us to deliver first |

quality software finally, without paying the penalty and annoying the customer, I feel you should go ahead and talk to them. Let me know if I can support you in any way. Good luck!

What all three vignettes have in common is that expectations are not met. The perceived reality at hand differs from some preconceived, planned state, like finishing on time, and achieving consensus. Differences come to the surface more or less clearly, more or less annoyingly, and more or less as being perceived as threatening—like having to pay penalty for a delay—or acceptable and natural—like needing to talk to arrange for the best possible solution under given circumstances. In times characterized by a very fast pace and almost instant communication cycles, change is inevitable. Hence, in our view, it is essential to be able to deal with change—which means—to be as open as possible to the current reality and to communicate and collaborate toward meeting the reality as it is perceived at the given moment. However, this requires one to listen very well to oneself and to others and to try to understand the essence of what is going on. There seems to be no way to achieve this without good, precise, and deep empathic listening as well as responding. How else could the manager and team member in the third vignette above come to a solution that is agreeable to both parties and furthermore uses both parties' resources sensitively and meaningfully?

You may interject, why we should care about using the other's resources sparingly. Why should we care, isn't it *their* job? Sure it is; however, if we want to stay in business with the other, ignoring their side may become costly and, sooner rather than later, will make them withdraw. This is totally different, if we accept the others as partners and acknowledge their issues as our issues as well, joining energies to find a solution that fits both. The same holds true for us. If the other side ignores our needs, we might take the first opportunity to quit the business.

Note the inherent reciprocity between (business) partners. One's communication and behavior does not stand alone, and it tends to be intricately intertwined with the other. We can have a strong influence on the other partner and the atmosphere. However, if our partner stands in constant opposition, our person-centered, constructive attitude cannot (fully) unfold and may be even swallowed by authoritarian, directive practices. But if we get a handle on our partner, for example, if the team member in our vignette is understood in his message to look for the most agreeable solution for both parties, then the trust can grow and the business relationship can become more transparent and mutually respectful.

 Invitation to reflect:

If you were the manager in the vignette Running out of time how would you deal with the situation? Would you tend to turn to your customer or would you rather deliver the (still faulty) software product? What would your course of action depend on? What would you say?

After having illustrated a few examples in which flexibility and an effective flow of communication within a constructive climate are needed, let us investigate into some more depth the foundations of a constructive, interpersonal climate.

9.3 Three Interpersonal Attitudes as Cornerstones of a Constructive Climate

Rogers postulated three attitudes for a relationship to be growth-promoting. These attitudes (or “ways of being”) need to be lived by at least one person and be perceived by the other person(s):

- Empathic understanding (sometimes briefly but imprecisely termed “empathy”)
- Acceptance or unconditional positive regard
- Congruence or genuineness, authenticity, and transparency.

According to Rogers (1980, p. 115), these attitudes form the basis of a constructive climate that enables a largely unbiased perception of any situation, and *significant learning*—learning that makes a difference to one’s life. If these attitudes are perceived at least to some degree, then people can become the best they can (Rogers 1961). Since many of us devote the majority of our time and effort to our work–life, it seems essential to consider what Rogers’ three attitudes mean for interpersonal relationships at work and how they influence the interplay of the 2agendas@work

9.3.1 Empathic Understanding, Empathy

Empathic understanding originates in the longing for a deep understanding from the perspective of the other person. Rogers describes the respective feeling as follows:

... I feel a continuing desire to understand—a sensitive empathy which each of the client’s feelings and communications as they seem to him at that moment. Acceptance does not mean much until it involves understanding. It is only that I understand the feelings and thoughts [...]—it is only as I see them as you see them and accept them and you, that you feel really free to explore... your inner and often buried experience... There is implied here a freedom to explore oneself at both conscious and unconscious levels (Rogers 1961 p. 35).

Rogers defines empathy as follows:

The state of empathy, or being empathic, is to perceive the internal frame of reference [i.e., the realm of experience which is available to the awareness of an individual at a given moment] of another with accuracy, and with the emotional components and meanings which pertain thereto, as if one were the other person, but without ever losing the ‘as if’ condition (Rogers 1959, p. 210).

In a recent survey, Seyhan Güver (Renate’s Ph.D. student) asked managers of intercultural projects what empathy meant to them (Güver 2016). We were

pleasantly surprised at the accuracy of the managers' understanding and will share selected responses in a later chapter on multicultural teams.

The following examples illustrate empathic and less-empathic responses in work-related conversations.

Case scenario, part 1

The employee says: "When I hear the word 'assessment,' I always think of something really upsetting."

- (1) Less-empathic responses:
 - Aren't you exaggerating a little? (judgemental)
 - Why's that? There must be something to it. (diagnosing, analyzing)
 - You need not be upset, you'll do fine. (saying how one should not feel)
 - If you always think negatively, you'll never become successful. (generalizing, instructing)
- (2) Empathic response-variants:
 - You tend to feel upset about what would happen?
 - Just the term makes you anxious.
 - So you would like to avoid it.
 - "Assessment" comes with something really unpleasant for you.

Case scenario, part 2

A team member says: "I can't help thinking that the coordinator looks down on me."

- (1) Less-empathic responses:
 - Many colleagues experience this, but you'll get used to it. (generalizing)
 - This is your fantasy! Here nobody is looked down upon. (teaching, instructing)
 - Oh, don't take it seriously, the best thing you can do is to ignore it. (giving advice)
 - The more you think like this, the worse it will be. (moralizing)
- (2) Empathic response-variants:
 - You would like to be taken seriously.
 - You feel patronized.
 - You indeed miss an eye-level contact with the coordinator.
 - There is something that makes you feel inferior in this particular relationship.

Case scenario, part 3

An employee shares with his team leader: "Finally I've finished that damn software upgrade."

(1) Less-empathic responses:

“So we may continue with the setup of the device.” (ignoring the emotional part of the message)

“You should be happy you have a job at all in these tough times!” (teaching, instructing)

“Damn software upgrade? There’s always something you need to criticize!” (generalizing, blaming)

(2) Empathic response-variants:

“Had a pretty rough time with this task?”

“Relieved to have it finished, huh?”

“Well, I guess you don’t feel like doing another upgrade in the near future.”

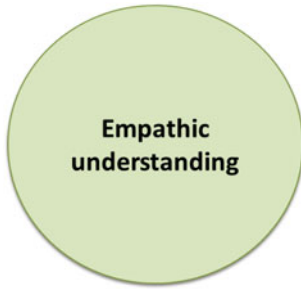
The case scenarios are intended to reveal that it does matter to listen for total meaning of a message rather than just the content and that attending to the feeling part; in particular, it matters to feel more thoroughly understood. Moreover, sensitive listening can facilitate the relationship (Rogers and Farson 1987). Suppose the team leader were to respond by directly giving another task. Would the employee feel that he had gotten his message across? Would he feel better about his job, more motivated to do good work on the next task?

On the other hand, the empathic responses communicate that the team leader heard and understands. This does not necessarily mean that the next task need be postponed or altered or that he must devote an extensive listening session to the employee complaining about the problems he encountered. Alternatively, he may react differently in light of the shared information he has acquired. It is first of all the perceived sensitivity on the part of the team leader which can transform an average team climate into a superb one (Rogers and Farson 1987).

 Invitation to reflect:

What would your response be to the following statement? “If something goes wrong, I’m always the first one who gets blamed!”

As sketched in Fig. 9.1, empathic understanding encompasses attitudes as well as skills. It has both cognitive and affective components (Cain 2010, p. 92) such that empathic responses take on a variety of forms. Based on David Cain’s description (Cain 2010, pp. 95–100), we summarize the straightforward forms of expressing empathic understanding in the Resource Box 9.3. Readers interested in the complex expressions are referred to Cain’s book.

As a skill:

- Effective listening “techniques“
- Putting yourself “into the other’s shoes“.

Effect: more appropriate reactionExample in business context:

- Try to really understand your customer in his/her context!

As an attitude:

- “I want to understand you!“
- Listening attitude.

Fig. 9.1 Empathic understanding as an attitude and skill

Resource Box 9.3 Varieties of empathic understanding according to Cain (2010) with examples adapted by the authors. “E” stands for Employee, and “M” stands for Manager

Varieties of empathy

- *Empathic understanding* responses attempt to grasp and accurately communicate the other person’s basic message. Examples:

E I’m just done with the damn data import.

M Seems it needed a lot of effort to finish it.

E Indeed, it seemed like an endless endeavor, the system wasn’t working properly, and we had **to** repeat the procedure over and over. I’m totally exhausted now.

- *Clarifying* responses attempt to articulate clearly what the other person is trying to say by struggling to find words, or offering just a vague expression. Examples:

E I’d really like to get up and walk out.

M You seem to be angry.

E I believe I am. We aren’t making any progress in this meeting and nobody is listening to me.

- *Affective* empathic responses focus on the other person’s emotions or bodily felt sense of a problem, going beyond the content of the message and articulating the feeling being expressed or implied: Examples:

E I just can't believe that our director signed the contract for the merger.
M You're feeling cheated and scared about the future of your workplace.
E Exactly. I've no idea what is going to happen to us.

- *Explorative* empathic responses engage a probing and tentative style to assist the other person to locate, explore, unfold, examine, and reflect on unclear or hidden aspects of experience. Examples:

E I can't quite put my finger on it, but I feel worried about the upcoming strategic meeting.

M So there's some vague sense that something may go wrong in the meeting?

E Yes. Like I'm not sure that my boss and I have the same sense of direction and expectations for the coming period. I can't agree with his strategies, they stand in opposition to what I'm aiming for.

- *Affirmative* empathic responses validate the other person's experience of sense of self, whether positive or negative. To be effective, they require credible evidence from mutual knowledge or sharing. Examples:

E I am so proud of how my team is performing. I think I'm a good leader.

M You are a good leader. All team members respect you as a leader and like their work.

E I think I've been neglectful of my family.

M From what you've said I can see that you have been neglectful lately.

 Invitation to reflect:

Studying the examples in this book, which kinds of empathic responses can you identify? Did you encounter empathic responses that do not match any of the categories listed above?

In your responses, do you prefer certain response patterns to others to express empathic understanding?

9.3.2 Problems in the Context of Empathic Understanding

Occasionally it happens that paraphrasing is not received by the other person, often the one in charge, as a means to clarify understanding but instead as a weakness, a sign of "stupidity," maneuvering, or even attack on the side of the listener. Let us illustrate this by a few examples.

Case example 1 for problems with empathic understanding:

- Manager to employee “The report needs urgent revision as there are many errors and the style is really poor. Also, the report has to be submitted to the commission as soon as possible in order not to miss tomorrow’s deadline. I don’t know why these things take so much of my energy and I never get to doing anything meaningful.”
- Employee “You feel exhausted by having to take care of all those details, I’m wondering how I could ...”
- Manager (annoyed, interrupting) “That’s my issue and how I feel. Better take care of the quality of the work you deliver. Style is not an option—it’s essential!”

Case example 2 for problems with empathic understanding:

- Manager to employee “The report needs urgent revision as there are many errors and the style is really poor. Also, the report has to be submitted to the commission as soon as possible in order not to miss tomorrow’s deadline.”
- Employee “You mean, I should revise the report by correcting errors and improving the style, then ...”
- Manager (interrupting) “Of course, that’s what I said. Instead of repeating my words, better go and do it!”

At a more subtle level, empathic understanding is sometimes avoided because the risk to be changed or feeling obliged to take action is too high. In fact, direct interpersonal contact including honest eye-contact tends to intrigue the partners in a conversation so that, as a genuine manager, you may feel the need to react to the person who shares his inner world with you. Just listening, with our mind made-up to definitely not react to the message in a genuine manner, would fail its purpose and soon be recognized as a shallow ploy. Reciprocally, a sensitive employee would also recognize realistic limitations to what a manager/leader could do to support him or her in a situation of distress and communicate this in her message. He or she might say something like: “I appreciate you listening to me and it feels good to know I’ve got someone who cares. This will help me to move along, and should I get stuck on the road, I hope I can call on you again.” However, any response learned in advance would miss the subtleties of the situation and relationship at hand, so readers, be warned about using the example just for orientation and feel called upon to form your own authentic response.

Summarizing, empathic understanding is the ability and choice to put yourself in the other’s perspective as if you were seeing the world through the other’s eyes. You look for the words that would best express the other’s struggle to express her/his point of view in challenging situations and when emotions are not clear enough to be expressed simply and directly. At best, empathy is a shared experience

as we allow the other to correct our best guess as to his/her ongoing feelings in the moment. As empathic understanding is crucial to communicating in the workplace, it has been included in item 4 (“Trying to understand and be understood comprehensively and thoroughly”) of the people-oriented agenda.

9.3.3 *Acceptance, Respect*

Synonyms here include: *unconditional positive regard, caring, prizing, acknowledgement, warmth.*

Rogers describes acceptance as follows:

I find that the more acceptance and liking I feel toward this individual, the more I will be creating a relationship which he can use. By acceptance I mean a warm regard for him as a person of unconditional self-worth, of value no matter what his condition, his behaviour, his feelings. It means a respect and liking for him as a separate person, a willingness for him to possess his own feelings in his own way (Rogers 1961, p. 34).

To be accepted exactly the way we are—not needing to disguise, justify, endlessly explain, perform or hide anything but being fully received as we are—is a precious gift. It helps us to accept ourselves more fully. Paradoxically, feeling accepted puts us in a state in which we are open to change (Rogers 1961), not needing to defend anything about ourselves.

Mutual acceptance or respect has the potential to connect people, to build rapport. Being accepted means that the other person perceives us with all our potentials as well as limitations and provides space to us—a characteristic of *inclusion* in the sense of making space in one’s inner world for the other. Acceptance, however, does not mean agreement. This is another issue. Indeed, it might be a lot harder to accept a colleague whose work style is totally different from ours than one whose style is in tune with ours.

The consequence of acceptance is a nonjudgemental attitude that can evolve to a *mutual* appreciation of one another, not depending on any conditions and giving us the safety to experience the feeling that is present to us in the moment.

Accepting the other nourishes trust. Consequently, our interaction will grant the *maximum possible space* to the other, without ever compromising our own congruence. In a job situation, this would mean that we follow our business goals and the maximum possible free space we can grant the other may be minimal. However, even this minimal freedom—like a small choice or question regarding a preference—if communicated genuinely, may help others to feel accepted rather than ignored and motivate them to collaborate as well as possible. Consequently, acceptance must neither be confused with not caring about what the other feels or does, nor with giving up one’s direction and blindly letting the other take over control.

Rogers clarifies that a nonjudgemental attitude does not imply the need to stop expressing reactions. On the contrary, it may grant the freedom to react without the fear of being judged:

... to cease evaluating another is not to cease having reactions. It may, as a matter of fact, free one to react. “I don’t like your idea (or painting, or invention, or writing)” is not an evaluation, but a reaction. It is subtly but sharply different from a judgment which says, “What you are doing is bad (or good), and this quality is assigned to you from some external source.” (1961, p. 358).

In fact, the judgement tends to put the speaker at the mercy of the evaluators’ forces who evaluate from their position of authority and often prompt defensive or justifying reaction from the speaker to counterattack. All this is very much in line with the notion of *autonomy support* in Self Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan and Deci 2000). As recent research shows, psychological well-being is increased when being with an autonomous supporting partner (Lynch et al. 2009).

☞ Invitation to reflect:

Do you have a pattern along which you tend to react in response to being positively or negatively judged by others? How do you feel in such situations? How do you react?

Do you tend to judge others? Do you think that judging others is (not) necessary? Can you say why you think so?

Considering the two distinct dynamics of personal reactions (also referred to as “I-messages”) and judgments, we have experienced that in some situations it is worthwhile to perceive judgement as a sort of reaction and not to let oneself react to the evaluation but rather to stay with oneself. “I see, you (don’t) concur with...” and show interest in the reaction: “What is it that causes your dislike/liking/opposition/....?” With such an attitude we can creatively influence the course of the conversation more often than we might expect.

Rogers expressed an intriguing relationship between receiving positive regard from another person and one’s own need *for* positive regard. The need for positive regard “is reciprocal, in that when an individual discriminates himself as satisfying another’s need for positive regard, he necessarily experiences satisfaction of his own need for positive regard” (1959, p. 223). We conjecture that this relationship lies at the roots of social and collaborative behavior—contributing to a positive experience in you satisfies me too.


☞ Invitation to reflect:

Do you remember any work-related situation in which you have felt:

- ignored, overlooked, judged, or
- genuinely accepted

How did you react in each of the situations? What was the effect on your motivation to engage in your job?

The vital importance of acceptance can be painfully recognized in situations in which it is missing—we are judged, rejected, ignored, excluded, etc. This tends to signal inferiority, at times feeling useless and is often mirrored in the loss of motivation to contribute. Such a strong, negative reaction to a lack of acceptance points to the fact that being accepted by others is a pervasive, deep need in humankind.

 Invitation to reflect:

For the manager or leader:

Do you feel you accept your team? How do you express this attitude?

For the team members: Do you feel you accept your peers and the team leader? How do you express this attitude?

In case you cannot accept someone: What is it that would need to change in yourself that would allow you to be more accepting? Is there any facet of the other that you like?

Acceptance and its opposite make themselves known by the way we act as well as the words we use. For example, we can express acceptance by responding quickly and carefully to our associates’ calls or emails, or by including them in activities or decisions, by listening to them, and a lot more that lets them experience that they matter to us. While this may sound and also be easy, it can become challenging in situations of conflict when the other is mad at us or shares a view that is totally at odds with something that matters to us. However, meeting this challenge can be decisive as to whether a conflict becomes an opportunity for constructive change or escalates in a destructive way (Rogers 1959). Figure 9.2 sketches essential features of acceptance as an attitude and its active expression.

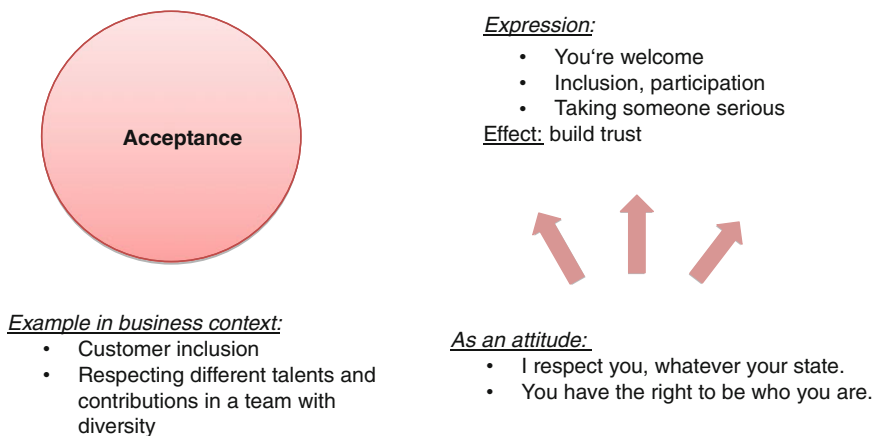


Fig. 9.2 Acceptance as an attitude and its expression

Example from experience building upon vignette 2: *Rigid external requirements or things turn out to be different than originally perceived*

Situation: One project partner started validation in time and strictly based on the project proposal. The other two partners responsible for the validation work-package revised the validation process to better suit the adaptations made throughout the project and claimed that their validation protocol needed to be followed by all partners! No one was prepared to step back from their position; communication stopped.

One project partner specializing in the design process strongly felt that all wanted the best for the project but the paths were different. She expressed this in an email sent to all project partners and carefully tried to identify differences and commonalities between the original and the revised validation protocol. Based on a transparent analysis, she suggested considering the validation study to be designated as incremental, with the “fast partner’s” results serving as a first step on which the revised validation activities had been built. This was exactly how the revised procedure had been generated and it seemed so simple to accomplish, just needing—on the task-based level—effort to look into what exactly had been done at each of the sites. But foremost, it needed—on the basic interpersonal level—trust and acceptance of the individual partners and an unbiased approach to their different values and viewpoints.

The validation work-package was accepted by the commission but some dents in the relationships between project partners remained, showing that genuine acceptance is something that needs to evolve.

9.3.4 *Problems with Receiving Acceptance or Respect*

Occasionally it happens that our acceptance of the other person is not well received. This can happen if, for example, the other person does not accept him/herself and hence raises suspicion that being accepted by another person might have some manipulative intent.

Example 1 for problems with acceptance:

Manager to employee “I appreciate how carefully you prepared the meeting room.”

Employee “I just do my duty, that’s what I’m paid for!”

Case example 2 for problems with acceptance:

- Manager “In my view, your critical remark hit the point and brought the discussion back to essential issues!”
- Colleague “I know that people don’t like my criticism, but that’s how I am. I just can’t listen to so much stupid stuff so I have to say something. Sorry.”

Case example 3 for problems with acceptance:

Alternatively, accepting feedback can be interpreted as evaluation or judgement and evoke a rejecting response, such as in the following exchange:

- Manager “In my view, your critical remark hit the point and brought the discussion back to essential issues!”
- Colleague Y “I know I’m good at grasping the essence; you don’t have to tell me.”

These case examples may provide some flavor on the subtleties of expressing respect and the fact that it needs to be received by the other person to contribute to a positive work atmosphere.

There are other situations, too, in which acceptance is missing. An apparent one is the case that we lose respect toward others by judging what they have said or (not) done and feel that their behavior is inappropriate (bad, wrong, harmful, etc.). Effectively, confronting the person with the effect of their behavior could even be regarded as a kind of acceptance, namely caring about the person enough to share our honest reaction and giving them a chance to respond. However, a person’s defenses may be too strong to let them perceive the situation on a broader context other than their own.

A less apparent situation in which acceptance is missing is one in which our (cultural, often unconscious) values make us blind to, or unaware of, the fact that we are ignoring another person’s values. A situation as simple as one in which a person’s being late for a meeting is received with negative emotions can illustrate this misunderstanding. In some cultures, such as those in South European and South American countries, it is more important to finish a (preceding) task than arriving on time. A manager unaware of this would easily destroy a positive climate by showing his/her frustration because of late attendance.

In summary, experiencing acceptance toward another person and oneself is a very powerful and versatile attitude. In the people-oriented agenda, it is integrated as item 3 (“Respect toward the other, oneself, and the environment.”). Expressing as well as receiving it appropriately may lie at the core of healthy interpersonal relationships at work and in all social contexts, regardless of our position, nationality, or religion. In particular, intercultural settings rely on a great deal of acceptance as well as cultural awareness to fully receive others from diverse cultures.

9.3.5 Congruence

Some synonyms for “congruence” are *realness, transparency, genuineness, authenticity, openness*. Rogers (1961, p. 33) describes congruence as follows:


I have found that the more that I can be genuine in the relationship, the more helpful it will be... Being genuine also involves the willingness to be and to express, in my words and my behavior, the various feelings and attitudes, which exist in me... It is only by providing the genuine reality which is in me, that the other person can successfully seek for the reality in him. I have found this to be true even when the attitudes I feel are not attitudes with which I am pleased, or attitudes which seem conducive to a good relationship.

This vital attitude is so basic on the one hand yet complex on the other hand that one term hardly suffices to capture the whole meaning. This is why a number of terms are being used interchangeably, each bringing core assets for any given context into the foreground. In the context of communication, for example, “transparency”—the 2nd item of the people-oriented agenda—is a key to delivering a message without any hidden aspects. In leadership, it is “honesty” or “integrity” that is what people look for and admire in a good leader in the first place (Kouzes and Posner 2002). In their book, *Transformational Leadership*, Bass and Riggio (2006) advocate being straightforward, honest, and open with others if we want to achieve effective leadership.

Since the notion of congruence is so complex, let us break down the complexity of the concept at least to some degree and see which parts or levels can be congruent (matching) or incongruent in us. The easier part is the one which we can control consciously, namely our expression of what we feel is going on inside us. If we willingly say something that is not what we feel inwardly, then we presumably lie or cheat. The more difficult part of congruence which we cannot fully control willingly is whether our inner world (feeling and meaning) is in tune (congruent) with our perception of this inner experience. Lack of congruence in this sphere can happen if we do not perceive our feelings accurately and if our perception of them is distorted, for example, to protect us from difficult feelings or to disguise them in order not to lose the acceptance of some significant other person. For example, if it would be too risky to admit being angry at a superior, one’s feeling might be distorted to signal sadness and depression. Yet this renders us incongruent because, while we would consciously express sadness, part of our organism would signal anger.

In brief, we are congruent or genuine only if our inner world (feeling and meaning) is in tune with the perception, as well as the communication, of our experience. Rogers emphasized many times that the development of congruence is a process that *spans our whole lifetime* and is never accomplished completely. This can be understood such that the environment tends to bring us into situations, for example, new ones, in which we need to establish congruence from initial disorientation. And, according to neuropsychologist Ainley et al. (2012) of the University of London, this ability to have access to our inner world depends on whether we

have, what she calls, high or low *interoceptive awareness*, the high being more accurate.

 Invitation to reflect:

Try to recall a person in your professional or school life whom you consider significant in their relationship to you. Do you think of this person as real, genuine, or authentic?

What is it that makes you think/feel like that? Did that person influence your further personal or professional growth? If so, how does this influence live on in you or help you in your way of being right now?

At any given point in time, we cannot consciously establish a complete match between our inner world and the way we perceive it, since not all aspects of our inner world are accessible to our awareness. However, the candid, congruent expression of what we perceive as going on inside us depends on what we want to share with the other person. Rogers (1980, p. 115) clearly states that an open, inner reaction is *shared only if this is deemed appropriate*. In this statement, the connection between congruence, acceptance, and empathic understanding becomes apparent, since the latter two variables would co-inform us about the appropriateness of an open, transparent reaction. In any case, we agree with Rogers that a high degree of congruence facilitates mutual understanding. If we do not even know what the boss, colleague, or customer is feeling because they hide their emotional reaction, how can we respond to their needs? Alternatively, when they express what they think and feel, we have an opportunity to receive them more fully and react appropriately.

Examples of being present with one's own needs that are counter to those of the other person or organization are not rare. Imagine, for example, an organization which was born out of a merger of different organizations with diverging opinions as to which business strategy seems most promising and should be followed. In such cases, there is a major challenge to move on and not to get stuck with the differences, and, as the leader personality, to sense one's own needs as well as those of the others and to act in a way that reflects one's congruence in addition to acceptance and empathy. More detailed examples and resolution proposals can be found in Motschnig and Nykl (2014). In any case, congruence is an attitude that goes deep and needs real first-person experience to be acquired. It is primarily our whole-person interaction through which our transparency or façade, authenticity or being a marionette, comes to light and is passed on to our social environment.

In a nutshell, seeking congruence—as a pivotal aspect of the people-oriented agenda—can optimally support us to behave appropriately, even in new, complex, unfamiliar settings. In such situations, a congruent, undistorted access to all inner resources from knowledge about feelings to intuition is crucial for appropriate behavior (Rogers 1983; Damasio 2000). In order to show some of the dynamics of congruence, Fig. 9.3 summarizes essential aspects in a clearly simplified form.



Example in IT context:

- Less stress due to more openness
- No loss of energy due to hiding of information or feelings

Expression:

- Transparency, openness, if appropriate
- Clarity in expression

Effect: Risk leading to a sense of safety



As an attitude:

- I feel connected.
- I meet you without prejudice!
- I don't hide behind a mask!
- My feelings, thoughts, words, and actions are in harmony.

Fig. 9.3 Congruence as an attitude and its expression

Rogers (1961) discovered that realness in one person frees the other to be real too. Openly addressing an unclear situation, a weakness, a misunderstanding, a revelation tends to stimulate openness in the other person. They may respond by sharing their thoughts and feelings signaling their understanding. More of the whole becomes revealed and hence available for thoughtful consideration. Furthermore, openness can lead to trust (Ryback 2013; iCom Team 2014). Others meet us without hiding, taking the risk of being uncovered and even attacked, so by opening up they demonstrate trust that their revelations will not be used against them. Should openness be misused, trust will be lost immediately (Motschnig and Nykl 2014). While this is likely to come with negative consequences, we can certainly learn from the interaction directly and timely and re-orient ourselves immediately.

9.3.6 Problems with Congruence

Congruence is an inner state in which we reside, more or less, and that we endeavor to re-establish once environmental or inner influences cause incongruences that often can be perceived as some kind of tension or stress. Let us consider a few examples:

Case example 1 illustrating environmental conditions challenging congruence: As the leading senior architect of your small town, you love your job and are made the head of a jury to select and award the best architectural designs for the renewal of the city center. Suddenly, you get a new boss who is politically biased and requires you to focus on strategic, political criteria in the architectural design proposals

above all. As a consequence, you have to turn back the ingenious proposals and accept those that meet the political criteria, all this clearly against your sense of integrity. Because of your age, you cannot simply quit the job, as this would likely render you unemployed and cause a threat to your economical existence. You are under extreme pressure.

Case example 2 illustrating inner conditions challenging congruence: Through a conflict in the team we are leading, we realize that our leadership style that we cherish is inadequate in some situations and largely has contributed to the conflict that is about to escalate. We feel we need to change our approach significantly to accommodate for situations such as the one in which we are currently involved.

Case example 3 illustrating incongruence in a relationship: While you cannot pinpoint the problem exactly, you feel you cannot be yourself in the relationship with a superior whom you respect and do not want to disappoint. In order to keep the relationship going, you need to hide aspects of yourself, which feels awkward, puts a load of stress on you and causes some decrease of your energy and vitality.

Intriguingly, there is no simple recipe on how to resolve incongruence. Typically, the solution differs from person to person and from situation to situation. Some say (e.g., Helgoe 2008) that introverts have a somewhat more difficult time, being more critical and analytical about their inner feelings. Nevertheless, according to Carl Rogers, receiving another person's unconditional acceptance, empathic understanding and genuineness, at least to some degree, are the core "ingredients" of an atmosphere in which each person tends to move to a higher degree of congruence. At the end of this subchapter, we invite you to accompany Richard Weylman, the author of *The Power of Why*, in his reflection on what it really means to be open.

Case example by illustrating openness in a sales context

Seriously, Do You Really Think You Are Open-Minded?

Jan 26, 2016, 08:00 am

When I was General Sales Manager for a Rolls-Royce dealership in upstate New York, we had converted an old grocery store into a luxurious showroom and service facility. We installed mirrored walls framed with mahogany paneling, baccarat crystal chandeliers, and even Sherle Wagner bathroom fixtures. We became a tourist attraction nearly over night. But given the demographics of the region most of our business was generated by our innovative and personalized marketing campaigns to major metro areas such as NYC, Boston, Washington D.C., Philadelphia, Miami and Palm Beach. We were known as the place to receive great service, a personalized approach and that we would take most anything in trade. We even were the first to create 7-year financing to leverage tax advantages then available and to maximize the ROI on a Rolls-Royce which contrary to any other brand was an appreciating asset. I constantly heard how creative and open-minded we

were as we seriously out performed other dealers nationwide. We were so proud of ourselves!

One afternoon, an older couple came into the showroom, I greeted them and then they began to look at several of the Rollers we had on display. They looked like the looky-loos we saw several times per week. He had on bibb overalls and she had on a dress that most would categorize as a “house coat.” They walked around several cars until they stopped at one and he said to his wife, “What do you think?” She said, “I like the color, what do you think?” And he said, “I like the color too darling.”

I smiled and walked back to my office and a few minutes later he walked into my office and said, “How much would that one we like be?” I said, “Well come in and sit down and I will add it up for you,” while giving him my best don’t you wish you could afford it smile. They both sat down and I quoted them the full near 6 figure price and smiled again. He looked at her and said “Well what do you think Darlin’?” She said “Well I like the color.”

He then stood up pulled down the flap of those bibb overalls (no shirt on, lots of body hair-scary looking), pulled off a money belt and counted out the full price in CASH! Then he leaned over my desk and said “Do you think you can get off your judgmental butt and deliver this car to my house downstate by 8 am tomorrow morning?” I jumped to my feet and said, “Yes sir, I will be there at 8 am sharp!”

When I pulled up the next morning, he had an average looking split-level house but it was adjacent to his massive wholesale construction company warehouse with at least 40 trucks getting loaded for the day’s deliveries. When he came out to meet me he had on a Fioravanti-tailored suit that was \$6,000 if it was a dime. He looked me straight in the eye and said “What threw you off big boy—was it the bib overalls or was it my wife’s house coat?” I sheepishly said “Well actually it was both.”

He then said, “I came to see you because I had heard how nice it was to do business with you, but a word of advice—you’re nice but you’re not very open-minded and frankly you have a long way to go in that department!” That hard to hear lesson has guided me all the years since.

I think of this story often because so many sales people and leaders talk about how open-minded they are, but in reality they are not. They talk about being open-minded but their immediate response to most anything new or different is “but,” as in “thanks, BUT we already have that pretty well handled” or “Yes BUT, I am pretty good at that already.” Business suffers because the tendency is to prejudice new ideas, new approaches, or even how to find new prospects. Consequently they do not invest in themselves, their team, or their business.

The marketplace is changing rapidly. Keep doing what you have been doing and you will NOT keep getting what you have been getting, rather you will slowly go into decline. You never know in advance how much you can

improve or where your next sale or referral will come from if you prejudge the outcome or the person in advance.

We learn two ways—from experience or from education. Take a moment now and learn from my experience so you do not make the same mistake I did. Or as Isaac Asimov said so well, “*Your assumptions are your windows on the world. Scrub them off every once in a while, or the light won’t come in.*”

—Richard Weylman, author of *The Power of Why*

9.3.7 *The Confluence of the Three Person-Centered Attitudes*

In order to be truly facilitative, the three Rogers’ variables—at any time—need to form a balanced configuration in which one or the other is in the foreground and neither of them is missing completely. Figure 9.4 sketches this situation.

To give an example, let us follow up on Vignette 1: *Different frames of reference, standpoints, and paths to reach the goal or “Whom should I trust more, an experienced colleague or myself?”* So the question is: How do we see holding and expressing all the three variables in the context of Vignette 1?

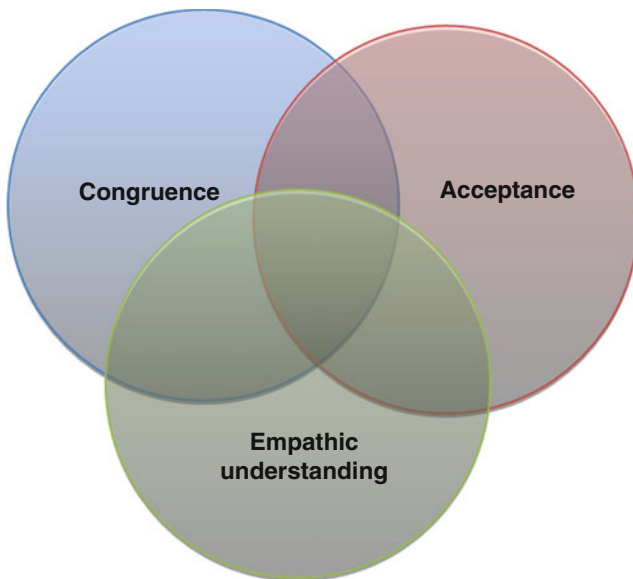


Fig. 9.4 Confluence of the three Rogers’ variables

First of all, how can we (or, in Vignette 1, the experienced manager and the junior expert) regain congruence? How can each admit to himself or herself, first of all, that one is feeling stressed, possibly somewhat angry at this particular difference in standpoints, and even sad that one's ideas and plans are not received by the other and blocked up? By admitting this to ourselves, we can more easily convey to the other that there is something that lies between us and needs attention, whenever the time is right. While admitting to oneself the difference in this one specific issue, it would be important to also emphasize the otherwise successful cooperation and good relationship. Possibly, consulting with others and thoughtfully describing to them each of the positions might help to meet this one challenge. Or both stepping back from their positions and exploring the interest behind the positions might help to re-establish some flow in this area.

Furthermore, listening for deep understanding of the other's perspective would be of highest priority. Would it be possible to sit down with her/him, without distraction, and really get into one another's perspective, one at a time, and understand his/her motivation from an authentic level? What is the logic in the other's perspective from that frame of reference, putting our own values and prejudices aside, at least temporarily, so that the other feels fully understood? This includes asking all the questions we need to in order to feel totally satisfied that we understand that perspective fully, remembering to keep our own values in check.

In this vignette, acceptance appears to be in place already, judging from the otherwise good relationship between the "players." So, having fully understood the other's perspective, we are now in a much more comfortable position to move on in collaboration without letting ourselves get stuck in the perceived difference. Feeling fully received, even in the difference, the other will be much more receptive to hearing our view and look out if there is some compromise that can be made or some third option to be taken. In the authors' view, such situations, indeed, can be turned to ones full of significant learning, personal growth, and innovative solutions.

As early as 1959, Rogers (1959, p. 215) formulated an essential relationship between congruence, acceptance, and empathic understanding. He wrote that a part of the congruence of a person is the experience of acceptance and empathic understanding (Rogers 1959, p. 215). He considered congruence that encompasses the experience of acceptance and empathic understanding as the basis of highly appropriate behavior. In our view, such perception, reaction, and behavior are fully in tune with including the people-oriented agenda and this is what (not only) our business world needs urgently.

Invitation to reflect:

Let us reflect on the three core attitudes in the interaction between the manager and team member interacting in the third vignette at the beginning of this chapter. At which places do congruence, acceptance, and empathic understanding enter the conversation and what effect do they have? What effect does the lack of congruence have?

In particular, how, in your experience, is realness expressed that lacks acceptance and empathic understanding? Have you ever experienced such a situation?

9.4 Coherence

The basic idea behind this concept is simple. It means that, at each moment, a person can integrate Rogers' three attitudes with following the organization's goals. In other words, he/she manages to follow two agendas such that the (inter-)personal and organizational aspects are coherent to each other, resonate, or fit in with each other. This constellation can create synergy between the flourishing of people and the moving forward in the organization or business. However, as with congruence, coherence needs to be re-established again and again. It is a process in which incoherent states are dissolved as coherence is approached. In music, this process can be compared with tuning which needs to be done each time a new instrument joins the orchestra or when one needs to make sure all are in tune before playing a piece together and avoiding dissonant tones.

Carrying the music metaphor further, the various attacks on coherence can be compared with the causes for acoustical dissonance. For example, one instrument can get off-tune—much as people can become incongruent/overstressed in their work. Moreover, the orchestra can get confused and stop functioning smoothly due to some instruments playing too loudly or fast, etc. This is comparable with some internal problem in an organization, such as unrealistic claims for higher salaries. Yet a further scenario deals with external causes of dissonance or attacks on coherence: Imagine that the orchestra cannot perform well because of environmental noises and disturbances, etc. Transferred to issues causing incoherence, a comparable scenario is the organization being threatened by new governmental demands. All these reasons can cause incoherence, and it is apparent that coherence needs to be re-established if employees and organization are to work productively, efficiently, and with the satisfaction of all concerned.

Evidently, once we are interested in people in the context of their work, Rogers' socio-environmental conditions of personal growth need to be complemented by their relationship to an organization's objectives so that the person as such *and* as part of the organization can unfold psychologically and positively contribute to the dynamically changing organizational objectives. This aspect of coherence is sketched on the left-hand side of Fig. 9.5 as an inclusion of person-centered attitudes in the frame of organizational objectives. In other words, it can be expressed as following the 2agendas@work.

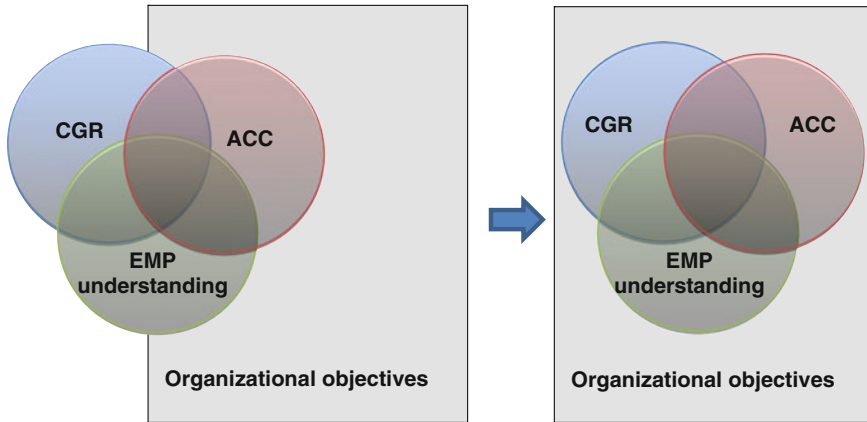


Fig. 9.5 Sketch of moving from an incoherent state to a coherent one in which the person-centered attitudes resonate with the organization's objectives

9.5 Conclusion

Congruence and coherence are highly desirable but complex and not easy-to-reach goals. Even though they can be acquired in a multitude of complementary ways, a proven path to higher congruence is a direct, interpersonal relationship to a person who embodies a high level of congruence, acceptance, and empathic understanding. This is because these attitudes are expressed through a complex mix of words, feelings, and actions.

If we can manage our person-centered attitudes to be consistent with the goals of the organization or team that we are part of or aspire to, the state of coherence is reached—in our view the best precondition of motivation for mindful action at work.

Let us end this chapter—but not the further development of our attitudes—with a quote by Carl Rogers:

Perhaps the most basic of these essential attitudes is realness, or genuineness. When the facilitator is a real person, being what he or she is, entering into relationships with the learners without presenting a front or a facade, the facilitator is much more likely to be effective. This means, that the feelings the facilitator is experiencing are available to his or her awareness, that he or she is able to live these feelings, to be them, and able to communicate them if appropriate (Rogers 1983, p. 121).

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