



Satir coping stances

"Our challenge now is to develop human beings with values: moral, ethical, and humanistic. For me, this means learning how to be congruent, and that leads to becoming more fully human. When we achieve that, we will be able to enjoy this most wonderful planet and the life that inhabits it." - Virginia Satir

When we are not in balance, we are likely to cope with change in an unbalanced, less effective way.

Balancing Self, Other and Context

We say we're congruent, if we've balanced self, other, and context. That also means we (can) communicate (at that moment) congruently - our verbal and body language express the same message.



We can apply this simple model to two individuals or to organisations. The model itself will become more clear with some examples of incongruent coping stances later on.

Self is usually an individual or a group, much like other (although self is probably more often an individual), other is another individual or a group, or maybe the corporation Self works for. Context is the here and now, maybe its' a project we're working on or our clients' client. It's a model, we get to choose how we use it.

We can recognize incongruent coping, because one or more of the three ingredients (Self, Other or Context) are missing from the interaction. A warning - incongruence is best detected by ourselves. If we label someone else as incongruent, we risk stepping into the trap of blaming.

We will illustrate the stances with an example dialogue between a software developer D and his manager M. The software developer comes to the manager because he found that the build was broken this morning.

Blaming

"It's your fault!". When we are blaming, we take no account of other. It's definitely not our fault something is amiss. The typical body stance for this would be finger pointing. As Jerry Weinberg says: where do the other three fingers point to, when one finger is pointing away? Blaming is usually made possible, because Others are placating.





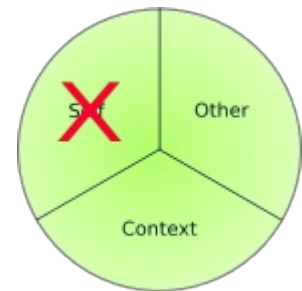
Example



D: When I came in this morning, I found that the build was broken. It took me 1 hour to find the cause and fix it.
 M: Did you break the build again? This is already the fifth time! You're always so sloppy.
 D: Well, I noticed that Peter was the last one to check in code yesterday...
 M: So now you're blaming someone else ... you never take responsibility for your actions!

Placating

"I'm not worthy, it is all my fault". When we are placating, we accept blame, or blame ourselves, even when we had nothing to do with it. When we placate, we believe we try to prevent conflict. Mostly, we only delay conflict, or set ourselves up for more blaming / placating. Often the coping hurts us more than dealing with the conflict, but that is hard to notice. In placating, we have erased Self from the picture.



Example



D: When I came in this morning, I found the build was broken. It took me 1 hour to find the cause and fix it.
 M: Oh, I'm so sorry. I should have provided you with better tools!
 D: I noticed Peter was the last one to check in code yesterday.
 M: I'm so sorry. I should have checked Peter was working with a pair. Please forgive me!

Superreasonable / Computing

"The process manual states that all processes must conform to standard x.y.z.013". When we are being superreasonable we want to apply general theories, whether they apply to the context or not. Self and Other are missing. We are being professional, and emotions are irrelevant. Going one level deeper, we may act superreasonable to hide our blaming ("you are not conforming to the process manual. You are a bad bad person") or, more often, our confusion and helplessness.



A few examples of possibly superreasonable behaviour:

- "Responsibility is essential to optimal performance" as a reaction to someone doing something that you find irresponsible;
- "Big design upfront is accepted by professional software developers as the best way to make software future proof" as a reaction to a developer proposing to do the simplest thing that could possibly work.



We must be careful not to make ourselves guilty of "authority fallacies". Such fallacies are of the following form:

- A person is (claimed to be) an authority on a Subject.
- This person makes a Claim about the Subject.
- Therefore, Claim is true (in all contexts, for there can only be One).

This fallacy is committed when the person in question is not a legitimate authority on the Subject. More formally, if a person is not qualified to make reliable claims in the Subject, any argument will be fallacious. Where did context disappear to just now?



Example 1

D: When I came in this morning, I found that the build was broken. It took me 1 hour to find the cause and fix it.

M: To err is human, so we all have to spend time to fix problems now and then. Why are you complaining?

Example 2

D: When I came in this morning, I found that the build was broken. It took me 1 hour to find the cause and fix it.

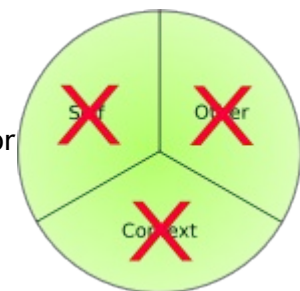
M: Was proper procedure followed for checking in the code?

D: Well, It was Peter who was the last to check in code, yesterday afternoon.

M: Well, according to our Software Engineering Guidelines section C Paragraph 5, every developer has to check in his code before he goes home. So Peter followed the right procedures. I don't see what you come to my office for - everything is as it should be. The Corporate Software Engineering Process Group didn't write these guidelines for nothing, you know...

Irrelevant

"Oh, look what a pretty flower". As with superreasonable, Self and Other usually are out of the picture. In addition, Context is missing completely. Often used to counter superreasonable (when we can't or won't find a counter-superreasonable stance as in "but in section x.y.z.14 it is stated...."). Irrelevance can be used to make difficult situations bearable - in a way highly relevant. Another way, like placating, to avoid conflict.



We may easily (often incorrectly) be led to believe Others behave irrelevantly, when we do not understand their behaviour in the current situation.



Example



D: When I came in this morning, I found that the build was broken. It took me 1 hour to find the cause and fix it.

M: Did you see the soccer match yesterday evening?

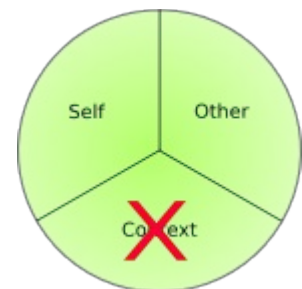
D: Well, I did, but I was talking about the broken build...

M: And did you like the match? I really enjoyed it, it was much better than the one last week... The penalty shoot-out was breathtaking!

D: Bye...

Loving / hating

"Oh, she's the greatest" or "Oh, I hate his guts". Context is completely out of the window, and Self and Other are locked in conflict (or mutual admiration). This may lead us to e.g. move deck chairs while our beloved ship is sinking or keep us fighting about our contract with a client instead of working with the client to save the project (and both of our butts).



Example 1

D: When I came in this morning, I found that the build was broken. It took me 1 hour to find the cause and fix it.

M: Let me guess, it was Peter again? He's always checking in faulty code! And he not only writes smelly code, he stinks! He is always asking stupid questions, his clothing taste sucks... he sucks! He can't do anything right! I wonder who's hired this guy...he should be fired!

Example 2



D: When I came in this morning, I found that the build was broken. It took me 1 hour to find the cause and fix it. I noticed that Peter was the last one to check in yesterday afternoon.

M: I'm sure Peter didn't check in faulty code, he's such a smart guy! Someone else must have made a mistake. Peter is our senior expert software developer. I hope he doesn't mind too much fixing all the mistakes you and the others make. I should give him a raise really, he's such a great guy.

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