



Towards congruence

Congruence means that:

*When I feel X (angry, happy, sad, grateful, hurt, proud, or whatever)
I say I feel X.
I sound like I feel X.
I look like I feel X.
My whole body is congruent with X.
I share my X feeling with you.
Then I can ask for help if I choose to.
And I know I will survive if I don't get the help I ask for.*

(from Gerald M. Weinberg, *Quality Software Management vol. III Congruent Action*, p. 64)

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

In this handout we provide some tips on how to move towards a more congruent stance and how to respond congruently to perceived incongruence in others. This handout is based on the works by Gerald Weinberg, Virginia Satir, and Norman Kerth.

Moving towards congruence

If you find yourself in an incongruent stance, you can take a number of steps to move yourself towards a more congruent stance:

First, *notice the incongruence* in yourself. Train yourself in recognising incongruence, e.g. by working with a coach, a friend or a triad. In this way you can reflect on what happened in different situations and on how you behaved and felt. We learned a lot for example from playing 'incongruence games': playing and exaggerating the incongruent stances as a pair or a small group is a lot of fun and helps to become more aware of the different stances.

Second, *make some small adjustments*, in your posture, breathing, and movement. Try to relax a bit, slow down, stop talking.

Third, *make contact with the other*. Speak from your own point of view, using "I" sentences. Avoid "you" sentences (that could sound like blaming) or "it" sentences (that could sound superreasonable).

Stick to observations and avoid interpretations, in the here-and-now. Use a present tense verb, avoid vague general purpose words like "responsibility". Keep it short and clear.

Treat the other with the respect, honesty and dignity you desire for yourself. If you feel you're not able to be respectful to the other or if you are just too excited or angry, you could indicate this (e.g. by saying "I'm having trouble saying how I feel right now, let's discuss these things later") and leave the interaction for this moment.

Fourth, *wait for the other to respond*.



Fifth, *repeat* as often as necessary until you become congruent or discover that you're not able to become congruent for this moment.

Reflect on what happened and use it as a learning opportunity.

Responding to incongruence

If you think you are facing incongruence in the other's behaviour, remember that it's *you* who interprets the other's behaviour as incongruent. The other might be behaving congruently from his or her point of view. Perhaps you're missing information? You could first try the *rule of three*: think of two other possible interpretations for the other's behaviour.

When facing incongruence, bring the other and/or the context back into the picture. Try rephrasing the other's ideas in a congruent way; stick to facts and observations, avoid interpretations. Typically:

- facing *blaming*, re-assure the other you are listening, e.g. repeat what the message you've heard, and then state your own feelings about it.
- facing *placating*, ask the person what he or she thinks about what they just said.
- facing *irrelevance*, let the person say what they want and use it as a metaphor to bring the discussion to the subject attempted to be avoided.
- facing *superreasonable*, gently touch the person; when the other is quoting a general truth or some authority, ask the person what *he or she* thinks or feels about it. You can also try some irrelevance to break through a wall of superreasonable behaviour.
- facing *loving/hating*, bring the context back. In projects, bringing the context back may not be that hard, if the project has clear goals.

Some more tips

Speak up when you feel an issue is important to you. Listen to your feelings - they will tell you what's really important for you.

Speak for yourself and speak to the right person. Don't communicate through third parties or speak for third parties.

Transform blaming behaviour into assertive, direct, honest behaviour; be seriously concerned about the other and what he or she is doing.

Transform placating behaviour into caring or yielding behaviour. An example of yielding behaviour: your boss asks you to perform a certain task you feel you are not up to; instead of responding in a placating way (e.g. saying nothing and accepting a task you know you're not up to) you can yield: "I feel I'm currently not able to do this task. Perhaps you can help me in learning how to do it?"



Transform superreasonable behaviour into focused or reasonable behaviour, e.g. in an emergency situation, to keep cool and to stay focused.

Transform loving/hating behaviour into beneficial alliances or friendly rivalries - always keeping an eye on the context.

Transform irrelevance into funny or creative behaviour - e.g. to get unstuck, to find new ideas or new ways out of the current situation.

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