

Congruence: A Powerful Tool in the Use of Self.

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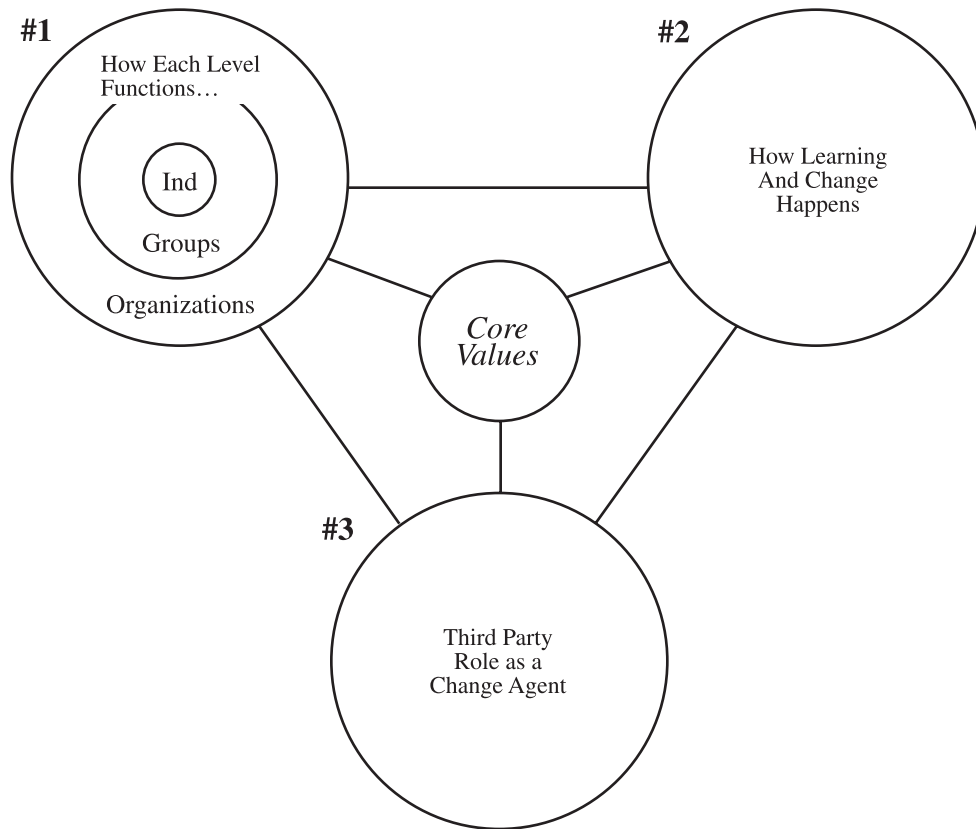
Congruence is an alignment between what I believe and how I act. My understanding of congruence in organizational work has been greatly enhanced by Robert Marshak, a professor in the American University/NTL Institute Masters program in OD.

I have reproduced an slightly adapted version of his diagram, which I will review. The three circles each identify a body of knowledge available to those who work as change agents in organizations. The upper left circle, #1, represents your models of how individuals, groups, and organizations function. These are your working models of healthy functioning from which you base your consulting interventions. You may be more or less conscious of these models, assumptions, and beliefs. Circle #2 represents your working model, including beliefs and assumptions, about how learning and change happens. Finally, circle #3 is your corresponding assumptions and model of your role as the change agent.

A powerful consultant presence results from a strong alignment between each of these areas. To illustrate, let's look at two contrasting examples. I may, as Freud, believe that individual's personalities are set early in life by repressed sexual energy(circle #1). Change happens by exploring symbolism and bringing these repressed issues back to consciousness(circle #2). My role is then to be an expert in interpreting symbolism and to encourage exploration of childhood memories(circle #3) But in another intervention, I may believe that teams need to struggle through conflict in order to resolve issues of inclusion and control(circle #1) Change happens when the group is willing to bring forth process issues or reflect and learn from critical incidents(circle #2). My role is to help create a safe space for issues to be voiced and reflection to occur(circle #3) Each of these examples maintains congruence between the three circles, creating the potential for each to be experienced as powerful interventions.

This congruence model raises several implications for change agents. First, am I conscious of my assumptions and beliefs? It is possible for a consultant to be very aware of their working models for one circle and be unconsciously operating out of the other two circles. Looking at circle #2 for example, do you work with change as more of an evolutionary or revolutionary concept? Is change an aspect of: fixing and maintaining, building and developing, transitioning from one state to another, or transforming from death to rebirth? If we switch our operating assumptions in one circle, do we need to change the circles to maintain congruence? Congruence requires noticing the words, metaphors and images we utilize in order to monitor alignment between how things function, how change happens and our role in creating that change.

Holding all of this together is our core values, shown as the dotted circle in the diagram. Our core beliefs, who we are, and what we stand for are the glue that binds our "self" with aligned models of consulting. Finally, congruence means aligning our words with our action. As Gandhi said, "We must be the change we are trying to create." This creates a powerful presence and full "use of self".



*Three Bodies Of Knowledge Pertinent to Organizational Change:
 Congruence Between Bodies Leads to Powerful Use of Self
 (This Model Was Originally Developed by Robert Marshak)*

ⁱ Marshak, R.J. (1993) Managing the Metaphors of Change. *Organizational Dynamics*. 22(1) 44-56.