THE GEOMETRY OF DIALOGUE

A VISUAL WAY OF UNDERSTANDING INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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PREFACE

I would like to begin this study by placing the topic of communication skills in the broadest possible historical context, a context which, at the same time, has great personal meaning for me.

In the course of my lifetime, which began in 1941, and with a pace that is still accelerating, the effectiveness of human tool-making has made mind-boggling leaps forward. By tools I mean computers, airplanes, cars, chemicals, bombs, guns, etc.: all the instruments of creation, destruction, transportation and communication that we have made to achieve our goals. For better or worse, almost all of them have gotten much more effective at doing whatever they do. As a computer programmer in the 1980s I watched this happen on my very own desk. The computers I programmed doubled or tripled in power every few years, and continue to do so today. And I loved it.

Similar quantum-leap improvements in our tools are happening everywhere one looks. Fiber optic cables carry thousands of messages where a wire carried one. My friend’s knee surgery was performed with tiny, remotely controlled cables. Such
examples of tool-making success could be extended to fill many books.

Unfortunately, all the things that destroy life have gotten more effective, too. The plutonium we have created for nuclear warheads is 3.5 million times more explosive than the TNT it replaces. Around the world, warring forces sow the land with new, improved, plastic land mines that are undetectable with traditional mine sweeping equipment and will lie in wait for decades, perhaps even centuries. This list also goes on and on.

All our tools, good and bad, tools for saving lives and tools for killing people, are getting more powerful. What makes this a pressing problem is that there has been no parallel increase in our ability to get along with one another, no change in our fundamental intentions toward one another, which are often coercive and punitive.

I leave it to you to judge whether our ability to communicate and reconcile our conflicts is deteriorating or just holding its own, as the years roll by. Based on the evidence of the twentieth century, a person would have to work very hard to argue that it was getting better. And no one in their right mind would suggest that our ability to get along had improved a thousand or million fold, as has the power of our tools.

So, as I struggle to understand my own era it appears to me that humanity is moving deeper and deeper into a crisis of tool-making versus social skills and interpersonal intentions. What I see is a rapidly expanding gap between our growing physical capacity to blow one another to pieces, on the one hand, and on the other, our relatively unchanging capacity to manage the conflicts of everyday life and negotiate about the distribution of limited resources. (Gunshot wounds are now the leading cause of death of young African-American men.) It’s hard to see how life can continue if this gap goes on getting larger. At every level of human society, from a family quarrel that ends in a shooting to nations that threaten each other with nuclear weapons and poison
gas, our capacity for mechanized mayhem appears to be racing further and further ahead of our communication skills.

It is considerations such as these (and the fact that I come from a family in which people did not talk to one another for decades at a time) that have turned me into a missionary for communication and conflict resolution skills.

What gives me hope is that fighting and making peace are both learned activities. No human being is born knowing how to do either. And just has we have invented new and more destructive ways to fight, we can invent new and more effective ways to make peace, and more creative ways to cooperate. We can invent them, and I believe we need to invent them soon if we want life to continue on planet Earth. And it is also true that better communication skills just plain make for a happier life, so this is not some bitter medicine we have to take. The path toward community and world peace can also be a path of deep personal fulfillment.

No one has influenced my thinking about human development more than the developmental psychologist Robert Kegan. In Kegan’s view, the central theme of human development a growing capacity to observe one’s own psychological processes: thinking, feeling, role-playing, story-telling, story making, etc. I think this may also be true of a family, an entire culture, or even of humanity as a whole. Just as getting along better in a family may involve the family members becoming more aware of how they handle conflict situations, the growing crisis of mechanized violence presses humanity as a whole to become more aware as a of how we cooperate (or don’t), communicate (or don’t) and solve problems together (or don’t). Many people are working to nurture this new global self-awareness and through this study I join with them in that great effort.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank at least some of the many people
who made this study possible. Dr. Marshall Rosenberg, of the Center for Nonviolent Communication, was the person who first got me inspired to study the moment to moment flow of interaction between people. Prof. W. Barnett Pearce, of Loyola University of Chicago, has been a great mentor and has given me large quantities of time, insight, inspiration and Indian food, to keep me going when it was difficult for me to see how I was going to accomplish the goals I had set for myself. Dr. Helen Meloy, of Calif. State University Northridge, worked with me on teaching materials and gave me the opportunity to teach communication skills to her peer counseling students as a guest lecturer at the Ventura Campus. I owe those co-learners a deep debt of gratitude for allowing me to accompany them on their first journey into the world of community volunteering. Dr. Susan Rennie, of Vermont College, encourage me to press on even when the way was not clear to me and the topic that I had chosen turned out to be much more difficult than I had imagined. My dear friend Clive Casez did not live to see this manuscript, but I know he would have enjoyed it, having been there when I first started teaching communication skills. Michael Bean, systems designer extrordinaire, equally at home with bicycles, bee hives and computers, has been a continual source of inspiration and encouragement to me to design the world continuously being born. All the people of good heart who have participated in my nonviolence trainings and compassionate communication workshops have helped me to keep alive the dream of a nurturing, cooperative world through times of great violence and confusion.

Dennis Rivers, 1997
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INTRODUCTION:
MY QUEST FOR A FACILITATIVE MODEL
OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

On the day that [the great physicist Richard] Feynman died, the following message was found on his office blackboard: “What I cannot create, I do not understand.” What was true for Feynman is true for the rest of us. One of the best ways to gain a deeper understanding of something is to create it, to construct it, to build it.\(^1\)

I.1. Issues in teaching communication skills

Six Dimensions is an elaborate model of the components, processes and possibilities at work in interpersonal communication, and is intended to be used as an overarching outline for communication skills training. Before I begin explaining all the various levels and details of this model, I would like to explain how it was that I got inspired to try to create such a model in the first place and the intellectual resources I hoped would make this model more illuminating and empowering.

The goal of communication training, as I see it, is to empower people to enter more skillfully, awarely, creatively and enthusiastically into all the various negotiations of living. Because living, whatever else we may say about it, is a communication-intensive activity. Since each of us is a unique person with unique needs, we are often going to want something different than the people around us. And since we live in a world of limits (limited land, food, time, attention, etc.) we have to negotiate with other people to try to get our needs met, and to try to arrange that everyone gets at least some

level of their basic needs met. If we say that life is about relating to other people, we are also saying that life cannot be understood without including communication. As I came to recognize this, over the course of the 1980s, I became more and more interested in how people communicate.

In the course of being both a student and a teacher of communication skills, I was always on the lookout for simple techniques that would help people communicate better. After a lot of trial and error it became clear to me that the “simple techniques” approach was not going to produce much in the way of results. This is largely because a person’s communication activities are embedded in and arise out of a web of contexts that constitute one’s overall way of understanding oneself and the world of relationships in which one lives. (In other words, I was trying to get the tail to wag the dog.) In the last paragraph I stated that life cannot be understood without including communication. It is also true, I now believe, that communication cannot be understood very deeply without including situations, relationships, communities and journeys we call life.

I.2. My need for an overall model of persons in process

As I tried to clarify key issues and attitudes involved in talking and listening more satisfyingly, I became aware that I did not have a satisfactory working model of a person’s “web of contexts” that I could link to communication. I was impressed with various theories of human functioning, especially that of Erik Erikson, in which the developing ego is the mediator between the organism’s needs and the environment’s resources and constraints. I also had been deeply inspired by the Object Relations theory of human development, in which infants are seen as gradually weaving a sense of self out of remembered interactions with their mothers (or other primary care givers). But I got nowhere when I tried to use such ideas to understand the moment-to-moment twists and turns in conversations. It was clear to me that conversations are the leading edge of our evolving relationships with other people, and thus the leading edge of our evolving
personalities. But I could not really describe the connection.

This frustration led me to investigate more conversationally-oriented models of overall human functioning. The result, after several years work, is the Six Dimensions Model described in this study. The Six Dimensions model is a reshuffling of ideas from existing studies and theories into a communication skill trainer’s (and learners) model, one that emphasizes the links between conversations, relationships and personhood. Traditional theorizing in psychology and communication studies is generally not intended to help ordinary people understand their lives better or take new actions. The Six Dimensions model, on the other hand, is a teaching model. It is addressed to the general public in the hope of stimulating people’s interest in and exploration of better communication skills and personal/social development. It uses conversations as a way of beginning to work on significant developmental issues, such as “What kind of story do I use to understand new situations?”.

My drive to build a multi-dimensional model of communication is also the result of two ideas connecting in my mind in an almost explosive way. The first idea comes from the work of Robert Kegan on the role of self-observation in the process of human development. A major part of the development of a person’s feelings, thoughts, social roles, etc., according to Kegan, has to do with being able to focus one’s attention on one’s own feeling, thinking and role performance, etc.

The second idea is from Carl Rogers. According to Rogers, we bring our psychological processes and life experience into awareness by symbolization (in words, pictures, music, stories, etc.) The conclusion I draw from the connection of these two

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2 Such as those found in the various books and papers of Barnett Pearce, John Shotter, Kenneth Gergen and proponents of systems-oriented family therapy.


ideas is that a crucial element in the process of development is the ability to conceive of and express the development one is trying to achieve.

Such conceptualizations of human development are a part of everyday life in many other cultures (Tibetan mandalas, Navajo sand paintings, Hassidic stories, and devotional chanting in India are examples). But in Western countries the conceptualization of human development is left to a few scholars and researchers. The argument just related strongly suggests to me that the topic of human development is not just for experts: everyone who wants to develop as a person will need to find a way to conceive of their own development, or will suffer for lack of such pictures, songs, stories, etc. The Six Dimensions model is my way of trying to bring my own personal and communicative development into conscious focus. It also might provide one possible example of this process to other people who, like myself, were born into a cultural tradition that is somewhat lacking in visions of human development. (I will present this argument at greater length in chapter 2.)

I.3. “Dimensions” as ranges of possible actions

The Six Dimensions model is based on the idea of a range of related possible actions. These could be imagined as “menus” (as in computer software), as palettes of colors in painting or as piano keyboards. As we communicate and negotiate our way through life we draw from a wide variety of ranges of possible actions and styles of action. Practically speaking, there are a nearly infinite number of possible sentences, and when you combine those sentences into sequences with body language and different contexts, you have an even larger nearly infinite number of possible conversations. Ordinarily we don't think much about exactly what kind of conversation we want to have.

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5For a discussion of how a sense of possibility evolves in children and the role that a sense of possibility plays in the lives of adults, see Jean Piaget, *Possibility and Necessity: Volume 1, The Role of Possibility in Cognitive Development* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).
We tend to have more of the kinds of conversations we observed and participated in when we were children. I believe that to get better at a given activity, to do something differently, we have to pay conscious attention to how we do it and try to feel out or imagine those other possibilities which we have not yet actualized. To use a visual metaphor, we have to imagine the terrain we are trying to cross.

I.4. Six Dimensions as a map of possibilities

The Six Dimensions model is a map of the possibilities available to us in the process of communication. It is intended to help people think more clearly about what they are trying to learn. To give an example, I have developed a list of about thirty fundamental kinds of conversations, drawing on the work of various communication researchers. In my workshops I ask my students to pair up and explore starting each of those thirty conversations. My hope is that each student will have several “ah-ha” experiences along the way, as they realize that the spectrum of possibilities is wider than they imagined. I believe very strongly that (please forgive all the “p”’s) the process of personal empowerment begins with the perception of positive possibilities. The alternative is to feel trapped in a game in which there are only a few moves allowed. In a recent interview the renown family therapist, Salvador Minuchin, used similar words to describe his lifetime of working with families:

Theoretically, I do what I have always done. I still look at the way in which the current transactions in a family support conflict. I am always saying to people, in one way or another, “There are more possibilities in you than you think. Let us find a way to help you become less narrow.” But the ways that I say that today are less dramatic than they used to be. I ask more questions and give fewer prescriptions.⁶ (my italics)

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I.5. Using “dimensions” or “menus” to show meaningful clusters of possibilities

If all this sounds a bit abstract to you, you are absolutely correct. It is abstract, just like algebra. And as Kegan has labored so carefully to demonstrate, human social development involves learning to abstract about living: to see underlying patterns and to propose overarching themes. The abstractness involved in seeing new possibilities is one of the central problems in my work. I want to help people see more possibilities in all the day-to-day negotiations of life, but it is not realistic to expect everyone to learn something as abstract as algebra, no matter how great the benefit might be. How am I going to make the idea of “possibility dimensions” more imaginable?

One response to this challenge that I am currently exploring is to borrow an experience that many people already have and use it as a reference point. That experience is the experience of using menus in computer software. Tens of millions of people around the world are accustomed to using Macintoshes and PC’s by ‘pulling down’ menus of possible actions. Rather than having one long list of all possible actions, software menus show us meaningful clusters of related possible actions.7 For example, the File Menu in a word processing program will include opening a file, saving it, closing it, etc. The Edit Menu will list actions that affect a particular block of text and will include erase, copy, and move. Building on this familiar experience, I would like people to imagine that the infinite possibilities in conversation can be grouped into six menu-like dimensions of related actions. In a later work I plan to elaborate on this or other possible visual metaphors such as dials on an auto dash board, controls in an airplane cockpit or the multi-layered keyboard on a church organ, but for the present study I will use the idea of a dimension in geometry as a simple metaphor for a range of related actions or

7 In asking my readers or students to contemplate not simply a list of possibilities, but six different lists, I realize that I am setting before them an abstraction task for which some may not be ready. Cognitive readiness is an unresolved issue in my work. For an extended discussion of this issue see Robert Kegan, In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).
experiences. (In a computer-based tutorial, I would be able to let readers choose the metaphor they like best.) The goal of using any of these metaphors would be the same: to help people become more aware of the choices that are available to them, and to present these choices in meaningful groups.

I.6. Some limits of knowledge and model-building

To map these clusters of related possibilities in communication, I have to ask two fundamental and overlapping questions: “What is going on inside of people?” and “What is going on between people?” My ongoing research as a communication trainer over the last ten years has been to learn as much as I can about the many and varied answers that have been put forth to these two questions up to now. And in the process of doing this I have encountered some of the limits of human knowledge. Four of these limits strike me as being major challenges to my project.

Limit one: no final boundary. The first of these four limits is expressed in a story told by Benoit Mandelbrot, the mathematician who popularized fractals in this century. He presents us with what I would call a wonderful “koan” (in the Zen tradition, a koan is an illuminating riddle). “How long is the coastline of Britain?” It turns out that the closer you look (bays, coves, rocks, pebbles, molecules, atoms, etc.) the longer it gets. Although at first glance one would probably say that the coastline of Britain has some definite length, the length of coastline of Britain is actually infinitely long (if one keeps on making the scale of observation smaller). Or, alternatively, its length depends on how closely you want to look. Neither of these alternatives is all that satisfying to someone (like me) who wants a definite answer.

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And, of course, it is not just the coastline of Britain that Mandelbrot is talking about. Many, perhaps all, objects and processes in nature appear to be similarly complex. I read Mandelbrot’s story after an intense period of looking for the one right description of human communication, and it helped me to see that human conversations are a part of the infinitely complex world of living systems in which there are no complete descriptions. There is a one word answer the questions “What’s going on inside of people and what’s going on between people?” The answer is “Everything!” As the evolutionary biologist George G. Simpson commented, the goal of physics is to find one law to explain all phenomena, but biology is one phenomenon to which all laws apply.9

Thus, one limit on model building is that no model of a living system can show everything at once. Model builders must select the scale of observation and the features they want to emphasize. Also, the idea of showing everything, even if it were possible, does not address the issue of patterns of coherence in the elements of everything. Different goals, in effect, create different angles of vision, which often reveal different patterns of coherence and suggest different models. Thus, it appears that we cannot escape from the knowledge-shaping effects of the goals that motivate our investigations.10 We can, however, understand our goals better and be more explicit about them.

Limit two: infinite variability. A second limit on our knowledge about conversations is that conversations vary enormously and it is part of the strength of human communication skills that conversations can and do vary to encompass endlessly

10 For a discussion of the way that desire shapes perception see Robert Ornstein, The Psychology of Consciousness (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman, 1972) 37. By emphasizing that different goals may cause us to look at the same subject matter in different ways, I believe that I do not, at this point, need to take a position in relation to the debate concerning whether or not perception is theory laden. I think it is worthwhile to separate the issues of goals influencing our view from the issue of ideas influencing our view. For a discussion of that latter issue see Alvin I. Goldman, Philosophical Applications of Cognitive Science, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1993) 33-39.
varying situations. Very rarely, if ever, are two conversations exactly alike, and our conversations probably would not get better if we tried to make them more uniform. Individuals grow, situations change and cultures evolve. This suggests that our knowledge about conversations is not converging on a stable target. (This would be another aspect of the “How long is the coastline of Britain?” riddle. The length of coastline of Britain changes continuously as sandbars form and wash away.) Conversations bend and turn to accommodate changing situations in much the same way that a stream winds its way down a canyon. And like a river rafter, we cannot know in advance the one best action to take, but we might be able to know in advance twenty fruitful actions that we could possibly take, depending on the circumstances.

**Limit three: multiple contexts.** A third limit on the process of understanding human communication is that, ultimately, there are no independent “parts” in natural systems. Everything depends on everything else. This is certainly true with regard to human interaction, as will be discussed at length in the following chapters. Most of what people do in interacting with one another depends for its meaning on a complex web of contexts (conversation, situation, personhood/life journey, community, culture and more). At the risk of making the Six Dimensions model too complex to understand, I have tried to include in the model a preliminary view of the various contexts involved.

**Limit four: self-referentiality.** A fourth limit to understanding human communication is that it includes self-referential loops that undermine any stable definition. While a rock or a leaf seem fairly immune to my opinions about them, my ideas about myself are a crucial part of my self, and what I think I’m doing and hope to do (my intentions) are a crucial part of my communication with others. This is most acute in situations such as that of a judge who in describing his action, performs his action (“I now sentence you to ten years in prison”), but self-referential loops (“...we are

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11This might happen in institutional settings such as courts of law, but I think you will agree that it would be stretching the definition of conversation to include these interactions as conversations.

12See quote from Fritjof Capra at beginning of Chapter Two.
doing such-and-such because that’s what we agree we’re doing...”) are pervasive in human communication. Given that my goal is to facilitate new interaction and not to solve logical riddles in the philosophy of language, my response to the problem of self-referentiality has been to embrace it rather than to try to overcome it. Thus I have included self-observation, self-questioning and the clarification of one’s intentions as central parts of the Six Dimensions model.

Although I have been humbled by these and other limits of human understanding encountered when one asks “What is going on inside of people?” and “What is going on between people?”, I have not given up trying to map the fundamental dynamics of interpersonal communication. What has changed is that I know that I am building a model from a particular perspective, one that emphasizes the points of influence and intervention that would allow people to steer their interactions toward creative cooperation and away from coercion. In the course of my model-building I try to bring those points of influence and intervention to the foreground and let all other information be in the background. The knowledge contained in my model will thus always be less than complete and relative to my goals of facilitating cooperation. (I include a discussion of this primarily facilitative stance at the end of chapter Two.)

I.7. Systems theory as a frame of reference

Many academic disciplines (anthropology, psychology, sociology, biology and more) have provided me with illuminating information about what is going on within and between people. Although the content of the Six Dimensions is drawn mostly from psychology and communication studies, the structure of the model is based primarily on

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systems theory, so I would like to present a brief overview of that enterprise.

Systems theory has gone through several phases in this century. In the 1920s and 1930s it was an area of interest in biology and medicine about the “whole organism,” how the whole organizes the parts through multiple feedback loops, and how the organism relates to its environment. World War II turned systems theory into a branch of engineering called operations research, as scientists applied ideas about feedback to the design of radar-guided anti-aircraft guns; and the mathematical theory of games was used by the Allies in their struggle against the German submarine fleet.\textsuperscript{14}

Operations research had become a fad by the 1960s, in which earnest managers divided the flow of everything into inputs, processes and outputs. The weekly body count in the Vietnam war was an example of how an idea with great promise can be taken to horrific extremes. This was the large scale industrial engineering phase of systems theory. The originators of systems theory never gave up on biology, it just took a few decades (in my view) for systems theory to overcome the simultaneously nurturing and distorting effects of World War II. As Gregory Bateson’s books became more popular in the 1970s, systems theory entered into its current ecological and psychological phase with an emphasis on the interwovenness and mutual causality observable in families, rain forests and the web of life.

Today’s systems theory in psychology is a detailed inquiry into how the pattern of the whole family or organization organizes the roles of various participants. But even here I think it is important not to go overboard with a good idea. I think it is a mistake to conceive of a person as merely an obedient cog in a family system, even if it looks like that at first glance. The truth may be more paradoxical: the whole organizes the parts and the parts organize the whole. That’s why often when one person changes, the whole family may change. Personally, I think the power is in the paradox. It is in switching

one’s perspective back and forth between the whole and the part that one sees the way in which natural systems, and families and organizations glue themselves together. (In the interpretation of texts, this is called hermeneutics. It is interesting to me that in our lifetimes, the methods of the sciences and the humanities have been moving in similar directions. That certainly was not true in other centuries.)

One growing edge of systems theory today concerns fractals: mathematical and biological patterns (like the structure of a fern leaf) in which each part contains the pattern of the whole, and the whole and the part can be seen to be expressions of the same pattern. Although I will not be able to explore the idea at length in this study, it appears to me that the same six-armed spiral pattern that is at work in conversations may also be work in projects, relationships and community life.

The original idea of feedback in systems theory has blossomed into the all encompassing idea of self-observation, and even self-creation through self-observation. Instead of “I think hence I am.” it is “I observe my thinking processes and myself into existence at the same time!”

Systems theory is far from perfect and often appears to explain everything in general but nothing in particular.15 One writer insists that it is not a single body of thought at all but only a grab-bag of loosely related ideas.16 Be that as it may, I find four of those ideas enormously helpful in trying to build a model of human communication.

- **Feedback:** The idea of feedback loops and circular causality.
- **Steering:** The idea of steering a complex process toward a goal or goals.
- **Emergence:** The idea that something new emerges from the complex interaction of the parts or components of a system.


• **Fractal similarity of process:** The idea that the same set of dynamics may be active at many different levels of organization: the cell, the organ, the body, the organization, the nation, etc.\(^{17}\)

To these systems theory ideas I have added three ideas about facilitative model-building:

**A first-person, facilitative point of view.** Representative models of communication usually embody the point of view of an outside observer rather than the points of view of the participants. This produces a “How do they communicate?” description. In the Six Dimensions model I emphasize the first person point of view, which produces a “How am I doing this and how could I do it differently?” description. This first person description can be turned into a third person description for purposes of scholarly discussion, but the important point for me is that it must remain possible to shift perspectives back into the first person world of action and embodiment.

**Action language.** Representative models are full of theoretical entities, hypothetical “things,” such as channels, messages, status, power, attitudes, etc. I am convinced that a model intended to facilitate new action needs to be expressed in the language of action: words such as speaking, listening, questioning (verbs) and completely, partially, concretely, abstractly, etc. (adverbs). It is very difficult to translate a third-person “thing” model into a first-person action model. Our models of social and scientific research are largely patterned on the reliable verification of the existence or non-existence of some physical or theoretical “thing.” That model does not work very well when we are trying to help a person expand their view of what actions are possible and voluntarily engage in some new behavior.

**Visual model making.** Many cultures have used geometry and diagrams to

\(^{17}\)For a thousand-page manifesto on this point (and the other points as well), see James G. Miller, *Living Systems* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978).
represent and understand important aspects of life. Among the most notable examples are Navajo(Dine) sand paintings, Hindu and Tibetan mandalas, ancient Greek mystery teachings centering on geometry, and the designs of cathedral windows. Diagrams are helpful because they allow us to model a complex set of relationships or interactions which would be difficult, if not impossible, to describe using everyday language. My work draws inspiration from these ancient traditions, as well as from architectural drawing and computer programming data flow diagrams.

I.8. Summary

In this introduction I have given a brief overview of my quest for a more facilitative model of interpersonal communication. In general, if we cannot observe an activity in which we are engaged, we will not be able to steer it toward success. And to observe a complex process such as interpersonal communication we need a rich vocabulary and an organizing map. The Six Dimensions model represents my effort to develop such a vocabulary and such a map, from the point of view of communication trainers and learners, and using the conceptual tools outlined above. On the next three pages you will find the visual models that tie together most of the information in this book. By starting with the diagrams, I hope that I will serve you better by providing structures to hold the large amount of information presented in the following chapters.
**Figure I-1. A SIX DIMENSIONS/FIVE TRANSFORMATIONS model of conversation**

by Dennis Rivers (for more information, visit www.coopcomm.org/geometry_of_dialogue)

**INFLOWING**

**background & FOREGROUND**

information streams about people's actions, feelings, thoughts, needs, intentions, inner resources, and the organizing themes of identity of other people's lives, etc.

**Transformation D:**

Conversational self-creation: I take into my inner resources and sense of self all the messages, feelings, intentions and actions I generate toward you.

**OUTFLOWING**

**background & FOREGROUND**

information streams generated by my/our actions & quality of action, and expressing my/our feelings, thoughts, needs, intentions, inner resources, and the organizing themes of my sense of self-in-relation, etc.

**Exploratory Self-Questioning**

How does this feel to me? What am I experiencing right now? How could I/we have done that differently? What can I/we learn from this? What inner resources am I bringing to this experience? What alternative inner resources could I bring to this experience? What solution might bring everyone more of what they want? What is the most important thing I want in this situation? What "maps" am I using and how could or should they be revised? (& more...)

**Dimension 1:**

Processes of Experiencing

observing, thinking/evaluating feeling, wanting/hoping (to, from, for / me, you, us past, present & future) anticipating (if...then...) (& more...)

**Dimension 2:**

Express, listen, reflect, summarize, question, take/yield a turn, declare intent & invite consent (& more...)

**Dimension 3:**

Conversational Actions

Express, listen, reflect, summarize, question, take/yield a turn, declare intent & invite consent (& more...)

**Dimension 4:**

Conversational Style: HOW...

completely, concretely, self-inclusively, action-oriented-ly, open-to-learning-ly, awarely, honestly, cooperatively, compassionately (& more...)

**Dimension 5:**

Forms of Self-Awareness

awareness of my own actions, self-listening & self-talk, thinking as inner conversation, exploratory self-questioning, taking the role of the other, listening through/to the body, journaling & meditation (& more...)

**Dimension 6:**

Inner Resources

relationship history, context, stories, scripts, maps, skills, categories, metaphors, internalized others, projects, goals, promises, how I imagine you feel about me, how I feel about myself (& more...)

**Transformation A:**

Using my inner resources I translate and transform my experience into conversational intentions.

**Transformation B:**

Using my inner resources I translate and transform my experience into conversational interactions and styles of interaction.

**Transformation C:**

By adopting the participant-observer-learner stance and expanding my self-awareness, I can transform experience and conversational interaction into new or revised inner resources.

**Transformation D:**

Includes

Conversational self-creation: I take into my inner resources and sense of self all the messages, feelings, intentions and actions I generate toward you.

**Transformation E:**

Using my inner resources (with varying degrees of self-awareness) to SELECT and SHAPE, I transform my perceiving into experiencing.

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1. EXPERIENCING:

- observing
- interpreting, evaluating
- feeling emotions
- wanting, hoping, envisioning

in conversation, to
- share, console
- negotiate, request
- problem solve
- plan shared action
(and many more)

6. UNDERSTANDING:

- learning, creating, using
- reinforcing and revising scripts, maps,
images, metaphors, and roles
- my interpretations, assumptions, about my own
knowledge, self, you and our context

in conversation, to
- listen, express
- reflect back
- summarize, praise
- ask questions
- take or yield a turn
(and more)

4. GUIDING AND SHAPING ONE’S AND INTERACTION QUALITIES OF ACTION

- conversation, to
- share, console
- negotiate, request
- problem solve
- plan shared action
(and many more)

3. TRANSLATING GOALS AND INTENTIONS INTO ACTION

in conversation, to
- listen, express
- reflect back
- summarize, praise
- ask questions
- take or yield a turn
(and more)

5. AWARENESS, SELF-AWARENESS, AND EXPLORATORY SELF-QUESTIONING

your self-awareness and styles of self-questioning

Your UNDERSTANDING

actualities: our stream of unique moment-to-moment asserting, communicating, cooperating, and conflicting

my self-reinforcement of my scripts, roles, meanings & feelings

Your EXPERIENCING

my self-reinforcement of my scripts, roles, meanings & feelings

Your INTENTION FORMING & GOAL SEEKING

our interaction

infinite field of possibilities, necessities, contexts & limits

Your ACTIONS

my actions

your actions

Figure 1-2. Both sides of the dialogue in the Six Dimensions model.

by Dennis Rivers (for more information, visit www.coopcomm.org/geometry_of_dialogue)

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Introduction: My Quest for a Facilitative Model of Interpersonal Communication

Using my/our inner resources (with varying degrees of self-awareness) to SELECT and ORGANIZE, I/we transform my/our perceiving into experiencing.

Using my/our inner resources I/we translate and transform my/our experience into intentions and goals.

Using inner resources I/we translate and transform my/our experience and intentions into creative interaction and style of interaction.

By adopting the participant-observer-learner stance and expanding my/our self-awareness, I/we can transform experience and interaction into new or revised inner resources (and thus change the ways I/we experience life and respond to life).

* = points of transformation

Figure 1-3. The multiple contexts of interpersonal communication

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CHAPTER ONE

METHODOLOGY AND JUSTIFICATION:
WHY BUILD A MULTI-DIMENSIONAL MODEL OF
INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

The Six Dimensions model described in this paper is a many-faceted, many-layered, facilitative interpretation of interpersonal communication and human experience. Because the web of human communicating, experiencing and relating is profoundly complex, even simplified models of it will tend to be quite complex. In creating the Six Dimensions model I have tried to overcome at least some of this difficulty by using multiple-layered, three-dimensional diagrams introduced at the end of the Introduction. The drawing of diagrams, which has a long history in mathematics, is slowly becoming accepted as a cognitive tool in many fields because it allows one to present an overview of a complex web of relationships, a task that would be much more difficult using sentences or propositions.

I realize that following my exposition and arguments concerning such a six-dimensioned, five-layered, multiple-feedback-loop model will demand a great deal of patience and effort from my readers. Therefore, in this chapter I will try to show why a model as complex as Six Dimensions is necessary and worthwhile. My discussion will

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18 This is an inference I draw from Ashby’s law of requisite variety, as described by Cliff Joslyn, “The Law of Requisite Variety” in Principles of Systems and Cybernetics, An Evolutionary Perspective (World Wide Web, 1993).
19 See Alvin I Goldman, Philosophical Applications of Cognitive Science (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1993), 55. Other cultures have extensive traditions of using diagrams to convey philosophical and psychological ideas. For example, Navajo sand paintings and Tibetan mandalas.
make the following major points: First, the study of communication includes most of what we know about human life. Second, the practice of teaching communication skills raises the issue of how all these facets of human life fit together, even though that is a difficult, if not impossible, question to answer. Third, the Six Dimensions model organizes a significant amount of material from psychology and communication theory from the point of view of communication skills learners and trainers. And fourth, the first-person approach of the Six Dimensions model emphasizes awareness, exploration and action rather than causal determinants, because a first-person-action description supports the emergence of new action better than the typical third-person view.

1.1. The study of communication includes most of what we know about human life.

As a multi-disciplinary activity, the study of human communication includes much of psychology and the social sciences, and touches on many facets of the humanities as well. Since interpersonal communication is woven through all aspects of living and is meaningful only in the context of living, when we try to understand and teach communication we cannot escape these larger integration issues. Perhaps as a result of this contextuality there is an amazingly wide range of scholarly reflection about communication. So much information is available, in fact, that I sometimes have a difficult time imagining the single subject matter to which all this information relates. Stephen W. Littlejohn’s Theories of Human Communication\(^\text{20}\) includes material on cybernetics, semiotics, sociology, hermeneutics, and feminism, and this list is only a brief sample of the topics introduced.

It sometimes appears to me that I am re-living the story of the blind men and the elephant, except that there are a thousand men and women, none of them blind but each one perhaps standing so close to one part that they cannot see much of anything else,

each one holding on to a unique part of some extraordinary, thousand-faceted creature. They hold rules, roles, loops, actions, cultures, languages, social classes, paradoxes, games, relationships, contexts, intentions and much more.

1.2. **The practice of teaching communication skills raises the issue of how all these facets fit together.**

Although they may be studied separately, in actual communicative encounters all the elements just mentioned are woven together. When we learn to communicate by imitating our parents, we unselfconsciously adopt and adapt their ways of combining the various elements. A teacher of communication skills, however, cannot rely on years of imitation as an educational method. Communication training, as I see it, must necessarily include both specific skills and some over-arching integrative model that suggests how those skills would fit into ongoing conversations, tasks and relationships. Many otherwise helpful books and classes on interpersonal communication leave their students on their own to figure out the integrative part of the process\(^\text{21}\). The Six Dimensions

\(^{21}\)In the context of teaching specific skills of interpersonal helping, Brammer notes that “the principle problem is putting the components together into a smooth, flowing performance.” Lawrence M. Brammer, *The Helping Relationship: Processes and Skills*. 5th ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1993), 70.
model represents my effort to develop an integrative meta-model of communication. My goal is not to propose a new theory of human communication, but rather to use graphic modeling tools to tie together as much of the existing theory and knowledge about communication as I have been able to understand.

1.3. The Six Dimensions model organizes the materials of communication theory from the point of view of communication skills trainers and learners.

In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas Kuhn\(^\text{22}\) describes various ways in which researchers come to their subject matter with already established perspectives that shape their perception of what counts as a fact and help to organize facts into meaningful patterns. Using the history of science as his evidence, he makes a strong case that there is no view of any given subject matter without a point of view. Persuaded and inspired by this argument, I have decided to build a model of interpersonal communication from the point of view of communication skills coaching rather than trying to achieve an allegedly point-of-view-less, universal understanding.

It seems to me that we not only bring a point of view, but, as embodied creatures, we also bring our own needs and drives to the encounter with a given subject matter. For example, the desire to heal illnesses catalyzed the development of biology over the centuries. This is in contrast to the supposed ideal in science of disinterested curiosity about life and nature. I think it would be fair to say that both desire and disinterested curiosity are at work in science, and that each plays a crucial role. (I’m sure some philosopher of science has already said this much better than I can.) Many contemporary examples come to mind. The desire to build an atomic bomb before Hitler did was the motivating cause of what was probably the largest and most expensive research project in human history up to its time, one that yielded many fundamental insights into the structure of matter and also gave birth to computers and computer science. And, on a

more mundane level, the desire to send more telephone messages down a single wire animated a long program of research that culminated in the development of fiber optics and glass telephone wires. And so on.

I take these examples to be illustrations of the point that our purposes as well as our paradigms help us to organize our information about nature into meaningful configurations. Our purposes may be noble or base but it seems to me that since they play a key role in focusing our attention we cannot have much knowledge without them and we cannot escape their shaping influences. The narrow empiricist stance that our knowledge of the world should be an unbiased picture of whatever is out there fails to address the significant issue that there is way too much “out there” to put into any one picture and far too little time and effort available to investigate everything. We choose what to investigate and how to investigate it, and therefore the overall pattern of our knowledge is inevitably shaped by our values and our choices. To use an extreme example, if we know more about making hydrogen bombs than we know about making peace, it is because we have spent trillions of dollars and hundreds of thousands of working lifetimes on the former and not on the latter. Our resulting knowledge of nuclear physics is objective only in a very narrow sense. Viewed from perspective of the overall distribution of knowledge in society (what we have chosen to know and what we have chosen to ignore) one can see that our knowledge of nuclear physics actually embodies our worst, extremely subjective fears and desires for power.

I have used this very political example to emphasize that our quests for knowledge are influenced in subtle but powerful ways by our values. Even when we are meticulously even-handed about evaluating evidence, values that may be unexamined will have already shaped the kind of questions we find worth asking.23 Hypothesis framing (“X causes Y”) and its twin, question framing (“Does X cause Y?”), are

23An example recently in the news concerns funding for heart disease research. Although heart disease is a major cause of death among women in the US, almost all of the federal research funding concerning heart disease was spent studying men.
indispensable processes that exert enormous influence on the process of inquiry. And yet our hypothesis framing and question framing activities are not particularly scientific or even rational.\(^{24}\) Therefore, in my view, scholars should strive to be conscious and explicit about their values and goals so that readers can understand what agenda of attention has shaped the question-asking and evidence-gathering.

I hope that my argument up to this point has persuaded you that every study embodies a particular perspective and implies the values that go with that perspective. Returning to the topic of my communication meta-model, it seems to me even more true (than in the case of just plain model-building) that the abstracting involved in building a meta-model grows out of the modeler’s values and purposes. Thus it is important for me to state that I come to this material as someone concerned with peacemaking, conflict resolution and the teaching of communication skills. The Six Dimensions model is my effort to integrate various strands of communication theory from the point of view of what I imagine and hope would be valuable to communication skills trainers and to people who are trying to develop a deeper perspective on their own communication activities, in family, work, friendship and community settings. (I have been convinced by the arguments of Roger Fisher, William Ury\(^{25}\) and others that similar processes are at work in all those different spheres.) Just as there is no one true picture of human communication (it’s too big to fit into any single picture, too many angles from which to view), there is certainly no one true picture of how various communication theories might fit together into an integrated whole. There could be a multitude of possible overviews of human communication, each one better than most of the others for some particular purpose. In my case I am trying to organize as much information as I can about

\(^{24}\)The philosopher of science Karl Popper is well-known for his position that it does not matter how one develops scientific hypotheses, which he calls “conjectures,” it only matters how one tests them. This suggests that our most rational activities can depend somewhat on irrational processes. Karl Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

communication from the point of view of the active participants in a conversation. (In the balance of this study I will refer to participants in conversations as “conversants,” following the example of W. Barnett Pearce26, rather than use the scholarly but forbidding term, “interlocutors.”)

1.4. The first-person approach of the Six Dimensions model emphasizes awareness, exploration and action rather than causal determinants in interaction.

Most research about human communication is conducted within a university setting in which the teaching of communication skills is not the primary purpose. The information is gathered and organized to fulfill a variety of other purposes: to test hypotheses, to demonstrate that candidates for advanced degrees have mastered the tools of social research, to document structures of oppression in society, and so on.27 My purpose here is not to judge whether these are worthy or unworthy goals. What concerns me is that information organized from these “third-person” perspectives seems to have very little to offer anyone approaching the subject from the “first-person” perspective of an active conversant asking “How could I have a more fruitful conversation?” The first-person and third-person stances are so different that information gathered in one may be inherently untranslatable into the other, a case of what Thomas Kuhn would call “incommensurable paradigms.” (If true, such a conclusion might offer some insight into why a century of social research has had so little discernible effect on the typical human patterns of war, massacre and oppression.) The first-person and third-person perspectives are also developed and championed by different scholarly groups, some


27In fairness to universities, there are many introductory classes in human communication that include some first-person information and exercises. But they suffer, in my view, from a pervasive fragmentation in which the learner is presented with a kind of “toolkit” of loosely connected ideas, research findings, techniques and exercises. What is the totality of which these ideas, etc. are aspects? One possible answer to this complaint of mine is that the totality to which these items refer is human life, and human life is so complex that it is beyond our capacity to sum up in any meaningful way.
seeking to identify the causal agents that shape people’s lives\textsuperscript{28} and others seeking to help people become causal agents in their own lives.\textsuperscript{29} (The Six Dimensions model clearly falls in the latter category.)

Inside the university, the first-person perspective takes on an occupational cast: potential speech-makers, psychotherapists, newscasters, lawyers, managers, nurses, labor negotiators, doctors and actors explore the development of their communication skills. But, I wish to protest, we are all “first-persons” engaged in dialogue and negotiation with all the important people in our lives. It seems to me that the question, “How could I have more fruitful conversations with the important people in my life?” deserves at least as much careful attention as “How can I listen to a client well?” or “How can I make a fine speech?” That is a matter of values, of course, and of defining what is worth studying.\textsuperscript{30}

\section*{1.5. The divided world of communication theory and practice.}

Perhaps because, in the realm of human affairs, there is no straightforward translation of what one knows into what one should do, there seems to me to be a deep first-person/third-person divide within the world of books about interpersonal communication. Most books that give advice do not cite research or propose overarching models\textsuperscript{31} and most books that cite research and/or propose models do not give...

\textsuperscript{28}B.F. Skinner, classical behaviorists and the sociobiologists would fall into this group. But over the past few decades many behaviorists have shifted their focus to helping people shape their own behavior.

\textsuperscript{29}For a study that places an increasing sense of personal agency at the center of human development, see Larry Cochran and Joan Laub, \textit{Becoming an Agent: Patterns and Dynamics for Shaping Your Life} (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1994).

\textsuperscript{30}By way of anecdote, I once read a book about building houses out of rammed earth, i.e., dirt. The author lamented that in spite of the fact that one could build fine houses out of dirt, houses that were fire-proof, termite-proof and would last for centuries, there was very little interest in building earthen houses. Since dirt was everywhere, nobody could make any money out of selling it. This seems to me to be the fate of interpersonal communication in the university. It appears that communication will flourish primarily in those forms that can be sold.

\textsuperscript{31}A typical example of this group is Matthew McKay, Martha Davis and Patrick Fanning, \textit{Messages: The Communication Skills Book} (Oakland, Calif.: New Harbinger, 1983).
advice.\textsuperscript{32} As Donald Schön wrote in the early 1980s:

\begin{quote}
...there is a disturbing tendency for research and practice to follow
divergent paths. Practitioners and researchers tend increasingly to live in
different worlds, pursue different enterprises, and have little to say to one
another. Teachers have gained relatively little from cognitive psychology;
political and administrative practice has gained little from the policy
sciences; and management science has contributed relatively little to the
practice of management. The divergence of research and practice
exacerbates the practitioner’s dilemma which I have called “rigor or
relevance,” and tempts the practitioner to force practice situations into
molds derived from research.\textsuperscript{33}
\end{quote}

I believe that, given the gestalt nature of human perception, the good advice in the
advice-giving books (such as \textit{Getting to Yes}\textsuperscript{34}) would be understood better and
remembered more easily if it were integrated into some over-arching model or storyline
rather than presented simply as a list of actions to take. Furthermore, I imagine that such
integrative models would facilitate action more effectively if they embodied a first-
person rather than third-person perspective.

Against this plea of mine for an integrative model is the consideration that the
systemic, contextual and open-ended complexity of human communication\textsuperscript{35} may make
accurate over-arching models as complex as the activity itself, hence not of much
explanatory value. A second argument against my desire to see an integrative plan would
come from the new complexity theorists,\textsuperscript{36} who would argue that complex systems in
nature are not built from integrative plans (hence an investigator will not be able to find
one). In this view, the order observed at any given level in a complex system is seen as
generated by the open-ended interaction of a limited number of rules or sub-systems that
operate at the next lower level.

\textsuperscript{32}A typical example of this group is Philip R. Cohen, Jerry Morgan and Martha E. Pollack, eds.,
\textsuperscript{34}Roger Fisher, William Ury and Bruce Patton, \textit{Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without
\textsuperscript{35}Pearce, \textit{Interpersonal Communication}, chap. 1.
Regarding the issue of books of theory that give no advice, I believe that the overarching patterns presented in theoretical work would be more helpful to a world suffering greatly from miscommunication and non-communication if they were translated into possible first-person actions.

Against this hope is the consideration, suggested by Pearce’s description of interpersonal communication, that “the right thing” to do in human conversations maybe so dependent on situational contingencies, cultural practices and the participant’s web of moral obligations that no amount of research or model-building will ever yield any worthwhile advice. If this were the case there still might be worthwhile conversations in which the participants helped one another sift through the complexities of their situations. And we might find guidance for our conduct in the behavior of noble persons, a pattern that is part of Aristotelian philosophy and also a wide-spread feature of traditional religion.

In the face of these difficulties and with full knowledge that I will not succeed as much as I would like, in the Six Dimensions model I try to give well-researched (but inevitably culture-bound) advice in the context of an over-arching (but less than complete) model. I hesitate to call the Six Dimensions model a theory of human communication because it offers a facilitative description rather than a causal explanation. In the world of interpersonal communication, as in the world of biological systems in general, everything pretty much causes everything else. But given that a person both influences and is influenced, it is possible to improve one’s patterns of interaction within one’s social world (to some unknown degree).

My goal is to try to name the various resources and possibility dimensions that people draw upon as they converse, and to suggest some ways of “imagining the real,” imagining one’s own action in a way that facilitates more fruitful action. As people become more aware of the subjective resources and possibilities that are available to

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them, and receive encouragement to explore and experiment, I believe they could begin to have different and more fulfilling conversations.

Such a strategy of awareness, exploration and action does not explain the cause of anything, but might cause people to cause new kinds of events. (The force of this last sentence depends on my having shifted from a third-person view of events as caused by outside forces to a first-person view of people as active agents, causing at least some of the events that occur in their lives.) My goal is thus not primarily to prove a point (allowing no other conclusion) but instead to document a reasoned appeal by which I hope persuade my readers to adopt a particular perspective and to take particular kinds of actions (listening more carefully, expressing themselves more fully, etc.). Both the logical form of my presentation and the methodology of my model-building follow the general outline of rhetorical rationality, the main points of which are summarized by John Shotter as follows:

It is now beginning to be argued: (1) that science does not start with doubt but with assent to a story or narrative (Booth, 1974; Lyotard, 1984) possessing a degree of rhetorical force; (2) that the social world is best seen as a continuous flux or flow of mental activity containing regions of self-reproducing order, reproduced at their boundaries, surrounded by ‘chaos’ (Giddens, 1984; Prigogine and Stengers, 1984); (3) that such activity can only be studied from a position of involvement ‘within’ it, instead of as an ‘outsider’ studying it as merely ‘physical’ activity (Bernstein, 1983; Giddens, 1984); (4) that primarily, knowledge is practical-moral knowledge, and as such does not depend upon justification or proof for its practical efficacy (Bernstein, 1983; Rorty, 1980); (5) that we are not in an ‘ownership’ relation to such knowledge, but we embody it as a part of who and what we are, and to try to give it up would

44Bernstein, Beyond Objectivism and Relativism.
be like trying to give up our bodies, who we ‘are’ (Giddens, 1984) - for we are dealing just as much with matters of ontology as epistemology (Bhaskar, 1986); and finally (6) that practical-moral knowledge is not a unified system, but constituted in large part argumentatively (Billig, 1987), that is within traditions of argumentation structured in terms of commonplaces (or topoi), whose discursive formulations are ‘essentially contested’ (Gallie, 1955-56). [Author’s italics and references. References cited by author are reproduced in the footnotes of this page.]

Of course, each of the six points in this quote cries out to be explained and argued. In terms of the Six Dimensions model, I would like to make only two brief amendments to this summary. First, concerning item (4), I would prefer to say that knowledge about human action, interaction and social meaning-making is practical-moral. In my view, lumping all forms of human knowing together weakens the argument rather than strengthening it. And second, I would prefer to see the appeals to “ontology” and “who we are” in item (5) restated with a more process-oriented vocabulary that emphasizes how we create ourselves through ongoing streams of action and interaction. In other words, I would like to see item (5), ontology, linked more carefully to item (2), process. Otherwise, it seems to me, we easily start slipping back into exactly those essentialist (entities and substances) habits of thought from which I believe Shotter would like to liberate us.

1.6. The Six Dimensions model is intended to be a facilitative interpretation of human communication.

Because it grows out of the constructivist approach summarized above, the Six Dimensions model is intended to be primarily a facilitative interpretation of human communication and action and only secondarily a realistic representation. In the course
of working on this study I have been inspired by the work of Thomas Kuhn to shift my emphasis from representational modeling to facilitative modeling. Representational modeling says that object or process “A” is to some high degree like model “B.” Facilitative modeling says that if you want to accomplish goal “C,” it would be helpful to look at process “A” as if it were like model “B.” (For example, if you want to win when you negotiate, think of the negotiation session as if it were ...a chess game, ...a football game, ...a meeting of two people who do not speak the same language, etc.) While representational modeling strives for the one truest picture of all, facilitative modeling is comfortable with the coexistence of various pictures, each one of which might be helpful for some particular purpose.

These two ways of modeling represent to me the “realist” and the “pragmatic” approaches to philosophy and life. It is not my purpose here to argue in the abstract that one is better than another (for a pragmatist like myself that would be fruitless; better for what?, I would ask). As John Shotter points out in Conversational Realities,51 we live in a world in which we both make things and find things already made. The problem is, according to Shotter (and Marx and Sartre before him) that we often view the products of our own collective action as if they were unchangeable facts of nature. (Gender and economic roles are the most frequently given examples.) At their best, realism deals with things found, pragmatism with the making of things. In my view, since life is a mixture of both making and finding, we need both realism and pragmatism and those visions need one another. By identifying (realistically, I hope) the areas of life that are primarily of our own making, we can take responsibility for making them differently and better.

These two worlds of model-making overlap and intertwine considerably. Pragmatic models rely on a certain amount of representation to locate their action steps in relation to their subject matters (although from one specific angle, only) and representational models (a topographical map of a mountain range, for example) are often

51Shotter, Conversational Realities, 70.
made with the express purpose of facilitating action (hiking or mining). But the crucial difference is that a pragmatic model is acknowledged to be only one of many possible ways to organize information about a given subject matter. The goal Six Dimensions, as a primarily pragmatic model, is to organize information about communication, awareness and action (the realistic part) into patterns of coherence that make it easier for people to imagine talking and listening to one another in new and more fruitful ways (the pragmatic part).
CHAPTER TWO

AN OVERVIEW OF THE SIX DIMENSIONS MODEL

2.1. The ‘parts’ in relation to the whole

Interpersonal communication appears to be as complex as the web of life that creates it. All its apparently distinct facets are mutually interwoven, as is the case generally with living systems. As Fritjof Capra put it,

The great shock of twentieth-century science has been that systems cannot be understood by analysis. The properties of the parts are not intrinsic properties but can be understood only within the context of the larger whole.52 ...Ultimately - as quantum physics showed so dramatically - there are no parts at all. What we call a part is merely a pattern in an inseparable web of relationships.53 (my italics)

This suggests to me a kind of “double bind” in that any model of interpersonal communication that is accurate will probably be unintelligibly complex, and any model that is simple enough to be understood will probably be wrong. (Perhaps this is why Lao Tsu is said to have remarked that those who know do not say and those who say do not know.) It is certainly the case that the more accurate quantum physics has become over the decades, the less intuitive sense it makes to the physicists who use it.54 It remains to be seen, in relation to interpersonal communication, how much of a middle ground there may be in which the building of conceptual models will be fruitful.

53 Ibid., 37.
54 This issue is discussed at length in Werner Heisenberg, Physics and Beyond: Encounters and Conversations, tr. Arnold J. Pomerans (New York: Harper, 1972), for example, 210.
Six Dimensions is my effort to make the complexity of interpersonal communication intelligible, at least to myself and hopefully to some others, by showing what have previously been described as ‘parts’ in relation to one another. The Six Dimensions model suggests that we look at communication as a network of interwoven connections between three different self-reinforcing spiral processes:

- One, a spiral of interacting processes within a person, as shown in Figure 2.1, below, that includes
  1. experiencing (perceiving, thinking, feeling, wanting, envisioning)
  2. intending (formulating and committing to goals and next steps)
  3. acting and interacting (from the perspective of the active person)
  4. shaping one’s actions in accordance with a particular style
  5. self-observing and exploratory self-questioning
  6. using, revising and creating inner resources (models and stories)
  (Also, see appendix Figure A.1.)

- Two, a spiral of self-reinforcing interaction between people (see appendix Figure A.2), and

- Three, a spiral interaction among the various contexts and time frames of human action in general and interpersonal communication in particular (see appendix Figure A.3).

Although I see these three spirals of interaction as always interwoven, the amount of detail involved in documenting each one requires that I describe them one at a time. In this study I will focus primarily on the first spiral, a circular pattern that can be imagined as linking together the six families of processes mentioned above, as illustrated in Figure 2.1, below.
The balance of this chapter presents an overview of these six possibility dimensions or “menus.” The next six chapters discuss each of these in turn. In the concluding chapters I will explore some connections between moment-to-moment
interpersonal communication and long-term processes of human development.

In the formulation of this model I have woven together the categories of experience that are expressed or implied in a wide range of action-facilitation texts, the most important of which I will review later in this chapter. I have also been greatly encouraged by the work of the cognitive anthropologist Roy D’Andrade, who has sought to understand the fundamental categories used by people around the world to understand their subjective experience. Although D’Andrade refers to these categories as a “folk model” of the mind, I think the term “first-person model” would be a more neutral term that does not imply a judgment on the representative accuracy of the categories. (D’Andrade himself does not intend the label, “folk,” to imply “superstitious” or “simple-minded” although some writers use the term in that way.) I will refer to D’Andrade’s work at several key points in my exposition.

2.2. The Six Dimensions model sorts the complexities of human communication and action into six clusters of related actions

The Six Dimensions model sorts various aspects of human communication and action into six overlapping and interacting dimensions and arranges the dimensions into a dynamic spiral. Because each dimension has many individual items in it I occasionally use the “menu” metaphor to dramatize the way conversants create their conversations by a complex process of selecting and combining. I believe that it is both revealing and productive to view communication between people as the interaction of two or more such individual six-armed spirals, as diagrammed in appendix Figure A.2. (I also believe that the dynamics represented by the Six Dimensions model of conversations repeat at the levels of situation, relationship, evolution of personhood, and community/organization building, as suggested by the multi-layered flow chart, appendix Figure A.3.)
Unfortunately, marshaling the arguments and evidence to support this “fractal”
contention would require many additional chapters, so while I can lay out some of the
groundwork, I will not be able to explore the fractal theme in this study as deeply as I
would like.)

In the following pages I describe each of the six dimensions, and then discuss the
various scholarly works that influenced me to group and arrange the information in this
way.

**Dimension 1. Experiencing**, understood as including at least the following five
dimensions:

1. perceiving (often the behavior of another person) -- what I am seeing, hearing,
touching -- a simple description of the sensory facts without evaluation

2. emoting -- the emotions I am experiencing, such as joy, sorrow,
fear, delight, anger, regret, etc. -- my emotional response to 1. in the light of

3. interpreting, evaluating, associating and remembering past wants --
evaluative processes that support and shape my emotional response
including the tangible effects of an event or behavior on me or my interests

4. wanting, hoping, wanting to request -- what I want now in terms of action,
information, conversation or promise

5. envisioning (anticipating results) -- what good situation do I imagine will
come about if I get what I’m wanting
**Dimension 2. Intending (intentions and goals)** in the following hierarchy of contexts.

- conversations
- situations & projects
- relationships
- the unfolding of one's personhood
- community building

In the overall scheme of human functioning, the forming of intentions seems to be a way of translating experience into action. Intentions bring together wanting to do something, some degree of imagining and understanding both the goal and the steps to achieve it, and a subjective sense of commitment to achieving it. Of these various elements, commitment seems the hardest to conceptualize. Following the approach described by Rom Harré in *Personal Being*[^55], one might imagine a commitment as a promise made to oneself, that is, the interiorization of the interpersonal process of promising. (My only reservation about this approach is that I’m not sure how well we understand the process of promising.)

**Dimension 3. Acting and interacting.** A separate palette of possible actions and interactions exists for each of the contexts listed above in Dimension 2. Examples in conversation would include speaking, listening, asking questions, using body language, raising or lowering one’s voice, etc.

Dimension 4. **Style or method of acting and interacting.** Whereas all forms of acting and interacting are conceived of as verbs (speaking, listening, etc.), the styles are conceived of as adverbs (carefully, recklessly, skillfully, wisely, compassionately, etc.). As the philosopher Rom Harré\(^{56}\) notes, by imposing a style on our actions we act on our own actions, an important reflexivity in the process of being human. I believe that the verb/adverb distinction is both totally artificial and profoundly useful, like latitude and longitude lines. From the third-person point of view a process and its qualities are inseparable, but from a first-person point of view the distinction opens up many new possibilities of action. Alerted to a range of possibilities, I may be able to perform the ‘same’ action in a wide variety of different ‘ways.’ The verb/adverb distinction allows those who make it to orient themselves toward particular points in a more richly differentiated spectrum of possible actions.

Dimension 5. **Self-awareness and self-questioning.** By paying attention to how we pull various skills, actions, styles and mental resources together to create conversations, social interaction and task performances, we can learn more from our experience and action, and grow in skill, awareness and resourcefulness. Learning to engage in exploratory self-questioning can be a key element in this process of adopting the participant-observer stance. According to Robert Kegan\(^{57}\), the capacity to observe oneself is the central axis of human personality growth. Although Kegan expresses some doubts about whether such self-awareness can be taught, other writers\(^{58}\) (and other cultures\(^{59}\)) have developed and are developing traditions of systematic self-observation.

\(^{56}\)Ibid., 193.

\(^{57}\)Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*.

\(^{58}\)Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner*.

\(^{59}\)Observing one’s own thought processes has been a central feature of Hindu and Buddhist meditation for many centuries; for example, the Vipassana tradition in South Asian and Tibetan Buddhism. Within Western culture the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola contain large elements of self-observation (according to informal conversations I have had with Jesuit priests). The existence of such exercises may count against Kegan’s point, but the difficulty of such exercises may actually support his contention that self-observation is an organic development within the human personality that cannot be taught by short-term methods.
Dimension 6. Creating, using and revising inner resources, conceived of as including the utilization of the following processes of remembering and pattern perceiving:

- plans and mental ‘scripts’ \ which I / conversations
- images and metaphors \ view in / situations & projects
- skills, roles and rules \ the / relationships
- stories and paradigm examples / context\ unfolding of personhood
- maps of self, other and situation / of \ community building

These overlapping kinds of inner resources are, by and large, the subject matter of cognitive psychology\(^60\) and of the new, narrative-oriented psychotherapy\(^61\).

Although for convenience I have described the above inner resources using familiar nouns such as “plan” and “map,” I understand all of these to be flowing processes of pattern perceiving and remembering, thus “planning” and “mapping” would be more accurate. (One major problem that I face is that so many of our ideas about how people function represent processes that have been mentally transformed into thing-like entities.\(^62\) It would be more accurate to speak of “utilizing selectively remembering for planning my interacting” than to speak “using a mental script to guide my actions.” But the tradition of reification is so well established in our culture that I believe you will agree that first version, while more accurate, is almost unintelligible. My solution to this dilemma is to muddle through, using verbs and adverbs as often as possible consistent with producing readable text.)

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2.3. These six dimensions represent one possible way to divide up the seamlessly interwoven totality of human functioning.

The Six Dimensions represent approximate distinctions. Just as there is no actual dividing line that separates the arm from the torso (the muscles of the arm go deep into the torso, or the muscles of the torso go deep into the arm, however you like), and yet we can distinguish an arm from a leg; similarly I propose, following the main direction of cognitive psychology in regard the “modularity of mind” issue, that we can make useful distinctions between intending, acting, self-observing, etc., even though they are deeply interwoven. I believe that these six distinctions are useful because they highlight aspects of a totality that is too large to grasp all at once (our own functioning). Like a person

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63For an exposition of the “modularity of mind” point of view, see Marvin Minsky, *The Society of Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986).
walking around a statue, we gain knowledge of an object from a succession of partial views, each one of which relies on all the others as context. And as John Shotter argues, it is not the case that such a statue would simply send us information. We ourselves generate information by the way we move in relation to an object, or shift perspectives in relation to bodies of knowledge. Each of the six dimensions proposed represents an angle from which we can view and understand the other five and the interaction of all.

Furthermore, although these six kinds of human functioning can interact in an infinity of ways, for pragmatic purposes I would like to draw you attention to one possible pathway of interaction: the circular pathway portrayed in Figure 2.1, above. I believe that this particular pathway offers the greatest possibilities for the facilitation of new awareness and action. The circle of arrows represents a kind of “epistemological walkabout,” a circular meta-story that contains a systematic sequence of changes of perspective. I see this as one way of encouraging the difficult-to-cultivate process of self-observation. (The Six Dimensions diagrams (Figure 2.1., above and see appendix) were inspired by, but are significantly different from, the “awareness wheel” developed by Miller, Wackman and Nunnally over the span of several books on interpersonal communication.)

From a third-person point of view, the causal assertions embodied in Figure 2.1. represent commonplaces of modern psychology, psychotherapy and/or common sense:

1. That we use mental models to transform the raw data of sensation into conscious experience.

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64 Shotter, Conversational Realities, 58.
65 The most recent and comprehensive of which is Sherod Miller, Daniel Wackman, Elam Nunnally and Carol Saline, Straight Talk (New York: Signet, 1982). I object to the authors’ attempt to trademark their observations about human functioning.
2. That we respond to our experience by forming intentions, which we fulfill by engaging in particular actions, carried out in particular manners.

3. That paying attention to our performance is a crucial element in improving our performance.

4. That changing the stories and metaphors we use to interpret people and the world will change our experience of people and the world.

2.4. **The Six Dimensions model is intended to help people imagine their own actions and imagine new actions.**

As the assertions just noted suggest, the usefulness of this model is not that it reaches some new conclusions about what causes what in human functioning, viewed from the outside. I propose that the model is useful because it draws our attention to what supports and facilitates what as we interact with others, viewed from the perspective of the active participant. It organizes a variety of ideas about human functioning in a way that might help a person imagine their own functioning and imagine new actions and new ways of interacting.

In aiming for such a goal, I am trying to bring together four fundamental themes from the work of four major psychological theorists of recent decades: Kenneth Gergen, Robert Kegan, Carl Rogers and Rom Harré.

Gergen\(^{66}\) appeals to social researchers to transform the societies they observe by illuminating previously unseen possibilities of thought, language and action. As he puts it, “In the transformative mode, the principal aim of research is to vivify the possibility of new modes of action.”\(^{67}\)

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\(^{67}\)Ibid., 61.
Kegan asserts that the capacity to observe more and more of one’s own functioning is the central axis of human personality growth. In his two most recent books on human development, Kegan argues that over the course of a lifetime we are first rooted in and then become more aware of, in succession, our sensations (infancy), our feelings (childhood), our thoughts (adolescence), our relationships and social roles (early adulthood), our capacity to create values and meaningful narratives that can hold together families and organizations (middle adulthood), and, for some individuals, our capacity to understand the interplay between different value systems and families of narratives (later adulthood). According to Kegan, our struggle to bring our own inner activities and capacities into conscious focus is one of two central dynamics of human development. (The other is the struggle to reconcile our need to assert our own integrity with our need for close relationships.)

How is it that we bring our inner processes into conscious focus? Rogers takes the very interesting position that consciousness is created by symbolization: “To use Angyal’s expression, consciousness (or awareness) is the symbolization of some of our experience. Awareness is thus seen as the symbolic representation (not necessarily in verbal symbols) of some portion of our experience.” Behind this idea is another idea that Rogers explains in the same monograph: that much of what a person experiences as a living organism never gets to the part of the brain that provides us with awareness. In order for an experience to become conscious, we must, according to Rogers, find some way of putting it into symbols. Although Rogers does not go into more detail in this essay, it is clear from the context that the symbolic representations he is thinking about

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68 Kegan, In Over Our Heads, and The Evolving Self.
are usually words, sentences and conversations, but they could be (and perhaps for some people, must be) images, melodies, carvings or movements in dance, i.e., the whole range of human artistic expression. (Life needs art!)

And finally, Harré argues that we become persons by adopting our culture’s theory or model (symbolization!) of personhood. Becoming a person, according to Harré, is a social process that cannot be reduced to the biology of being an animal or elevated to the ontology of being an incarnate and enduring self or soul. Along with moving through a physical world, Harré explains, we move through a social world that is constituted entirely by agreements: languages, customs, educational systems, family traditions. All these are contingent. They could have been different if history had unfolded in some other way, and they would be different for a person born in another country. We come to play the roles that other people expect of us within a given culture, and thus we also come to think about ourselves using the categories (symbolizations, again) that other people use to think about us.

From Harré’s point of view we need models of personhood in order to become persons. But this suggests to me that we are at the mercy of the richness or poverty of our culture’s model of personhood. Harré’s approach raises many questions in my mind. Who is responsible for keeping those models of personhood in good repair? How much are we “stuck” with the culture into which we were born? If one’s cultural model does not include the stages of self-awareness described by Kegan, will a person ever get to them? (Few will, I imagine.) Is it possible for a culture to lose it’s soul, i.e., simply lose track of it’s model of personhood? (I think so.) In pluralistic societies, how does one take any given model of personhood seriously enough to embody it? And if one’s culture becomes disoriented, as in such cases as Nazi Germany, Cambodia or Rwanda, (or in a
less dramatic way, consumerism-bedazzled America) how does one find the strength to resist the disorientation? (History is not encouraging on this point.)

If there is no essence of being a person, either genetic or spiritual, that will guide our development, and there is no guarantee that our culture will guide our development toward human fulfillment, it seems to me that there is still hope for us because we can raise the issue of models of personhood to a conscious level. We can take a more conscious, active role in investigating the possibilities that are open to us and choosing the kind of person we want to become. This would be a considerable challenge, but it is not as though there are a lot of easier alternatives.

My labor to understand what each of these four ideas implies for all the others has led me to the following chain of inferences:

(1) If the central direction of human development is a growing awareness of one’s own functioning (thoughts, feelings, actions and interactions, then patterns of thoughts, feelings, actions and interaction, then meta-patterns, etc.) and

(2) if such an awareness of one’s own functioning is created by symbolization (storying, modeling, imaging, naming) and

(3) if, therefore, our development as persons is limited by the richness or poverty of our culture’s models of personhood and self-awareness, then

(4) it is worthwhile to try to build richly-elaborated, symbolic models of self-awareness, communicative action and personhood in order to support and encourage people to make the essential journey of full human development.\textsuperscript{70}

(5) And, furthermore, if the purpose of post-modern theorizing and model-building is to illuminate the possibility of new modes of action, as Gergen

\textsuperscript{70}It sees to me that novels sometimes fulfill this function. It also seems to me that something parallel to this was at work in the emergence of humanistic psychology.
suggests, then such *symbolic models of self-awareness, action and personhood* should be envisioned from the first-person, active agent (“I’m doing this. How could I do it differently?”) perspective, and expressed in a vocabulary of healthy functioning and development.

In developing the Six Dimensions model I am seeking to create such a model, using the most insightful resource material I can find and anchored in the activity of communication training.

These themes: awareness, self-observation, new possibilities of action/interaction, model building and personhood, enfold one another in complex ways because self-observation itself would be a new form of action for many people, and building or studying a model of self-observation can itself be a beginning form of self-observation. Also, Six Dimensions is a mental model that includes a rudimentary mental model of mental models and hence includes itself.

In defense the naturalness of such circularity, I would argue that ordinary conversations quite often include commentaries on themselves, meta-communicative remarks about how the conversations are going or where they should go next. And one can easily imagine an autobiography that contains a chapter in which the author struggles to understand and write his or her life story.

The greatest single difficulty that I see in using a spiral, self-referential model as a teaching aid is that such a model requires that a person think simultaneously on different levels of abstraction, which can create a “hall of mirrors” feeling of disorientation. The circular diagram I have drawn includes self-observation as part of self-reinforcing spiral of (1) experiencing, (2) intending, (3) acting, (4) acting on one’s own action through adopting a style of action, (5) self-observing, and (6) mental model building-
revising, that continues around the spiral by shaping (1)experiencing, and so on. As you look at the diagram, you are, in effect, observing a picture of someone who is already engaged in a process of self-observation and who could be you. Now I happen to believe that this vantage point is a very creative and instructive one. It is the position of “sand tray work” (play with figurines in a tray of sand) in psychotherapy. And it is the point of simultaneous participation and observation that the social psychologist Thomas Scheff sees as facilitating the process of catharsis.  

So it is a vantage point that I would like to see everyone explore.

But as Kegan suggests in relation to new forms of family therapy that encourage clients to adopt a systemic level of observation, introducing multiple levels of abstraction or nested inclusions into a model can push it beyond the grasp of many people. I believe that self-enfolding circularities are an important, creative, powerful part of being human (in spite of the fact that they pose intractable logical problems). The whole idea of sense-of-self is circular. The difficulties of self-observation notwithstanding, Kegan holds that we create ourselves by observing and reflecting on more and more of our own inner processes over the course of a lifetime (and thus become able to think about our own thinking). Harré suggests that we become a person by adopting our culture’s theory or model of what it means to be a person, and then acting on our own actions (cultivating a style of action) in accordance with that theory. But in spite of high value that these theorists place on a fundamentally reflexive approach to being and becoming human, it remains to be seen if the model of self-referential awareness and action I am

74 Rom Harré, *Personal Being.*
proposing will be of much help to people, or whether it presumes too much of the seeing-at-several-levels skill that it is trying to teach. The ongoing challenge will be to find ways to make it accessible.

2.5. The ideas integrated by Six Dimensions model

The Six Dimensions model includes ideas and insights from a wide range of authors, as shown in Table 2.1., below. The books and authors used as primary sources of information for dimensions or ‘menus’ One through Six are discussed in each of the next six chapters. As I mentioned earlier in my introductory chapters, when people arrive in a communication skills class, they bring their entire lives with them. This table summarizes the resources I am drawing upon to respond to those lives.

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Table 2.1. Resources for an integrative model of awareness, communication and action
These lists of references emphasize interpersonal communication because that is the primary activity I wish to facilitate. But the lists also include general works from psychology and the social sciences. As Littlejohn’s summary of human communication theory\(^ {75}\) demonstrates, to make sense out of human communication requires that we view communication as part of the totality of being human as understood through psychology, philosophy, anthropology, etc. This is the “hermeneutic circle” of the whole explaining the part and the part explaining the whole, (which, according to anthropologist Clifford Geertz, plays a large role in our understanding of just about everything).\(^ {76}\) In the case of interpersonal communication, there are strong arguments to the effect that it, communication, is quite a large part of the whole.\(^ {77}\) In the following chapters I will explain the key ideas that the various works noted in Table 2.1. have contributed to the Six Dimensions model.

\(^{75}\)Littlejohn, *Human Communication Theory*.


3.1. Discussion and references concerning the structure and categorization of experience, and of experience in communication.

There are some forms of experience that are universally understandable, without much need for symbolic mediation. If one sees a person weeping at a funeral or crying out in pain because their hand has been caught in a closing door, one has an immediate, intuitive understanding of what the other person is experiencing. But much, perhaps most, of human experience is not so self-explanatory. Generally speaking, in order for me to tell you what I am experiencing, or for me to understand what you are experiencing, we need some sort of shared vocabulary of experience. Furthermore, in order to convey or understand experience more completely, we need some sort of conventions about how fit together the various elements of experience our culture names (thinking, feeling, wanting, hoping, etc., in European cultures) into a script or structure that “makes sense.” Such shared scripts or structures allow us to convey complex constellations of meaning and feeling. Rather than just saying “Ouch!” or “Hurry up!”, I can say things such as “I need your report right now so that I can complete our departmental budget on time. I’m afraid we’ll be in big trouble if it’s late.”
3.2. Resources for understanding the structure of day-to-day human experiencing?

This chapter explores the question “What is the structure of day-to-day human experiencing?” Since human experience appears to be fairly malleable, a pragmatic, post-modern translation of this question would be “What would be a good way to imagine the structure of experiencing in everyday life? What sort of division of experiencing would allow you to express yourself more understandably to others and allow you to listen to others more appreciatively and insightfully?” Many of the books referred to below propose de facto structures of experience without naming them as such. Many of the advice-giving books appear to be carrying on and expanding a tradition of communication facilitation known as “sensitivity training” and begun by the National Training Laboratories78 in the 1940s.

In designing the first menu of the Six Dimension model to give some structure to the questions “What’s going on inside of me?” and “What’s going on inside of you?”, I have used elements from the following works.

3.2.1. Roy D’Andrade, *The Development of Cognitive Anthropology.*79 This book contains the most explicit discussion I have been able to find concerning the categories of everyday experience. In his section on models of the mind (p. 158), D’Andrade proposes that ordinary Americans understand their inner functioning as composed of five processes arranged in the following causal chain: perceiving, thinking, feeling, wishing and intending. Such a chain connects events in a person’s life to a person’s subsequent acts, as illustrated in D’Andrade’s flow-chart drawing, reproduced below. An example of a report of my experience using this logic might run as follows:

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78 As noted by Robert Bolton in *People Skills* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 289.
“When I saw that car accident at the intersection of Main and Elm (perceiving) I thought to myself, ‘Oh my God, that’s the third accident at that intersection this year and the City Council still has not put in stop signs there’ (thinking) and I felt so sorry for the people in the accident and so disgusted with the City Council members (feeling) I just wanted to drive down to the Street Maintenance Department and take one of those signs and go back to the intersection and put it up myself! (wishing and intending) In this report one sees the perception-thought-feeling-wish sequence described by D’Andrade in the figure 3.1, below.

Figure 3.1. A folk model of mental processes and the causal relations among them. From Roy D’Andrade, The Development of Cognitive Anthropology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 162.

D’Andrade’s model suggests that there may be universal elements in the communication skill texts of Marshall Rosenberg and Sherod Miller, et al., cited below, from which I have drawn many of the elements of the Six Dimensions model. D’Andrade cites the work of another anthropologist, Anna W. Wierzbicka, who asserts
that similar conceptualizations of the structure of experience (as given in Figure 3.1.) appear to be in use in every human culture. Such an assertion of universality is bound to be challenged by other scholars. But for my current purpose of offering well-researched advice to people in English-speaking cultures, I feel it is sufficient for me to offer evidence that the categories presented in Dimension One are in widespread use by many authors and in many cultures. (I hope Wierzbicka is right about the universality issue, because if so that would suggest that the barriers to intercultural communication may not as great as might have been imagined. But such considerations are beyond the scope of this study.)

3.2.2. Sherod Miller et al., *Straight Talk*, a guide for improved family communication written by three researchers at the University of Minnesota Family Research Center. The “awareness wheel” circular diagram presented in this book is both a model for self-observation and typology of experience directly tied to communicative practice. It includes sensations, interpretations, feelings, intentions and actions. I have adopted all these elements in my model, but not in the configuration presented by the authors. I first started thinking about intentions after reading this book, however the authors mix together various kinds of intentions in the same list: conversational (e.g., “I want to make a complaint...”), situational (e.g., “I want us to complete this job by Friday.”) and relational (e.g., “I want to be a good father.”). I believe that the issues concerning intentions would be better understood if different time scales and contexts of intentions were used to group intentions into separate lists.


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 Presents a four-part model that applies equally to speaking, responsive listening and understanding one’s own or another person’s experience. It includes

1. observing,
2. emoting,
3. the interpreting and evaluating processes that support the emotions, and
4. wanting (expressed in specific action requests).

I have adopted all these elements in my model of experiencing and expanded on them with material from other writers.

3.2.4. Rom Harré, ed., *The Social Construction of Emotions*.\(^{82}\) Presents current thinking and debates about the nature of human feeling, especially the relationship between emotions and the cognitive evaluation that may (some say must) precede or accompany them. The idea that emotions are partly or largely situational performances further complicates the task of coaching people to share their feelings.

3.2.5. Sharon A. Bower and Gordon H. Bower, *Asserting Yourself*.\(^{83}\) Presents a four-part “DESC” script for assertive communication:

Describe the behavior of other person that is causing a problem,

Express feelings,

Specify the desired new behavior, and explain the positive

Consequences of complying with the request.

The authors recommend writing and memorizing a script in advance of confronting a person with whom one has a problem, and practicing one’s script-writing skills by using scenes from one’s past or by writing complaint letters to companies. I have adopted the Bowers’ emphasis on describing the positive consequences that would flow from getting

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one’s request granted, and call it “envisioning.” It is an element not present in either Rosenberg’s or Bolton’s approach (noted below). On the other hand, the Bowers seem to me to have built an overly simplistic view of conflict into their model, in that problems, by definition, are always caused by other people’s behavior. There is little room here for conflicts of needs, conflicts of interpretations, or mutually accomplished creative problem solving.

3.2.6. **Robert Bolton, *People Skills*.** 84 This book is a wide ranging and well documented introduction to communication skills, assertion and conflict resolution. Bolton notes that there are disagreements among various teachers and researchers in this field. He adopts and adapts Gordon’s Teacher Effectiveness Training three-part scheme of experience labeling:

1. describe problem behavior,
2. disclose feelings evoked, and
3. explain feeling by describing tangible effect of listener’s behavior on speaker.

Bolton’s model offers an explanation of feelings that is absent in the Bowers’ model, but does not include specifying desired new behavior or explaining positive consequences. I have included Bolton’s “tangible effects on me” explanation of feelings in my model as part of a range of “emotion explainers” that includes such items as “how I interpret your behavior” and “what I want/wanted to happen.”

3.2.7. **Carroll E. Izard, Jerome Kagan and Robert B. Zajonc, eds., *Emotions, Cognition and Behavior*.** 85 Several of the advice-giving books shown above recommend that a person describe thoughts and feelings to others as if the two were separate internal events, and to investigate the degree to which one’s feelings may be the

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result of one’s own thought processes. (This gets elevated to the level of religious dogma in Bandler and Grinder’s *The Structure of Magic,*\(^{86}\) and is argued more carefully in Lazarus and Folkman’s *Stress, Appraisal and Coping.*\(^{87}\) The essays in *Emotion, Cognition and Behavior* demonstrate that the relationship between thinking and feeling is complex, variable, the subject of heated debate, and not as neatly summarizable as the advice-givers, myself included, would have everyone believe. Cognitively oriented scholars emphasize that our feelings grow out of our interpretations of whatever is happening, but scholars of emotion point out that the opposite can also be true: a particular mood can influence the kind of interpretations we generate.

### 3.3. Summary and Workshop Workbook example

In this chapter I have introduced the content of the first of the Six Dimensions, “Experiencing,” which is modeled as includes perceiving, thinking, feeling, wanting, and envisioning/anticipating. My goal in organizing this wide array of ideas from psychology and communication studies into a list of five processes is the same as many of the authors cited: to provide people with a rich descriptive vocabulary with which to both express themselves more fully and listen more carefully and appreciatively. Reproduced below is a section from my workshop workbook in which I introduce my adaptation of these ideas to the general public.

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\(^{86}\) Bandler and Grinder, *The Structure of Magic,* introduction.

Expressing your experience. Slow down and give your listeners more information about what you are experiencing by using a wide range of “I-statements.” You are likely to get more of your listener’s empathy if you express more of what you are seeing, hearing, feeling, interpreting, wanting, and envisioning. Listening is a very creative process in which the listener reconstructs the speaker’s experience. The more facets or dimensions of your experience that you share, the easier it will be for your conversation partner to reconstruct your experience and understand what you are feeling. This is equally worthwhile whether you are trying to solve a problem with someone or trying to express appreciation for them.

Human communication works by leaving most things unsaid and depending on the listener to fill in the missing information. For example, a receptionist may say to a counselor, “Your two o’clock is here,” a sentence which, on the face of it, makes no sense whatsoever. She means “Your client who made an appointment for two o’clock is here,” and the listener knows that. It’s amazing how much of the time this abbreviating and implying process works just fine. BUT, in situations of change, ambiguity, conflict or emotional need, our “shorthand” way of speaking may not work at all. Our listeners may fill in a completely different set of details than the one we intended, or our listeners may not understand the significance of what we are saying (they may get some of the details but miss the big picture).

According to various communication researchers, there are five dimensions of experience that your conversation partners can use to recreate your experience inside their minds. The more elements you provide, the higher the probability that your listener’s re-creation will match your experience. I will refer to these as the “five messages.” The table below shows an example of saying more of what you’re experiencing. The shorthand version would be something like “You must stop racing your wheelchair down the hall!” Here are the details of the five messages that are left out in the shorthand version:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Five Messages</th>
<th>Example (in a hospital):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>seeing, hearing...</td>
<td>“John, when I see you racing your wheelchair down the hall...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and feeling...</td>
<td>...I feel really angry...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>because I...</td>
<td>...because I imagine that you are going to hurt yourself and someone else, too...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and now I want...</td>
<td>...so I want you to promise me right now that you will slow down...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>so that...</td>
<td>...so that you can get out of here in one piece and I can stop worrying about a collision.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Here are eight examples of statements that give your listener a full range of information about your experience. Notice how a person’s feelings can change according to the needs and interpretations they bring to a situation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceiving</th>
<th>Emoting</th>
<th>Thinking</th>
<th>Wanting</th>
<th>Envisioning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. When I saw/heard...</td>
<td>2. I felt...</td>
<td>3. because I... (need, want, interpret, associate, etc.)</td>
<td>4. and now I want/then I wanted...</td>
<td>5. so that/in order to...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I saw the bear in the woods with her three cubs...</td>
<td>...I felt overjoyed!...</td>
<td>...because I needed a picture of bears for my wildlife class...</td>
<td>...and I wanted the bear to stand perfectly still...</td>
<td>so I could focus my camera.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I saw the dishes in the sink...</td>
<td>...I felt irritated...</td>
<td>...because I want to start cooking dinner right away...</td>
<td>...and I want to ask you to help me do the dishes right now...</td>
<td>...so that dinner will be ready by the time our guests arrive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I saw the flying saucer on your roof...</td>
<td>...I felt more excited than I have ever been in my life...</td>
<td>...because I imagined the saucer people would give you the anti-gravity formula...</td>
<td>...and I wanted you to promise that you would share it with me...</td>
<td>...so that we would both get rich and famous.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I saw the grant application in the office mail...</td>
<td>...I felt delighted...</td>
<td>...because I think our program is good enough to win a large grant...</td>
<td>...and I want to ask you to help me with the budget pages...</td>
<td>...so that we can get the application in before the deadline.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

...I felt depressed... ...because I cannot see clients when I’m filling out forms... ...and I want you to help me with the budget pages... ...so that I can keep up my case work over the next three weeks.
4.1. Intentions - the missing link

Akmajian, et al., propose that “Linguistic communication is possible because the speaker and hearer share a system of inferential strategies leading from the utterances [sic] of an expression to the hearer’s recognition of the speaker’s communicative intent.”

That is to say, since most sentences can be understood in a variety of ways, communication is successful not when the listener simply understands the words but when the listener also correctly infers the speaker’s communicative intention from both the words and the context in which they are spoken. A person who drives into a gas station and says, “I want ten gallons of regular.” is actually making the request, “Please sell me ten gallons of gas.” rather than merely describing a subjective state of desire.

The attendant will probably correctly infer the intended request because it is situationally appropriate. (A sarcastic attendant could highlight the lack of a specific request by saying, “And I want a trip to Hawaii, so what else is new?”), mirroring a statement of

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89 The description of the inference model given in the Akmajian text is parallel to the summary of Sperber and Wilson’s relevance theory in Littlejohn, Human Communication Theory, 133.
90 This example adapted from one in Akmajian, et al., Linguistics, 326.
desire with another statement of desire.\textsuperscript{91})

In this view of communication, which follows along the lines of “speech act” philosophy of language developed by John Austin\textsuperscript{92} and John Searle,\textsuperscript{93} the heart of interpersonal communication is to recognize what another person is trying to accomplish by using various words and sentences, one or more goals which are usually not stated explicitly by the other person. In this usage intention is understood to mean both having a situational goal and being committed to reaching it by taking various actions.\textsuperscript{94}

4.2. Intentions - the missing topic

In spite of a great deal of advocacy from different schools of thought, the idea that the recognition of a person’s communicative intent is at the heart of interpersonal communication has not found its way into any of the ten popular books on the subject which I own. \textit{Straight Talk}\textsuperscript{95} come the closest with a discussion of both kinds of conversations and sharing one’s goals and intentions, but it does not put the two together to suggest that one might state the kind of conversation one wanted to have. \textit{Parent Effectiveness Training}\textsuperscript{96} includes discussions to help parents clarify their communicative intentions toward their children. Parents are encouraged to determine whether a given problem “belongs to the child,” in which case the parent mostly reflects the child’s experience to help the child formulate her or his own solutions; or whether the problem “belongs to the parent,” in which case the parent needs to engage in active negotiation with the child. Although everyday conversations often include conversation-arranging

\textsuperscript{91}For a discussion of sarcasm in the form of responding to the literal rather than actual meaning of another person’s statement, see Goodman, \textit{The Talk Book}, 120.

\textsuperscript{92}John Austin, \textit{How to Do Things with Words} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962).


\textsuperscript{95}Miller, et al., \textit{Straight Talk}.

comments such as, “Right now I’d like to talk to you about...[subject matter],” neither Straight Talk nor P.E.T. encourage people to make such meta-communicative overtures.

In The Talk Book,\textsuperscript{97} Gerald Goodman makes a clear but very brief reference to the desirability of reaching an agreement before trying to have a conversation in which one person intends to do most of the talking, but he does not develop the idea of meta-communicative overtures as a general theme.

I can imagine communication-oriented authors not wanting to get too involved in the topic of intentions for fear of getting bogged down in a subjective swamp of psychological issues concerning desires, plans, goals and how people manage to carry them out. But, as Bratman notes concerning intentions, “To achieve complex goals, I must coordinate my present and future activities. And I need also to coordinate my activities with yours. Future-directed intentions help facilitate both intra- and interpersonal coordination.”\textsuperscript{98} This suggests to me that the topic of intentions is probably unavoidable in any descriptively rich account of human functioning.

From the point of view of the symbolic interactionist school of sociology, society consists of cooperative behavior, and cooperative behavior (joint action) requires understanding the intentions of others.\textsuperscript{99} In other words, understanding the intentions of other people is at the heart of human social life, a topic cannot be avoided.

4.3. The nature of intentions in human interaction

Although at first glance one might think of intentions as a matter of will power and commitment, there is a cognitive side to the process of intending. Intentions appear to be part of a natural abstracting process through which people combine smaller units of

\textsuperscript{97} Goodman, The Talk Book, 29.
\textsuperscript{99} Littlejohn, Human Communication Theory, 161.
thought and action into larger performances and programs of action. The topic of intentions points our attention toward the issue of hierarchies in human experience and functioning. As Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson put it, “...a hierarchy of levels seems to pervade the world we live in and our experience of selves and others, and ... valid statements about one level can only be made from the next higher one.”

Not only is there a logical necessity to go “one level up” in order to make valid statements about a given level; there appears to be a cognitive necessity to go “one level up” in order to be able to conceive of and to plan for action on a given level. (Kegan asserts just such a necessity, but defines the ‘levels’ differently than Watzlawick, et al.) Each higher level is the context for the one below it. Pearce, et al., present one possible cartography of such levels of context in interpersonal communication, as shown in Figure 4.1, below.

![Diagram of the hierarchy of contexts in interpersonal communication](image)

Figure 4.1. The hierarchy of contexts in interpersonal communication. (From Pearce, et al.

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100 Bratman, “What is Intention?,” 18.
Although the hierarchy shown in Figure 4.1 starts with speech acts (declaring, requesting, promising, etc.), speech acts themselves require the weaving together of awareness, desires, gestures, words, tone of voice, which in turn weave together syllables and neuro-muscular performances, and so on down to the smallest subatomic particle. Each level appears to be coordinated by the one above it.

4.4. Intention, cognition and human development

I believe that there is a profound parallelism between this structure of progressively more encompassing contexts, and Robert Kegan’s view of the successive levels of social-cognitive development, although the two frameworks are not identical. Pearce, et al., present the hierarchy of contexts as being simultaneously present as the backdrop of all communication, but they do not describe how conversants become aware of the levels of context. Kegan describes the gradual unfolding of awareness of each successive level, an awareness that allows a person to coordinate all the levels below the one they are ‘standing in’ or ‘grounded in.’ One reason intentions are a psychologically significant issue is that any inquiry into intentions demands that a person climb up at least one rung on the ladder of contexts. And that, for Kegan, is the fundamental growth exercise of human development.

I interpret the Pearce, et al., model noted above to suggest that our intentions for a speech act or conversation grow out of the episode or situation, our intentions for an episode or situation grow out of our relationship with our conversant, and our intentions for a relationship grow at least partly out of our culture (the role we want to play with that person). While Pearce would agree that this is one possible way that contexts cluster around conversations, he also argues that the web of contexts is continually rearranging
in the course of social interaction, with different contexts becoming of primary importance at different times.\textsuperscript{103}

According to Kegan’s\textsuperscript{104} view of the normative progression in human development, the psychological ground of a person’s sense of self shifts several times in the course of a lifetime. We begin life rooted, as it were, in our sensations and emotions. As we come fully into our thoughts (usually between ages 15 to 20) we begin to be able to take a perspective on the our feelings in which we were previously immersed. As we come more fully into our social role (usually between ages 25 to 35) we are develop a vantage point of larger projects from which to contemplate both our thoughts and feelings. In middle adulthood, as our life experiences in various social roles allows us to become more grounded in our power to create value systems and guiding stories at work and at home, we become more able to contemplate our social roles and to have them without having to be possessed by them. If we live in an environment that supports further development, our growing familiarity with guiding stories may allow us to develop a trans-systemic perspective in which we can view our own ideologies and meaningful stories, in which we were previously immersed, from the point of view of the universal and cross-cultural processes of meaning-making.

Thus there is an existential dimension to intentions, in that our intentions reflect our stage in the human life-cycle. We don’t expect five-year-olds to fulfill the role of reliable employees. And we expect twenty-year-olds to adopt rather than create the mission statements and value structures of the organizations they become part of. We expect at least some forty-five-year-olds to frame good, new laws rather than just follow and enforce the existing ones. And we expect at least some sixty-five-year-olds (on the

\textsuperscript{103}Pearce, \textit{Interpersonal Communication}, 35.
\textsuperscript{104}The summary of Kegan’s views presented here is drawn from his two most recent books, \textit{The Evolving Self} and \textit{In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life}. 65
Supreme Court) to be able to articulate a vision of the universal principles that should guide the creation of all laws. As one moves up this ladder of more encompassing awareness, the time involved in a typical task gets longer and longer, from the child’s first essay to the mature novelist’s suite of books. Our intentions to take on age-appropriate tasks have a cognitive element in them, a sense of overview that reflects our capacity to imagine a goal and imagine the various steps that lead up to it.\textsuperscript{105} Kegan’s point is that our capacity to “overview” is a learned, quasi-algebraic skill that unfolds slowly over the course of a lifetime. I believe that the concept of “intentions” is important because it points toward the way people use their capacity to abstract in order to coordinate their life activities and to move up and down various ladders of context and time frame. Gordon W. Allport expressed a parallel idea when he wrote, “The possession of long-range goals, regarded a central to one’s personal existence, distinguishes the human being from the animal, the adult from the child, and in many cases the healthy personality from the sick.”\textsuperscript{106} To which I would only add that I believe that a long-range goal, in more process terms, is a continuously renewed intention.

4.5. Encouraging the communication of intentions in conversation

Returning to the subject of interpersonal communication, I believe that, if the heart of interpersonal communication is to recognize what another person is trying to accomplish, then we might assist other people in understanding us better if we simply told them what kind of conversational transaction we are trying to have, rather than hoping that they will infer our intentions correctly. (Although such meta-communicative overtures can be observed in the talk of skilled conversants, they seem to escaped the

\textsuperscript{105} The examples in this paragraph are my application of Kegan’s ideas.

notice of many of the communication advice-givers.) Of course, such declarations of intention would require that we know our own intent, which is not always the case, and that we are not trying to deceive our conversation partner. The effort to declare one’s communicative intentions would raise both those issues, which would probably be a good thing.¹⁰⁷

As a result of these considerations and conclusions I have included intentions as the second of the six dimensions of first-person functioning in the Six Dimensions model and I have incorporated into my concept of intention the hierarchy of contexts described by Pearce, et al. By doing this I hope to encourage people to:

- ... become aware of the language of intentions and the wide range of intentions that we are capable of holding.

- ... clarify their intentions through a process of self-inquiry which makes intentions the object of new self-awareness.

- ... share more of their intentions with others (including conversational goals) and discern more of the intentions of others.

- ... cultivate new intentions and revise existing ones in the light of new experience.

- ... cultivate the intention to become more aware of one’s intentions

### 4.6. Translating experience into intention and action

In the dynamic spiral proposed by the Six Dimensions model, intentions somehow grow out of experience, or experience is somehow translated or transformed

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into intentions. Several scholars familiar with the Six Dimensions model have challenged me to explain more of that transformation. With respect to intentions in interpersonal communication, I find an illuminating link in the work of D’Andrade:

Much of the folk model of the mind is deeply embodied in the lexicon of natural language, so that in learning the language the child learns the great distinctions between perception, cognition, affect, motivation and intention. Also, as the philosopher Zeno Vendler (1972) has pointed out, there is a close correspondence between the kinds of speech acts found in natural languages and these same categories.108

What makes this important in understanding the link between experience and conversational intentions is that “the kinds of speech acts found in natural languages” can be understood as the kinds of conversational intentions people learn to bring to their encounters with others, what people learn and then hope to accomplish through conversational interaction. D’Andrade continues his exposition by presenting the following table of correspondences:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speech act categories [intentions in conversation]</th>
<th>Mental processes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Representatives</td>
<td>Thoughts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I hereby state, claim, deduce...</td>
<td>I think, believe, infer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directives</td>
<td>Wishes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I hereby order, request, invite...</td>
<td>I want, need, wish for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commissives</td>
<td>Intentions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I hereby promise, vow, commit...</td>
<td>I intend to, aim to, plan to...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressives</td>
<td>Feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I hereby apologize, commend...</td>
<td>I feel sorry that, proud of...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.2. Relation of speech act categories to mental processes. From D’Andrade, *Development of Cognitive Anthropology*, 167.

D’Andrade explains these correspondences as follows:

What this correspondence does is give an external structure by which internal mental states can be identified. That is, what are wishes? Wishes are what directives express. Thoughts are what representatives express. Intentions are what commissives express. And feelings are what expressives express. To learn to use the speech act categories is to learn the identity of the mental processes which they express.109

D’Andrade appears to be arguing here for a variation on the theme that our inner lives are shaped by conversations internalized early in life, a theme also advanced by the philosopher Rom Harré and the Object Relations school of psychotherapy. The speech acts available to us in a particular culture provide us with a template of categories for understanding (and thus shaping) our subjective states.

Thus, one answer to the question of how we actually translate our experience into intentions and then action, as portrayed by the Six Dimensions model, is that many (most?) human cultures provide their members with the functional equivalent of a translation table and a master script that makes it easy to go, for example, from desiring (as an experience) to desiring to ask (as an intention) to asking (as an action).

While I am happy to have this much of an answer to the question, I am not completely satisfied with this approach because it still leaves us at the mercy of our particular cultural toolkit. As I noted earlier in this essay, what do we do if our culture falls apart, or if we happen to have come from a particularly dysfunctional family?

109D’Andrade, Development of Cognitive Anthropology, 168.
4.7. Other views of intentions in communication

In developing my presentation of the topic of intentions, I have relied on the following authors and works in addition to those already cited above.

4.7.1. Philip R. Cohen, Jerry Morgan and Martha E. Pollack, eds., Intentions in Communication,\textsuperscript{110} presents papers and responses that form a dialogue between the disciplines of philosophy and artificial intelligence. In one of these papers John Searle argues that “collective intentional behavior is a primitive phenomenon that cannot be analyzed as just the summation of individual intentional behavior...” (p. 401) Following Searle, the Six Dimensions model presents “intending” as a fundamental aspect of human experience and functioning at both the individual and various aggregate levels.

4.7.2 John Searle, The Construction of Social Reality,\textsuperscript{111} elaborates on the role of shared intentionality in the creation of social facts. He argues that we live in a complex web of social agreements which, once made, are taken for granted as the internalized interpretive background that makes everyday social interaction mutually understandable for the participants.

4.8. Coaching individuals to express their intentions

As an example of how people might learn to express their intentions more skillfully in everyday conversations, I have included below several pages on this topic from my workshop training manual. In these pages I seek to explain the role of intentions in laypeople’s terms. And I offer an elaborate exercise to help the student feel empowered to make new kinds of conversational overtures and have new kinds of conversations.


Declaring conversational intentions. If you need to have a long, complex, important, or emotion-laden conversation with someone, briefly explain your conversational intention first and invite the consent of your intended conversation partner. In order to help your conversation partner cooperate with you and to reduce possible misunderstandings, start important conversations by inviting your conversation partner to join you in the specific kind of conversation you want to have.

**WHY EXPLAIN?** Some conversations require a lot more time, effort and involvement than others. If you want to have a conversation requiring a significant amount of effort from the other person, it will go better if that person understands what he or she is getting into and consents to participate. Of course, in giving up the varying amounts of coercion and surprise that are at work when we just launch into whatever we want to talk about, we are more vulnerable to being turned down. But, if the other person agrees to talk with us, they will be more present in the conversation and more able to either meet our needs or explain why they cannot (and perhaps suggest alternatives we had not thought of).

Many good communicators do this explaining intent/inviting consent without giving it any thought. They start important conversations by saying things such as:

- “Hi, Steve. I need to ask for your help on my project. Got a minute to talk about it?”
- “Uh...Maria, do you have a minute? Right now I’d like to talk to you about... Is that OK?”
- “Well, sit down for a minute and let me tell you what happened...”
- “Hello there, Mr. Sanchez. Say, uh...I’m not completely comfortable about this job. Can we talk about it?”
- “Hi, Jerry, this is Mike. How ya doin’? I want to talk you about Fred. He’s in jail again. Is this a good time to talk?”

Such combined explanations-of-intent and invitations-to-consent (C.E.I.’s, for short) can help your conversations along in several ways:

First, C.E.I.’s can give the listener a chance to consent to or decline the offer of a specific conversation. A person who has agreed to participate will participate more fully.

Second, C.E.I.’s can help the listener understand the “big picture,” the overall context in which the speaker hopes the listener will understand what is about to be said. (Many researchers assert that understanding the speaker’s conversational intention is crucial for understanding the speaker’s message.)
Third, C.E.I.’s can allow the listener to get ready for what is coming, especially if the topic is emotionally charged. (If you surprise people by launching into emotional conversations, they may respond by avoiding further conversations with you or by being permanently on guard.)

And fourth, C.E.I.’s can help the listener understand the role that the speaker wants the listener to play in the conversation.

GETTING EXPLICIT. Often people conduct this “negotiation about conversation” through body language and tone of voice during the first few seconds of interaction. But since we often have to talk with people whose body language and tone of voice patterns may be quite different from ours, we may need to be more explicit and direct in the way we ask people to have conversations with us. The more important the conversation, the more important it is to have your partner’s consent. Just saying, “Hi!”, or talking about the weather does not require agreement, because a person can easily indicate with their tone of voice whether or not they are interested in chatting.

To be invited into a conversation is an act of respect. And a consciously consenting participant is much more likely to pay attention and cooperate than someone who feels pushed into an undefined conversation by the force of another person’s talking. It’s not universal, but to assume without asking that a person is available to talk may be interpreted by many people as lack of respect. When we begin conversation by respecting the wishes of the other, we start to generate some of the goodwill (trust that their wishes will be considered) needed for creative problem solving. I believe that the empathy we get will be more genuine and the agreements we reach will be more reliable if we give people a choice about talking with us.

As you become consciously familiar with various kinds of conversations, you will find it easier to:

- Invite someone to have one of a wide range of conversations, depending on your wants or needs.
- Agree to someone’s conversational invitation.
- Say, “no.” Decline an invitation from someone.
- When in doubt, gently prompt a person to clarify what kind of conversation she or he is trying to have with you.
- Avoid conversations that are negative, self-defeating or self-destructive.

On the following pages you will find a list of the most common conversational intentions. The exercise pages provide a place for you to make notes as you work with a practice partner and explore how it feels to start each of the conversations on the list.
FINDING YOUR VOICE IN DIFFERENT SITUATIONS. Although few conversations are exactly alike, for the sake of exploration we can group most English conversations into approximately forty overlapping types of intention. I classify about thirty of these intents as fulfilling and about twelve as unfulfilling. The goal here is not to develop rigid logical categories, but instead to suggest many of the "flavors" of conversational intention that can be distinguished in everyday talking and listening (including exits and “time-outs”). The goal of presenting the list of fulfilling intentions is to help you feel empowered to start a wide range of new and more satisfying conversations. As you explore these lists feel free to add your own entries.

INTENTIONS WORTH AVOIDING. In order to be realistic I have included a second list that contains what I call unfulfilling conversational intentions. Here I have included motives such as to coerce, to deceive, to punish, to demean, etc. In our time TV, movies, popular music and books continually bombard us with ready-made examples of extraordinary sarcasm, cruelty and violence. So in the process of developing a positive personal style of interaction, we may have to struggle against what is almost a cultural brainwashing in favor of violence and against cooperation, respect and kindness. There are many moral arguments about these matters and I leave it to you to decide the issues of morality. I would, however, like to point out two of the most serious pragmatic liabilities of the intent to harm others.

The first is that whatever we do to others, we teach others to do back to us, both in conversation and in life in general. This was brought home to me quite chillingly over a period of years, as I observed a stressed-out, single-mother friend of mine use sarcasm as a way of trying to discipline her ten-year-old son. The ten-year-old became a teenager who would speak to his mother with the same withering sarcasm she had used on him only a few years before.

Second, while the unfulfilling intentions and actions on the second list may provide some short-term satisfaction as one person expresses their bad feelings toward another, anyone who can possibly leave will not stay around to be coerced or demeaned. And if someone cannot leave, no one involved will be happy. These highly advertised and promoted intentions to abuse represent a kind of “Science of Misery.” Do these twelve things and you can be certain that your relationships will end or turn bitter.

These considerations suggest that it is in our own best interest to make a careful self-inventory of our interaction styles and to explore more positive ways of interacting with the people around us.
Exercise: With your practice partner, try starting each of the conversations on the list. Note which feel easy to start and which feel more challenging. Begin with: “Right now I'd like to...” or “I'd like to take about 1/5/30 minutes and...”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AN EXPLORATORY LIST OF FULFILLING CONVERSATIONAL INTENTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. ...tell you about my experiences/feelings...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>that involve no implied requests or complaints toward you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>so that you will understand the request, offer, complaint, etc. that I want to make</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. ...hear what’s happening with you. (More specific: ...hear how you are doing with...)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. ...entertain you with a story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. ...explore some possibilities concerning ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(requiring your empathy but not your advice or permission)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. ...plan a course of action for myself (with your help or with you as listener/witness only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. ...coordinate/plan our actions together concerning...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. ...express my affection for you (or appreciation of you concerning...)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. ...express support for you as you cope with a difficult situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. ...complain/make a request about something you have done (or said)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(for better resolution of conflicts, translate complaints into requests)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. ...confirm my understanding of the experience or position you just shared.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...........(this usually continues with “I hear that you...,” “Sounds like you...,” “So you’re feeling kinda....,” or “Let me see if I understand you...”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. ...resolve a conflict that I have with you about...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. ...negotiate or bargain with you about...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. ...work with you to reach a decision about...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. ...give you permission or consent to.../...get your permission or consent to...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. ...give you some information about .../...get some information from you about...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. ...give you some advice about .../...get some advice from you about...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. ...give you directions, orders or work assignments.../ get directions or orders from you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. ...make a request of you (for action, time, information, object, money, promise, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. ...consent to (or refuse) a request you have made to me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. ...make an offer to you (for action, information, object, promise, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. ...accept or decline an offer you have made to me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. ...persuade or motivate you to adopt (a particular) point of view.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. ...persuade or motivate you to choose (a particular) course of action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. ...forgive you for... / ask for your forgiveness concerning...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. ...make an apology to you about... / request an apology from you about...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. ...offer an interpretation of... (what ... means to me) / ask for your interpretation of...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. ...offer an evaluation of... (how good or bad I think ... is) / ask for your evaluation of...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. ...change the subject of the conversation and talk about...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. ...have some time to think things over.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. ...leave/ end this conversation so that I can...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Exercise: (to be explored in private or with a therapist) To what degree do you find yourself relying on these kinds of conversations to influence the people in your life? What possibilities do you see for change? To what degree are you the target of these behaviors? What possibilities do you see for change?

AN EXPLORATORY LIST OF UNFULFILLING CONVERSATIONAL INTENTIONS
(These conversational intentions and related actions are unfulfilling, at the very least, because we would not like someone to do these things to us. Yet if and when we do any of these things, we teach and encourage others to do them back to us and/or to avoid contact with us.)

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. | To lie, deceive or mislead  
(sometimes redeemed by good overall intentions, but usually not) |
| 2. | To threaten |
| 3. | To hurt or abuse |
| 4. | To punish (creates resentment, avoidance and desire for revenge) |
| 5. | To blame (focuses on past instead of present and future) |
| 6. | To control or coerce (force, influence without consent) |
| 7. | To manipulate (to influence someone without his or her knowledge and consent)  
To demean or shame ...to make someone look bad in eyes of others |
| 8. | ...to make people doubt themselves or feel bad about themselves |
| 9. | To deny the existence of a problem in the face of evidence and appeals from others |
| 10. | To hide what is important to me from you (if you are an important person in my life) |
| 11. | To suppress or invalidate someone’s emotional response to a given event or situation |
| 12. | To withdraw from interaction in order to avoid the consequences of something I have done. (stonewalling) |
CHAPTER FIVE

FUNDAMENTAL FORMS OF COMMUNICATIVE ACTION (DIMENSION 3)

5.1. Introduction: Reflections on the question “What shall I do?”

As Pearce points out, “...interpersonal communication deals primarily with the question of What should I do? rather than the question What do I know?” (author’s italics) To which I would only add that while the two questions can be separated in one’s mind, in the process of living they are never very far apart. In fact, this chapter combines them by exploring the question “What do I know about what I should do?”

The pragmatic point of view, which focuses on life as a stream of action, takes “What shall I do?” and “How shall I do it?” to be the most significant questions that people can ask themselves. In keeping with the complementarity I have already noted between the pragmatic and realistic points of view, these two pragmatic questions just cited immediately give rise to a whole range of more realistic ones. For example, “What am I capable of?” and “What actions are available to me in this particular situation?”

In creating Dimension Three of the Six Dimensions model, I am trying to provide preliminary, and provocative, and evocative answers to these questions. (Literally provocative, hopefully stimulating people to speak, to find a new voice.)

In this chapter I am going to try to answer these questions by presenting a

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summary of the fundamental forms of communicative action, as understood by two scholars in the field. In the next chapter I will explore various ways of understanding conversational style, the “How shall I do it?” question.

Why make this inquiry? As the philosopher Martin Heidegger observed, we attend primarily to the breakdowns in the flow of everyday life. Facts assumed to be understood by everyone are left unsaid, and processes functioning normally become part of the taken-for-granted background of daily living. Thus, if everyone were communicating happily by following the tacit traditions of their family and culture, it is not likely that anyone would bother to analyze the forms of communicative action and interaction. (In exploring the evolution of metacognition, Andrew Lock notes that communication failure is one of the main ways that we become aware of the communication process itself.) And, of course, we are bound to encounter people from other families and, more and more, people of other cultures. The difficulties of these encounters can cause us to begin to pay conscious attention to our own heretofore-taken-for-granted ways of communicating. It is also true that the tacit traditions within both families and cultures break down all the time and often produce an unacceptable amount of suffering. Thus, we may find ourselves drawn (sometimes pushed!) to ask basic questions about what else might be possible in our interactions with others.

5.2. Psychotherapy and everyday life.

In trying to map the action possibilities in everyday conversation, I rely heavily

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113 As explained by Terry Winograd and Fernando Flores in Understanding Computers and Cognition (New York, Addison-Wesley, 1987), 36.
115 Ibid.
on the work of psychotherapists. Why is that appropriate? From the point of view just described, of consciousness attending to the “breakdowns,” the distinction we make between psychotherapy and everyday life is largely illusory. Everyday life includes large and continual elements of solving problems, dealing with loss and disappointment, repairing damaged relationships, finding the strength to assert oneself in threatening situations, etc. These are the central themes of friendship, parenting, living together, working together and supervising. And these same topics make up a large part of the practice of psychotherapy and social work. Although the communication and nurturing skills learned by professionals can be thought of (and are often are thought of) as the trade secrets of a licensed elite, I believe that most of these skills are what everyone would know (or would want to know) in a more people-oriented culture. There is considerable evidence to suggest that much of the emotional support that psychotherapists provide to their clients, we could all provide to one another if we made sustaining the emotional well-being of others more of a priority in our lives.116 Thus we can all benefit from the many decades of careful thought that psychotherapists have devoted to understanding good therapist-client communication, because (according to Carl Rogers117) the central features of good therapist-client communication are the central features of good communication between any two persons.

Discussion of this topic is made more difficult by virtue of the fact that psychotherapists and social workers, in order to justify their status as paid professionals, tend to surround whatever they do with an aura of medical and technical expertise, even if a large part of what they do is simply to provide friendship to people in stressful

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116This was a popular theme in the 1960s and 1970s. For a current re-statement of this position, with references to the earlier research, see Jacquelyn Small, Becoming Naturally Therapeutic (New York: Bantam, 1990).
117Carl Rogers, A Way of Being (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1980), 45.
Providing friendship to people in stressful situations is a good and necessary activity, but it is also something that many, if not most, people can do (or could do with appropriate encouragement).

5.3. Two “mappers” of categories in the field of interpersonal communication

The information in this chapter on the forms of communicative action comes primarily from the work of two psychologists who both advocate what one might call a universal communicative literacy. Their books are intended to provide the “appropriate encouragement” just mentioned and to empower everyone to be more of a “helper,” a more skilled and nurturing companion in the face of people’s inevitable life difficulties, and a more skilled, fulfilled and compassionate participant in all relationships.

In *The Helping Relationship*,119 Lawrence Brammer makes a strong case for transporting helping skills out of the restricted world of licensed psychotherapists and into an expanded world of trained laypersons that includes volunteers, friends, family members and peer support persons. “It is striking to realize,” Brammer notes, “that formalized helping relationships in the form of counseling, treatment, ministering or psychotherapy have characteristics in common with all human relating.”120

In *The Talk Book*, Gerald Goodman organizes wide ranging information from

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120Ibid., 14.
communication and psychological research into six basic categories of communicative action and uses these categories as the outline for a course of instruction in communication skills intended for everyone.¹²¹

Two aspects of these books make them relevant to the Six Dimensions project. First, each presents a structured outline of what the author sees as the most fundamental possibilities in interpersonal communication from the point of view of the participants.¹²² Second, each sees himself as summarizing a wide range of research in the field. I have drawn primarily on these two sources in order to try to include in the Six Dimensions model the best currently available information about communicative action.

5.4. Arguments for and against menus of possible actions.

As John Steinbruner points out in his work on decision-making,¹²³ people generally do not organize their behavior by a rational evaluation of all the possibilities that are open to them; there are simply too many. (Instead, he argues, people adjust their behavior by paying attention to how well they are doing in relation to a few key goals or indicators of success.) At first glance this would seem to argue against the usefulness of providing people with “ranges” or “palettes” of possible actions. In defense of “providing a palette” I would say that ordinary behavior is quite habitual, and it is when people want to change their habits that a “palette” of as yet untried possibilities can be helpful. What is at issue here, as I see it, is not primarily how people organize their behavior, but how they might reorganize and improve it. Reorganizing and improving

¹²² One could argue that the most fundamental categories of interpersonal communication consist of neuron firings or movements in the throat or ear canal, and I would take that to be an interesting argument, but not one made from the point of view of the conscious participants in a conversation.
will often involve consciously looking at what was previously done without a thought, and including new actions and organizing themes in one’s repertoire of action. The distinction I am making here between “organize” and “reorganize” is an adaptation of the one that Thomas Kuhn\textsuperscript{124} makes between “normal science” and periods of “paradigm shift.” And just as the dynamics of normal science do not adequately represent or explain paradigm shifts, I would like to argue that the dynamics of ordinary behavior will not necessarily help us to understand the dynamics of change.

As I noted in my introduction to this study, the renown family therapist Salvador Minuchin summed up the heart of psychotherapy as, “I am always saying to people, in one way or another, “There are more possibilities in you than you think. Let us find a way to help you become less narrow.””\textsuperscript{125}

5.5. Goodman’s six “talk tools”

In order to make the path to new possibilities more understandable, Goodman describes what he sees as the six “talk tools” of more satisfying conversations (thus implicitly adopting a “toolkit” metaphor). In my preferred metaphor, he offers his readers a menu of six conversational possibilities. He describes these as follows.

5.5.1. Disclosures, which can be viewed as arranged across a spectrum of emotional risk. In making “risky” disclosures, which Goodman advocates, we allow others to see us as less than ideal, but we also allow others to actually come to know us. Revealing our distresses, disappointments and failures to others can make us “vulnerable to being viewed as less of a person” but it also opens us to receive the empathy and support of others, and to build intimate relationships based on mutual acceptance. The

\textsuperscript{124}Kuhn, \textit{Structure of Scientific Revolutions}.

alternative, according to Goodman, is an emotional isolation that makes for mental illness. (While I agree with Goodman in relation to American and perhaps European cultures, it is not clear to me that this is a universal truth. Asian and Native American cultures place great value on emotional reserve.)

5.5.2. **Reflections** are expressions from a listener that summarize a speaker’s expressed experience, *as experienced from the speaker’s point of view*. In reflecting, the listener acknowledges the speaker’s experience as the speaker experienced it, rather than as the listener would have experienced it or as some ideal person might or ought to have experienced it. Reflections are the polar complement of disclosures, in that they are the response generally needed in order to allow someone making a disclosure to feel that their disclosure has been understood by the listener.

5.5.3. **Interpretations**, as described by Goodman, are, like reflections, a response to another person’s experience. But instead of the listener trying to express from the speaker’s point of view what the speaker is experiencing, the listener expresses what the speaker’s experience means *to the listener, according to the listener’s perspective and values*, and perhaps what the listener thinks the speaker’s experience *ought* to mean to the speaker. “... [T]here are two ways of giving personal interpretations: classifying (naming, diagnosing and pigeonholing); and analyzing (explaining, dissecting or reordering).”

5.5.4. **Advisements** for Goodman cover an entire range of conversational interactions that are intended to influence the behavior of others and that vary in their

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126GOODMAN, The Talk Book, 73.
degree of assertiveness. Although advisements can create conflict and Goodman has lot of warnings and advice to give us about them, he reminds us that we cannot live and work closely with other people without trying to influence their actions. “A bald fact of human relations is that getting close forces us into a continuing series of adjustments. To keep life balanced, we work at shaping others into adjustments [sic] with us.”¹²⁷ In order of ascending forcefulness, five typical forms of influencing others are:

- **Advising questions** of the form “Don’t you think it would be a good idea if we...” These are the most tentative because they explicitly invite correction or contradiction.

- **Me-too advisements** respond to the other person’s situation with a personal story that expresses or implies a recommended course of action.

- **Suggestions**, by containing an explicit label of “suggestion,” usually signal the recipient that they are free to accept or reject the advice.

- **Soft commands**, such as “Don’t touch handrail - wet paint,” provide a rationale for compliance that sends a meta-message of respect to the recipient.

- **Hard commands** of the “Keep off the grass.” or “Kiss me!” sort do not invite or anticipate dialogue or refusal. They can imply either authority or great intimacy

Goodman acknowledges that “advisement” is not an entirely satisfactory label for this group of conversational transactions in which one person is trying to influence another. Under that general heading I would certainly want to add making requests.

which, for reasons not stated, is not mentioned anywhere in this text but is a central theme in books on assertiveness training.

5.5.5. Questions. “The spoken question is used for a wider range of motives than any other talk tool.”128 And the key to understanding questions is to understand that much of the time questions are not requests for information.

(One problem I see in Goodman’s exposition is that although he introduces us to the rich interweave of intentions that motive us to communicate with one another, he does not give us any overview of intentions in the same way that he gives us an overview of talk tools. Since intentions are acknowledged as a crucial part of the process, I would have liked to have seen a more explicit discussion of the varieties of intention in relation to all the six talk tools.)

Goodman divides the overall territory of questioning into several overlapping zones:

- **Loaded questions** of the “Why don’t you slow down and take three deep breaths” variety soften the effect of giving advice or offering and interpretation.

- **“Semi-innocent” questions** contain some degree of actual request for information mixed with a large amount of another conversational intention. For example:
  
  Complaining: “How come you never...”
  
  Requesting approval: “Wasn’t I great...”
  
  Resisting demands: “Why don’t we wait until...”
  
  Softening surprise: “Would you believe...”
  
  Initiating flirtation: “Do you shop here often?”

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128Ibid., 118.
Bragging: “Have you seen the new exhibit at the Getty?”

Demonstrating a common bond: “So you like turtles, too, huh?”

Reducing anxiety: “Pretty scary, huh?”

Softening persuasion: “How comfortable would you be if we…”

* Closed questions for short answers constrain the recipient to reply in the terms given by the questioner, often simply “yes” or “no,” as when a salesperson says “Are you ready to buy this?” Closed questions are often “semi-innocent” because of the way they constrain the recipient. They can also have multiple options as in “Would you like the green model with blue stripes, the blue model with green stripes, or the beige model with pink sparkles?” This latter form is significant because it appears to be offering a wide range of choices when it may actually be leaving out important choices such as “I don’t want to buy any of those.” or “I would like to do some more shopping around before I make a purchase.”

Multiple choice questions can have positive uses, though, as when a person tries to clarify a confusing situation and says “I’m confused. Are we talking about...(A or B or C)?”

* Open questions for longer answers give recipients permission to reply in their own terms and at length if they so choose. Open ended questions can still contain an element of suggestion. The question, “How do you feel about seeing Gone With the Wind tonight?” implies that I would like to see it, but allows you to decline the invitation without losing face.

* Rhetorical questions soften the effect of interpretation or advice offered by one person to another. For example, I can say, “What kind of living hell
are we creating by selling land mines to third-world countries?”, instead of saying, “We are creating a living hell by selling land mines to third-world countries.” In the former version I invite my listener to agree with me, but the question form gives listeners some sense of permission to think for themselves. In the latter version I constrain my listener to accept my point of view or start an argument.

Disclosing questions reveal the condition of the questioner as much as or more than they request information. They reveal feelings that the questioner would be embarrassed to state directly. For example, the question, “How do you feel about seeing Gone With the Wind tonight?”, asked of someone I did not know very well, would be an indirect way of asking for a date, a way that would allow the recipient to decline my invitation by simply expressing lack of interest in that particular movie.

5.5.6. “Silences” is the term that Goodman uses to label a cluster of related activities that includes conversational waiting, paying attention, turn-taking, crowding, interrupting and “overtalking.”

Receiving the attention of others is a fundamental psychological need, so the patterns of waiting or rushing that emerge in conversations have a large impact on how people feel about themselves, their conversation partners and their relationships with their conversation partners.

The roots of attention-seeking go back to the infant’s early experience of being attended to and cared for. Love and attention are so deeply intertwined in early life that as adults many people experience compassionate attentiveness as a powerfully healing (although impersonal) form of love. As babies, we find our voice by engaging in a
responsive interplay with our mothers, (or other primary caregivers). According to the Object Relationists (whom Goodman cites) the baby interiorizes this responsive interplay and it becomes the structure of the young child’s emerging personality. A great deal of clinical and developmental data supports Goodman’s advocacy of slowing down in conversations and learning to wait, that is, learning to let other people take the time they need to express whatever it is they are trying to say.

5.5.7. Critique of Goodman’s approach. While I like the “tools in a toolkit” metaphor because it is reassuringly informal and suggests a variety of possible actions that are available to everyone, there are several ways in which this metaphor is awkward and misleading. First, the six activities have been nominalized (turned into thing-like nouns), which sets them somewhat at a distance from the reader and leaves readers with the task of re-imagining the six tools as the reader’s own activities of disclosing, reflecting, etc. Second, once imagined as separate tools, it does not follow naturally to imagine weaving communicative actions together or stringing them together into a sequence, both of which are necessary in conversations. Third, one learns quickly that there are really more than six actions to take in conversation. The six talk tools turn out to be less like separate tools and more like the first six major branchings of a tree trunk. The tree actually has many, many branches. In the course of his exposition, Goodman introduces his reader to an illuminating array of distinctions, categories and possibilities. I like the material but I wonder to what degree readers will turn away in disappointment when they discover that “the intimate science of communicating in close relationships” is much more complicated than the list of six actions that Goodman presents at first. This is not an easy issue to resolve. One might say that one virtue of The Talk Book is that it starts out simply enough to get people engaged in learning that the topic is complex.
Another virtue of Goodman’s book is that he shows his reader the six talk tools in action in long transcripts of actual conversations, interspersed with his comments pointing out how particular actions evoke particular responses in conversation.

5.8. Brammer’s outline of helping skills

Although Brammer’s outline of communication skills is more elaborate than Goodman’s, Brammer’s goal, to identify and describe the fundamental skills that helpers need to learn, is narrower than Goodman’s goal, which is to identify and describe the fundamental skills that everyone needs to learn. I find both these lists illuminating because the authors are trying to define, as fully as is reasonably possible, the fundamental spectrum or universe of action possibilities in conversation (which I am trying to summarize for communication-skill students in the Six Dimensions model). Faced with the fact that “there is no standard classification of helping skills,” Brammer created a classification based on his experience of “what categories are most meaningful in training helpers.”129 (Although he does not discuss the issue, this is a significant example of practice shaping theory.) His list of helping skills is shown in Table 5.1, below.

129Brammer, The Helping Relationship, 22.
# Table 5.1. Brammer’s outline of helping skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FOR UNDERSTANDING</th>
<th>FOR SUPPORT AND CRISIS INTERVENTION</th>
<th>FOR POSITIVE ACTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Listening</td>
<td>1. Supporting</td>
<td>1. Problem solving and decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Attending</td>
<td>1.2 Reassuring</td>
<td>1.1 Identifying problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Paraphrasing</td>
<td>1.3 Relaxing</td>
<td>1.2 Changing problems to goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Clarifying</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.3 Analyzing problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Perception checking</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.4 Exploring alternatives and implications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Leading</td>
<td>2. Crisis Intervention</td>
<td>1.5 Planning a course of action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Indirect leading</td>
<td>2.2 Consoling</td>
<td>1.6 Generalizing to new problems</td>
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<td>3. Reflecting</td>
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<td>4. Summarizing</td>
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<td>5. Confronting</td>
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<td>7.3 Suggesting</td>
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As I count them there are forty-eight distinct actions in Table 5.1. To me, this fact by itself raises some interesting questions. For example, how is a person supposed to keep forty-eight action possibilities continuously “in view,” as it were, in the course of a supportive conversation? Brammer is clearly proposing a meta-vocabulary of communicative action that will make severe cognitive demands on would-be helpers. In studying the explanations of these various actions, it seems to me that there is an unresolved tension between Brammer’s implicit goal of presenting an accurate, detailed palette of action possibilities and his desire for many people at all levels of society to become helpers. Those many people may find themselves, in Robert Kegan’s terms, “in over their heads.” At the very least, a way of connecting all these diverse actions would be very helpful.

To Brammer’s credit, he does suggest an overall plot line to the series of conversations in which these specific communicative actions would take place. The helping relationship begins with an emphasis on understanding and empathizing and gradually shifts to an emphasis on support for decision making and action. In the process, “helpees” get support to pay attention to their feelings and to weigh the pros and cons of various courses of action. Within this organizing scenario, helpers improvise based on their sense of what feels appropriate, while trying to embody the genuineness, caring and actively expressed empathic understanding that are known to be generally helpful.

Brammer’s outline calls to mind the “how long is the coastline of Britain?” riddle discussed in the introduction to this study. The closer one looks, the more there is to see. (This is true of Goodman’s book as well.) So a truly comprehensive list of

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conversational transactions may be so long, and hence so demanding, that it would not be of much use to anyone in organizing their behavior.

I think Brammer’s list becomes more helpful if one uses the relative distinction I described in the last chapter between conversational intentions and fundamental speech actions such as speaking and listening. These two levels are mixed together in the list. By adopting a two-level view one can see how a particular conversational intention might be accomplished by a sequence and interplay of a limited number of speech actions. The intention/speech action distinction is a relative one because, given that interpersonal communication is goal-oriented and context-bound, there is never a speech action that does not carry forward some guiding intention. But for the purpose of modeling the moment-to-moment action choices that are available to people, I believe that it helps to separate conversational intentions from speech actions. I challenge my students to become aware of how they use various speech actions to carry forward specific intentions. What follows is my working synthesis of Goodman’s and Brammer’s categories as developed in my teaching practice.

5.10. A menu of conversational actions

The construction of category schemes always involves value judgments about what is most important for people to pay attention to. What facets of a process should be highlighted and what facets should be lumped together in a category called “Other” or “For later study”? In my efforts to teach Goodman’s,131 Brammer’s132 and Rosenberg’s133 material the following list of most important speech actions has evolved. The purpose of this list is to introduce students to the basic conversational tools they need

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132Brammer, The Helping Relationship.
133Rosenberg, Nonviolent Communication.
to fulfill all conversational intentions. So these speech actions are described as distinct from both conversational intentions, which are described at length in chapter 4 of this study, and conversational styles, which are described at length in chapter 6. (For clarity I have described some of these actions using “I,” “you” and other personal pronouns.)

1. **Listening: paying focused attention to you and giving small signals that I am following what you are saying.** It is important for speakers to know that listeners are receiving the message or following the story. This happens continuously by the listener giving the speaker what Goodman calls “minimal encouragements,” including repeated nodding and repeatedly saying “uh-huh” or “yes” while the speaker is talking. These minimal encouragements keep the conversational focus entirely on the speaker.

2. **Reflecting back: expressing in words the essence of what you have just said.** This is what Carl Rogers called active or empathic listening. The idea is to say back to the speaker the essence of what has just been said, to reassure the speaker that she or he has been understood. The focus of the conversation shifts briefly to the listener, to allow the listener to express what has been heard. The need to be recognized and understood by another person is a deep one, going back, according to Winnicott\(^{134}\) and Kohut\(^{135}\) to the evolution of the self in the mother-infant dialogue.

3. **Talking: expressing my experience, needs, and requests, giving information, interpretations, directions or advice, and story-telling and banter.** Expressing oneself has been the traditional focus of communication studies and rhetoric, so it is the paradigmatic speech action about which we have the most information. (I find it telling that a history of communication theory from the ancient Greeks to 1900 has no

\(^{134}\)Donald W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (New York: Tavistock/Methuen, 1982), 111-118.

entry for “listen” or “listening” in the index.\(^\text{136}\) Most typically, for men in Western societies, the focus is external: on opinions, projects, sports, objects such as cars, and competing for status and attention. According to Deborah Tannen,\(^\text{137}\) men’s talking is shaped by their experience of growing up in competitive, hierarchical groups. Women’s socialization toward cooperation leaves them more inclined to discuss their web of social relationships and use talk to build alliances of mutual support. It is only in recent decades, with the advent of humanistic psychology and the publication of books such as Sydney Jourard’s *The Transparent Self*,\(^\text{138}\) that men have been encouraged to express their feelings and experiences. Men tend to act out the feelings they have not the skill or permission to express in words and this plays a large role in the problem of domestic violence. (See the Workshop Workbook example at the end of chapter 3 for an example of how I present expressing one’s experience in my classes.)

4. Pausing/waiting/being silent. Giving you (or me) time to think. Waiting and its opposites, rushing and interrupting, pay important roles in the process of directing attention in conversation. It usually takes a moment for a person to work out the implications and significance of what another person has said. In many cultures, if we begin responding the very instant that another person stops talking, we indicate that we are not really considering what they have said. Also, we may be cutting off a process of exploratory self-disclosure, in that the speaker may need an occasional pause in which to formulate the next part of their statement. The pace of crowding and interrupting in a conversation can indicate how anxious or how confident people are about getting their turn and being heard, in a particular conversation and in life in general. Anxiety about


\(^{137}\text{Deborah Tannen, *That’s Not What I Meant!: How Conversational Style Makes or Breaks Relationships* (New York: Ballantine, 1987), 125-144.}\)

being heard can become self-perpetuating, if the anxious person loses conversation partners because of interrupting or rushing to respond.

5. **Summarizing a significant segment of what I or you (or we both) have said.** Summaries are related to and overlap with reflecting back, but they refer to larger chunks of conversation. If, after listening for half an hour to you talk about apartment hunting, I say “So you’ve been out there looking at every listing you could find,” I am creating an opportunity for you to say more on that topic or change the subject. Reflecting is often focused on a particular incident or experience, whereas summarizing appears to recognize the overall intent of an entire conversation or a large part of a conversation. Summaries are like intersections: they allow the conversation to go in new directions.

6. **Asking questions, especially open-ended questions, to move the conversation forward.** As Goodman’s analysis of questions, presented earlier in this chapter, makes clear, people use the question form to accomplish many purposes other than requesting information or explanation. So much so that I believe real question-asking can get lost in a sea of pseudo-questions. What I want to call a “real” question signals an openness to learn on the part of the person asking. And the tone of voice with which the question is asked usually indicates how wide a range of possible answers will be tolerated by the asker. Certain psychologists emphasize that telling the truth about one’s thoughts, feelings and experiences is the central task of becoming a person.\(^{139}\) The absolutely essential complement of telling the truth about one’s own life is the willingness to hear the truths of another person’s life. Open ended questions, of the “How do you feel about the possibility of our moving to New York if I get a job offer

\(^{139}\)Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, Blanton, *Radical Honesty*, and J. & M. Paul, *Do I Have To Give Up Me To Be Loved By You.*
there?” variety, can signal a genuine openness to receive the truth of another person’s experience, whatever it may be. (At the end of this chapter I include a section on asking open-ended questions from my workshop workbook.)

7. Turn-taking: changing the focus of attention in the conversation by my taking a turn or encouraging you to take a turn. The way people take turns in a conversation shows how power is shared and attention is distributed in their relationship. Because we all need attention, it is tempting to conclude that the ideal human relationship is one in which all participants get to express themselves approximately the same amount. Such relationships are my personal preference and my political commitment, but human cultures are so different in the way they organize social interaction that I hesitate to say that one pattern is best for everyone. Interrupting and talking at the same time as another person can have very different significance in different cultures.140

Extremes of domination, as in suicidal religious cults, are clearly dysfunctional. But extremes of egalitarianism, as I have experienced in various political groups, can lead to an inability to make decisions and commitments. My experience has been that many people appear to be caught in less-than-satisfying turn-taking patterns simply because no one ever helped them develop new ones. Without being fanatic about it, my goal is to help people move their conversational turn-taking in the directions of greater awareness, mutuality, respect, consent and satisfaction. By presenting turn-taking as one of a wide range of conversational actions, I hope to encourage people to develop their turn-taking skill without becoming obsessed with the process.

140 It was thought until recently that men interrupt women much more than women interrupt men, suggesting the imbalance of power between women and men in society. A recent, extensive review of this topic suggests that the process of interrupting is more complex than previously assumed, has different meanings in different social and cultural circumstances, and the evidence documenting the process is more varied and ambiguous. Interruption can be an act of domination or disrespect in some circumstances. See Deborah James and Sandra Clarke, “Women, Men and Interruptions: A Critical Review,” in Gender and Conversational Interaction, ed. Deborah Tannen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 231-280.
8. **Declaring conversational intent and inviting consent.** As I discussed at length in chapter 4, briefly negotiating with another person about what kind of conversation to have can be a crucial part of a conversation. And the more important or demanding the conversation is going to be, the more important it is to declare one’s intent and invite the consent of one’s prospective conversation partner. Deborah Tannen describes a related process that she calls this “naming the frame,” helping a conversation along by giving it a label that allows both participants to have the same expectations.\(^{141}\)

By including this kind of “meta-communication” in my list of fundamental communication activities, I am taking the position that even beginning students of communication skills should be challenged to include meta-communication in their picture of what happens between people. (See the Workshop Workbook example at the end of chapter 4 for an example of how I present this topic in my classes.)

9. **Using body language to express our overall involvement in, and emotional reaction to, the interaction in which we are participating; and observing the body language of others.** Body language includes posture, eye contact, direction of gaze, tone of voice, adjustment of distance between conversants and body movements (as in moving one’s hands to express more of the feeling of what one is talking about). Because body language has so many psychological and cultural aspects, I have many questions about trying to teach people to alter their body language. To the degree that our body language is faithfully expressing our feelings, I believe we may be better off just learning from our body language rather than trying to change it. For example, some doctors in hospitals sit next to their patients when they visit them; other doctors stand at the foot of the bed when

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\(^{141}\)Tannen, *That’s Not What I Meant!*, 176.
they visit and appear to be more interested in the disease than in the patient. One approach to this situation would be to encourage all doctors to sit next to their patients, which might be a good idea, but I think it would be important for such behavior change to be accompanied by some self-exploration on the part of the doctors, so that the underlying attitude that is causing the “body language” message might change. In this case, and I think in many cases, the body language is not the problem. But it is an important window through which we can catch glimpses of our own attitudes and feelings, especially attitudes and feelings we might prefer not to face or not to have. Also, learning to pay attention to the body language of the people around us, especially the feelings that are being conveyed by tone of voice, can deepen our listening. Of the fundamental speech actions listed here, using and observing body language is the most challenging and the most open-ended. I include it in this list for the sake of completeness, but the coaching of body language awareness is beyond the scope of this study.

5.11 Summary and Workshop Workbook examples

To recapitulate, here is my working list of fundamental communicative actions:

1. Listening: paying focused attention to you and giving small signals that I am following what you are saying.

2. Reflecting back: expressing in words the essence of what you have just said.

3. Talking: expressing my experience, needs, and requests, giving information, interpretations, directions or advice, and story-telling and banter.

142This example is from the anthropologist Edward T. Hall, quoted in Ronald B. Adler and George Rodman, Understanding Human Communication (Fort Worth: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1988), 121. The analysis that follows the example is my own.
4. Pausing/waiting/being silent. Giving you (or me) time to think.

5. Summarizing a significant segment of what I or you (or we both) have said.

6. Asking questions, especially open-ended questions, to move the conversation forward.

7. Turn-taking: changing the focus of attention in the conversation by my taking a turn or encouraging you to take a turn.

8. Declaring conversational intent and inviting consent.

9. Using body language to express our overall involvement in, and emotional reaction to, the interaction in which we are participating; and observing the body language of others.

Because of the way intention and action are woven together in communication, this list of fundamental speech actions is only meaningful in partnership with the extensive list of conversational intentions presented in the last chapter. In my experience, the interaction of these two lists reveals more about what is happening in conversation than either Brammer’s or Goodman’s single list approach.

As an example of how people might learn to listen more responsively and ask more open-ended questions, I have included below several pages on these topics from my workshop training manual.
Listening responsively: Listen first and acknowledge what you hear, even if you don’t agree with it, before expressing your experience or point of view. In order to get more of your conversation partner’s attention in tense situations, pay attention first: listen and reflect back what you hear (especially feelings) before you express your own position. This step separates acknowledging and approving/agreeing. Acknowledging another person’s thoughts and feelings does not have to mean that you approve of or agree with that person’s actions or way of experiencing, or that you will do whatever they ask.

When people are upset about something and want to get it “off their chests,” their capacity to listen is greatly diminished. Blocking the expression of someone’s feelings by trying to get your point across will usually cause the other person to try even harder to get their feelings recognized. Once people feel that their messages and feelings have been heard, they start to relax and they have more free attention to listen.

Example (in a hospital). Nurse, after listening to patient:

“I hear that you are very uncomfortable right now, Susan, and you would really like to get out of that bed and move around. But your doctor says your bones won’t heal unless you stay put for another week”

Although you might think that most people just want sympathy from their listeners, people actually want a whole range of responses from each other in conversation. There are two groups of responses that are especially important in conflict situations:

(1) Recognition and acknowledgment

(2) Agreement and approval

One recurring problem in conflict situations is that many people don’t separate these two groups. They are stuck together in people’s minds like a “package deal.” The effect of this combining is that Person A feels that any acknowledgment of Person B’s experience implies agreement and approval, therefore Person A will not acknowledge any of Person B’s experience. Each side tries harder to get heard and each side tries harder to not hear the other. Of course, this is a recipe for stalemate (if not disaster).

In fact, most people really want to be recognized and acknowledged, separate and apart from the issue of whether you approve of their experience or agree with their position. With practice, you can learn to separate these two groups of responses. As you do this, you may find that, figuratively speaking, you can give your conversation partners half of what they want, even if you can’t give them all of what
they want. In many conflict situations that will be giant step forward. Your conversation partners will also be more likely to acknowledge your position and experience, even if they don’t sympathize. This mutual acknowledgment can create an emotional atmosphere in which it is easier to work toward agreement or more gracefully accommodate disagreements.

Here are some examples of acknowledgments that do not imply agreement:

A counselor to a drug abuse client: “I hear that you are feeling terrible right now and that you really want some drugs. And I want you to know that I’m still concerned this stuff you’re taking is going to kill you.”

A mother to a five-year-old: “I know that you want some more cake and ice cream, Jimmy, because it tastes yummy, but you’ve already had three pieces and I’m really worried that you’ll get an upset tummy. That’s why I don’t want you to have any more.”

Union representative to company owner’s representative: “I understand from your presentation that you see XYZ company as short of cash, threatened by foreign competition and not in a position to agree to any wage increases. Now I would like us to explore contract arrangements that would allow my union members to get a wage increase and XYZ Company to advance its organizational goals.”

In each case a person’s listening to and acknowledgment of their conversation partner’s experience or position increases the chance that the conversation partner will be willing to listen in turn. The examples given above are all a bit long and include a declaration of the listener’s position or decision. In many conversations you may simply want to reassure your conversation partner with a word or two that you have heard and understood whatever they are experiencing. For example, saying, “You sound really happy about that.”, etc.

This type of compassionate listening is a powerful resource for navigating through life, but it is also quite demanding. We have to remember our position while we state someone else’s position. That takes practice. We also have to be able to hear other people’s criticism without losing our sense of self-esteem. That requires cultivating a deeper sense of self-esteem, which is no small project. In spite of these difficulties, the results can be so rewarding that I have found this listening practice to be worth all the effort required.
Exercise: Think of one or more conversations in your life that went badly. Imagine how the conversations might have gone better with more responsive listening. Write down your alternative version of the conversation.

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**Asking more open-ended questions.** In order to get more information and interaction from your conversation partner, ask questions that allow for a wide range of responses and avoid asking questions that can be answered with a simple “yes” or “no.”

Consider the difference between two versions of the same question, as each might occur in a conversation between two people in a close relationship:

“Well, honey, would you like to go ahead and take that apartment we saw yesterday?”

and

“Well, honey, how do you feel about us taking that apartment we saw yesterday?”

The first version suggests a “yes” or “no” answer, favors “yes” and does not invite much discussion. A person hearing such a question may feel pressured to reach a decision, and may not make the best decision.

Both versions imply a suggestion to take the apartment, but the second question is much more inviting of a wide range of responses. Even if our goal is to persuade someone, we can’t do a good job of that unless we address their concerns, and we won’t find out their concerns unless we ask questions that invite discussion.

When your are under time pressure, it is tempting to push people to make “yes-no” decisions. But pressing forward without addressing people’s concerns has played a key role in many on-the-job accidents and catastrophes (such as the Challenger space shuttle explosion).

Here are a variety of open-ended questions that could be helpful in trying to solve problems in a way that meets more of everyone’s needs, and could also be useful in just creating richer and more satisfying conversations:

“How comfortable are you with Plan B?”

“How could I modify this proposal to meet more of your requirements?”

“What kind of information do you need in order to go forward?”

“How did you like that movie?”

“What do you think about ... moving the office to Boston?”

(rather than “Is it OK with you if we...?”)

How are you feeling about all of this?

“How ready are you to ... ?”

(rather than “Are you ready to ...?”)
Exercise: Translate each of the following “yes-no” questions into an open-ended one. What problems can you imagine arising from each of the “yes-no” versions.

On seeing a person who looks disappointed: “So you didn’t like that, huh?”

A pilot to a new co-pilot: “D’you know how to fly this thing?”

A nurse to a patient: “Have you been taking your medication?”

Parent to teen: “Don’t you think it would be better if you did your homework first?”

Exercise 4B: Take each of the examples at the bottom of the Page 15 and write an open-ended question that would fit a situation in your life.
CHAPTER 6

STYLES OF ACTION AND INTERACTION -
THE GENESIS OF REFLEXIVITY (DIMENSION 4)

6.1. Style of action and the significance of adverbs.

The goal of building the Six Dimensions model has been to see how much information about human experience, interaction and communication I can integrate under one conceptual umbrella. My exposition up to this point has been as follows. In chapter 3 I discussed various views on the structure of experiencing, and distilled from those views a template of experiencing that constitutes Dimension 1 of the Six Dimensions model. The next step in the Six Dimensions “spiral story” is that we develop an intention that represents our felt response to our experience. In chapter 4 I reviewed some recent thinking on the role of intentions in communication and presented a preliminary map of intentions that people can use as a menu to remind themselves of the wide range of possibilities that are open to us in the course of an evolving conversation.

The next step in the spiral story is that we convert our intentions into action. In the last chapter I reviewed two current books that present overviews of conversational actions and used them as a basis for developing a menu of fundamental conversational actions that we use to carry out our intentions. In what I see as continuing a line of thought developed by Searle and others, I divide the work of conversational action into
overarching interpersonal intentions (to share, comfort, criticize, praise, instruct, etc.), addressed by Dimension 2, on the one hand, and relatively low-level, multi-purpose speech actions such as listening, speaking, waiting, etc. addressed by Dimension 3, on the other. This distinction allows us to conceive of various overarching intentions being carried out by chains of simpler speech actions.

That brings us to the present stage of the Six Dimensions spiral story: styles of action, Dimension 4. Up to this point the key elements in each dimension of the model have been verbs that the reader can translate into first-person actions. In the experiencing dimension you will find observing, thinking, feeling, wanting, envisioning. In the intentions dimension you will find intending to share, to instruct, to complain, to appreciate, etc. In the action dimension you will find speaking, listening, waiting, reflecting, etc. Even though this matrix times a second matrix times a third matrix allows us to conceive of an infinite variety of conversational actions, it is still far from being a complete account of interpersonal interaction. So at this point I would like to introduce into the model the dimension of adverbs, or qualities of action and interaction, as Dimension 4.

The adverbs one can apply to conversational interaction span a large spectrum from the rather utilitarian at one end to the psychological, and then to what might be called spiritual.

Focusing on the utilitarian adverbs might lead us to pay attention to how concretely we expressed our experiencing (vs. vaguely), or how completely (vs. partially). Focusing on the psychological adverbs might lead us to pay attention to how self-inclusively we express our experience (using “I want...” rather than “They should...”), or how action-oriented-ly or thing-oriented-ly we express ourselves (using verbs to describe
Chapter Six: Styles of Action and Interaction - The Genesis of Reflexivity (Dimension 4) Page 107

actions desired vs. using a noun “shorthand” such as “I want... love... respect... obedience... tolerance...,” all of which are complex streams of action that have been turned into mental ‘things’).

And finally, focusing on the spiritual adverbs might lead us to pay attention to how compassionately we listen, how patiently we negotiate, how forgivingly we receive another person’s apology.

It is not within the scope of this study to review the history of the emergence of adverbs as a linguistic form. I would, however, like to make one point about the tremendous power of adverbs as a human invention. The combinatorial mathematics of adverb use allows for the careful calibration of action with a modest number of words. Imagining the simplest scenario, given a hundred verbs and a hundred adverbs one can potentially use those two hundred words to come up with ten thousand two-word action descriptions on an as-needed basis. The verb-only alternative would require that one have an already established vocabulary of ten thousand distinct verbs at one’s command. Getting two hundred words to do the work of ten thousand (or even just a few thousand) is a major achievement. I see the significance of this as follows: Since cooperation between people means the coordination of action, the easier it is to express fine calibrations of behavior the easier it would be to cooperate.

6.2. Adverbs as facilitators of self-observation and development

A second significant feature of adverbs is that they allow us to conceive of acting upon our own actions\textsuperscript{143} and of developmental progressions of skill. Thus when I think of throwing a ball, I can articulate the idea of throwing the ball clumsily or skillfully, and

\textsuperscript{143}I am indebted to Rom Harré for introducing me to the idea of acting upon one’s own action. He describes this as part of the process through which a person develops a sense of self. Harré, \textit{Personal Being}, 213.
I can use this and similar words to mark out a path of desired development. In using adverbs in this way I am engaged in a linguistically mediated and facilitated process of self-observation. In the light of Robert Kegan’s position that a growing capacity for self-observation is the central theme of human development, adverb vocabularies are deeply significant because they are one of the tools that human cultures have evolved to support the emergence of this self-observation.

I became aware of this role of adverbs over the course of several years of studying with Marshall Rosenberg, a psychologist and communication trainer. I observed Dr. Rosenberg coaching participants in many communication workshops. After about a year of this, it became clear to me that almost all of his coaching was focused on four adverbial issues. He was continually encouraging people to express themselves more completely, concretely, self-inclusively and action-oriented-ly. Here is a brief description of each of these four issues.

- How completely did people express their experiences and wants? As do many communication trainers, he gave his students a kind of mental check list of important elements in experience, and encouraged his students to express themselves more fully, including observations, feelings, interpreting and wanting. One key problem in communication is that people leave out important elements of their experience from their self-disclosures and depend on their listeners to fill in the missing information from what is assumed to be understood by both parties. Those assumptions are often wrong.
- How concretely and specifically did people describe their experiencing? For a variety of reasons, many people express themselves in terms that are vague, generalizations or both. The person who says “You never wash the dishes!” seems to be making an emphatic argument, but in fact leaves it to their listener to translate that
general remark into a specific request for help in the present, such as “I would really appreciate it if you would wash the dishes now.”

- How self-inclusively does a person describe their experience? In the hope of increasing the force of what they say, or perhaps to shield themselves from hostile rejoinders, many people express their distresses as if their own involvement did not matter. The person who says “A real friend would know to call.” is obviously angry and disappointed with their conversant, but the anger and disappointment are not acknowledged as the speaker’s experience. The “I” of the speaker is entirely absent in the surface structure of the statement. This may shield the speaker from a harsh rejoinder but it also makes it much more difficult for the conversant to offer amends or apologies. To say “I am angry and disappointed that you didn’t call me.” leaves the speaker more vulnerable (their feelings may not be acknowledged, or may be rejected) but also opens the way for possible reconciliation.

- How action-oriented-ly does a person express their wants and needs? English, and European languages generally, favor nouns and adjectives over verbs and adverbs to such a degree that people who speak English continually convert streams of action into mental ‘things’: “walking” (a verb) becomes getting some “exercise” (used as a noun), taking off one’s hat becomes showing respect (a verb now tied to some sort of ‘thing’). What we often want from other people is that they behave differently toward us in some significant way. But our language of substances and their qualities does not help us negotiate with the world for different actions. Instead of saying “I want some respect...” an irate parent might evoke a more cooperative response by saying “Please shut the door quietly.” Dr. Rosenberg continually encouraged his students to shift to a more action-oriented way of thinking and conversing.
In observing Dr. Rosenberg’s coaching I had performed an informal kind of factor analysis, i.e., I had identified four clusters of his responses to students and gradually discerned the underlying theme of each cluster. It was (and is) a matter of disagreement between Dr. Rosenberg and myself that he did not announce and explain these four adverbial criteria in a more explicit way. (In my own classes I explain my coaching criteria to my students in advance of making any comments or suggestions about their communication styles.)

6.3. Adverbs and reflexivity

Being able to identify these four qualities of communicative action was a major step forward for me in my development both as a person and as communication trainer. I believe this is because these four adverbs allowed me, as I proposed at the beginning of this section, to conceive of acting on my own communicative actions and to conceive of developmental progressions of talking and listening skills (along the lines of “more completely,” “more concretely,” “more self-inclusively,” and “more action-oriented-ly.”)

Up to this point in my narrative about the Six Dimensions model the theme of self-observation has been implicit. The dimensions concerning experiencing (#1), intending (#2) and acting (#3) all imply a large amount of standing back and looking at one’s own processes and activities, but the self-observation theme is not directly stated. By introducing the adverbs into the model as Dimension 4 and including “awarely” as one of the qualities of action, the model begins to describe the self-awareness which is always present (to some greater or lesser degree) in living. Dimension 5, the next step in the spiral (to be explored in the next chapter), is entirely about the process and methods of self-observation and exploratory self-questioning. While cyberneticists are fond of

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talking about the way that living systems “steer” themselves toward goals,¹⁴⁵ it is not so
clear how living systems as complex as human persons “steer” themselves toward
fulfillment. I am convinced that adverbs are an important part of the answer to this
question, because they are one major way that people bring their own activities into
focus.

6.4. Resources for a menu of adverbial options

The four qualities of good communication that were (and are) the basis of Dr.
Rosenberg’s coaching are not unique to his approach. Many communication teachers and
therapists advocate one or more similar style changes,¹⁴⁶ but often see these particular
style changes as part of a longer list of recommendations. There is no consensus on what
constitutes the subject matter of communication,¹⁴⁷ and the same is true with regard to
good communication. But although there is not a consensus, there is certainly a
convergence toward central themes, as was evident in my review of several
communication self-help books in chapter 3. These themes suggest what may be the
most important style changes to aim for. If one accepts (for the sake of discussion) that
all the advice in the communication training and self-help books is good advice, the
human limits on time and effort press a person to ask “Out of all this advice, what are the
most important qualities to aim for?” For example, a recent popular book on
communication and negotiation, *Getting What You Want*,¹⁴⁸ consists of a list of one
hundred recommendations (many of which I agree with). It is not clear to me how

¹⁴⁶For example, Matthew McKay, Martha Davis and Patrick Fanning, *Messages: The
¹⁴⁷A brief comment about the lack of consensus regarding the teaching of communication appears
anyone could carry around a list of one hundred recommendations in their mind while trying to communicate or negotiate!

I believe the question of priorities is a question worth wrestling with, even if there are angles from which it can be seen to be unanswerable.149 Because each person is different and each situation is different, “good communication” and “what is most important” do not appear to be a stable targets of knowledge which one can approach by a series of successive approximations. There will always be a large element of creative improvising involved. Keeping these limits in mind, in the remainder of this chapter I present a summary of the most widely advocated communication style changes, translated into a list of adverbs and arranged in what seems to me to be an approximate order of ascending difficulty.

6.5. Suggestions from the work of Bandler and Grinder

For the past twenty-five years the psychological researchers Richard Bandler and John Grinder have been seeking to translate visionary ideas about the social and linguistic construction of reality into actual methods of psychotherapy and training. Or at least that is one reasonable way of summing up their intentionally provocative work, as long as it not offered as a conclusive description. In the 1970s they founded a psychological school of thought and practice entitled “neuro-linguistic programming” (NLP) and subsequently inspired a large group of psychotherapists to write books exploring the possibilities opened up by this new point of view. The history of neuro-linguistic programming has been marked by a lot of interesting twists and turns as NLP developed from a brilliant book into a many-faceted school of psychotherapy and...

149For example, my use of the phrase “the most important style changes to aim for” does not address the issues of “important for whom” or “important toward what ends.” The goal of encouraging mutuality and cooperation is assumed.
personal development, but I will not attempt to describe that history here. Instead, I will limit my focus to Bandler and Grinder’s (hereinafter referred to as B & G) first project and first book, *The Structure of Magic*,\(^{150}\) which is focused specifically on patterns of language use in psychotherapy.

Inspired by the development of transformational grammar, which is concerned with the deep structure that underlies the surface variations of language, B & G set out to describe the ‘deep structure’ of good psychotherapy. They made an intensive study of three renown therapists of the time who were very different in their approaches to psychotherapy: Fritz Perls, a principal founder of Gestalt therapy, Virginia Satir, a pioneer in family therapy, and Milton Erickson, a psychiatrist and clinical hypnotherapist. Even though these three psychotherapists used very different frames of reference, B & G discovered that there were great similarities in the patterns of conversations that the three had with their clients/patients.\(^{151}\)

Certain themes in conversation appear to facilitate positive change in psychotherapy. B & G describe these themes in *The Structure of Magic* with the intention of making them generally available, so that therapists can more effectively facilitate change in their clients and, to some unspecified degree, so that lay people can facilitate their own internal and interpersonal changes. One of the creative aspects of NLP is that by focusing on language processes and the representation of experience rather than alleged disease processes, NLP has been able to articulate a more universal vision of improved functioning.\(^{152}\) Many NLP-related books quietly contradict the

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\(^{151}\)Surprisingly, *The Structure of Magic* does not give the details of the research, only the results. One description of the research appears in Joseph O’Connor and John Seymour, *Introducing Neuro-Linguistic Programming* (London: Mandala, 1990), chapter 1.

\(^{152}\)Richard Bandler’s *Using Your Brain - For a CHANGE* (Moab, Utah: Real People Press, 1985) embodies this “power to everyone” attitude.
“expert doctor/ignorant and diseased patient” mindset that still pervades much of the world of psychotherapy in spite of decades of effort to shift perspectives.

For B & G, the central problem in living is understood as people withdrawing into their linguistic pictures of life (stories, formulas) and losing touch with the actual process of living. The purpose of psychotherapy is therefore to draw people back into vivid contact with themselves and others. As B & G put it,

...we do not operate directly on the world in which we live, but rather ... we create models or maps of the world and use these maps to guide our behavior.153

For the therapist to challenge the Deep Structure [of the way clients tell their life stories] is equivalent to demanding that the client mobilize his [sic] resources to re-connect his linguistic model with his world of experience. In other words, the therapist here is challenging the client’s assumption that his linguistic model is reality.154

Analysis of the recorded therapy sessions of the three psychotherapists mentioned above revealed to B & G that there were three main problematic processes in the clients’ representation of and communication about their life situations. B & G describe these as deletion, distortion and generalization.155

**Deletion.** Client’s would leave out significant chunks of information, and the omissions often served to defend the client’s dysfunctional framing of their experience.

**Distortion.** Clients would distort or twist their experience to fit the model of life they had created. One of the most significant distortions was to turn streams of activity

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154 Ibid., 46.
155 Unfortunately, although B & G are critical of nominalizing (turning actions into mental “things”), they express their ideas in a heavily nominalized vocabulary. I would have preferred for them to write of deleting, distorting and generalizing, in order to keep alive in our minds the idea that these are actions that people are performing and therefore could perform otherwise!
performed by the client, for example, divorcing, deciding, or avoiding, into
nominalizations such as divorce, decision, or avoidance. This translation into nouns
makes choosing and changing hard to imagine because it makes the processes like the
ones mentioned seen like they “are just happening” or “have already happened” rather
than being part of the ongoing stream of the clients’ own action and interaction.

A second significant distortion (it’s a deletion, too) is the disappearing “I”: to
omit mention of oneself as the experiencer of one experience. For example, saying
“Things should be different at home.” instead of “I want my kids to behave differently.”
This, too, makes it difficult to imagine negotiating new patterns of interaction with the
significant others of one’s life, since the problem or conflict is represented as all “over
there.”

Presuppositions that lie under the surface of the client’s language use are a third
significant distortion of experience. For example, the statement “There’s no point in my
applying for the new job at work.” may be the tip of an iceberg of assumptions that
includes, “Since I’m no good at public speaking, there’s no point in my applying for the
new job at work.” The unstated assumption may or may not be true. We tend to make
the assumptions that fit our dominant model or story, but in making those assumptions
we may create self-fulfilling prophecies that perpetuate an unsatisfying way of relating to
life.

**Generalization** can often indicate a retreat from engagement with the details of
interaction, and the impoverishment of the client’s picture of his or her world. The
statement “You *never* wash the dishes!” paired with the response “You’re always
nagging me when you know I’ve had a hard day.” sets the stage for each person to retreat
even further into their stereotyping of the other. In generalizing, we remove from mental
view all the counter-instances that might hold the key to the new behavior we want either from ourselves or from others.

To sum up, Bandler and Grinder’s observations of psychotherapy strongly suggest that as clients picture their experience, deleting, distorting and generalizing are three key actions that keep clients stuck in their problems by making their current life seem inevitable and making alternative possibilities seem unimaginable. B & G’s great discovery was that therapists operating from very different frames of reference engaged in similar conversational transactions with their clients as the therapists worked to confront and redirect the clients’ distorted and impoverished representations of their experience.

After I became familiar with Bandler and Grinder’s research, I was delighted to see how much their conclusions support the conclusions that I had reached over two years of informally observing Dr. Rosenberg coach students in communication skill workshops. I believe that B & G’s work suffers, however, from being expressed in language that is too critical. If one translates B & G’s language from diagnosing problematic behaviors to recommending styles of communicative action, criticizing “deletion” becomes advocating that people express themselves “more completely,” criticizing “generalization” becomes advocating that people express themselves “more concretely and specifically,” and criticizing “distortion” becomes (among other things) advocating that people express themselves “more self-inclusively” and “more action-oriented-ly.” And in fact, that is just the role that B & G see effective therapists playing, although the advocacy in therapy is usually implicit. (I interpret continually asking a person to be more specific to be an implicit advocacy of communicating more specifically.)
The significance of Bandler and Grinder’s early work, summarized above, for the Six Dimensions project is that they were trying to identify the underlying essential themes of good psychotherapy. These themes turned out to be complementary responses to the basic ways that clients’ misrepresent their experience, both to themselves and to others. In describing these themes B & G can be seen as advocating particular styles (adverbs) of communicative action for clients, for therapists and for everyone. This is because the issue of accuracy or genuineness in the representation of one’s experience cuts across all of our social role boundaries. It is as much about everyday life as it is about psychotherapy.

In searching for what is truly essential in the client/therapist conversation, Bandler and Grinder also address the issue of priorities that I mentioned above. As teachers and students (and humans) we need, given the limits of time, to try to work on the most important issues first. My goal in creating the Six Dimensions model is to do in relation to communication training something parallel to what B & G did in relation to the practice of psychotherapy. In organizing the materials of communication research into six lists, which in principle could each be infinite, I continually try to push the most fruitful, important and widely recommended items to the top of each list. This inevitably involves subjective judgment on my part, but in each case I try to test my subjective judgments against the work of other researchers, especially researchers who try to summarize the best in their field. On this basis I have incorporated the essential themes identified by Bandler and Grinder, and by Rosenberg, into my list of recommended adverbs of better communication.

(Given that B & G drew a large part of their inspiration from Gestalt therapy and General Semantics, there are many other authors and psychotherapists who have made
similar recommendations. But I do not believe it would carry forward the current discussion for me to go into the history of these ideas.)

6.6. Levels of abstraction in psychotherapy and teaching

Using the frame of reference laid out by Bandler and Grinder, it is possible to see that one level of psychotherapy is for the therapist to challenge the clients particular deletings and distortings, so that the client can see new possibilities. Another, more difficult, level is for the therapist to name those processes and to help the client become aware of how much they may be habitually deleting, distorting and generalizing, so that the client can make changes in conversational and representational style that apply in many contexts. These two levels of abstraction are central in parenting and teaching, as well. And they are both at work in the Six Dimensions model. I am both recommending specific adverbs and inviting people to understand the overall role that adverbs play in helping us conceive of our style of action and steer our actions toward fulfillment. (One drawback of this approach, from my view, is that many people may have difficulty shifting back and forth between those two levels of abstraction.)

6.7. Carl Rogers’ view of the essential qualities

The work of Carl Rogers is especially relevant to my effort to create a menu of qualities of fulfilling communicative action. First of all, he was consciously looking for the essential qualities of supportive communication. Second, he argued that the qualities of good communication in the psychotherapy setting are the main qualities of all growth-promoting relationships. And finally, he went to great lengths to test his personal

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156 This would be an example of what Gregory Bateson called “deutero-learning.” See Watzlawick et al., Pragmatics, 263.
157 For an extended examination of levels of abstraction in parenting, teaching psychotherapy, and human development, see Kegan, The Evolving Self and In Over Our Heads.
inferences about the nature of growth-enhancing communication, and cooperated with many other researchers to carry out these tests. One of the many exemplary aspects of Rogers’ career was the way he combined the role of a caring therapist striving to be a supportive presence in the lives of others with the role of a scientific researcher looking for publicly verifiable knowledge.

In my analysis of adverbs, presented above, I suggested that adverbs related to communication can be viewed as spread out on a spectrum from the pragmatic to the psychological to the spiritual. The qualities identified by Rosenberg and NLP appear to me to be primarily pragmatic and psychological, and seem to apply most readily to self-expression. The qualities identified by Rogers appear to me to be more psychological and even spiritual, and to apply most readily to nurturing and listening to others. (I will say more about the spiritual element below.)

Rogers’ work is linked at a deep level to the work of Bandler and Grinder several decades later in that all used tape recorders as instruments of empirical research. To understand the significance of this, one has to remember that until the advent of tape recorders, the main intellectual tool for understanding the dynamics of psychotherapy was the case study, a narrative written in retrospect by the therapist. This meant that the reader received a highly edited, highly summarized and often highly ideologized version of what had happened, even when the writer had the very best intentions of telling the truth, (which, unfortunately, is not always the case).  

It was difficult, if not impossible, for another researcher to look at a given case from a different angle, because all the information that might support a different view would probably have been left out. The wide-spread introduction of recording equipment in the 1940s and 1950s fundamentally

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158 For a discussion of this issue, see Jeffrey Masson, *Against Therapy* (New York: Athenium, 1988)
changed the boundaries of what kind or research was possible concerning the dynamics of psychotherapy. As Rogers writes,

I was at last able to scrounge equipment for recording my and my students’ interviews. I cannot exaggerate the excitement of our learnings as we clustered about the machine that enabled us to listen to ourselves, playing over and over some puzzling point at which the interview clearly went wrong, or those moments in which the client moved significantly forward.159 (my italics)

(The introduction of the tape recorder into psychotherapy research is, I believe, as significant as the introduction of the microscope into biological research. For the therapists it represented an entirely new form of technology-assisted self observation.)

Rogers framed his fundamental hypothesis as follows: “Individuals have within themselves vast resources for self-understanding, and for altering their self-concepts, basic attitudes and self-directed behavior; these resources can be tapped if a definable climate of facilitative psychological attitudes can be provided.”160 Thus Rogers and his colleagues went looking for those “facilitative psychological attitudes.” What they found is the now famous trio of genuineness, acceptance and empathy (actively expressed empathic understanding).

In giving a brief summary of these three attitudes I am going to take the liberty of translating Rogers’ nouns and adjectives into adverbs. Although Rogers was devoted to facilitating positive change and to a process vision of being a person, he expressed his ideas in the language of his era, a language which emphasized (and still does) fixed objects and their stable qualities. In translating wonderful nouns such as “acceptance” into wonderful adverbs such as “acceptingly,” I hope to bring these qualities more within people’s reach. It is easier for me to imagine myself “listening more acceptingly” than it

159 Rogers, A Way of Being, 138.
160 Ibid., 115.
is for me to imagine myself “adopting an attitude of acceptance” (notice the two nouns). A process vision of being a person strongly suggests that virtues are adverbial, that compassion, for example, consists in a thousand different actions performed compassionately. (I doubt that we can ever give up nouns completely and I would not even try. Most of my favorite adverbs are built on nouns. What I believe we can do with great benefit is to shift the emphasis in our speaking and thinking from nouns to verbs and adverbs, to streams of action and styles of action.)

Communicating more genuinely is the first of the three activities on the part of therapists that appear to help clients grow and change. In every human culture there is a tension between the social role playing demanded of people and people’s actual feelings, desires and experiences. Rogers saw the main source of psychological pain in life as the product of people learning to play their social roles so well (responding to the rewards of acceptance from others) that they fell out of touch altogether with their actual experiencing. So one major step toward growth and inner healing is to get back in touch with all the parts of one’s experience that for one reason or another one may have pushed out of awareness. Congruence, as used by Rogers, means the congruence of experience, awareness and expression. To the degree that the therapist can be present without a facade, to that degree the therapist can, by example, encourage the client to be present without a facade, to face and work through their troubling feelings and experiences. This contagious honesty is also a key element in friendship and parenting, and it serves to counteract our vulnerability to using denial as a way of coping with our life difficulties.

Communicating more acceptingly has to do with therapist’s response to the client’s problems and the client’s self-disclosure. Rogers used the phrase “unconditional positive regard” to try to express his vision of acceptance and caring. By an attitude of
concern for the client and faith in the inner potential of the client and at the same time not judging, condemning, correcting or steering, the therapist creates an emotional ‘space’ in which the client can face their experiences, failures, compromises, mistakes, etc. without being overwhelmed by loss of self-esteem. This, too, is an element in the best of friendships and the best of parenting. Freed from the need to keep up appearances and avoid punishment and criticism, we can better acknowledge and learn from whatever is going on inside of us and in our lives. Freed from the need to defend our dysfunctional behaviors, we can actually look at them, and get beyond the need to repeat them. But these are hard things to do alone. As Rogers states, “...as persons are accepted and prized, they tend to develop a more caring attitude toward themselves.”161 This interpersonal vision of how people come to care about themselves has received a great deal of confirmation in recent decades from the “object relations” studies of human development and psychotherapy.162

**Empathizing more responsively** is my translation into verbs of Rogers’ idea of empathic understanding. By this Rogers means more than just that the therapist accurately but silently understands the thoughts and feelings of the client from the client’s point of view. The additional element is that the therapist expresses back to the client whatever it is that the therapist has been able to understand so that the client knows that he or she has been understood. And if the therapist’s understanding is wrong, the client can have the satisfaction of correcting it. Here again, I see Rogers’ ideas as having been confirmed by “object relations”-oriented thinking on the role of a “mirroring” other (usually the mother) in early childhood development.163 Basically, the object relationists

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161Ibid.
163I regret to report that I have not come across any dialogues between Rogerians and Object Relationists or advocates of Kohut’s self psychology. These two latter groups tend to cite only writers in
assert that we learn to pay attention to ourselves because someone pays attention to us, and we then internalize that attention-giving care-giver and make her/him a central part of our personality. Although most Rogerian therapists would probably shrink from the idea that they are new parents for their clients, the evidence of early childhood development suggest that they are. The transaction proposed here has nothing to do with the alleged transference to the therapist of the client’s alleged sexual desire for their opposite-sex parent; it has to do with the idea that we learn to believe in ourselves because an important someone believes in us and we take their belief “to heart” (as the colloquial expression puts it). Rogers sums this up by saying “As persons are empathetically heard, it becomes possible for them to listen more accurately to the flow of [their] inner experiencings.”

In summarizing these essentials of Rogers’ vision, practice and confirming research, I have made a minor shift in perspective because it seems to me that “counselor qualities” or “facilitative psychological attitudes” can be understood more fruitfully as styles of action. I believe that my summary is true to the original. I also believe that Rogers would probably agree with and even approve of my translation, since from a theoretical point of view counselor qualities can easily be seen as an abstraction of styles of action. From my coaching, encouraging, training perspective, translating counselor qualities into styles of action is a crucial step in helping people embody those very qualities.

6.8. Dimension 4: An adverbial agenda for communicating more satisfyingly

In seeking to develop a “teaching menu” of the most significant adverbial
qualities of good communication, I have reviewed the research of several scholars who themselves were trying to understand the most significant qualities of good communication, both in and out of the psychotherapy setting. The resulting combined list of adverbs, shown below, which I have arranged in clusters of related qualities, closely parallels Brammer’s summary of the characteristics of the helper as growth facilitator, which attempts to summarize a wide range of research on the topic.\textsuperscript{165}

Although the topic of interpersonal communication will always include a large unique and subjective element for each person, this convergence of lists allows me, first, to test my intuitions, observations and hunches against the combined research of many other researchers, and second, to feel confident that I am passing on the best available advice (at least for people from European cultures\textsuperscript{166}). If the qualities of action on the list are difficult to master, at least we have the satisfaction of knowing that we are working on the essentials of good communication, good relationships and a fulfilling way of being a person.

At every step of the way, I try to reconceptualize these ideal styles of communication as developmental gradients. By translating the “qualities of an effective growth facilitator” into more approachable “styles of action” I hope to put these various noble qualities onto everyone’s “possibility menu.” For example, in relation to various of the qualities of action on the following list, I could frame a true sentence beginning with “Right now I could learn to express myself a little bit more...” And in relation to

\textsuperscript{165}Brammer, \textit{The Helping Relationship}, chap. 3. Some of the overlap is due to the fact that Brammer cites Rogers, but he cites many other researchers as well.

\textsuperscript{166}To the degree that our multi-cultural environment becomes a low-context environment, with less of a single background of shared understanding, advice to express oneself more fully may be good advice for everyone. For a comments supporting this point of view see Lock, “Metaphenomena and change,” 113, and Littlejohn’s summary of Basil Bernstein’s concept of the “elaborated code” style of communication “in groups in which perspectives are not shared.”, Littlejohn, Theories of Human Communication, 198.
other qualities I could frame a sentence beginning with that “Right now I could learn to listen a little bit more...”

1. **More completely and richly** - describing a full range of the aspects of my experiencing, a preliminary parsing of which might include observing, thinking, feeling, wanting, envisioning and intending.

2. **More concretely and specifically** - giving more details and avoiding abstractions and generalizations unless the context actually requires them.

3. **More self-inclusively and person-inclusively** - using I-statements to locate myself inside of my experience and using you-statements rather than it-statements to summarize and reflect your experience.

4. **More action-orientedly** - using verbs and adverbs rather than nouns to describe what you and I are doing and how we are doing it.

5. **More honestly, sincerely, genuinely, congruently** - allowing myself to be known by others, avoiding deception, facades and rigid role-playing.

6. **More acceptingly, respectfully, caringly, warmly, forgivingly** - relinquishing punishment, belittling, judgment and coercion as ways of relating.

7. **More empathically and understandingly** - making the effort to see your world and your experience as I imagine it would look from your point of view.

8. **More responsively, engagingly** - letting you know the way in which I have understood your experience, actively confirming your experience when I can (when it is within the scope of my values to do so). (We can always
acknowledge other people’s experience in a respectful way. We may not always be able sincerely to confirm another person’s experience.)

As I mentioned above, in a process philosophy view of life, virtues are largely adverbial. Although some activities are inherently better than others (it is better to teach than to steal), most everyday activities can become expressions of virtue according to how they are performed: awarely, creatively, compassionately, etc. Zen masters perform the smallest of daily tasks with great awareness, and therefore do not divide life into important tasks and unimportant tasks, because it is awareness itself that is truly important. And Mother Theresa once remarked that it is not given to us in this life to do great things, but rather to do small things with great love. (That is to say, “lovingly.”)

One way of understanding psychotherapy is to view it as an attempt to understand, refine and reproduce the best of what happens in nurturing and supportive relationships, which is to say the styles of action of people at their most virtuous moments. From this perspective it is not surprising that when researchers used the most careful scientific techniques to study the most effective therapists in action, they rediscovered a set of adverbial qualities that include virtues recognized for millennia: caring, kindness, forgiveness, honesty, attention to detail, and so on. The qualities of good communication in psychotherapy turn out to be the universal qualities of fulfilling living and satisfying relating.

Perhaps part of the dream of science and reason has been that virtue can be replaced by enlightened technique. Well, the most conscientious and determined scientific observers have come out of the laboratory to announce to us that the very best
technique is...virtue! It is not the result that a science- and technique-oriented culture
wanted to hear, and therefore this news falls on many deaf ears. But it is good news
for ordinary people, because it affirms that with effort and attention we can all become
more nurturing and sustaining influences in the lives of the people around us. And those
of us who have trouble accepting traditional approaches to virtue can now find
encouragement from scientists to be more honest, caring, understanding and responsive.

6.9. Additional adverbs presupposed by those already given

In this chapter I have explored the qualities of mutually satisfying communicative
action. By studying the intense conversations that take place between therapists and
clients, scholars have been able to identify some of what appear to be the universal
qualities of nurturing conversations in Western cultures. (I believe that these are
probably the qualities of nurturing conversations for people everywhere, but that is an
argument beyond the scope of this study.)

I have used a focus on adverbs as a way of bridging the gap between discussions
of attitudes, facilitating conditions and counselor qualities, on the one hand, and a
vocabulary of action styles that are potentially available to everyone, on the other. How
a person goes about learning to talk, listen, or otherwise behave in a new ways is a topic
that we understand imperfectly at best, as our societal difficulties with drugs, alcohol,
prison recidivism and family violence indicate. At the very least, a person needs to be
able to conceive of the new direction in which they wish to move. (Examples of success,
and social support to keep trying are probably important ingredients, as well.) The list of

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167For example, in relation to most of the psychological complaints of modern life there is no
evidence that Ph.D.’s and M.D.’s make better counselors than people with M.A.’s, or even than hot-line
volunteers who have received a brief training to mobilize their capacity for empathizing. But the
institutional momentum to train experts seems unstoppable. Graduate programs continue to produce them.
State governments continue to license them. And the very careful research that has revealed that they are
not needed gets ignored. See Dawes, House of Cards.
“adverbs of better communication” presented in this chapter is my way of trying to help my students identify and imagine possible new ways of talking, listening and being a person. As Alan Fogel has argued with great eloquence, communication and personhood are two ways of looking at the same process.\textsuperscript{168}

Although I feel confident about the eight adverbs (or groups of closely related adverbs) that I have included in my list so far, I am not confident that the list is complete. Of course, in one sense such a list could never be complete because people are always capable of dividing the terrain of living into different provinces. A second reason for my list’s necessary incompleteness is that I am trying to document the most fruitful starting places, which would include some but not all the qualities of the most skillful and compassionate communicating.\textsuperscript{169} But beyond these issues it does seem to me that there are several more adverbs of equal importance that I believe were taken for granted by the researchers I have quoted so far, perhaps because they form the universal backdrop of psychotherapy. In shifting contexts from the world of psychotherapy to the world of everyday conversation and conflict resolution, these taken-for-granted elements need to be stated explicitly.

The first of these additional qualities is “awarely.” The eight qualities identified above as helpful or humanly fulfilling all presuppose that a person is paying attention to their interaction with others. Cultures vary in the degree to which they encourage people to develop their capacity to pay attention and to overcome the human tendency to deal with painful or challenging stimuli by withdrawing into numbness or by distracting

\textsuperscript{168}Fogel’s full position is that communication, personhood and culture are three different ways of looking at the same process, but it is his linking of communication and personhood that I want to offer in support of my argument. See Alan Fogel, \textit{Developing through Relationships: Origins of Communication, Self and Culture} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

\textsuperscript{169}For one scholar’s attempt to summarize the qualities of fully actualized persons, see Abraham H. Maslow, \textit{The Farther Reaches of Human Nature} (New York: Viking, 1971), 135. All of Maslow’s fifteen “B-values” (qualities of fully actualized persons) can easily be translated into adverbs.
oneself. Another eternal temptation is to stop paying attention to the process of living because one has fallen into a reasonably satisfactory routine. Psychotherapy, whatever else it may be about, is about slowing down and paying attention: the therapist to the client, the clients to their own experiences, and the therapists to their own experience of being with the clients. The West lacks traditions of mindfulness such as Zen and yoga, and those few that is has are intended primarily for monks and nuns. Psychotherapy represents the emergence of a distinctly Western form of disciplined attention to the present moment. In the face of the universal temptation to try to deal with our life difficulties by absent-mindedness and absent-heartedness, psychotherapy appeals to us to “be here now,” to develop our capacity to be more fully present to ourselves and others. For these reasons, and the fact that positive changes generally require attention, I have included “awarely” in my recommended list of communicative styles.

Closely related to and complementary to the quality of “awarely” is the quality “skillfully.” Encouraging people to think about improving their skills is in fact encouraging them to view themselves as developing through time and capable of learning. These are givens in much of psychotherapy but are not givens in everyday life. Part of the message of humanistic psychology has been the recommendation that people accept themselves and feel good about themselves simply as part of being human, without relation to action or accomplishment. But life includes action, life is living, skillfully or clumsily, and people’s sense of self-esteem needs to be anchored at least partly in the ongoing process of developing actual life competencies.

Our use of nouns to refer to ourselves, as convenient as it may be, continually suggests that we are fixed objects with stable qualities (car, house, tree, person, man, woman). This continuous suggestion is quite wrong and makes it difficult for us to
imagine living differently, coping skillfully, and learning to handle our life difficulties in
new and more satisfying ways. Thus the word “skillfully” implies a different way of
looking as one’s life, a way that is more open-ended and open to learning.

The third addition to the list, making it item Number 11, is the adverb
“creatively.” Living is a continuous process of creative improvisation, whether one is a
symphony conductor or a truck driver. But many people imagine that creativity is only
for artists and people of leisure. Unfortunately, there is an element of truth about social
class differences in this stereotype, as Basil Bernstein documented in his study of
language use among working-class school children in British schools. The dominant
theme in the lives of the working-class families was obedience, and therefore the children
learned a language of obedience rather than a language of exploration. The middle-class
children were being prepared by their families for professional lives in which they would
have to consult, negotiate, explore possibilities, etc., and the language use of the middle-
class children was more exploratory. Unfortunately, I see the culture of “following
orders” as leaving people helpless in the face of many life difficulties, which demand of
us that we negotiate, explore, experiment and improvise, whether we think of ourselves
as creative or not. Creativity is also built into the structure of language: we continually
improvise new word combinations (sentences) to fit new situations. It is important for
me to introduce the idea of creativity to my students to help them see more possibilities
in each encounter, rather than imagining that there is a fixed rule somewhere that they
ought to have known in order to respond more successfully. Openness to new experience
is closely related to creativity. In creativity we rearrange the elements of experience. In
being open to new experience, we allow new experiences to rearrange us: our thoughts,
our feelings, our guiding stories.

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The last of my fundamental adverbs of better communication is “courageously.”

Implied in the psychotherapy encounter is the courage to face one’s problems rather than deny them or run away from them. And in a larger context, risking disappointment and the shame of failure is part of every worthwhile endeavor, from saying hello to someone to climbing a mountain or building a cathedral. A key theme in Rogers’ overall vision of life is that we need the approval of others so badly that we blot out of awareness the parts of our spontaneous experience that do not fit the role that others want us to play. But the core of each person has an integrity that they need to fulfill and express (within the boundaries of not injuring others), regardless of what other people want. To be true to oneself is thus often to risk the disapproval of others.171 At the level of existential philosophy, it is only by courageously facing the fact of death that we can open ourselves in gratitude to the miracle of being alive.172 Putting “courageously” on the list is my way of validating my student’s fears. Their fears make perfect sense to me. Courage, to me, is not about being fearless. It is about facing one’s fears, admitting one’s fears, acting in the face of one’s fears, and also, paradoxically, about finding support from others to face difficult situations. The greatest courage of all, from my perspective, is to face my own mistakes and failures. To personalize Santayana’s epigram about history, it is only by facing my mistakes that I can be free from repeating them.

With the addition of the four adverbs discussed in this section, the list of adverbs included in Dimension 4 now reads as follows.

171 Jordan and Margaret Paul put courageous openness to learn at the center of their approach to counseling couples, as described in their book, Do I Have To Give Up Me To Be Loved By You? (Minneapolis: CompCare Publishers, 1983).
172 For an extended discussion of this and other themes in existentialist philosophy, see Paul Tillich, The Courage to Be (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952).
1. More completely and richly
2. More concretely and specifically
3. More self-inclusively and person-inclusively
4. More action-oriented-ly
5. More honestly, sincerely, genuinely, congruently
6. More acceptingly, respectfully, caringly, warmly, forgivingly
7. More empathically and understandingly
8. More responsively, engagingly
9. More awarely
10. More skillfully
11. More creatively and open to new experience
12. More courageously

6.10. Summary and conclusion

In this chapter I have explored using adverbs as a way of encouraging people to adopt the perspective of acting on their own actions,\textsuperscript{173} thereby opening up a new range

\textsuperscript{173}As mentioned in previous chapters, I am indebted to Rom Harré for this insight into the genesis of reflexive consciousness.
of creative possibilities for more cooperative and fulfilling communication (and living). Our vocabularies are one of the main lenses through which we look at life. I have used the work of Carl Rogers and of Bandler and Grinder to assemble a rich vocabulary of conversational styles that I hope will be both descriptive and facilitative, and I have tried to express these styles as developmental gradients (gradual “on ramps”) in order to make them as accessible as possible.

Robert Kegan posits a growing capacity for self-observation as one of the core processes of human development, perhaps the central process, but he has serious reservations about whether self-observation can be taught in any straightforward way. I believe that the language of adverbs plays an important role in the unfolding of a person’s capacity to observe themselves in action and interaction. By bringing the topic of adverb use to the conscious level and by offering my students and myself a challenging and existentially meaningful list of adverbs (as Dimension 4 of the Six Dimensions model), I hope to facilitate the emergence of our awareness, interpersonal skill and compassion.

Earlier in this study I shared my belief that in order to understand communication one needs to understand human life, and in order to understand human life one needs to understand communication. From my point of view, the adverbial dimension bridges the gap in scale between the moment and the lifetime. The adverbial qualities of a nurturing conversation can easily be seen as the qualities of a fully human person.174

The question remains as to how a person would come to feel empowered to aspire to such qualities of action as appear on my list. From my life experience, that appears to happen in four ways: by being in a relationship with an inspiring person, by reading

174This implies and suggests to me that communication training is a very fundamental kind of developmental coaching (which was a conclusion that I had hoped to avoid, in order the keep my trainings from getting too serious).
about exemplary lives, by experiencing and then reflecting on situations in which I failed miserably because I lacked various qualities, and by reading the works of authors such as Abraham Maslow,\textsuperscript{175} who directly advocate a life of conscious personal development.

In many religions studying the lives of saints is a central part of spiritual practice. Seeing how other people have embodied various virtues makes it possible to imagine that one could develop in similar directions, even if not to a similar degree. No list of adverbs can do that as deeply as the story of a human life. On the other hand, it is not always clear just exactly what we are trying to learn from the lives of exemplary persons. For many people, to consciously emulate the qualities of another person’s way of living will probably involve bringing those qualities into focus, naming them and thinking about them. And for that effort, a list of adverbs may be very helpful. From this point of view, my list of the twelve adverbs of growth-supporting communication represents the inspiring teachers of humanistic psychology at their best moments (Rogers, Perls, Satir, Erickson, Maslow, and many others).

\textsuperscript{175}Maslow, \textit{The Farther Reaches of Human Nature}. 
7.1. Communication training makes self-awareness demands

In the last chapter I explored the way that adverbs can imply and encourage a beginning sort of self-observation. Using adverbs appears to be one of the ways that we articulate the desired directions in which we would like to steer our behavior. In this chapter I am going to explore more explicit means of focusing on the qualities of one’s action and interaction.

To assist a person in talking or listening differently is to engage that person in an intense process of self-observation. (A process for which all persons are not equally prepared.) That is, in order to improve one’s performance of any activity, one must make the effort to observe oneself performing that activity, to conceive of a direction of development and to measure the gap between current performance and desired performance.176 When practicing basketball it is easy to see that one’s shots are consistently going to the left side of the hoop, because the ball is an external object and one’s visual perception of the ball in flight is largely unmediated by language. But we

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are in the middle of our communication, and our perception of complex social situations and our behavior in those situations is mediated by our descriptive vocabularies and cultural thought tools. Thus, observing one’s own communication style is a more challenging task than observing one’s sports performance. My experience has been that observing one’s own communication style is a task in which we will be helped or hindered by the richness or poverty of the descriptive vocabularies and thought tools that are available to us. Thus, each dimension in the Six Dimensions model presents the student with a distinct vocabulary of observation in relation to both self and others, a vocabulary for describing what is going on inside of me and what is going on inside of you, and for conceiving of how our two streams of activity fit together. Dimension 5 is special because its goal is to help people become aware of their own self-awareness activities and to incorporate new ones into their mental toolkit. (The kind of reflexive awareness I am encouraging my students to develop is the focus of a newly emerging field of cognitive psychology called “metacognition.”\textsuperscript{177})

7.2. A menu of self-awareness activities.

The examples of self-attention that I include in Dimension 5 are shown below in approximate order of ascending difficulty. Among the various examples given in the list below I will be concentrating in this study on exploratory self-questioning. That is because exploratory self-questioning fits well with the cognitive emphasis of the Six Dimensions model and because it is more directly applicable to teaching communication skills than the other entries. But in practice I advocate all of them and I recognize that different people will be temperamentally inclined to some rather than others. Many more examples of self-awareness activities could be added to the list (which is meant to be

\textsuperscript{177}Janet Metcalfe and Arthur P. Shimamura, eds., \textit{Metacognition: Knowing about Knowing} (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994).
open-ended, as is each of the six dimensions proposed by this study).

1. **Unstructured self-listening** can happen when people choose a quiet activity such as walking, sitting on the porch, fishing, canoeing, or just loafing around without too much outside stimulation.

2. **Conscious self-observation** involves making a special effort to focus one’s attention on the present situation both as a participant and as an observer.\(^{178}\)

3. **Structured inner dialogue** as exemplified by Gestalt therapy,\(^{179}\) in which a person actively gives voice to each of several conflicting feelings, persons in conflict and/or aspects of the self in conflict.

4. **Role playing exercises** are used in a wide variety of training settings. Taking the role of the other can allow people to discover and observe new aspects of themselves.

5. **Listening to and through the body** can be done through yoga, tai chi, or giving or receiving massages, and by some forms of dancing. Since mental chatter can keep both our joys and our sorrows out of awareness, calming down by focusing on the body can allow a person to feel more present in their experience.

6. **Journal writing** can involve a person in an extended reflection upon their own life. By externalizing one’s life experience in writing one can literally “look” at the stream of life experience that we are ordinarily inside of and therefore often cannot bring into focus.

7. **Self-expression in art and music** involve a similar kind of externalizing of experience that I noted in relation to journal writing. All of these forms of symbolic expression are deeply significant in the light of Carl Rogers’ idea, discussed in previous

\(^{178}\text{Ellen J. Langer, } Mindfulness\text{ (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1989).}\)

\(^{179}\text{Erving and Miriam Polster, } Gestalt Therapy Integrated\text{ (New York: Vantage Books, 1974), 247.}\)
chapters, that our experience becomes conscious primarily through symbolic expression.

8. **Meditation** often involves a systematic observation of one’s own thoughts and desires in which the person adopts the role of the detached and compassionate observer of whatever is going on in one’s mind.

9. **Friendship, psychotherapy and pastoral counseling** involve focusing on our life experience with the help of someone who is (hopefully) a careful and encouraging listener, and who is skillful at putting experience into words.

10. **Exploratory self-questioning** involves learning to ask oneself particularly fruitful questions in the course of interacting with people and trying to solve problems. Questions are learning tools that allow us to focus our attention on a particular topic. Exploratory self-questioning can allow us to focus our attention on our own performance or participation in situations large and small.

### 7.3. Exploratory self-questioning as a way of focusing one’s attention

Learning to ask fruitful questions of others, of oneself and about one’s situation or task at hand is an important part of the professional training of psychotherapists, engineers, architects, and mathematicians among others. (It is also part of the communal life of the Quakers, as I have observed in attending various Quaker meetings, and part of Jesuit religious practice, as a Jesuit friend shared with me.)

I believe that cultivating fruitful questions is a cultural pattern we can all benefit by adopting. In the case of the professions, it is important because professional practice

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180 This is especially true in narrative therapy. For dozens of inspiring examples see Jill Freedman and Gene Combs, *Narrative Therapy: The Social Construction of Preferred Realities* (New York: Norton, 1996) chap. 5.
is more that simply applying technical knowledge. One must enter into and understand a situation well enough to make good judgments about which technical knowledge applies and what elements in the situation are unique and require a uniquely creative response. Asking fruitful questions is a major part of that process of entering into and understanding. And as I see it, the same is true of all of us in everyday life. We cannot navigate through life by simply applying already known rules. There is always the question of “Is this a situation to which that rule applies?” And there are always new situations for which there is no rule at all. We have to both bring our previous knowledge to each encounter and also open ourselves to learn about the unique elements of each new situation. Of course, this would be bad advice to give someone who was about to join the army. In arguing for a rich set of exploratory questions, I am arguing in favor of people negotiating and making up their own minds rather than following orders. (Within reason, though, since I myself obey traffic signals, and my life depends on other people doing the same.)

The many examples of exploratory questions given by Donald Schön in *The Reflective Practitioner* suggest that we use questions to make a kind of ‘space’ in our minds for things we do not know yet (in the sense of understand), or have not decided yet, or have not invented yet, or have not discovered yet. “Hmmm,” an architect might think, “how could we arrange this building so that it follows the contour of the land?” The answer will involve a complex mix discovery, invention, understanding and decision. In general, one cannot think about some topic about which one knows nothing. But that is just what questions allow us to begin doing.

Because they focus attention, provide a theme and give energy by creating a

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psychological momentum toward resolution, exploratory questions can be powerful thought tools. Thus, teaching people to ask such questions has social and political implications. I imagine that persons encouraged to question would be more likely to question the status quo in their society, and might be more creative in working with others in cooperative problem solving situations. One aspect of a culture is its tacit list of “questions you will be applauded for asking” and its tacit list of “questions you will be ostracized for asking.” In contemporary America, “How am I going to find a job?” is a question everyone is encouraged to ask, but “What are we going to do about the long-term unemployed?” is a question that very few American politicians are willing say out loud. Questions suggest that there could be answers, and thus they contain elements of advocacy, hope and even of self-fulfilling prophecy. Questions can give symbolic form and focus to our intention to learn and our intention to solve a particular problem.

As I noted in my introduction to chapter 5, we are drawn to study interpersonal communication partly as a result of communication breakdowns. Hopefully, these problems evoke in us the exploratory question “How could we do this better?” rather than such profoundly unproductive question as “Why are you so unreasonable... uncooperative... stuck in your own way of doing things?” etc.

When I teach a class in communication skills I am implicitly or explicitly seeking to get participants engaged with the question “How could we do this better?” I hope to stir up in my students a combination of curiosity and hope that will motivate them to work through the embarrassment that can arises when one discovers that one is not coping with some part of life as skillfully or creatively as one would like. And the various dimensions of the Six Dimensions model presented so far all imply that the reader or student has been inspired by some similar mixture of curiosity and hope.
focused on one’s own learning. So this chapter makes explicit what has been implied all along. By presenting a long list of provocative questions I hope to both provide new depth of content for my student’s self-questioning and also help them to become conscious of the questioning process itself (the same learning at two levels I mentioned in my chapter on adverbs). This chapter represents my exploration of the meta-question “What group of questions would be fruitful to ask in looking at one’s own life activities?”

7.4. A preliminary list of exploratory questions

No one list of self-awareness questions could possibly meet the needs of every person in every situation, so the following questions are offered as examples that might be adapted by the reader rather than as a fixed list of recommendations. Next to each question in the table below I have given the field in which I have encountered that question. There are an infinite possible number of such questions. Choosing the most fruitful one to ask oneself in a given situation will always be an art. But the situation is not hopeless. People learn various arts every day, from cooking to painting, by seeing how skilled people do them. Table 7.1, below, is a list of questions from a selection of highly skilled question-askers.
Table 7.1. --A preliminary list of exploratory questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Source fields</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How does this feel to me?</td>
<td>Gestalt therapy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What am I experiencing right now?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How could I have done that differently?</td>
<td>General psychotherapy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What can I learn from this?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What kind of explanations do I give myself</td>
<td>Martin Seligman’s research on learned helplessness and explanatory style.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>when bad events happen?</td>
<td>(184)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How could I view this difficult situation in</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a different light?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the most important thing that I</td>
<td>Conflict resolution, negotiation,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>want in this situation?</td>
<td>management, especially <em>Getting to Yes</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What solution might bring everyone more of</td>
<td>(185)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>what they want?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is my best alternative to a negotiated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agreement?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What kind of self-fulfilling prophecy to I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>want to set in motion in this situation?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What possibilities would be suggested if I</td>
<td>Creative problem-solving in the arts,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>were to look at this situation as if it were</td>
<td>architecture, engineering and management.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>an airplane... a car... a circus... a movie...</td>
<td>(186)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a Broadway musical..., etc.?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does this situation remind me of?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

185 Fisher, Ury and Patton, *Getting to Yes*.
186 Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner*. 
### Table 7.1. A preliminary list of exploratory questions (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Source fields</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If I am successful in carrying out my intended course of action, what kind of person will I become?(^{187})</td>
<td>Social constructionism. In the social constructionist view of being a person, a sense of self is the overarching story that persons tell to make sense out of their actions and the events of their lives. Each of our actions supports the development of some stories and inhibits the development of others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many times can I remember when we all got along together just fine, when we didn’t have this problem? How did that work and what did that feel like? (focusing on success) Looking back on this accomplishment, what seem to be the turning points that made this possible? What were all the details of that moment of success? Reviewing all these moments of success up to now, what kind of future could be possible?</td>
<td>Narrative therapy.(^{188}) (These are typical questions from narrative therapy that I have translated into a first person inquiry.) The central concern of narrative therapy is that the stories we tell ourselves to make sense of our lives and our life difficulties always leave out the kinds of events in our lives that might support a more energizing story. Narrative therapy in intended to bring these “sparkling moments” into the foreground of attention, and to use them as a basis for creating a story that emphasizes strength and resourcefulness rather than illness, dysfunction and disability.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^{187}\) Suggested by Barnett Pearce in a personal conversation and expressing the point of view explained in Pearce, *Communication and the Human Condition.*

\(^{188}\) Freedman and Combs, *Narrative Therapy.*
Table 7.1. --A preliminary list of exploratory questions (concluded).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Source fields</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DIMENSION 1: EXPERIENCING</strong></td>
<td>Psychotherapy, nonviolence training and the Six Dimensions model.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What am I experiencing right now?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How could I expand my awareness of and vocabulary of experience?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DIMENSION 2: INTENTIONS AND GOALS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What kind of conversation do I want to have?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What kinds of conversations are possible to have?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are my long range goals and what are the tensions between them?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In what kinds of directions would I like to develop as a person?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DIMENSION 3: ACTION AND INTERACTION</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What actions are possible for me in conversation and interaction?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What new actions might be possible for me?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DIMENSION 4: QUALITIES OF INTERACTION</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What styles of interacting do I rely on in order to coordinate my life activities with the life activities of others?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What qualities of action are possible in interpersonal communication and how can I steer the qualities of my interactions with others?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DIMENSION 5: SELF-OBSERVATION AND SELF-QUESTIONING</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How could I improve the quality of the attention that I bring to my own life?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What kind of creative question might help me see my current problem in a new light?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DIMENSION 6: INNER RESOURCES</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What inner resources (stories, maps, skills) am I bringing to this situation, am I mobilizing to meet this challenge?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What alternative inner resources could I bringing to this situation?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In what ways do I need to revise my map of myself or of this situation?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What new information and/or skills would help me handle this kind of challenge?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who are my heroes, saints, exemplars and permission-granting figures.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There are several underlying themes or qualities in these questions that I believe make them creative or generative. And these qualities are related to the adverbs discussed in the last chapter. First, the questions generally express a courageous openness to new experience and new understanding (they are all open ended). Second, they are concerned with actions and process (“How could I do this differently?”) rather than with classification or blame. (For example, the Broadway song lyric, “What kind of fool am I?”, is a question directed toward the self, but a fruitless one.) Third, they embody a creative stance in relation to one’s life and one’s problems, rather than a rule-following stance. And finally, they encourage delving into the details of one’s situation rather than abstracting or generalizing.

While the questions shown in Table 7.1 cannot begin to exhaust the possibilities of framing productive questions to be addressed to oneself, the questions shown do express some of the power of carefully framed questions to draw us into a deeper engagement with our own processes of living. My hope in teaching my students how to ask and adopt these kinds of questions is that the questions will help them focus their attention on their own communicating and relating styles, a difficult but rewarding and empowering task. Perhaps one weakness of many communication skill training programs (and one of my own) is that they try to give people “the answers” before people have gotten fully engaged with the questions. So the answers have little or nothing to connect with in the lives of the intended recipients. This is an open-ended challenge for me in the development of my training activities. Stated as a challenging question, it would be, “How can I get my students more engaged in the open-ended quest for better communication, regardless of what specific recommendations I may feel are worthwhile?”
In discovering that students in communication classes have a difficult time focusing their attention on their own style of interacting, (that is, they have difficulty adopting the participant-observer role) I stumbled onto a topic that other scholars have already studied at length. In the remainder of this chapter I will explore several views of the psychological significance of self-attention. Communication skill classes are, in fact, a microcosm of human development. The self-attention that makes it possible to learn new ways of talking and listening is, in fact, one of the central, if not the central, themes in the development of the self.

7.5. Self-observation and self-awareness in human development

Throughout this study I have made frequent references to Robert Kegan’s view that an increasing capacity to observe oneself is the central theme of human development. According to Kegan, if all goes well in the course of development, by school age children are capable of observing their sensations; by the mid-teens young people are generally capable of focusing on their feelings; by the mid-twenties many people can think about their own thought processes; by the mid-forties many people can hold their social roles at arm’s length and live through them but not in them. Many people stop at this point but some people continue this trajectory of development, becoming able to contemplate the ways that different cultures, including their own, bring many social roles together under different overarching visions. Of course, not everyone progresses through this curriculum of development at the same pace or with the same degree of mastery.

These stages are strongly linked to interpersonal development. What we can not recognize in ourselves, we will have a hard time empathizing with in another person. Kegan’s vision appears to me to proceed from the personal to the interpersonal. An equally satisfying story could be told from the other direction: portraying personal
development as a series of interiorizations of relationships. From this point of view, which is the “object relations” view, we learn to pay attention to ourselves because and in the way other people pay attention to us. This alternative view of the direction of causality in human development would not change Kegan’s fundamental insights. But I think a more relational view might offer important suggestions concerning the unanswered question that he acknowledges about how to nurture human development and about how development gets stuck. To the degree that Kegan is right about the role of self-awareness in human development, to that degree teaching people to engage in exploratory self-questioning is a direct kind of developmental coaching.

7.6. Changing the questions in one’s inner dialogue

From the point of view of the relational interiorization described above, we learn to ask questions of others because others asked lots of questions of us very early in our lives. Ordinarily the object of our questioning is some other person, object or state of affairs. We gradually interiorize the questioning, instructing, affirming, scolding, ordering voice of the other and it becomes our inner voice of thought\textsuperscript{189} that allows us to pay attention to ourselves and to engage in some degree of self-inquiry and self-direction.

While I would like to express my appreciation for the love and devotion of parents everywhere for their children, it still may be true that the questions we first interiorized from our parents are not the most enlightening or fruitful question for us to ask ourselves today. This applies especially to such logically impossible-to-answer questions as “How could you be so stupid?” or “How could you do this to me?” Because our self-awareness is meditated by our learned styles of inner inquiry, some of us may find ourselves locked in a cycle of fruitless self-accusation.

In relation to this problem, Dimension 5 offers two new possibilities. One is a list of potentially more rewarding questions to ask (and other suggestions for greater self-awareness). The second is an explicit naming of the self-awareness and self-questioning processes, which invites people to start paying attention to the way they pay attention to themselves. There is room here for all the adverbs that I discussed in the last chapter, especially “awarely” and “caringly.” I believe that all the adverbial qualities proven to make for a healing, growth-promoting dialogue between therapist and client, teacher and student, parent and child, also make for a healing dialogue within one’s own mind.190

7.7. Learned optimism and the inner dialogue

In this section I am going to review the work of Martin Seligman on learned helplessness and learned optimism, and show how the theme of self-attention is central to his approach.

Seligman became deeply interested in how people cope with helplessness after his father suffered a stroke and became an invalid. Seligman was puzzled by the fact that in the behavioral psychology of the 1950s and 1960s there was no category of learning that applied to “learning to give up,” that is, learning that no effort on one’s part will bring any positive result. In 1965, Seligman and his graduate student colleague, Steven Maier, conducted a series of experiments on dogs which contradicted the dominant view that helplessness could not be learned and demonstrated that dogs could be conditioned to adopt a helpless stance. If the dogs were given electric shocks and no action to turn off the shock was effective, the dogs would stop trying to escape from the shocks even when it was later possible to escape. They had learned to behave in a helpless manner.

190A relational way of understanding Carl Rogers’ statement that, “As persons are accepted and prized, they tend to develop a more caring attitude toward themselves.” (Rogers, A Way of Being, 116.), would be that we remember and mentally repeat the nurturing conversations we have.
Convinced that he was on the trail of something fundamental in behavior, Seligman turned his attention to people and the processes by which people become discouraged. Over several decades of work he developed his theories of learned helplessness and learned optimism. During this time the entire field of behavioral psychology underwent a paradigm shift that reintroduced cognition into explanations of human action. Stimulus-response models were replaced by stimulus-evaluation/interpretation-response models. And Seligman’s ideas developed in a similar direction.

What he found was that people who become discouraged and depressed in the face of adversity make three characteristically pessimistic interpretations of their situation. First, they are likely to conclude that the adversity will go on forever. Second, they are likely to conclude that the adversity will contaminate everything in their lives. And finally, they are likely to conclude that the bad events are totally their own fault. When taken to extreme lengths this process has been described as “catastrophizing,” an immobilizing kind of exaggeration, but even moderate amounts of this kind of thinking can discourage a person from making creative efforts to change their situation.

Optimists, on the other hand, are likely to conclude that troubles will be limited in time, will be confined to one situation, and are probably a matter of random bad luck. Optimists succeed in life better than pessimists, according to Seligman’s data, not because their picture of life is more accurate, but because their picture encourages them to make many efforts to reach their goals. In family life, school, health matters, work and politics (that is, just about everywhere) explanatory style has a drastic effect on people’s resilience in the face of difficulty.

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191 For an example of the present cognitive emphasis in behavioral psychology, see Richard S. Lazarus and Susan Folkman, *Stress, Appraisal and Coping* (New York, Springer, 1984).
Seligman is careful to point out that there are times when pessimism is very appropriate, for example, when the cost of failure is quite high, as would be the case if someone were overly optimistic about their ability to drive a car after having drinking. But many people, young and old, at work and at school, are pessimistic in situations where they have little to lose and much to gain by making additional efforts. It is these people that Seligman hopes to help by teaching them how to observe and change their explanatory style. And he sees the pessimistic explanatory style as a major contributing cause of depression.

Seligman recommends “…listening in on your own internal dialogue and disputing your negative dialogue”\textsuperscript{192} with contrary evidence and arguments. He presents the outline of a structured inner conversation that highlights the negative interpretations that need to be challenged. It seems to me that it is one of the weaknesses of an otherwise informative and inspiring book that he does not acknowledge that observing one’s own thoughts may be a demanding activity for many people. Also, some cultures and some people have more of an accepted tradition of arguing than others. But even though these are significant reservations, what is important to me is that Seligman’s program of self-change starts with self-observation and includes a kind of inner dialogue. Thus, the “learned optimism” program maps easily on to Dimension 4 (style of action) and Dimension 5 (self-observation) of the Six Dimensions model. The style of action that Seligman wants to help people change is the style of an internal conversation characterized by sweeping negative generalizations. (Seligman’s work is a strong confirmation, from a completely different world of research, of Bandler and Grinder’s recommendations reviewed in chapter 6.) The adverbial elements described in Dimension 4 (such as, “more specifically,” “more creatively,” etc.) apply equally well to

\textsuperscript{192}Seligman, \textit{Learned Optimism}, 255.
both inner and outer conversations.

Seligman’s approach to changing one’s explanatory style follows the “direct challenge” method of confronting one’s unrealistic thoughts pioneered by the psychotherapist Albert Ellis. But I think it would be a mistake to stop with only that one style of rather abrasive inner inquiry, because such a style may not be equally fruitful for all persons. One possible alternative for an inner dialogue is the creative self-questioning tradition in engineering and design that I am describing and advocating in this chapter. Translated into this perspective, one might confront and challenge unrealistic thoughts by asking oneself questions such as:

- What instances can I remember when I did better than this?
- What could I learn from this that would change what I do in future?
- How could I view myself in this difficult situation in a more possibility-affirming and self-affirming way?

No one style of inner dialogue will suit all persons. Because many arguments produce bad or mixed results, I believe that starting an argument with oneself will not necessarily be the best way for many people to steer their thinking away from self-defeating generalizations.

7.8. The emotional significance of the participant-observer role

At various points in this study I have commented on the fact that communication training involves encouraging and sometimes even demanding that people observe themselves in action. In my experience, this challenge to the student or workshop participant is often made without being named as such. In this chapter I have been naming that process in three ways. First, I have been trying to clarify my understanding

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\(^{193}\text{Seligman, Learned Optimism, 72.}\)
of the varieties of self-observation. Second, I have assembled a toolkit of self-
observation methods. And third, I have been trying to develop the rationale of an
explicit conversation about self-observation. I would like to both challenge my students
to observe themselves more skillfully, so that they can guide their action in fruitful
directions, and also support them in that effort by inviting them into a conscious dialogue
about self-observation and the part it plays in one’s development as a person.

Thus far in my discussion of exploratory self-questioning, I have argued that
certain kinds of carefully framed questions can help to focus our attention on a learning
task, help us look at a situation from revealing new angles, and provide us with a theme
around which to organize our exploration of new skills and new styles. I am convinced
that self-questioning is one of the ways that we challenge ourselves to learn, and one of
the ways in which a person can adopt the participant-observer stance that facilitates
learning.

In this section I am going to discuss the emotional significance of the participant-
observer stance, relying on Thomas Scheff’s *Catharsis in Healing, Ritual and Drama.*

In this work, Scheff takes the literary criticism idea of *aesthetic distance* and
applies it to the problem of emotional trauma. In its original use, aesthetic distance
was a metaphor to describe the observer’s relationship to a work of art. If a play on the
stage did not stir up any feelings in audience members, they (or the play itself) could be
described as over-distanced. If, on the other hand, audience members leapt on to the
stage to try to save a member of the cast from his or her fate in the drama, those audience
members could be described as under-distanced. In order for a play to have its right
effect, the audience members must maintain a delicate balance in which they are close

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195 Ibid., 63.
enough to be emotionally caught up in the drama but also safe in their knowledge that they are “just watching a play.” At that point of balance, described as the aesthetic distance, audience members are free to weep for the tragedy portrayed on the stage or screen, and in the process release their own pent up feelings sorrow and loss, (that is, to experience catharsis).

Scheff takes the idea that aesthetic distance facilitates catharsis and uses it to understand the dynamics of psychotherapy and the significance of rituals, especially rituals of grieving. A key element in Scheff’s argument is that we have a biological need to release the tension associated with strong emotions. One cannot live without experiencing loss and frustration, yet many societies actively discourage people from expressing the emotions that are a normal response to various kinds of stress. This emotional repression becomes self-perpetuating, in that people who have had their own feelings repressed into unawareness will be very uncomfortable with the expression of feelings by others.\(^\text{196}\) The long term consequences of such emotional repression can be “a defense against emotional commitment, a denial of feeling, and an impoverishment of the personality.”\(^\text{197}\) (Other studies published after Scheff’s, such as those of Arno Gruen\(^\text{198}\) and Alice Miller,\(^\text{199}\) assert that the repression of feeling as a key part of the culture of cruelty.)

Many cultures use rituals to help their members work through the natural processes of grieving. The experiences of loss are stylized, and thus distanced, in these rituals. For example, in funerals music, special clothing and special words help people to

\(^{196}\)A similar point is made by Arno Gruen in *The Insanity of Normality* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1992).

\(^{197}\)Scheff, Catharsis, 121.


distance themselves from the immediacy of their experience of loss, and create a safe context in which to experience their emotions. Similarly, in psychotherapy a person may revisit the traumas of their life, but the context of the therapy room and the relationship with the therapist create an alternative ground from which to both observe and to some degree re-experience one’s own suffering. In examining how people cope with their feelings, Scheff introduces the distinction between emotional distress and emotional discharge. People can experience an intense amount of emotional distress without necessarily going through the physiological processes of crying, shaking, laughing, etc. needed for the tension to be discharged. What is required for discharge is, paradoxically, a slight distancing from the feeling process itself.

Scheff’s response to the problem of emotional repression is to teach and advocate forms of therapy such as Re-evaluation Counseling that focus on creating a safe setting in which a person can discharge painful feelings. However, since Scheff wrote Catharsis in the 1970s, the cognitive emphasis in the world of psychotherapy has grown much larger and it is now clear that the way people interpret events is as important as the events themselves in triggering emotions.²⁰⁰ So Scheff’s description of emotions as simple biological responses to stressful situations would now be viewed as probably applying to only a few situations. Also, Scheff’s emphasis on early trauma seems to me to be unnecessary, given the developmentalist arguments, which I accept, that suffering and loss are continuous elements in life.²⁰¹

But in my view, these aspects of Scheff’s argument do not diminish the value of Scheff’s ideas about appropriate emotional distance. Precisely because the experience of

²⁰⁰Lazarus and Folkman’s Stress, Appraisal, and Coping, noted above, is an example of recent thinking about the way that cognitive processes shape our emotional responses.
²⁰¹For an extended explanation of this view, see Judith Viorst, Necessary Losses (New York: Bantam, 1985).
loss is an unavoidable part of being human, we need to understand more about how to let ourselves grieve in satisfying ways. Scheff views the main emotional problem of Western countries as one of being over-distanced, of having withdrawn into a safe numbness in which we observe the events of our lives but we are no longer emotionally engaged. But this overview is balanced by his acknowledgment that most of us veer back and forth between too much emotional stimulation and too little. Perhaps because he is a sociologist, Scheff’s discussion deals with the help people get from cultural institutions (such as drama, film and psychotherapy) to find the life-nurturing middle ground, and with the interference that people get in the form of repression. He does not deal with the process of finding this middle ground as a developmental task, a possible skill that people might or should commit themselves to learning.

The way people create an appropriate emotional distance varies considerably from person to person. In general, Scheff has found that, in relation to a burden of unexpressed painful feelings, focusing on the present is more distancing than focusing on the past, fiction or fantasy is more distancing than real events, rapid review is more distancing than detailed review, and focusing on positive emotions is more distancing than focusing on negative emotions. In relation to film and drama, “Any dramatic technique which reminds the audience that the action is not real increases the distance. The use of masks by characters in primitive dramas is an example.” Other techniques include stylized language, irony, comedy, asides to the audience, music, settings in the distant, fabled past or far future. With regard to contemporary culture, Scheff notes, “It is possible that a large segment of the mass media audience in the United States is currently fascinated with violence, horror and disaster drama because it represents an unconscious

202 There are many current books on this topic. For example, see Therese A. Rando, Grieving (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1988).
203 Scheff, Catharsis, 138.
search for experiences that decrease distance so that catharsis can occur.”

Scheff does not mention philosophy, but it seems to me that withdrawing into a world of abstractions is clearly a way of trying to hold one’s experience at an optimal distance, a distance that allows a person to both participate and observe. The same would hold true for professional vocabularies, a major form of stylized language. Medical vocabularies help doctors to stay emotionally calm while participating in the sort of life-and-death actions (for example, cutting open another person’s body and removing an internal organ) that would cause most people to be incapacitated with emotion.

As a communication trainer, I am actively involved in coaching people to develop the appropriate aesthetic distance in relation to their problems and conflicts. The vocabularies of conflict resolution (for example, terms such as “BATNA,” Best Alternative To a Negotiated Agreement) are just the sort of “stylized language” that allows people to both back away and stay engaged. Thus, I see skill at finding the appropriate aesthetic distance to be part of the demands of everyday life, not just a part of psychotherapy. For example, William Ury, a teacher of negotiation skills at Harvard, describes the first step of his negotiation method as mentally “going to the balcony,” that is, adopting a perspective of sufficient distance to allow a person see the whole situation, thus avoiding rash moves. I believe that Scheff and Ury are talking about the same thing, a universally human, universally necessary and universally difficult process.

In terms of seeing participant observation as a universal process, I think the idea of aesthetic distance can be applied to thinking as well as to feeling. We are always trying to maintain an optimal distance from our object of inquiry: too close means lost in the details, too far back means too abstract or “schematic.” The tools we use to achieve

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204 Scheff, Catharsis, 146.
an **aesthetic distance of cognition** are metaphor, story, diagram and organizing image, but there is no ideal solution. It would be of great benefit to us if we could learn the art of finding the aesthetic distance, both of the feeling and the thinking varieties, but, in my view, in trying to learn this we are largely at the mercy of our local culture, which may or may not be able to help us.

In promoting the practice of exploratory self-questioning, I am trying to provide my students with a gentle method of both observing and entering more fully into their ongoing conversations with other people and their ongoing conversation with life. In entertaining these self-questions we create a mental conversation in which we shift back and forth between the role of questioning observer and the role of the responding participant. Coping with life requires that we find a creative middle ground of participant-observation, avoiding the pitfalls of numbness and withdrawal on one side and over-stimulation and disorientation on the other. We have to be close enough to our problems and challenges to be emotionally stirred up and motivated to solve them, but not so close that we feel overwhelmed. I hope that by introducing my students to the topic of self-observation, to various self-awareness practices and to the practice of exploratory self-questioning, I will give them some of the tools they need to find that life-supporting middle ground.

### 7.9. Conclusion: The significance of self-observation

The work of the scholars reviewed in this chapter suggest that learning to observe one’s thoughts, feelings and actions is as important in life as eating or breathing, “a core competency” of a well-lived life, to use current language. People have actually known

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206The dream of developing an ideal form of knowledge about life is the theme of Hermann Hesse’s novel, *The Glass Bead Game*. In the story, the high priest of the game that includes all knowledge decides that the players have become too removed from the actual processes of living. He gives up the quest for perfect understanding and goes back to living an ordinary life.
this truth for a long time. Socrates taught that the unexamined life is not worth living. And many religions (Buddhism, Hinduism and Catholicism come immediately to mind) emphasize self-observation and moral self-examination.

But those who have already known this truth have not necessarily known why it is true, or how someone outside of their tradition would approach it. Thus, I see the modern researchers I have reviewed, Kegan, Seligman and Scheff, as renewing and extending one of the great discoveries of human culture. This is important to me because as I coach people to observe their own experiencing and their communication styles, I am continually challenged to make this idea more accessible to others, to understand it better myself, and to find new and more engaging ways of expressing it.

Translated into my frame of reference, systems theory, the significance of self-awareness and self-observation is that we are always, to a greater or lesser degree, trying to steer our life activities toward success and fulfillment. We are always trying to get the basketball to go in the hoop, and our fingers to hit the right keys (or at least some enjoyable keys) on the piano keyboard of life. And in order to steer we have to observe. In regard to fulfilling interpersonal communication, we are always trying to coordinate our actions, experiences and feelings with those of other people, a complex task!

Another way of putting this would be to say that the better we can observe, the better we will be able to steer. Each step in the Six Dimensions spiral story invites a person to engage in a new kind of self-observation, provides one possible vocabulary for doing so, and encourages people to begin actively steering their actions and interactions toward mutuality and “win-win” solutions.

Of all the actions we take in life, our story-making, life-interpreting, metaphor-invoking, classification-using, skill-mobilizing activities are the most worth observing
and the most difficult to observe. The great achievement of cognitive psychology has been to demonstrate that without always realizing it we are continually shaping and steering not only our actions but also our experience of life. We do this by being selective about what we let into awareness, and by using a variety of thought tools to give structure to what we do let in. I have labeled these experience structuring activities and capacities as “inner resources” (although I am not entirely satisfied with using a noun to label a process). Because we live in and think through our experience shaping style, it is a great challenge to make it the focus of conscious attention. It shapes our way of attending to it! Much of psychotherapy is the process of helping people to observe their own experience-guiding activities, and encouraging them to take creative responsibility for guiding their experience toward fulfillment and away from self-defeating thought patterns and life styles.

The story-making, life-interpreting, metaphor-invoking, classification-using and skill-mobilizing activities I mentioned above, and which are the topic of the next chapter, provide the inner structure of our everyday conversations and our conflict resolution efforts. Ultimately, helping people communicate better involves helping them develop, change, renew or revise the inner resources they bring to each encounter. Communication training thus shares some of the goals of education, psychotherapy and religion, which, each in its own way, tries to help people develop new inner resources.

Ordinarily, we rely on our parents and our culture to give us whatever mental toolkit we need to get through life. Part of the postmodern condition is the realization that both parents and cultures sometimes have valuable traditions to pass on and sometimes do not. Sometimes both fail in catastrophic ways, as in Nazi Germany, child abuse or the Vietnam war. To some degree people have always been responsible for
creating and steering their own lives, but the extent of this varies enormously between traditional and modern cultures. In the context in which I do my communication teaching, people have almost total responsibility for creating their lives, but not necessarily the skills or knowledge to do so.

The Six Dimensions model is my effort address the needs of my students by translating the best available research into a map of steps toward greater self-awareness and better communication. It was not my original intention to have this be a general map of human development. But I have discovered in the course of my work on this project that interpersonal communication is, in fact, the moment-to-moment process of human development. (For example, the “paying attention to one’s experience,” which is at the heart of many recommendations for better communication, is exactly the paying attention to one’s own thoughts and feelings that Kegan\textsuperscript{207} has identified as one of the central themes of human development.) So rather than trying to keep these two levels separate, I have tried to show the many links between them. I realize that this makes my approach to learning new communication skills more complex. My hope is that it also makes it more significant in the lives of my students.

Cognitive therapy and many popular self-help books appeal to people to look directly at the scripts, myths and metaphors that shape their lives. I am not sure this is the best advice, because it may demand more self-observation skill than most people have, and thus set people up to fail. In arranging the sequence of topics in the Six Dimensions model, I have introduced the idea of self observation before introducing the idea of inner resources. This reflects my experience of how difficult it is for people to observe their own story-making and metaphor-using, etc. My hope is that by encouraging my students to engage in a series of graduated self-awareness efforts

\footnote{Kegan, \textit{The Evolving Self}.}
involving experience, intentions, forms of action, styles of action, and kinds of self-observation, I will help them build the skill they need in order to contemplate, and then perhaps rewrite, the scripts that shape their conversations and guide their lives.
CHAPTER 8

THE INNER RESOURCES THAT WE USE TO SHAPE OUR EXPERIENCE AND RESPONSES (DIMENSION 6)

“Experience is not what happens to you, it’s what you do with what happens to you.”
Alders Huxley

8.1. Introduction: Stories and models in our dialogue with the world.

In the course of coaching people to listen and express themselves in more satisfying ways, I have again and again had the frustrating feeling that a person’s communicative activities were an enactment of some deeply held story. I say frustrating because the techniques of better communication that I was teaching were not at all powerful enough to reorganize someone’s unhappy story.

In conversations people appear to be guiding their interactions according to some already understood ‘plot line,’ which has a strong tendency to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. People who are convinced that the world is out to injure them approach others in a suspicious mood that is almost sure to evoke standoffish or hostile responses which confirm the web of assumptions that prompted the suspicious mood in the first place.

Thus, in my view, any account of interpersonal communication that hopes to be comprehensive must include a vision of how moment-to-moment communicative

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interchanges arise out of and carry forward the stories or other mental models that people use to make sense out of their lives.

As is usually the case with my discoveries, in discovering the power of story lines I had stumbled into a territory which has already been the subject of intense study by many scholars. As I mentioned in the last chapter, the re-emergence of cognitive psychology in recent decades has meant that stimulus-response models have been replaced with stimulus-evaluation/interpretation-response models. Rather than viewing people as passive responders to their environments who unconsciously learn to find the rewards, many, if not most, psychological theorists now view people as active interpreters of their environments.

In short, people respond to events largely in terms of the meaning they are able to give to those events. Similar ideas have been around for a long time, some emphasizing that thought shapes perception and others emphasizing that desire shapes perception, or a combination of both. This theme appears in the ancient Hindu Upanishads, is mentioned in the works of St. Thomas Aquinas, was a central idea in Kanto’s philosophy and was championed in the 1930s by the philosopher George Herbert Mead. But it is only in recent decades that this idea has become widely accepted as a workable middle ground between objectivism (in which the event is all important) and subjectivism (in which the

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209 Cognition was a popular topic of psychological study in the late 1800s but went out of fashion with the rise of behaviorism, which viewed any process that cannot be directly observed as not worthy of scientific study. While B. F. Skinner maintained this position as a kind of inviolable dogma, other behaviorists (to their credit as theorists of learning) learned from their critics and expanded the behaviorist position to include such processes as cognition and visual imagery. For an example of this newer approach to behaviorism, see Arnold Lazarus, In the Mind’s Eye (New York: Guilford Press, 1984).

210 But there are still significant dissents. Sociobiologists see people as acting out genetically given strategies for reproductive success.

211 From a lecture by Prof. Raimundo Panikkar, Dept. of Religious Studies, UC Santa Barbara, 1976.

212 Charon sums up Mead’s version of this as “Objects we encounter are defined according to their use for us.” Joel Charon, Symbolic Interactionism (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1979), 29.
response is all important). In this interactive view, what is important is how the person creatively interprets the event and links the event to their response. Many scholars now argue that the story form is the primary mental tool that people use to make that link, that is to say, the most fundamental and significant form of human thinking. The Six Dimensions model is itself a spiral, recursive, first-person story about experience and human interaction, so in investigating the inner resources that people bring to their encounters with others, I will also make occasional comments on the design of the Six Dimensions model as a template for understanding and guiding one’s interactions.

In this chapter I am going to review some of ways of understanding how we shape our experience by using and creating cultural forms. It is clear that both families and cultures pass down stories, which are adopted by and shape the experience of later generations. But there is not much point in investigating this process unless people have some latitude to reorganize their stories. Otherwise it would simply become a matter of documenting a process of cultural determinism. So, as has been the case throughout this study, I am going to report on this process with an emphasis on the aspect through which it might be guided.

In his interpretation of the “person as scientist,” George A. Kelly provides one of the clearest overviews of the process of making and using mental models. We humans are, according to Kelly, always trying to predict what will happen next. By which he means that we are always, consciously or unconsciously, framing hypotheses of the “If I do this, then that will happen” or “If X happens, then Y will happen” sort. Our

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214The model is recursive because it is an inner resource and it contains a dimension devoted to inner resources, a map that contains a territory for maps, including itself. This parallels the recursiveness of the human personality, in which my sense of self includes my self-image.
knowledge of the world is actually our knowledge of our efforts to survive and thrive in our particular world. Each person has their own set of interwoven expectation rules which they use to construe the passing flow of events and classify events and objects into identifiable clusters. This web of expectations allows to make long term commitments, such as planting food in the spring that we hope to reap in the fall, etc. Kelly did not deal with stories, but it is easy to see how stories weave together complex strands of expectations, and also disappointments and surprises (because life never fits entirely inside our plot lines or categories). Thus we are always retelling our stories and adjusting our hypotheses (or perhaps scouting around for reassuring evidence, so that we will not have to adjust them.) This perspective closely links knowing with doing.

By adopting a perspective that connects knowing and doing, we can imagine exploring the creative possibilities at the organism-environment (and person-to-person) boundary. Although this dialogical stance is a demanding one, I believe it is a more empowering stance than being either only the passive victim of a fixed external world, on the one hand, or only the active emperor of one’s imagination in a universe that is “up for grabs,” on the other. Human cooperation appears to require both the assertion of one’s creative narrative and respect for the other person as more than just the product of one’s narrative.

### 8.2. An analysis of mental model-building

Most discussions about mental model building are based on inferences about what people must be doing in their minds in order to formulate their responses to life. X-rays

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215This is a position that is proposed in great detail in Charles D. Laughlin, Jr., John McManus and Eugene G. d’Aquili, *Brain, Symbol and Experience: Toward a Neurophenomenology of Human Consciousness* (Boston: Shambala, 1990).

216David Bakan asserts that the assertion-communion polarity is the central theme of human life in Western cultures. See David Bakan, *The Duality of Human Existence: Isolation and Communion in Western Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966).
and CAT scans of brain activity currently do not reveal any scripts, plot lines, metaphors or mental maps. (That could change, but such a change could easily take centuries.) We ‘see’ the ‘script’ as being immanent in the person’s behavior and self-report, but in doing so we are limited by our styles of inference, by what we are capable of imagining might be going inside another person’s mind. Our ideas about another person’s mental models are retrospective hypotheses.

The emerging field of narrative therapy offers an alternative way of approaching this elusive subject matter. The goal in narrative therapy is to help clients tell new and more fulfilling, more empowering stories about their lives. This more constructive, interventionist approach is starting to produce a body of knowledge about conscious life-story-making that reveals some of the dynamics involved. (This is an example of what W. Barnett Pearce calls the “Thor Heyerdahl solution.” Heyerdahl, a writer and explorer, wanted to know how the great Easter Island monoliths were made, a subject that had puzzled many scholars. The present islanders informed him that they knew how to do it, so he simply asked them to make one and observed how it was done, something that no one else had thought of doing.)

The early work of Bandler and Grinder also embodies this interventionist stance. They tape recorded the encounters of master psychotherapists with clients in search of change. By analyzing people’s efforts to change their “picture of life” Bandler and Grinder drew inferences about how such pictures were created in the first place. What they found was that people appear to create and maintain their scripts, pictures and models by engaging in three sets of activities:

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218Pearce, Interpersonal Communication, 67.
219Bandler and Grinder, The Structure of Magic.
Including vs. deleting: Attention is selective. No picture or story can hold all the events of life, so we learn to track certain events and ignore others. This including and leaving out is implied in the stories and pictures that we inherit from our families and cultures, and in learning the stories we learn the selective patterns of attention that sustain each one. A crucial facet of inner story construction concerns the people we choose to include in our story as heroes and exemplars and those we choose to include in our story as bad examples or threatening figures.  

Clarifying vs. distorting: One central fact of human life is that people learn both to lie and to tell the truth. And we can lie to ourselves as well as to others. Many writers, as varied as Sartre, Gandhi and Carl Rogers, have proposed that the struggle to face the truth of one’s situation and one’s actual feelings is the central struggle of being a person. In the short run, it always feels easier to say “It broke.” than to say “I broke it.” But in the long run, avoiding responsibility for our problems, which we try to accomplish most often by telling a distorted story, only creates more problems. To tell the truth requires a sturdy sense of self worth, and people often cannot tolerate the loss of face that can accompany facing one’s mistakes and shortcomings. (Even though not facing one’s problems generally leads to a miserable life.) Our story-telling and picture-making about life express how far we have traveled on the very challenging road toward truth-telling. One interpretation of psychotherapy is that the experience of being accepted by another person in spite of one’s failings is what gives psychotherapy clients

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221For a current restatement of this idea, see Brad Blanton, Radical Honesty (New York: Dell Publishing, 1996).
222It is a characteristic of bullies, for example, that they tend to portray themselves as aggrieved parties, unjustly abused by others. See Gruen, The Insanity of Normality.
223Consider the tradition of hara-kiri in Japan, which is acted out in less ceremonial ways in every human culture.
the strength to face the truth of their lives and make the changes they need. (I interpret this to be the central dynamic of Rogerian counseling.)

**Attending to unique particulars vs. generalizing:** One of the main ways that we simplify the world in our story-telling is by creating categories, stereotypes and stock inferences. “If there is smoke, there is a fire.” etc. Generalizations allow us to respond quickly, but only at the eternal risk of responding wrongly. Making generalizations can satisfy our need to make sense out of a chaotic world, but the patterns we think we see may be only in our own minds, or if true they may go out of date with the passing of time or be inappropriate in new situations. Life seems to require of us that we both look for underlying “if-then” patterns (“If I do X, then Y will happen.”)\(^{224}\) and also stay open to unique experiences. One way that psychotherapists try to help their clients escape from the grip of self-defeating generalizations (such as “I can never do anything right.”) is to enter into a conversation about the specifics of counter-instances (for example, the question, “Tell me about a time when you did an excellent job.”)\(^{225}\)

### 8.3. Vocabularies of self-description

Up to this point, I have summarized three central dynamics that appear to be at work in the way we create our pictures of and stories about life (according to Richard Bandler, John Grinder and a variety of other thinkers and psychotherapists). We include and exclude events from our story, we clarify or distort the plot line of events according to how threatening the events are, and we shift back and forth between generalizing about events and allowing ourselves to be surprised and puzzled by unique events (or the unique aspect of everything that happens). Each of these dynamics suggests ways in

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\(^{224}\)This is the main theme of George A. Kelly’s work. See George A. Kelly, A Theory of Personality: The Psychology of Personal Constructs (New York: Norton, 1963).

\(^{225}\)Freeman and Combs, *Narrative Therapy*, 125.
which we can re-tell our stories, and help other people to re-tell their life stories in more satisfying ways. In the remainder of this section I am going to focus on various aspects of the vocabularies we use to do our story-telling and picture-making.

As Thomas Kuhn\textsuperscript{226} has so persuasively demonstrated in relation to science, we come to our object of investigation with an intellectual toolkit of ideas and examples that shape our view of it. Without this toolkit, all we would see would be chaos. We use our toolkit to organize our view, but it never organizes everything. There are always interesting and puzzling exceptions, and these beckon to us to revise our ideas and travel on to the next set of anomalies. Kuhn see this as the essential dynamic in the growth of knowledge. The part of Kuhn’s argument that I want to highlight here is that our vocabulary shapes our view.

There is a great deal in everyday life that follows this pattern, and, as Rom Harré\textsuperscript{227} notes, we come to our lives with an intellectual toolkit of ideas and examples that shape our view of our life journeys. A major source of this toolkit in Western cultures is the field of psychology. Psychology is not only a descriptive endeavor, it also influences. That is because we are reflexive beings: our being-ness includes our picture of ourselves. Thus we change when our description of ourselves changes, a process not true of rocks or trees, so far as we know.

Along with being the topic of many popular books, for many years psychology was the most popular undergraduate college major in the United States. Which is to say that psychology is one of the main providers of our vocabulary and organizing assumptions that shape our view of our lives and our life-story-telling.

In recent years a variety of thinkers have begun to question the assumptions and

\textsuperscript{226}Kuhn, \textit{Structure of Scientific Revolutions}.
\textsuperscript{227}Harré, \textit{Personal Being}, 24.
limits of the vocabulary that psychology has given us. They have begun to create new vocabularies based on what they see as more empowering assumptions. This is an important issue because in everyday life our habitual assumptions tend to become self-fulfilling prophecies. Let us examine three major shifts in vocabulary that are working their way into everyday common thought and that could be consciously adopted by persons in search of a more empowering story-telling style: first, from a vocabulary of substances to a vocabulary of action; second, from being a passive patient to being an active agent; and third from a vocabulary of illness to a vocabulary of healthy functioning. To me these are central issues in the way people put together the “stories that become lenses.”

8.3.1. From substances to actions. Perhaps as a result of its origins in nineteenth century medicine, the vocabulary of psychology has been heavily focused on substance-like nouns such as “id,” “ego,” “superego,” “libido,” “neurosis,” “psychosis,” “complex,” “the unconscious” and so on. These were imagined to act in particular ways that were labeled “defense,” “transference,” “sublimation,” etc., suggesting perhaps fluid-like substances that erupted or were dammed up, discharged, or redirected. As Roy Schafer\textsuperscript{228} has argued at great length, current developments in science, psychology and the philosophy of knowledge do not support the continued use of such hypothetical substances or entities (ego, libido, etc.) as explanations of human behavior. Saying “George’s ego made him do X,” evocative as it may sound, actually adds nothing to our knowledge beyond saying “George did X.” In fact, Schafer argues, since the goal of therapy is to help George to see how he does X, taking about egos and superegos would just confuse the picture for both George and his therapist. The gist of Schafer’s position

\textsuperscript{228}Roy Schafer, \textit{A New Language for Psychoanalysis} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 5.
is that human activity is not well described or well understood by a language of substances and entities (e.g., “having” a “neurosis”). In place of such language he offers a language of persons acting in particular styles:

“We shall regard each psychological process, event, experience, or behavior as some kind of activity, henceforth to be called action, and shall designate each action by an active verb stating its nature and by an adverb (or adverbial locution), when applicable, stating the mode of this action.”

In saying this, Schafer is addressing other psychoanalysts, since he is an educator and supervisor of psychoanalysts, and his books are directed toward a professional audience. But I believe very strongly that if this is good advice for helping psychoanalysts understand their patients, it is equally good advice for ordinary people who are trying to steer their own actions and make sense out of their own lives. We continually describe ourselves as if we were entities with fixed qualities (a good person, a bright kid, a lost soul, etc.). But what is generally most important in life is how we guide our actions, and how other people act toward us. This problem has been discussed by many other writers and thinkers as the problem of nominalization or reification.

From my point of view, the problem of nominalization will probably always be with us because things are easier to think about than processes; and therefore we will always be tempted to mentally turn processes into easier-to-contemplate ‘things.’ Imagining a process entails imagining a succession of scenes in which the action unfolds. This makes considerably more cognitive demands on a person than imagining a static object. In spite of this difficulty, I believe that it is still worthwhile to encourage people

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229Ibid., 9.
230Bandler and Grinder, Structure of Magic, 74.
to think in terms of action and manner of action as they create their life stories. (I have incorporated Schafer’s recommendations into the structure of the Six Dimensions model. Every dimension is expressed in verbs or adverbs, which are proposed as the action of a conscious person rather than the effect of some sub-personal substance or entity.)

8.3.2. From passive patiency to active agency. In the world of the natural sciences, every event is generally understood to have been caused by some previous event. To the best of our knowledge physical objects never cause their own movement. Objects at rest remain at rest until moved by some external force. Objects have no choice about what they do and no responsibility for what they do. Psychology inherited this tradition of explanation by prior causes, and produced nearly a century of language concerning the process of being acted upon. As Gordon Allport put it in the 1950s, “People, it seems, are busy leading their lives into the future, whereas psychology, for the most part, is busy tracing them into the past.”

In contrast to all the ways in which we are acted upon in the course of living, becoming a person involves our own acting upon: initiating, choosing, creating, taking responsibility, paying attention and making meaning. All advocacy of morality assumes that people are capable of choosing their actions. These processes of personhood may be spiritual in nature or they may be emergent properties of hyper-complex biological systems, or perhaps both. What is clear is that the processes of moving oneself, choosing and making events happen cannot be adequately described in a language of “being acted upon” that generally portrays people as passive victims only, “billiard balls,” as it were.

The inadequacy of this kind of mechanistic thinking in both psychoanalysis and

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232 “...culture was conceived as an “overlay” on biologically determined human behavior. The causes of human behavior were assumed to lie in that biological substrate.” Jerome Bruner, Acts of Meaning (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 20.
233 Allport, Becoming, 51.
behaviorism up to the 1950s played a large role in provoking the emergence of humanistic and existentialist psychologies that emphasize choosing, creating and making meaning. But the incompatibility of our ideas about moral action and choice with our ideas about physical causality remains unreconciled to this day. Although ideas about emergent properties of evolving systems offer some hope bridging the gap, there is still a lot of controversy in Western societies about choice, responsibility and the causes of human action.

Rom Harré, a philosopher of psychology at Oxford and Georgetown Universities, has tried to solve this problem by insisting that we actually live simultaneously in two different worlds, a physical world of causal processes and a physically supported social world of linguistically mediated moral agreements, commitments and choices. John Searle makes similar “two-level” arguments in his book *The Construction of Social Reality*. While not everyone will accept a “living in two worlds” solution, these complex arguments are examples of the emergence of new vocabularies of initiative, conscious action and choice. Even behaviorists, once the champions of “the person as the effect of the environment” now actively promote self-guiding activities for stress reduction, overcoming phobias, and many other health enhancing activities.

In *Becoming an Agent*, which describes among its case histories the struggles of several disabled accident victims to take charge of and rebuild their lives, counselors Larry Cochran and Joan Laub present a clear manifesto of “personal causation.” In making the transition from passive patient to active agent, people use positive personal

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234 Harré, *Personal Being*.  
narratives to mobilize and coordinate their actions.

Within this theory, patients are stuck in “facticity” (the fixed and unchangeable) while agents explore and actualize possibilities. Through cultivating symbolization (more refined representation), imagination (to conceive of possibility), and judgment (to distinguish what is fixed and what is possible), the central task of an agent is to discern meaningful possibilities to guide courses of action.\textsuperscript{238}

There are many cultural and political aspects to this topic. It has long been a contention of critical theorists that the dominant forces in society work hard to make current social arrangement seem as if they are God-given or carved in stone, when in fact they are only temporary human inventions. Consider the arguments about slavery in the United States before the Civil War. The slave-owners tried to persuade the slaves themselves that God had made them to be slaves forever, and thus to undercut their desire to rebel or run away. In retelling one’s life story to emphasize new possibilities, one may, unfortunately, come into conflict with people in one’s family, work or political environment who have a strong interest in things not changing.

Ideas about choosing, creating and the power to change can also evoke strong feelings of shame and inadequacy, as people start to measure themselves against a more expansive standard. Sartre called the inauthenticity associated with the refusal to acknowledge one’s own choice-making “bad faith,” and thought it was one of the central problems of being human.

So there are risks involved in realizing one has choices. But there could be ways of helping people accommodate to the idea of choice and agency. For example, by suggesting that people start by making small changes in their lives first. And by emphasizing a dialogical stance that keeps people attentive to their environment, rather than a you-create-everything stance that can create a “boom and bust” cycle of

\textsuperscript{238}Ibid., 18.
unrealizable expectations followed by failure. In my view, because of the reflexivity of being human noted above (that our being includes the vocabularies we use to describe our being), freedom of action is only possible if we have a vocabulary of voluntary action.

(The Six Dimensions model portrays a person as an active co-participant in their communication activities rather than as a passive responder to the actions of others. Each of the six dimensions introduces the student to an open-ended world of action possibilities, expressed in an “I am doing this” vocabulary.)

**8.3.3 From a vocabulary of illness to a vocabulary of healthy functioning.** In this section (8.3.) I have been reviewing what I consider to be the deep themes of experience shaping personal narratives. These themes are suffused throughout entire vocabularies, so we may not realize that when we use particular words in our story-making we are giving ourselves a large helping of the theme underneath the word. For example, if I say “I’ve got a real neurosis about women.” I am invoking the themes of “passive sufferer” and “possessor of an illness substance or entity” even though these may not be the most empowering ways for me to think about my feelings and actions toward women. Restating my experience as “I date nervously,” as oddball as it might sound, would at least open up the possibility that eventually I might be able to “date confidently” because I am thinking of myself as an active agent.

One of the most powerful themes in people’s story-making is the theme of illness and healing. In using illness as a metaphor for difficulty, as I just did in the above paragraph, I was using a theme that is vivid, dramatic, timeless, universally recognized, evocative of sympathy from others, and associated with high status persons (doctors). Unfortunately, that theme would probably be also inaccurate and misleading to both
myself and my listeners.

Because modern psychology evolved out of medicine, it brought with it a tendency to judge everyone along a scale of illness and wellness. Over the past several decades there has been a great effort to create alternative vocabularies of personal development for describing our efforts to become happy, skillful, wise and creative people on the one hand and to grow out of being unhappy, unskillful, unreflective and monotonous people on the other. But the financial connection between the psychotherapy profession and medical insurance companies has continually rewarded the development and use of an illness/wellness vocabulary, in spite of its serious limitations. Alcoholics Anonymous has also persuaded millions of people that excessive drinking is an illness, an idea that may not be equally helpful to all persons with a drinking problem.

Abraham Maslow\textsuperscript{239} was one of the foremost critics of the illness and healing theme. He rejected Freud’s medicalization of everyday life and argued that it is not possible to understand well people by studying sick people. More recently, Robert Kegan\textsuperscript{240} has argued that much of what get labeled as pathology in human experience can be better understood as developmental crises as people seek to master the emotional curriculum of being a person. Kenneth Gergen\textsuperscript{241} has questioned the nearly exponential expansion of categories of mental illness, from around a dozen in the 1920s to approximately 200 in the 1980s, with no upper limit in sight. Freedman and Combs\textsuperscript{242}, narrative therapists, argue strongly for a vision of psychotherapy that focuses entirely on new, positive possibilities and avoids diagnostic categories of mental illness altogether.

In spite of such careful arguments, there are still powerful forces at work in

\textsuperscript{239}Maslow, \textit{The Farther Reaches of Human Nature}, 31.
\textsuperscript{240}Kegan, \textit{The Evolving Self}, 4.
\textsuperscript{241}Gergen, \textit{Realities and Relationships}, 161.
\textsuperscript{242}Freedman and Combs, \textit{Narrative Therapy}. 
Western societies encouraging people with difficulties to see themselves as sick, and to seek the help of highly-paid “healers.” While classifying alcohol use, compulsive gambling or depression as illnesses may remove some of the stigma associated with these experiences, it also can encourage people to tell themselves a strongly disempowering story. In the following paragraphs I present five ways that I see the illness vocabulary misleading people. In each case I will contrast the implications of the illness vocabulary with the implications of a developmental or growth vocabulary as a way of looking at positive human change.

First, the illness model suggests a pre-existing state of health from which we have deviated. The goal is to get back to normal.

Alternative. From a developmental point of view, there is no pre-existing state of full development from which I have fallen away into some predicament. We don’t start out in life with big muscles and then somehow lose track of them. Our task is to build, not to restore, and we want to change what is normal rather than go back to it. There is no shame in being an unfinished person, because we are all created unfinished, created to labor at completing ourselves. In most cases it would be bizarre for a person who was physically ill to surrender to their illness. On the other hand, embracing one’s incompleteness sets the stage for new growth and may even be a prerequisite for it.

Second, the illness model suggests that the cause of one’s difficulties lies in powerful external or impersonal forces such as germs, genes, crazy-making situations, intolerable stresses, or one’s allegedly inevitable sexual desire for one’s opposite sex parent. Power over one’s condition is minimal.

Alternative. From a developmental point of view, responsibility for my state of development is largely my own, and the older I get, the more it becomes my own. In
contrast to my situation in relation to many (but not all) diseases, I have the power to make a difference in the kind of person I become. Teachers and coaches can help greatly, but only to the extent that I put their influence into action. A great doctor may be able to remove a brain tumor from (and save the life of) an inert patient, but a great coach can do nothing with an inert athlete.

Third, the illness model motivates me to find a healer, an expert who is capable of dealing with those external or impersonal forces over which I have little or no influence.

Alternative. From a developmental point of view, because I understand that no one can lift weights on my behalf, I am more motivated to lift my own weights. And to the degree that I understand that my development is a matter of exercise, exploration and learning rather than restoration at the hands of a healer, I may be more motivated to seek new skills and opportunities to practice.

Fourth, it is greatly to be hoped that the treatment of my illness will be successful and that the illness will cease and never return. And I usually wish that I had not gotten the illness in the first place.

Alternative. From a developmental point of view, growth challenges always occur and never go away, beginning with our pushing ourselves up as babies. Any skill learned needs to be practiced throughout life to be maintained; and all the deeper qualities of personhood are open-ended, capable of and in need of infinite refinement. There is no ‘safe’ zone. Just the opposite is true. Attempts to make oneself safe from growth challenges will lead to a diminished life.

Fifth, those who have the illness are THEM, those whose resistance has been overwhelmed by the germ or gene. Perhaps I can be safe and not become one of THEM.
Alternative. From a developmental point of view, the people who are challenged by life to grow and tempted by various forms of dishonesty, confusion and evasion are US. In contrast to the ill and the well, we are all together in being challenged by life. As Sartre pointed out, we can’t avoid wrestling with the issue of what we will make of ourselves, because even avoiding the issue is a kind of stance toward it.

There are certainly times in life when we are physically ill and at least the first four of the above characteristics of illness hold true. My reservations concern the way the idea of illness has traveled beyond the world of medicine and shaped the way we see our developmental struggles and failings, tempting us to see our personal problems and growth challenges as diseases, to develop an elaborate vocabulary of deficits, and to define our quest as a search for a healing encounter in which we are a relatively passive patient. My experience is that a vocabulary of development allows us to see all sorts of possibilities for action and change that a vocabulary of illness makes invisible. For that reason I believe that metaphors of illness and healing should be used vary sparingly.

Echoes of the illness vocabulary show up in communication skill texts, which often describe growth challenges in terms of what people are doing wrong. Parent Effectiveness Training,\textsuperscript{243} for example, offers a list of a dozen typical responses of parents to children, all of which are considered to have negative consequences.

1. Ordering, directing, commanding
2. Warning, admonishing, threatening
3. Exhorting, moralizing, preaching
4. Advising, giving solutions or suggestions
5. Lecturing, teaching, giving logical solutions
6. Judging, criticizing, disagreeing, blaming
7. Praising, agreeing

\textsuperscript{243}Gordon, Parent Effectiveness Training, 41-44.
8. Name-calling, ridiculing, shaming
9. Interpreting, analyzing, diagnosing
10. Reassuring, sympathizing, consoling, supporting
11. Probing, questioning, interrogating
12. Withdrawing, distracting, humoring, diverting

I agree that many of the responses on this list would not be fruitful in many situations, and some would never be fruitful. But the list itself is an example of many of the actions that it recommends against. This list, to me, has strong undertones of preaching, blaming, shaming, lecturing and diagnosing. It is a tribute to the empowering parts of the P.E.T. program that people get past this part and learn to practice active listening. Robert Bolton, in People Skills,\(^\text{244}\) spends an entire chapter elaborating on this list (described as the “dirty dozen” communication spoilers, an example of name-calling), as if a person really could continuously remember a list of twelve actions not to perform!, or perhaps in the hope that knowing how things go wrong will somehow motivate people to study more conversation enhancing responses. Similarly, McKay, et al.,\(^\text{245}\) repeat this list of “no-no’s” and include an additional “no-no” list of how not to be a good listener. I confess that it is hard for me to see the educational purpose of describing as bad practically everything that people do in everyday interaction, even if the diagnosis is correct (which it often is). I believe that we see in such lists the deep theme that development is the process of overcoming pathology. In my experience, the development of communication skills involves learning to act in ways that are completely new, and that have relatively little to do with one’s previous shortcomings. It is not clear to me that focusing on past shortcomings does anything but confuse the student.

\(^{244}\)Bolton, People Skills, 14-26.
\(^{245}\)Matthew McKay, Martha Davis and Partick Fanning, Messages: The Communication Skills Book (Oakland, Calif.: New Harbinger, 1983), 16.
In the design of my communication skills teaching materials I only give negative examples of action in the direct context of positive examples, as in “before and after” comparison pairs. In the Six Dimensions model, all fundamental processes are described with positive verbs and adverbs, in keeping with the goal of helping people to imagine new actions.

8.4. Summary

Although *The Social Construction of Reality*\(^{246}\) is one of my favorite books, I have long felt that it does not make any sense to tell people that they create their own realities unless I could offer some real advice about how to go about creating a more satisfying one. Fortunately, in the past two decades a good deal of progress has been made on this issue and result has been the emergence of the narrative emphasis in the worlds of communication studies and psychotherapy. There appears to me to be an emerging consensus, of which Jerome Bruner’s work is an example, that story-telling is the central means by which people shape their experience of life, the central form of human meaning-making.\(^{247}\) The subtitle of Freedman and Comb’s book on narrative therapy is *The Social Construction of Preferred Realities.* In that book they describe the kind of intimate coaching that supports a person to tell their life story in a new way. In *Retelling a Life*, Roy Schafer has recently reinterpreted the central task of psychoanalysis to be that of helping people frame more adaptive stories about their life experiences.\(^{248}\)

It remains to be seen if the positive possibilities revealed by narratively-oriented psychotherapy can be realized in the culture at large, outside of the narrow confines of the therapy room and the therapist-client relationship. In this chapter I have reviewed


some of the central dynamics that appear to be at the heart of life-story-construction and reconstruction. These include selecting to include or exclude, structuring in order to clarify or to distort, and generalizing vs. paying attention to unique and specific features of a situation.

Our story-making also draws on various cultural vocabularies that provide us with ready-made thought tools for understanding our lives. The problem with these thought tools is that they can bring with them questionable assumptions about life. I surveyed three of the vocabularies that I believe have the most profound influence of people’s story-telling. In each case I showed how the vocabulary could be changed in what I see as growth-promoting ways. The first vocabulary consists of noun-like entities and substances, which we use when we talk about id, ego, self, energy, neurosis, etc. These words are gradually being replaced with process words such as asserting, listening, creating, attending, ignoring, etc. The process words affirm each person as an active doer, even if we do not exactly know how we are doing things.

The second vocabulary specifically concerns the issue of being an active doer. We have inherited from the physical sciences a vocabulary of cause and effect that makes it easier for us to see ourselves as caused by external forces than to see ourselves as causing important events in our lives. A new vocabulary of conscious, voluntary action is emerging in the marketplace of ideas, inviting us to open ourselves to new possibilities of what we may be able to do and become.

The third vocabulary concerns illness, healing and human development. Our culture provides us with elaborate descriptions of illness and invites us, in many ways, to see ourselves as passive patients. A new vocabulary of development is emerging which
invites us to see ourselves as consciously striving and growing toward positive goals that have little or nothing to do with illness or healing.

The theme of consciously striving toward positive goals is one of the central organizing themes of the Six Dimensions model, which is oriented toward process, active agency and healthy functioning, and which invites people to select, structure and generalize/focus on specifics in new ways.

As I mentioned in a earlier chapter, in our search for knowledge we are like a person walking around a statue, we gain knowledge of an object from a succession of partial views, each one of which relies on all the others as context. And as John Shotter\textsuperscript{249} argues, it is not the case that such a statue would simply send us information. We ourselves generate information by the way we move in relation to an object, or shift perspectives in relation to bodies of knowledge. Freedman and Combs\textsuperscript{250} also argue that we can create new knowledge by asking generative questions. Each of the dimensions proposed in the Six Dimensions model represents an open question about the possibility of new actions and an angle from which we can view and understand the other five and the interaction of all.

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\textsuperscript{249}Shotter, \textit{Conversational Realities}. \\
\textsuperscript{250}Freedman and Combs, \textit{Narrative Therapy}, 113.
\end{tabular}
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9.1. Introduction

I infer from Thomas Kuhn’s work that building up a descriptive vocabulary is as much a part of the development of science as testing hypotheses. The Six Dimensions model is part of an even larger descriptive model that I am developing to explore the dynamics of human cooperation and personhood. Beyond what is normally thought of as the scope of science is the reflexive process of human self-creation. Our descriptive vocabularies about ourselves are a significant aspect of who we are. A rock will not become a tree if we call it a tree. But people have a tendency to grow into whatever their descriptive vocabularies emphasize. This makes the development of descriptive vocabularies a significant task, and especially so when the vocabularies are the background of teaching, as is the case in my situation.

Up to this point in this study I have focused primarily on describing conversations and have made only passing mention of the all-important contexts in which conversations take place. Following Pearce, et. al., I see moment-to-moment communication taking place inside a nested hierarchy of contexts. To illustrate this point I reproduced in chapter 4 a diagram from Pearce’s paper, which I repeat below for your convenience.

\[\text{Kuhn, Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 45.}\]
(with my amendments in italics).

![Diagram of the hierarchy of contexts in interpersonal communication.](image)

Figure 9.1. The hierarchy of contexts in interpersonal communication.²⁵²

In my flow-chart illustrations of the Six Dimensions model I tried to indicate these contexts by drawing multiple layers joined together by a dynamic loop, as shown in the drawing fragment below.

![Fragment of the Six Dimensions CONTEXTS flow chart.](image)

Figure 9.2. A fragment of the Six Dimensions CONTEXTS flow chart.

In this multiple-layered arrangement, which is repeated throughout the Six Dimensions model, I am trying to convey a host of nested interactions: that situations and projects provide the context for conversations and conversations provide the content of situations and projects; that relationships provide the context for situations and projects, and situations and projects provide the content of relationships, and so on. It is not within the scope of this study to document all the ways that content and context interact, or to explore the assertion implied in my drawings that similar dynamics appear to occur at various different scales of human cooperation.

However, I would like to present a brief overview of the relationship between the conversation and personhood layers, as a way of justifying my assertions that the Six Dimensions model, and most other forms of communication training as well, are models of both interpersonal communication and human development; In giving this overview of human development I will make reference to communication training in general rather than the Six Dimensions model, in order to highlight the way I see all types of communication training as also forms of developmental coaching.

### 9.2. The tasks of becoming a person

In earlier chapters of this study I have made reference at various points to my experience that coaching people in the development of new communication skills involves an encounter with all the processes that are at work in the unfolding of that particular person’s personality or sense of self. This leads naturally to the question of what is going on as someone “becomes a person,” which I prefer to express in a more active way as “what are the central tasks of becoming a person?” If Fritjof Capra\textsuperscript{253} and other systems theorists are correct in asserting that there really are no separate ‘parts’ in

\textsuperscript{253}Capra, *The Web of Life*, 37.
natural systems, it means to me that good communication training will necessarily have many aspects of developmental coaching.

“What are the central tasks of personhood?” is an enormous question. Fortunately, various thinkers have given it an enormous amount of thought. Unfortunately, it is difficult to be certain about these global assessments concerning personhood because there are many contending ideas in the field. Various scholars emphasize different tasks, and even entirely different frames of reference (biological drives, gender, family histories, genetic predispositions, and so on). Like language, personhood seems to be an essential part of being human, but also a quite variable part. (Perhaps this is because language and personhood are deeply intertwined. That is an idea I will explore as this chapter unfolds.)

In keeping with my preference for active agency, in choosing scholars to rely on I have selected theorists who see people as actively constructing their personhood, rather than simply expressing genetic, cultural or familial influences. My search for an active vocabulary of development that blends well with communication training has prompted me to pass over the work of Erik Erikson254 in favor of other theorists. It is not clear to me that there is any one best view of human development, and it is very difficult to evaluate the competing truth claims of various developmental theories. What is clear to me is that Erikson’s view is largely a third-person view of how people develop. And as I have argued in the earlier chapters of this study, to engage people in direct self-development activities appears to me to require more of a first-person view. (Although I am a great admirer of Carl Jung, I have similar concerns about the difficulty of translating Jung’s ideas about human development into action.) In this chapter I will present a brief summary of what I consider to be the most inspiring and energizing

answers about the tasks of personhood in Western cultures, understood as the five polarities shown below. And I will attempt to show how each of these developmental tasks is worked on in our conversations with one another and with ourselves.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A TEN-FOLD INTERPRETATION OF THE TASKS OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Learning to assert oneself and also to commune with others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Learning to observe one’s own thoughts, feelings and actions and to express one’s experience in symbols (words, images, etc.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Learning to build a picture or concept of one’s self and the world in which one lives and also to stay open to new experiences of both.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Learning to make long-term efforts and commitments and also to play and to improvise creatively in the present.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Learning to accept both joy and sorrow as part of life.</td>
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Figure 9.3. A ten-fold interpretation of the tasks of human development

9.3. Pairs of complements

In trying to reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable opposites of electrons behaving like particles under some circumstances and like waves under others, the Danish physicist and philosopher Niels Bohr suggested that, while the opposite of an ordinary truth is a falsehood, the opposite of a great truth is often another great truth. This complementarity, which Bohr later recognized was at the heart of Chinese philosophy, appears to me to be at work in our unfolding as persons (although I am not drawing on

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Chinese philosophy to support my proposals. In my reading of the literature on human development, the challenges of becoming a person appear to come in complementary pairs. In the pages that follow I will describe each pair. In keeping with the idea of natural systems, I present each of these pairs as interacting with all the others.

9.4. Learning to assert oneself and also to commune with others.

Both Robert Kegan and the Object Relationists agree that an essential part of human development concerns balancing and integrating the drive to assert one’s autonomy, integrity and uniqueness of experience, on the one hand, with the need for communion, nurturing and connectedness on the other. This pair appears to me to be a current reworking and extension of Freud’s emphasis on the capacity for work(assertion) and love(communion) as the two measures of mental health. The deeper side of asserting one’s integrity, from a Rogerian perspective, has to do with trusting one’s own feelings and gradually developing and internal sense of rightness (rather than relying on the approval of others to guide one’s actions).256

Both the need to assert oneself and the need to commune with others are expressed, practiced and fulfilled (well or poorly) in and through conversations (one example of the way that communication training is developmental coaching). Rom Harré suggests that we assert our existence as a person among persons by learning to use the pronouns of our native language, “I,” “me,” “you,” “him/her,” etc. What is significant to me is that as we learn these pronouns we start to create mini-stories called “sentences.”

The workbook examples I presented in chapter 3 emphasized fully expressing one’s experience in complex five-part sentences. These sentences are equally useful as

256Rogers, On Becoming a Person, 118-119.
templates for active listening and empathizing with others.\textsuperscript{257} I repeat a part of that example below to illustrate how providing a person with a vocabulary of self-expression can facilitate both asserting and communing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceiving</th>
<th>Emoting</th>
<th>Thinking</th>
<th>Wanting</th>
<th>Envisioning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. When I saw/heard...</td>
<td>2. I felt...</td>
<td>3. because I... (need, want, interpret, associate, etc.)</td>
<td>4. and now I want/ then I wanted...</td>
<td>5. so that/ in order to...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMPATHIZING: (After a long disclosure by the speaker.)</td>
<td>...you felt really upset...</td>
<td>...because it reminded you of the people you loved in your family who died in the war...</td>
<td>...and you wish they would have put up a notice or something, warning people how strong the pictures were</td>
<td>...so that you could have kind of mentally prepared yourself, or maybe decided not to see them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASSERTING: When I read William Styron’s novel Sophie’s Choice...</td>
<td>...I felt totally outraged...</td>
<td>...because it seemed to me that Styron was just using the pain of the holocaust victims as a dramatic hook to get us to read his pot-boiler sex novel...</td>
<td>...and I want writers to focus on examples of successful resistance to domination and degradation...</td>
<td>...so that we can all find the courage to resist all the various dominations and degradations that we face in our lives.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 9.4 Five-part empathizing and asserting.

9.5. To learn to observe one’s own thoughts, feelings and actions \textbf{and} to learn to express one’s experience in symbols (words, images, etc.).

This pair is not as strongly oppositional as the others in this chapter, but it does contain an inner experience/outer expression polarity. In relation to the first pair of tasks, it is interesting to note that both empathizing with others and asserting oneself involve \textbf{symbolic self-expression} in language. And both empathizing with others and asserting

\textsuperscript{257}I am indebted for this idea to Dr. Marshall Rosenberg, who uses it as the basis of his communication training workshops. The five-part forms of self-expression and empathizing are adapted from his work. (See Rosenberg, \textit{Nonviolent Communication}.)
oneself involve **self-awareness**: directly in the case of self-assertion and indirectly in the case of empathizing. (We use our own experience as a basis for empathizing. If we are out of touch with our own emotions, for example, we will have a difficult time feeling other people’s emotions.)

As I have discussed at length in previous chapters, the developmental theorist Robert Kegan has proposed that an increasing capacity for self-observation is at the core of human development. Beginning as babies, when we gradually bring our bodily sensations and impulses into focus, we progress along a lifetime curriculum of increasing self-awareness. Over a period of decades we become more able to observe our emotions, thoughts, roles and relationships, and networks of relationships. One of Kegan’s most interesting ideas is that our sense of self shifts several times in the course of a lifetime because it is focused on the part of ourselves that we are in the process of discovering. To me, the most powerful implication of Kegan’s work is that we can’t steer what we can’t observe, or, stated in more positive language, that getting better at observing one’s thoughts, feelings and actions is a fundamental prerequisite for guiding those processes in fulfilling directions.

What I would add to Kegan’s point of view (I think he would probably agree) is that our discovery of our own psychological processes is mediated by the richness or poverty of our cultural vocabularies of experience, and by the kinds of exploratory conversations that we are supported to participate in.

Both Scheff and Kegan attribute profound significance to our learning how to be participant-observers, learning how to get engaged enough in living to be moved by life and learning how to stand back just far enough to make sense out of what is happening and release the emotions that our engagement with life evokes. Since both our
participation in all the dramas of life and our observation of our participation are mediated, in my view, by conversation skills and descriptive vocabularies, the distinction between participation and observation may be a bit overdrawn. The participant-observer stance may be the by-product of a rich vocabulary of experience.

For Carl Rogers, it is in the accurate, genuine expression of our experience in symbolic forms (words, images, music, dance, etc.) that we actually discover our experience and ourselves. According to Rogers, the main psychological problem in life is that, in search of approval from others, we start to say (symbolize) whatever we imagine other people want to hear. Our symbolizing thus gets disconnected from our actual “organismic” experiencing, leading us to become estranged from ourselves. The road toward full-humanness is therefore a path of authentic and expressive symbolization, a willingness to say out loud what one has actually been thinking and feeling. This often starts in psychotherapy, where clients learn to consciously articulate (the better to negotiate) the gaps between their own needs and feelings and the needs and feelings of the important people in their lives. I am reminded here of a lyric from a Black Pride song of the 1960s: “Gonna say it out loud! I’m Black and I’m proud!” For Rogers, the “say it out loud” part is essential.

From my point of view, Rogers’ ideas about symbolization add a crucial element to Kegan’s overall scenario of human unfolding. The naming of our thoughts and feeling helps us to bring them into focus. Thus, what gets classified as psychopathology may actually be a matter of linguistic and cultural impoverishment: the lack of a rich symbol set and the lack of encouragement for self-expression. From this perspective, communication training is a kind of inadvertent developmental coaching.

Communication trainers generally try to get people to pay attention to their thoughts and feelings, helping them to become more aware of their experiences. This increased awareness can lead to a greater sense of autonomy and self-determination, as individuals learn to express their thoughts and feelings more authentically. Rogers, On Becoming a Person, 108.
feelings, in order to help people communicate those thoughts and feelings more successfully to others. I do not know how often it occurs to communication trainers that learning to pay attention to one’s own thoughts and feelings is the central task of adult development! Thus, vocabularies of self-expression are also powerful vocabularies of self-discovery.

9.6. Learning to build a picture or concept of yourself and the world in which you live and also to stay open to new experiences of both.

The question of what is important in human development calls to mind the story of the blind men and the elephant. But in this case, it is not that the men are blind, it is that the elephant is so much larger than any one set of eyes can see. So each reports on the parts he can bring into view. While the idea that we have a picture of life and ourselves is as old as philosophy, this was a facet of human experience that went out of focus for American psychology for the half century between the First World War and the 1960s. George Kelly was one of the key renewers of the idea that something important happens in people between the stimulus and the response. In order to survive, Kelly argued from the 1950s onward, we need to exert some control over our environment and anticipate the course of events (predict what is going to happen). We are all scientists, therefore, trying to figure out the regularities in the world around us and trying to understand which actions will reliably bring what results. Kelly’s biologically-oriented view of our knowledge gathering “...emphasizes the creative capacity of the living thing to represent the environment, not merely to respond to it. Because he[sic] can represent his environment, he can place alternative constructions upon it, and indeed do something about it if it does not suit him. To the living creature, then, the universe is real, but it is
not inexorable unless he chooses to construe it that way.”\textsuperscript{259} (author’s italics) Kelly’s view expressed the emerging vision of cognitive psychology and the biology of cognition. It is now commonplace to read discussions of the way that people make models of their worlds, and operate in accordance with those models (and not necessarily in accordance with the actual worlds). Bandler and Grinder\textsuperscript{260} frame this as the central problem of psychotherapy, that a person’s map has drifted away from a close structural resemblance to the territory of living. Carl Rogers\textsuperscript{261} sees the development of a more realistic and accepting self-concept as one of the central changes in person-centered psychotherapy. And the central dynamic in Piaget’s psychology of human development is the shifting back and forth between assimilation and accommodation. In assimilation, we use our existing ideas and thought forms (schemas) to make sense out of what we see. There are always some things that we cannot quite make sense out of with our existing ideas, images and stories. If we move successfully along the curriculum of life, these exceptions eventually provoke us to develop a more inclusive idea or story (accommodation), one that gives meaning to the previously unexplained anomalies. Life is a series of plateaus and revolutions. (For both Piaget and Kuhn, it is important to remember that the revolutions depend upon and grow out of the plateaus. The imperfections of our maps and stories stimulate us to create more inclusive, more subtle maps. Kuhn\textsuperscript{262} called this “the essential [creative] tension” in science and Kegan would like to persuade us that this is the essential tension in human development as well. This add considerable depth to Kelly’s idea of the person-as-scientist.)

To build an accurate map of oneself and one’s world appears to be one of the

\textsuperscript{259}Kelly, A Theory of Personality, 8.
\textsuperscript{260}Bandler and Grinder, Structure of Magic, 14.
\textsuperscript{261}Rogers, On Becoming a Person, 167.
central tasks of becoming a person. Berger and Luckmann\textsuperscript{263} explain our need for such maps of self and world by appealing to evolutionary biology. We are the least programmed and the most adaptable of all species. Our adaptability allows us to live anywhere, but it means that we are born without a ready-made set of responses to any particular environment. Thus we are doomed or fated to have to create a picture of our world, and we construct these models of life with language, through stories and in conversation. As Peter Berger puts it in \textit{The Sacred Canopy}, “The subjective reality of the world hangs on the thin thread of conversation. The reason why most of us are unaware of this precariousness most of the time is grounded in the continuity of our conversation with significant others.”\textsuperscript{264} The sharing of experiences, which is at the heart of both conversation and psychotherapy, has an underlying dynamic of looking for reliable themes, recurring patterns of intelligibility, in the flow of events and actions. And, looking for ways that the events and actions of our lives could be reconceptualized in the light of a new and more meaningful theme.\textsuperscript{265}

The contrasting pull in this pair of developmental imperatives is our need to stay open to new experiences, to not become imprisoned in our maps and models. All modeling is based on leaving many things out of the picture. Thus, our models of both ourselves and of the world represent what was important to us at a given moment in our life journey. But since we change and the world around us changes, even the most carefully constructed model of life is bound to become progressively more and more unrepresentative of our actual situation. (Perhaps that is why people read one novel after

\textsuperscript{263}Berger and Luckmann, \textit{Social Construction of Reality}, 47.


\textsuperscript{265}This is the central idea of narrative therapy. See Freedman and Combs, \textit{Narrative Therapy}, and Epston and White, \textit{Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends}. An earlier example of this approach, from the 1950s and 1960s, is to be found in Viktor Frankl’s “logotherapy.” See Viktor Frankl, \textit{The Doctor and the Soul: From Psychotherapy to Logotherapy}, 2nd ed. (New York: Bantam, 1967).
another. I think that reading a new story helps us to tell a new story about our lives.)

This imperative to stay open to new experiences is expressed by many twentieth
century psychologists and thinkers. And all who discuss it describe it as a struggle.
Piaget describe our struggle to revise our schemas in the light of the exceptions that will
not go away. Kuhn speaks of paradigm shifts. Rogers sees one of the consequences of
successful person-centered therapy is that the client becomes more comfortable with
“being a process,” with changing from day to day and with not being able to predict what
is going to happen next. As Viktor Frankl remarks, “we cannot really live with
Baedekers [guide books] in our hands; if we did so we would overlook all chances in life
that come only once; we would skirt our destiny...”266

Life appears to present us with a complex task: we both need to make sense out
of life with ideas, stories and generalizations, and we also need to continually see beyond
them and revise them. This “seeing beyond” our concepts and getting/staying in touch
with the ever-changing flow of life is a major theme in Zen, Sufism, General Semantics,
Gestalt therapy and the philosophical works of Jiddu Krishnamurti. (While all these
schools of thought advocate seeing beyond one’s fixed ideas, I do not believe that any
would agree with my proposal that we need to both have and see beyond our stories and
schemas.)

Just as our story-making and model-building unfold in language and conversation,
our “seeing beyond” unfolds in conversation also. Therapy is about giving voice to what
has been left out of one’s established life narrative. Zen and Sufi stories, which
originally were told in person by spiritual teachers, attempt to jolt us out of our
conceptual ruts with surprise and paradox. General Semantics and Gestalt therapy
attempt to deconstruct our established generalizations by confronting us with

266Frankl, The Doctor and the Soul, 48.
contradictory counter-instances or encouraging us to adopt the perspective of the other.
The new narrative therapy uses probing, provocative questions to help clients see their
life experiences from new vantage points.

Communication training includes elements of both story-making and story-
deconstruction. We formulate our pictures of life and ourselves in conversation and we
change and “see beyond” our pictures in other conversations. Thus, to assist a person in
developing new styles of conversing is to invite that person to start telling the story of
their life experiences in new ways. I gave examples in chapter 8 of some of new
vocabularies of description that I offer my students. I invite them to try using a
vocabulary of action (“Please shut the door gently.”) rather than a vocabulary of quasi-
substances (“I want some respect!”). I invite them to use a vocabulary of learning (“I am
learning to speak in front of groups more confidently.”) rather than a vocabulary of
illness (“I have a phobia about public speaking.”) And so on. The quality of our
communication skills has a direct influence on the way we make models of living and on
the way we try to stay open to new experience, thus, again, communication training is a
kind of developmental coaching. And it unfolds on several levels. To make explicit
what has previously been tacit in a person’s communication style is to challenge that
person to start over, to see their encounters with others through fresh eyes, to consciously
choose a way of speaking and listening rather than following previously learned patterns.
All of which constitute a meta-story and meta-conversation about openness. We change
our conversations through meta-conversations! Communication training seems to me to
include both introducing people to new tools, new stories, new forms of conversation,
and also about asking people to pay attention and learn to improvise more creatively.
9.7. **Learning to make long-term efforts and commitments and also to play and to improvise creatively in the present.**

So much of what is important in life unfolds over long periods of time. Growing food involves planning months and years ahead of time, and long periods of effort that bring no immediate gratification. Raising children involves decades of love and attention. Learning significant skills in both traditional and modern societies involves years of effort. Whether one wishes to be a shaman, skilled craftsperson, doctor, basketball player or violinist, ten years of effort is involved. In chapter 4 I included a quote from Gordon W. Allport which is also relevant here: “The possession of long-range goals, regarded a central to one’s personal existence, distinguishes the human being from the animal, the adult from the child, and in many cases the healthy personality from the sick.”267 The “love and work” which form the measure of healthy development in Freudian psychology268 both involve long-term commitments and resilience in the face of frustration and disappointment. (They both involve a capacity to delight in the present moment, also.) We live in the eternal now. How is it that we live in the present and yet manage to act into the future?

I recognize that in asking this question I am entering (yet again) into an area which is deeply “interpretive.” In spite of the fact that there is little certainty about this issue, there are certainly some very interesting intuitions, interpretive leaps and hunches. Here are the best that I have been able to put together.

1. We use our experiences of the past to project story lines into the future.

2. We experience the promises of others and we learn to make and fulfill promises.

3. We have small experiences of effort followed by reward that allow us to

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imagine that a large amount of effort will be followed by a large reward.

4. We experience the pleasure of effort and mastery in learning to walk, run, swim, bike, skate, etc.

5. We experience ourselves as the objects of continued caring, and thus we learn to devote ourselves to the well-being of other people. As Greenspan describes the process, “Whereas initially a child feels joy, warmth and security passively in herself being loved and cared for, she is soon able to extend these feelings to a beloved caregiver and, gradually, to others in her family, then teachers and peers.”

6. We turn working into an art form, that is, we learn to transform merely instrumental actions into ends in themselves, getting satisfaction out of doing well tasks which do not appear to be inherently satisfying or meaningful. This appears to me to be a creative extension into adult life of our early experiences of mastery in learning to walk and talk, etc.

It is interesting to note, in this regard, Viktor Frankl’s idea that we can tolerate any “how” as long as we have a “why.” By this he means that a great purpose will allow us to tolerate almost any amount of difficulty. This portrays the process as largely cognitive. But there is also a more active side to it. Activities become meaningful partly by virtue of the effort we invest in them. There is no particular external purpose, for example, in getting a little white ball to roll across a lawn and into a little hole in the ground. Or in climbing Mt. Everest. We make these activities meaningful by virtue of the large amounts of effort we put into them, which is a tribute to human inventiveness.

There are elements of conversation in all of this. The young child’s experience of being loved appears to be carried as memories of conversations with her/his caregiver,

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which are repeated in two-sided soliloquies when the child is alone. And Seligman has documented the way our resilience in the face of disappointment depends upon the kind of explanatory conversations we have (primarily with ourselves, although these could be interpersonal conversations as well). What is most significant for me is the way that we bring the future into the present through conversation. Two of the key elements in communication and negotiation training are to get people to clarify what they want and to help people learn to ask for it through new forms of conversation called “assertiveness” or “negotiation.” Although that might not seem to have much developmental significance at first glance, I see in these communication teaching routines a continual practice in imagining a future state of satisfaction and expressing that future state of satisfaction in present conversations. Many of the conversational moves explained by the speech act theorists, such as offering, promising, accepting, committing, etc., serve this function of imaginatively bringing a future into the present.

The complement to our need to make long term commitments is our need to enter more fully into the present moment. In one sense, the present is all we have and if we are not creatively alive in the present, we are not very alive, period.

In Playing and Reality, Donald W. Winnicott, one of the principal architects of the “object relations” point of view, traces the origins of human creativity to the rhythms of infant experience. As the baby comes to realize that mommy is a separate person, mommy’s times away from the baby become more and more upsetting. The toddler fights back feelings of abandonment by remembering mommy, by acts of active imagination. The toddler gradually becomes capable of investing a favorite blanket or doll with mommy’s comforting presence. Winnicott

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271 Donald W. Winnicott, Playing and Reality (New York: Tavistock/Methuen, 1982).
calls these “transitional objects” because they exist in a zone where imagination and reality overlap. All object relationist theorists view the actively remembered mommy as the core (the “internal object”) around which the young child elaborates a sense of self (the “relation”). The unfolding of a sense of self is our first creative endeavor, so we are all artists from the moment we begin life. And Winnicott sees ongoing creative and imaginative activity as the leaven of every life. Healthy persons continue all through life to creatively invest people and objects in their world with emotional significance, drawing on their earliest experiences. And we make new creations of art, story, music and craft, the entire function of which is to celebrate our power to make new emotional meaning where before there was none (an empty canvas, a quiet room before the music starts). “Tell me a story!” the young child says, ready to get stirred up and enchanted about people and creatures who never were. Why should anyone get stirred up, a realist might ask, about people and creatures who never were? Because, Winnicott might answer, emotional meaning is not something that we get out of objects, it is something we learn to give to them, with a lifetime of practice. That practice is called “play” and that process of giving is as much a part of nature as the rocks and trees. Without it, human life is flat. As Winnicott put it,

It is creative apperception more than anything else that makes the individual feel that life is worth living. Contrasted with this is a relationship to external reality which is one of compliance, the world and its details being recognized but only as something to be fitted in with or demanding adaptation. Compliance carries with it a sense of futility for the individual and is associated with the idea that nothing matters and that life is not worth living. In a tantalizing way many individuals have experienced just enough of creative living to recognize that for most of their time they are living uncreatively, as if caught up in the creativity of someone else, or of a machine.272 (my italics)

272Winnicott, Playing and Reality, 65.
With regard to conversation, in telling one another the stories of our daily experiences we creatively turn life (mostly random events) into art (meaningful narratives). And in listening to one another’s stories, we each become the primordial “comforting and accepting other” of early childhood, a “thou” in the context of whose presence it becomes possible to be an “I.”

Although we need to plan for the future and make long-term efforts in order to survive and to unfold our abilities, every virtue in life can be overdone. In modern societies the rewards for being future-oriented are so large that many people are tempted to abandon the present altogether, that is to say, to become so obsessed with future-oriented activities that they are too preoccupied to enjoy and cultivate nurturing day-to-day interaction with others. A future orientation can also be a way of actively blotting out one’s awareness of troubling feelings and situations. Unfortunately, such bulwarks against one’s troubles continually have to be repaired and rebuilt, leading to a life in which there is never a sense of rest.

Just as eating and breathing are present time activities that cannot be put off to some future year, many human virtues, such as awareness, compassion, a sense of beauty and the healthy expression of feeling, unfold entirely in and through the present moment. Art, meditation, sports and psychotherapy are important ways in which people who have learned to “delay gratification” struggle to re-enter the moving present moment of their lives. (Although each of these can also be turned into a future-oriented project.) And to that list I would add the open-ended conversations of friendship. Friendship is based on the present experience of liking another person, and, ideally, serves no goals beyond itself.\(^{273}\) I have grown to believe that friends are people who want to hear the stories of

\(^{273}\text{William K. Rawlins, } Friendship Matters (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1992), 18.\)
one another’s lives, and who like the underlying patterns of meaning-making they find in
their friends’ story-telling. In encouraging people to express their experience more
completely and listen more appreciatively, communication trainers are also coaching
their students to become better friends and to enter more fully into the present.

9.8. Learning to accept and express both joy and sorrow.

This is the last and I think the most difficult to explain of my five pairs of
proposed developmental imperatives. Of the two feelings, my impression is that sorrow
has been better understood than joy, so I will start with it.

The clearest statement I have been able to find concerning the role of sorrow in
life is Judith Viorst’s *Necessary Losses*,\(^{274}\) the result of her six years of study at the
Washington Psychoanalytic Society. I will introduce her ideas with a preface from my
own thoughts about sorrow.

I have a strong feeling that there is at work in everyday life (at least in my world
of middle-class America) a deep misconception about suffering and sorrow, which is that
since we suffer when we make mistakes, all suffering must be the result of some mistake
that we have made. And therefore if we could just perfect our technique of living and
stop making mistakes we would not have to suffer. I believe that it is this misconception
that causes people to hide their suffering from one another, because to acknowledge
one’s suffering is implicitly to confess that one has sinned or erred some way or other.

An alternative misunderstanding of suffering, one associated with what mental health
professionals now call “character disorders,” is that all suffering in life is caused by
someone else’s hostile actions toward us.

As it happens, life is much more complex than that. Although we do make

mistakes and cause ourselves to suffer, and although other people occasionally do try to make our lives difficult, there is also a large amount of what be called healthy or existential suffering built into life. Our loved ones do not get old and die because of some terrible blunder we have made. They get old and die because that is the way life works on Planet Earth. As Rollo May points out in *Love and Will*, Americans have concentrated so hard on changing the things that we can change, that we have lost a sense of noble acceptance concerning the things that we cannot change. The premier symbol for this unbalanced attitude is Captain Ahab in the novel, *Moby Dick*, who must destroy the whale, which represents all that Captain Ahab cannot control.

Judith Viorst introduces her readers to an even deeper complexity: that we are bound to suffer in life many times when we are doing just the right thing! Which is to say that every great developmental step forward in life involves relinquishing the comforts of the previous step, and these are real losses. Learning to eat means you mother does not feed you any more. Learning to walk means that your parents do not carry you as much any more (and, of course, eventually you weigh so much that your parents never carry you again). This pattern of “necessary losses” begins in infancy and follows us all through life, according to Viorst, providing some periods of terrible ambivalence along the way.

For example, the very young child experiences an intense conflict between wanting to stay fused with mommy and wanting to exercise newly developing skills of walking, running and exploring the world. This generates the “terrible two’s” during which the toddler engages in a lot of help me/don’t help me behaviors. This happens again during the teen years when young people both want to be sheltered from the demands of the adult world and also want to participate in the adult world. Most young

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people eventually opt for independence and responsibility, but it is not a choice without its costs. Starting life on one’s own is often the most difficult task the young person has ever undertaken. The stresses involved in creating a new, independent identity make people more vulnerable to episodes of schizophrenia during the years just after leaving home than at any other time in life.276

Continuing through the life-cycle, Viorst discusses the way that establishing a family of one’s own means redrawing the lines of familial loyalties and letting go of the relationship one once had with one’s parents. After having readjusted one’s loyalties in order to raise children, each parent has the experience of being very important in the lives of their children and then not being so important any more, and that is if everything goes well! In our mid-life years, when most of our parents die, we lose our illusions of immortality, but this loss opens the way for a deeper encounter with the mystery, beauty and terror of being human, opens the way to a deeper integrity.277

Thus, at every stage along life’s way an important part of being a person is to accept and experience what might be called the natural sorrows of being human. What is called for here is an attitude of deep compassion and acceptance, for one’s own suffering and for every one else’s. Buddhists stress the idea of “no blame.” Since we are all in same boat, one can grieve and weep without shame. How different this is from tough-guy prescriptions of masculinity. Unfortunately, tough guys can end up being very troubled people. For example, in the years since the Vietnam war ended, the number of veterans who have committed suicide has exceeded the number of soldiers who were killed in combat in Vietnam. Both Thomas Scheff and Carl Rogers would counsel us that

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277 Yalom devotes four chapters to the way people cope or fail to cope with the reality of death, a major theme in existential psychology. See Yalom, Irvin D., Existential Psychotherapy. (New York: Basic Books, 1980) chaps. 2-5.
our inevitable, periodic feelings of grief need to be acknowledged and expressed. The attempt to hold them back (and to maintain a facade of invulnerability) paradoxically puts us in the position of holding on to them, so that we cannot open ourselves to new experiences.

Turning once again to the role of communication and conversation in the unfolding of our personhood, it is in giving voice to our sorrows that we work through them. Rogers sees this happening because putting our feelings into words allows the feelings to come into awareness. Scheff sees this happening because putting our feelings into words allows us to adopt the slightly distanced participant-observer stance that facilitates emotional discharge. I see the crucial factor as being the real or imagined “accepting other” who, by affirming the inherent goodness of the sufferer, relieves the sufferer of the burden of shame associated with suffering. All these dynamics are probably at work. To the degree that communication training includes helping people get in touch with their feelings, such training touches on this lifelong developmental issue. First, by helping people express their own feelings in more satisfying and perhaps more diplomatic ways (note the recurring themes of asserting and communing). And second, by helping people to feel safe with emotions so that they will be more able to be a compassionate and reassuring witness to the emotional expression of others.

The contrasting imperative to opening oneself to the sorrows of life, is to open oneself to the joys of life. Joy, it appears to me, is even more complex than sorrow; and there are not nearly as many books about it.

Joy and sorrow appear to me to be deeply intertwined in that, along the lines of the above discussion, if people numb themselves to avoid the inevitable sorrows of life, they will probably not be able to feel any of the joys, either. So, paradoxically, facing
one’s sorrows might actually be the first step toward a more joyous life. In the following few pages I will explore some of the possible contexts in which we might understand the place of joy in a fully human life.

Although the American Declaration of Independence affirms each person’s right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, it is not clear that one can actually pursue happiness in a direct way. In a filmed lecture that I watched a few years ago, Viktor Frankl rather apologetically and diplomatically explained to his audience that the Declaration of Independence was simply wrong about the happiness part. Happiness, he insisted, came out of meaningfulness. To be happy, he advised, we needed to give ourselves to a worthy project and pour our effort into it. This project could be a great love, a crusade to save the world or any large project that moved us deeply. What was important was that we reach beyond ourselves to something larger.

Biologically, feelings of exalted satisfaction seem to be related to the successful exertion of effort, having both physical, cognitive and contextual components. For example, experienced long distance runners report entering into such states of exalted satisfaction after they have been running for several hours. But prisoners forced to run for long periods of time on threat of death would probably not experience such states.

Studies of manic-depressive disorder suggest that a continuous flood of intense good feelings, unrelated to any life activities, can be disorienting. Attempts to create instant good feelings with drugs are a well-documented disaster in the USA. (But there are many factors at work in this issue since many people who are drawn to use drugs may already have lives full of problems. The use of plant intoxicants in traditional cultures of the Andes and the Amazon is usually not accompanied by social breakdowns.)

Our words for joy vary according to the time frame in which the feelings of

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278See Maxmen, *Essential Psychopathology*, chap. 11, for a discussion of affective disorders.
elation unfold. Thus we usually speak of pleasure and delight to indicate feelings that emerge quickly, whereas joy, well-being and fulfillment can refer both to momentary feelings and to positive feelings that unfold over months or years.

Humanistic psychologists such as Carl Rogers,279 Abraham Maslow,280 and William Schutz281 assert very strongly that human beings have an inborn need to grow toward a full-humanness that includes creativity, awareness, genuineness and emotional aliveness, among other qualities. Our feelings of fulfillment, in this view, will reflect the degree to which we have guided our lives in those directions. Rogers and Maslow are thus similar to Frankl in that they view joy as a kind of sublime byproduct, in their case, of our effort to cultivate deeply human qualities of character. Schutz sees joy emerging in our lives at three different levels. First, at the *bodily level*, through health, exercise and the experience of vitality. Second, at the *interpersonal level*, through a capacity to include others in our lives, a capacity to influence and be influenced by others, and a capacity for affection. And third, at the *social and organizational level*, through changing the dynamics of families, schools and workplaces to be more supportive of full human development.282

There appears to be a consensus among thoughtful writers on the topic that joy is like the fruit of a complex tree. In the short run we cannot produce this fruit by acts of will, just as there is nothing we can do a particular twig on an apple tree to force it to instantly produce an apple. But there are many things we can do to nurture the entire tree. The things we can do appear to me to cluster around the themes of love, work,

282None of the feelings described in this paragraph fare well in the exploitive and highly competitive atmosphere of market economies, and none of the authors deals well with the psychological utopianism implicit in their positions. I believe that this is a conflict worth understanding, but an examination of this issue is beyond the scope of the present study.
creativity, sense of beauty and sense of gratitude. Human happiness appears to be strongly context-bound. We become happy in the context of loving and being loved (which includes understanding others and being understood by others). We become happy in the context of competence and success in work, in the context of imaginative and creative play and meaning-making activity, in the context of cultivating the experience of beauty in art and nature, and in the context of cultivating a deeper sense of gratitude for the miracles of everyday life. Maslow wrote somewhere that the greatest miracle in life is that the Sun comes up in the morning.

The closest we may get to the direct cultivation of joy concerns our basic stance toward experience. In the face of loss, sorrow and uncertainty, it is possible to give up on the process of giving ourselves to life. We can adopt a stance of “If I never love or trust anyone again, I will never be abandoned or disappointed.” The social and cultural aspects of such withdrawal from full engagement with life and community are the theme of Cristopher Lasch’s The Minimal Self.\(^\text{283}\) Lasch argues that the continually impending disasters of modern life cause people to gradually relinquish their ties to their communities and families. “Under siege, the self contracts to a defensive core, armed against adversity.”\(^\text{284}\)

But there is an alternative to this attitude. Part of the wisdom of middle age, catalyzed most often by the death of one’s parents and one’s children leaving home, can be that people are worth loving in spite of the fact that they get old and die, in spite of the fact that they leave us. Rather than setting our standards of personal entitlement so high that life always disappoints us, we can reorganize our expectations so that life delights us more often. That appears to me to be the central dynamic at work in the practice of


\(^{284}\)Ibid., 15.
gratitude. Through meditation, prayer, relaxation and other forms of temporarily letting go of our needs, concerns, mental models and preoccupations, we can come to experience more of everyday life (the Sun, the sky, the sound of children playing down the street) as a gift.\footnote{For a discussion of this attitude see David Steindl-Rast, Gratefulness, The Heart of Prayer: An Approach to Life in Fullness (New York: Paulist Press, 1984).}

In conclusion, there is a mountain of evidence that we need to face our sorrows more productively, that we need to grieve the inevitable wounds and losses of life more consciously and thus more satisfyingly. So my suggestion that opening oneself to sorrow is an important part of human development appears to be on solid ground. My assertion of the complementary imperative, that we need also to open ourselves to the experience of joy in order to become fully human, is much more problematic. Human history is proof that people do not need to be happy, or fully-developed, in order to survive. And happiness appears to be not an activity or experience in itself but rather mostly a byproduct of more fundamental activities and experiences in a person’s life, such as loving, meaning-making and the full realization of one’s potential. As Brammer notes, “happiness as a goal in itself is very elusive.”\footnote{Brammer, The Helping Relationship, 12.} Yet we know that we have the capacity to experience joy and I think we intuit correctly that a life not touched by joy is a life only half lived. In the face of all this mixed evidence, how can I defend my proposed developmental imperative to open oneself to joy?

I believe that one answer to this is that the two sides of the joy and sorrow polarity cannot really be separated from one another. Although, for the sake of argument, I have tried to discuss and justify them one at a time,\footnote{In this particular argument the idea of “both A and B” does not break down to “A taken separately” and “B taken separately.”} speaking first of sorrow and then of joy, what I have in fact been arguing for is that we open ourselves to the full range of

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\item[286] Brammer, The Helping Relationship, 12.
\item[287] In this particular argument the idea of “both A and B” does not break down to “A taken separately” and “B taken separately.”
\end{itemize}
our own feelings, which, if we are fully engaged with life, will always include a complex mix of both joy and sorrow, elation and frustration. The Zen philosopher Alan Watts spoke frequently on this topic of inseparable polarities, gently reminding his audiences that to want joy without sorrow was like wanting the existence of “up” without “down” or the existence of “hot” without “cold.” If we want to have good feelings, we will probably have to open ourselves to all of our feelings, however long a journey that may be.

A final argument in support of an imperative to open ourselves to joy is that we have, even in very painful circumstances, some creative freedom in how we respond to life. (This is the central theme of Viktor Frankl’s work.) Because we can have some influence over how we respond to life, one measure of a fully human life is how successfully a person manages to choose/create gratitude rather than resentment and hope rather than despair.

So my study ends on the themes of “whole systems” and “interconnectedness” with which it began. Our feelings are probably as complex and interwoven as the world in which we live and all our hopes about and pictures of that world, since our feelings express our unique encounters with that world. Returning to my theme of the unfolding persons in interpersonal communication, it is in the telling of our feelings of both joy and sorrow to an accepting listener that we bring them more fully into awareness, that they become more completely our feelings. Thus, to help people learn how to put their experiences into words, how to share them with others, and now to receive the sharings of others, is to help them weave the web of life. I believe that it is in the telling of our life stories to one another, largely in and through conversations, that we come to realize

that we actually have lives about which to tell stories. And finally, to understand another person and to be understood, both processes that unfold in and through conversation, are a large part of loving and being loved.
When a person arrives in a communication class seeking to learn new skills, they arrive as a complex whole person in which the psychological, social, linguistic, and developmental aspects are infinitely intertwined. But information about communication and about these facets is divided into many separate disciplines. Developing the Six Dimensions model has been my way of trying to integrate under a single conceptual umbrella many of these widely varying streams of information about interpersonal communication. I have used the three diagrams in the appendix to aid in this effort because such flow-chart-style diagrams allow an overview of a network of complex relationships, something that is very difficult to do in a straightforward narrative.

The significance of this sort of model is related to the reflexive nature of personhood and the adaptive open-endedness of human nature. So far as we know, we are the only beings in nature whose beingness is significantly determined by their picturing and understanding of their beingness. A description adds nothing to rock or a tree, whereas a life story is an important element of a fully human life. Historically, descriptions of human interaction have partly shaped what they were supposedly only to describe. (Social Darwinism is an example.) I accept the interactive, dialogical quality of our knowledge about ourselves as a higher order fact of life, like the certainty of uncertainty in human affairs.

In trying to assemble information about various aspects of human communication
into a coherent framework, I have been trying to develop a description of interpersonal cooperation that facilitates the practice of interpersonal cooperation. I was encouraged in doing this by the example Prof. Lawrence Brammer, an authority on the teaching of communication skills. Faced with the fact that there was no standard classification or grouping for the forty-seven communication skills he wanted to teach, he decided to group the skills into the categories that he thought would be most meaningful in helping people to learn them.\textsuperscript{289} In a similar way, I have tried to organize hundreds of aspects of interpersonal communication into a circle of six clusters as a way of highlighting possibilities for new cooperative action.

In developing the Six Dimensions model I have had both teaching motivations and intellectual motivations. I have described my teaching motivations in the preceding paragraphs and throughout this study. In addition to simply wanting to be a better teacher, in the course of reading the works of various psychologists I became convinced of a train of inferences about human development. This five-part train of inferences, which I presented at length in chapter 2 and repeat in summary form below, is my intellectual rationale for building the Six dimensions model.

(1) If the central direction of human development is, as asserted by Kegan, a growing awareness of one’s own functioning (thoughts, feelings, actions and interactions, then patterns of thoughts, feelings, actions and interaction, then meta-patterns, etc.), and

(2) if such an awareness of one’s own functioning is, as asserted by Rogers, created by symbolization (storying, modeling, imaging, naming), and

\textsuperscript{289}Brammer, \textit{Helping Relationship}, 22.
(3) if, therefore, our development as persons is limited by the richness or poverty of our culture’s models of personhood and self-awareness, then

(4) it is worthwhile to try to build a richly-elaborated, symbolic model of self-awareness, communicative action and personhood in order to support and encourage people to make the essential journey of full human development.

(5) And furthermore, if the purpose of post-modern theorizing and model-building is, as asserted by Gergen, to illuminate the possibility of new modes of action, then such symbolic models of self-awareness, communicative action and personhood should be envisioned from the first-person, active agent (“I’m doing this. How could I do it differently?”) perspective, and expressed in a vocabulary of healthy functioning and development.

The gist of this argument is summed up by my freshly-minted cybernetic maxim, “What you can’t observe, you can’t steer.” Guiding our interactions toward fulfillment and toward win-win solutions to problems requires a careful and compassionate observing of our interactions. And observing our interaction with others requires a rich descriptive vocabulary of what to look for. The Six Dimensions model is my effort to assemble such a vocabulary from a wide range of the best available research and thinking about interpersonal communication and human development.
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