



## Metatheorie der Veränderung

# Guiding Processes of Psychodynamics

### Psychodynamics

By psychodynamics (movement of the psyche) we understand the inner processes which give a person stability, identity, direction and control of his impulses, enabling competence building and social co-existence. These processes crystallise into patterns, which then make certain other processes more likely.

Through meta-theoretical analyses of numerous theories developed by psychology, we have identified eight guiding processes (always represented as blue circles in the rosettes). These guiding processes (how one understands movements of the psyche) are to be found in different terms, emphases and conceptualisations within many, but not all, psychological theories. From our point of view, this approach enables us to establish in theory why and how these counselling methods and procedures are effective for change. In this way, all different counselling methods and procedures can be integrated, and it becomes possible to demonstrate why they are helpful or even why they may possibly be dysfunctional or damaging. By psychodynamics we mean the process with which we work on emotional stability and change. This takes place by making continuous decisions according to eight guiding processes.

Perhaps the most important aspect of this meta-physical concept of change is that one does not have to 'make' the change, as, under normal circumstances, it simply happens by itself. If something undesirable remains, it will be stabilised. For this reason, we need to explore how the person himself, unconsciously or unintentionally, creates the inner situation under which he suffers. Counselling is responsible for stagnation, not for change! Those who release the brake, move forward by themselves.

### Guiding Process Personal Responsibility (action versus passivity)

Personal responsibility is one of the eight guiding processes of psychodynamics. The question to be decided is this: 'Do I exert influence (or not)?'

Each person permanently decides which paradigm he constructs. In truth, nothing has clear meaning. That which disconcerts one person aggravates another, that to which one person responds with rage, another takes with humour. Everyone is responsible for their thoughts, feelings, intentions, actions and omissions and makes their own decisions: - What meaning do I give to that which I have experienced? Do I try to influence the situation? Or do I feel defined by it and become a 'victim'?

To a large extent this process is built upon unconscious habits. To feel responsible for everything in equal measure would not be functional. The majority could also be different and the least of it can be changed (freely quoted from N. Luhmann). It is, therefore, a question of choosing where to act internally or externally,



## Metatheorie der Veränderung

when to allow oneself to be influenced, and where to experience oneself as affected by external factors without being churned up inside by them.

### **Action**

*I exercise personal responsibility in the form of action when I experience myself as the initiator of the respective situation: "I was able to do this!" (instead of "that went well"), "I want this!" (instead of "This must now be done!"), "I am making myself insecure!" (instead of "I am insecure!"). Thus, one experiences oneself as the initiator and therefore one has potential influence over a phenomenon. However, if one now experiences something where one does not (as yet) perceive oneself as the initiator, (i.e. "This is simply stupid!", instead of "I have decided to find this stupid, because it makes me fearful!"), then one will not be able to alter this experience either. One then believes things are simply so, (e.g., a personality trait or a feature of "the reality"). Our counsel insists that each person takes responsibility for their own actions, and this consists of deciding consciously where they allow themselves to be influenced or where they can have influence, rather than seeing themselves as or behaving like a victim, even though there may be options for action (which, however, may be connected with effort or fear).*

### **Passivity**

*I exercise personal responsibility when it is clear to me that conclusions about the world - i.e. about the conditions, other people or the company - are **my** conclusions about the world. Perceptions do not represent the real world, but, rather, they are attributions. Therefore, if I experience someone as obtrusive, ("He wants to take me for a ride!") and I make a value judgement about him ("I think he is outrageous!"), then it is my responsibility to recognise that it is my judgement about this behaviour (after all, maybe the other person considers himself to be interesting). Each of these aspects informs me not (only) about others, but also always about myself. Everyone is responsible for the way in which they feel affected. Other people cannot cause one's own feelings! One always decides for oneself (usually unconsciously), how one allows oneself to feel as one does. In counselling situations, it is thus always possible to work on the effect upon the client and in this way to help him acquire more self-responsibility by showing him that he has (unconscious) motives for seeing the world the way he does.*

## Guiding Process Self-Perception (concise versus diffuse)

Self-perception is one of the eight guiding processes of psycho-dynamics. The underlying decision can be found in the question: - **"How do I (don't I) feel?"**

That which people want to perceive in themselves determines what they can feel responsible for. Only where awareness exists can it be influenced and controlled. Nobody wants to, or ought to, feel everything. This would completely overburden a person and allow nothing to become concise. With regard to change, it is decisive how concise or diffuse a matter is perceived to be. Because only that which has already been perceived concisely can change.



## Metatheorie der Veränderung

A process of perception is concise if it can be verbally articulated, if it is associated with an effect, if it is permitted to be comprehensively experienced and visible to the outside. An experience is diffuse, if it lies in the background, pale, vague, unnamed or only referred to in general terms.

The (re)discovery of self-awareness is an essential aspect of counselling processes.

### **Concise**

*The distinction between concise and diffuse experience is of particular significance, as it maintains a shadowy existence within psychology and counselling. At the same time, however, it has great significance and effectiveness in enabling change during practical work.*

*Self-perception is concise when the perceived can be differentiated and described with one's own words (rather than with clichés), when it can be experienced comprehensively, physically, sensitively and emotionally, and when it can be clearly and perceptibly expressed in contact. Often people can speak easily about their fear, but they cannot show it. Or someone shows their sorrow, but as soon as they stand facing someone, their tears disappear. Most people need their counsellor's intensive support to make their experience come alive – particularly when dealing with repressed or rejected self-representation. On the part of the counsellor much practice and life experience is required, so that they can offer the client support with the necessary clarity and fearlessness, but also sensitivity and acceptance.*

### **Diffuse**

*Diffuse – as opposed to concise -becomes self-awareness when one or more of the following phenomena can be observed.*

- 1. Someone **evaluates** his experience. Very often it looks like this: "I am in good form, I am not well!" With this statement, there is no information given about what someone experiences or how they feel about it. However, many people appear to be satisfied with this.*
- 2. Someone describes how he feels, but, nevertheless, a **confused and inconsistent picture** emerges: "Well, I feel so despondent and unmotivated and I think I ought not to feel like this. And then I try hard to do something meaningful, but I have the feeling that no one sees that and anyhow, it's not worth it." In such a statement, different experiential states intermingle and thus, different self-representations also. Therefore, it is completely unclear what function the various different aspects of experience have.*
- 3. Although someone articulates his feelings, he **suppresses the bodily experience or the expression of the feeling** to a high degree or even totally, for example, by completely tensing up, hardly breathing, looking downwards, distracting with a displacement activity or whitewashing the experience.*



## Metatheorie der Veränderung

*Such diffuse states are expressions of stagnation and must be examined to determine their meaning and function. Otherwise neither the perception of the needs nor the interconnected avoidance impulses can succeed in affecting change.*

### Guiding Process Self-Expression (revealing versus concealing)

Self-expression is one of the eight guiding processes of psychodynamics. The decision to be made is: - **“What do I (don't I) reveal?”**

Choosing which part of yourself to reveal and conceal is an aspect of functional psychodynamics. As a life in social roles is only possible if you can do both: **Revealing** what you wish to and **concealing** what you wish to. However, as people constantly express all that is happening inside them with body language (posture, facial expression, gestures) and tone (modulation, rhythm, intensity, tempo and pitch of speech), only impulses which are conscious can be hidden. Everyone tells much more of themselves than they, themselves, know. In counselling, this is crucial. Often, matters which a person is deliberately hiding or of which they are unconscious, also become visible. Change can be accomplished by gaining information from the involuntarily 'expressed', which allows access to that which has been internally inhibited, negated, denied, repressed, not understood or perceived.

#### **Revealing**

*People are often engaged with the guiding distinction of revealing/concealing because they wish to make a good impression. It is, or seems, important to them what others think about them or see in them. Therefore, they try to shape what part of themselves is visible and what is not. However, one only has part control over that which one reveals or conceals, namely that which one is aware of, and which is consciously accessible to one's self-expression. Another part is outside one's control. It does not only express what is consciously accessible to oneself, but also who one is, without one knowing or perceiving this. One shows oneself as a complete person. And one also shows that one wishes to reveal something and that one is trying to hide something. One reveals oneself, intentionally, by that which one says, does and communicates through body language. And one shows oneself, unintentionally, through body language signals which one doesn't control and by letting things 'slip out', verbally or non-verbally. Freud called this a 'Freudian Slip'. Generally, people try to show that which corresponds to their idea of who they would like to be. Therefore, one can discover something about each person's ideal image of himself. No matter whether he wants to impress, control, be faultless, intimidate others, keep his distance, be self-sufficient, help others or be helpful to them, all of these reveal information which has great value when counselling.*

#### **Conceal**

*Why do people attempt to conceal things? Why are we not content to be what we are? Why this effort? On a verbal level, this is easily explained. If everybody expressed all that was going around in their head, it would quickly destroy all relationships they have. Complete honesty is not a viable concept. In fact, this is why constant internal activity is*



## Metatheorie der Veränderung

*required along the lines of the guiding distinction of self-expression. Even on the non-verbal level this is so: those who always tactlessly show when they are dissatisfied with something also put relationships under pressure. Therefore, the functional aspect of concealment lies in empathising with that which is appropriate for the particular relationship and role. Here, balancing appropriate consideration with approachable, open contact is a continuous task. Thus, concealment becomes dysfunctional when it is not a response to the present circumstances or to social practices, norms or no-go areas, but rather serves to deal with internal anxieties and the avoidance of internal conflict (why have I done/said/shown this again? How could I ...?). If things cannot be as they are, because an inner entity is against it, then this is something completely different to consciously deciding to avoid a particular behaviour for the benefit of needs (closeness, belonging, effectiveness in a role, etc.), to leave something unsaid or to keep my facial expression under control. The guiding question here must be: "Is the client free in his decision or is he unconsciously inhibited?"*

### Guiding Process Regulation of Needs (facilitate versus inhibit)

Regulation of needs is one of the eight guiding processes of psychodynamics. The decision which each person must make consists of the following question: **"What do I (don't I) want?"**

The dynamics of a psychological system requires the continuous regulation of your own desires. If you have access to your needs, you can feel comfortable with yourself and your (social) environment. Thus, the ability to recognise needs, to categorise them and to know they can be satisfied and how, play an important role. Needs function as a type of signal system. They are constantly either facilitated or inhibited. Both are important for reacting appropriately in a particular situation. Good regulation of needs always requires contact with your (social) environment, as no person can be happy without others. As a rule, psychological impairment begins when certain needs are no longer recognised, when they must be constantly satisfied, continuously inhibited or superimposed by substitute needs.

#### **Facilitating**

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#### **Inhibiting**



## Metatheorie der Veränderung

*The ability to inhibit one's impulses and needs is acquired by the psyche in the first years of life. Without this ability, a person is unable to socially co-exist. The sentence, "if you don't give me what I want, I will throw myself to the floor and scream", or acting in such a way, is inappropriate for an adult. A lack of inhibition, everything always now and immediately, is a problem, as all parents know only too well. Wellbeing, mental self-regulation, social relationships and collaboration in organisations are not possible without the ability to inhibit. Even this ability can be exercised functionally or dysfunctionally. Here, the freedom to choose is also central.*

*A problem is created if a person must constantly inhibit certain needs. A chronic and, above all, undesired frustration can develop – and such a person leaves a type of 'gap' when in contact with others, just then when it would be necessary to make this need available to others (i.e. If a contact-inhibited supervisor remains cool, where it would be required to share one's emotions about the illness of an employee, and so loses the respect of the entire team and their loyalty too!).*

*Similarly, it becomes difficult when someone cannot inhibit a certain need - for example, when a person cannot bear to be separated from another, or if he gives preference to certain others, etc. Therefore, personal change always consists of expanding your own choice possibilities, living your needs and making conscious decisions, rather than becoming the victim of unconscious and unperceived processes.*

### Guiding Process Consciousness (conscious versus unconscious)

Consciousness is one of the eight guiding processes of psychodynamics. The significant distinction consists of the question: **"What do I know (not know) about myself"**

Consciousness is defined as the process which regulates self-direction in a person (i.e. not his digestion). It can operate in two ways, **consciously** or **unconsciously**. This is completely functional, as otherwise one would be totally overloaded. Consciousness can know about itself ("this is what is going on inside me") or it can be oblivious of itself.

When one does not know what one thinks, feels, wants, expresses, accepts, or if one does not know with what to resonate, to identify oneself with or how one understands, then one cannot consciously direct oneself. One can only influence that which one knows. This is why not knowing is dysfunctional, when you act, think and feel unconsciously, and it thus damages yourself or others; if, for example, you do not do what is good for you or what is required in the job. On the other hand, knowing becomes dysfunctional when it leads to pondering, paralysis, permanent doubts or pedantry, and the release into unconscious competence is avoided.

#### **Conscious**

*The differentiation between conscious and unconscious has a very long tradition. Here we present it in a modified form. We assume that each person must decide to reduce complexity, which consciousness events he wishes to*



## Metatheorie der Veränderung

*perceive and which ones should remain undetected. This decision-making framework is partly pre-determined (usually we do not consciously occupy ourselves with breathing, digestion or the grammar we use). On the other hand, it is shaped by one's own experiences and events (i.e. one's own personal history). Particular prominence has been given to the term 'blind spot'. It means something comparable, something that others perceive, but not the person concerned. When something is conscious, it is given a meaning (but no meaning, when one does not accept feedback). In order to deal with the meaning of something (see reflection), it must, on the other hand, first be conscious. The shift of unconscious mental processes into consciousness is therefore regarded in many counselling schools as an essential feature of change (Freud: "Where 'It' was, it should be replaced with 'I'). However, we differ very much from the classical deep psychological concept of fixed stages in the definition of consciousness (THE conscious, THE unconscious). In our procedural understanding of the psyche, psychological dynamics appear as a web of impulses, which are conscious or unconscious, reflected or automated, to differing degrees.*

### **Unconscious**

*Unconscious processes dominate the inner psychological events. Nobody could constantly think of everything that is required for regulation and decisions about significance. If there were no unconscious inner world, we could not have any inner processes which surprise us and expand or alter our image of ourselves. Our self-control would be completely overburdened if we did not simply decide, once and for all, about most things, and then forget and suppress them. Therefore, in our unconscious processes and memory structures all our expectations are stored, our preconceived notions about ourselves, other people, how relationships develop and what can be expected from them. This unconscious memory treasure has, in each new present moment, unceasing consequences for that which we think, feel and do. Therefore, it is a fallacy to think one is wasting one's time when occupying oneself with the past, if one, in the face of present day problems (bullying in the company), examines reputed 'past' experiences during counselling (e.g., having experienced being ostracised as a youth). Putting it another way: if I have not processed my history as a youth, my past will never be history, rather, it will dictate my present by means of unconscious processes. Change occurs when I revise decisions which I have made, consciously or unconsciously. Only then will my future no longer resemble my past.*

## Guiding Process Comprehension (making plausible versus maintaining implausibility)

Comprehension is one of the eight guiding processes of psychodynamics. The guiding distinction lies in the question: **"What do I (don't I) understand?"**.

Each person continuously organises his life, through the creation of connections, causalities, calculations of means and purpose, desires and goals. One cannot avoid the 'meaning', rather, one continuously constructs it anew. Thus, one can choose if one **makes something plausible**, or whether one leaves it as **implausible**. Where one's own behaviour or that of another person cannot be deduced plausibly, even though one would wish for this, one reduces one's ability to find a fitting response to the situation. The desire and the necessity



## Metatheorie der Veränderung

to understand oneself and to plausibly understand one's own self, occurs in many psychological theories. Everyday language also demonstrates this. "That (or he or she) is simply crazy!" is the usual response when one doesn't understand or cannot explain another person's behaviour. Therefore, one of the core tasks of every counsellor is to enable or advance understanding, or to interrupt and replace dysfunctional understanding: - "I am simply not capable of anything", or: - "I always tell myself, as my father used to say, that I am capable of nothing, and I still believe this, just as I believed my father then".

### **Making plausible**

*A Jazz connoisseur finds the sequence of chords during improvising highly plausible. Someone who hears this music for the first time, may not detect a pattern in it. An art historian will see allegories in the mosaics of medieval church windows, whereas a tourist would see haphazard displays of colour. A person can say "I don't understand myself", and with that he means that his impulses or feelings are not plausible to himself, that he cannot deduce anything from them and does not understand their meaning and purpose. The psychological system is unceasingly occupied by the guiding distinction plausible/implausible. One must constantly make a choice from the abundance of that which one perceives, feels and thinks, and from the abundance of signals and stimulants to which one is exposed in the environment. One must choose how to generate plausible, "meaningful" information for oneself, and what one allows to pass by from the background noise of the (inner) world. This distinction will usually take place implicitly in most areas. Often a cause is required to trigger explicit plausibility activities (i.e. unexpected events, danger, pain, different plans, unusual occurrences): "Why? How so? Why this way and not another way? Oh!" Because of limited capacity one must decide what one wishes to understand and what may be perceived and yet remain uncomprehended. When making this decision, and other ones too, it is possible to err and one can fail in one's attempt to make something plausible. Therefore, counselling must be utilised in this guiding process of the psyche.*

### **Maintaining implausibility**

*The decision to make something plausible is always functional when, by this method, I gain information which gives me a better basis regarding other (guiding-) decisions. Whether I associate something with myself or the environment, how I shape my needs regulation, whether I wish to affirm or deny something, whether I can do something or not, whether I wish to feel something more deeply or not, that is the question. Where one doesn't understand oneself plausibly, one is in danger of devaluing oneself, ("stupidly I lost the plot!") instead of affirming one's own actions. One is threatened with seeing things as unalterable, ("that's just the way I am") though they are changeable; one is inclined to repress one's needs, ("this will only lead to misfortune"), where there might be scope for finding happiness and much more in other things. Thus, it can be a sign that counselling is required when you suffer because of something which you cannot, yourself, fathom out. When you understand yourself or the process, it is probable that new and different possibilities emerge. Not understanding yourself is risky, where you have a chance of understanding.*





## Guiding Process Acceptance (affirming versus negating)

Acceptance is one of the eight guiding processes of psychodynamics. Every person must find an answer to the question: **“In which way do I evaluate?”**.

No matter what you experience, internally or externally, you must decide whether you **affirm** these experiences, or **negate** them. You can accept or reject the experience, welcome or ignore it. Some people habitually reject certain, uncomfortable aspects of their experiences. They can value or devalue others, they can accept their experiences or deny them. However, this impairs inner processes such as self-perception, consciousness and the handling of needs. Therefore, it is important in many areas to develop an attitude of ‘what is, is permitted’. This enables change – because what is permitted to be, begins to change. At the same time, everyone must be able to deny and put a brake on impulses which are not appropriate to the situation. This can be completely functional in certain situations.

In a social context, affirmation and denial play a central role during the creation, maintenance and processing of conflicts. Another important function of this guiding process in relating to one’s environment is the reduction of complexity: those who already know in principle what they find good or bad don’t need to reflect upon everything anew, rather, they are immediately able to act (‘I will simply .....!’)

### **Affirming**

*Deciding between affirming and negating is necessary for psychological systems, so that one can choose between the incalculable possibilities of what one is able to want and what the environment offers in the way of opportunities. Thus, for centuries, judgments such as good/bad, right/wrong, beautiful/ugly have taken hold to deliver guidance about which thoughts, feelings and actions are to be considered appropriate. The psychological system is exposed to this distinction from the beginning (“You did this correctly, well, nicely!”) and internalises it. Therefore, we learn in our contacts with others which impulses are to be evaluated and how. Affirmation strengthens what is, negation reduces what is. This evaluation model is a form of socially legitimised aggression and with increasing age, it is also applied to oneself. Inner representations are formed which evaluate, judge, pursue, punish, reward, and confirm etc. It is important in the context of change and counselling that this form or orientation is a learned behaviour and can, therefore, also be changed. In addition, since it provides a significant contribution to stabilising the existence of the affirmed aspects and eliminating the negated aspects of the psyche, counselling must be focused on this guiding distinction and must help the client to exert influence (rather than merely using the distinction consciously or unconsciously).*

### **Negating**

*No psychological system is viable without the ability to negate. Important differences exist in whether the negation happens chronically or selectively and whether it refers to the behaviour or to a person. The difference between the two sentences, “You are never the daughter you should be!” and “I do not want you to come to dinner with unwashed hands!” could not be greater. If someone experiences that smaller or larger aspects of his person are chronically*



## Metatheorie der Veränderung

*rejected, shamed, abandoned or devalued, then, in all probability, he will internalise this message. Effectively, he will split internally into an accusing and an accused part, into a persecuting and persecuted part, into a "go away" and a "I am not wanted" part, into a "you ought to" and an "I am trying", part etc. People internalise rejection of the self. Thus, at this point, the ability to negate is used dysfunctionally. This results in a range of problems regarding self-esteem, self-regulation, self-awareness, relationship behaviour etc. Especially charming is the fact that advice is frequently sought because the self-rejecting representations of the person are not as successful as desired ("I would like to become more secure") or the rejected parts have collapsed ("burn-out"). In both cases a 'repair' should be carried out. However, by doing that the counsellor would aid the self-rejection in the client. He would do harm if he did not recognise this danger and, in a best-case scenario, would contribute to the postponement of the acute need (unfortunately this takes place rather too often).*

*That which was caused in clients due to a lack of affirmation and acceptance, cannot be cured without acceptance. Counselling as an improvement strategy for clients continues the drama of a dysfunctional upbringing. Therefore, the ability of the counsellor to meet all aspects of the client with benevolence, acceptance and openness, to explore the function of self-rejection, to create stimuli which enable affirmative impulses once more, and, last, but not least, also the determination with which he leads his client into the avoided areas of self-experience, has great significance.*

### Guiding Process Resonance (reacting versus ignoring)

Resonance is one of the eight guiding processes of psychodynamics. The decision which every individual must make in relationship to his environment, consists of the question: **"What do I (don't I) react to?"**

Every human must select from an infinite abundance of what in himself and in the world he responds to, because one cannot **react** to everything. This serves to reduce the complexity and the absorption of uncertainty. Thus one must **ignore** most things. The associated selection process can, of course, only take place on a selective basis. Therefore, each person develops patterns, habits, as well as effective and cognitive expectations (frames of reference, strategies). They filter that to which they react, what meaning to give to certain events and what one does not even register. These resonance patterns are acquired and so are also changeable. They can certainly become dysfunctional when, for example, certain information is habitually ignored. To consciously recognise one's own patterns and habits and to reflect upon them, will, therefore, allow significant access to the possibility of change.

#### **Reacting**

*If the psyche reacted to everything which the environment makes available, it would immediately collapse from overload. Just like any other system, human response is highly selective, thus most things are ignored. But in order to react at all and to bring movement, inner receptiveness is required. Just like we would not be able to see without the optic nerve's responsiveness to light waves, so we could not respond to feelings, language, body language and thoughts from such 'offers' out of our environment. Systems differ from their environment and from each other by the way in which they shape this response. To succeed in life, therefore, we must make response decisions: what we would like to*



## Metatheorie der Veränderung

*react to and what we want to ignore. It is obvious that how free this choice is depends much upon how appropriately or inappropriately we were programmed ("You are the musical one!"), which response is connected with pleasure and which with displeasure. But response patterns can change, this is why this guiding process is so important from a meta-theoretical viewpoint. Thus, for counselling, amongst other things, this has important consequences: The counsellor is effective then, when the intervention finds a response in the client. This, though, also means: What is right for one person, is wrong for another.*

### **Ignoring**

*The psychological guiding process resonance can derail in two ways and therefore become dysfunctional. There can be too much or too little resonance, i.e. a strong reaction to an inner stimulus or an environmental event, or none or too little resonance. There are people who react so strongly to the stimulus of fear that they will do anything to reduce this fear immediately. Equally, there are also people that do not feel fear when they are really in danger and where it would be extremely sensible to do something or to avoid it. There are people that react so strongly to the criticism of people which are important to them that they give up altogether and submit. And there are others who don't wish to and will not hear criticism, but rather, allow it to bounce off, and they then become unreachable. At this point, too, one can see that psychological competence depends on the free choice of decisions and is not defined by right or wrong. Both, reacting and ignoring, are important. One requires competence for both. Only then a life- functioning connection which fits aspects of the environment and oneself can be created, ("It is fun to climb mountains with other mountaineers"); one can adapt oneself favourably to the unalterable environment ("Oh, I think I will find something new after being fired!") and one can master appropriately one's inner world and aspects of one's own person, which are not playing a role at the moment, without feeling unhappy ("I will make the time for my sport again at the weekend, and today I will, wholeheartedly, go dancing with my wife!").*