



Introduction

The Person-Centred Approach (PCA), developed by Carl Rogers, is a humanistic model of psychotherapy grounded in the belief that individuals possess an innate tendency toward growth, self-understanding, and self-actualisation. Rogers proposed that psychological distress arises when this natural growth process is blocked, often due to conditions of worth that lead to incongruence between the self-concept and lived experience. Rather than viewing clients as disordered or deficient, the person-centred approach understands individuals as fundamentally trustworthy and capable of change when provided with the right relational conditions.

Historically, Rogers first introduced this approach in the 1940s, originally referring to it as non-directive therapy, in contrast to the dominant psychoanalytic and behavioural models of the time, which positioned the therapist as expert and interpreter. During the 1950s, Rogers refined the model and renamed it client-centred therapy, emphasising the primacy of the client's subjective experience and autonomy. He later adopted the term person-centred approach to reflect its broader application beyond psychotherapy, including education, group work, conflict resolution, and organisational development.

A major theoretical contribution of Rogers was the identification of the six necessary and sufficient conditions for therapeutic change, particularly the core conditions of empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence. These conditions shifted psychotherapy from a technique-driven, directive process to a relational, facilitative approach, in which the therapist creates a safe, non-judgemental environment that allows the client's inherent actualising tendency to operate.

Overall, the person-centred approach represents a significant shift in psychotherapy by redefining both the role of the therapist and the nature of psychological change, emphasising human potential, authenticity, and the healing power of the therapeutic relationship.

The working approach

Actualising tendency, Carl Rogers proposed that all individuals possess an actualising tendency, an innate and trustworthy drive toward growth, fulfilment, and psychological integration. Psychological distress occurs when this tendency is blocked or distorted, often through conditions of worth, leading individuals to deny or distort aspects of their experience. From this perspective, a client's presenting issues are understood as their best attempts to cope under restrictive conditions, rather than a lack of motivation or pathology, and is meaningful and purposeful within the client's experience. Distress is linked to incongruence, where there is a mismatch between the self-concept and lived experience. Movement toward actualisation requires increasing congruence.

The concept underpins person-centred therapy by shifting the therapist's role from expert to facilitator of growth. By providing the six necessary and sufficient conditions, particularly empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence, the therapist creates a safe, non-judgemental environment in which clients can explore their experiences, reconnect with their needs, and naturally move toward greater congruence and self-actualisation.

Recognising the actualising tendency benefits the client by reframing presenting problems as adaptive responses to blocked growth rather than pathology. When the therapist provides a safe, non-judgemental environment and embodies the core conditions, the client's inherent growth process is reactivated. This allows them to explore previously denied or distorted experiences, trust their own judgments, strengthen authenticity, reduce incongruence, and move toward self-awareness, personal fulfilment, and self-actualisation.

Carl Rogers proposed **The six necessary and sufficient conditions** for therapeutic change, which together create the relational environment required for psychological growth. These are:

1. psychological contact between client and therapist;
2. the client experiencing incongruence;
3. therapist congruence or genuineness;
4. unconditional positive regard toward the client;
5. empathic understanding of the client's internal frame of reference; and
6. the client's perception of the therapist's empathy and acceptance.

Redefining change as a relational process rather than a technical one. Rogers argued that when these conditions are present, they are both necessary and sufficient for therapeutic change, meaning no additional techniques or interventions are required. This fundamentally shifted therapy from therapist-led problem-solving to a facilitative, person-centred approach that trusts the client's innate actualising tendency.

Client is that these conditions create a safe, non-judgemental, and empathic environment in which clients feel understood and accepted. This reduces defensiveness, allows exploration of previously denied or distorted experiences, and supports movement toward greater congruence, self-acceptance, and self-actualisation. As a result, clients are empowered to trust their own experiences and engage actively in their growth and change.

The **Core conditions (CC)**, C. Roger never used the term, it was coined by the British person-centred movement in the 1970s and 1980s, separating the three conditions from Rogers' 'The six necessary and sufficient conditions'

The three conditions – Empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regards (UPR) are sometimes referred to as the 'facilitative conditions' or the 'client's conditions' meaning, they are the conditions that the client needs for the therapy to work, they need to be transmitted from the therapist to the client.

This creates a relational environment that facilitates the client's movement toward psychological growth, self-integration, and autonomy. Enabling the client's innate tendency toward growth. clients can explore denied feelings, revise their self-concept and re-integrate disowned aspects of the self. Client's self-exploration in a safe non-judgmental environment can help understanding the client and their presenting issue.

This shift of focus from intervention to relationship both explains therapeutic change and influenced later models by foregrounding the therapeutic alliance as a primary mechanism of change.

Rogers believed that by using the CC, the client would feel safe enough to access their own potential and move towards self-actualisation. As Maslow called it, to be able to find the answers in themselves.

'Core conditions are attitudinal conditions that foster growth' (Rogers 1985).

Client will feel accepted, valued, prized, respected and cared for as a unique individual. It also demonstrates trust in client's capacity for self-direction and positive change, it also shows the client 'to be whatever immediate feeling is going on- confusion, resentment, fear, anger, courage, love or pride' (Rogers 1986).

UPR will show positive regard without influence with therapist's values and conditions. Demonstrating empathy, meaning sensing the client's experience as if it was the therapist's own and reflect this back to the client, this will help the client express feelings freely without judgment. Congruence, presenting the therapist's open real self, sharing their perception of the client's feelings may help in further exploration.

Non-directive therapy, a central feature of person-centred therapy, refers to an approach in which the therapist does not guide, advise, or direct the client, but instead provides a facilitative, supportive environment. The therapist trusts the client's innate actualising tendency and allows the client to explore their experiences, feelings, and choices at their own pace, without judgment or imposed solutions.

It empowers autonomy, self-trust, and self-exploration. By not imposing the therapist's perspective, clients can access their own insights, reconnect with authentic feelings, and make decisions aligned with their true values. This reduces defensiveness, strengthens the internal locus of evaluation, and supports movement toward greater congruence, self-understanding, and self-actualisation. Non-directiveness also encourages clients to take ownership of their growth, reinforcing long-term psychological resilience and self-efficacy.

In person-centred therapy, the therapist works non-defectively, providing a facilitative, non-judgemental environment rather than directing the client, and attends fully to the client's phenomenology and frame of reference. Presenting issues are understood as meaningful responses to conditions of worth, incongruence, or reliance on an external locus of evaluation, rather than pathology. Through the core conditions of empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence, the therapist creates safety and trust, allowing the client to reconnect with their Organismic Valuing Process. This enables authentic self-evaluation, exploration of previously denied experiences, reduced incongruence, and movement toward self-awareness, congruence, and self-actualisation.

Carl Rogers described **conditions of worth** as values and expectations internalised from significant others, whereby individuals come to believe they are worthy of acceptance only if they think, feel, or behave in particular ways. Their contribution to therapy lies in explaining how psychological distress develops when individuals deny or distort aspects of their experience in order to maintain conditional acceptance.

Within person-centred therapy, conditions of worth provide a framework for understanding distress as the result of incongruence between the individual's self-concept and their lived experience. Clients' presenting issues are therefore understood as adaptive responses to these internalised conditions, rather than as pathology or resistance to change.

Therapeutically, recognising conditions of worth informs the emphasis on unconditional positive regard. By offering consistent acceptance without conditions, the therapist counters the internalised conditions of worth that restrict growth. This creates a safe relational environment in which clients can explore previously denied experiences, reduce incongruence, and reconnect with their authentic needs and values.

As conditions of worth weaken within the therapeutic relationship, clients are better able to accept their experiences and move toward greater congruence and self-actualisation, demonstrating the central role of this concept in both understanding client difficulties and facilitating therapeutic change.

Providing the core conditions of empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence, creating a safe, non-judgemental environment in which the client feels understood and valued. Presenting issues are understood as meaningful responses to conditions of worth, incongruence, or reliance on an external locus of evaluation, rather than pathology. The therapist works non-defectively, attending to the client's phenomenology and frame of reference, allowing the client to trust their actualising tendency and Organismic Valuing Process, explore previously denied experiences, strengthen authenticity, reduce incongruence, and move toward self-awareness, congruence, and self-actualisation.

Understanding conditions of worth benefits the client by reframing distress and presenting issues as the result of adaptive coping to conditional acceptance, rather than personal failure. Through a safe, non-judgemental relationship with a therapist providing empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence, clients can challenge these internalised conditions, explore denied experiences, trust their own feelings, and gradually move toward greater self-acceptance, congruence, and self-actualisation.

Conditions of worth are recognised as internalised expectations that lead individuals to value themselves only when meeting others' standards, creating incongruence between self-concept and authentic experience. Presenting issues are therefore seen as meaningful coping responses, not pathology. The therapist works non-defectively, attending to the client's phenomenology and frame of reference, and providing the core conditions of empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence. Within this supportive environment, the client can trust their actualising tendency and Organismic

Valuing Process, strengthen an internal locus of evaluation, explore previously denied experiences, reduce incongruence, and move toward self-awareness, authenticity, and self-actualisation.

Phenomenology, in person-centred therapy refers to the idea that an individual's behaviour and emotions can only be fully understood through their subjective experience of reality, that is how the world is perceived and interpreted by the client, rather than through objective facts alone. C. Rogers argued that people respond not to reality itself, but to their phenomenal field, and their personal lived experience, each person's experience is unique.

This perspective rejects the assumption that the therapist's interpretation of events is more valid than the client's own experience and redefines where psychological truth is located. Therapy places the client's subjective experience at the centre of the therapeutic process rather than prioritising diagnosis, interpretation. This underpins the non-directive approach and justifies empathy as a core therapeutic condition. Change occurs when clients feel deeply understood within their own frame of reference, not when they are corrected or analysed.

Client's presenting issues are understood in terms of how the client experiences them, not how they appear externally. Feelings are understood as logical responses within the client's subjective world. Allows the therapist to view the client as the expert on their own experience. By accurately empathising with the client, the therapist helps the client clarify meanings and move toward greater self-understanding and congruence.

The advantage for the client is that this approach validates their unique experience, helping them feel truly heard and understood. By attending to the client's phenomenology, the therapist creates a safe, non-judgemental environment, reducing defensiveness and enabling exploration of previously denied or distorted experiences. This supports greater self-awareness, congruence, and movement toward self-actualisation, empowering clients to trust their own feelings and choices.

Frame of reference refers to an individual's unique subjective experience of the world, including thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and interpretations. In person-centred therapy, understanding the client's frame of reference is essential because it recognises that each person experiences reality differently, and these experiences are meaningful within their own context.

When the therapist attends fully to client's frame of reference, the client feels heard, validated, and understood. This reduces defensiveness, promotes trust, and creates a safe environment for exploring blocked or distorted experiences. By working within the

client's own perspective, therapy supports greater self-awareness, reduces incongruence, and allows the client to reconnect with their authentic needs and potential for growth.

The therapist works from the client's phenomenology—their subjective experience—and seeks to understand their frame of reference, the unique way they perceive and interpret the world. This allows presenting issues to be seen as meaningful responses to incongruence or conditions of worth, rather than as pathology. The therapist provides the core conditions of empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence, creating a safe, non-judgemental environment. By attending fully to the client's experience, therapy validates their feelings, reduces defensiveness, and enables exploration of previously denied or distorted experiences, supporting greater self-awareness, congruence, and movement toward self-actualisation.

The **locus of evaluation** refers to the source from which an individual derives judgements about themselves, such as worth, success, or acceptability. People with a psychologically healthy internal locus of evaluation rely primarily on their own feelings and experiences to assess themselves, whereas those influenced by an external locus of evaluation judge themselves according to others' expectations, approval, or conditions of worth.

In therapy, helping a client shift toward an internal locus of evaluation is highly beneficial. It allows the client to trust their own feelings and perceptions, reducing reliance on external approval and promoting authentic self-expression. This supports exploration of previously denied or distorted experiences, reduces incongruence, strengthens self-acceptance, and fosters movement toward self-actualisation. The therapist's provision of empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence creates the relational safety needed for this internal shift.

The therapist attends to the client's phenomenology—their subjective experience—and their frame of reference, the unique way they perceive and interpret the world. Presenting issues are understood as meaningful responses to conditions of worth, incongruence, or reliance on an external locus of evaluation, where self-worth depends on others' approval. The therapist provides the core conditions of empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence, creating a safe, non-judgemental environment. This allows clients to trust their own internal locus of evaluation, explore previously denied experiences, reduce incongruence, and move toward self-awareness, authenticity, and self-actualisation.

The **Organismic Valuing Process (OVP)** is the innate ability of individuals to evaluate their experiences, choices, and behaviours in terms of what is growth-promoting, authentic, and fulfilling. It reflects the self's natural guidance system, allowing people to distinguish between experiences that support or hinder their psychological and emotional development. When functioning well, the OVP directs the person toward experiences that enhance congruence, autonomy, and self-actualisation.

In therapy, supporting the OVP benefits the client by reactivating trust in their own internal evaluation, reducing reliance on external approval or conditions of worth. This helps clients make authentic choices, reconnect with previously denied needs, and explore experiences without distortion or self-criticism. By providing empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence, the therapist creates a safe environment where the client can follow their OVP, strengthen self-trust, and move toward greater congruence, authenticity, and self-fulfilment.

The therapist attends to the client's phenomenology—their subjective experience—and their frame of reference, the unique way they perceive and interpret the world. Presenting issues are understood as meaningful responses to conditions of worth, incongruence, or reliance on an external locus of evaluation, which can distort self-perception. The therapist provides the core conditions of empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence, creating a safe, non-judgemental environment. Within this context, the client can reconnect with their Organismic Valuing Process, trusting their own internal guidance to evaluate experiences and choices. This enables exploration of previously denied needs, reduces incongruence, fosters authenticity, and supports movement toward self-actualisation and psychological growth.

Conclusion

Carl Rogers' person-centred approach represents a fundamental shift in psychotherapy by emphasising the individual's innate capacity for growth, self-understanding, and self-actualisation. Central concepts such as the actualising tendency, phenomenology, frame of reference, conditions of worth, and the locus of evaluation highlight Rogers' view of human beings as inherently trustworthy rather than pathological. The identification of the core conditions and the six necessary and sufficient conditions redefined therapeutic change as a relational process, positioning the therapist as a genuine, empathic facilitator rather than an expert or authority. By providing a non-directive, accepting, and empathic environment, person-centred therapy enables clients to reduce incongruence, reconnect with their authentic experience, and move toward greater congruence and psychological well-being. As such, Rogers' approach continues to make a lasting contribution to counselling and

psychotherapy through its humanistic emphasis on autonomy, dignity, and the healing power of the therapeutic relationship.

References

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