

Valuing Process

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1. Core Definition

The **Valuing Process** (VP), often discussed synonymously with the Organismic Valuing Process (OVP) in the therapeutic context, is a fundamental concept within the framework of Carl Rogers' Person-Centered Theory. At its core, the VP represents the innate, biological, and psychological mechanism through which individuals assess their experiences in relation to their tendency toward self-actualization. This process involves the continuous, fluid evaluation of experiences based on whether they maintain or enhance the organism. Put simply, the organism naturally values experiences that promote growth, health, and fulfillment, and negatively values those that inhibit actualization or cause harm. This valuation is intuitive and immediate, operating outside of rational, conscious deliberation in its purest form.

Rogers posited that every human being possesses an inherent capacity to know what is good for them, acting as an internal guidance system that dictates preferences and directs behavior toward constructive ends. When the individual is psychologically healthy and functioning optimally, their awareness aligns closely with the evaluations made by this internal, organismic process. The significance of the Valuing Process lies in its distinction from external systems of evaluation. Unlike moral codes, societal expectations, or parental mandates, the VP is personalized, experiential, and rooted in the organism's authentic needs and desires. It is the restoration and reliance upon this internal compass that Carl Rogers identified as crucial for combating psychological distress and achieving psychological well-being.

2. Theoretical Context (Carl Rogers)

The development of the Valuing Process concept is inextricably linked to the broader structure of Person-Centered Therapy (PCT). Rogers believed that all organisms are driven by a single motivating force: the **actualizing tendency**--the inherent desire to maintain, enhance, and reproduce themselves. The Valuing Process is the mechanism through which the actualizing tendency expresses itself and guides the organism. Initially, the infant functions almost perfectly based on the OVP, valuing experiences like warmth, affection, and food, and rejecting pain or discomfort, because these evaluations directly reflect what enhances or detracts from their existence.

However, as the individual interacts with their social environment, particularly authority figures such as parents and teachers, they begin to internalize external standards of worth. This introduction of **Conditions of Worth** represents the central obstacle to the functional Valuing Process. For

example, a child may receive love only if they behave in a specific, approved manner, leading the child to introject the belief that their worth is conditional. To retain the essential need for positive regard, the individual must deny or distort experiences that conflict with these internalized conditions, thereby interrupting the natural, holistic operation of the OVP. This disjunction between the organism's genuine experience and the conscious self-concept forms the basis of psychological distress.

Therefore, the goal of PCT, and specifically the successful implementation of the Valuing Process in therapy, is not to teach the client new values, but to provide a therapeutic environment--characterized by the core conditions of congruence, unconditional positive regard, and accurate empathy--that allows the client to shed their introjected Conditions of Worth. By feeling fully accepted regardless of their feelings or actions (unconditional positive regard), the client no longer needs to rely on external appraisals and can begin to trust their own inherent organismic evaluations, allowing the authentic Valuing Process to resume its primary role in guiding life choices.

3. Mechanism of Incongruence

The core problem the Valuing Process seeks to address is **incongruence**, which Rogers defined as the disparity between the person's actual experience (their organismic reality) and their self-concept (how they perceive themselves). The source content correctly highlights that incongruence can manifest as feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, or internal conflict, even among individuals who have achieved significant external successes or life milestones. This paradox occurs because the individual's self-concept has been molded by the internalized Conditions of Worth, forcing them to live life based on the values of others (society, parents, peers) rather than their own.

When an experience threatens the self-concept established by Conditions of Worth, the individual employs defense mechanisms such as distortion or denial to prevent the threatening experience from reaching full conscious awareness. For instance, a person who was taught that "good people never show anger" might distort their genuine feelings of frustration into generalized anxiety, or outright deny the anger exists, because acknowledging the anger would threaten their internalized self-concept of being a "good person." This constant need to defend the rigid, externally derived self-concept against the constantly evolving, fluid reality of the organism creates a state of chronic psychological tension--incongruence. The genuine valuations of the organism are suppressed or ignored, leading to decisions and paths that, despite bringing external approval, fail to satisfy the person's true, deep-seated needs for self-actualization and fulfillment.

The interruption of the Valuing Process, therefore, directly causes incongruence. When the organismic evaluations conflict with the conscious self-concept, the individual is living a life dedicated to a false self. The therapeutic intervention involves guiding the client through using the

Valuing Process to determine their own personal values, thereby re-establishing the integrity between the organism and the self-concept. This reintegration reduces the need for defensive maneuvers, allowing the individual to experience feelings and needs directly and honestly, ultimately resolving the feelings of inadequacy stemming from a life lived in accordance with external mandates.

4. Key Characteristics of the Re-established Valuing Process

Flexibility and Fluidity: Unlike fixed moral codes or rigid external rules, the restored Valuing Process is highly flexible. The valuation of an experience shifts constantly based on the organism's current state and needs, ensuring that behavior remains adaptive and conducive to growth across different situations and developmental stages. What is valued today may be rejected tomorrow if it ceases to foster actualization.

Internal Locus of Evaluation: A fundamental characteristic is the shift in the "locus of evaluation" from external authorities (parents, peers, institutions) to the internal, experiential realm. The individual learns to trust their gut feelings, internal signals, and immediate experiential data as the primary guide for determining worth and desirability.

Holistic Assessment: The VP assesses experiences not merely on logical or rational grounds, but holistically, incorporating emotional, visceral, cognitive, and sensory data. This integration ensures that decisions are congruent with the totality of the individual's being, rather than being driven solely by intellectual analysis or societal pressure.

Unconditional Acceptance of Experience: The valuing individual is characterized by openness to experience. They are able to acknowledge and accept all feelings and thoughts--even those traditionally deemed "negative" or "unacceptable"--because they recognize that these experiences provide crucial data necessary for accurate organismic evaluation.

5. Function and Goal

The primary function of leveraging the Valuing Process in therapy is the facilitation of psychological maturity and self-determination. The therapist's role is not prescriptive but facilitative; they do not suggest values but create the climate necessary for the client to discover and reclaim their own. Once the client recognizes and trusts their intrinsic values, the responsibility shifts entirely to them, as noted in the source material: it is the person's responsibility to follow the path that stays true to their rediscovered values and will make them genuinely happy, regardless of whether those values align with society or authority figures.

The goal is the emergence of the **fully functioning person**--an individual who is living authentically, characterized by a continuous striving toward self-actualization. This state is marked

by three primary qualities resulting from a functional VP: 1) Openness to experience (lack of defensiveness); 2) Existential living (living fully in the present moment); and 3) Organismic trusting (relying on the internal compass for decision-making). The individual learns that their own subjective experience is the most reliable source of information for navigating life.

Furthermore, the Valuing Process serves a critical ethical function within humanistic thought. By emphasizing the discovery of personal, internal values over the blind acceptance of external, conventional values, Rogers promoted a view of human behavior that prioritizes authenticity and internal honesty. He argued that when individuals are truly self-directed by their OVP, their choices tend naturally toward social health and constructive behavior, suggesting that the self-actualizing individual is inherently social and ethical, rather than selfish, provided they are genuinely in touch with their deepest needs.

6. Significance and Impact

The concept of the Valuing Process holds profound significance as a cornerstone of Humanistic Psychology. It provides a robust theoretical mechanism to explain psychological maladjustment (incongruence caused by Conditions of Worth) and the path to psychological health (reintegration through self-trust and the VP). By positioning the individual as the ultimate authority on their own life and well-being, the VP radically democratized the therapeutic relationship, moving away from models where the expert (the therapist) dictates the direction of change.

The emphasis on internal validation provided by the Valuing Process has had wide-ranging impacts beyond the clinical setting, influencing educational philosophy, organizational leadership, and parenting strategies. In these fields, the application of Rogerian principles encourages environments where intrinsic motivation and self-directed learning are prioritized over external rewards and punishments, promoting creativity and resilience by fostering reliance on one's own judgment rather than relying solely on external evaluation systems. The VP thus remains central to the humanistic vision of fostering individuals who are autonomous, constructive, and capable of navigating complex moral and social landscapes based on an authentic sense of self.

7. Further Reading

Carl Rogers (Source for the proponent and originator of the theory)

Person-Centered Therapy (Source for the therapeutic context)

Incongruence (Source for the core psychological conflict addressed)