

Introduction to the Emotional Coherence Framework

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Emotional Coherence

How people act and think makes emotional sense based on what they have learned during their lives thus far about themselves and about the world and how it functions. We can say that people’s behaviors, choices and feelings are driven to a large extent by the **emotional learnings**, often learned in the context of strong emotions, that they have stored throughout their lives.

Mary feels shy when she’s called upon to speak up in meetings at work. In one-to-one settings it’s no problem for her, but she just doesn’t feel comfortable expressing herself in groups. Why is that? We can’t know from the outside what’s going on for Mary, but we can assume that she has coherent, deeply-learned emotional reasons for her behavior, which she may or may not wish to examine or change. Mary’s colleagues will have their individual reactions to her behavior in meetings, which may range from “I never noticed that.” to “That’s fine. It doesn’t affect me. I’m sure she has her reasons.” to “What a shame—I know she has lots of good ideas.” to “I hate insecure people. Why doesn’t she just open her mouth? It’s not so hard.”

How people react to Mary’s (or anyone else’s) behavior has a lot to do with their own emotional learnings about the world and human interactions and how things function or how people should behave. When people begin learning about emotional coherence and moving past their initial reactions, then their view of others and others’ behavior can be deepened by an awareness of how each person’s reality makes deep emotional sense to that person.

It turns out that Mary was the youngest of six children. She often saw her siblings fighting over who was right or wrong and who should get more of the things they all wanted—like attention from their parents. She learned that, when she kept quiet and didn’t join in the fray, her oldest brother felt protective of her and made sure her needs were taken care of. Her unconsciously learned behavior was an effective response to the bellicose environment in the large family and the special attention she could depend on from her brother.

How Mary behaves makes emotional sense *for Mary* based on what she has learned about the way the world works, and, quite probably, she is not even aware of having learned those rules of engagement. Her behavior may not make sense to some other people. Becoming schooled in the concept of **emotional coherence** (i.e. that people’s feelings, beliefs, and

behaviors make deep sense based on their emotional learnings about the world) may help others to accept Mary the way she is and refrain from judging her. Feeling accepted, in turn, can help Mary to grow in confidence and trust in herself and her relationships.

We call this lens through which we view the sense and purpose of behaviors, beliefs, and choices the **assumption of emotional coherence**.

Memory Reconsolidation

Beginning in the 1980s, the psychotherapists Bruce Ecker and Laurel Hulley investigated the roots of lasting psychological transformation among their clients. They discovered that there were fascinating and reproducible aspects to the process of achieving lasting change by permanently restructuring or nullifying deeply held emotional learnings. And so, over time, Ecker and Hulley developed an approach to psychotherapy, called **Coherence Therapy**, that focuses on guiding an effective process of transformation.

Years later, starting in the early 2000s, the neuroscience community became aware for the first time of the brain's own process, called **memory reconsolidation**, for permanently changing or nullifying deeply held learnings. Memory reconsolidation is one type of **neuroplasticity**, the brain's ongoing ability to change its neural networks throughout a person's life. The description of the steps necessary for the brain to carry out memory reconsolidation maps perfectly to the clinical observations that led to and are used in Coherence Therapy.

Here's a short summary of how it works. When the original emotional learning that is the target of a person's desired change is consciously and experientially reactivated, and, at the same time, the person experiences something contrary to what the original learning knows is true or expects will happen, then the brain reacts to this "**mismatch**" situation by making the synapses where the original learning is stored unstable, or labile, and therefore open to change.

This unstable state of the synapses containing the original learning offers a window of opportunity (of approximately five hours) for the brain to choose anew and store an emotional learning that is in alignment with the person's current needs and world view.

With the aim of giving a first impression of the complex process of memory reconsolidation, let's take a look at what role it played in Mary's developmental journey. In the early years of her career, she didn't question her own behavior in meetings, accepting that other people made suggestions and discussed the issues at hand, and that she listened and remained quiet.

Then, one year, in Mary's annual performance review, her boss made clear that Mary's career advancement was being hindered by her "shyness" in meetings (as the boss saw it). Mary decided to delve into the reasons behind her behavior, and she contacted a **Coherence Coach** for support.

Over the course of a few sessions with her coach, Mary discovered that she had coherent reasons for remaining quiet during meetings. It harked back to her early experiences in her large family, as we described above. Mary came to understand her original emotional learning as “When I’m in a group of peers who are all defending their individual needs, then the only way for me to get my own needs met is to be silent and wait for someone to notice and take care of me.” This first step of discovering and truly understanding how much sense her behavior made was already energizing for Mary! She wasn’t simply a “shy wallflower”, but rather someone who had, as a young child, found a solution to her problem of how to get her urgent needs met.

After having discovered the coherent roots and the clear value of her deep need to remain silent in certain circumstances, Mary worked with her coach to find situations in which she behaved differently, in which she did *not* need to remain silent when in a group, since such situations existed in her life as well. Mary was part of a clique of women who went out on the town together every couple of weeks, and in that context, she was verbally active and forthcoming with her opinions and what she needed.

In a decisive session, the coach guided Mary to activate the experience once again of knowing that the only way to get her needs met was to be silent and wait for someone to take care of her, and at the same time, to experience the contradictory knowledge that she was, in fact, fully capable of actively taking care of her own needs in the company of her girlfriends.

Mary’s brain now had a window of opportunity to sort and juggle and re-examine these two experiential truths that simply didn’t fit together. She ultimately felt and saw that what she had learned in her childhood was appropriate and meaningful back then, and had served her extremely well, but was no longer appropriate to her current life. She was now an adult who experienced that she was able to speak up for herself, since she already did that on a regular basis.

Through memory reconsolidation, Mary restructured her early emotional learning that required her to be silent in certain settings into the sure knowledge that she did not need to be silent in order to have her needs met. Her reason for refraining from speaking in groups no longer existed, and she began to share her ideas with her colleagues in work meetings.

Mary’s story is a simplified example of memory reconsolidation in action.

Why is Emotional Coherence So Important?

Each individual on this earth has walked a unique path and learned a personal set of truths about the world. Even identical twins experience the world individually and develop their own unique emotional realities that grow out of their life experiences.

Who knows best the truths of your emotional reality? You do! Each person is the **sole source of knowledge** about his or her own emotional learnings. Others may try to interpret your

behavior or hypothesize about your life, but they can never really know what your experiences mean to you or how they feel to you.

It is therefore an extremely useful and respectful stance for us to assume emotional coherence in other people and, indeed, in ourselves.

Why does my friend behave in a certain way? If I assume she sees the world exactly the same way I do, then I may be annoyed that her behavior is not what I would choose in a given situation. But if I remind myself that I don't yet understand her behavior and its coherent roots, then I can adopt an attitude of friendly interest and curiosity, and minimize any need to judge her.

When my partner has a problem to solve or a decision to make in his own life, I have some choices about how to interact with him. I could start by giving him advice based on what I would do in his situation, a common response based on the assumption that his needs are the same as mine or that his emotional reality is just like mine. On the other hand, I can remind myself that he is the sole source of knowledge about his own coherent emotional learnings, and I can support him in finding his own solutions, which may be very different from what I would have suggested.

An ongoing and everyday awareness of the idea that people's feelings and behaviors make deep emotional sense can help us be dramatically more effective in communicating with others, helping others in need, accepting others' choices, finding effective and lasting solutions to problems, and accepting and loving ourselves.

Areas of Applicability to Life

The examples described above give a few glimpses into interpersonal situations in which an awareness of emotional coherence shines a new and refreshing light on people and their choices and behaviors, and how much sense these make.

If we broaden our view, we can see that the concept of emotional coherence underlies everything that involves the human species, since each of us is always acting within our own sense of reality and the way the world is from within that subjective reality.

In our "Coherence in Action" initiative, we are handling initially the underlying coherence principles in the following areas, whereby this list is just a beginning:

- coaching
- couple relationships
- parent-child relationships
- teaching
- various group forms and structures
 - o in organizations
 - o in international relations
 - o in justice systems
 - o among cultures

Wherever people are involved, emotional coherence is at the heart of their interactions, behaviors, feelings, and choices.

Implications and Potential

Once we realize that people as individuals and in groups act in accordance with their coherent inner constructs (their own models of reality), and that these inner constructs can be updated, transformed, or nullified through the process of memory reconsolidation, we can see a path toward lasting change in what had previously seemed like intractable problems.

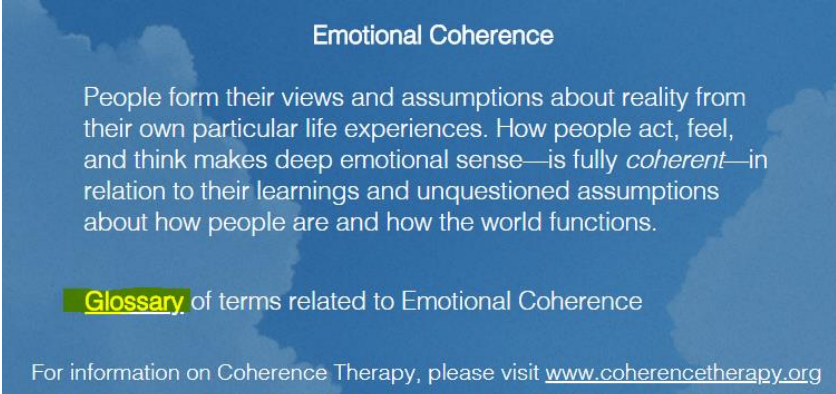
It is indeed possible to improve relationships in all areas of human interaction.

Where to Learn More

Website for “Coherence in Action”

www.coherenceinaction.com

Note: On this website, at the bottom of every page, you can find a link to a [glossary](#) of important terminology often used when discussing emotional coherence.



Emotional Coherence

People form their views and assumptions about reality from their own particular life experiences. How people act, feel, and think makes deep emotional sense—is fully *coherent*—in relation to their learnings and unquestioned assumptions about how people are and how the world functions.

Glossary of terms related to Emotional Coherence

For information on Coherence Therapy, please visit www.coherencetherapy.org

Multimedia introductory course on Emotional Coherence

<http://store.payloadz.com/details/2284393-movies-and-videos-educational-whats-really-going-on-here-how-to-navigate-life-using-the-hidden-intelligence-of-our-emotional-brain.html>

Coherence Psychology Institute website

www.coherenceinstitute.org