

# The Timeless Way of Educating. Theme-Centered Interaction, a Pattern Language by Ruth C. Cohn

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60 years ago in New York City, psychoanalyst and pedagogue Ruth C. Cohn started developing Theme-Centered Interaction (TCI) as a framework to humanely facilitate educational groups. Her work is an important and useful toolset aimed at Social Learning of a certain subject matter—decades old yet relevant today. It aims at enhancing both self-leadership and facilitation skills. Today it is well-known in Europe and India, but not in the United States of America. The author of this paper believes that Ruth C. Cohn actually wrote a pattern language, therefore he reproduces Cohn's basic ideas in patterns form.

The contribution of this paper is fourfold: First and foremost, the basic tools of TCI are rephrased and related to each other to show their pattern language character. TCI is being re-introduced among an international audience. TCI gets put into the context of educational and facilitation frameworks already established in the field of software development, in particular the existing body of pedagogical patterns and Agility. Finally, evidence from diverse fields is being collected that supports the efficacy of TCI.

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## 1. OVERVIEW

I left America too soon – I realised that, too. TCI was not yet established. It is still, if at all, in an embryonic stage.

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RUTH C. COHN[Heidbrink 2002, print p. 168]

Back in 1955 New York City psychoanalyst and pedagogue Ruth C. Cohn started developing a structure for facilitating non-therapeutic groups called “Theme-Centered Interaction” (TCI). The goals of TCI are Social Learning of a certain subject matter and emancipatory development of the person, ultimately aiming at cultural and social change. TCI is decades old yet relevant today. TCI can be found in classrooms, youth work, continuing education, companies and other areas where people gather to learn.

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Cohn emigrated from Germany to Switzerland in 1933 soon after the Nazi Party came to power and fled to the United States of America during World War II. In 1974, just a few years after her first publications on TCI, she returned to Switzerland. Most publications on TCI by Cohn and others are therefore in German. Later, it has been introduced to India by Mary Anne Kuebel and others. Today, TCI is being practiced in Europe and India, but does not seem to be very popular in the United States.

I have practiced TCI as a voluntary youth worker. For every volunteer a basic training in TCI was mandatory, and we have run our open offerings adhering to TCI principles.

I consider TCI a good addition to the learning and facilitation tools well-known in software engineering.

A vivid group within the patterns movement is especially devoted to pedagogical patterns. There are also several teaching and team patterns by Christian Köppe et al., e.g. [Köppe 2012; de Cortie et al. 2014]. The Peer-agogy project has published pattern catalogs, too [Rheingold et al. 2015, pp. 57–95, 97–101]. TCI complements all of them. Research, development and production have become fast-paced and increasingly demand settings that enable innovation and continuous learning. Many development activities are team endeavors, therefore there is an increasing need for leadership education. E.g. in the software field, Gerald M. Weinberg has popularized the work of family therapist Virginia Satir, a colleague of Ruth C. Cohn's; this might be most visible with Project Retrospectives in the tradition of Norman L. Kerth, that have become quite common among those who exhibit Agility<sup>1</sup> (cf. TIME FOR REFLECTION[Manns and Rising 2005c]).

TCI aims at strengthening self-leadership; leading oneself is seen as a necessary precondition for leading others. Therefore its tools apply equally to facilitators as well as group participants.

The audience of this catalog consists of anyone who intends to blend technology and human factors—which is a rewarding task because, as Gerald M. Weinberg put it,

“No matter how it looks at first, it's always a people problem.”[Weinberg 1985]

Not all team members are alike and especially not necessarily like their facilitator. E.g. there are different Learning Styles, for example the Visual and Read / Write “perceptual modes”[Fleming and Mills 1992], and personality types, for example Extraverted feeling and Introverted thinking types. Instead of considering them alterable, they should best be taken for granted. One instrument to assess the latter is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator.[Wierzchowski 2009] Expert facilitators let themselves successfully be guided by their subjective group coordination models, and anticipating the behaviors of each single team member contributes to their models. [Kolbe and Boos 2008]

This paper is not the first attempt to advertize TCI among software developers in particular: At XP Days 2010 in Eindhoven, the Netherlands, Erik Groeneveld and Thijs Janssen ran a workshop entitled “Team building using Theme Centered Interaction”, Gero Wedemann has combined Scrum and TCI at his chair of System Engineering and Information Management at the University of Applied Sciences in Stralsund, Germany, and Eva Hornecker, who chairs Human Computer Interaction at the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, wrote her diploma thesis on didactics in Computer Science taking TCI into account[Hornecker 1995].

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<sup>1</sup>This wording refers to Dave Thomas, who suggested to abandon the term “Agile” in favor of “Agility”. [Thomas 2014]

## 1.1 Goals of Theme-Centered Interaction

Humanistic education tries to counteract fixed reactions of any kind.

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RUTH C. COHN[Cohn 2002b, p. 121]

Continuous learning is of vital importance today [Kerievsky 2001], [Iba et al. 2013, pp. 35–117]. One way to do so are STUDY GROUPS[Manns and Rising 2005b], [Iba et al. 2013, pp. 94f., 119–189]. Collaborative learning works best if safety is provided[Gabriel 2002, pp. 69–71], [Kerievsky 1999, pp. 15–17], [Kerth 2001, pp. 7f., 108–116]. No learning “can succeed if people are afraid, or if there is an atmosphere of blame, criticism, sarcasm or even humor at other people’s expense.”[Kerievsky 2001, p. 4]

This paper introduces a framework that makes such safe learning possible.

Ruth C. Cohn’s work is both an expression of her Humanistic world view and practices that help make these values come true. Knowing TCI adds to the Requisite Variety[Ashby 1956, p. 207], [Weinberg 1994, pp. 6, 9–11] of group facilitators, which enables them to deal with a wider spectrum of situations. Likewise, TCI can also train participants in earning more Requisite Variety.

More specifically, TCI aims at Living Learning, a term coined by Norman Liberman, instead of dead learning. Ruth C. Cohn’s contemporary Carl Ransom Rogers, one of the founders of Humanistic Psychology, called his similar intention “Significant Learning” and established the following criteria (cf. [Schneider-Landolf 1987]):

- The learner is personally involved in a holistic sense,
- the learning is self-initiated,
- it is evaluated by the learner, who knows best whether he or she has learned what he or she has needed, and
- the essence of learning is meaning to the learner.[Abraham and Kuebel 2002, p. 43]

Living Learning is resource-oriented—individual strengths are going to be discovered and supported.

Christopher Alexander wrote:

“In a society which emphasizes teaching, children and students—and adults—become passive and unable to think or act for themselves. Creative, active individuals can only grow up in a society which emphasizes learning instead of teaching.”[Alexander et al. 1977b, p. 100]

TCI proposes tools at different levels of abstraction to facilitate learning in teams. Ruth C. Cohn originally had small groups in mind, therefore especially her Auxiliary Rules (see Section 6) are geared towards smaller numbers of participants. However, TCI has also been adapted to larger groups; see Section 7.2 for references.

TCI is not a specific method. It is the written down experience in realizing Humanistic values. This is similar to the Agile Manifesto, that has informed several different methodologies. Project Retrospectives do not follow a rigid method either—Norman L. Kerth stressed that by calling their building blocks “exercises” the facilitator can choose from and wrote

“During my years as a facilitator, people have asked me to provide a set of step-by-step instructions on how to run a retrospective. I generally respond that I can’t draw a map because I’ve never been to the terrain that they are about to enter—remember, every project is different! However, I can provide instructions that can be used as guidelines.”[Kerth 2001, pp. 11f.]

The Timeless Way of first discovering and then applying age-old patterns as described by Christopher Alexander is not a method to be mechanically applied either:

“Indeed it turns out, in the end, that what this method does is simply free us from all method.”  
[Alexander et al. 1979, p. 13]

## 1.2 Pattern Language

I believe that Ruth C. Cohn actually wrote a pattern language[Alexander et al. 1977d]. Like Christopher Alexander, Cohn also used the dialectical form. So I reproduce her basic ideas while stressing the pattern form. Cohn documented her proven practice—Alexander documented proven tacit knowledge. Christopher Alexander has considered continuous adaptation based on feedback very important:

“Things that are good have a certain kind of structure. You can’t get that structure except dynamically. Period. In nature you’ve got continuous very-small-feedback-loop adaptation going on, which is why things get to be harmonious. That’s why they have the qualities we value. If it wasn’t for the time dimension, it wouldn’t happen.”[Brand 1995, p. 21]

Ruth C. Cohn proposed keeping a DYNAMIC BALANCE (see Section 5.1) between the constituents of groups which requires the facilitators to sense feedback as well. Christopher Alexander makes use of the metaphor homeostasis (originally referring to self-organizing regulation in living organisms of several properties, e.g. body temperature) for the unselfconscious process, that “consistently produces well-fitting forms, even in the face of change”, while “in a selfconscious culture the homeostatic structure of the process is broken down, so that the production of forms which fail to fit their contexts is not only possible, but likely.”[Alexander 1964, pp. 37f.] Ruth C. Cohn’s imperative to keep a DYNAMIC BALANCE has been compared to homeostasis as well by Diether Craemer[Craemer 1988, p. 32]. Like Ruth C. Cohn Christopher Alexander also has intended to enhance life, and he did so by means of urban planning and architecture:

“The creativity of society, and the creativity of the environment and the way we build it, are not minor issues. They are fundamental. They go to the health and freedom of society, and to the capacity for society and environment to bring a valued and enchanting life to its inhabitants.  
[. . .] We must build a civilization in which individuals are able to like themselves, to heal themselves, and to love one another in generosity.”[Alexander 2012, p. 12]

Both Ruth C. Cohn[Cohn 2002c, pp. 96f.] and Christopher Alexander[Coplien 2011, pp. 9f.] have integrated Asian philosophy into their reasoning.

Table I lists the patterns of the language proposed.

The presentation of the patterns is similar to the style well known from [Alexander et al. 1977d]: Each pattern starts with a name. The first paragraph establishes the context, probably referring to more general patterns, then after three diamonds follows the problem, which consists of a bold summary and a long body which explains the problem and the forces that have to be resolved. A bold solution summary is then introduced with the word “Therefore”. After the solution summary the solution and its consequences are elaborated on in more detail. Now another three diamonds follow and sometimes set the stage for references to more specific patterns that complete this pattern. Typographic conventions for references to other patterns are also similar to [Alexander et al. 1977d].

I tried to follow Ruth C. Cohn’s original work as closely as possible. Her quotations have intentionally been revised by no means—therefore gender-neutrality could not have been completely enforced throughout this paper, and there is a mixture of American and Indian English including the respective typographical conventions. Especially in Europe and India TCI has many practitioners and thus has also yielded a large body of literature. This publication only sporadically refers to such material as secondary sources to supplement the primary sources. Regarding the original work of Ruth C. Cohn, this paper collects an almost complete set of patterns; later authors have suggested extensions or modifications to TCI, which only made it into this work if these were discussed with her.

Table I. Thumbnails of the patterns

Section	Title	Intent
3.1	EXISTENTIAL- ANTHROPOLOGICAL AXIOM	Autonomy <i>and</i> interdependence
3.2	ETHICAL AXIOM	Life and growth: "Therapy for humanity"[Cohn 2002b, pp. 122f.], appreciation
3.3	PRAGMATIC-POLITICAL AX- IOM	Conditionally limited free will, which can be expanded
5.1	DYNAMIC BALANCE	Watch over the piecemeal establishment of wholeness. Let group cohesion happen.
5.2	PARTICIPANT LEADER	Primarily, the facilitator is a participant.
4.1	CHAIRPERSON POSTULATE	Decide deliberately in relative freedom.
4.2	DISTURBANCE POSTULATE	"Disturbances take precedence."[Cohn 1969, p. 30] Therefore: "Disturbances [...] have precedence."[Cohn 2002c, pp. 74f.]
4.3	The Possible Third Postu- late	"Be responsible for what you do and what you do not do – personally and socially."[Cohn 2002c, p. 78]
6.1	STAND BY AND STATE YOURSELF	"Speak Yourself"[Heidbrink 2002, online p. 8]
6.2	PREFER STATEMENTS OVER QUESTIONS	Prevent disturbances.
6.3	SELECTIVE AUTHENTICITY	Be genuine, but only as frank as you want.
6.4	HOLD BACK INTERPRETA- TIONS	Prevent defensive reactions.
6.5	AVOID GENERALIZATIONS	Prevent disturbances.
6.6	COMMENTS ON PARTICI- PANTS	Do not blame or be superreasonable.
6.7	SIDE CONVERSATIONS	Often, side conversations are important. Therefore: Open them to the group.
6.8	SEQUENTIAL SPEAKERS	Keep everyone involved.
6.9	GROUP NEGOTIATES OR- DER OF SPEAKERS	Empowerment
6.10	LISTEN TO YOUR AND OTH- ERS' BODILY SIGNALS	Sharpen your intuition.
6.11	GET INVOLVED! TAKE AC- TION!	Courageously live humanistic values.
6.12	ONE'S OWN AND OTHERS' NEEDS	Consider your own, but also others' needs.

## 2. FOUR FACTORS MODEL OF GROUPS

After many months of an apparently futile search, I dreamt of an equilateral pyramid. After awaking, I interpreted the dream as follows: An equilateral pyramid has four basic angles. My group work is based on four elements ["I", "We", "It", and "Globe", respectively]. They are interrelated [...]. In order to be able to visualise them clearly, I then changed the four balanced points into an equilateral triangle within a many-layered sphere.

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RUTH C. COHN[Cohn 2002c, p. 73]

Ruth C. Cohn's work is concerned with thematic groups. She identified four factors that are central to every such group:

*"I"*. Each single individual,

*"We"*. the group,

*"It"*. the subject matter or assignment the group is concerned with—the reason why these individuals have gathered in the first place—and

*"Globe"*. the environment which the gathering takes place in—both the direct surroundings, weather, timing constraints, and the whole universe.

Figure 1 illustrates the four factors. The Triangle within the Sphere has become the symbol for Theme-Centered Interaction.

These four factors and their interrelations serve as the group model the following sections will refer to.

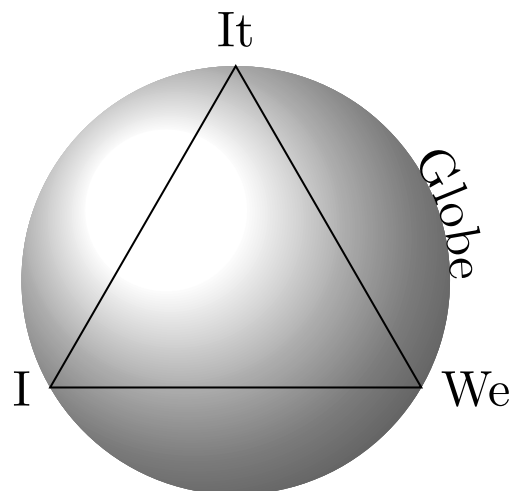


Fig. 1. Triangle within sphere representing the four factors "I", "We", "It", and "Globe", respectively

### 3. AXIOMS

If these principles are not recognised, TCI methodology can be misused as a self-negating technology.

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RUTH C. COHN[Cohn 2002c, p. 74]

Ruth C. Cohn has based Theme-Centered Interaction (TCI) on a certain world view, a certain conception of the human being, a certain mindset and certain values; for Cohn and TCI, these have been “irreducible”. She made them explicit in terms of so-called axioms. In TCI the three axioms are the starting points for reasoning. As such, they always apply, so none of them starts with a context paragraph. This is similar to the first pattern in Christopher Alexander’s pattern language, which does not have a context paragraph either.[Alexander et al. 1977a] The axioms also form the ends TCI aims at.

“The axioms of TCI are age-old, but have never, as far as I know, been systematically summarised in this way.”[Cohn 2002c, p. 75]

The Axioms are meant to lead the way like a compass.[Cohn 1994] Actionable patterns derived from these Axioms are being presented in Sections 4–6 and 7.1.

#### 3.1 Existential-Anthropological Axiom

**Each human being is a psychobiological unit. He or she also belongs to the universe. Hence he or she is both autonomous and interdependent.[Cohn 1969, p. 22]**

“A person who makes choices by ‘doing what he feels like’ without consideration of the environment or interpersonal relationships is autistic rather than autonomous.”[Cohn 1969, p. 23]

Often the conflict between autonomy and interdependence gets disguised. Then, persons are at the mercy of their own learned reaction patterns.

Therefore:

**Become aware of your interdependence with everyone and everything. Then, your autonomy will grow, [Cohn 2002c, p. 74], [Tscheke 2012, pp. 122f.] and you become able to decide responsibly.**

This axiom has two aspects: Mind and body cannot be separated from one another. Becoming more realistic about one’s own autonomy and interdependence helps overcome apathy and helps unconscious habits not guide oneself any more[Cohn 1969, pp. 22f.]. Thus, this axiom values feeling and thinking in the Here and Now. This will help you to make better decisions.

This axiom lets the conflict between autonomy and interdependence be accepted as one of many given dualisms: “We live in the many dualities that Nature provides – ebb and tide; seeding and fruition; separatedness and union.”[Cohn 2002a, p. 113]



Express autonomy in terms of the CHAIRPERSON POSTULATE (see Section 4.1), and the DISTURBANCE POSTULATE (see Section 4.2) accomodates interdependence. Both Postulates also explicate the inseparableness of feeling and thinking. . .

### 3.2 Ethical Axiom

**Life and growth are precious.[Cohn 2002c, p. 74] These values are threatened by humans acting destructively. [Cohn 2002b, p. 122]**

Almost all humans desire love, peace and justice. However, it is hard to make these values come true. [Cohn 2002b, p. 140]

Therefore:

**Act out ethical values.[Cohn 2002c, pp. 74f.]**

Human beings can decide. Each decision can pose its own challenge, because every context is different. TCI contributes to a “therapy for humanity”:

“The concern in both [individual therapy and therapy for humanity] is for changing and in developing a consciousness for essentials. [...] The issue is understanding hostility for what it is: that blessed state of being able to project evil on the enemy and killing him, instead of getting to know the inner enemy and educating him.”[Cohn 2002b, p. 123]

Instead of just listing some culturally embossed ethical guidelines or commandments e.g. in the Jewish-Christian tradition or the Categorical Imperative by Immanuel Kant, Ruth C. Cohn has introduced the concept of an “organismic values sense” innate in human beings, that needs to be nourished—otherwise it would get masked during adolescence: “In my imagination the ethical values sense is an ability, which requires practice.”[Cohn 2002b, p. 144]



Chair your “internal group” according to the CHAIRPERSON POSTULATE (see Section 4.1), thus get “to know the inner enemy” and educate him or her. The DISTURBANCE POSTULATE (see Section 4.2) ensures that no one gets lost. . .

### 3.3 Pragmatic-Political Axiom

**Conditional inner and outer boundaries limit exercising free will.**

“Our exercise of free will is larger if we are healthy, intelligent, materially secure and spiritually mature, as opposed to our being sick, lacking in good sense or poor or if we are suffering under violence and immaturity.”[Cohn 2002c, p. 75]

Therefore:

**Become aware of the factors that limit exercising free will. Doing so you will also sense your breathing room and expand its boundaries.[Cohn 2002c, pp. 74f.], [Tscheke 2012, pp. 124f.]**



TCI aims at Living Learning and more general at cultural and social change, thus expansion of boundaries; the DYNAMIC BALANCE (see Section 5.1) contributes to this goal. Exercising free will is being promoted by the CHAIRPERSON POSTULATE (see Section 4.1). . .



## 4. POSTULATES

*Let us give to this group and get from this group whatever each of you and I want to give and get here in this session in terms of ourselves, others and the theme.*

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RUTH C. COHN[Cohn 1969, p. 29]

Ruth C. Cohn deduced the Postulates from the Axioms. By bringing the Axioms to awareness and by expanding one's own consciousness, the Postulates are meant to realize the values inherent in the Axioms.[Cohn 1994]

"The postulates demand the recognition of reality as experienced personally, instead of setting dogmas as an authority."[Cohn 2002c, p. 78]

She saw the sense of a Postulate in its relatively general validity.[Cohn 2002c, p. 78] How to facilitate thematic groups will follow in Section 5.

### 4.1 Chairperson Postulate

... the EXISTENTIAL-ANTHROPOLOGICAL AXIOM (see Section 3.1) states that we are interdependent, but we are also autonomous. The ETHICAL AXIOM (see Section 3.2) advises us to get "to know the inner enemy" as a prerequisite of acting ethically. The PRAGMATIC-POLITICAL AXIOM (see Section 3.3) states that we can expand our exercise of free will.



**Being a psychobiological unit implies that you always have competing internal realities. Being both autonomous and interdependent implies that you are not almighty, you are not powerless, you are partially powerful.**

Ruth C. Cohn coined the metaphor of an "internal group" which participants are the "different needs and endeavours" of a single person. Friedemann Schulz von Thun described in detail the different competing and contradictory members of what he has called the "inner team"; its actual "members" differ from person to person and from time to time.[Schulz von Thun 2001]

Therefore:

**Be your chairperson, the chairperson of your own.**

Chair your "internal group". Head your "inner team". Be aware of yourself and of your internal realities and your environment. Lead yourself. Be in control of yourself, lookout for yourself, taking the interdependence into account.

Take each situation as an opportunity to make your own decision.[Cohn 2002c, pp. 76f.] Be aware that this relative freedom also implies being responsible for the effects of your decision. Give and take according to your wish to be responsible for yourself and others.[Cohn 1994] This will expand your individual boundaries.

You will always be only your own chairperson and never that of another person, except when that person loses or has not yet attained his or her own consciousness.



Use STAND BY AND STATE YOURSELF (see Section 6.1) to express that you do not intend to take over other participants. SELECTIVE AUTHENTICITY (see Section 6.3) emphasizes that it is always up to you how to act and what to say. Use LISTEN TO YOUR AND OTHERS' BODILY SIGNALS (see Section 6.10) to train your intuition. GET INVOLVED! TAKE ACTION! (see Section 6.11) invites you to show more courage to stand up for your beliefs. ONE'S OWN AND OTHERS' NEEDS (see Section 6.12) reminds you to also consider the interdependence. . .

## 4.2 Disturbance Postulate

... the EXISTENTIAL-ANTHROPOLOGICAL AXIOM (see Section 3.1) states that we are autonomous, but we are also interdependent. The ETHICAL AXIOM (see Section 3.2) states the need for decision making.



### **Group cohesion suffers, if disturbances are present. Disturbances interrupt the group process.**

A disturbed group member is literally absent, so both the rest of the group is disconnected from him or her, and he or she is disconnected from the rest of the group. All participants will achieve more for themselves, together and regarding the subject matter if they do so simultaneously.[Cohn 1969, p. 30]

Disturbances can manifest regarding any factor of the Four Factors Model of Groups (see Section 2): The individual him- or herself, the group, the subject matter or the globe, respectively.

Often, disturbances result from incongruent coping, a term coined by Virginia Satir. I consider her reasoning also instrumental in the context of TCI. She has developed a model with three areas: “Self”, “Other”, and “Context”; this model illustrates coping stances. Coping congruently means to take all three areas into account, while incongruent stances result from neglecting one, two or all three areas. This model is similar to three of Cohn’s four factors and thus can serve to further categorize many disturbances in TCI groups. E.g. a disturbance regarding the “We” might be Blaming—the participant blaming someone is protecting “Self” at “Other’s” expense—, and a disturbance resulting from troubles with the “It” has been called the Irrelevant coping stance—the participant considers “Self” and “Other”, but neglects “Context”. [Weinberg 1994, pp. 26–41]

Incongruence is not the only kind of disturbance. Weather conditions that have adversely changed (“Globe”) for example can be a disturbance for the group.

Therefore:

**Contribute to sensing and probably resolving any disturbance with high priority.[Cohn 2002c, pp. 74f.]**

“If you are bored, angry, in pain, preoccupied or unable to participate in any way, bring it to the group.” [Cohn 1969, p. 30]

Disturbances exist. Not being disguised or repressed they pose opportunities of learning and growth both on the individual and on the group level.[Tscheke 2012, p. 129] If the facilitator or any participant senses any disturbance, he or she should indicate that. Sometimes, this is enough to re-establish cohesion. Sometimes, the disturbance needs more explicit resolution. This will expand the boundaries of the group, that would otherwise be determined by its disturbances.

Gerald M. Weinberg has proposed many techniques for overcoming incongruence. [Weinberg 1994, pp. 42–68]

At around the same time when Ruth C. Cohn discovered TCI Ōno Taiichi has introduced Jidōka, also known as Autonomation, to the Toyota plants, making it one of the two pillars of the Toyota Production System:

“A problem early in the process always results in a defective product later in the process. This will stop the production line or change a plan whether you like it or not.”[Ohno 1988, p. 4]

Therefore:

“Stopping the machine when there is trouble forces awareness on everyone. When the problem is clearly understood, improvement is possible. Expanding this thought, we establish a rule that even in a manually operated production line, the workers themselves should push the stop button to halt production if any abnormality appears.”[Ohno 1988, p. 7]

In Software Kanban Jidōka is known as the “Stop the Line” principle. The scope of Jidōka is the assembly line or production—in TCI terms the “It”. Therefore it comes as no surprise that the DISTURBANCE POSTULATE goes well beyond Jidōka—even if the scope of the latter gets expanded to also cover development or compliance as sometimes seen in practice; the DISTURBANCE POSTULATE is meant equally well to also be applied to the other three factors “I”, “We” and “Globe”, respectively.



The DYNAMIC BALANCE (see Section 5.1) facilitation advice emphasizes the equal importance of all four factors that make up a group. The SIDE CONVERSATIONS (see Section 6.7) auxiliary rule directly follows from the DISTURBANCE POSTULATE. STAND BY AND STATE YOURSELF (see Section 6.1) will e.g. avoid the Superreasonable coping stance that effectively neglects both “Self” and the “Other”. Both PREFER STATEMENTS OVER QUESTIONS (see Section 6.2) and COMMENTS ON PARTICIPANTS (see Section 6.6) avoid a Blaming coping stance neglecting the “Other”. HOLD BACK INTERPRETATIONS (see Section 6.4) avoids defensive behavior of other participants. AVOID GENERALIZATIONS (see Section 6.5) contributes to the group process. SEQUENTIAL SPEAKERS (see Section 6.8) keeps everyone involved. GROUP NEGOTIATES ORDER OF SPEAKERS (see Section 6.9) avoids an opposition between the facilitator and the other participants. Use LISTEN TO YOUR AND OTHERS’ BODILY SIGNALS (see Section 6.10) to train your intuition. GET INVOLVED! TAKE ACTION! (see Section 6.11) invites you to show more courage to stand up for your beliefs. . .

#### 4.3 The Possible Third Postulate

*Especially facing violence and injustice around the world Günter Hoppe suggested adding a third Postulate to the existing body of Postulates entitled GET INVOLVED! TAKE ACTION! [Hoppe 1993]*

*In response to him Ruth C. Cohn wrote that an imperative as concrete as he coined it could only be an Auxiliary Rule (see Section 6.11), but not serve as a Postulate, and she instead suggested the more general wording*

*“Be responsible for what you do and what you do not do – personally and socially.” [Cohn 2002c, p. 78]*

*She wanted this sentence to be understood more as a kōan—an anecdote or a conundrum a Zen master tells his or her apprentice to meditate about—than a Postulate, because she saw its essence already present in the two existing Postulates, especially the CHAIRPERSON POSTULATE (see Section 4.1). She further explained that being one’s own Chairperson also means being responsible for how to act and what to do. Every person was different. Persons had different ways to take this responsibility: While some types of persons were living more inwardly while having a large effect at the same time, other types were having a large effect while for them the inner path was too far away. [Cohn 1994]*

## 5. FACILITATION

This section describes the role and general tasks of the facilitators of TCI groups. More specific advice will be given in Section 6.

### 5.1 Dynamic Balance

[...] the individual, the interaction in the group, the content, the environmental factors – I had been treating all these things in my practice as equally important. The individual is just as important as everyone altogether, everyone just as important as the content, the content just as important as the place, time and situation in which the group is taking place.

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RUTH C. COHN[Cohn 2002c, p. 91]

... the Four Factors Model of Groups (see Section 2) mirrors the tensions inherent in the AXIOMS (see Section 3).



**Often, groups steadily lean towards one of the four factors “I”, “We”, “It”, or “Globe”. This disturbs Living Learning.**

In educational groups, for example, in general the “It” is emphasized, whereas those groups fall short of the other three factors. Leaning to the “We” might be good for group cohesion, but has the downside of tending to Groupthink, which is known to have negative effects e.g. on a realistic self-appraisal and on creativity.[Janis 1971] The AXIOMS presume that there are several given dualisms acting as forces. If some of those dominate, then the group tends to lean towards one or more of the factors at the expense of the remaining factors.

Therefore:

**Strive for a balance between the four factors “I”, “We”, “It”, and “Globe”. There will never be a perfect balance, however, but it is important that the facilitator tries to rebalance the factors.[Heidbrink 2002, print p. 161]**

At the beginning, the group facilitator considers the “Globe”, especially the conditions the gathering takes place within: How much time do we have available? Can some interruptions already be anticipated—e.g. a participant has not arrived yet or announced that he or she has to leave earlier than the remaining participants?

Then the facilitator carefully formulates the theme. The theme is more than just the “It”, the subject matter; the theme also takes the other three factors and the mutual relation of all factors into account. The theme will serve as a means to integrate the group, it connects each individual and the group in the Here and Now. Therefore facilitators have to pay attention to its wording for it to be both easily memorized by and relevant for all participants.[Cohn 2002c, p. 80]

Until the end of the group work the group facilitator now fosters an equal consideration of all four factors. To accomplish this, he or she intervenes the process when necessary:

“If the group has turned over-intellectual, [the group leader] may state his own feelings. If the group emotes without concern for the theme, or intellectual connections, he may give some of his thoughts or interpret the emotional flow of the group.”[Cohn 1969, p. 34]

Dynamically balancing all four factors will increase group cohesion[Cohn 1969, p. 32] while at the same time avoiding the negative side effect Groupthink.

Also strive for balancing body, head and spirit.[Heidbrink 2002, print p. 161]



It is the primary responsibility of the PARTICIPANT LEADER (see Section 5.2) to establish a DYNAMIC BALANCE. . .

## 5.2 Participant Leader

*All rules given to the participants pertain equally well to the group leader who is at his best if he follows the rules given to the participants.*

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RUTH C. COHN[Cohn 1969, p. 34]

. . . one central goal in TCI facilitation is maintaining a DYNAMIC BALANCE (see Section 5.1) between the four factors “I”, “We”, “It”, and “Globe”, respectively.



**The group facilitator as such has a prominent position. He or she should use that positively as a role model. Probably being more experienced than most group members, he or she has authority. Acting authoritarian will cause group cohesion to suffer[Cohn 1969, p. 34].**

Therefore:

**As a facilitator adopt a self-conception of being much like the other participants of your group. Be authentic and selective in what you say and at the same time take responsibility for the DYNAMIC BALANCE by wise interventions.**

The TCI facilitator acts authoritative instead of authoritarian. By virtue of his or her experience regarding facilitating groups (not necessarily regarding the subject matter) the leader is the guardian of the group process—while also becoming visible as a person.

Primarily, the facilitator is a participant. His or her facilitator role is a temporary appointment. The participants may take turns to facilitate their group. Many TCI groups have two collaborative facilitators (see Section 7.1), which is an offer to less experienced participants to mature as a facilitator.



SELECTIVE AUTHENTICITY (see Section 6.3) and LISTEN TO YOUR AND OTHERS’ BODILY SIGNALS (see Section 6.10) are especially important for the facilitator in his or her relatively prominent position. For the group it is better if the facilitator every once in a while wisely intervenes, but otherwise lets the group take responsibility: GROUP NEGOTIATES ORDER OF SPEAKERS (see Section 6.9). . .

## 6. AUXILIARY RULES

Impersonal speech characterizes evasiveness and lack of awareness of personal responsibility. [...] The Theme-Centered Interactional Method rests upon the conviction that the “We”-experience is based upon each individual participant’s “I”-experience. [...] The theme serves as the bridge from person to person.

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RUTH C. COHN[Cohn 1969, p. 31]

Auxiliary rules complement the Axioms and Postulates—and they need to be understood against the background of both: Situation-dependent, they suggest how to act and what to do.[Cohn 1994] Ruth C. Cohn suggested to only apply those rules that match the situation in question. She also opposed using these rules detached from Axioms and Postulates which they were intended to support—“otherwise they could be serving a contrary spirit, the sort of which they should be opposing. Intolerance and dogmatism are possible names for this contrary spirit.”[Cohn 2002c, p. 78]

Just like some patterns of Christopher Alexander’s pattern language that come later in his book, most of these patterns do not point to any other patterns that embellish them.

### 6.1 Stand by and State Yourself

... the CHAIRPERSON POSTULATE (see Section 4.1) asks the participants to be their and only their own chairperson. The DISTURBANCE POSTULATE (see Section 4.2) gives disturbances, if any, precedence.



**Using “We” can mean the alleged shared opinion of the group or is simply a statement as impersonal as if passive voice had been used. The speaker avoids taking responsibility.[Cohn 1969, p. 31]**

Using “We” or even passive voice often is a sign of hiding behind public opinion or an alleged majority.

Therefore:

**Make personal statements. “Speak yourself”.[Heidbrink 2002, online p. 8] Speak “per I” and not “per We” or even passive voice.[Cohn 1969, p. 31]**

If I believe in my statement, then I do not need fictitious, quantitative support by others. And should I need it, though, then I have to test whether the group really shares my opinion.

This rule aims at making responsible statements. It is an instruction of self-leadership, an invitation to get to know yourself and a means to breathe life into the group. It contributes to overcoming the Superreasonable coping stance.



### 6.2 Prefer Statements over Questions

... the CHAIRPERSON POSTULATE (see Section 4.1) encourages each participant to get to know and to be him- or herself. The DISTURBANCE POSTULATE (see Section 4.2) gives disturbances, if any, precedence.



**Questions often serve to hide.[Cohn 1969, p. 31]**

Those who ask for reasons other than clarification avoid expressing their thoughts or experiences.[Cohn 2002c, p. 79] Consider for example the question “‘What do you think about giving kids too much freedom?’”[Cohn 1969, p. 31] Sometimes questions even disturb others.

Therefore:

**Prefer statements to questions.[Cohn 1969, p. 31] If you ask, though, also state the reason and meaning of the question to you.[Cohn 2002c, p. 79],**

“Personal statements are more revealing [than interviewing] and stimulate others.”[Cohn 1969, p. 31]. So instead of the above question state for example “‘My kids didn’t turn out well – I think I spoiled them.’”[Cohn 1969, p. 31]

This rule contributes to overcoming the Blaming coping stance.

In cases where a participant asks a question to elicit information missing, the group leader should not intervene, however.



The application of the COMMENTS ON PARTICIPANTS (see Section 6.6) auxiliary rule avoids Blaming other group members as well.[Cohn 1992d, p. 126]

### 6.3 Selective Authenticity

... the CHAIRPERSON POSTULATE (see Section 4.1) encourages each participant to get to know and to be him- or herself.



**Talking or acting only because you have been forced to means to act without having assessed in advance what you are doing; then you will not act autonomously. Rashly talking ignores both your own and the others’ willingness to confide in and appreciate you.**

In the first case you blindly follow either some group norm or some internalized constraint. Or you make decisions without really feeling like it or without having considered the actual facts.

In the second case you prevent harmonization and collaboration. The same will happen if you lie to or manipulate the other group members.

Therefore:

**Communicate authentically and selectively.**

Selective authenticity builds confidence and contributes to appreciation. The more confidence has been built, the less filtering you have to impose on your own communication—which in turn leads to a more productive and joyful collaboration.

Being your own chairperson also results in the option to be selective: “Not everything has to be said, but what is said, should be genuine.”—a contrast to the “absolute frankness” promoted by the encounter movement. [Cohn 2002c, p. 77]

Being a role model the PARTICIPANT LEADER (see Section 5.2) in particular has learned to communicate selectively authentic.



### 6.4 Hold back Interpretations

... the DISTURBANCE POSTULATE (see Section 4.2) gives disturbances, if any, precedence. The SELECTIVE AUTHENTICITY (see Section 6.3) asks the participants to be genuine.



**Inadequately interpreting statements of other participants causes defense.**

Interpreting statements of other people is often playing self-adulation games.

Therefore:

**Do not interpret others—express your reaction to others instead. [Cohn 2002c, p. 79] It is more effective to use “I” statements than “You” statements. [Abraham and Kuebel 2002, p. 52]**

A request like “Please keep quiet—I want to ponder” leads to spontaneous interaction.

While many interpretations may harm the process, some at least do not harm; if an interpretation is correct and is being brought up at the right moment, it can consolidate the knowledge of the interpreted person.

The PARTICIPANT LEADER (see Section 5.2) can also deliberately use an interpretation as an intervention to reestablish the DYNAMIC BALANCE (see Section 5.1).[Cohn 1969, p. 34]



### 6.5 Avoid Generalizations

... the DISTURBANCE POSTULATE (see Section 4.2) gives disturbances, if any, precedence. The SELECTIVE AUTHENTICITY (see Section 6.3) asks the participants to be genuine.



**Generalizations can disrupt the group process.**

Therefore:

**Be careful with using generalizations.[Cohn 2002c, p. 79]**

After having worked on a certain topic in-depth, generalizations might prove useful anyhow to transition to another topic.[Cohn 1992c, p. 126] Wisely applied, they are a useful technique especially for the PARTICIPANT LEADER (see Section 5.2).



### 6.6 Comments on Participants

... the DISTURBANCE POSTULATE (see Section 4.2) gives disturbances, if any, precedence. The CHAIRPERSON POSTULATE (see Section 4.1) says not to control other people.



**Giving feedback to another group participant can be a secret weapon to render her or him a scapegoat.**

Therefore:

**Anytime you comment on other participants or other persons explain the reason of your statement. State how that person affects you personally.[Cohn 2002c, p. 79]**

Feedback always expresses personal opinion. If a participant explains the meaning behind the feedback he or she gives, true dialogues are being promoted. This rule contributes to overcoming the Blaming coping stance.



The application of the PREFER STATEMENTS OVER QUESTIONS (see Section 6.2) auxiliary rule avoids Blaming other group members as well.[Cohn 1992d, p. 126]



## 6.7 Side Conversations

... the DISTURBANCE POSTULATE (see Section 4.2) gives disturbances, if any, precedence.



**Side conversations disturb. “They usually contain very important things for the whole group.”**  
**[Abraham and Kuebel 2002, p. 51]**

If they were not important, they would not happen. Often, a side conversation indicates that its two participants are strongly involved in the group process. Or it might be a sign that a group member left the process and tries to join again.

Therefore:

**Attend to side conversations.[Abraham and Kuebel 2002, p. 51]**

Given this rule has been applied as an invitation rather than an enforcement, this rule assists participants who conduct a side conversation to more easily join the group process once again. This rule might also help participants that shyed away from exposing themselves in the group.



## 6.8 Sequential Speakers

... the DISTURBANCE POSTULATE (see Section 4.2) gives disturbances, if any, precedence.



**Nobody is able to listen to more than one statement in parallel.**

Following verbal interactions contributes to cohesiveness.

Non-verbal interactions like gestures, pairing etc. by members of the group other than those who speak can also disrupt attention.

Therefore:

**Do not speak while another participant is speaking.[Cohn 1969, p. 30]**

Mindful interest for one another and perceiving the statements and actions of all other group members get greatly increased if all members of the group inflict the rule on oneself to only speak in sequential order.



## 6.9 Group Negotiates order of Speakers

... the DISTURBANCE POSTULATE (see Section 4.2) gives disturbances, if any, precedence. The PARTICIPANT LEADER (see Section 5.2) states that the facilitator is mostly a participant.



**A group leader also managing the list of speakers deprives the group of power.**

Sometimes more than one member of the group wants to speak up at a time. These needs are a reality. Without knowing in advance who wants to contribute what it is hard to order the statements. Furthermore, in such situations often extroverts will take the opportunity to speak while introverts finally won't speak up at all.

Therefore:

**The group itself should negotiate the order of speakers.[Cohn 1969, p. 30] In order to do so, its participants shall exchange keywords to indicate what each of them wants to talk about.**

The interests of those who want to speak are being discussed before continuing with the group process. The acute needs of those who want to speak up thus get tempered. The autonomous choice how to continue empowers the group. Because the group now knows the keywords, it is less likely that these wants get forgotten than if the group facilitator simply had given someone the floor. Minority votes more likely get articulated (c.f. [Modesto 2002]).



#### 6.10 Listen to your and others' Bodily Signals

... the CHAIRPERSON POSTULATE (see Section 4.1) encourages each participant to be aware of him- or herself and of others. The DISTURBANCE POSTULATE (see Section 4.2) asks group participants to notice disturbances and to contribute to their resolution as soon as there are any.



#### **Turning over-rational denies the fact that we are both thinking and feeling beings.**

If we ignore our feelings then we miss a sensorium able to assess the current situation. We are more likely not to be aware of what is going on. Group cohesion will suffer.

Therefore:

**Notice the state of your body and messages it is sending out. Also notice messages from the bodies of your fellow participants.[Cohn 1969, p. 31], [Cohn 2002c, p. 79]**

We “have perceptions, images, feelings, thoughts.”[Cohn 2002d, p. 214] “Physical awareness is an important experience in itself as well as a potent tool for recognizing feelings.”[Cohn 1969, p. 31] Listening to bodily signals helps sharpening intuition (cf. [Cohn 1969, pp. 28f.]).

The PARTICIPANT LEADER (see Section 5.2) in particular has been trained to sense his or her and others' bodily messages.

Ruth C. Cohn practiced meditation[Cohn 2002c, p. 97], which has similar elements and thus effects.



#### 6.11 Get Involved! Take Action!

*Originally, Günter Hoppe proposed this Auxiliary Rule as a third Postulate. Ruth C. Cohn stated in her reply that it could not apply to everyone regardless of her or his general state of health—e.g. not to pregnant women—and therefore was an Auxiliary Rule, but not a Postulate; she suggested to generalize his suggestion as quoted in The Possible Third Postulate (see Section 4.3).[Cohn 1994]*

... the CHAIRPERSON POSTULATE (see Section 4.1) encourages each participant to act responsibly in relative freedom and according to her or his wishes. The DISTURBANCE POSTULATE (see Section 4.2) asks group participants to give the resolution of disturbances priority. The Possible Third Postulate further emphasizes the ethical commandment to be conscious with regard to one's own responsibility.



#### **Inhumanity in the “Globe” perpetuates itself. You feel powerless.**

That living a successful life was just for a chosen few cannot be right. Yet facing ever repeating violence and injustice in the world and being told “There is no alternative”, one can easily withdraw back into oneself and say “There is nothing one can do about it.” So once more the vicious circle will not break. Saul D. Alinsky put it this way:

“The issue that is not clear to organizers, missionaries, educators, or any outsider, is simply that if people feel they don’t have the power to change a bad situation, *then they do not think about it.*”[Alinsky 1989, p. 105]

Therefore:

**“Concern yourself with the world around you, with your ‘Globe’ and its representation within yourself. Take action and change what you are able to in the sense of humanization.”[Hoppe 1993]**

Make the first move out of the vicious circle of violence and injustice.

You are partially powerful and therefore also partially responsible for you, others and the world. Personal involvement helps positively change society.

Patricia Lee “Patti” Smith repeatedly asks her audience:

“Don’t forget it—use your voice! You will decide what happens in this world! You are the future! The future is now!”



#### 6.12 One’s Own and Others’ Needs

*This Auxiliary Rule has been proposed by Matthias Kroeger in collaboration with Ruth C. Cohn.[Kroeger 1992, p. 102].*

... the CHAIRPERSON POSTULATE (see Section 4.1) encourages each participant to act responsibly in relative freedom and according to her or his wishes.



**Acting to satisfy just one’s own desires often means not to sense legitimate expectations by others.**

Therefore:

**Do not only consider what you would like, but also, what you have to and should.**

The CHAIRPERSON POSTULATE does not invite you to blindly follow just your own will. Instead, it is meant to consciously decide how to act. This means considering both your own needs, but also those of others.



## 7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper primarily stressed the dialectical form of Theme-Centered Interaction (TCI), which perfectly relates to patterns. There is much more to TCI. This section briefly points to complementary techniques and material.

### 7.1 Techniques Typical for TCI Groups

Some facilitation techniques can be often observed in TCI groups.

*Co-Facilitation.* Often, TCI Groups are being facilitated collaboratively by two persons. Together they sense more than any single one of them would. The two facilitators also serve the group as an example of cooperation instead of competition.

*Concentric Circles.* An introduction game also well-known from PLoPs.[Kuebel 2002]

*Giving Summaries.* The PARTICIPANT LEADER (see Section 5.2) can give the process a new direction and thus reestablish the DYNAMIC BALANCE (see Section 5.1) by summarizing the discussion so far.

*Rounds.* Ruth C. Cohn suggested several different kinds of rounds: Every participant is given the chance to state his or her feelings and thoughts in that very moment, among them the “Flashbulb”. [Cohn 2002e; Cohn 1992a]

*Silence.* Silence enhances awareness.[Klein 2002, pp. 322–325] “Silence in the group means the experience of being a self without being alone.”[Cohn 2002a, p. 113], cf. [Cohn 2002c, p. 97]

*Weaving a Net.* A game enhancing the awareness of interdependence also well-known from PLoPs. [Kuebel 2002]

### 7.2 Adaptation to Larger Groups

Ruth C. Cohn originally developed TCI for small educational groups. Irene Klein has devised a modified variant together with her that also fits larger groups.[Klein 2002] In effect, this is also known as the Open Space Technology.

### 7.3 Biographical Note

Ruth Charlotte Cohn, née Hirschfeld, was born in 1912 in Berlin, Germany. From 1931 to 1933 she attended Heidelberg and Berlin universities. Being a Jew, having read Hitler’s book,[Cohn 2002b, p. 134] which he again announced the persecution of Jews in,[Hitler 1933] and facing the Nazi terror instantly having started right after their coming to power, she fled to Switzerland in 1933 and continued her university studies in Zurich. She studied psychology, economics, literature, pedagogy, philosophy and theology and became a psychoanalyst. In parallel she saved the lives of her parents and parents in law and gave birth to her first child. In 1940 she was scared to death because of rumors that Germany had invaded Switzerland.

One year later the family emigrated to the United States of America because of no chance of being granted permanent residency or even citizenship in Switzerland.[Cohn 1990, p. 14] Ruth C. Cohn was trained in Early Childhood Progressive Education at the Bank Street Cooperative School for Student Teachers in New York City.[Heidbrink 2002, print pp. 164f.], [Schneider-Landolf 2015, pp. 5–7] She continued her university studies at the Columbia University in the same city. In 1949 she published her first poetry book, still in German [Cohn 1949]. Later she also published poems in English[Wisconsin Poetry Magazine], using her pen name Eve Amat [Cohn 1990, p. 15]. Being a nonmedical psychoanalyst Cohn was actively involved in establishing the National

Psychological Association for Psychoanalysis, that has also granted membership to psychotherapists who have not been trained physicians in contrast to e.g. the American Institute for Psychoanalysis. She was an active member of the Academy of American Psychotherapists where she met many adherers of Humanistic Psychology. 1955 she started practicing TCI. Her work was further influenced by ecological concerns[Cohn 2002c, p. 81], [Heidbrink 2002, print pp. 169f.], especially Rachel L. Carson's book[Carson 2002], the Black-White inequality in the United States and the Vietnam War[Cohn 2002c, p. 91]. To research and disseminate TCI, she and Norman Liberman founded the Workshop Institute for Living Learning (WILL) in 1966, in 2002 renamed to Ruth Cohn Institute for TCI-international (RCI). During her decades in the United States she transcended psychoanalysis towards experientialism. Since 1968 Ruth C. Cohn repeatedly visited Europe having been invited to conferences, e.g. the Lindau Psychotherapy Weeks in 1971, and looking for organizations to practice TCI in.[Cohn 2002c, pp. 80–86]

In 1974 she relocated to Switzerland to consult the progressive, international boarding school Ecole d'Humanité. In Europe, TCI has quickly won many practitioners, especially within the Protestant Christian denominations in Germany, but also in schools, continuing education, recreational centers, business management etc.[Cohn 1969, p. 36] and has early helped diminish West German Roman Catholic Church's reservations towards psychological counseling[Ziemann 2006, pp. 90–93]. Ruth C. Cohn died in 2010 in Düsseldorf, Germany.

Ruth C. Cohn received several awards for her achievements: In 1971 the New York Society for Clinical Psychology awarded her the Psychologist of the Year prize, in 1979 the Universität Hamburg, Germany, granted her the title of honorary doctor, in 1992 she was decorated with the Commander's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany, and in 1994 she received another honorary doctor's degree by the University of Bern, Switzerland.

#### 7.4 Pointers to Further Study

Ruth C. Cohn “had developed the method of TCI even before it was defined, simply by practising it”[Cohn 2002c, p. 99]—studying the original definitions and body of secondary sources on TCI is no substitute for practicing it, i.e. exposing oneself to a more immersive experience, probably in a MASTER-JOURNEYMAN[Weir 1998, pp. 496–499] or MASTER AND APPRENTICES arrangement (cf. [Hoover and Oshineye 2009]):

“The fundamental learning situation is one in which a person learns by helping someone who really knows what he is doing.”[Alexander et al. 1977c, p. 413]

The RCI both maintains a directory of TCI practitioners and has defined a formal training curriculum in TCI.

Others have developed means of group facilitation with similar intents. Nonviolent Communication by Marshall B. Rosenberg can complement TCI.[Mohs 2010] Dan Bar-On has developed Storytelling that both expresses autonomy and interdependence and aims at avoiding “monolithic identity constructions” by acceptance of other positions and one's own contradictions—and ultimately harmonization and pacification.[Bar-On 2006; Bar-On 2008]

Ruth C. Cohn's CHAIRPERSON POSTULATE (see Section 4.1) in part draws on the concept of competing and contradictory subpersonalities, the “internal group”. This concept goes back to Roberto Assagioli's Psychosynthesis [Assagioli 2012] and is becoming more and more accepted[Schwartz 1995, pp. 11–17]. Two other references from the large body of literature following the tradition of this concept are [Kramer 1995; Satir 2009].

The KNOW YOURSELF pattern[Manns and Rising 2015a] states that it is important to get to know one's own values and interests, abilities and limitations to sustain tasks that require perseverance. This pattern suggests to write a Values Essay, a Self-Affirmation exercise.

Theme-Centered Interaction is rooted at the intersection of Counseling Psychology, Ethics, Clinical Psychology and Sociological Social Psychology. These areas have developed disciplines like group dynamics, sociometry and action research. Here the reader can find additional material on the topic of this paper.

It is worth mentioning that mainly in Psychological Social Psychology and Industrial and Organizational Psychology there is a discipline called small group research [Weinberg 1998, pp. 91f.]. This branch has contributed valuable insights into decision making, problem solving, whether to team or not to team, coordination, computer supported collaborative work, social ostracism etc.

More recently, action teaching has been proposed, which joins the two traditions again. [Plous 2000]

## 7.5 Efficacy of Theme-Centered Interaction

After having read this section the reader will be more confident that TCI works and at least regarding some aspects why or how it works.

The majority of Humanistic Psychology has traditionally been inclined towards qualitative research. Most publications on TCI therefore are practitioner reports and qualitative studies, e.g. [Cohn and Terfurth 1993; Ewert 2008], some additionally applied quantitative methods, e.g. [Tscheke 2012]. So the space searched for quantitative evidence of the efficacy of TCI needs to be extended to related fields in pedagogy and psychology. It turns out to be most easy to verify the efficacy of Auxiliary Rules, because they hypothesize more concrete effects to happen in shorter time spans than the Postulates. Given the limited research resources, the ultimate goal of cultural and social change—which would be hard to measure anyway [Taras et al. 2009]—and “therapy for humanity” therefore will hardly be researched in at all. TCI is a rather all-encompassing approach, thus relates to many practices from different disciplines—e.g. psychotherapy from Clinical Psychology, small group research from Psychological Social Psychology and Industrial and Organizational Psychology, education and instruction from Pedagogy and Educational Psychology—, this further extends the search space.

TCI follows the traditions of Gestalt Therapy, Person-Centered Psychotherapy, Experiential Therapy, Group Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis, each of which has shown scientific evidence of efficacy regarding the treatment of certain conditions, see e.g. [Grawe et al. 2001]. One example is the Auxiliary Rule *STAND BY AND STATE YOURSELF* (see Section 6.1), which enjoys strong support from Group Psychotherapy, see e.g. [Yalom 1970]. Other examples are the Auxiliary Rules *SELECTIVE AUTHENTICITY* (see Section 6.3) and *LISTEN TO YOUR AND OTHERS' BODILY SIGNALS* (see Section 6.10), that are rooted in Experientialism. [Cohn 1992b, p. 99]

From the late 1970s to date there is empirical research in the so-called Self-Determination Theory, e.g. [Deci and Ryan 1980]. This theory assumes three universal human needs that are necessary conditions for well-being: Competence, mutual relatedness to others and autonomy. The Self-Determination Theory is concerned with what motivates people. It sees intrinsic motivation as the force to grow one's own competence, relatedness and autonomy and explains that therefore intrinsic has a much more long-lasting effect than extrinsic motivation. It also explains the empirically discovered fact that extrinsic can even undermine intrinsic motivation. The Axioms of TCI are very well compatible with this theory. The theory also supports the preference TCI gives to authoritative instead of authoritarian facilitators. It has been shown that students who perceive their teachers as supportive of their autonomy and care for their problems score higher regarding their intrinsic motivation. [Bieg et al. 2011] This is the power of empowerment. Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction is one of the teaching styles that aim at increasing intrinsic motivation and have been positively appraised in the context of Evidence-Based Education. [Kamil et al. 2008, pp. 26–30, 47–50]

The recent Positive Psychology movement can be seen as an offspring of Humanistic Psychology, and differently from its ancestor, Positive Psychology applies quantitative research methods rigorously. TCI and Positive Psychology both apply psychology to improve individual and social well-being and support growth in the general population instead of being geared towards people with mental health issues. As regards TCI Positive Psychology has shown the importance of thorough training and supervision of facilitators [Seligman et al. 2009, pp. 298–300].

Cognitive scientists discovered about a decade ago that even very young toddlers clearly prefer social over antisocial behavior—even when only watching it; they concluded that their findings supported the view that the

social evaluation performed by infants was universal and unlearned.[Hamlin et al. 2007] A very recent neuroscientific study shows the importance parental values and parental empathy plays in the further development of social values during the second year of one's life.[Cowell and Decety 2015] Ruth C. Cohn assumed there was an “organismic values sense” innate in human beings, that needed to be nourished[Cohn 2002b, p. 144]—modern research supports her hypothesis. Research in socialization[Hastings et al. 2007, p. 655] again supports Cohn's preference of authoritative over authoritarian styles.

The neuroscientific concept of a so-called embodied mind and other respective research support the assumption made in TCI that thinking and feeling are inseparably connected,[von Kanitz 2014, pp. 255f.] which becomes visible e.g. in the EXISTENTIAL-ANTHROPOLOGICAL AXIOM (see Section 3.1), the DYNAMIC BALANCE imperative (see Section 5.1) and the LISTEN TO YOUR AND OTHERS' BODILY SIGNALS Auxiliary Rule (see Section 6.10).

The PRAGMATIC-POLITICAL AXIOM (see Section 3.3) assumes that free will exists, limited by conditional inner and outer boundaries; the CHAIRPERSON POSTULATE (see Section 4.1) draws on that Axiom. Recent neurophysiological findings do not necessarily contradict Ruth C. Cohn's view, especially because she mentioned inner boundaries as a limitation.[Boldt 2012]

In Evidence-Based Education a very large synthesis of meta-analyses recently concluded that the conduct of teachers accounted for the largest fraction of learning variance in students. More precisely, it turned out that a good teacher needed to provide safety, act accepting and empathically, which here meant to put him- or herself in the position of the students, be open for feedback from his or her students, actively scrutinize him- or herself and adapt the teaching methods accordingly.[Hattie 2009; Hattie 2012], see also [Kamil et al. 2008, pp. 31–36]. This study has become known as “Visible Learning”. Transferred to TCI these results justify the facilitators' role to keep a DYNAMIC BALANCE (see Section 5.1) and the empathy that shines through both the SELECTIVE AUTHENTICITY (see Section 6.3) and the LISTEN TO YOUR AND OTHERS' BODILY SIGNALS (see Section 6.10) Auxiliary Rules. More general, it supports that Weinberg's metaphor of Ashby's Requisite Variety also holds for educators: The more methods he or she can choose from depending on the current situation the better.

## APPENDIX

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