OPERATIONALIZING AND VISUALIZING PSYCHODYNAMICS IN POSITIVE PSYCHOTHERAPY (PPT)

RICHARD-CHRISTIAN WERRINGLOER
Dr., M.D., psychotherapist
Certified Positive Psychotherapist,
Master trainer of PPT (Herrenberg, Germany)
Email: Richard.Werringloer@gmx.de

Received 12.03.2023
Accepted for publication 15.06.2023
Published 01.07.2023
DOI: 10.52982/lkj201

Abstract
This article presents a novel conflict model for operationalizing and visualizing psychodynamics within the context of Positive Psychotherapy (PPT). The model builds upon the traditional approach of N. Peseschkian and M. Goncharov’s model from 2014, further enhanced by the basic needs of love, security, and autonomy as outlined by G. v. Witzleben (2014), and the emotions delineated by P. Ekman and Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). The model affords an in-depth understanding of a patient’s motivations and psychodynamic responses in various situations. It expands upon previous models that focused on conflicts rooted in the connection between primary and secondary capabilities. By considering the simultaneous or sequential existence of different inner conflicts, the model allows for a comprehensive view of a patient’s psychodynamics. While this article only provides an excerpt of the ideas from the author’s recent book, it offers general guidelines for operationalizing and visualizing psychodynamics within PPT, encouraging further exploration and understanding of individual psychodynamics.

Keywords: positive psychotherapy, psychodynamics, conflict model, traditional Chinese medicine, inner conflict

Introduction
Prof. Dr. Nossrat Peseschkian, with his observations and analysis of the psyche, has given a wide metatheory for understanding the psychodynamics of the individual’s inner conflict. The objective of this article is to describe a conflict model which the author created for operationalizing and visualizing his concepts of conflict contents and dynamics within a graphic representation. N. Peseschkian’s (1977a) own diagram of the actual, basic and inner conflict served as an underlaying structure which then was further developed and explained through concepts of Maxim Goncharov, Gabriele von Witzleben (2014a), Paul Ekman (1970) and Traditional Chinese Medicine. In its entirety the enhanced model aims to describe systematically as many aspects of the individual conflict contents and dynamics as possible using an operationalized process. This article is a brief synopsis of an extensive chapter on psychodynamics form from the book “Living a fulfilled life; Self-Exploration and Personal Growth with Positive Psychotherapy after Prof. Dr. Nossrat Peseschkian” (Werringloer, 2023) and has to be seen as this. The main contents found within have been described succinctly within the short following pages.

Methodology
The graphic conflict model described in the book “Living a fulfilled life; Self-Exploration and Personal Growth with Positive Psychotherapy after Prof. Dr. Nossrat Peseschkian” (Werringloer, 2023) systematically operationalizes the description of conflict contents and dynamics. It is based on Nossrat
Peseschkian’s (1977a) own model of psychodynamics (Fig. 1) that describes an Actual Conflict, a Basic Conflict and an Inner Conflict. The Actual Conflict consists of the conflict situation that leads to an infringement of Primary and Secondary Capabilities by Micro- or Macro-Trauma. The Basic Conflict consists of the sub- or preconscious conflictive concepts about the Primary and Secondary Actual Capacities acquired during childhood that reside within the personality structure. The Inner Conflict is triggered when a Basic Conflict is touched by an Actual Conflict through a series of micro-traumatic events or a major life event (Macro-Trauma). The ego that is no longer capable of handling the occurring events properly thus resorts to conflict processing through somatization and behavioral escape reactions. The individual vents his/her excess energy through a sympathetic or parasympathetic reaction.

![Fig. 1. N. Peseschkian’s model of Psychodynamics](image)

Nossrat Peseschkian’s (1977a) own model of psychodynamics is combined with the emotional wheel from TCM (Traditional Chinese Medicine) (Fig. 2) which describes emotions identical with the universal emotions described by Paul Ekman (1970) with the exception of surprise. The TCM wheel of emotions, with its emotions happiness and anger predominated by the sympathetic nerve system and the emotions sadness and fear predominated by the parasympathetic nerve system, interlocks perfectly with N. Peseschkian’s model with honesty/candor (sympathetic nerve system) and courtesy (parasympathetic nerve system) forming a perfect association (Fig. 3). The emotion disgust can be seen as an emotion that is engaged by both nervous systems at the same time. P. Ekman’s (1970) ideas of combined emotions is then also added through the introduction of shame and guilt... As in M. Goncharov’s (2014) conflict model – for describing the locations of these conflicts within life – the four dimensions of life (body-health (B)/work-achievement (W)/social life (S)/Future – spirituality (F)) are
The last step introduces the concept of love, security and autonomy as basic essential needs of an individual – described and used by Gabriela von Witzleben (2014b) in her work on the “triadic principle”. This is a highly enriching expansion of the concept of the basic conflict because inner conflicts are generally rooted in one or more of these three needs that are present in Nossrat Peseschkian’s work, but not all of them are explicitly mentioned as such in his conflict model (The need for love is included in N. Peseschkian’s basic capability for love and security for example is described by the capacity of trust and hope.) The importance of this differentiation becomes obvious when we look at the way children learn and see how their learning is often conditioned by the manipulation of these three basic needs. A child may have learned cleanliness because its parents had scolded it and shown it their emotional disapproval, saying they wouldn’t love it any more whenever it soiled its pants (Cleanliness – Love). The child might have learned how to be industrious and achieve because the parents otherwise would have punished him/her physically (achievement - physical security) when he/she brought home bad grades. The child might have learned to be obedient because the parents would otherwise have locked it up in his/her room or taken away the car keys (obedience - autonomy). So, in addition to love, a basic conflict can be rooted in the individual’s needs for security and autonomy and can be of major help in understanding, explaining and solving the patient’s conflicts. In addition to the basic and actual capabilities, we also find these three needs in N. Peseschkian’s concept of “attachment – differentiation – detachment”. We can see how the infants’ satisfaction of its need for love and being mirrored is highly important in the infants’ connection to the mother/parents during the stage of attachment and how it is a safeguard for the infant’s survival and development. The need for security then evolves as predominant in the child’s stage of differentiation as the child progressively discovers the world around it and has to take care of him/herself. The need and longing for autonomy then take on its importance in the stage of detachment and allows the youth to
become independent. All three needs are present in all of the stages but each one has a particular role to play at a specific stage. The three basic needs of love, security and autonomy are added individually to the diagram within the area of the basic conflict (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3. Framework of the new conflict model containing the Actual, Basic and Inner Conflict

Discussion:

3.1. Conflict Dynamics

As we will now discuss successively - in positive psychotherapy, we can, per definition, distinguish between an Actual Conflict, which is an acute or chronic-load situation caused by micro- or macro-trauma and the cause of the conflict with its conflict content (objectives and behavior) and localization within the four
dimensions of life. The **Basic Conflict** consists of the sub- or preconscious conflictive concepts for this situation within the personality structure acquired during childhood, with its conflict content (objectives and behavior) and localization (Four Dimensions and Four Dimensions of role modeling and comprehension). The **Inner Conflict** is the resulting subconscious seemingly irresolvable decompensation of the known strategies with internal (somatization) and external escape reactions within the Four Dimensions that do not bring a solution to the situation but at least afford a temporary relief/compensation. In the long run, the conflicts have to be solved or lead to helplessness, hopelessness, and further decompensation. So, the inner conflict results from the actual conflict with its challenges touching the basic conflict and the lack of a solution through prior, known strategies/behavior patterns and results in somatization and psychological compensation reactions with further helplessness and inner confusion. It may be a conflict on different levels of the conscious and subconscious, with the person consciously wanting something but subconsciously acting in the opposite direction, resulting in inner disharmony and failure to achieve his/her objectives. When this becomes chronic, the person becomes symptomatic.

- **Introductive example of conflict dynamics (Fig. 4):**

  The repeated lack of punctuality of family members (Actual Conflict) at family gatherings meets one’s concept of punctuality learned as a child (Basic Conflict) and leads to inner confusion and an outburst of anger and a headache (Inner Conflict).

- **The Actual Conflict (Fig. 5)**

  **Theory:**
  
  An Actual Conflict is an acute or chronic load-situation caused by Micro- or Macro-Trauma (Life Events) and the cause of the conflict with its conflict content: The objectives with their localization within the Four Dimensions of Life expression (Four Dimensions: Body-Health/Work/Social Life/Future-Spirituality) and behavior (Actual Capacities) to reach it.

  **Introductive example:**
  
  Family members repetitively come late to a social event that was planned.

  **Nonpunctuality (behavior – secondary actual capacity) is a micro-traumatic acute and chronic event happening at a family meeting (objective) within the social area (Four Dimensions).**

- **The Basic Conflict (Fig. 6)**

  **Theory:**
  
  As described above, the Basic Conflict consists of the sub- or preconscious conflictive concepts that reside within the personality structure. These conflictive concepts were acquired during childhood and are no longer adequate - with their conflict content (the objectives (4 Dimensions of Life) and the behavior to achieve them (Actual Capacities) and their localization within life and area of origin (4 Dimensions & 4 Dimensions of Role Modeling & Comprehension).

  **Introductive example actual conflict:**
  
  As children, we were taught that punctuality was a sign of respect for one another and especially family members. Those who came late were ridiculed and scolded if they did not comply.

  As conflict content and conflictive concept Punctuality (behavior – Secondary Actual Capacity) is closely linked to the experience of Love/acceptance (Primary Actual Capacity – that becomes a subconscious objective) through educative conditioning (4 Dimensions of Role Modeling & Comprehension) in the social context and especially family-relationships (Objective - 4 Dimensions).

  The repeated lack of punctuality of family The Inner Conflict (Fig. 7)

  **Theory:**
  
  The Inner conflict occurs when a Basic Conflict learned in childhood meets a series of micro-traumatic events or a major life event (Macro-Trauma). The ego does not have the resources and strategies to handle these events properly and resorts to somatization on the physical level and conflict-processing escape reactions on the external level.

  **Introductive example basic conflict:**
  
  Because we did not learn a calm and reflective way of reacting to repeated situations of unpunctuality at all as children, when we are overstressed by repeated or massive situations of lack of punctuality, we can no longer react in a controlled way and decompensate. This leads to verbal tirades and a headache as a flight reaction.

  The repeated nonpunctuality (Micro-Trauma) of family members (Actual Conflict) meets our Punctuality concepts learned as children (Basic Conflict) and leads to the decompensation of the
ego and inner confusion with an outburst of anger and a headache (Inner Conflict - flight reaction within the Four Dimensions of Life).

In this situation, we react with Honesty/Candor, since this is the Key-Conflict reaction strategy that we acquired as children (see Key-Conflict further on).

---

Fig. 4. Introductive example of conflict dynamics
Fig. 5. The Actual Conflict; Fig. 6. The Basic Conflict; Fig. 7. The Inner Conflict; Fig. 8. The Key Conflict
The Key Conflict (Fig. 8)

Honesty and courtesy combine to create the Key Conflict. Within the individual, it is a type of switch for directing conflict energy outwards or inwards. Honesty is the capability to openly express our needs and conflict energy to the outside world, while courtesy is the ability to keep our needs to ourselves, politely not intruding into other people’s lives. Courtesy allows us to prioritize the needs of others by confining conflict energy within ourselves. We need both honesty and courtesy, and when we use them in balance as strengths, we can express ourselves honestly and politely as an integral personality. If we are overly courteous, the consequence is many internal conflicts. Because we do not express our needs, we usually do not get what we want and then blame ourselves for not standing up to our needs. If we are overly honest, we inevitably create external conflicts, maybe seemingly getting what we want at first, but that short-term gain tends to cause further conflicts in the long run. Every individual has his/her propensity.

Introductive example key conflict:
We react with open anger to the unpunctuality of our family members.

As children, through genetics, for example, conditioning or maybe as compulsive reactivity, we learn to express ourselves with candor, too often explode in anger.

3.2. Explanatory example for the description of an individual’s psychodynamics
During the last year, a thirty-year-old woman noticed that she and her husband were quarreling more about household tasks and wanted some time for herself. She had witnessed how husbands of friends helped out at home so their wives had more time to themselves. She thought it was not right that she did everything in the household and her husband simply rested, being pampered at home, and doing whatever he wanted to do. They communicated less; her husband became irritable, worked longer hours and no longer gave her the attention she had once enjoyed in the past. On the other hand, she became more engaged in her household and family work, felt lonelier and less loved each day, and often suffered hypertensive crises in the evenings.

Actual conflict: There is a succession of two actual conflicts in this situation. The first comes from the continuous feeling of being treated unjustly, and the second is a reaction to her husband’s reaction of withdrawing his attention and affection.

Basic conflict: In the first conflict situation, the Basic Conflict/Concept was the new concepts she had learned from her environment. How the household should be shared respectfully (Justice – Love) and that she needed some space for self-realization, just as her husband had (Justice – Autonomy). These concepts contrasted with the ones she had learned during childhood when her mother was always occupied with the household and the division of labor between a woman in the home and men outside the home was clearly defined. The conflict situation arose through her gradual change of perspective and values.

The origin of the second Basic Conflict was that her mother had never had time to play with her when she was a child. To receive some Love and Time from her mother, she had to help her with the housework. Since this made her mother happier and emotionally warmer, she experienced the feeling of acceptance (Love), and she adopted household chores as a strategy to receive Love. Her husband’s withdrawing his affection (Love) is the trigger to the activation of this second – though older – Basic Conflict/Concept.

Inner conflict: So, despite her Courteous personality, in the first conflict situation, the daily Micro-Trauma caused by unequally distributed household tasks and a need for more self-determination caused her to occasionally vent in anger with her husband. When her husband retreated and no longer gave her attention, she felt guilty, became anxious and sad, and unconsciously sought his Love through Cleanliness and Orderliness. This pattern was contrary to her need for Justice. Since she was preoccupied with cleaning, there was less possibility for the two to find time for one another or discuss their feelings, and so the situation worsened. Both felt personally rejected and escaped by working even more intensely. In the evening, the inner tension rose so high that she often experienced hypertensive crises.
Fig. 9. Explanatory example of an individual’s psychodynamics
4. The process of visualizing a conflict situation with the conflict diagram

We can visualize a conflict situation for an individual by applying our diagram in the following way:

1. **Actual conflict**
   - What are the macro-traumatic or micro-traumatic events of the actual conflict? Where in what dimensions does the actual conflict affect my balance model, and what behavior or subject is touched?

2. **Basic conflict**
   - **Actual Capabilities (Behavior):**
     - Do actual capabilities play a role in this event, and which ones?
     - Are these my vulnerable, sensible, neuralgic actual capabilities? Are they my barking dog/my shadow self?
   - **Dimension of Role-Modeling:**
     - How are my individual emotional areas developed? Do I see any deficits, for example, missing self-esteem?
     - Does the event touch one or more of the four emotional areas, and which ones? Is this the area where I have a deficit?

3. **Four Dimensions of Life Expression (Balance Model)**
   - Which of the Four Dimensions is touched, and what is touched? A strategy or goal?
   - Does the event touch an area that is especially important to me, and is it connected to my self-worth?
   - Does it touch an area which I have neglected, that I have never occupied myself with but now must engage?
   - How balanced am I now? Do I have one-sided-nesses, burdens, deficits, stress, grief?
   - What are my typical escape reactions? Am I using them here?
   - Do I tend to use any defense mechanisms?

4. **Learned Behavior (Actual Capacities), Strategies, and Goals:**
   - Do any of the items above remind me of behavior, strategies, and goals that my parents or someone who has served as a model to me used?
   - **The Three Primary Needs**
     - Which primary needs have been touched, and in which way? Are they especially sensitive to me? Which emotional load is triggered? Where does it lie? Why is it so important to me?
   - **Honesty – Politeness**
   - Which capacity do I usually use? Which one am I expressing now?

3. **Inner conflict and its expression**

   - What are my emotional reactions?
   - What are my escape reactions?

**Example of a patient:**

A 26-year-old apprentice teacher arrives for consultation, full of fear and visibly agitated, complaining about panic attacks, cold sweats, sleeplessness, and diarrhea. He says he has been suffering from colitis for a few months now. It had all started after the beginning of his apprenticeship a year ago. He has tried his very best, but his superior criticizes him and expects more and more. Since he is investing more time at work, he has less time at home now and gets into conflicts with his girlfriend. She generally understands him well and helps him calm down, but his fears of being unable to manage the work situation, his sense of insufficiency, and fear of losing her make him well up in anger fits, and panic attacks add stress to the relationship. He says he believes that if he is not successful at his apprenticeship, he will probably never make it in life and will probably even lose his girlfriend. Most of his anger is directed at himself.

When asked about his Four Dimensions, good resources could be found in a healthy diet and sufficient sports. He has good friends, although he has seen them less in the past few months, yet he knows he can rely on them. He also has a profound spirituality that gives him strength in these difficult days. When relaying the past five years, he tells how he passed his teaching exam with good results. Before that, he had had several unstable relationships with women from whom he had separated, thinking they were not the right match for him. Going into his family background, we discover that his mother was very loving and had patience and time for him. She was always active, eating well, biking, and hiking, and worked as a teacher and was very fond of her job. She had good friends and was a spiritual woman as well. But she was often sad and frustrated because her husband never took time for her and the children and was too strict with them. She had fussed about this for years, but then she resigned herself to the situation because she did not want to leave her children without a father and the security of both parents because these were important values to her.
Although he never was there for them, except as a breadwinner. Two years before his maturity exam, his mother finally divorced his father and left with the children. Because of her own experience, his mother always insisted: “Find the right person that really fits you!”

In contrast to his mother, his father had never eaten well except at home; he skipped meals, had ulcers and headaches often, and never did sports. He worked “24/7” as the patient describes, and seldom went on a holiday with the family. When he went on vacation with the family, he usually took along some work to do.

Despite all his devotion to his work, his father never had really been successful. Except for his coworkers, he had no friends and was an atheist. He believed in duty in achievement and that one “always has to be among the best.” Honor meant getting a profession and working hard for one’s money; this was the only way mankind could find salvation. He never had time for his children except when they had achieved something exceptional. He was impatient and screamed often, and never served as a model to the children as his mother had.

Looking at the Four Dimensions of role modeling, we find two major Basic Conflicts in this patient. One adopted through his father’s education in the area of the “I”- relationship. That as a child, he only received positive attention when he was obedient or had accomplished something remarkable. On the other hand, when he erred, his father screamed at him so fiercely that it “scared the shit” out of him. Luckily, he had a mother from whom he received ample attention. The second Basic Conflict was in the area of the “Thou”-relationship. He had internalized the terrible relationship with his parents and vowed never to get into a relationship like theirs. He didn’t want to find himself a “prisoner of such a marriage” in which he would quarrel with his partner about different convictions and interests day in and day out without leaving each other. Therefore, he really wanted to be “sure of marrying the right person” and be able to live one’s own interests (search for the perfect partner). This had led to changing girlfriends often. And now that he had found “the girl of his life” who had the same interests and many similar habits, he was afraid of losing her because he sometimes lost his temper, was very grumpy, and had panic attacks.

Of course, in addition to these two major Basic Conflicts, many more conflict contents and dynamics can be found within the case history and are of interest to analyze and describe.

Looking at this case history, we see different Life Events cascading: his parents’ divorce, multiple girlfriends, graduation, finding “the woman of his dreams”, and his apprenticeship. The unrealistic demands of his supervisor resulted in Micro-Trauma in the form of degradation, which brought him to...
decompensation. This conflict and its results then impacted his relationship with his girlfriend, causing conflict to arise between the two.

Finally, the conflict manifested in the physical symptom of colitis.

His continuous search for the perfect partner – the one that would leave him a maximum of opportunities to realize himself – inevitably brought repeated breakups and an increasing amount of insecurity to his self-worth and ability to maintain stable relationships. The disease, and the Macro-Traumata of his parent’s divorce, repeatedly changing relationships, and the insecurity in a new apprenticeship touched the areas of Trust, Confidence, Hope, Faith, Doubt, Certitude, Unity, and more... The disease itself is strongly connected to the sense and need for physical Security, the trauma within the relationships to family and partnership more to
the security in Love. The following Micro-Trauma of harassment from a superior touch on the Basic Conflict inflicted by his relationship with his father. His Basic Concept/Conflict of trying to receive attention and appraisal (Love) through Obedience and Achievement was triggered but was futile and led to decompensation in the form of headaches and irritable bowel movements. His further conflict-coping reaction of working harder (escape into work and retreat from social life) did not alleviate the conflict and meant that he saw his girlfriend and friends even less. With an ambivalent Honesty-Courtesy personality trait, his emotional outrage went mostly inwards. He blamed himself and felt shame and guilt. He escaped in loud fits that irritated his girlfriend and led to the next conflict. His memory of his parents’ relationship and its consequences engrained in his mind, his trauma, his emotional outrage went mostly inward. With the conflict model described above, the author attempted to operationalize and visualize psychodynamics within the metatheory of Positive Psychotherapy. It is a combination of N. Peseschkian’s traditional model and M. Goncharov’s model from 2014 that are enhanced by the basic needs love, security and autonomy G. v. Witzleben - described in her books about triad-work - and emotions delineated by P. Ekman and TCM. The model gives an in depth look and understanding of what is moving the patient and what his psychodynamic reactions in a given situation are - based on the models of PPT of an actual, basic and inner conflict given direction by the key conflict. It goes beyond the current models that are primarily based on a basic conflict rooting in a forged connection between a secondary capability connected to a primary one. Since patients are time and again also motivated by the needs for security and/or autonomy or even all of these three basic needs at the same time, all have been taken into consideration. The model makes possible the description of different inner conflicts that exist at the same time or in sequence. Along with the sympathetic and parasympathetic reaction due to inner conflict - described by N. Peseschkian - the visualization of N. Peseschkian escape reactions and Ekman’s/TCM emotions becomes feasible. Defense reactions can also be added. On so few pages the article can only be an excerpt of the ideas which the author described in his recently published book “Living a fulfilled life; Self-Exploration and Personal Growth with Positive Psychotherapy after Prof. Dr. Nossrat Peseschkian”. Nonetheless, the general guidelines to operationalization and visualization of psychodynamics within PPT are concisely described and the author hopes that the article inspires further interest and work on the understanding of the psychodynamics of the individual.

Conclusion:

With the conflict model described above, the author attempted to operationalize and visualize psychodynamics within the metatheory of Positive Psychotherapy. It is a combination of N. Peseschkian’s traditional model and M. Goncharov’s model from 2014 that are enhanced by the basic needs love, security and autonomy G. v. Witzleben - described in her books about triad-work - and emotions delineated by P. Ekman and TCM. The model gives an in depth look and understanding of what is moving the patient and what his psychodynamic reactions in a given situation are - based on the models of PPT of an actual, basic and inner conflict given direction by the key conflict. It goes beyond the current models that are primarily based on a basic conflict rooting in a forged connection between a secondary capability connected to a primary one. Since patients are time and again also motivated by the needs for security and/or autonomy or even all of these three basic needs at the same time, all have been taken into consideration. The model makes possible the description of different inner conflicts that exist at the same time or in sequence. Along with the sympathetic and parasympathetic reaction due to inner conflict - described by N. Peseschkian - the visualization of N. Peseschkian escape reactions and Ekman’s/TCM emotions becomes feasible. Defense reactions can also be added. On so few pages the article can only be an excerpt of the ideas which the author described in his recently published book “Living a fulfilled life; Self-Exploration and Personal Growth with Positive Psychotherapy after Prof. Dr. Nossrat Peseschkian”. Nonetheless, the general guidelines to operationalization and visualization of psychodynamics within PPT are concisely described and the author hopes that the article inspires further interest and work on the understanding of the psychodynamics of the individual.

References: