



Transformation of uncertainty in the therapeutic process

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My starting point

About uncertainty

- The unavoidability of uncertainty
 - Mechanistic worldview: can, should and shall be eliminated
 - Existentialist worldview: existential uncertainty lead to existential anxiety
 - Embodied cognition: uncertainty is us

My starting point

About living – about facing a challenge:

- Why is it that two people approach the same challenge with a different sense of uncertainty?
- What's happening for each of them?
- Can we help a person to experience challenges differently?

What we need to consider about uncertainty?

- People do not experience uncertainty in every event or encounter
- Individuals have different levels of tolerance of uncertainty
- Increasing information does not necessary lead to decrease of uncertainty
- Uncertainty does not necessarily be experienced as negative
- Uncertainty is not a purely computation exercise
- Individual needs to experience uncertainty to consciously explore new alternatives

Definition of Uncertainty

Uncertainty is being aware of the unpredictability of an event or encounter that impacts the consecution of the agent's goals.

- Perceived lack of information
- Valued to the agent/individual
- Neither positive nor negative

Important

- The unpredictability is not in the event
- I believe that the events simply trigger responses, they are not in their nature; predictable or unpredictable, positive or negative
- The characteristics of the event are the result of the 'event with the agent'

What would be success

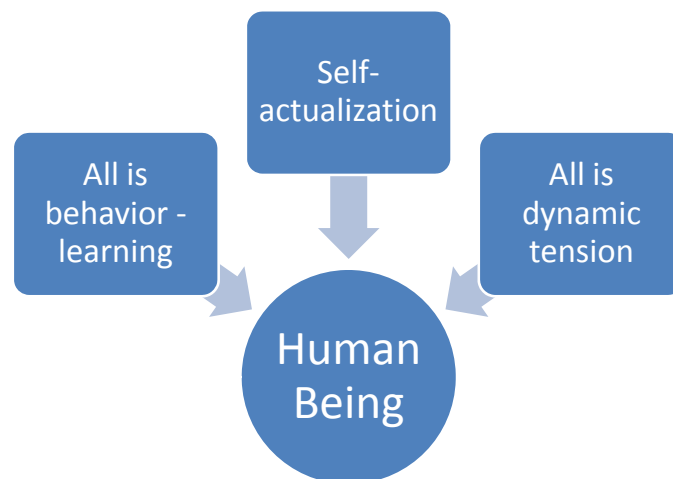
- The development of a framework where the elimination and increase of uncertainty co-exists as possible strategies
- A proposal of what might constitute the basic aspects of the transformation of uncertainty in the therapeutic process

What do I work with?

- Individuals that want to feel better about their lives
- Individuals that are exposed and requested to act differently
- My own experience of embracing the 'unknown' as a mean to meet my clients

underlying assumption: what a Human Being is

Images of a Human Being



Experience of Uncertainty

- Psychodynamic = elimination by making the conscious the unconscious
- Humanistic = minimising it through the creation of certainty of human potential
- Behaviourism = ignoring it by focusing only on external processes
- Existential = assimilation as anxiety and primary driving force

Ontology of Action – Heylighen F.

Agents



Agent = part of condition necessary for action

But which is not affected by action

- $A + X \rightarrow A + Y$
- A = agent or catalyst of the action $X \rightarrow Y$

Agents have a certain invariance or stability

- "objects" rather than processes

Agents are produced by variation and selection

- stable conditions survive longer than unstable ones
- => they will become more common

Goal-directedness

Attractors = implicit goals of actions/agents

- i.e. situations that all actions go towards
- and will return to even when perturbed

Fitness = "attractivity" of a state = underlying goal/value of all agents

Examples:

- **Physics**: goal = minimal potential energy
- **Biology**: goal = maximal survival and reproduction
- **Psychology**: goal = maximal happiness
- **Economics**: goal = maximal "utility" (benefit)

The Intentional Stance

Action: $A + X \rightarrow A + Y$

Agent A has

- **Belief or Sensation** about the situation it is in
 - initial condition X to which A reacts
- **Intention** about what action to do next
 - Action Y that A performs
- **Desire or Goal**
 - Attractor to which A's actions eventually lead

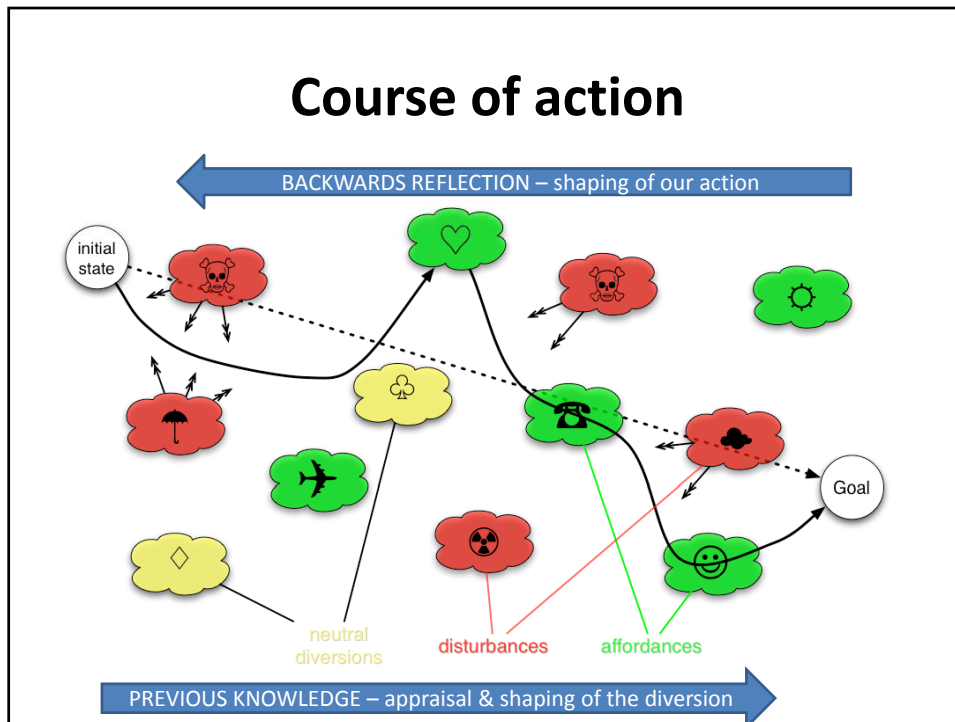
Definition of Uncertainty

Uncertainty is being aware of the **lack of (absolute) accuracy of a chosen action** elicited by a challenge in the pursue of the agent's goals

- Cannot be eliminated
- Play a basic evolutionary role – fear
- It has a learning aspect but it is embedded within internal experience
- We do not always experience uncertainty as anxiety

How good are diversions and challenges?

- The properties of a challenge/diversion are the 'relational characteristics' of the challenge and the individual
- The transformation of our world via knowledge and technology shapes the way we relate with our environment
- An agent, a human being, always operates in its immediate living experience



On taking up a challenge!

- What is happening for an individual to engage or not in a challenge
 - Multidimensional goals
 - Cultural exposure and diversity
 - New technology and knowledge

- Being healthy is being active – because living is being in movement

Appraisal of challenges

- Experience of the Agent
 - Direct Experience
 - What I have experienced
 - Group Experience
 - How the immediate and basic development relationships understand and interpret the world
 - Cultural/Time Experience
 - Cultural values, scientific knowledge, etc...

WORLDVIEW

Living in a Worldview

- Coping Strategy
 - Knowledge is never complete – but it doesn't mean that is not enough to be effective.
 - Being effective is moving towards the agent's goal in a particular context
 - Repetition of a particular course of action and its feedback defines a value system and behavioral repertoire

Coping Strategy is an Appraisal Mechanism and a proven successful Course of Action according to 'local rules'

Living in a worldview

- Universal rules are inaccessible
 - Better explanations of the world are explanations embedded in a particular time and knowledge
 - Universal rules are the local rules of a 'period of time', of a civilization(s)
 - the experience of 'universality' of 'local rules' is a defense mechanism (in psychodynamic may be identified as 'rationalisation')

What's the experience of successful coping strategies?

- Self-efficacy
- Sense of control
 - Sense of predictability
 - Ability to plan
- Feedback

Feel I can cope ≠ I know the 'best strategy'
= I know what works for me

What's the experience of successful coping strategies?

- FLOW – Optimal Experience
 - Clear goals
 - Concentrating, a high degree of concentration on a limited field of attention
 - A loss of the feeling of self-consciousness, the merging of action and awareness.
 - Distorted sense of time, one's subjective experience of time is altered.
 - Direct and immediate feedback
 - Balance between ability level and challenge
 - A sense of personal control over the situation or activity.
 - The activity is intrinsically rewarding, so there is an effortlessness of action
 - A lack of awareness of bodily needs
 - Absorption into the activity, narrowing of the focus of awareness down to the activity itself, action awareness merging

What's a non-successful coping strategies?

- A challenge elicits/triggers our own way of coping with it 'as a known challenge'
- The feedback is substantially different from the one we anticipated – we experience it as a break not as a degree of success
- Benefits of coping strategy might not be within awareness, e.g. socialisation
- Because is not a degree of success it challenges both our own appraisal and the subsequent course of action
 - Self-construct
 - Certainties

Collapse of a Coping Strategy

- Spinelli, E
 - Structure: Self-construct with a certain degree of rigidity
 - Increase of Uncertainty/Anxiety: accepting that my living experience cannot be explained
 - Increase of Rigidity: dissociating more my self-construct from the living experience
- Brothers, D
 - systemically emergent certainties (SECs)
 - Trauma = destruction of SECs

What's the experience of a non-successful coping strategies?

- Uncertainty as lack of knowledge or Existentialist
would say ANXIETY
- But not only
 - Rigidity (fundamentalism)
 - Positive emotional arousing (suspense-pleasure)

What's the experience of a non-successful coping strategies?

- Difficulties of relating, to the unique, never before encountered, circumstances within which we find ourselves – Shotter, J (2009)
- Wittgenstein (1953): These difficulties cannot be overcome simply by our thinking about them, for at first we have nothing to think with
- Andersen, T (1936 – 2007): not with making a *choice between, say, an A or a B, but to do with* “having to give something up, really give it up”
- **Disorientation**
 - **Not being able to plan a perceived appropriate course of action**

What's the experience of a non-successful coping strategies?

Shotter, J

- New circumstances
 - **We cannot *plan an appropriate line of action.***
 - *We can, however, engage in self directed explorations* of the new circumstances
 - Appropriate ***possible ways of acting can emerge.***

What's the experience of a non-successful coping strategies?

- Todes, S (2001): being poised is “being in touch with one’s circumstances”, being ready to respond immediately and spontaneously in whatever way is required by the exigencies of our circumstances
- **Tolerance to Disorientation**
 - **Being ready to identify and respond to the anomalies of the new circumstances**

Brain Lateralisation

- Left Brain: All about past and future. Thinks linearly and methodically. Picks details of the present moment, associate it with our past experience and projects them into the future.
- Right Brain: Right here, right now. Thinks in pictures and learns kinesthetically through the movements of our body. Information in the form of energy through all our senses

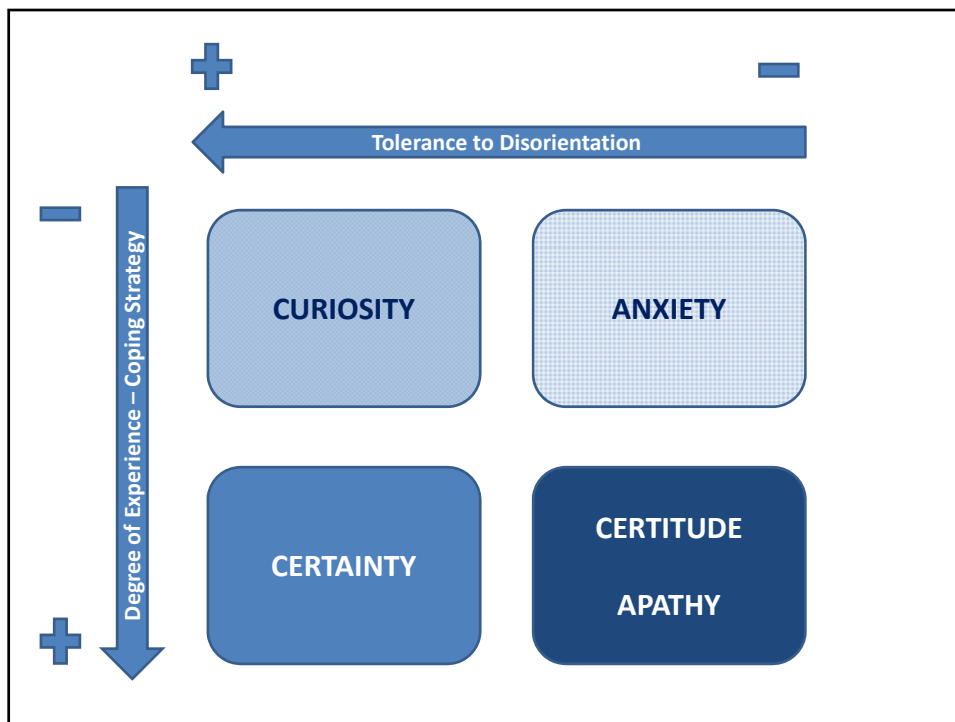
Bolte Taylor, J

Can it be developed

- Attachment theory
 - Enable the individual to acknowledge the experience
 - Bring the experience within a behavioral context – not affective context
- Positive exposure to diverse environment and relationship

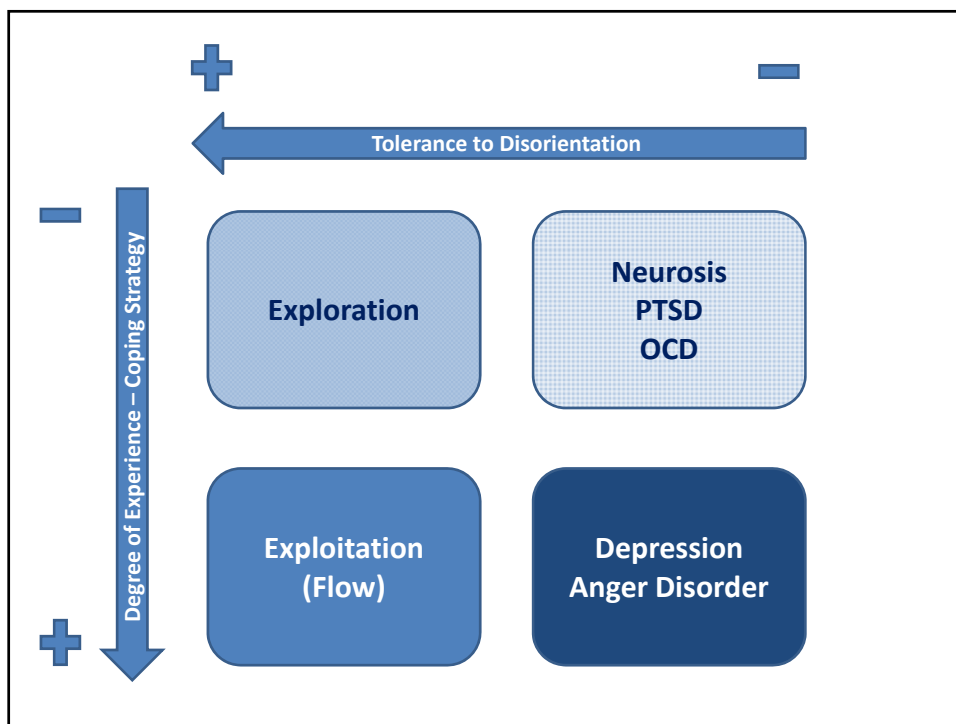
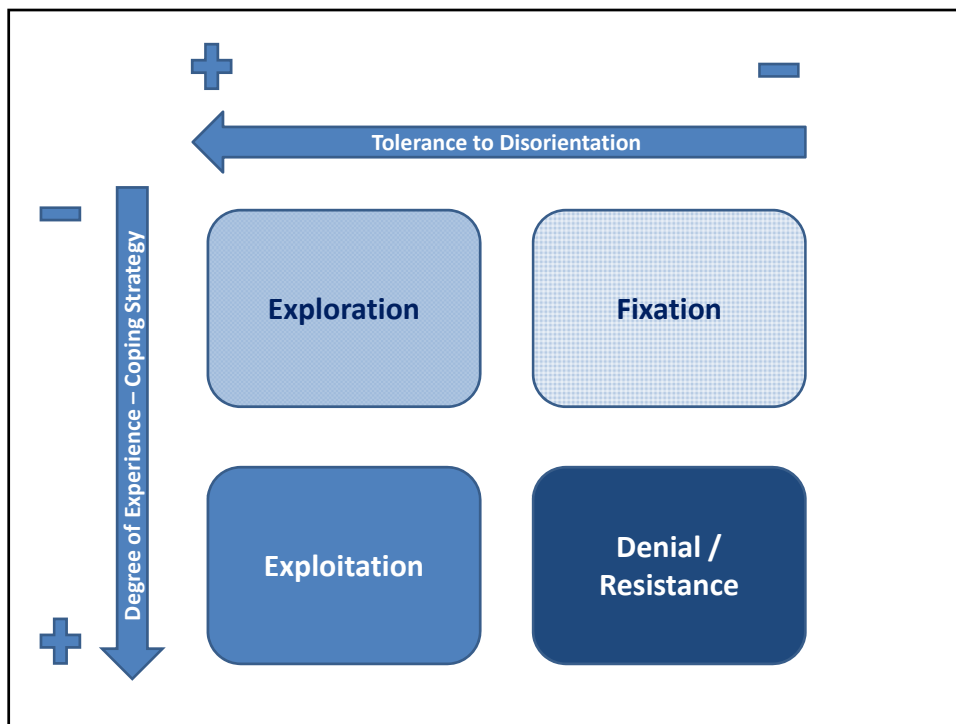
Experience of Uncertainty

- Transformed by:
 - **Degree of experience** which provides me with an appraisal mechanism and course of action – Coping Strategy
 - **Tolerance to disorientation** which provides me with being focused and active within my immediate experience
 - Enables me to experience the differences or anomalies of my course of action
 - Enables novelty



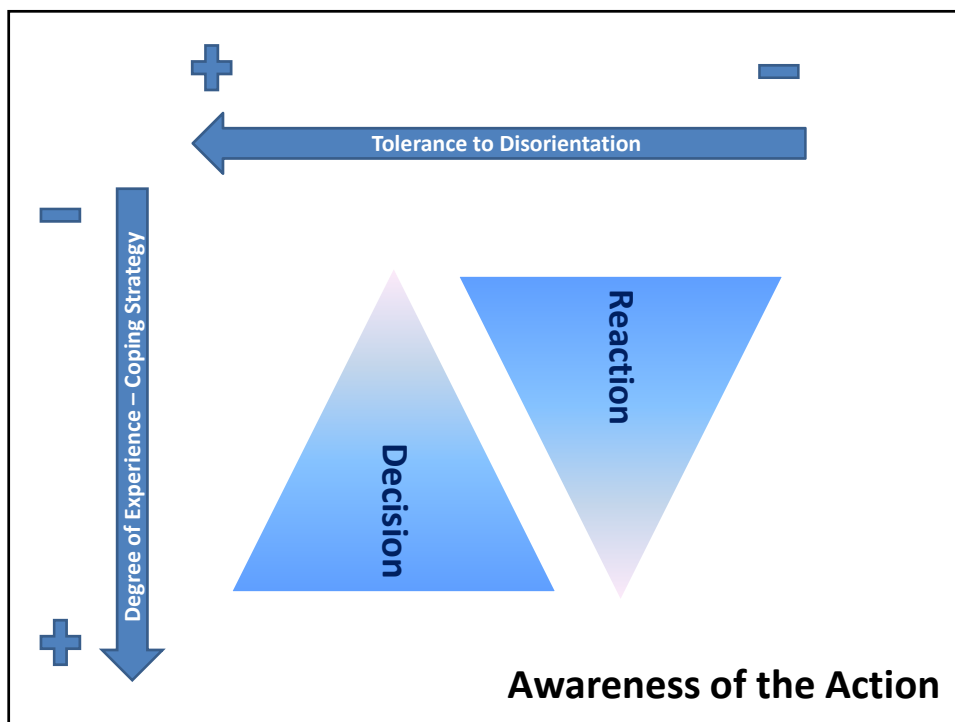
Definitions

- **Certainty:** is the experience of a perceived successful coping strategy
- **Anxiety:** is the experience of lacking a coping strategy of the collapse of a previously perceived successful one
- **Certitude/Apathy:** is the perception that a coping strategy is the reality
- **Curiosity:** is the experience of developing a new coping strategy



In progress: Components of Action

- Decision
 - A rational assessment of the challenge and planning of a course of action (and alternatives of different anticipated – but limited – scenarios)
 - Implies the possibility of delay of satisfaction
- Reaction
 - Immediate, sole and rigid course action in the face of a challenge to satisfy one predominant need
 - No anticipation, no alternative scenarios
 - No delay of satisfaction



Objective of Therapy

- Increase resilience
 - Ability to identify and let go a non-effective **Coping Strategy**
 - Experience the loss of certainty as a natural process of discovery
- Increase Spontaneity
 - Ability to identify **differences and anomalies** in our immediate experience (compare to our Coping Strategy)
 - Ability to experiment **New Coping Strategies** that may deliver the expected result

What works in Therapy?

- **Client Factors:** motivation, positive & realistic expectations, and
 - Secure attachment (+ tolerance to disorientation)
 - Do not have high levels of perfectionism (+ tolerance to disorientation)
 - Are ready to change (+ tolerance to disorientation)
 - Have high levels of social support (+ ability to exploration)

What works in Therapy?

- **Relational Factors:**

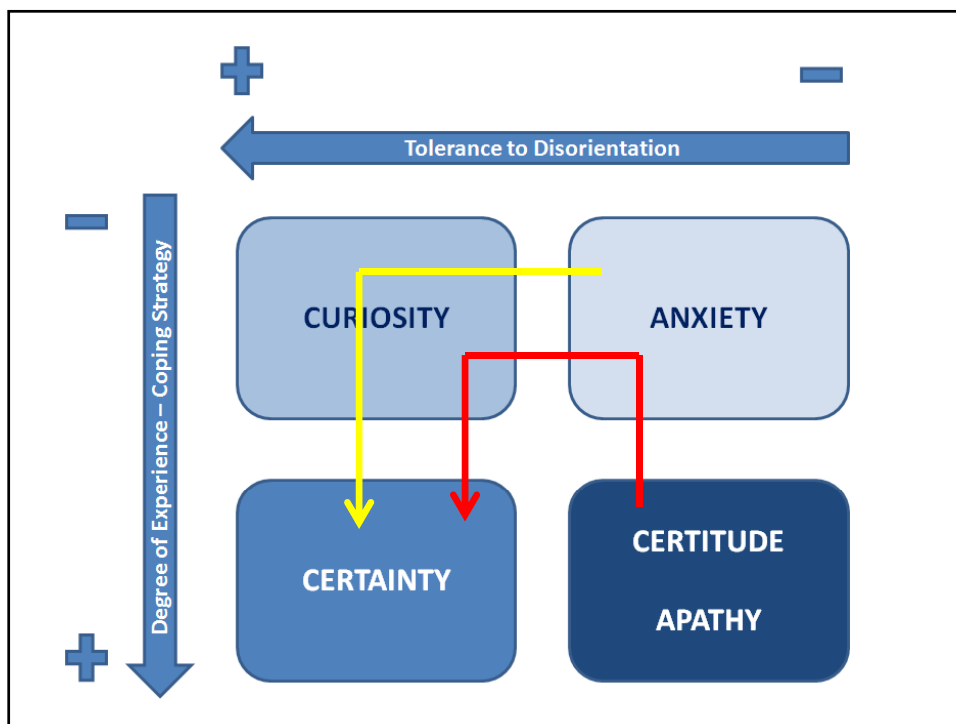
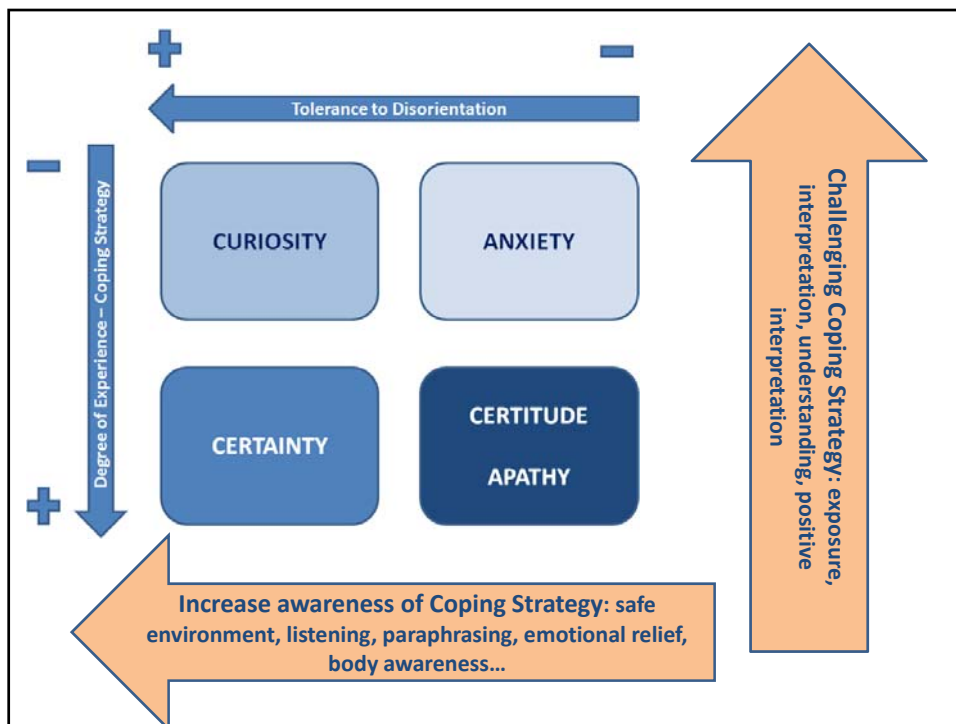
- Quality of the therapeutic relationship
- Agreement to collaborate towards goals
- Feedback
- Self-disclosure

Creation of a relationship where the individual can let go his/her relational coping strategies

What works in Therapy?

- **Technique and Practice Factors:**

- CBT exposure techniques (challenging existing coping strategies)
- Interpretation (challenging existing coping strategies)
- Deepening levels of experiencing (increasing ability to experience here-and-now)



The Process of Therapy

Psychodynamic	Existential / Phenomenological	PPT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expression • Understanding • Relationship • Regression • Differentiation • Creation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worldview as expressed by the client • Challenges provoked by the therapeutic relationship itself • Bridging of the client's 'therapy world' and 'wider world' worldviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation / distancing • Inventory • Situational Encouragement • Verbalisation • Broadening goals

Next Steps

- What is the definition of health
- What is the therapeutic process based on coping strategies
- What makes challenges more attractive
 - Flow does not include novelty
 - What novelty is more attractive? is it attractive?
- Are there unhealthy challenges?