

## Evaluating Models of Relational Competence Theory

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### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this article is to summarize methods used to evaluate the 16 Models of Relational Competence Theory (RCT). Methods to verify the validity and usefulness of these Models must take into account how these models are interrelated. This interrelatedness allows to evaluate participants with single and multi-function statically objective self-report, paper-and-pencil tests. Psychological interventions occur dynamically and systematically through workbooks, written, interactive practice exercises, administered to participants at a distance. Workbooks were developed from theory-derived, theory-related, or theory-independent sources and objective tests and measures, thus combining and matching evaluation with intervention in ways that would be difficult if not impossible to accomplish verbally in face-to-face psychotherapy.*

**Key words:** evidence, method, models, validation, theory, writing

### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to: (1) show how models of Relational Competence Theory (RCT) are interrelated with each other; (2) summarize methods and means used to evaluate and validate models with specifically constructed instruments; and (3) name workbooks or systematically written interactive practice exercises derived directly from models of RCT. This theory has already been applied

to play (L'Abate, 2009c), self-help (Harwood & L'Abate, 2010), and hurt feelings (L'Abate, in press-a).

RCT was introduced briefly in Poland a few years ago (L'Abate, 2008a). Its interrelated models can be evaluated either with static, single or multi-function, self-report paper-and-pencil tests (Cusinato & L'Abate, in press), and dynamic, written interactive practice exercises or workbooks administered as homework (L'Abate, 2010, in press-b; in press-c; L'Abate, Cusinato, Maino, Colesso, & Scilletta, 2010). Consequently, this article assumes that readers of this journal will be familiar with the 16 models of RCT already summarized in the previous publication.

This article will cover three areas of RCT. First, an attempt will be made to show how models of RCT relate with each other, as found in any human and theoretical hierarchal and pyramidal enterprise (L'Abate, 2009). Second, evidence gathered from the very outset by developing methods to evaluate RCT (L'Abate, 1976; L'Abate, Boyce, Fraizer, & Russ, 1992) cannot be summarized here, because it would occupy too much space. However, information and evidence to support the validity of most models of RCT are available (Cusinato and L'Abate, in press; L'Abate et al., 2010). There, interested readers, clinicians and researchers, will find original copies of model-derived test instruments. Third, model-derived and model-related workbooks are available to professionals in various publications (L'Abate, 1986, 1992, 1996, 2010).

Most objective tests developed to evaluate RCT models are based on writing, either

through self-report by participants themselves or through an examiner, as in the EcoMap (Figure 3) and the Likeness Task (Cusinato & Colesso, 2008). Homework assignments of workbooks indicate a drastic, radical, and sharp change from traditional face-to-face (f2f) talk-based (tb) psychotherapy (L'Abate, 1991, 1992, 1999). This approach is based on the conviction that people in need of help can and should be helped first without ever seeing them f2f through the use of distance writing (DW; L'Abate, 1997, 1999, 2001, 2004a, 2004b, 2007a, 2007b, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c, 2009a, in press-b, in press-c; L'Abate & Sweeney, 2010), and, second, seeing participants f2f only when tb interventions are necessary to control the effects of homework assignments and identify causes of resistance or inability to write at a distance.

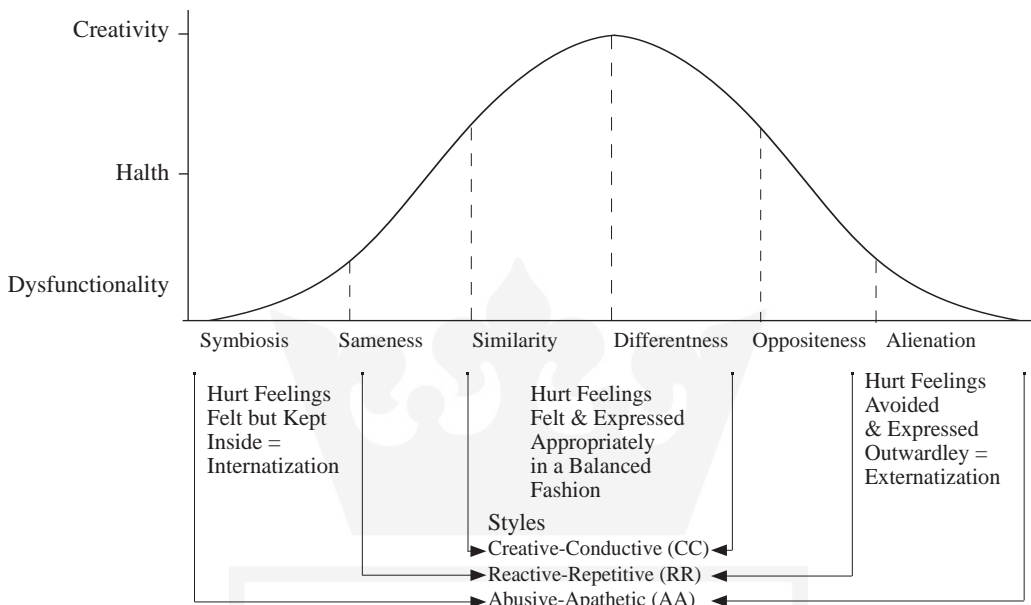
What differentiates DW from f2f tb psychotherapy is the conviction (L'Abate, in press-b) that, for psychotherapy to become a scientifically-based treatment, interventions must be *replicable*, as in many homework assignments (Harwood & L'Abate, 2010; Kazantzis & L'Abate, 2007; L'Abate, 2007b). To be replicable, any type of promotional, preventive, and psychotherapeutic intervention must rely on replicable writing. Words are not replicable (L'Abate, 1999). As long psychotherapy is based on words, it will continue to be an artistic enterprise that, unfortunately, very likely will also attract charlatans. Artists usually do not evaluate their works. They claim, declare, and proclaim that their works are art without any necessary evidence or external judgment. The distinguishing characteristic of professionals/scientists is administration of an objective evaluation before, during, after termination, and on follow-up. This approach is necessary especially when there is a plethora of workbooks from which to choose to match individual concerns with specific treatment

(L'Abate, 1996, 2010; in press-b), a level of specificity difficult if not impossible to achieve in f2f tb psychotherapy.

### **THE INTERRELATEDNESS OF RELATIONAL COMPETENCE THEORY MODELS**

RCT models are not independent from each other. As in any human hierarchy (commercial, educational, industrial, military, and religious), one part of the whole needs to relate well, i.e., needs to get along with, other parts of the hierarchy. Therefore, RCT models must be inter-correlated, conceptually first and empirically second. They do not function as isolated, independent parts. Each model, in one way or another, is related with other models, according to the requirement of redundancy enunciated in the previous publication (L'Abate, 2008a).

For instance, Model 8, as shown in Figure 1 shows how a simple dichotomy of similar/dissimilar is basic to a contextual, developmental, and dialectical continuum of likeness or resemblance differentiated into six ranges: Symbiosis, Sameness, Similarity, Differentness, Oppositeness, and Alienation. Model 9 derives from Model 8 by combining Symbiosis with Alienation to produce an Abusive-Apathetic, Neglectful (AAN) dysfunctional style. Combining Sameness with Oppositeness produces a Reactive-Repetitive (RR) borderline style. Combining Similarity with Differentness produces a Creative-Conductive (CC) functional style. Model 10 is produced by an expansion from Models 8 & 9 into an arithmetical model composed by Multiplicative, Additive, Static Positive, Static Negative, Subtractive, and Divisive interactions. Model 11, composed by Selffulness, Selfishness, Selflessness, and No-Self is related to all the previous models, as shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 1.** A Contextual, Curvilinear, Dialectical Model<sup>8</sup> for a Likeness Continuum

| Model 8: Continuum of Likeness            |                     |                             |                     |                          |
|---|---------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| Symbiosis                                 | Sameness            | Similarity/Differentness    | Oppositeness        | Alienation               |
| .....                                     |                     |                             |                     |                          |
| Model 9: Styles in Intimate Relationships |                     |                             |                     |                          |
| AA  | RR                  | CC                          | RR                  | AA                       |
| .....                                     |                     |                             |                     |                          |
| Model 10: Interactions                    |                     |                             |                     |                          |
| Divisive/<br>Subtractive                  | Static/<br>Positive | Multiplicative/<br>Additive | Static/<br>Negative | Divisive/<br>Subtractive |
| .....                                     |                     |                             |                     |                          |
| Model 11: Selfhood                        |                     |                             |                     |                          |
| No-self                                   | Selfish/Selfless    | Selffull                    | Selfish/Selfless    | No-self                  |
| .....                                     |                     |                             |                     |                          |

\*Adapted from L'Abate et al. (2010).

**Figure 2.** Relationships among four Models of Identity Differentiation 8, Styles 9, Interactions 10, and Selfhood 11\*

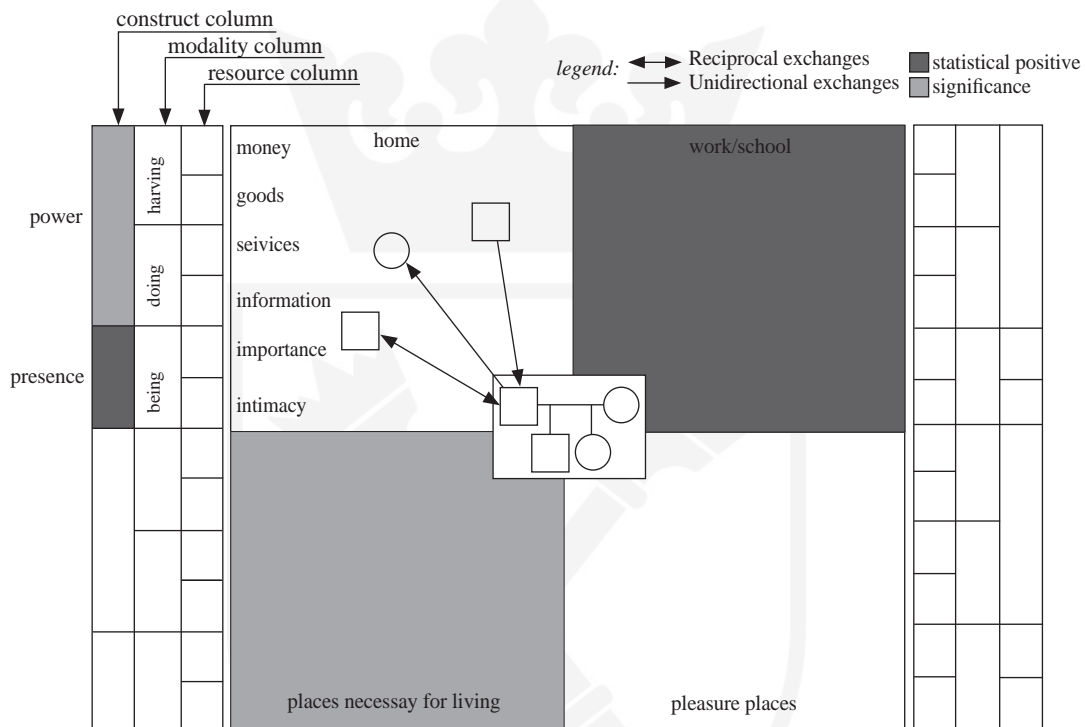
Figure 3 shows how Models 3, 7, 9, 11, (Model 7), Styles (Model 9), Priorities (Model 12 & 15 interact, that is, are interrelated with 12) and Intimacy (Model 15). four Types of Settings (Model 3), Modalities

| Relationships among Models 3, 7, 9, 11, 12 & 15 with four Types of Settings and Priorities* Constructs | Modalities | Resources Model <sup>7</sup> | Examples of Resources exchanged by Settings (Model 3)   |  |  |   |
|--|------------|------------------------------|---|--|--|---|
|  |            |                              | Home 3  | Work/School <sup>3</sup>   | Survival 12  | Enjoyment 12  |
| Presence   | Being      | Importance (Model 11)        | Valuing oneself, feelings valued, recognition's of one's goodness and value, feeling as a person who matters                | Status related to Job or Profession, Level of education; titles, ranks & honors                            | Positive attribution of Importance to self and intimates   | Free expression of pleasure to see and welcome family members & intimates                                       |
|  |            | Intimacy (Model 15)          | Sharing of confidences, joys, hurts, and fears of being hurt, affection, forgiveness of transgressions, emotional closeness | Not included or considered irrelevant or secondary to work/school performance; Avoided as much as possible | Ability to share hurt feelings with self and intimates, forgiving transgressions in self and intimates | Reflecting on one's own positive behavior, sharing confidences with intimates & friends without Doing or Having |
| Power  | Doing      | Information                  | Books, internet, magazines, newspaper, radio, telephone, TV   | Knowledge relevant to job, occupational, or professional performance                                       | Keeping up with news and with happenings within one's world & community                                | Crossword puzzles, brain teasers, virtual pursuit; computer, arts, music, movies                                |
|  |            | Services                     | Cooking, taking care of trash, cleaning chores, fixing house, taking care of bills, cars, taxes, school and work, etc.      | Blue- or white-collar jobs or educational or reliable occupational or professional performance             | Shopping wisely, keeping within one's budget; planning for the future;                                 | Volunteering, exercising, competing in marathons, walking, sports, etc.   |
|  | Having     | Goods/possessions            | Car(s), food, furniture, TV, radio, house, second home &/or land, clothing, jewelry, etc.                                   | Work station, size and style of cubicle or office  | Avoiding debts by not buying extra-vagantly  | Hobbies requiring manipulation of objects; play, collecting   |
|  |            | Money                        | Bank account, cash at hand, credit card, salary, other income   | Salary plus bonus, insurance, perks, benefits  | Savings, controlled use of credit cards;   | Used to have fun, movies, travel, theater.  |

\*Adapted from L'Abate et al. 2010.

Figure 4. shows how the EcoMap, a multi-function, multiple-purpose instrument, evaluates how participants perceive their connections with intimates in various settings and contexts. Settings (Model 3) are objective

and can be photographed and recorded. Contexts (component of Model 1) are subjectively perceived and can be elicited through instruments, like the EcoMap.



**Figure 4.** RC-Ecomap Form for Administration: Models 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 11 & 12

Analyzed results can be transferred to a map – useful for evaluation and/or intervention – using these components of the model

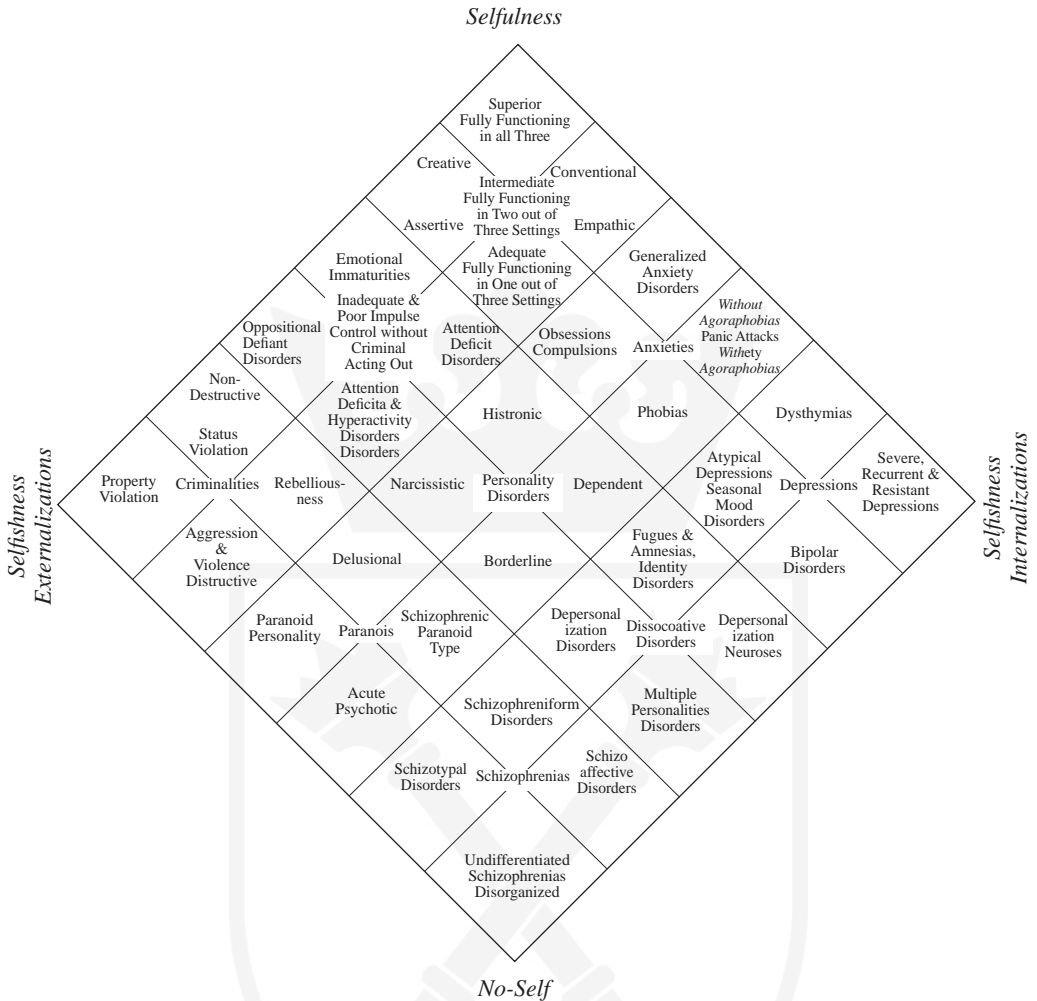


Figure 5. Model 11: Expansion and Integration of Psychiatric Disorders with Superior and Above Average Functioning

Model 11, as shown in Figure 5, integrates discrete, non-dimensional psychiatric categories with dimensions of superior functioning related to multiplicative and additive as well as to externalizing, internalizing, and pathological interactions (Model 10), styles in intimate relationships (Model 9), and the six ranges of Likeness (Model 8).

**OBJECTIVE TEST INSTRUMENTS**

**Meta-theoretical Assumptions**

Model 1: as an information processing model is basic to almost all the other 15 models. Emotionality, Rationality, Activity, Awareness, and Context (ERAAwC). It can be evaluated

objectively with a validated Relational Answers Questionnaire (RAQ) available in L'Abate et al. (2010). Model 2 can be evaluated with a recently developed measures related to impression formation and other three levels of description and explanation (Cusinato & L'Abate, in press). Model 3 can be measured by how much time one spends in one Setting over the other settings (home, school/work, transit, and transitory settings).

### Theoretical Assumptions

Model 4 about the ability to love, can be assessed by a variety of measures developed by authors extraneous to RCT (L'Abate, Cusinato, Maino, Colesson, & Scilletta, 2010). Model 5 about the ability to control and regulate self can be measured by reaction time, how fast or how slow one approaches or avoids someone else, a task, or an object, as well as by measures of temporal perspective. Model 6 can be evaluated by any measure of functionality/dysfunctionality available on the market.

### Developmental and Normative Models

Model 7 could be measured by instruments developed by the original authors of resource exchange theory (Foa & Foa, 1974). Model 8 can be evaluated with the Likeness Task developed and validated by Cusinato and Colesso (2008). Various other models already cited above can be evaluated with the EcoMap (Figure 3). Styles in Model 9 should be visible to examination of dysfunctional individuals, couples, and families. However, this model was validated by Cusinato and Colesso (2007) through a new paper-and-pencil, self-report test Interactions in Model 10 can be assessed according to a still-experimental ecologically-oriented Questionnaire (L'Abate, 2008a). Model 11 is the most validated of all RCT models, through a visual-verbal picture test, the Dyadic Relationships Test (Cusinato & L'Abate, 2005a, 2005b), and the Self-Other Profile Chart (SOPC). Model 12

can be evaluated with still experimental General and Personal Priorities Scales.

### Clinically-relevant Models

There are no instruments developed for Models 13 & 14 because Distance Regulation and the deadly Drama Triangle should be observable to most experienced professionals, as in the so-called Stockholm and Parental Alienation Syndromes and Bullying. Model 15 can be evaluated with the Sharing of Hurts Scale (Cusinato, Aceti, & L'Abate, 1997).

### Theory-derived Workbooks

Workbooks (L'Abate, 1992, 1996, 2010) can be divided into being (1) *independent* from RCT when produced from another theory or model; (2) loosely *related* to RCT, as in externalizations and internalizations (Figure 5); and (3) directly *derived* from specific models of RCT. Three original workbooks about Depression, Negotiation, and Intimacy were published in L'Abate (1986). One workbook, Planned Parenting (L'Abate, 2010) includes all the models of RCT using concrete questions just as much as a concrete, simple interview (L'Abate, 2009) has been reduced to workbook format. Models 1, 4, 5, 9 & 12 can be administered through structured enrichment programs for couples and families (L'Abate & Weinstein, 1987). Intimacy (Model 15) can be evaluated with a Sharing of Hurts workbook (L'Abate, 2010).

### CONCLUSION

RCT theory can be evaluated by writing, statically through model-derived test instruments and dynamically through interactive workbooks. In this fashion it is possible to link evaluation with treatment in ways that would be difficult if not impossible to achieve verbally (L'Abate, 2010).



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