

Person-Centered Organizations: Cooperation, Competition, or Separation?

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Abstract

There are many organizations that share the philosophical underpinnings proposed by Carl Rogers, namely the conditions and attitudes conducive for constructive growth and commitment to relationships based on the concept of the actualizing and formative tendencies. Each organization has specific aims and functions that may differ. If one symbolizes the person-centered approach as an organism, the different organizations, functioning at different levels, contribute to the whole. This article aims to describe four English-language organizations and presents a case for individual and institutional memberships that support the advancement of the person-centered approach within political and institutional arenas. It also highlights ways in which readers could choose to support the person-centered “organism,” halting a current climate of decline.

Author Note: This article is based on an article published in *Person-Centered Quarterly* (2008) by Andrea Uphoff: “Punching above our weight: The importance being earnest about BAPCA....and ADPCA, NEAPCEPC and WAPCEPC!” The views presented are solely those of the authors. For more information about how you can help develop the person-centered approach through organizational involvement, please visit the websites listed at the end of this article or contact Andrea at uphoffandrea@gmx.de and Jef at jcornelius-white@missouristate.edu.

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English-Language Person-Centered Organizations

The Association for the Development of the Person-Centered Approach (ADPCA) is presently a small organization (150 members, down from a maximum membership of 300). We believe its primary contribution to the person-centered world is the creation of a community for individual growth and connection. As part of its strategy for continuing and advancing a scholarly presence in academic and training institutes, the organization produces *The Person-Centered Journal* and its newsletter, *Renaissance*. ADPCA convenes at an annual conference and funds many scholarships for membership and conference attendance. This fall, ADPCA will support a small training program in the Las Vegas area. The organization also maintains a website.

The British Association for the Person-Centred Approach (BAPCA) is also a relatively small organization (now 650 members, down from a maximum membership of 1,200) that has similar purposes as ADPCA but also punches way above its weight politically. In other words, it is involved in a large range of issues with larger committees and professional regulation groups such as Health Professions Council (HPC), National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) and Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT). Because it is important that person-centered involvement is noted and respected, BAPCA endeavors to send representatives to all relevant major PCA conferences. These actions keep BAPCA noticed and on the map of the counseling and psychotherapy world, and more recently the group has been involved in stakeholder and social responsibility forums. Beyond this, BAPCA also supports 27 local groups spread throughout the U.K.

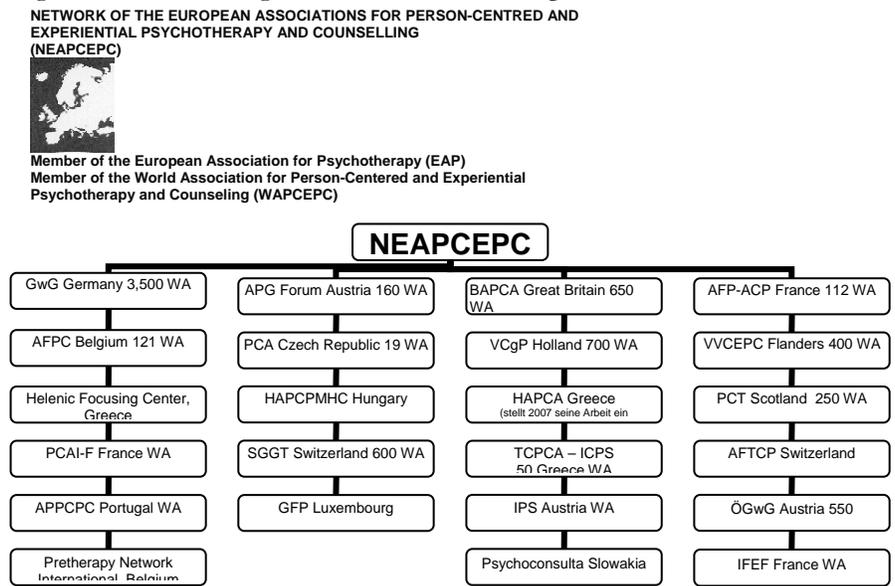
Make no mistake, however effective person-centered therapists may be individually, it is academic and political presence that will maintain our active role in the arena of psychotherapy and counseling. It is our working together on a multitude of endeavors that will make an impact in a way individual practice cannot. Such activities include: (1) having person-centered therapy represented at all elite conferences and symposia, (2) conducting research and publishing academic papers and books, and (3) lobbying and creating website presences. As an

example, BAPCA recently contributed \$40,000 to meta-analysis research on the relative effectiveness of person-centered and experiential therapies at Strathclyde University in Glasgow, the results of which made British national news several times during the July 2008 World Association conference in Norwich, England. The statement is published on the website of the WAPCEPC and will be published in prestigious academic journals. But BAPCA did not do this alone: a number of organizations worked together to accomplish this. The PCA needs many organizations to help it stretch out beyond national boundaries, and sometimes insular thinking, if we are to promote and sustain growth and expansion of the person-centered paradigm.

Over the past 10 years, the Network of European Associations for Person-Centred and Experiential Psychotherapy and Counselling (NEAPCEPC) has helped expand the person-centered paradigm. The network is made up of 23 training and umbrella organizations, BAPCA being one of the founding members. The network endeavors to maintain links across Europe and develop programs that will get the person-centered approach cemented in the midst of other more prominent organizations like the European Association of Counselling and the European Association of Psychotherapy.

The person-centered approach is well served through NEAPCEPC representation in sociopolitical processes, which ensure a continued contribution to paradigms in health, social insurance, education, academic contexts and licensure. Its most recent project has been to develop “The European Certificate for Person-Centered and Experiential Psychotherapy and Counseling” (PCE Certificate) intended to promote mobility of qualified practitioners across Europe. Figure 1 shows the organizations and countries represented in NEAPCEPC. WA signifies that this organization is also a member in WAPCEPC. The numbers at the end of each box signify approximate membership numbers where known.

Figure 1 Member organizations of the European Network



BAPCA is also a member of the World Association for Person-Centered and Experiential Psychotherapy and Counseling (WAPCEPC). WAPCEPC conferences (abbreviated to PCE) take place every two years and attract participants from all over the globe, a majority of whom are not native English speakers. The last conferences, in Potsdam in 2006 and Norwich in 2008, had 400 to 500 attendees, with about 10% from Japan. All six populated continents were represented.

An important characteristic of both WAPCEPC and NEAPCEPC is the inclusivity of all orientations and approaches of the person-centered world. The WAPCEPC's mission is to give equal priority to all schools of the PCA, asserting that we must unite to face the future together.

WAPCEPC consists of both organizational and individual members. Many of the organizational members overlap with those in the NEAPCEPC. After years of negotiation, The WAPCEPC recently approved a change to its bylaws to include applications to form

regional chapters. Membership fees vary by economies of nationalities, size of organizations, and status of membership in other organizations that have relationships to WAPCEPC. There is a reduced rate for students. One of the most important achievements of the WAPCEPC is the publication, since 2002, of an international journal, *Person-Centered and Experiential Psychotherapies (PCEP)*, available free to all members. PCEP has four issues per year and attracts submissions from authors from all parts of the PCE community and from all over the world.

WAPCEPC is also large enough and has enough clout to influence national governments. During recent attempts to discredit and reject person-centered therapy from admittance into the health insurance system in Germany, the WAPCEPC board together with WAPCEPC members with expertise in the field of research wrote a letter to German parliament, which helped stay the decision at least temporarily.

Democratic Unity

We are suggesting that the real importance of all these listed organizations is political: they all help to keep the person-centered approach on the map internationally *and* locally. One of the most robust findings from humanistic education studies (Cornelius-White & Harbaugh, in press) is that sustainability of groups requires cooperation; competition and individualism promote separation and are a recipe for decline. Rogers (1951) saw the purpose of person-centered education as one aiming for “democratic unity” and forming and meeting “shared goals” (p. 386). Needs dictate that we unite with others, take an inclusive and internationalist perspective embracing, with openness, organizations throughout the world that also have their roots in the interests of respectful scientific and professional debate.

If you are not already an individual member, joining WAPCEPC, BAPCA and/or ADPCA, as an individual, can only strengthen PCA/CCT. If you are a member of ADPCA, advocating for your organization to join WAPCEPC is a political act—one that helps fund initiatives to maintain and enhance the person-centered approach worldwide. One of WAPCEPC’s roles is representation of person-centered and experiential approaches in the world of psychotherapy. The person-centered approach must seek forums

where it can have a lasting political impact as, for example, at the 5th World Congress for Psychotherapy in Beijing, China, a country where client-centered therapy has recently become an officially sanctioned modality. The congress is the most significant platform for all schools of psychotherapy, and it is crucial that person-centered therapies maintain a high-level presence at this event. The person-centered stance will be represented in a special symposium at this conference. Failure to continue this presence at future congresses would lead to person-centered therapy being ignored in many circles. Thus, eventually the person-centered approach would be unsustainable in professional and academic circles in the U.K., the U.S., or any other country.

We, the authors, believe that now is the time to unite as one cause—maintain our stance, consolidate our power, keep the person-centered approach on the map. Promote BAPCA, ADPCA, and WAPCEPC to your friends, colleagues, and students at local universities to encourage them to become members. We encourage you to participate and influence the initiatives and ongoing “development of the person-centered approach” through organizations focusing on recognizing and financing the modalities of therapy and the ongoing training and practice initiatives that introduce new people to the person-centered approach.

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