

# Congruity Theory

**Theorist: Osgood, C.,  
& Tannenbaum, P.**

**Date: 1955**

# Basic Conception of Congruity Theory

- ▶ The basic idea of the congruity principle is quite similar to that of Heider's balance theory and Newcomb's symmetry.
- ▶ Osgood and Tannenbaum assumed that "judgmental frames of reference tend toward maximal simplicity." Thus, since extreme "black-and white," "all-or-nothing" judgments are simpler than refined ones, valuations tend to move toward extremes, or there is a continuing pressure toward polarization.

# Explanation of Theory:

- ▶ *The Congruity theory predicts that if there are two contradicting people, sets of information, or concepts on which a judgment must be made by a single observer, the observer will experience pressure to change his or her judgment on one of the sides.*
- ▶ *However, if the two sets of information are similar or congruent, then there will be no problem, and the observer will not experience pressure of any form.*

# Incongruity

- ▶ Incongruity is said to exist when the attitudes toward the source and the object are similar and the assertion is negative,
- ▶ or when they are dissimilar and the assertion is positive.

# *The observer alone must decide the level of congruence between the two sides :*

- ▶ *(1) taking a stance in the middle and viewing the exchange as one without problem,*
- ▶ *(2) changing their viewpoint of one of the sides.*

# Metatheoretical Assumptions:

- ▶ Through the analysis of the ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions, it can be derived that the congruity theory is naturalistic.

# Ontological Assumptions:

- ▶ Congruity theory appears to have multiple realities, and there are numerous ways to view things when using the theory to conduct a study or perform an analysis.

# Epistemological Assumptions:

- ▶ Congruity theory takes a dependent view of things, as things could change to each observer, depending on the way they view what is going on between the two main parties involved.



# Axiological Assumptions:

- ▶ Congruity theory appears to value-laden in nature, and it takes into account that separate observers may be biased.

## Critique:

- ▶ Congruity theory is a scientific model because it is predictive of how third-party observers will react to an argument between two main parties. It does little to explain why people do what they do necessarily in such a situation, but simply states how their actions and views might change.

# Ideas and Implications :

- ▶ The basic premise of the theory is to help determine the levels of congruence between two sides.
- ▶ If a third-party observer *feels pressure* to take a side or change a viewpoint, there must be *low levels of congruence* between the two sides.
- ▶ If the third-party observer feels *no pressure*, than there must be a **high level** of congruence between the two immediate parties.

# Measurement Technique

- ▶ Congruity theory is integrally involved with a measurement technique proposed by Osgood. (1957) and known as the semantic differential, the first such close relationship between a theory and a scaling technique. One important component of the semantic differential is the evaluative dimension. Objects are evaluated on a seven-point scale, one pole representing "good" and the other "bad."

# Example

- ▶ Thus if Mr. X, who dislikes President Bush (rating of -3 on the evaluative dimension) and likes the idea of withdrawing American troops from Korea (+3), reads that President Bush advocates troop withdrawal, congruity theory would predict that Mr. X's rating of Bush would move from -3 toward the positive end of the scale and his ratings of troop withdrawal would move down from +3 toward the negative end. The relation between Bush and troop withdrawal is , positive.

# Problems

- ▶ The relationship of "assertion" remains not only dichotomous (either associative or dissociative), but vaguely defined as well.
- ▶ Tendency toward simplicity is a highly dubious proposition.
- ▶ The adequacy of a seven point scale.
- ▶ The congruity model ignores alternative methods for reducing imbalance or incongruity (Suedfeld, 1971).

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Marketing letters journal (oct 2004)

- ▶ A number of studies have investigated the self-congruity hypothesis, which predicts that consumers prefer products and brands whose images closely correspond to their own self-concepts.

# Theories of Attitude Change

- ▶ "Humans are striving for consistency." (Keisler, 1955)
- ▶ Congruity Theory- Osgood and Tannen- 1960
- ▶ Cognitive Dissonance Theory- Festinger, 1957
- ▶ Heider's Balance Theory, 1944
- ▶ Structural Balance- Cartwright and Harary, 1956
- ▶ Cognitive Balancing- Abelson and Rosenberg, 1958