

# The Behavior of the Self: A Self-Directed Application of the Relational Approach

Panayotis Zamaros, 2026

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*Editorial note. This article presents the original theoretical framework, structure, ideas, and argumentation of Panayotis Zamaros, developed in the context of personal research on organizational behavior and institutional theory. Preliminary academic editing — including prose refinement, full structural revision from four to five parts, introduction of Part II, reframing of the thesis argument as a validity/reliability distinction, consequent revision of the epistemological analysis in Part IV, integration of the comparative figures, and review of the bibliography — was carried out by Claude (Anthropic, claude-sonnet-4-6), acting as editorial assistant. The final editing was performed by the author. All theoretical claims, scholarly judgements, and analytical conclusions are the author's own, grounded in and supported by the referenced sources.*

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**Abstract** The Relational Approach (Zamaros, 2011a, 2017) proposes that any unit acting outward — presenting itself to others, making itself visible as a coherent whole — operates through a four-strand relational loop between act, action, perception, and response. The two preceding articles in this series include establishing the framework (Zamaros, 2026a), and applying it stakeholder by stakeholder (Zamaros, 2026b). This article applies the same logic to the individual as the unit of analysis. It develops the argument in five parts. Part I establishes the individual as a relational unit: transductively constituted, acting through a descriptive signature, disclosing itself through trust. Part II examines the self in relation to itself within the introspective tradition and draws the distinction between validity and reliability: introspection gives genuine self-truth but cannot guarantee that the self's account of itself matches how it lands on others. This is a limit not of validity but of reliability, and it is structural. Part III builds the four-strand behavioral architecture for the self, introducing the self-perception arc (Strand 1') and its constitutive gap from Strand 3. Part IV positions the Relational Approach relative to the action research literature (Argyris and Schön, Torbert, Marshall), showing that the shared limit of these frameworks is ontological: none treats the self-other relation as constitutive. Part V presents the self-directed relational inquiry in practice.

**Keywords:** behavior of the self, relational approach, introspection, self-knowledge, validity, reliability, transductive constitution, act/action, four-strand architecture, action research

## Introduction

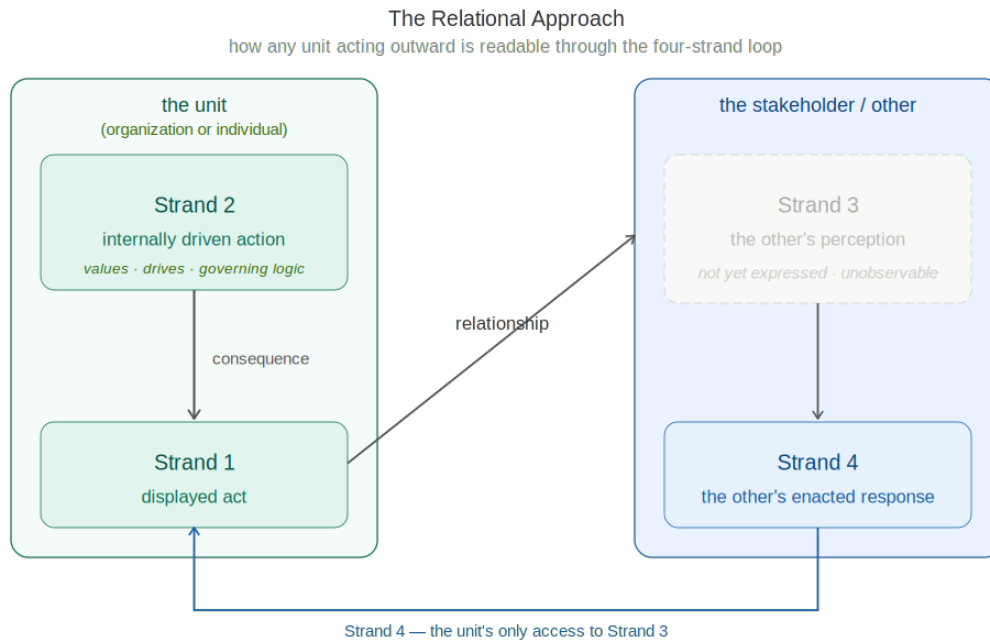
The two preceding articles in this series ask how organizations behave. The first (Zamaros, 2026a) establishes the theoretical framework: the behavior of organizations as institutional, outward-facing action, analyzed through a four-strand architecture that captures the relational loop between what the organization projects, what drives that projection, how stakeholders perceive it, and how they respond. The second (Zamaros, 2026b) applies that architecture to six stakeholder relationships — consumers, employees, investors, suppliers, competitors, and the state — showing how the same institutional behavior lands differently depending on which relational position the stakeholder occupies.

This article asks a different question: how does the individual behave — as a unit, in public, toward the world? And, by extension, how can the individual know itself? It is the third article in the series, completing an arc from the organization as institutional unit (Zamaros, 2026a) to the organization in practice against its stakeholders (Zamaros, 2026b) to the individual as the smallest relational unit the framework can address.

The question is not new. The introspective tradition — from Wundt's (1897) scientific method through Rogers's (1951, 1961) self-concept to Rollo May's (1953) existential analysis — has developed sophisticated accounts of the self's access to its own inner life. These accounts are not dismissed here. They give genuine self-truth: the self's inner experience is real, and introspection is a legitimate and rigorous mode of accessing it. What they cannot give is objective reliability. The self cannot verify its own self-perception against an independent standard, because the observer and the observed are the same entity. This is not a failure of introspection. It is its structural limit — and it is the limit that the thesis on self-directed method identified: the self-directed approach alone has equal chances of confirming and disconfirming the difference between experience and its description, because the criterion lies outside the self (Zamaros, 2003: Chapter 2).

The Relational Approach does not resolve this by replacing introspection. It resolves it by supplying the structural corrective that reliability requires: outside guidance. The individual is a relational unit — transductively constituted, acting outward through a descriptive signature, readable only through the four-strand loop that connects what the self projects, what drives that projection, how others perceive it, and how they respond. The self-directed application of the Relational Approach positions introspection and relational reading as complementary: the first gives self-truth, the second provides the reliability check that self-truth alone cannot supply.

One structural modification is required when moving from the organizational to the self-directed application. The self, unlike the organization, perceives its own act: it has a reading of what it projects. This self-perception arc — Strand 1' — is the loop that introspective self-knowledge relies on. The article's central argument is that Strand 1' and Strand 3 — the world's perception of the self — are not of the same perception, and cannot be made the same by introspective effort. Only Strand 4 — the world's enacted response — gives the self a glimpse into Strand 3. The gap between Strand 1' and Strand 3 is the reliability gap, that is the gap between what the self believes it projects and what others perceive. It is the primary object of self-directed relational inquiry.



S1 belong to the unit, S3 is the other's perception, S4 is the other's response. The four-strand architecture of the Relational Approach (Zamaros, 2011a, 2017). Applicable to any unit — organization or individual — acting outward in a relational field.

Figure 1. The four-strand architecture of the Relational Approach (Zamaros, 2011a, 2017). Applicable to any unit — organization or individual — acting outward in a relational field. S2 (internally driven action) generates S1 (displayed act) as its consequence. S3 (the other's perception) is unobservable. S4 (the other's enacted response) is the unit's only access to S3.

## Part I: The Fundamentals

### 1. Transductive Constitution

The individual is not a fixed essence prior to relation. An individual is non-divisible as a biological entity, but not psychically or socially: a person is transductively constituted (Zamaros, 2011a: 14). Following Simondon, transduction is a relation in which the terms are constituted by the relation itself. Self and other are interrelated such that a change in the self brings about a change in the other, and vice versa (Zamaros, 2011a: 15). Two flows constitute this mutual constitution: from other to self, the centeredness of the other shaping who the self becomes; and from self to other, the self seeking to discursively influence its environment (ibid.). Flows are premised on difference: indifference precludes any flow, any relationship, any relational perception (ibid.: 17). Difference is not an obstacle to relation. It is its condition.

It follows that there is no self prior to relation, and no self-knowledge independent of the relational field the self inhabits. The self that presents itself to others is not a pre-existing entity choosing to be visible at will. It is an entity constituted by the very act of presentation, of taking the risk to present oneself — and by the response from the other that presentation generates.

### 2. Act and Action

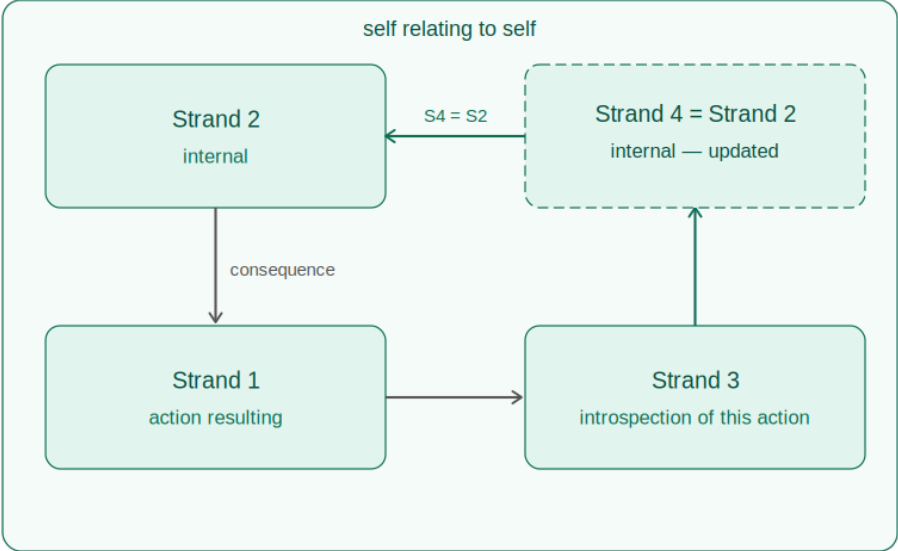
Schutz (1967/1932: 39) distinguishes two senses of doing. Action (*actio*) is the doing in the very course of being constituted: a flow, an ongoing sequence, a process of bringing

something forth. Act (*actum*) is the already constituted doing, considered as a completed unit. The act is publicly observable. The action is not (Zamaros, 2026a).

The self’s internal drives, values, and governing logic — the action — generate a publicly observable act: a gesture, a statement, a decision, a pattern of conduct. This unique act is what the others perceive. The action is not perceived. This asymmetry is not a limitation of access to be overcome by better introspection; it is the constitutive condition of public life. The self cannot hand its *actio* to another; it can only produce its *actum*. We all have a secret garden and thus must be kept.

A further asymmetry follows. The act, once produced, belongs to the relational field which is by definition public — not to the actor. What the self intended to project (its reading of its own act, Strand 1’) and what the act actually projects (as perceived by the other, Strand 3) are generated by the same act but are not the same perception. The self does not control this divergence. It can only read it through Strand 4.

In the first structural position: S2 (internally driven action) generates S1 (the displayed act) as its consequence. The self then reads that act back through S1’ (self-perception) — subject and observed are the same entity. Strand 3 — the other’s perception — is not reached.



The introspective loop closes on itself. S4 feeds back into S2 — the self that introspects is the self that is updated by introspection. Strand 3 is the self’s own perception. The other’s Strand 3 is not reached from within this loop.

Figure 2. The self in relation with itself. S2 (internal) generates S1 (action resulting) as consequence. S3 is the self’s introspection of that action (= S1’). S4 = S2: the introspective reading feeds back to update the inner states. The loop closes entirely within the self.

In the second structural position: S2 generates S1 as its consequence; that act enters the relational field and generates S3 (how others perceive it); S3 generates S4 (how others respond). S4 is the only empirical access the self has to S3. Language, as the primary medium of S1, is the instrument through which the self attempts to orient S3 in a preferred direction.

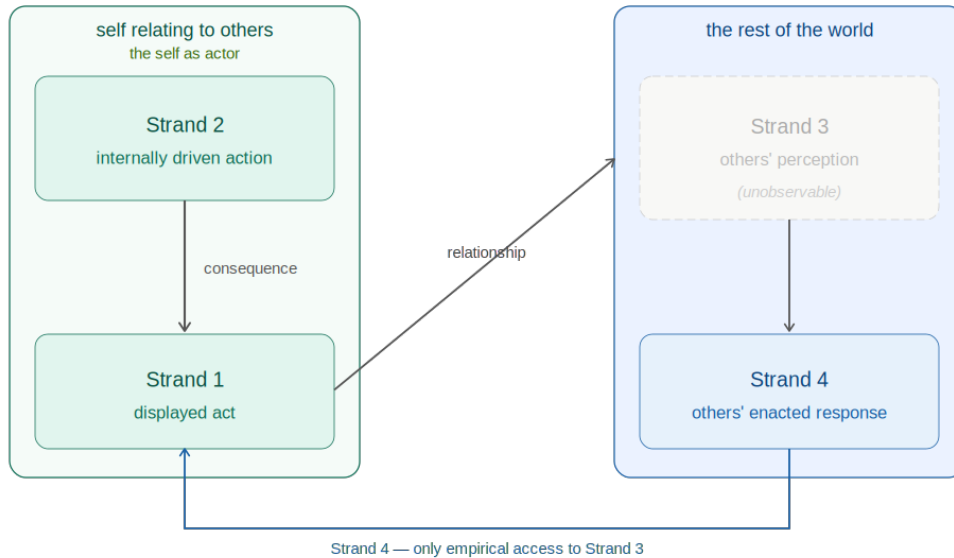


Figure 3. The self in relation with others. S2 generates S1 (displayed act) as consequence. S1 enters the relational field: S3 (others' perception, unobservable) generates S4 (others' enacted response). Strand 4 is the only empirical access to Strand 3.

### 3. Language

If transductive constitution is the ontological ground and the act/action asymmetry is the constitutive condition of public life, language is the operational medium in which both are enacted. The self does not exist for others as an inner state. It exists as a sign: the set of visible, audible, and behavioral marks through which it makes itself present in the relational field. There is no self available to others outside the signs it produces.

A description is any signifier that speaks on behalf of the signified; a descriptive system is a selected set of signifiers and signifieds composing a unique relational whole (Zamaros, online 2004: 7). Each one of us makes different choices and forms one's discursive identity, the descriptive signature as the chosen set of signifiers and qualifiers through which the self generates its meaning in the world (ibid.: 9). The signature is the self's linguistic identity in the relational field: the recognizable pattern — characteristic ways of framing, asserting, qualifying, responding — by which the self is identified across encounters. The signature is Strand 1 as a sign system. It is constructed by the self — its chosen self-presentation. Once constructed, it escapes the self's control in two directions. Outward: it is read by others through Strand 3 filters that belong to them, not to the self. The other does not receive the intention behind the sign; the other receives the sign and decodes it through their own sedimented experience. Inward: the self is constrained by its own signature. Having established a pattern, deviation is immediately legible to the other — as inconsistency, as deception, or as change. The descriptive signature is a public commitment. It can be revised; it cannot be unilaterally unmade. In brief, the descriptive signature is the expression of Strand 2, what one is, in Strand 1 as seen from the other's perspective under Strand 3 and which, reactively, is expressed under Strand 4, which constitutes the other's discursive signature.

A discourse is not a collection of haphazard words: we mean for a reason — for an action, a performance, where each event is captured by a chosen meaning (ibid.: 11). Thus, realized purposes are the outcomes of description (ibid.). Language achieves two outcomes for the self (ibid.): the inscription of self and other as identities of a coherent order; and the persuasion of others to perceive the self in one way rather than another. The first is structural: by naming, the self fixes itself and the other as distinguishable entities with stable identities — it creates the condition of a relational field in which self and other can interact over time. The second is relational: every act of language is also an attempt to orient the other's Strand 3 toward a preferred reading. Language is not neutral description; it is the primary instrument of identity management.

Selective persuasion rests on three qualities: “authority, credibility, and constancy” (ibid.: 46). Authority is recognized standing — the ground on which others grant the self's utterances weight. Credibility is the correspondence between what the self claims and what it does: a self whose Strand 2 consistently matches its Strand 1 and vice versa builds credibility; a self whose acts contradict its accounts erodes it. Constancy is the durability of the descriptive signature across time and relational contexts: the self that is recognizably itself across encounters accumulates identity.

Neither authority nor credibility are properties the self possesses. They are properties others attribute. They live in Strand 3 — in the other's perception — and are made legible through Strand 4: in what others grant, defer, follow, or challenge. The self cannot award itself authority by fiat. It can only construct and maintain the Strand 1 conditions under which others are disposed of granting it.

Constancy is the quality most directly relevant to self-directed relational inquiry. A descriptive signature that holds across time produces a consistent Strand 1: the other's Strand 3 reading of the self can deepen or qualify across encounters. A signature that shifts produces an unstable Strand 1: each encounter resets the decoding process and no relational deposit accumulates. Constancy is the temporal condition of relationship formation. Its absence — legible in Strand 4 as withdrawal, hesitation, or confusion — is typically the first indicator that the self's self-presentation is failing to generate a stable identity in the relational field.

The three Cs are the power seat of one's discourse obeying to a logic (Zamaros, 2012: 67) namely, functional in that signifiers are selected relative to purpose in a manner to achieve authority, credibility, and constancy in what we say. Next to this, the discursive logic (ibid.) organizes language around specified values, an *ἡθος*. The paradigmatic logic makes the system to be a point of reference, an exemplar to follow, and finally the hyper-rational logic directs and organizes effective social practice, that is when the discourse has material effects (ibid.).

#### 4. Aletheia and Trust

Before tackling the notion of ‘trust’, we need to shed light on that of ‘aletheia’ — *ἀλήθεια* — which is compounded from the alpha privativum and *lēthē* meaning concealment, oblivion, the covering-over that withholds what is from view. *Ἀλήθεια* is therefore *un-*

*concealment* (Heidegger, 1998/1982: 89, in Zamaros, 2011b). What is it that is unconcealed? The inner self. Strand 1, what the other perceives as our own behavior is premised on the unconcealedness of the self, that is Strand 2. In other words, doing is premised on the uncovering of thinking and perceiving.

Next comes *ήθος*. Heidegger (1993/1947: 258, in Zamaros, 2011b) reads the Heraclitean fragment “pointing to the dwelling of human beings” (*ήθος ανθρώπων δαίμων*) in a manner where *ήθος* is the familiar abode, the originary ground from which the self acts. By extension, *ήθος* is the governing orientation of the self with its values, drives, and habitual dispositions. Thus, any behavioral orientation and direction is informed by *ήθος* which in this manner qualifies Strand 2. Thus, *ήθος* is the condition of (un)concealment seemingly obeying one simple rule, the safety of the self that is trust.

Trust is the relational condition that makes *αλήθεια* possible. Zamaros (2011b: 113) grounds this in *trieue* (the steadfastness of an oak), the constancy that is the oldest root of trust as genuine trust (*πίστις αληθής*): “the trust that things are such as they have always been and will be as they have always been”. Without this grounding existential certainty, interpersonal trust between self and the other (captured as the behavioral relationship between Strands 1 and 3) cannot see the day: the risk of *un-concealment* presupposes that what is held in common makes that risk worth taking.

The self-directed relational inquiry does not ask whether the self is trustworthy. It reads the gap structurally: what is the Strand 1/Strand 2 distance in a given relational context, and what does Strand 4 indicate about how others respond to the act they receive — regardless of the *ήθος* that generated it.

## Part II: The Self in Relation to Itself

The self relates to others as well as to itself, a relation whereby the self is its own object of inquiry; this is the domain of introspection, or what Zamaros (2003: 39) calls a self-directed approach to inquiry. The introspective tradition spans four principal accounts examined here: Wundt’s scientific method, Rogers’s self-concept, and Rollo May’s existential analysis. Each establishes, from a different direction, that the self has genuine access to its own inner experience. Each also discloses the structural limit of that access. The synthesis — validity without full reliability — frames the epistemological contribution of the Relational Approach.

### 1. Introspection as Method — Wundt

The first systematic attempt to make introspection a scientific method is Wundt’s (1897) *Outlines of Psychology*. By *Selbstbeobachtung* — trained self-observation — Wundt sought to give the study of inner experience the rigor of the natural sciences: controlled conditions, defined stimuli, replicable results. The ambition is stated with precision in §3: “exact observation is here possible only in the form of experimental observation, and that psychology can never be a pure science of observation” (Wundt, 1897: 20). Trained observers in his Leipzig laboratory reported the quality and structure of their immediate

experience under specified experimental conditions — the first systematic attempt to generate reliable introspective data.

The attempt clarified the power and the limit of introspection equally. Its power: introspective reports yield access to the phenomenal structure of experience that no external measurement can replicate. What it is to experience a sensation cannot be reduced to its physiological correlate; only the experiencing subject can report the quality from the inside. Its limit: Wundt himself identifies the structural source of the problem. “The very intention to observe, which is a necessary condition of all observation, modifies essentially the rise and progress of psychical processes” (ibid.: 21). By extension: “the intention to observe either essentially modifies the facts to be observed, or completely suppresses them” (ibid.). The observer alters what it observes by the act of observing. The instrument and the object are the same entity. This is not a methodological failure to be corrected by better training. It is the structural condition of inner observation.

The report is valid — it corresponds to something real in the self’s experience. It cannot be independently confirmed — its truth lies inside the experience being reported, accessible only to the experiencing subject. Reliability requires a criterion outside the method, and introspection structurally cannot generate that criterion.

Figure 2 above captures this mode: S2 (internal) generates S1 (action resulting); S3 is the self’s introspective perception of that act (= S1’); S4 feeds back into S2, updating the inner states. The loop is complete — and entirely internal.

## 2. Self-Concept and Self-Truth — Rogers

Carl Rogers (1902–1987) distinguished the self-concept — the self as the person believes it to be, the structure of organized perceptions of the self — from the organismic self: the self as it is experienced at the level of immediate felt sense (Rogers, 1951: 136–137). Incongruence between these two produces disturbance: the person who espouses openness while their body signals defensiveness; who describes themselves as confident while their behavior reveals anxiety. The therapeutic encounter is designed to restore congruence — to bring the self-concept into alignment with the organismic experience that the self-concept has suppressed or distorted (Rogers, 1961: 115–116).

Mapping to the architecture: the self-concept maps to Strand 1’ (what the self believes it projects) together with the espoused layer of Strand 2 (what the self believes governs its action). The organismic self maps to the deeper, pre-reflective Strand 2 — the actual governing logic, felt rather than named. Rogers’s therapeutic goal is to close the gap between these two layers: to make the self’s account of itself congruent with what actually generates its act.

Rogers’s fundamental contribution is the affirmation of self-truth. The organismic self is not a fiction to be corrected by others’ perceptions: it is the most direct access the self has to its own experience, and it has validity. “The organism is the locus of all experience” (Rogers, 1951: 483). Others’ perceptions (Strand 3) and responses (Strand 4) do not determine what the self is. They determine how the self’s act lands. Rogers supplies the

philosophical ground for the distinction this article draws: introspection gives valid self-truth; the reliability of that truth as a public account is a different matter, and a structural one.

### 3. Existential Self-Awareness — Rollo May

Rollo May (1909–1994) approached self-awareness as the distinctively human capacity to stand apart from oneself: to take oneself as an object, to know that one exists, and to confront the freedom and anxiety that this knowledge generates (May, 1953: 74–76). Self-awareness is not merely cognitive inventory. It is the encounter with existence itself — with the radical openness of the self that has no predetermined essence and must constitute itself through its choices and commitments.

Mapping to the architecture: May's self-awareness operates directly on Strand 2 — the self confronting the values, drives, and governing assumptions that constitute it, not as given facts but as chosen and therefore revisable positions. It is the deepest form of introspective reach: not merely observing inner states (Wundt) or reconciling self-concept with felt sense (Rogers), but confronting the freedom that underlies both. The anxiety this generates is, for May, not pathology but the condition of authentic existence.

The structural limit: May is explicit that self-awareness occurs always against the world — always as being-in-the-world (*Dasein*), never as an isolated subjectivity. The world is the necessary backdrop of self-awareness. But May's account provides no structural role for what the world perceives of the self or does in response. The world is condition, not structure. Strand 3 and Strand 4 remain outside the architecture.

### 4. Validity and Reliability: The Structural Limit of Introspection

The three accounts examined converge on one finding and one limit.

The finding: the self has genuine, non-negotiable access to its own inner experience. Wundt establishes that inner states can be the object of systematic observation. Rogers establishes that the organismic self is real and that its experience has priority over any external account of what the self should be. May establishes that self-awareness reaches the governing freedom that underlies all action. In each case, what the self finds in itself is genuine. It is self-truth.

The limit: the self cannot objectively verify its own self-perception. The observer and the observed are the same entity, using the same instrument. There is no independent standard internal to the self against which the introspective report can be confirmed. What the self perceives of itself (Strand 1') is its reading of its own act through its own Strand 2: its governing values and assumptions shape what it sees. The other's reading of the same act (Strand 3) is filtered through conditions that belong to the other, not to the self.

The consequence is precise. Introspection threatens not validity but reliability. The self's self-account is genuinely its own — it gives real self-truth. But that account may not match how the self's act lands on others. The criterion for this match lies outside the self. This is what the thesis identified as the structural impasse of self-directed method: the self

alone cannot determine whether its description of its experience matches the experience of those on the receiving end of its acts (Zamaros, 2003: Chapter 2). The conclusion was not that introspection is invalid. It was that introspection alone is insufficient — because reliability requires outside guidance.

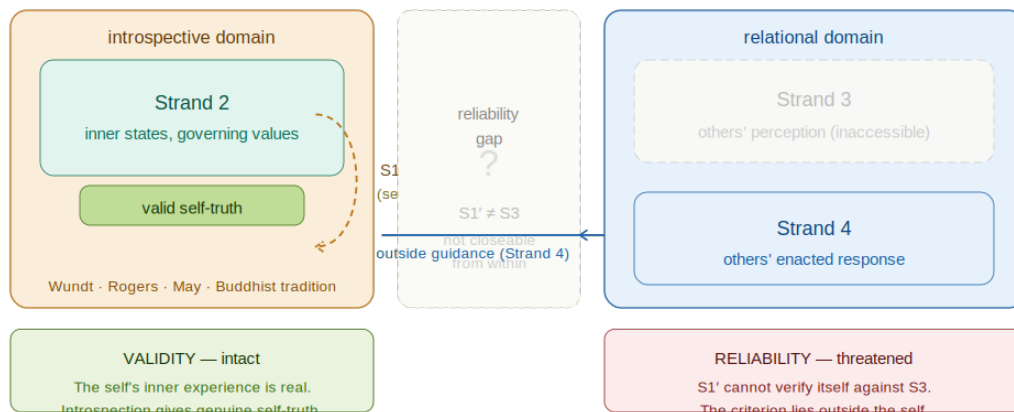


Figure 2. The introspective loop and the reliability gap. Strand 4 provides the structural outside guidance that introspection alone cannot supply.

Figure 4. The introspective loop and the reliability gap.  $S1'$  (the self's perception of its own act, =  $S3$  in Figure 2) cannot be verified against Strand 3 (the other's perception) from within the self. Strand 4 (others' enacted response) is the structural outside guidance that introspection alone cannot supply.

## Part III: The Behavior of the Self

### 1. The Primary Object: Behavior OF, Not Behavior IN

The introspective tradition examined in Part II attends to the behavior in the self: inner states, self-concept, existential awareness, the arising and passing of mental phenomena. This is the self as the object of its own gaze, and it is a legitimate object. The Relational Approach does not replace it. It adds a different object: the behavior of the self — the self as a unit acting outward, presenting itself to others, making itself visible and identifiable.

This is the self as others encounter it — as act, not as inner state. It is the self as institutional in Allport's (1933) sense: the patterned, outward-facing expression of a relational field. Understanding the behavior of the self does not require abandoning introspection. It requires holding introspection and relational reading simultaneously: the first gives the self-truth that the act expresses; the second gives the reading that the act receives.

### 2. The Four-Strand Architecture Applied to the Self

The Relational Approach's four-strand architecture (Zamaros, 2011a: 24–26) applies to the self with the following rendering.

Strand 1 is the behavior of the self as displayed act: what the self projects publicly through language, conduct, decisions, and patterns of interaction. This is the self as visible — the face it presents to a given relational other.

Strand 2 is the behavior of the self as internally driven action: values, drives, governing assumptions, and the logic that generates Strand 1. Strand 2 is the object of introspective access — the domain examined by Wundt, Rogers, and May. It is partially accessible to the self through reflection, but only partially: any self-noticing is framed and conducted by selves beyond the screen of conscious appreciation (Marshall, 2001: 434, following Bateson, 1973: 408). The self's access to its own Strand 2 is genuine — Rogers is right that the organismic self is real — but not complete.

Strand 3 is the way others perceive the self — not the self's acts as such, but the thinking that is not yet expressed and has no behavioral indicators (Zamaros, 2011a: 25). It mediates between what the self projects and what others do. Strand 3 is structurally inaccessible to the self: not a matter of insufficient attention, but of the structure of the relational field. Perception belongs to the perceiver.

Strand 4 is the way others behave toward the self as a result of their Strand 3 perception: how they respond, what they initiate, what they withdraw, what they offer. Strand 4 is the only structural access the self has to Strand 3. It is the outside guidance that reliability requires.

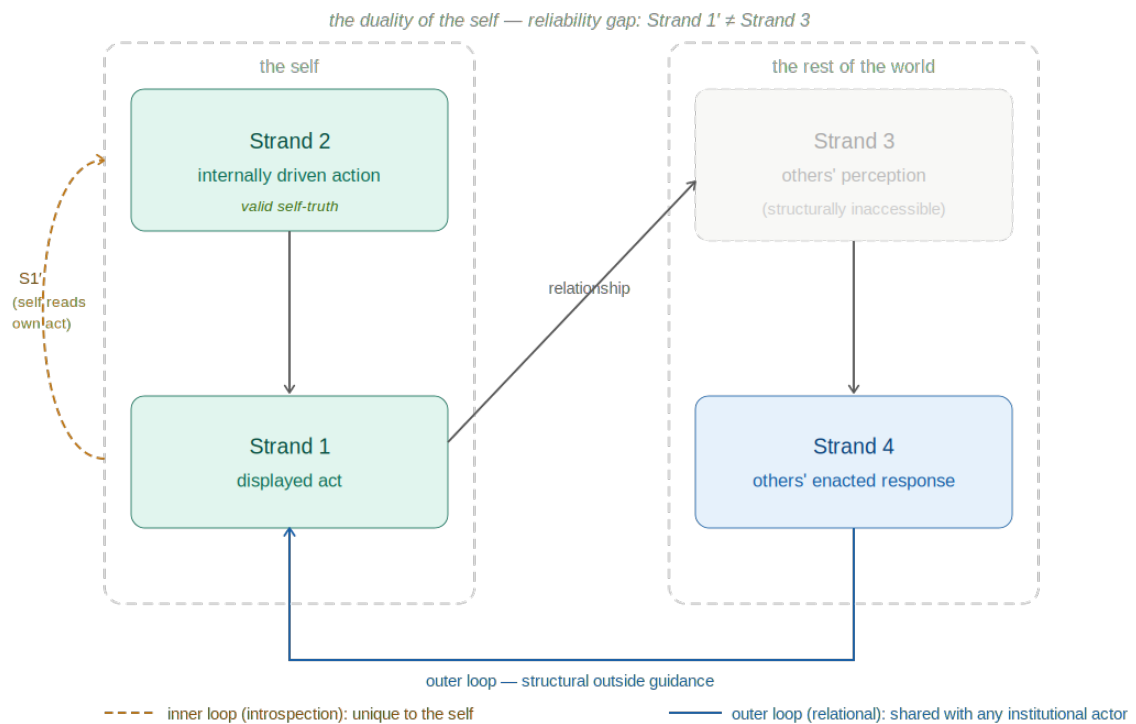
Figure 3 above captures this loop: S2 generates S1 (displayed act); S1 enters the relational field; S3 (unobservable) generates S4 (the other's response); S4 feeds back. This is the same four-strand architecture that governs any organizational unit (Zamaros, 2026a).

### **3. The Self-Perception Arc: Strand 1'**

The self, unlike the organization, perceives its own act. This self-perception arc — Strand 1' — is the self's reading of what it projects. It is what the introspective tradition cultivates: from Wundt's trained observation of inner states to Rogers's self-concept, from May's existential self-awareness, all these practices refine the self's capacity to read its own Strand 1 through its own Strand 2. Strand 1' is the product of this refinement.

It is generated by the same Strand 1 that Strand 3 reads, but it is not the same reading. The self reads its own act through its own governing logic (Strand 2). Others read the same act through their own filters — contextual, relational, historical — that belong to them, not to the self. Strand 1' cannot replicate Strand 3, however rigorously it is cultivated. This is the reliability gap. It is not a failure of introspective discipline: it is a structural consequence of the fact that perception belongs to the perceiver.

The gap between Strand 1' and Strand 3 is the central diagnostic object of the self-directed relational inquiry. It can only be approached through Strand 4.



The outer loop is the organizational diagram. The inner loop (S1') is the self's distinctive addition — its capacity to be its own object. effective QA or double-loop learning develop an institutional equivalent of S1' — but the structural limit remains: neither the self nor the organization can access S3 from within.

Figure C. The integrated diagram: the duality of the self. S1' (inner loop) is the self relating with itself. The outer loop is the self relating with others.

Figure 5. The duality of the self: both loops simultaneously. The inner loop (S1', amber dashed) is unique to the self — the capacity to be its own object. The outer loop (S4 → self, blue) is the relational loop of Figure 3. Organizations acquire an equivalent of the inner loop through QA or double-loop learning, but the structural limit holds for both: neither the self nor the organization can access Strand 3 from within.

## 4. The Relationship Qualification

The self's relationships — intimate, professional, social, civic — can be qualified as strong, rocky, or broken (Zamaros, 2017: 88). The quality of a relationship is not a fixed property of either party. It is the product of the interaction between the self's Strand 1 and the other's Strand 3 — mediated through Strand 4. The same Strand 1 may produce strong relationships in one relational context and rocky ones in another, depending on which Strand 3 filters are in play. The behavior of the self is not the variable. The relational position of the other is. This asymmetry is what the self-directed relational inquiry makes visible, and what introspective self-knowledge alone cannot reach.

## Part IV: Self-Knowledge as Relational Reading

### 1. Validity, Reliability, and the Role of the Other

The introspective tradition established in Part II gives the Relational Approach its epistemological grounding. The self's inner experience is real. Strand 2 has validity: the values, drives, and governing assumptions the self discovers through introspection are genuinely its own, not fictions to be overridden by others' perceptions. The self's account of itself — however refined through Wundt's training, Rogers's congruence, or May's existential confrontation — has standing.

What it does not have, standing alone, is reliability. Reliability requires an independent criterion, and the criterion for the self's self-account as a public act lies in how that act lands on others. No introspective discipline provides this. The self's reading of its own act (Strand 1') remains within the self's own frame of reference — shaped by the same Strand 2 that generated the act in the first place. The other's reading (Strand 3) is shaped by conditions the self cannot replicate from within.

This distinction — validity without guaranteed reliability — is the precise epistemological location of the Relational Approach. The approach does not dismiss self-truth. It supplements it with structural outside guidance: Strand 4 as the corrective that introspection structurally cannot supply.

## **2. Argyris and Schön: The Open Loop**

Argyris and Schön (1974: 6–7) identify, with structural precision, a gap that no amount of introspection can close. “Espoused theory is the theory of action to which a person gives allegiance, and which, upon request, he will explain to others.” By contrast, “theory-in-use is the theory that actually governs action”. The two diverge systematically — not through dishonesty, but through structure: the governing logic that produces the act is not the logic by which the self accounts for that act. In terms of the Relational Approach: espoused theory is the self's account of its Strand 1; theory-in-use is the Strand 2 that generates it. This is the incongruence Rogers identified between self-concept and organismic self — reformulated as a learning problem.

Single-loop learning corrects action without questioning the governing values that produced it: “the error is corrected without any change in the underlying policies and objectives” (Argyris and Schön, 1978: 2–3). Double-loop learning reaches the governing variables themselves — the values, norms, and frames that constitute Strand 2 (ibid.: 2–3). This is the move toward the deeper introspective layer: May's existential confrontation, Rogers's access to the organismic self. It is a genuine advance.

The structural limit is precise. Both learning loops run entirely inside the self. The circuit moves between the self's Strand 1 (or its account of it) and the self's Strand 2 (or its governing logic). What others perceive — Strand 3 — does not appear as a structural element. What others enact in response — Strand 4 — enters at best as data the self collects: information to be processed for the self, by the self. The relational field is context to the learning process, not a structural pole of it. The loop is open.

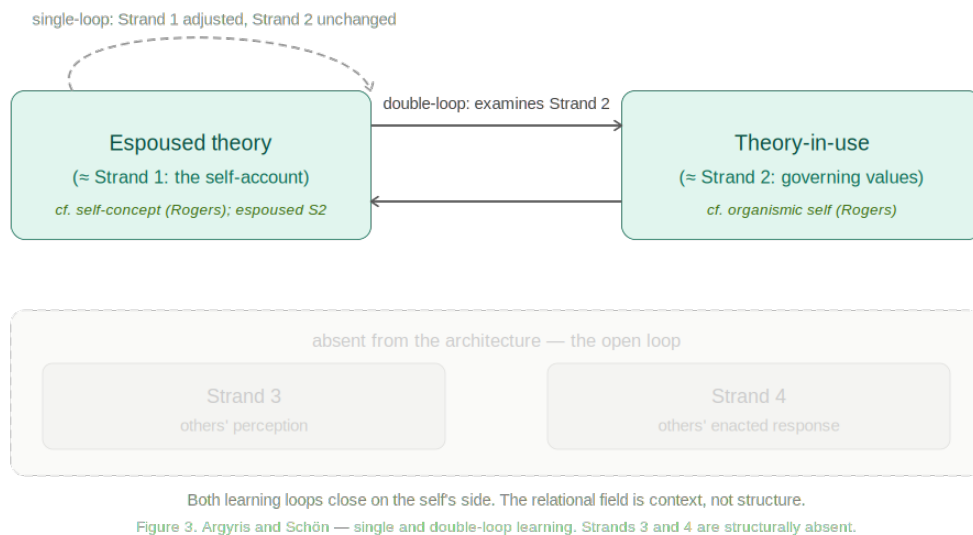


Figure 6. Argyris and Schön — single and double-loop learning between espoused theory ( $\approx$  Strand 1) and theory-in-use ( $\approx$  Strand 2). Strands 3 and 4 are structurally absent. The circuit closes on the self's side.

### 3. Torbert: Sequential Modes versus Simultaneous Structure

Torbert (2001: 250–260) develops the most explicitly multi-dimensional account of action inquiry in the action research literature. He distinguishes three modes: first person research/practice, attending to one's own experiencing, thinking, and acting in the moment; second person research/practice, engaging others face-to-face, inquiring collaboratively in real time; and third person research/practice, generating knowledge at a distance — through theory, research design, or systemic engagement beyond the immediate relational exchange (ibid.: 251–252).

The typology names three scopes that a sustained self-directed practice must address. The limit is architectural. The three modes are presented as distinct and selectable: the inquirer chooses which mode serves the current need. The Relational Approach shows that this selection cannot be structural — because the moments are never separate. When the self acts (Strand 1), others already perceive (Strand 3) and respond (Strand 4), regardless of whether the self attends to this. There is no first person moment that is not already second person in structure. Choosing to adopt a second person mode does not initiate a relational process; it orients the self's attention toward one that is already underway.

The difference between second and third person research/practice “remains unfortunately enigmatic” (Zamaros, 2003: fn. 6). The Relational Approach clarifies why. Both second and third person modes engage others — face-to-face in one case, at a distance in the other. But Strand 3 and Strand 4 encompass both intimate and systemic others: the relational field does not change structure by proximity. The enigmatic boundary dissolves once the modes are understood as different relational distances within a single structural loop that runs whether or not the self attends to it.

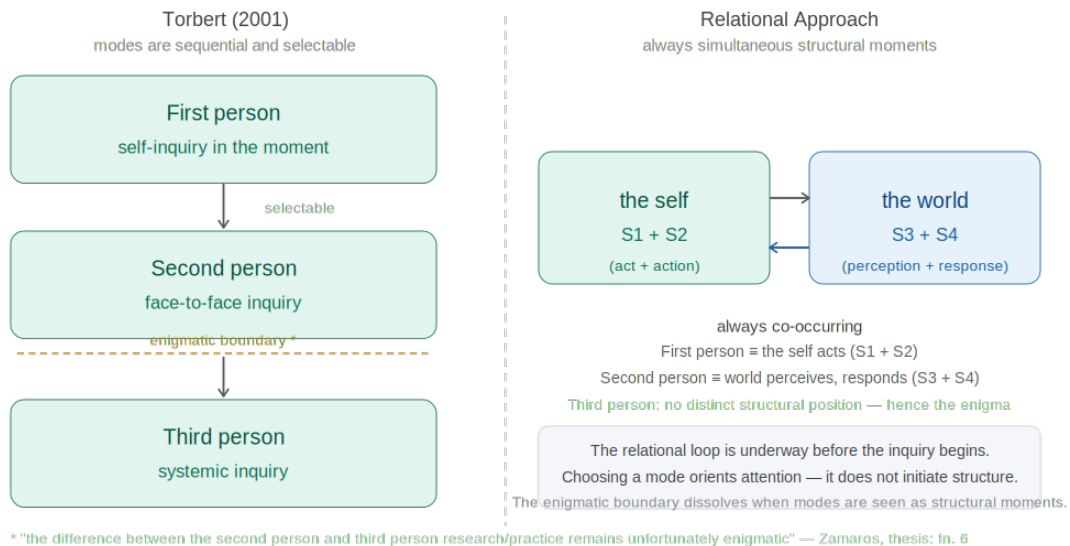


Figure 4. Torbert's sequential modes versus the Relational Approach's simultaneous structure.

Figure 7. Torbert's sequential modes (left) versus the Relational Approach's simultaneous structure (right). The enigmatic boundary between second and third person is resolved by the structural unity of Strands 3 and 4.

#### 4. Marshall: Phenomenology and Its Structural Limit

Marshall (2001) provides the most phenomenologically developed account of self-reflective inquiry practice in the action research literature. Her organizing framework distinguishes an inner arc and an outer arc of attention. The inner arc attends to the self's own perceiving, meaning-making, and framing — "scanning, for breadth, and tracking, for sustained curiosity" (ibid.: 434). The outer arc reaches toward others and what the encounter generates. Between the two: "I juggle and balance and move emphasis between inner and outer arcs of attention, seeking an alive interplay, a generative, appropriate combination and dynamic" (ibid.: 435).

Mapped to the four-strand architecture: the inner arc is Strand 1'-oriented — the self attending to its own act through its own meaning-making, in the tradition of Wundt and Rogers. The outer arc is Strand 4-oriented — the self engaging with others' enacted responses. Marshall's practice tracks both arcs with phenomenological care. It is, within the terms of the action research tradition, the most structurally self-aware approach available.

Marshall herself names the limit of the inner arc with precision: "any self-noticing is framed and conducted by selves beyond the screen of my conscious appreciation" (ibid.: 434). The grounding is Bateson (1973: 408): "of course, the whole of the mind could not be reported in a part of the mind". This is the reliability gap named as a craft condition — a limit requiring humility, openness, and "soft rigour". Marshall's response is methodological: work with the limit through disciplined attentional practice.

The Relational Approach treats this gap differently. Strand 3's inaccessibility is not a craft limit to be worked with. It is a structural condition: the other's perception belongs to the other, constitutively, regardless of the quality of the self's attention. No degree of inner arc discipline narrows the gap between Strand 1' and Strand 3 — not because Marshall's

practice is insufficient, but because the gap is not produced by attentional failure. It is produced by the structure of the relational field. Perception is not transferable.

Marshall's third frame — agency and communion, drawn from Bakan (1966) — moves closest to the Relational Approach's ontological ground. Communion is "the sense of being 'at one' with other organisms or the context, its basis is integration, interdependence, receptivity" (Marshall, 2001: 437). The Relational Approach recognizes this and reframes its basis: communion is not a mode to be cultivated. Mutual constitution — transductive constitution — is the structural condition under which the self exists. What Marshall names as a practice, the Relational Approach establishes as an ontology.

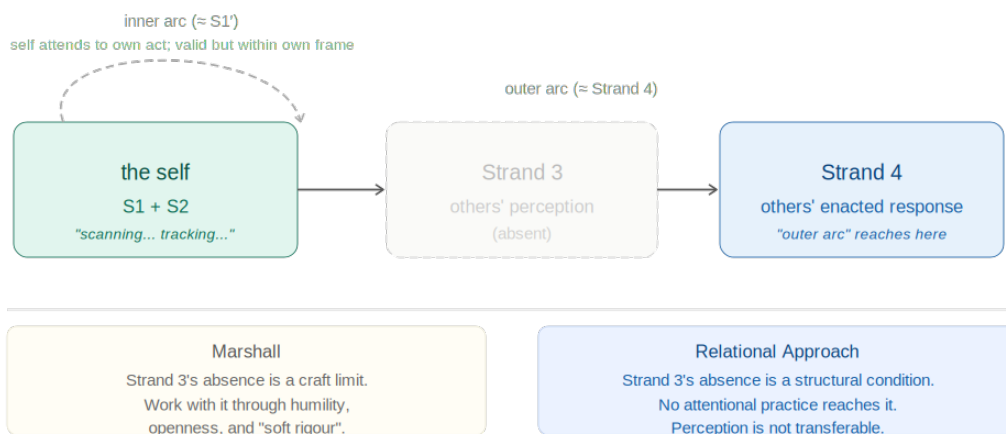


Figure 5. Marshall's inner arc (≈ Strand 1') and outer arc (≈ Strand 4). Strand 3 is absent from the architecture — a craft limit for Marshall; a structural condition for the Relational Approach.

Figure 8. Marshall's inner arc (≈ Strand 1') and outer arc (≈ Strand 4). Strand 3 is absent from the architecture — a craft limit for Marshall; a structural condition for the Relational Approach.

## 5. The Common Limitation

Three frameworks; one structural limit. Argyris and Schön formalize the Strand 1/Strand 2 loop with precision — but the circuit closes on the self's side; the relational field is context, not structure. Torbert names three scopes including others — but the modes are selectable; the relational loop is not structural, only methodologically available. Marshall tracks both arcs with phenomenological care — but Strand 3's absence is a craft limit, not an architectural condition.

The line of descent that runs from Schön's (1983) reflection-in-action through Heron and Reason's (2001) co-operative inquiry to these practices shares this limit: the self-other relation is something the inquirer engages by choice. The relation begins when the inquirer initiates it. It ends when the inquirer steps away.

The Relational Approach makes the contrary claim. The self-other relation is not initiated by the inquirer. It is constitutive: the self acts; others perceive; others respond — always, prior to any methodological decision. Self-directed relational inquiry does not produce the relation. It reads a relation that already exists — and it requires all four strands to read it, because the self without Strands 3 and 4 is the self as it imagines itself to be, not the self as it is constituted.

## 6. The Thesis Impasse Resolved

Earlier work (Zamaros, 2003: Chapter 2) identified a structural problem in self-directed method. The self-directed approach captures the researcher's own experience as part of the phenomenon — inner arcs of attention — making experience itself the object of inquiry. The other-directed approach studies the behavior of others as a series of acts from which action is deduced — outer arcs of attention (Zamaros, 2003: 39, 55). Taken alone, the self-directed approach has equal chances of confirming and disconfirming the difference between experience and its description — because the criterion lies outside the self. Schutz (1967/1932: 26) makes the same point in general form: the judgement content of an utterance may remain accessible, but “the epistemic attitude that determines what the utterer means” cannot be determined from outside. The other-directed supplement does not resolve this: the meanings that govern others' acts remain unavailable; only the acts can be read — and acts do not disclose the meanings that generated them (ibid.: 26–27). The thesis concluded: our inability to prove the difference stems from the difference itself.

The Relational Approach does not overcome this by better method. It makes the structure explicit. The self gives genuine self-truth (valid): what it discovers through introspection — through Rogers's congruence or May's existential awareness — is genuinely its own. But the self cannot guarantee that this truth matches how its act lands on others (reliability threatened): the criterion for this match lies outside the self, in Strand 3. And Strand 3 is constitutively inaccessible. Not a gap to be closed — a condition to be read through Strand 4.

The thesis impasse, in this light, was not a failure of inquiry. It was a correct structural description. The self cannot prove from within itself that its self-account matches the experience of those on the receiving end of its acts. Only Strand 4 provides the structural outside guidance that this proof requires. Strand 4 does not replace self-truth: it provides its reliability check. That is the epistemological contribution of the Relational Approach — not against introspection, but beyond it.

## Part V: The Self-Directed Relational Inquiry in Practice

*Γνῶθι σεαυτόν* — know thyself. The Delphic injunction is the purpose of the inquiry developed in this article. Not the management of identity, not the optimization of self-presentation: the knowledge of what the self actually is — in relation, in act, in the gap between what it intends and what others receive. The self-directed relational inquiry is a structured instrument for that knowledge. It requires all four strands, because the self known only through introspection is the self as it imagines itself to be. The self known relationally — through the loop between act, perception, and response — is the self as it is constituted.

### 1. The Instruments of Self-Knowledge

The self-directed relational inquiry collects data under each of the four strands within a chosen relational context — intimate, professional, social, or civic. The four-strand logic is invariant across contexts; what changes is the precision of the diagram: the specific relationship between self and relational other, and the specific data sources appropriate to that relationship.

Strand 1 data is collected from the self's publicly observable conduct: recurring patterns of language, decision-making tendencies, behavioral signatures across a given relational context. These are the self's displayed acts — what others can observe regardless of what the self intends. Discourse analysis of one's own communications (messages, stated positions, habitual phrasing, patterns of response) is the primary instrument. The three qualities of authority, credibility, and constancy (Zamaros, 2012: 46) are directly testable here.

Strand 2 data is collected through structured introspection: identification of governing values, examination of what the self is oriented toward in a given relational context, and analysis of the gap between stated commitments and behavioral patterns. The introspective instruments of Part II apply — phenomenological self-examination (Rogers), existential encounter (May), sustained self-observation (Wundt, 1897: §3). The open-self framework (Zamaros and Zamaros, S., 2003: 33) provides a structured instrument: what is the gap between the identity the self projects as ideal and the identity it actually enacts? The self-awareness activities developed in Zamaros (2017) extend this work into a practical, in-context toolkit: structured exercises for identifying governing values, reading behavioral signatures, and tracking relational patterns across the four strands.

Strand 3 has no direct behavioral indicators. It is inferred from Strand 4 data and from the gap between Strand 1 (what is projected) and Strand 4 (how others respond). The inference is structurally disciplined: the self does not guess at Strand 3; it reads Strand 4 and reasons backward.

Strand 4 data is collected from the other's enacted responses: how others initiate contact or withdraw it, what they offer or withhold, how they characterize the self in its presence and, where accessible, in its absence. Qualitative patterns in Strand 4 — persistent withdrawal, consistent misreading of the self's intent, recurrent offers of a particular kind of support — are the primary indicators of Strand 3 content.

## **2. Reading the Relational Field**

From Strands 1 and 2 combined: what kind of self is this, what does it claim to be, and what does its internal logic confirm or contradict? A self that projects openness (Strand 1) while governed by a need for control (Strand 2) produces a behavioral gap: the act does not match the action. This gap tends to be legible in Strand 4 before it is acknowledged in Strand 2 — others respond to the enacted act, not to the introspectively held self-account.

From Strand 4: what kind of relational others does the self attract, and what is the quality of the relationships? A self that consistently produces rocky relationships across professional contexts — despite a Strand 1 that projects collaboration — carries a Strand 1'/Strand 3 gap as its primary finding. The Strand 4 pattern is the evidence; the Strand 3 inference is the interpretation; the Strand 2 examination is the diagnostic.

The relationship qualification is the summary finding. Strong relationships confirm that Strand 1 and Strand 3 are broadly aligned: what the self projects is, broadly, what others perceive. Rocky or broken relationships indicate divergence — that the self's Strand 1 is landing differently in Strand 3 than Strand 1' assumes. Introspection alone cannot detect this divergence. Only Strand 4 can. This is what the Delphic injunction requires: a reading of the self that the self, alone, cannot produce.

### 3. Knowing Thyself in Action

The purpose of the inquiry is not knowledge for its own sake but self-knowledge as the basis of action. Once the gap between Strand 1' and Strand 3 is confirmed through Strand 4 — once the self knows how its act lands differently from how it intends — a structural choice opens.

The first option is to work from the inside: to examine and revise Strand 2 — the governing values and drives that generate the act — so that what the self projects (Strand 1) and what it governs (Strand 2) become consistent. This is the introspective route: the deepest form of self-knowledge, and the most demanding. Rogers's movement toward congruence between self-concept and organismic experience runs here; May's existential confrontation with governing freedom enables it; the self-awareness activities of Zamaros (2017) support it with structured instruments for sustained inner examination.

The second option is to work from the outside: to revise the descriptive signature — adjusting Strand 1 to align more accurately with what Strand 2 actually generates, rather than what the self wishes to project. This closes the public gap faster. It carries a risk: if others detect that the self has revised its self-presentation without a corresponding internal change, constancy is lost and credibility follows.

The relationship qualification determines the weight of each option. Where relationships are strong, the relational field is broadly confirmed — the gap is narrow and the self is, in the most direct sense, known. Where relationships are rocky or broken, the gap is structural and the inquiry is most urgent. In a professional development or self-enhancement context, both options are available as instruments; what the self-directed relational inquiry provides is the structural picture that makes the choice legible rather than arbitrary.

The inquiry does not prescribe. It makes visible. The purpose — *γνώθι σεαυτόν* — is served not when the self decides what to do, but when the self sees, clearly and without illusion, what it is.

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