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Original Research Article

Transformation Theory of Change (TTC): An African Communal Architecture for Personality Development Across the Lifespan

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Abstract: This paper introduces the architecture of the Transformation Theory of Change (TTC), a culturally grounded framework for understanding personality as a dynamic system that continues to develop across the lifespan. Developed at the intersection of Guidance and Counselling scholarship, African communal philosophy, and transformative counselling practice, TTC treats change, rather than stability, as the ordinary condition of human development. The theory is anchored in Carl Rogers' (1961) Person-Centred Theory, particularly the actualising tendency, and extends it through an African communal lens suited to Nigerian and other postcolonial counselling contexts. TTC is organised around five interconnected pillars, the Core Self, Relational Self, Adaptive Self, Purposeful Self, and Wounded-and-Healing Self, operating across six contextual domains, and a recurring five-stage cycle of Disruption, Descent, Discovery, Integration, and Contribution. This paper deliberately narrows its scope to that architecture and to two of the theory's formal propositions, now designated Proposition 1 (Transformation-as-Natural-State) and Proposition 2 (Wounded-and-Healing Self), which are developed here with operational definitions and explicit disconfirmation criteria. The architecture is positioned against established personality and counselling psychology theory, and the supporting evidence is read critically rather than treated as settled confirmation, including a genuine tension within the African communal philosophy literature over how much individual agency such frameworks properly accommodate. Three further propositions arising from the same theoretical work are noted as directions for future development rather than elaborated in full, and the proposed measurement programme is intentionally held for a separate paper. The paper closes with an honest account of the theory's current limitations, including the measurement challenges posed by its more experiential constructs and the methodological status of its recurring five-part structure.

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Keywords: Transformation Theory of Change, TTC, Personality Transformation, African Communalism, Counselling Psychology, Lifespan Development, Postcolonial Theory

1. Introduction

Personality theory has long treated stability as the default condition and change as the exception requiring explanation. From Freud's (1923) structural model to Costa and McCrae's (1994) trait-stability findings, the dominant tradition in personality psychology has assumed that personality settles by early adulthood and resists meaningful alteration afterward. Recent longitudinal and meta-analytic work has complicated this picture. Bleidorn et al. (2022) synthesised decades of longitudinal data and found that although rank-order stability increases with age, mean-level change in personality traits continues well into later adulthood, a pattern inconsistent with a strict plaster metaphor. Jackson and Wright (2024) went further, arguing that the mechanisms driving personality change operate throughout adulthood rather than tapering off after the twenties. This assumption of early stabilisation has practical consequences: it can lead practitioners to read persistent difficulty as fixed character rather than a phase within an ongoing process, and it can underplay the extent to which people continue to develop across the lifespan.

Guidance and counselling scholars working in African contexts have raised a related but distinct concern that personality frameworks developed in Western, individualist settings do not adequately capture the communal, relational, and spiritually embedded character of identity as it is lived in much of African life (Nwoye, 2006; Aluede, 2006). Jansen (2026) has argued that mainstream psychological practice continues to insert a Western conception of personhood between practitioner and client even in African clinical settings, with consequences for how distress and growth are interpreted. This paper responds to both concerns by introducing the architecture of the Transformation Theory of Change (TTC), a framework that treats transformation as a recurring and normal feature of personality across the lifespan, and that is grounded explicitly in African communal philosophy (Mbiti, 1990; Nsamenang, 2006) while engaging directly with established counselling psychology theory.

TTC's primary theoretical anchor is Carl Rogers' (1961) Person-Centred Theory, and in particular the actualising tendency, the human drive toward growth and self-realisation. Doyle (2025) has recently revisited this concept and argued that the person-centred tradition itself has been read too narrowly as an individual, rather than relational, account of growth, a reading that sits comfortably alongside the communal extension TTC proposes. TTC extends the actualising tendency by giving it a structured architecture: five interconnected pillars of personality, a recurring five-stage cycle of change, and six contextual domains in which that process unfolds. This paper presents that architecture in full, together with two of the theory's formal propositions that are, at this stage, the most conceptually developed and most amenable to empirical testing, Proposition 1, the Transformation-as-Natural-State Proposition, and Proposition 2, the

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Wounded-and-Healing Self Proposition. Three further propositions, numbered 3 through 5, arise from the same body of work and are noted briefly as directions for future development but are not elaborated here. The paper is deliberately scoped to the theory's architecture and to these two propositions, rather than to the fuller measurement programme TTC will eventually require; that programme is left for separate, future work once at least preliminary instrument data exist.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 The Stability Paradigm in Personality Theory and Its Limitations

The prevailing view in personality psychology has been one of relative stability. Costa and McCrae (1994) found the Big Five dimensions, Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism, to be substantially stable across adulthood, concluding that personality is, in their well-known phrase, set like plaster by around age thirty. Cattell (1965) built a stable, factor-analytic system of source traits, and Eysenck (1967) grounded personality stability in neurobiology, which made change look not just unlikely but physiologically improbable. This tradition produced genuine psychometric gains and remains influential in contemporary trait research.

Bleidorn et al. (2021), reviewing the accumulated longitudinal literature, concluded that personality traits are considerably more open to change across the lifespan than the plaster metaphor implies, while still showing meaningful rank-order consistency over time. Ones et al. (2024) proposed that apparent stability is often better understood as an alignment between traits and environmental demands rather than an intrinsic fixedness of the trait itself. Haehner et al. (2026), in a meta-analytic review of trait variance across the lifespan, found that the dispersion of individual differences in personality shifts with age in ways a simple stability account does not anticipate. Wright et al. (2026) pushed this argument furthest, reporting that when change is measured using methods sensitive to short-term fluctuation rather than broad trait averages, traits prove considerably less stable than researchers and laypeople tend to assume.

Evidence on change mechanisms reinforces this reassessment. Hudson et al. (2020) found that individuals who set explicit goals to change particular personality characteristics showed measurable trait growth in the intended direction across a dozen intensive longitudinal studies. A companion study by the same team, however, found that a person's belief about whether personality can change did not itself predict the degree of trait change experienced (Hudson et al., 2020), an important qualification indicating that mindset about changeability and actual changeability are not the same construct, a distinction relevant to how Proposition 1 below is framed. Wright and Jackson (2023) linked personality change directly to life outcomes, reporting that shifts in traits such as conscientiousness and neuroticism were associated with corresponding changes in well-being and functioning. Atherton et al. (2020) traced stability and change in personality traits and major life goals from college through midlife and found that goal content shifted in tandem with personality trajectories.

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Nigerian-specific scholarship reinforces this picture at the level of practice, not only theory. Aluede (2006) observed that school counsellors in Nigeria work within settings of considerable complexity, where students and families navigate poverty alongside aspiration, and tradition alongside modernity, dynamics a trait-stability model was not built to capture. Denga (2004) documented the institutional and resource constraints under which Nigerian school counsellors typically operate, constraints that shape not only what counselling can practically achieve but which theoretical frameworks feel usable to practitioners at all. A theory that assumes stable, well-resourced, individually oriented therapeutic relationships travels poorly into settings of the sort Denga (2004) describes, where a single counsellor may serve a large school population and family involvement is a practical necessity rather than an optional adjunct to treatment.

2.2 Transformation-Oriented Theories in Counselling Psychology

Not every tradition in counselling psychology has accepted the stability paradigm. Erikson's (1968) psychosocial theory mapped personality development across eight stages spanning the full lifespan, treating identity formation as an ongoing task. The framework has been influential, but it assigns one dominant developmental challenge per life stage within a largely Western, age-normative view of the lifespan, which limits how well it travels across cultural contexts. Prochaska and DiClemente's (1983) transtheoretical model gave counselling a stage-based account of behavioural change that has proven useful, particularly in addiction and health behaviour work, though its scope is limited to behaviour rather than personality and it says little about the relational, spiritual, and communal dimensions of change that matter in African counselling contexts.

Post-traumatic growth research has developed into one of the more substantial transformation-oriented literatures. Tedeschi and Calhoun's (2004) foundational research showed that adversity can produce genuine development beyond a person's pre-trauma baseline, a finding with direct relevance for counsellors working with populations facing chronic hardship. Jayawickreme et al. (2020), in a wide-ranging methodological review, raised a caution that bears directly on how this literature should be read: much of the evidence for post-traumatic growth relies on retrospective self-report, which risks conflating a person's current narrative about growth with an actual, measurable change in functioning. This caution matters for how TTC's Wounded-and-Healing Self pillar is operationalised below, and it is addressed in the disconfirmation criteria attached to Proposition 2. Ortega-Williams et al. (2024) examined intergenerational healing among Black communities and argued that post-traumatic growth, as conventionally measured, often underrepresents growth that is collective rather than purely individual, a limitation bearing directly on frameworks, including TTC, that locate healing within communal processes. Brady (2025) argued from an existentialist angle that the meaning a person constructs from adversity, rather than the adversity itself, determines whether growth follows, a claim consistent with TTC's treatment of woundedness as material to be integrated into a coherent life narrative rather than erased.

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Lawrence and Falaye (2020) evaluated trauma-focused counselling among internally displaced adolescents in Nigeria and found measurable improvements in psychological functioning following structured intervention. Aliche et al. (2022), working with Nigerian cancer patients, found that mindfulness and a strong sense of meaning in life were both associated with higher post-traumatic growth, a finding connecting directly to the role TTC assigns to purpose and meaning-making in its Purposeful Self pillar and Discovery stage. Hervey (2023) evaluated a spiritually oriented trauma healing programme in Nigeria and documented reductions in trauma symptoms alongside gains participants described as spiritual growth, evidence that spiritual and communal resources contribute to recovery in Nigerian settings, consistent with the communal grounding TTC gives its Wounded-and-Healing Self pillar. Sabo (2025), studying survivors of banditry attacks in Southern Kaduna, found that resilience and social support jointly predicted psychological wellbeing among affected individuals, reinforcing that relational support functions as a resource for growth rather than a peripheral comfort.

Purpose and motivation research offers a further transformation-oriented tradition relevant to TTC's architecture. Ryan et al. (2021), extending self-determination theory, described autonomy, competence, and relatedness as innate psychological needs whose satisfaction drives growth-oriented behaviour, giving an empirically supported vocabulary for what TTC's Purposeful Self pillar describes in less granular terms. Hill et al. (2023) proposed a developmental framework for how purpose forms and strengthens over time, arguing that purpose develops through experience and reflection rather than arriving as a fixed trait, a claim aligning closely with TTC's treatment of the Purposeful Self as maturing through the transformation cycle. Where self-determination theory specifies the conditions under which growth-oriented motivation flourishes, TTC's contribution is to locate that motivation within a broader, culturally grounded cycle that also makes room for disruption, descent, and woundedness, phases self-determination theory does not directly address.

2.3 African Communal Philosophy and Person-Centred Theory as TTC's Anchors

Of the established frameworks, Carl Rogers' (1961) Person-Centred Theory comes closest to anticipating what TTC proposes. Rogers offered three ideas that matter here. First, the actualising tendency, the drive toward growth and toward becoming more fully oneself, supplies the motivational engine behind TTC's transformation cycle; TTC gives that concept structure through a five-pillar architecture and a culturally grounded process model Person-Centred Theory itself did not develop. Second, Rogers' (1961) fully functioning person, marked by openness to experience and organismic trust, maps onto TTC's picture of someone who has moved through several transformation cycles toward integration and contribution. Third, Rogers' emphasis on unconditional positive regard, empathic understanding, and congruence as core therapeutic conditions carries directly into TTC's counselling applications. Doyle (2025) has argued that the person-centred tradition, properly read, already contains resources for a more relational account of selfhood than it is usually given credit for, a reading that narrows the distance between Rogers' framework and the communal extension TTC proposes.

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Mbiti's (1990) claim that in African philosophy a person exists in corporate relationship with community, captured in the formulation that a person is a person through other persons, is a direct challenge to the individualist architecture of trait theory. Nsamenang (2006) has argued that the individualism built into mainstream Western personality theory misreads the African experience of selfhood, in which identity cannot easily be separated from relational obligation and spiritual meaning. Bayuo (2026), writing from nursing theory but drawing on African philosophical foundations, proposed a theory of communal-relational person-becoming that treats personhood as a continuous process of becoming through relationship rather than a fixed state, a framing closely aligned with TTC's own treatment of the self as always in process. Kayange (2020) examined ubuntu as a virtue-based ethical theory rather than only a description of communal life, arguing that ubuntu carries normative force, it tells a person not only what selfhood is but what it ought to become, strengthening the ethical grounding of TTC's communal claims. Sodi et al. (2021) offered an insider account of the related Southern African concept of botho, arguing that such frameworks function as an essential ingredient of African psychology rather than a cultural gloss added to imported theory.

Not all recent scholarship treats African communalism as straightforwardly compatible with individual agency, and this tension is worth registering rather than smoothing over. Andanda and Duewell (2024) examined the philosophical relationship between individualistic and relational ethics in African thought and concluded that the two are not simply opposed; individual agency and relational embeddedness can be jointly present within an African ethical framework, provided the framework does not collapse one into the other. Khan (2023) argued that ubuntu is sometimes invoked in ways that understate the space it leaves for individual initiative, and that a socialistic reading of African personhood can overstate collective determination at the expense of individual agency. Biar (2024) proposed the term communal individualism to describe this same tension, arguing that African communal life has always accommodated a meaningful zone of individual distinctiveness within its relational structure rather than eliminating it. This body of work cautions against a reading of the Relational Self pillar that treats communal embeddedness as erasing individual agency; TTC's architecture holds the two together rather than subordinating one to the other, a point developed further in the Discussion below.

Applied scholarship extends these philosophical claims into practice settings relevant to counselling. Mugumbate et al. (2023) reviewed how ubuntu has been incorporated into social work education across Africa and reported growing consensus that communal frameworks improve the cultural fit of helping professions without requiring wholesale rejection of Western clinical training. Ngondo and Klyueva (2022) argued for an ubuntu-centred approach to health communication, contending that communication grounded in communal values produces better engagement in African health settings than individualist frameworks. Sefotho and Letseka (2024) framed botho and ubuntu as forms of cognitive justice in psychology, arguing that omitting African communal concepts from psychological theory is a form of epistemic exclusion rather than a neutral gap. Rotzinger et

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al. (2025), studying how emerging adults in Namibia and Kenya live out ubuntu values today, found that communal commitments persist meaningfully amid rapid social change, evidence against the assumption that communal identity is a traditional artefact giving way to individualism under modernisation.

3. Theoretical Architecture of TTC

3.1 Core Premise and the Palm Tree Principle

TTC's core premise is that human personality is not a fixed construct but a dynamic system in continuous transformation. The theory treats change, rather than stability, as characteristic of personality development across the lifespan, unfolding through the interplay of individual agency, relational context, and systemic forces operating across several life domains at once. This is offered as a challenge to the assumption that personality is relatively stable after early adulthood (Costa & McCrae, 1994), not as a claim that stability is itself pathological, a distinction developed further in connection with Proposition 1 below.

The palm tree serves as TTC's guiding metaphor. Rooted in the West African landscape and long recognised as a symbol of resilience and provision, it offers seven points of correspondence with TTC's architecture. The roots go down before the tree goes up, corresponding to the Descent stage. The trunk bends without breaking, corresponding to the Adaptive Self. Scarring on the trunk records survival, corresponding to the Wounded-and-Healing Self. The tree fruits only after patient seasons, reflecting the claim that no stage can be skipped without cost. Little of the tree goes unused, expressing the claim that experience can become a resource. The tree grows upward while remaining rooted, reflecting the relationship between the Core Self and Adaptive Self. And it rarely grows in isolation, corresponding to the Relational Self and to the African communal philosophy of personhood (Mbiti, 1990).

3.2 Theoretical Assumptions

TTC rests on five assumptions. Transformation-as-Natural-State holds that change is the default condition of human existence, and that apparent stability is either a temporary equilibrium or, in some cases, stagnation. Relational Embeddedness holds that the self cannot be understood apart from its web of relationships, consistent with African communal philosophy (Mbiti, 1990; Nsamenang, 2006) and with Adler's (1956) concept of social interest. Purposeful Evolution holds that transformation is strongest when tied to meaningful purpose, consistent with Frankl's (1959) logotherapy and with Kashdan et al.'s (2023) proposal that purpose in life is best understood as a resolvable construct with distinct cognitive, motivational, and behavioural components rather than a single trait. Multi-Domain Integration holds that transformation in one life domain tends to ripple into others. Cultural Fluency recognises that personality development, in globalised contexts, includes the capacity to move between cultural systems while retaining internal coherence, a demand of particular relevance in Nigerian and African contexts.

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TTC's architecture is organised, at several levels, around the number five, five assumptions, five pillars, and five cycle stages. This recurring structure is a fair target for scrutiny, and it is addressed directly in the limitations section below rather than left unexamined.

3.3 The Five Pillars

TTC is built around five pillars, each a distinct but interconnected dimension of personality involved in transformation.

Pillar One: The Core Self (Foundation). The Core Self is the relatively stable essence of identity, the values, spiritual-moral commitments, and cultural identity that anchor a person through transformation. It changes slowly and retains a recognisable continuity; when transformation strays too far from the Core Self, people tend to experience disintegration rather than growth. This pillar corresponds to Rogers' (1961) organismic self and to Allport's (1961) propriate strivings. Carvalho et al. (2025), revisiting McAdams' account of personality stability and change, argued that the most enduring elements of identity function as an anchoring narrative core against which more surface-level change is measured, a view compatible with how the Core Self operates within TTC. For counsellors, assessing the Core Self establishes the stable ground from which growth can proceed.

Pillar Two: The Relational Self (Connection). The Relational Self covers personality as it is expressed and shaped through relationships. Different relationships draw out different parts of the self, consistent with Adler's (1956) social interest and with attachment theory's account of secure bonds as a resource for taking developmental risks (Bowlby, 1988). In African contexts, this is the pillar most directly informed by communal personhood: character is expressed, tested, and refined through relationships and contribution to community rather than held as a private possession (Mbiti, 1990). Ikpeh and Awi (2025) documented how ubuntu functions as a framework for social capital building among Black women in academic settings, evidence that communal identity operates not only as philosophy but as a practical resource in daily professional life. Nzegwu (2006) adds a qualification: communal family structures in African contexts are also gendered structures, whose transformation is sanctioned unevenly within the family or community, a point counsellors applying this pillar should not overlook.

Pillar Three: The Adaptive Self (Change). The Adaptive Self is a person's capacity to adjust behaviour, thought, and emotional response to changing circumstances. It draws on Bandura's (1997) concept of self-efficacy, the belief that one can exercise control over one's own functioning and environment, as the motivational base of behavioural flexibility. Bleckmann et al. (2026), studying volitional personality change among adolescents, found that young people who wanted to change specific aspects of their personality were more likely to report doing so when they held a clear sense of why the change mattered to them, evidence consistent with the role self-efficacy and purpose jointly play in adaptive capacity. Cultural code-switching is one specialised form of this adaptive capacity, particularly relevant in multicultural settings.

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Pillar Four: The Purposeful Self (Intention). The Purposeful Self is the future-facing dimension of personality, the part that pulls a person forward through goals, aspirations, and a sense of calling. It aligns most directly with Rogers' (1961) actualising tendency, extended by grounding purpose explicitly in communal contribution and, in many African contexts, spiritual calling (Frankl, 1959). Hill et al. (2023) proposed that purpose develops through a recognisable sequence of orientation, exploration, and commitment, a sequence that maps usefully onto how the Purposeful Self matures across successive turns of TTC's transformation cycle rather than emerging fully formed.

Pillar Five: The Wounded-and-Healing Self (Injury and Recovery). The Wounded-and-Healing Self acknowledges that personality carries hurts and ongoing recovery alongside its strengths. This pillar draws on the post-traumatic growth research of Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004), and on Nwoye's (2006) documentation of comparable processes in African counselling contexts, with attention to the communal support structures that make healing possible. Ortega-Williams et al. (2024) argued that healing of this kind is frequently collective rather than purely individual, strengthening the case for locating this pillar within a communal rather than solitary framework. Wholeness in TTC does not require an absence of scars; it requires their integration into a coherent life narrative. This pillar is developed further below in connection with Proposition 2.

3.4 The Transformation Cycle

Personality transformation in TTC unfolds through a cycle that recurs across the lifespan, better understood as a rising spiral than a straight line, each pass builds on the last, carrying the person toward greater complexity and capacity for contribution.

Stage One: Disruption (The Catalyst). Every transformation begins with something that disturbs an existing equilibrium, a life transition, a crisis, an accumulation of dissatisfaction, or exposure to an idea that unsettles comfortable assumptions. This stage resembles Lewin's (1951) unfreezing, an established equilibrium disturbed before change becomes possible. Buchinger et al. (2023), tracking the codevelopment of life goals and personality traits across adulthood, found that shifts in what people wanted from their lives frequently preceded, rather than followed, measurable personality change, consistent with disruption functioning as a genuine catalyst.

Stage Two: Descent (The Between Space). After disruption comes a liminal space between the known past and an unknown future, where old patterns no longer work and new ones have not yet formed, resembling the contemplation and preparation stages of Prochaska and DiClemente's (1983) model. Relational support matters most here: Nwoye (2006) documented how central communal and family support is in helping clients move through disorientation without deteriorating. A TTC-informed counsellor frames descent as a necessary stage rather than a pathology.

Stage Three: Discovery (The Emergence). As people persist through descent, new insight, perspective, and capability begin to emerge through cognitive realisation, emotional

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shift, and relational discovery, lining up with Rogers' (1961) description of a client beginning to experience themselves more openly and trustingly.

Stage Four: Integration (The Consolidation). Integration turns the discoveries of the previous stage into stable characteristics through behavioural consolidation and identity reconstruction, corresponding to Lewin's (1951) refreezing. It requires patience; rushing toward contribution before genuine integration tends to produce superficial change that later collapses. Olaru et al. (2023) found that lasting shifts in personality were more closely tied to changes in life satisfaction when those shifts had stabilised over time rather than remaining recent, supporting integration as a distinct and necessary stage.

Stage Five: Contribution (The Giving Back). The final stage turns outward, mentoring, teaching, community service, or simply living as an example that helps others, reflecting Adler's (1956) social interest and Erikson's (1968) generativity. Contribution completes one turn of the cycle without ending transformation; new disruptions will arrive, and the next spiral begins at a higher developmental level.

3.5 Contextual Domains of Transformation

Transformation in TTC does not occur in the abstract; it occurs within specific life contexts. Six domains are identified below, each with its own dynamics while remaining connected to the others, consistent with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory. Table 1 sets out these domains, their defining characteristics within the TTC framework, and the corresponding focus a counsellor working within that domain would typically adopt.

Table 1: Six contextual domains of TTC, their defining characteristics, and counselling focus.

Domain	Defining Characteristic	Counselling Focus
Family and Kinship	Transformation shaped by extended-family obligation, intergenerational expectation, and communal accountability rather than nuclear-family boundaries alone	Assessing relational support structures and mapping family-of-origin patterns that anchor or constrain change
Spiritual and Religious Life	Change interpreted through, and often legitimised by, religious or spiritual meaning-making frameworks prevalent across Nigerian and wider African contexts	Working with, rather than around, a client's spiritual vocabulary for describing disruption and healing
Education and Vocation	Transformation tied to formal schooling milestones, vocational identity formation, and socially recognised markers of competence	Linking career and academic transitions to underlying identity shifts rather than treating them as purely practical decisions

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Domain	Defining Characteristic	Counselling Focus
Community and Social Belonging	Personality expressed and validated through visible contribution to community life, consistent with communal personhood	Identifying opportunities for the Contribution stage to be enacted within a client's actual community setting
Economic and Material Life	Change shaped by material constraint, economic aspiration, and the practical demands of provision for self and family	Acknowledging economic pressure as a legitimate disruptor rather than a background condition to be set aside
Health and Embodiment	Transformation registered through the body, including illness, recovery, and physical resilience as sites of meaning	Attending to embodied experience as a channel through which the Wounded-and-Healing Self is expressed

Source: Author's construction, 2026.

Feyijimi et al. (2026), working outside the counselling literature but within the same communal-model tradition, proposed a four-pillared cultural-contextual-communal framework for workforce development in African settings, illustrating that multi-domain, communally anchored architectures of this general kind are gaining traction well beyond therapeutic contexts, a pattern that lends independent plausibility to TTC's own domain structure.

4. Formal Propositions of TTC

TTC's fuller theoretical work has produced five formal propositions. This paper develops two of them in operational detail, Proposition 1 (the Transformation-as-Natural-State Proposition) and Proposition 2 (the Wounded-and-Healing Self Proposition), because they are, at this stage, the most conceptually mature and the most directly testable using existing measurement traditions in personality and counselling psychology. The remaining three propositions are noted briefly in section 4.3 as markers of the theory's intended trajectory; they are not elaborated here, since doing so responsibly would require operational and disconfirmation criteria this paper has not yet developed for them.

4.1 Proposition 1: The Transformation-as-Natural-State Proposition

Claim. Individuals who hold an implicit view of personality as continuously transformable, rather than fixed after early adulthood, will show measurably greater engagement in growth-oriented behaviour than individuals holding a fixed-trait view, after accounting for age, socioeconomic status, and baseline psychological distress. Growth-oriented engagement is operationalised here as voluntary initiation of skill-building or self-development activity within the preceding twelve months, help-seeking behaviour in response to a personal difficulty, and self-reported willingness to revise long-held beliefs or habits when presented with disconfirming evidence.

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Operational test. This proposition can be tested by administering a personality-mindset measure, adapted from Dweck's (2006) implicit theories framework, alongside the behavioural indices above, in a cross-sectional or longitudinal Nigerian sample. Hudson et al.'s (2020) finding that belief in changeability did not itself predict actual trait change is directly relevant here and should be treated as a competing hypothesis the operational test must address rather than as evidence that undermines Proposition 1 outright; the two studies measured different outcomes, actual trait change against reported growth-oriented behaviour, and TTC's claim concerns the latter.

Disconfirming pattern. The proposition would be disconfirmed if growth-oriented behaviour shows no meaningful association with personality mindset, or if a fixed-trait view is instead associated with equal or greater wellbeing and functioning without corresponding distress, a pattern that would sit more comfortably with Costa and McCrae's (1994) stability evidence, and with the null finding reported by Hudson et al. (2020), than with TTC's claim.

Boundary condition. TTC does not predict that all apparent stability reflects stagnation. A person whose life circumstances are genuinely settled may show low transformation-activity without this indicating psychological difficulty. The proposition concerns engagement with transformation opportunities as they arise, not a constant baseline level of change-seeking behaviour; this qualification is intended to guard directly against the risk of pathologising healthy stability, discussed further under Limitations.

4.2 Proposition 2: The Wounded-and-Healing Self Proposition

Claim. Individuals who actively engage in structured healing work addressing past adversity and receive adequate relational support during that process will show post-traumatic growth, defined as new psychological capacities, deepened relationships, or a revised sense of meaning exceeding their pre-adversity baseline, at significantly higher rates than individuals who meet only one, or neither, condition.

Operational test. This can be tested using an adapted Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996) at two time points, alongside a brief measure of perceived relational support, across four comparison groups: healing engagement with support, healing engagement without support, support without active healing engagement, and neither. Lee and Matthews (2025) recently confirmed that social support and meaning-making ability jointly predict post-traumatic growth outcomes in ways that support a two-factor comparison design of this kind, lending methodological confidence to the proposed test.

Disconfirming pattern. The proposition would be disconfirmed if PTG scores do not differ meaningfully across these four groups, or if relational support shows no interaction effect with healing engagement, suggesting the two factors do not combine in the way TTC predicts.

Measurement caveat. Healing work and adequate relational support are constructs that resist clean operationalisation, and any instrument built to capture them risks flattening

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lived complexity into checklist items, a concern raised again in the Limitations section and consistent with Jayawickreme et al.'s (2020) broader caution about the retrospective, self-report basis of much post-traumatic growth measurement. Qualitative narrative methods, such as a structured interview protocol suited to oral and storytelling traditions prominent in African communities (Nwoye, 2006), should accompany, rather than replace, quantitative testing of this proposition.

4.3 Additional Propositions for Future Development

Three further propositions arose from the same theoretical work that produced Propositions 1 and 2. Proposition 3, the Relational Embeddedness Proposition, concerns the relationship between relational network quality and depth of transformation. Proposition 4, the Transformation Cycle Universality Proposition, concerns the sequential universality of the five-stage cycle across cultural and demographic contexts. Proposition 5, the Communal Transformation Proposition, concerns the role of communal, rather than individual, framing in sustaining transformation. These three are held back from the present paper deliberately. Each requires further conceptual development, in particular, the same kind of operational definition and disconfirmation criteria given to Propositions 1 and 2 above, before being offered as formal, testable claims. They are noted here only as markers of the theory's intended direction.

5. Discussion

5.1 TTC in the Landscape of Personality and Counselling Psychology Theory

TTC engages with the established canon of personality and counselling psychology theory. Table 2 compares TTC's architecture with several established frameworks across points of convergence and difference, and states what TTC's architecture contributes beyond each.

Table 2: TTC's architecture in comparative perspective within the counselling psychology theory landscape.

Framework	Point of Convergence with TTC	What TTC's Architecture Adds
Person-Centred Theory (Rogers, 1961)	Shared grounding in the actualising tendency as the motivational engine of growth	A structured five-pillar architecture, a five-stage cycle, and six contextual domains not developed within Person-Centred Theory itself
Psychosocial Development Theory (Erikson, 1968)	Shared treatment of identity formation as a lifelong, staged task	A recurring spiral rather than a single fixed sequence of age-linked stages, and explicit African communal grounding
Transtheoretical Model (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983)	Shared stage-based account of how change unfolds over time	Extension from behaviour change specifically to the whole architecture of personality,

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Framework	Point of Convergence with TTC	What TTC's Architecture Adds
		including relational and spiritual dimensions
Narrative Identity Theory (McAdams, 1993)	Shared view that an evolving life story, not fixed traits, is what develops across adulthood	A named, structured process model of how that story changes, organised around discrete stages rather than open narrative integration
Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan et al., 2021)	Shared claim that autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs drive growth-oriented behaviour	Location of that motivation within a broader cycle that accommodates disruption, descent, and woundedness alongside growth
Post-Traumatic Growth Theory (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004)	Shared claim that adversity can produce genuine development beyond a pre-adversity baseline	Integration of woundedness as one pillar among five, embedded within a communal rather than solely individual healing process

Source: Author's construction, 2026.

What sets TTC apart in this landscape is its treatment of transformation as a constitutive dynamic of personality across the lifespan. Allport (1961) acknowledged functional autonomy, and Jung's (1953) individuation addressed lifelong self-realisation, but neither centres transformation as the defining feature of personality in the way TTC's architecture does. McAdams (1993) and Ryan and Deci (2000) each capture part of the same territory, an evolving self-narrative in the first case, and intrinsic growth motivation in the second, but neither integrates these with the communal, spiritual, and wound-inclusive dimensions that TTC's architecture brings together in one framework.

5.2 Synthesis: TTC Against the Evidence

Bleidorn et al. (2022) and Jackson and Wright (2024) confirm that personality traits retain considerable rank-order stability across adulthood even as mean levels shift, which is not a rejection of TTC's core premise but a description of the pace at which transformation typically proceeds. TTC's claim is not that personality changes rapidly or unpredictably; it is that change, however gradual, is the ordinary condition rather than the exception requiring special explanation. Haehner et al.'s (2026) finding that trait variance shifts across the lifespan, and Wright et al.'s (2026) demonstration that finer-grained measurement reveals more instability than trait-level averages suggest, both point toward a personality system more continuously in motion than the plaster metaphor implies, closer to TTC's architecture than to the stability paradigm it responds to.

The post-traumatic growth literature sits in a more complicated relationship with TTC's Wounded-and-Healing Self pillar than simple confirmation would suggest. Jayawickreme et al.'s (2020) methodological caution, that much reported growth reflects retrospective narrative construction rather than measured psychological change, is a

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genuine limitation of the broader PTG tradition, and it applies with equal force to any instrument TTC eventually builds to test Proposition 2. At the same time, the Nigerian evidence reviewed above, Lawrence and Falaye (2020), Aliche et al. (2022), and Hervey (2023), among them, converges on a pattern in which structured engagement with adversity, particularly when supported relationally or spiritually, is associated with better outcomes than adversity left unaddressed. This convergence does not resolve Jayawickreme et al.'s methodological concern, but it suggests the pattern Proposition 2 predicts has independent support across several Nigerian samples, a reasonable basis for treating the proposition as worth testing formally.

The African communal philosophy literature raises a genuine tension the architecture has to hold rather than resolve by fiat. Andanda and Duewell (2024) and Khan (2023) both caution against readings of communal personhood that understate individual agency, while Biar's (2024) notion of communal individualism argues that African communal life has always made room for individual distinctiveness within relational structure. The Relational Self pillar is compatible with this more qualified reading: it locates the self within relationship without claiming that relationship exhausts or overrides individual agency, and the Adaptive Self and Purposeful Self pillars sit alongside it to preserve space for individually directed change within a communally embedded life. Whether this balance is struck correctly in practice is an empirical question future measurement work will need to address.

6. Limitations and Critical Evaluation

TTC's architecture and the two propositions developed above are offered as an original, still-developing contribution. The following limitations are acknowledged as the theory's growing edges.

First, empirical validation is limited. As a newly proposed architecture, TTC has not yet been tested through controlled research. Its pillars, cycle stages, contextual domains, and the two propositions developed above are theoretically grounded claims drawn from clinical and pastoral observation and engagement with the literature reviewed here, not yet from data. Testing Propositions 1 and 2 as operationalised above, and building normative data for Nigerian and African populations, remain ahead. Haehner et al. (2025) have already shown that personality trait change follows somewhat different patterns across sub-Saharan African samples than in the Western samples most personality research relies on, underscoring the need for future testing conducted with Nigerian and African samples specifically.

Second, some of TTC's richest constructs resist easy measurement. The Wounded-and-Healing Self and the communal dimensions of the Relational Self do not translate cleanly into standard psychometric instruments. There is a real risk that instruments built to capture them either flatten what they measure or become too unwieldy for practical use, a concern flagged above in connection with Proposition 2's measurement caveat and Jayawickreme et al.'s (2020) warning about retrospective self-report in

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post-traumatic growth research. This is a familiar problem across the humanistic tradition and will require sustained methodological attention.

Third, there is a risk of over-normalising transformation. TTC's claim that transformation is the natural state could, if stated without qualification, end up pathologising periods of genuine stability and settled identity. Costa and McCrae's (1994) longitudinal evidence for adult personality stability, together with more recent confirmation from Bleidorn et al. (2022) that rank-order stability increases meaningfully with age, is a serious empirical challenge, and the boundary condition attached to Proposition 1 above is offered as a first, partial answer; a fuller account of how healthy stability and healthy transformation relate to one another is still needed.

Fourth, the architecture's recurring five-part structure invites a fair question. Five assumptions, five pillars, and five cycle stages is a striking symmetry, and a reviewer is right to ask whether the number five reflects a genuine carving of the phenomena at its joints, or an aesthetic imposition on the theory-building process. At present, the honest answer is that the pillars and stages were derived through iterative clinical and pastoral observation and dialogue with the literature reviewed in section 2, not through a factor-analytic or grounded-theory procedure that would let the data itself suggest the number and shape of categories. Future qualitative work, for example, a grounded-theory analysis of transformation narratives collected independently of the theory, would test whether five is the right number for either the pillars or the stages, or an artefact of how the theory was built.

Fifth, there is tension between cultural grounding and universal application. TTC is explicitly grounded in African communal philosophy and resists the individualist assumptions of Western personality theory, while also claiming applicability beyond that context. Whether both claims can be fully reconciled is a fair question, and the disagreement among Andanda and Duewell (2024), Khan (2023), and Biar (2024) over how much individual agency African communal frameworks properly accommodate shows that this question remains unsettled even within the communal philosophy literature TTC draws on. Cross-cultural testing and dialogue with scholars from other traditions are needed to work through it.

Sixth, there is the matter of researcher reflexivity. TTC's architecture is explicitly autobiographical: the author has drawn on her own transformation experience in developing it. That gives the theory an authentic, lived quality that purely academic theorising often lacks, but it also carries a risk of confirmation bias. This has to be addressed openly, through deliberate effort to seek out experiences and populations that challenge the theory's claims rather than only confirm them, and through the disconfirmation criteria attached to Propositions 1 and 2 above.

7. Conclusion and Implications for Counselling Psychology

The Transformation Theory of Change (TTC) proposes that personality is better understood as a dynamic system than as a fixed structure, one organised around five

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interconnected pillars, Core Self, Relational Self, Adaptive Self, Purposeful Self, and Wounded-and-Healing Self, operating across six contextual life domains, and developing through a recurring five-stage cycle of Disruption, Descent, Discovery, Integration, and Contribution.

Anchored in Rogers' (1961) actualising tendency and extended through an African communal lens, TTC's architecture gives that concept a structure that Person-Centred Theory itself does not provide. Of TTC's five formal propositions, this paper has developed two, Proposition 1, the Transformation-as-Natural-State Proposition, and Proposition 2, the Wounded-and-Healing Self Proposition, in sufficient operational detail to be tested empirically, including explicit criteria under which each would be disconfirmed. The remaining three propositions are noted as markers of the theory's intended direction rather than presented as finished claims, and the theory's proposed measurement suite is deliberately left for separate, future work.

For Guidance and Counselling practice in Nigerian and other African contexts, TTC's contribution at this stage is primarily conceptual. It offers a vocabulary and structure for understanding client presentations as phases within an ongoing process rather than as fixed character, and it foregrounds communal and relational dimensions of healing that individualist frameworks tend to underweight. Its empirical claims remain to be tested, and the limitations set out above, particularly around measurement, the risk of over-normalising transformation, and the architecture's own five-part symmetry, are offered as an honest account of the work still needed. The theory is presented here as a first, still-developing formal statement, open to critique, testing, and revision by the wider counselling psychology community.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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