



Dependence to Interdependence

One of my favourite books is [The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People](#), by [Stephen Covey](#)¹. The book is about personal growth and change. It has been applauded and used by individuals in private life and in business. In his book, Covey presents a step-by-step approach for meeting and dealing with problems of life that most people at some time face. One of the concepts he talks about is the [Maturity Continuum](#) - moving from [dependence to interdependence](#). This brief overview fails to capture the full richness and complexity of Covey's work, but will give you an idea and an opening.

Dependence

[Dependence](#) is the state we are in as infants. We can do nothing for ourselves and rely on others for our life needs, such as food, nurturing, comfort and safety. When in the state of dependence, others are responsible for our wellbeing, not ourselves. If things go wrong, we can 'blame' others. It is not 'our fault,' as we were unable to control events. While this state applies to infants, it may apply to some adults who cannot look after themselves, such as if they are physically or mentally disabled.

If maturity occurs correctly and without undue hindrance, we evolve out of dependence to the next stage, that of [Independence](#). Persons who grow up physically and chronologically but do not reach this stage, are referred to as being 'immature.' Characteristics of immaturity include the refusal to take responsibility for one's own actions and the inclination to blame someone else for them.

Independence

[Independence](#) is the state in which we have become self-reliant. We no longer need others to do everything for us. We can take care of our own physical, emotional, mental and financial needs. This does not mean we 'know everything.' We may still need to refer to and learn from others.

But we are self-motivated and able to make our own decisions about what to do and not to do in our own best interests. Importantly, we take responsibility for our own actions. We may say that others influenced us in certain ways, but in the end, we recognise that we undertake our own actions and are responsible for them. Covey makes a distinction that "dependent people need others to get what they want, whereas independent people get what they want through their own efforts."

Interdependence

[Interdependence](#) is the state of recognising the value of acting in concert with others. While independence is a necessary stage in our growth, it is not the final one. There is a limit to what a person can do by himself or herself. Life cannot survive or thrive for long in silos. Cooperation and joint enterprises are the mark of interdependence. Before a person can be interdependent, they must first be independent. When you are dependent, you don't have a choice. Being interdependent is a choice. You therefore, need to have reached independence in order to make that choice.

The Value of Interdependence

Why should we strive for Interdependence? According to Covey, [Interdependence](#) is the state in which we have a much greater access to resources and knowledge. Sharing ourselves and pooling resources yields potential for "public victories" and "win-win" situations. When focused only on ourselves, we have limited perspectives on issues and problems. Interdependence brings clarity, greater understanding, wider perspective, and the opportunity to act with greater effectiveness.

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¹ 1989, Free Press, New York, London, Toronto, Sydney.