Grygoriy Shamborovskyi

Department of International Economic Relations,
Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, Lviv, Ukraine
E-mail: gregorysham@gmail.com
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8558-150X
Web of Science ResearcherID: L-6047-2017

The SET Model: Systemic Existential Transformation in Complex Human Environments

Abstract

The *purpose* of this paper is to introduce and conceptualize the SET model (Systemic Existential Transformation) as an integrative framework for understanding human well-being and transformation in complex environments. Unlike conventional models, SET focuses on inner dynamics of meaning, resonance, and systemic coherence rather than static metrics. *Methodology.* The model is based on interdisciplinary synthesis, including existential philosophy, systems thinking, and symbolic cartography. It integrates qualitative tools such as the SET Core 100 matrix (a structure of 100 meaning-energy clusters), the Loop of Transformation (a recursive process of rupture and integration), and the Pure Well-being Index (PWI). These tools were developed through theoretical modeling and applied experimentally in coaching and facilitation contexts. *Results.* The SET model outlines a dynamic, recursive view of personal and systemic change. It identifies key patterns of disintegration and reintegration and offers structured tools for navigating them. The model has been piloted in reflective practices across domains such as personal development, education, and organizational leadership. It remains in a conceptual phase and requires further empirical validation. *Practical Implications.* The model can be applied in coaching, education, and organizational settings to improve self-awareness, adaptive capacity, and meaningful alignment. Tools like the SET Core 100 and PWI support practitioners in navigating complex human states and transitions beyond conventional metrics of success. *Value/originality.* SET offers a novel grammar of transformation rooted in inner coherence and existential navigation. It contributes to the emerging paradigm of meaning-centered development and may be of interest to researchers and practitioners exploring deep adaptation, resilience, and integrative well-being.

1 Introduction

In the contemporary world marked by turbulence, fragmentation, and accelerating systemic crises, traditional models of human well-being – be they economic, psychological, or social – struggle to provide adequate frameworks for sustainable development. From rising mental health issues (Gergen 2009) to ecological collapse (Morin 2008) and societal polarization, these phenomena suggest that current paradigms are insufficient for navigating the deeper structures of human experience and transformation.

This article introduces the SET model (Systemic Existential Transformation) as a response to this theoretical and practical gap. SET proposes that well-being cannot be reduced to hedonic SETisfaction, material growth, or individual achievement alone. Instead, it emerges as a dynamic interplay between inner resonance, systemic coherence, and meaningful participation in the unfolding field of life. The SET model repositions the human being not as a fixed unit within a system, but as an active energetic-conscious participant navigating complex, evolving fields of meaning.

Rooted in existential philosophy (Frankl 2006), systems theory (Capra and Luisi 2014), and integrative psychology, SET builds a bridge between subjective experience and collective transformation. It introduces a structural model – the SET Core 100 – that maps 100 energetic-meaning clusters across

12 thematic groups, offering a new grammar of inner navigation. By framing transformation as a cyclical process involving rupture, reorganization, and reintegration, SET provides a powerful lens through which individuals and systems can realign with vitality, purpose, and coherence.

This introduction lays the groundwork for exploring the SET model's theoretical foundations, structural components, and potential applications across multiple domains, from personal development and coaching to systemic innovation and social design.

2 Theoretical Background

Contemporary approaches to well-being and transformation typically fall into disciplinary silos – psychological, economic, sociological – each offering partial perspectives. Positive psychology, exemplified by Seligman's PERMA model (Seligman 2011), emphasizes positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. Integral Theory (Wilber 2000) proposes a multi-perspectival approach to reality, mapping individual and collective dimensions across levels of consciousness. Spiral Dynamics (Beck and Cowan 1996) outlines the evolution of value systems in individuals and cultures, while systemic coaching and constellations (Hellinger 2001) explore family and organizational dynamics through "fields" of relational entanglement.

Although these frameworks contribute valuable insights, they often rely on either static metrics (e.g., happiness scores, GDP, productivity) or complex typologies that may lack intuitive resonance with lived experience. Moreover, they rarely account for the energy of breakdowns, existential crises, or liminal states – crucial thresholds where true transformation becomes possible.

SET (Systemic Existential Transformation) builds on these legacies but introduces a novel fusion: it positions meaning-energy dynamics as central to both personal evolution and systemic coherence. It does not simply aim to categorize psychological traits or social values, but to map the deep architecture of human states as they fluctuate, fracture, integrate, and realign in response to the field of being.

Key to this model is the concept of resonant navigation: the ability to orient oneself not through external goals or imposed norms, but through an inner attunement to states of coherence, breakdown, and emergent integration. Unlike static stage-based models, SET views transformation as a recursive loop – a dynamic dance of disintegration and reintegration occurring within complex human environments.

By foregrounding the existential and systemic together, SET provides a unified theoretical foundation for understanding transformation as a participatory, adaptive, and meaning-driven process.

3 The SET Framework

The SET model is structured around the understanding that transformation is not a linear path, but a recursive, meaning-driven process involving shifts in energy, perception, and systemic integration. At its core lies a framework known as the SET Core 100 – a matrix of 100 energetic-meaning clusters organized into 12 thematic groups. These clusters represent symbolic and experiential states that emerge within human consciousness during periods of change, breakdown, insight, and integration.

The twelve core groupings of the SET Core 100 include, among others: Resonance (states of alignment and vibrational coherence), Rupture (states of breakdown, conflict, or existential crisis), Tension, Movement, Echo, The Unknown, HE and SHE, The Other, and Output. Together, these function as a modular grammar for navigating states of being in relation to the surrounding field.

Central to the framework is the Loop of Transformation – a spiral process by which individuals move through stages of dissonance, reflection, synthesis, and reorientation. Rather than resolving conflict once and for all, this loop allows for continual recalibration of one's position in the field of experience. Every transformation cycle is marked by an entry (rupture), descent (immersion), reconfiguration (emergence), and expansion (resonance or integration).

SET introduces the notion of the field of being – a dynamic informational-energetic space in which states, impulses, and systemic conditions interact. The individual is seen as a sensing agent within this field, navigating through patterns of coherence and dissonance via internal compass points defined by meaning.

To facilitate this navigation, the SET framework includes:
– State Cartography: mapping one's location in the SET Core 100 matrix;
– The Pure Well-being Index (PWI): an alternative measure of transformation-aligned well-being;
– Narrative Reflection Tools: structured introspection and symbolic dialogue.

This architecture is designed not only for theoretical inquiry but for practical application – enabling a person or group to identify their current existential 'coordinates,' recognize systemic influences, and engage in conscious re-alignment with a chosen trajectory of becoming.

4 Methodological Foundations

The methodological foundation of the SET model rests on the integration of phenomenological inquiry, systems thinking, and symbolic cartography (Jung 1968; Merleau-Ponty 1962). Rather than relying solely on empirical or quantitative instruments,

SET prioritizes meaning-based diagnostics, where the lived experience of transformation becomes the primary source of insight.

Field-Based Orientation: SET begins from the assumption that every human being is embedded in a dynamic "field of being" – an ever-evolving matrix of energies, systems, symbols, and relational patterns. Transformation is thus not isolated within the individual, but unfolds as a systemic event that involves shifts in one's orientation within this field. The field is sensed and interpreted through resonance, rupture, and other meaning-energetic patterns, as mapped in the SET Core 100.

Resonant Navigation: Instead of goals or external benchmarks, the SET model emphasizes resonant navigation – the embodied sensing of directional meaning through inner states. Transformation is not forced or imposed; it is oriented from within. This methodological posture draws inspiration from phenomenology (e.g., Husserl, Merleau-Ponty), existential psychology, and indigenous systems of knowledge navigation.

Symbolic Cartography: The SET Core 100 provides a semi-structured cartography of inner experience. Practitioners or individuals can identify their current state cluster and trace possible trajectories through the loop of transformation. This process does not diagnose in a clinical sense, but enables reflective insight, energetic realignment, and meta-cognitive agency.

Tools and Instruments: To support application, the SET model includes:

- The Pure Well-being Index (PWI): an alternative evaluative scale grounded in alignment with inner coherence, not external achievement.
- Narrative Reflection Protocols: guided introspective prompts for working with symbolic material and transitions.
- Field Mapping Templates: visual/spatial tools to identify tensions, ruptures, and coherent zones within individual or collective systems.
- Methodological Integrity: While still in early stages of development, SET adheres to methodological integrity through:
- Transdisciplinary synthesis (integrating qualitative, somatic, and systemic knowledge);
- Iterative design logic (testing concepts in real-life coaching, facilitation, and self-reflection contexts);
- Participatory epistemology (treating participants as co-creators of meaning, not passive subjects).

5 Potential Applications

The SET model, though conceptually grounded, is intentionally designed for practical deployment across a range of individual and systemic contexts. Its integrative, meaning-driven structure lends itself to applications in areas where conventional metrics or linear models fail to capture the complexity of transformation.

5.1 Individual Development and Coaching

SET offers a unique lens for personal growth, supporting individuals in navigating moments of existential rupture, identity reorientation, or life transition. Coaches and therapists can use the SET Core 100 as a reflective map to help clients identify inner states, patterns of fragmentation, and emerging potentials. The Pure Well-being Index (PWI) allows for the tracking of alignment with internal coherence rather than external validation.

5.2 Education and Learning Design

In educational settings, SET redefines learning as a transformational journey rather than a content acquisition process. Educators can integrate SET-inspired frameworks to foster metacognitive awareness, emotional resonance, and meaning-making capacities in students. Curriculum design can be informed by the loop of transformation, allowing learners to process uncertainty, failure, and innovation through structured reflection and symbolic mapping.

5.3 Organizational Development and Leadership

SET can be applied to leadership training, change management, and organizational culture work by identifying collective states of coherence or dissonance within teams and systems. Leaders can learn to navigate complexity using field-sensing and narrative diagnostics, replacing linear KPIs with dynamic field indicators of health, innovation, and adaptive capacity.

5.4 Social Innovation and Community Resilience

In social design and participatory governance, the SET model can help communities map systemic ruptures (e.g., conflict, trauma, polarization) and design regenerative responses rooted in shared meaning. This can empower groups to move beyond problem-solving into co-creative reimagination of futures, informed by resonance, trust, and relational integrity.

5.5 Integrative Health and Well-being

Beyond mental health diagnostics, SET can support integrative approaches that consider the energetic, symbolic, and systemic layers of well-being. It encourages dialogue between conventional medicine, somatic practices, and existential inquiry – fostering holistic healing processes grounded in personal agency and relational depth.

6 Discussion and Limitations

The SET model proposes a profound reorientation of how transformation and well-being are understood and facilitated. By shifting the focus from fixed categories and linear progressions toward a dynamic, meaning-centered navigation of experience,

SET aligns with emerging paradigms in complexity science, existential psychology, and integral theory. It reframes human development not as a path to optimization, but as a participatory dance within an ever-shifting field of relational, symbolic, and energetic forces.

SET's most compelling contribution lies in its ontological shift: instead of treating individuals as containers of traits or dysfunctions, it views them as field-responsive agents capable of sensing, interpreting, and co-shaping their trajectories of becoming. This opens space for deeper therapeutic work, more adaptive leadership, and more coherent social systems.

6.1 Conceptual Maturity vs. Empirical Validation

As of now, SET remains a conceptual framework. While it has been tested informally through facilitation, coaching, and reflection practices, it has not yet undergone rigorous empirical validation through longitudinal studies or peer-reviewed clinical trials. Future research must translate symbolic constructs into testable variables and investigate outcomes across contexts.

6.2 Accessibility and Complexity

The language and symbolism of the SET model – though rich and nuanced – may initially be inaccessible to general audiences or practitioners unfamiliar with systems thinking or metaphysical constructs (Garmash 2016). This raises the need for layered entry points: simplified tools, grounded case studies, and facilitator training pathways.

6.3 Risk of Over-Symbolization

While symbolic cartography (Jung 1968; Merleau-Ponty 1962) is central to SET, there is a risk of excessive abstraction, especially when working with vulnerable populations. Care must be taken to balance metaphor with grounding – ensuring that insights translate into embodied, lived change rather than conceptual overinterpretation.

6.4 Integration with Existing Systems

SET challenges conventional metrics, hierarchies, and diagnostic models – which may pose barriers to integration in fields such as public health, education, or corporate systems. Implementation strategies must include bridge-building with existing frameworks rather than binary opposition.

Despite these limitations, the SET model offers a compelling vision for transformation in a time of systemic breakdown. It contributes a living grammar for navigating the unknown – rooted not in control, but in presence, coherence, and meaning.

7 Conclusion and Future Research

The SET model introduces a novel paradigm for understanding and facilitating human transformation within complex environments. By integrating existential depth, systemic awareness, and symbolic navigation, SET transcends disciplinary silos and invites a more holistic and participatory approach to well-being.

In contrast to models that prioritize optimization, happiness, or linear development, SET honors rupture, ambiguity, and meaning as essential components of human becoming. Its tools – such as the SET Core 100, the Loop of Transformation, and the Pure Well-being Index – offer a flexible grammar for mapping and engaging with dynamic inner states and field-based realities.

This article has outlined the theoretical foundations, methodological principles, structural components, and potential applications of SET across education, mental health, leadership, and social innovation. While still conceptual in nature, the model opens new terrain for research, practice, and dialogue.

Future research directions include:
– Empirical studies testing SET-informed interventions in coaching, therapy, and education.
– Validation and refinement of the SET Core 100 structure using psychometric and phenomenological methods.
– Development of digital tools for symbolic mapping and resonance tracking.
– Cross-cultural adaptations that honor diverse cosmologies while retaining SET's energetic architecture.

As systems around the world face increasing uncertainty and fragmentation, SET offers not a fixed solution, but a navigational compass – an evolving framework through which individuals and collectives may learn to move with coherence, clarity, and courage into the unknown.

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