

Planning and Optimising Outcomes

Planning is an everyday life skill and ranges from the informal planning to make a phone call through to planning your whole future. There are a number of useful models that can be used to assist us in our planning. In this article I want to introduce a few of the models I have developed as part of my modelling methodology of Developmental Behavioural Modelling (DBM). These models supplement the NLP Well Formed Outcome Model.

The NLP Well Formed Outcome Conditions

I first came across the Well-Formed Outcome conditions in the work of NLP developer Leslie Cameron-Bandler (ref. Solutions). Since that time there have been numerous versions. They all share a common set of checks for establishing a plan for achieving an outcome.

Briefly, the main conditions require that the outcome should be stated positively so that it can be realistically sensed. Then it can be specified in terms of sensory evidence. From there it can be located in space and time – when and where and for how long. The next check is to make sure that it can be practically initiated and followed through and is not dependent on chance or other things that are beyond control. This includes checking that the necessary resources are available such as skills, money, materials, etc. The final condition is the ecological check. This checks how the change fits with the person's overall well being and specifically with the potentially positive aspects of the current situation.

In practice the conditions are checked more in a circular or recursive fashion with changes made in one condition being cross-checked with earlier decisions.

In the mid 80's I found Cameron-Bandler's formulation to be very helpful and used it with many clients as well as friends and colleagues. The main conditions are summarised in the table below. The second condition is one that I added in 1987 after a lot of experience with the model.

Well Formed Outcome And Direction

Conditions	Detail	Metaphor (Holiday)	Questions
1. State Outcomes Positively	As full a sensory based description and in as much detail as possible, stated in positive terms.	Rather than state where you don't want to be a travel agent would prefer to know where you do want to be and the more detail you can add the easier it will be for him to get your hotel room, town, country, etc.	What do you want? Note: it is useful to use specifier questions from the language model throughout.
2. Outcome Level And Direction	Go for the highest level outcome. Check for congruity with highest level (the direction). Check whether more than the single outcome is required to achieve the higher level outcome (direction). May have to go up a number of levels	Is the holiday wanted specifically or is it only one way to get a higher level outcome e.g. Relaxing; getting away from problems -e.g. Hierarchy D cope with job better C relax B get away from job A holiday Is going on holiday the best way of coping with the job, or would something else be more useful. It is often useful to go higher than cope with job.	What will that do for you? What is the benefit of this outcome A? (get B) What is the benefit of this outcome B? (get C) etc. Until a direction is obtained. Then ask: Do you still want to go for the original outcome as the best way of achieving this direction?
3. Evidence	Sensory based evidence. What would be seen V Heard A Touched K	What will you use to know you have got your holiday successfully e.g. Direct experience Holiday snapshots Post cards etc.	How will you know? How will I know? How will others know? When the outcome is attained
4. Appropriately Contextualised	Time and place appropriate. Time and place inappropriate. Duration	When and where to go. When and where not to go. How long to go for etc.	When and where do you want it? When and where don't you want it? How long for
5. Outcome And Direction Initiated And Maintained By Client	Determine the resources, skills, etc. Required to achieve the outcome. Determine the existing blocks to achieving the outcome.	What do you need. What would stop you, e.g. Need a passport, money and a ticket. Stopped by no baby sitter, haven't arranged time off work, etc.	What do you need? What stops you?
6. Ecological Check	Make sure the outcome adds choice and doesn't limit choice. Maintain the current positive by-products of the limiting state.	How will this affect the rest of your life. What will you gain, e.g. Fun, relaxation. What will you lose, e.g. Money, holiday time. Overall is it worth it, will you be worse off by going.	How will this affect the rest of your life? What might you gain? What might you lose? Is it worthwhile?

My Remodelling of the WFO and New Developments

The 2nd Condition: Direction

In 1986 I was in a staff room talking with a colleague. He asked me if I knew any good places to go on holiday. I had been using the WFO a lot and thought it would be easy to use it to help him with his holiday. Before offering him this help I asked him if he had any particular reason for going on holiday, thinking it would give me the beginnings of a more detailed 'outcome'. He said he needed to get away from work for a while. I asked him why and he said that he needed to relax. Again I asked why and he replied that he was not coping well with the job at the moment. At this point the holiday seemed a distant and perhaps not wholly relevant outcome!

A holiday would not necessarily be the most useful thing for him to do. He could come back to work and still not cope well. A holiday might be part of a solution but more checking was required. It proved useful to check what direction was involved and if the

outcome was the most suitable for that direction. It was also useful to check the different levels of direction.

I then added this check as the second condition. This check saved me many hours of potentially wasted planning and quickly got to the key issues behind the outcome. I was able to be much more effective in first helping clients to identify the most relevant outcome and then plan it well using the WFO.

After adding 'direction' to the WFO conditions I began to explore directions more thoroughly. In any direction there are three elements. There is a moving "away" from, a moving "toward", and the connection between them; the direction itself. Each of these can be attended to separately or in relation to each other. In the following exercise the "away from" is the problem and the "toward" the solution / outcome. Notice the different things that are highlighted.

Exercise: Problem, Solution (Outcome), and Direction Frames

1. Consider a specific problematic situation.
2. Consider the situation for three minutes in each of the following frames, writing down your responses.
 - a. The problem
 - b. The solution
 - c. The direction.
3. Now compare them.
4. Now combine them. From the feeling of the direction, feel what you are moving away from and towards. Simultaneously.

I constructed well-formed conditions for the away and towards. For example they should be of the same logical type and level. So moving away from loneliness toward eating chocolate would not be well formed in terms of type of things involved. What would be well formed and useful would be to separate the two directions of "hunger towards eating (with chocolate as one behavioural option)" and "loneliness towards company" and then check if they were acceptable to the client.

At this time (1987) I was also familiar with the work of Bateson and some of his former research team including the book 'Change' (Watzlawick et. al.). In this highly recommended book they highlight the difficulties in establishing the best form of change and that the attempted solution may be the problem. For example a couple that always talk about their relationship problems of being disconnected could be maintaining this 'problem' situation by the way they do so.

In the early 90's I was working with a colleague with the managing director and board of directors of a large car manufacturing company where a difficulty of this type was evident. The company was in a process of change and the managing director was really keen for his management team to be with him through the change. He was constantly emphasising WHY they should change and was getting increasingly frustrated that they

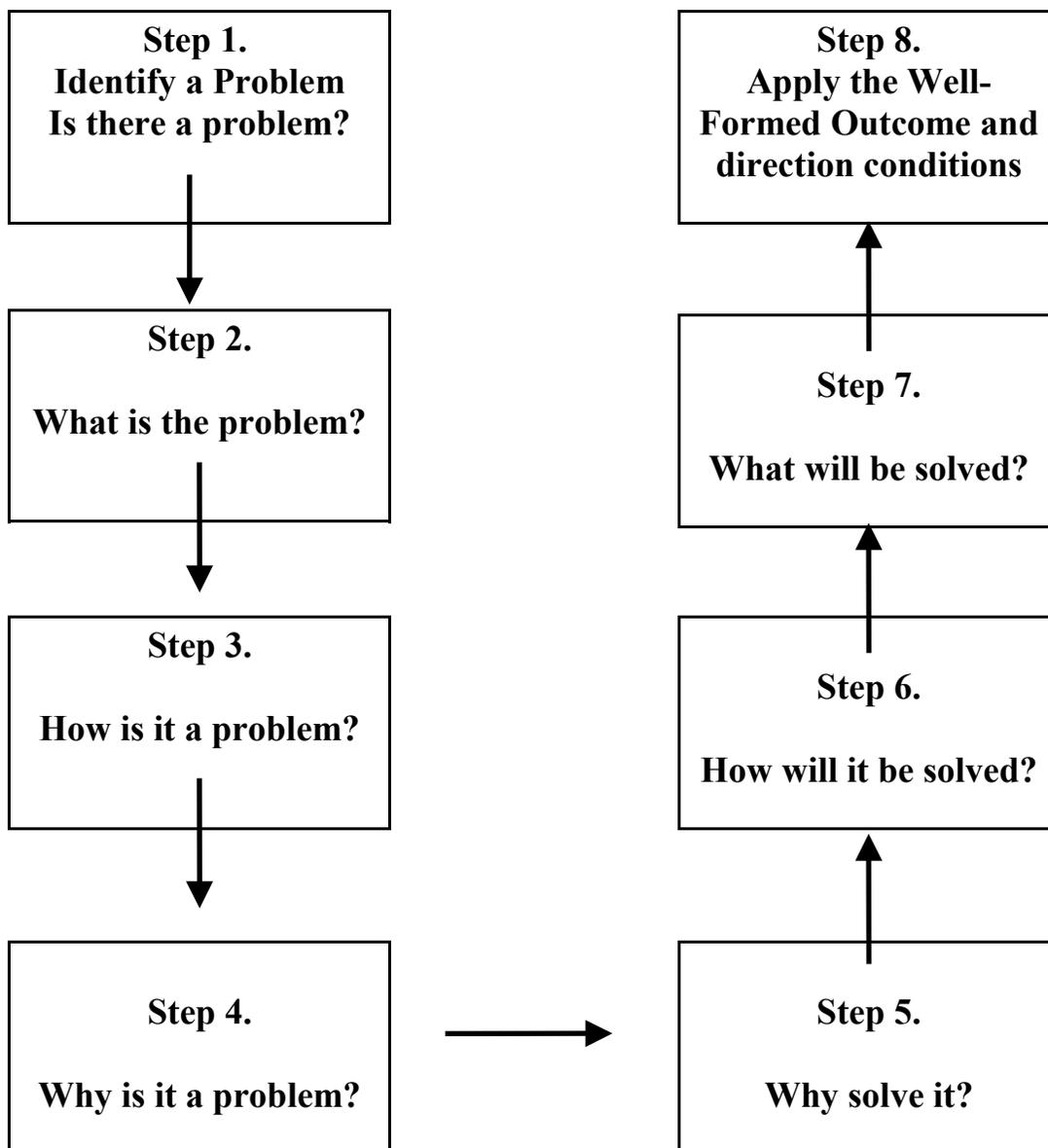
kept talking about things such as what the change would mean, HOW would they make it happen, WHAT would it cost and so on. Because they were not talking in the same way as he was he felt that they were not fully agreeing with him.

From the observers point of view it was clear that they were very much with him, so much so that they had already moved on to debate how to make the changes and what exactly they should change. I designed a model for them to use in their meetings that allowed them to separate the different issues of WHAT, HOW and WHY. Initially the model can be used sequentially as a planning tool. After a little practice it becomes a mapping tool to understand "where" someone is attending from.

Exercise: Problem Solving Planning

In this exercise it is important to keep within the particular frames as much as possible. After the sequence it is interesting to compare the different frames and how it felt to shift between them. Sometimes it can be difficult to distinguish one of them. It is often the “How will it be solved” frame that is difficult. This happens because we sometimes jump too quickly from “Why” to “What” can I do about it. Taking the time to think about “How” generally it can be solved is excellent for creating options and as a basis for selecting a more effective plan for “What” to do.

If you explore an outcome that you have already chosen you may be very surprised to discover just how much it changes when you explore it using this model.



Tracking Problems and Solutions

I continued to model problems and outcomes. In reviewing the holiday example above I realised that that higher levels benefits could be re-modelled in terms of sequences of problem solving.

In the holiday example above, the holiday is the presenting problem (Do you know anywhere good to go on holiday?). It is also a solution to the problem of getting away from work. Getting away from work is a solution for the problem of relaxation. Relaxation in turn is a solution to coping better at work. So each middle solution becomes the next problem to solve. At the beginning of the sequence there will be what I came to call a “core problem”. Core problems are the result of our normal stability being disrupted either through a challenge or through a new aspiration.

It is worth highlighting that an overemphasis on problems or solutions separate from each other will only be dealing with part of the situation and will be less likely to be meeting the clients deeper needs. A solution focussed therapy, for example, is in danger of being superficial and only dealing with the initial ‘solutions’. There cannot be a solution without a problem and how do you know if you have the most useful solution and just as importantly the most accurately formed problem?

Exercise: Problems and Solutions

1. Identify an initial outcome.



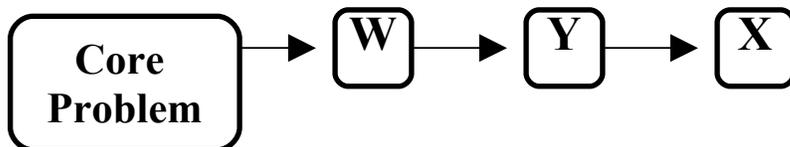
2. Ask, “What is this (X) a Solution to?” This will recover (Y)



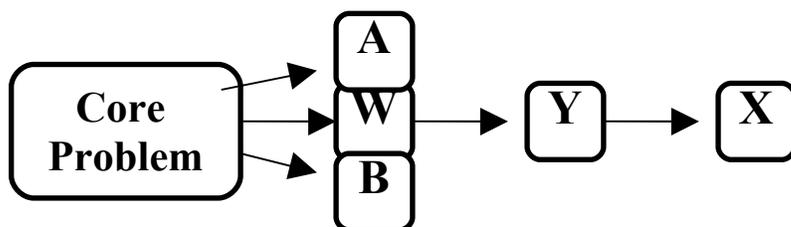
3. Ask, “What is this (Y) a Solution to?” This will recover (X)



4. Repeat until a Core Problem is reached. A Core Problem will be an initial problem in the state of affairs. A core problem is not directly a solution to anything.

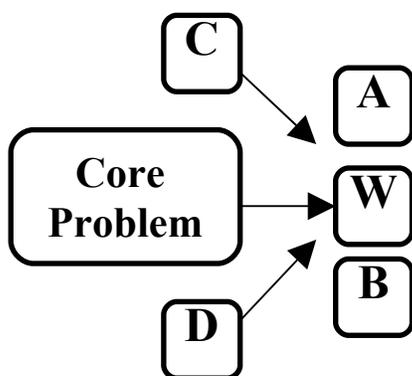


5. Optimising the options: Now you can proceed to identify other options.



Connect each set of new options with the Core Problem as to how it fits.

6. Optimise Solutions: What other things can be connected into the solution?



This is a process that can also be used for generative problems, such as how can I be happier, improve my job, etc. Generative problems also disrupt our stability. When we aspire to something new we need to change the current stability.

I hope that you enjoy playing with these models and exercises. I will be introducing further re-modelling of NLP and new developments in future articles.

I would also like to hear from anyone who has questions about these or any other NLP model or technique. In particular questions about how models work or how you could work them better could be of interest to others in developing more precision and increasing your successful application of the NLP technology. Many of my new developments have been created in direct response to difficulties or confusions related to how NLP actually worked. I look forward to our continual learning and developing together.

I can be contacted at:
Sensory Systems Training
162 Queens Drive
Queens Park
Glasgow G42 8QN
Phone: 0044 141 424 4177

Fax: 0044 141 424 4199

Email: johnm@sensorysystems.co.uk

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References:

Cameron-Bandler, Leslie, *Solutions: Enhancing Love, Sex, and Relationship*. FuturePace 1985