Modelling Language:
Questioning and Developing Language
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NLP was developed using Modelling. The first model created by Bandler and Grinder was the Meta Model (M. M.). The Meta Model became the main tool in their subsequent modelling and in the creation of NLP. In this series of articles I will outline some of my developments in modelling language. This is an area in which I have worked longest and probably found the most rewarding. As well as being the central tool for creating NLP, language has been the main tool in creating Developmental Behavioural Modelling (DBM).

For a number of years I was content to use the Meta Model (M. M.) questions. I was working therapeutically with families and adolescents and the M. M. proved to be very useful. They were by no means the only things I used. The stimulus for my re-modelling was initiated through my attempts to train others working in social work and child care. Teaching the M. M. highlighted a number of concerns for me. I have continued to explore language and the following account is a result of twelve years of development. I will summarise the main stages to give a flavour of the modelling sequence as well as to emphasise the recursive nature by which models are developed.

My response to my more serious concerns has been a continual developing of my modelling of modelling. I will outline the main stages below.

Questioning the Meta Model

The Map: How was the M. M. formed?

The 'format' chosen for the M. M. included three so called universal modelling principles of deletion, generalisation and distortion. I could find no source of them apart from Bandler and Grinder. Transformational Grammar used only deletion as a central term. On closer reading it seemed that they were their own terms.

Deletion, generalisation and distortion are three different <u>types</u> of label. In other words the internal structure of the meta model was not well modelled in terms of 'types'. A deletion describes <u>what is taken out</u>, a generalisation describes a change <u>in what was there</u> and distortion describes a change <u>from what is there.</u> They are unrelated categories.

"*Again, we wish to point out that our categories do not impose any necessity on the structure of reality – we have found these categories useful in organising our own thinking and actions, both in presenting this material and in therapy; that is, in developing our model for therapy. We suspect that most readers will, if they think about the usual meanings of the terms, come to see Generalisation and Deletion as special cases of Distortion.*" Magic I, p. 20, Footnote 8

A model should be integrated if it is to be more than a list or classification. A list or classification can be useful but Bandler and Grinder claimed that the M. M. is both a

'model' and 'meta' - a model of the model known as language. This is indeed a grand claim to make. So 'how specifically is it a meta model?'.

"Fortunately, an explicit model of the structure of language has been developed independent of the context of psychology and therapy by transformational grammarians. Adapted for use in therapy, it offers us an explicit Meta-model for the enrichment and expansion of our therapeutic skills and offers us a valuable set of tools to increase our effectiveness and, thus, the magical quality of our own therapeutic work." Magic I, p 19

How complete is the Metal Model?

 "The Meta-Model we are presenting is in large part inspired by the formal model developed in transformational linguistics. Since the transformational model was created to answer questions which are not immediately connected with the way that humans change, not all portions of it are equally useful in creating a Meta-model for therapy. Thus, we have adapted the model, selecting only the portions relevant for our purposes and arranging them in a system appropriate for our objectives in therapy. Magic I, p. 40

Bandler and Grinder would appear to have included only the portions that they thought were relevant for therapy. Why did they select the structures they selected? They do not say. Did they have other structures? The simple answer to this last question is yes. In Grinder's book on Transformational Grammar there are a number of additional structures. For example from page 80-84 six structures which were not included in the M. M. are described (The 'either argument', the 'tag question', the 'not even' fragment argument, the 'neither' fragment argument, the 'some → any' shift argument, the 'until' argument). A number of other patterns are given later in the book. Many of these patterns I consider to be a great benefit in therapy and beyond. Clearly the M. M. could be extended. Bandler and Grinder were of a similar opinion at that time. In their very useful bibliography they twice identify potential material for extending the M. M.:

"An excellent example of the General Semantics approach which we feel will contribute much to an enlarged Meta-Model for therapy." P 221

The Territory: The Wizards: Other questions asked by Erickson, Perls, etc.

Did Bandler and Grinder model all of the 'territory' when they were modeling the therapeutic wizards? Did the 'therapeutic wizards' whom they modelled use other patterns of questions? Again the answer is yes. Open any book with transcripts of Perls, Satir, Erickson you will find many other types of questions.

Perls: From: Gestalt Therapy Verbatim
1. M. I can't go back.
Perls: You cannot go back. Who prevents you? p. 109
2. Perls: And now?
M: They go away.
Perls: And then?
M: Then I am Alone.

Perls: And you are safe? p. 112

Satir: From: Virginia Satir, The Patterns of Her Magic, Andreas
1.48.18: Linda: No, she couldn't touch me.
48:20 Virginia: Why?
2.48:25 Linda: I was a *wonderful* little baby.
48:28 Virginia: "Wonderful little baby". Where did you get that idea?

Erickson: From: Life Reframing in Hypnosis, M. H. Erickson, Irvington, 1985
1. Erickson: Is it rolled up enough? p. 83
2. Erickson: Why do you say yes? p. 239

It is not just the 'wizards' that used other questions, Bandler also used other questions.
Bandler: From: Magic In Action
1. Bandler : *"You have a belief, right? Right? Now, is it a strong belief?"* page158
2. Bandler: *"For example, what are some of the differences?"* page160

"Yet, while the techniques of these wizards are different, they share one thing: They introduce changes in their client's models which allow their clients more options in their behaviour. What we see is that each of these wizards has a map or model for changing their client's models of the world - i.e., a Meta-model - which allows them to effectively expand and enrich their client's models in some way that makes the client's lives richer and more worth living." B and G., Magic I, p. 18

It is evident that the wizards are using more than the M. M. questions.

Some other language uses not included in the Meta Model

1. From Transformational Grammar, Grinder lists a number of patterns not included in the later M. M..(Grinder 1973)
2. Other NLP Language Models: Milton Model, Sensory Predicates, Metaphoric, Presuppositions, Sleight of Mouth patterns
3. The M. M. is only for constructing questions. A complete model would include statements and commands (integrate with the Milton model).
4. From my modelling experience: concepts, qualifiers, concurrence, judgements, rules, inferences, numbers, performative language. There are no M. M. questions for questions! The M. M. makes no distinction between 'walk' and 'hurry'(both unspecified verbs). We can go for a 'walk', we do not go for a 'hurry'. The higher functions of 'love', belonging' are treated the same as sensory behaviours of 'walk' or 'talk'. Try the M. M. question 'how do you know?' to each of these and experience the difference.
5. In one of my previous articles I outlined the use of what, how and why to explore problems and solutions. This emphasises the great benefit of the question 'why?'. This was actively discouraged in NLP. I have been given many different reason as to 'why' why shouldn't be used. One reason was that parents ask this of children and so it will anchor a negative state. Another, more serious, reason was that the question 'why?' takes the client out of their model and so you will not get sensory descriptions. This reason is valid only if you are wanting to stay at the sensory level. When we are working with values, beliefs and identity or with strategies and modelling where sequence is important then it is necessary to know why

things need to be in a certain order. We can ask a why level question without using why, for example 'how come?' or 'what is the reason for that?'. If you don't know why you have not to use why and if there is a paramount reason (which I doubt) then there is no guarantee it won't be asked with a 'how' or 'what' question!

How to question with the Meta Model

In addition the Meta Model does not describe how Satir, Perls, and Erickson knew when and how to use a M. M. type question. The decision cannot be made through using the M.M.. So clearly the M. M., however useful, is not a 'Meta Model for Therapy'. It cannot be used to organise the therapists questioning in a MEANINGFUL way. It is not a model of meaning and purpose but a model for specifying the historical changes in the structure of the client's statements.

DBM re-modelling of Meta Model and further language modelling

There has been little official development within the M. M.. The Milton Model, together with pre-suppositions, were added. Meta Model III with some other guidance for the use of the M. M. was also added. Recent additions of questions from General Semantics and elsewhere by Michael Hall are a very useful add-on to the M. M. but they do not address the serious limitations listed below.

Limitations of the Meta Model

1. The model is not an integrated classification but more of a structured list. If it was an integrated model then deletion, generalisation and distortion would be of the same type. They are not.
2. There are many important language structures not included
3. The individual structures do not relate to each other.
4. The model is only designed to retrace the historical 'transformation'. It is not designed to study language use. This means it can not be a meta model for therapy as intended. The model does not give the required basis for directing questioning beyond what statements the client makes.
5. The M. M. does not relate to our use of language only to the production of surface structures from deep structure. It does not relate to how these deep structures are created and changed. The main classification structures correspond to what is produced not how it is produced. Much of this is due to the use of 'filter' as a working metaphor. As I pointed out in my last article filtering is the opposite of what happens. To model language use we require to identify what is happening in positive terms. What is the client doing that results in deletion, generalisation and distortion?
6. If everything is a distortion, as Bandler and Grinder suggest, then to use the term distinguishes nothing. Distortion presupposes a previous accuracy of form, something well formed. It is this 'well formed' in terms of models that the M. M. fails to specify.
7. The M. M. responds to the products of our subjective experience, not how we created them. It cannot be used therefore to model its own creation. It cannot be a 'meta' model of how we use language.

An improved model would need to respond to these concerns.

I am continually seeking ever more practical and integrated models of language that can be used for therapy, modelling and for any other application area. I will now outline some of the (overlapping) stages in my re-modelling of the NLP Meta Model.

Stages in my re-modelling of the Meta Model

The first stage (1979 – 1983).
I put my own summary of all the language structures outlined by Bandler and Grinder together. I used this for over five years until I wanted to teach other professionals how to gather quality information.

The second stage (1983 – 1986).
I put my putting the Meta and Milton models together. These were presented as the opposite though there was not a perfect overlap. This resulted in the 'filling in of some gaps'. In this stage I was keen to change the aggressive language used with the M. M.. I changed 'violation' and 'challenge' to 'pattern' and 'specifier question'. This made teaching them easier and the use of them untainted by the over aggressiveness that often seemed to accompany the M.M.

The third stage (1986)
I created the 'Integrated Language Model' (see diagram). This arose from a major insight that I had. I wanted to develop a holistic language model. I had puzzled over this for a while before realising that any whole model can be described using three related components of 'detail', 'scope' and 'connection' and that these components could replace the unrelated components of deletion, generalisation and distortion. I created of the three distinctions of detail, scope and connection to describe the positive processes of modelling. I also realised that mind reading was also something we did to ourselves and not just others as in 'I can't do that'. This later led to my realising that all of these were examples of a larger category of 'judgements'.

Benefits in re-modelling language

For me the benefits from re-modelling language have been many and varied. In addition to enjoying an improved understanding and appreciation of our language processes I have greatly increased my skills and ability in modelling. Using this modelling skill resulted in many new models since 1986 and the creation of the modelling methodology of Developmental Behavioural Modelling (DBM).

I have also improved my effectiveness as a therapist and consultant through greater sensitivity and skill in questioning and understanding of my clients language use. I also found it much easier to teach my new model than the old Meta Model.

The labels used were more 'friendly' and easily connected to other areas of NLP. Detail, scope and connection easily applied to all aspects of modeling, not just language, making it easier to appreciate modeling as something that we all do all of the time.

In the next part I will outline my developments since 1986 together with some exercises for you to further develop your questioning skills.

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Integrated Language Model

USE STRUCTURES TO ENCOURAGE "CLIENT" TO USE THEIR MODEL | Direction | ASK QUESTIONS TO SPECIFY AND CLARIFY "CLIENT'S" MODEL

(referred to as "MILTON MODEL")   (referred to as "META MODEL")

Modelling Process	Typical Statement	Structure	Sub-distinctions	Example Statement	Feed Forward	Typical Question
DETAIL What elements are included. Information not given by the speaker. The listener has to supply it from their own model..	1. You are sitting …….. 2. … more relaxed …. 3. … feeling comfortable... 4. …thinking about that person…. 5. …and you have a lot of curiosity…. 6. …about that interesting person…	1. Major phrase missing 2. Comparative missing 3. Process or behaviour eg: sense, know, wonder, experience, think, 4. People or things not specified eg: him, them, it 5. Process words used as a noun eg: hypnosis, curiosity, learnings love 6. Noun supported by nominalised process words, adjectives	1. DELETION: SIMPLE 2. DELETION: COMPARATIVE 3. UNSPECIFIED VERB 4. UNSPECIFIED REFERENTIAL INDEX 5. NOMINALISATION 6. LESSER NOMINALISATION	1. "I feel uncomfortable" 2. "It's better to stay" 3. "He's rejected me" 4. "They don't listen to me" 5. "We have to improve our relationship" 6. "She is a lazy housewife"	1. Specify what they are uncomfortable about 2. Retrieve the comparison 3. Specify "rejected" 4. Specify "they" 5. Retrieve process in "relating" (Noun into verb: add '-ing') 6. Retrieve information from judgement "lazy" (Adjective into adverb: add '-ly')	1. "About what?" 2. "Better than what?" 3. "How did he reject you?" 4. "Who doesn't listen to you?" 5. "What is it about your relating together that you'd like to improve?" 6. "What does she do lazily?"
SCOPE The extent; the models limits can be too extensive or too limited. What is included and excluded.	1. …Friends are important… 2. …thinking about all your contact with them… 3. …Just relaxing… 4a. …You can remember… 4b. …what you needed from them…	1. A class or group is referred to; Scope extended 2. Over-extended Scope: all; every; never; nobody 3. Words that limit the Scope, eg Just, only 4a. What included/excluded as possible eg: can, able to, want 4b. What included/excluded as necessary: must, have to, need to	1. GENERALISED REFERENTIAL INDEX 2. UNIVERSAL QUANTIFIER 3. LIMITING QUANTIFIER 4. MODAL OPERATORS a) - of possibility b) - of necessity	1. "Arabs are dishonest" 2. "He always complains" 3. "She's the only one for me" 4a."I can't tell him the truth" 4b. "I must finish this today"	1. Specify evidence, reduce scope 2. Recover specific examples, - reduce scope 3. Recover larger frame, - extend scope 4a. Specify "can't", (bring within scope) 4b. Specify "must", (move beyond scope)	1. "Every single one? Which ones?" 2. "Always? Every time he speaks?" 3. "The only one ever, anywhere for anything?" 4a. "What would happen if you did?" 4b. "What would happen if you didn't?"
CONNECTION The relation and connection between elements within the model. The basis for these are not supplied by the speaker.	1. …It's important to people to be cared for… 2. …I know you want to improve things… 3. …and you are attending and learning… 4. …if you relax more, you can remember… 5. …and learning will make things easier 6. …now you are sitting quietly……remembering	1. Evaluative statement or rule in which the source is missing 2. Information or judgement about self or other is made without supporting evidence 3. Conjunction[3], eg and 4. Connection in time, eg during, as, while, when, use of but, if…then 5. Causality eg, makes, forces, requires 6. Two statements, often with a pause in between, given as being different ways of saying the same thing. (One part is often externally verifiable, the other, mind reading)	1. LOST PERFORMATIVE 2. MIND READING (other, self or context) 3. CAUSAL MODELLING OR LINKAGE 4. IMPLIED CAUSALITY 5. CAUSE-EFFECT 6. COMPLEX EQUIVALENCE	1. "It's bad to be inconsistent" 2. "She doesn't like me" 3. "You look at me and I get angry" 4. "I would talk to her but she's really angry at me" 5. "His frowning makes me angry" 6. "She hates me…she's always yelling at me"	1. Recover where judgement rule comes from 2. Recover the evidence 3. Check for possible causal connection 4. Specify implied connection: "angry" - "talk to" 5. Specify the connection between "frowning" and "angry" 6. Specify the connection between the two	1. "Who says? How do you know?" 2. "How do you know?" 3. "Is there a connection between my looking and you getting angry?" 4. "How does her being angry stop you talking to her?" 5. "How does his frowning make you angry?" 6. "How does yelling mean hate?" "Have you ever yelled at people you don't hate?"