



Angela Dunbar, telephone: +44 (0) 1189 968259

Email: angeladunbar@cleancoaching.com web: www.cleancoaching.com

Coaching, training and supervision using David Grove's clean concepts

Date: 20th May 2012

Working with Metaphors Inside and Outside the Body:



How both associated and disassociated metaphors can be useful resources in distinctly different ways

Introduction

Clean Language (created by New Zealand Psychotherapist David Grove) is a powerful practical tool to help people bring unconscious patterns of thinking into conscious awareness, by exploring the metaphors and symbols the client naturally uses to describe their experience. Through those metaphors and symbols, existing patterns of thinking can be examined and explored, making different connections and establishing new configurations that can result in a change in beliefs, behaviours and ultimately, results. These new thinking patterns have an altered function, which is also very likely to alter the physical structure of the neural connections involved in that thinking, drawing on the research highlighted below.

Clean Language consists of a relatively small set of questions, stripped clean of the questioner's own intent and beliefs that would otherwise influence their language, consciously or otherwise. The trained Clean Language facilitator asks the questions with a certain slow paced delivery and carefully wraps the client's own words into the question, mirroring back their experience and very gently building on it with a well timed question to focus attention on another aspect of that experience. Gradually the client's inner experience comes alive with a rich vista of mental representations that can be awe inspiring for both client and facilitator. For a comprehensive explanation of Clean Language and a list of basic questions, see "Using Metaphors in Coaching" by A Dunbar (2005) at the end of this paper.

In this paper, the potential impact of Clean Language is justified through the exploration of a variety of psychological models and experimental findings. I suggest that often a client gains new insights when a 'switch' in their imagined perspective takes place and that one way to encourage such a switch is by tracking which primary sense (often visual or feelings-based) is used to describe their experience.



Angela Dunbar, telephone: +44 (0) 1189 968259

Email: angeladunbar@cleancoaching.com web: www.cleancoaching.com

Coaching, training and supervision using David Grove's clean concepts

Date: 20th May 2012

Mental Representations and Sensory Mechanisms

The term '**mental representations**' is used across a wide range of disciplines, including cognitive psychology, cognitive science, neuroscience and philosophy. Mental representations, often referred to as 'symbols' or 'schemas', are the individual components that make up our thinking patterns. For humans to be able to remember things, problem solve and do most higher-level cognitive functioning, they need a way of storing their experience of the external world so that those elements of experience can be recalled and used within their imagination to create complex ideas and concepts. We have an awareness of our mental representations when we consciously think of an object in our imagination. Cognitive psychologists claim that those representations are enduring and exist beneath conscious awareness too. We experience some of the impact of unconscious mental representations when we dream.

Many have argued that our internal, imagined mental representations are constructed using the same sensory mechanisms that we use to perceive the external world, such as sight, sound, touch, smell and taste. NLP practitioners claim that individuals have 'preferred' mental representations, the key ones being visual, kinaesthetic and auditory representations. The response from the scientific community has so far been inconclusive, with studies supposedly being unable to find such a correlation. However the basic claim for sensory mental representations can be supported from a number of different disciplines, albeit with different labels used to describe them.

Developmental psychologists have looked to early infant experiences to understand how mental representations are created in the first place. Infants learn basic concepts as self (inside and part of me) and environment (outside me and not directly controllable) very early on in their lives. Many years ago Piaget (1896 – 1980) claimed distinct stages of an infant's cognitive development, achieved through their own interaction with their environment. Through this interaction, Piaget claimed infants gradually establish the boundaries between self and other, in time reaching the **object permanence** stage where the child is able to recreate a mental representation of an object from the 'real world' and manipulate it in their imagination. Mandler (1992) proposes a transitional step that infants use to move from purely perceptual understanding to thinking in concepts, creating 'image schemas', which are simple visual shapes and patterns that store a set of primitive meanings for different aspects of the world, including basic concepts such as 'containment' and 'support'. This, she claims, forms the foundation of our conceptual system of thoughts, one that is accessible firstly and primarily through **imagery**.

Furthermore, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) suggest that these image schemas provide the basic scaffolding upon which **all** future conceptual understanding and cognitive reasoning is based, and cite universally spoken metaphors as one subtle way that these underlying mental images reveal themselves, although most of the time we are not consciously aware of their existence. Lakoff and Johnson emphasize the inherent nature of these mental images, which they believe form as a result of our embodied presence in the world perceived as outside and around us.

Cognitive scientists traditionally see mental representations as **functions** of the mind operating like software programmes in a computer and distinctly separate from the hardware of the brain, On the other hand, biological psychologists research the **structure** of the brain and explore how the basic reflex action of each individual neuron combine to make complex webs of connections, spanning multiple areas of the brain. Until recently it seemed that relating functional mental representations to corresponding structural patterns of brain cells was an impossible feat. However, with the advent of neuroscience technology and research methods such as fMRI brain scanning, the gap between the cognitive functioning and the biological structure of the brain is beginning to close.



Angela Dunbar, telephone: +44 (0) 1189 968259

Email: angeladunbar@cleancoaching.com web: www.cleancoaching.com

Coaching, training and supervision using David Grove's clean concepts

Date: 20th May 2012

Brain imaging – the evidence

Stephen Kosslyn (Kosslyn et al, 2006), cognitive psychologist and neuroscientist, has for many years been measuring how mental imagery affects how people think and what they do. Through brain imaging, he identified that the same part of the brain is activated when we think of an image as when we actually see it. Through a series of experiment where subjects were asked to rotate an imagined object, he also proved that people actually **think in 3D**, by rotating the object through an imaginary space. Moreover, mental imagery can also involve the sense of touch, if, for instance people were asked to imagine moving their hand. In fact, people can be **primed** to use one or other sensory representation, with the corresponding brain areas involved in 'real' perception lighting up on the brain scan.

What gets really exciting is how the mental image is constrained by the 'real' image. If the mental image is small, subject report less 'granularity' and not so much detail will be noticeable. Also, the more difficult the imagined movement is, the longer it takes for people to perform it. Amazingly, if a person with a damaged tendon is asked to imagine moving that area, they will not only feel the pain but also the movement they imagine will be constricted by the physical damage. A conclusion could be drawn from this that is relevant for working with Clean Language, and that is that mental representations **constrain** thinking as well as enable it. Therefore, there is value in helping a client to become aware of alternative mental representations. One possible way to achieve this is by switching attention from one sensory representation to another, which will presumably activate another region of the brain. In this way, the volume and complexity of neurons and their connections will be increased, which both psychologists and biologists agree would lead to deeper, more complex thinking – resulting in insightful learning and understanding.

The Brain – Body Connection

Our bodies affect how we think. And how we think can also affect our bodies. In 'The Body has a Mind of its Own' (Blakeslee and Blakeslee, 2008) the authors give a wealth of neuroscientific evidence that we have various 'blueprints' of our body literally mapped across our brains. Body maps of the somasensory system include the complex subset of touch senses: temperature, pain, balance, proprioception (awareness of the position of our body and its parts in space, and how they are moving) and finally **interoception**, which is our visceral awareness of what's happen **within our bodies**, internal tissues and organs. The body map for our interceptive sense is held within the right frontal insula in the brain, which is also responsible for detecting our emotional state of mind. Brain scanning confirms that we really do experience emotions as coming from specific places within our bodies, with both physical pain and emotional pain lighting up the same brain circuitry within those regions.

What we think is happening in our bodies affects what does happen, this has been proven over and over again by the placebo effect. Bodily changes also feedback to the brain and major changes can be shown to change the structure of a body map. For instance, people born with webbed toes have an indistinct map for separate toes. After surgery to remove the webs, the brain quickly rewires to remove them in the body map too. It seems likely from the current evidence of the interactivity between brain and body, that enduring mental representations in the mind could, over time, shape physical, bodily responses and perhaps even the symptoms of many illnesses and conditions.

Different Perspectives, Different Thinking

Tim Rohrer (2007) takes a multidisciplinary view of the mind from an embodied perspective, and draws out the impact of taking different perspectives with our mental representations. People can take a 'viewer-



Angela Dunbar, telephone: +44 (0) 1189 968259

Date: 20th May 2012

Email: angeladunbar@cleancoaching.com web: www.cleancoaching.com

Coaching, training and supervision using David Grove's clean concepts

centred perspective', creating a mental representative from the first person perspective (in the same way as NLP uses the term 'associated') or from the non-partial object-centred perspective (the disassociated view, in NLP terms). An even wider 'environmental-centred perspective' takes a bird's eye view on multiple objects within a space. Both object- and environmental-centred perspectives are often referred to in neuroscience as an "Allocentric" perspective, now thought to be a framework the brain uses to support memory (stored mental representations), amongst other things.

Rohrer makes the point that the viewer centred perspective tends to lead to an awareness of one's body, an awareness that in modern times seems less prevalent, despite it being our first and most fundamental perspective on the world. From the viewer-centred perspective, we are more likely to get a 'felt sense' of our experience. This 'felt sense' can be a highly resourceful state, in fact Eugene Gendlin (1981) is a psychotherapist who uses a process called 'focusing' to encourage his clients to connect with a deeper experience from within their bodies.

However, I suggest that in order to break out of the habitual thinking constraints that may exist in our current mental representation, perhaps the allocentric (or disassociated) perspective allows a wider, more all encompassing view that adds new information to the system, enabling the internal symbols to change in response..

Grove's definitions and models

David Grove (1989) differentiated between mental representations which were 'symbols' **within** the body and metaphors, which were **outside**, and proposed that each had different qualities and required a different strategy. Symbols inside the body usually indicate a sense of self-ownership and are representations of existing, enduring beliefs and emotions. Metaphors outside are more likely to be representations of what we don't own, for instance, future desired outcomes. They are likely to be transient and complex in structure, resembling systems with multiple parts. In his later work with Emergent Knowledge, he created a model to understand a person and their relationship with the external world as a 'small world' structure, with A representing the person as they are now, in their current reality, and B representing a desired outcome, future based and located in a space outside of them at a distance away. The core strategy of Emergent Knowledge is to enable a person to examine the space **outside** A, B and everything in between, in order to reach a new mental space **beyond** the confines of the prevailing 'A to B' structure.

Three Key Perceptual Spaces

Taking into account all the sources above, here is a summary of 3 key perceptual spaces that I believe exist for a client, each representing a different 'world' to explore with Clean Language

Symbols inside the body: Usually corresponds to a 'felt sense' (although some may see or even hear this 'inside' experience) it can be a very powerful motivator if the client can imagine that felt sense in connection with their outcome. However, if the desired outcome is one they have no experience of, this may be a tough thing to imagine at the start of a Clean Language coaching session. More likely, they have a pre-existing and enduring felt sense that represents their **current reality**. In my experience this is the **easiest route** into a client's inner landscape of thinking patterns. Once explored, this inner symbol could then be the key to getting outside of the body and into a disassociated viewpoint (either object- or environment- centred). This wider perspective adds new information to the system which allows the internal symbol to change.



Angela Dunbar, telephone: +44 (0) 1189 968259

Email: angeladunbar@cleancoaching.com web: www.cleancoaching.com

Coaching, training and supervision using David Grove's clean concepts

Date: 20th May 2012

Symbols & Metaphors around the body: Some people will take an associated perspective that includes not just inside their bodies but also the space immediately around them. Blakesley & Blakesey (2008) provide evidence that we all have a 'peripersonal space' which is also part of our body maps, and we treat that space as though it were part of us. From this perspective we are likely to be able to feel what's inside and see what's immediately around us, switching attention easily from what's inside and what's outside.

Metaphors outside the body: In my experience, people normally find it easier to describe unachieved outcomes as being outside their body and at some distance away. By paying attention to the visual components, the images can become clearer. By focusing attention on increasingly fine detail, the image is likely to be brought nearer in the imagination, and allow for even greater examination. Once the visual elements have been fully explored, a shift can be encouraged that focuses attention on what's happening inside. This may lead back to the current reality, and therefore the above strategy for 'Symbols Inside' needs to be followed. If the desired outcome can be experienced as a felt sense inside, then focusing attention on the internal symbols is most likely to lead to a transformation in understanding and behavioural change.

The 'Inside Out/Outside In' strategy for using Clean Language

This is a proposed model that I believe provides a useful navigation for Clean Language facilitator to follow when working with clients, giving a broad 'path' to follow, from inside to outside then back to inside:

1. Begin by **noticing and focusing attention on the primary sensory perspective** the client is using. This could be focusing on metaphors outside the body, or symbols inside the body.
 - A useful question to identify which primary sensory perspective is being used is to ask in response of any certainty of knowing expressed by the client "And when (client's knowing), how do you know?"
 - Symbols inside the body are likely to represent their reality now.
 - Metaphors outside are likely to represent their desired outcome.
2. **Stay with the preferred sense** until the symbols / metaphors take on a clear form. **Really pinpoint the locations** of visual images and imagined feelings by asking "**And whereabouts is that xxx?**"
3. Once fully explored, **encourage a 'switch' in perspective**, from the inside 'current reality' to the outside 'desired outcome', or the other way around.
 - Some continued switching between inside and outside may be necessary to get both 'reality now' and 'desired outcome' fully expressed
 - Ask questions such as "And when x is inside, what happens outside?"
 - "And when x is outside, what happens inside?"
4. **Encourage an even wider perspective:** From the disassociated, outside perspective, ask questions to **expand attention even further out**. Ask questions about what's around and beyond their focus.
5. Once new knowledge has been gained, **bring attention back to inside**, such as asking the question: "What's happening now, inside?" Ask relationship questions to explore the impact of the external desired outcome on the internal symbols. Mature any changes by continuing to ask questions so that the new 'felt sense' is fully experienced.



Angela Dunbar, telephone: +44 (0) 1189 968259

Date: 20th May 2012

Email: angeladunbar@cleancoaching.com web: www.cleancoaching.com

Coaching, training and supervision using David Grove's clean concepts

Summary

Like all models, this is not the truth, just another representation that seeks to simplify complex thinking dynamics. It is also a fledging model, developed by noticing my own patterns of thinking and relating them to over 10 years experience of coaching with Clean Language and training others in its use. Your input would be welcomed, in terms of sharing anecdotes, experiences of symbols inside and metaphors outside and the significance of / conditions required for - a 'switch'. Please contact Angela Dunbar at coach@angeladunbar.co.uk to offer supporting evidence, suggestions, criticisms and counter-arguments.

References:

- Blakeslee, S & Blakeslee M (2008) *The Body has a Mind of its Own* Random House, US
- Burgess, Neil (2006) *Spatial memory: how egocentric and allocentric combine* In TRENDS in Cognitive Sciences Vol.10 No.12. <http://www.icn.ucl.ac.uk/nburgess/papers/Burgess06TiCS.pdf>
- Dunbar, A (2005) *Using Metaphors in Coaching* in Association for Coaching Bulletin, Sept 05. Accessable through this link: <http://www.cleancoaching.com/#/clean-coaching-free-articles/4514711939>
- Gendlin, E.T. (1981) *Focusing*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Grove D.J. and Panzer B.I. (1989) *Resolving traumatic memories: Metaphors and symbols in psychotherapy* New York: Irvington Publishers, Inc.
- Jordan, S (2005) *An Introduction to focusing* in Self & Society, Volume 33 No 2, [Association for Humanistic Psychology in Britain](http://www.associationforhumanisticpsychology.org.uk/journal/vol33no2/20050506.htm)
- Klatzky Roberta L. (1998) *Allocentric and Egocentric Spatial Representations: Definitions, Distinctions, and Interconnections* http://www.psy.cmu.edu/faculty/klatzky/allo_ego.pdf
- Kosslyn, S, Thompson W & Georgio Ganis (2006) *The case for Mental Imagery* Oxford University Press, New York
- Lakoff, G & Johnson M (1980) *Metaphors we Live By*, Chicago Press, London,
- Mandler, J (1992) *How to Build a Baby*, in Psychological Review; Oct 1992, Vol. 99 Issue 4, p587, 18p.
- Robertson, Ian (2002) *The Mind's Eye* Bantum Press, London
- Rohrer, Tim. 2007, *The Body in Space: Embodiment, Experientialism and Linguistic Conceptualization* In Body, Language and Mind, vol 1. Ziemke, Tom; Zlatev, Jordan; Frank, Roz; Dirven, René (eds.). Berlin: Mouton deGruyter, pp. 339-378. Accessed online 6/5/2012: http://www.antle.iat.sfu.ca/courses/iat884/resources/Roher_07_thebodyinspace.pdf

For further information, copies of slides and to be kept updated on revised versions of this paper, email: angeladunbar@cleancoaching.com

The Clean Coaching Centre offer distance learning trainings in Clean Language and Emergent Knowledge aimed specifically for coaches. Courses include teleclasses and webinars, audio recordings, and supervised, recorded practice sessions with feedback. www.cleancoaching.com

Join our newsletter list to receive regular thought provoking articles on Clean, Coaching and Psychology.