

A Modeller's Perspective

By James Lawley | Published 21 February 2014 | cleanlanguage.co.uk/articles/blogs/95/

Introduction

One vital aspect of modelling rarely made explicit is the perspective adopted by the modeller when modelling an exemplar for an ability or pattern of behaviour. There are a surprisingly large number of modeller perspectives to choose from. This blog describes six.

Penny Tompkins and I use 'perspective' rather than the traditional NLP term 'perceptual position' since there is more to a perspective than adopting one of the 'first', 'second' or 'third' positions. (For a general exploration of perspective see our article: [Multiple Perceptions, Perspectives and Perceivers.](#))

The most common and direct way to describe a perspective is through metaphor. Paradoxically, one of the best ways to grasp something as subjective as perspective is to take the descriptive metaphor 'literally', i.e. to physically embody it. It also helps to distinguish between a variety of modelling perspectives.

Many leading modeller's have developed their own modelling process and each one requires the modeller to shift to a different perspective to undertake the modelling. I'll examine six of the better known methodologies for the perspective the developer adopts when using their methodology. (For a longer list of modelling methodologies see [Section 10 of How to do a Modelling Project](#)).

Each of the [five-stages of a modelling project](#) requires the modeller to adopt different perspective, I will limit this blog to those used during 'information gathering' since that is where the distinctions are clearest.

I want to emphasise that although I use the expert modellers' own metaphors, these are *my* models of what they do; they may well have other ways of describing their approach.

Six Modelling Methodologies

I have used our [sensory, conceptual, symbolic](#) distinctions to classify six modelling methodologies used by expert modellers. Each one has a different modelling perspective which can be described as follows in table 1:

Category	Modelling Methodology	Expert Modeller	Modeller's Perspective
Sensory	'Real' NLP Modelling	John Grinder	Unconscious uptake
	Generative Trance	Steve Gilligan	Deep trance identification
Conceptual	Analytic Modelling	Robert Dilts	Take on
	Experiential Array	Gordon & Dawes	Step in and try on
	Sub-modality Modelling	Richard Bandler	Teach me to be you
Symbolic (<i>Metaphoric</i>)	Symbolic Modelling	Lawley & Tompkins	Facilitating self-modelling through perceptual pointing

Since they are aiming to achieve a similar end, the six methodologies share many features. For example, they all use an inductive approach that aims to construct a model (consciously or unconsciously) of how something works based on observations of the data (i.e. from the bottom up). They aim to discover something new rather than attempt to prove or disprove a hypothesis.¹ All six perspectives deliberately resist forming assumptions before they interact with the exemplar. However, modellers use a variety of metaphors to describe how they:

- Set aside their map
- Start with a clean slate
- Empty their mind
- Access a know-nothing (nerk-nerk) state
- Adopt a Zen mind
- Have a child-like curiosity
- Get very still and quiet inside
- Get their ego out of the way

While there are other similarities, by examining the differences between the perspectives the range and variety becomes apparent. Two keys to understanding the differences are: (i) the relationship – and especially the spatial relationship – the modeller has with the *exemplar's* model of what they do; and (ii) how the modeller uses their body as part of their modelling. These distinctions, among others, are discussed below.

Six Modelling Perspectives for Gathering Information

Table 2 below summarises and compares each of the six modelling perspectives for:

- (a) The role of the exemplar
- (b) What is primarily modelled
- (c) Where and how the modeller creates a model of the exemplar's model

Modeller's Perspective	Role of Exemplar	What is <i>primarily</i> modelled	Where / how modeller creates their model
<i>Unconscious uptake</i>	No active part	External behaviour in a typical context	Unconsciously in the body and mind of the modeller
<i>Deep trance identification</i>	No active part	Identity (become the exemplar)	Unconsciously as if they are in the body and mind of the exemplar
<i>Take on</i>	Describes his or her experience and verifies modeller's model	Internal process and external behaviour during interview	Consciously in the mind and body of the modeller
<i>Step in and try on</i>	Describes his or her experience and verifies modeller's model	Internal behaviours, criteria and beliefs	Between modeller and exemplar – the modeller then steps into the model, tries it on and steps out
<i>Teach me to be you</i>	Explains to modeller how to do what they do	Sub-modalities	Consciously in the mind and body of the modeller
<i>Facilitating self-modelling through pointing</i>	Self-models, i.e. they create and describe a metaphor landscape in and around them self.	Verbal and nonverbal metaphors	In and around the <i>exemplar</i> maintaining the exemplar's perspective

I will now overview each of the six modelling perspectives compared in table 2 above.

Unconscious *uptake* (Grinder)

While in a state of wide peripheral vision, no internal dialogue and mild trance, the modeller observes the exemplar doing the expertise. The modeller maintains this state while observing and uses his or her body to mirror the exemplar with micro-muscular movements. Through a process of “unconscious uptake” the modeller acquires the external behaviour (and vicariously the internal process) of the exemplar. The modeller’s body and unconscious mind take in or absorb whatever the exemplar does – without any censorship. They are a sponge-like vessel which, through the mirroring process, acquires the behavioural patterns of the exemplar.

In spatial terms, the external behaviour and internal states of the exemplar are transferred to the modeller’s body and mind *without conscious awareness*. Later on the modeller can consciously decode the acquired patterns by self-modelling and then re-code these into a formal model if required.

Deep trance *identification* (Gilligan)

Similar in some ways to unconscious uptake, “deep trance identification” minimises the role of the conscious mind and involves trance. The difference is that the modeller (after making suitable agreements with him or her self) aims to *become* the exemplar. Sometimes known as ‘full second-position modelling’ or “field-based modeling” the modeller aims to put themselves fully within the mind and body of the exemplar, experiencing all that the exemplar experiences. They can do this either in the presence of the exemplar or not.

In spatial terms, the modeller acts as if their body and mind *goes into* the body and mind of the exemplar to experience life entirely from that perspective.

Take on (Dilts)²

Robert Dilts consciously constructs his model of the exemplar’s model in his own body and his own mind-space bit by bit. As he does this he “takes on” the internal and external patterns of the exemplar, i.e. he uses the exemplar’s verbal and nonverbal answers to his questions to replicate in himself the essential elements and processes. These are regularly recapitulated back to the exemplar as a test for congruence between Dilts’ description of his model and the exemplar’s experience.

In this way, the model to be acquired is consciously transferred from the exemplar and reconstructed within and around the modeller.

Step in and try on (Gordon & Dawes)³

David Gordon asks questions and gathers information from his exemplar so he can construct a representation of his exemplar’s model between him and the exemplar. Every now and then he “steps in” (sometimes physically taking a step forward), “tries on” his model to get a sense of it from the inside, and allows the exemplar’s descriptions to “take over” his body and “guide the reorganizing” of his experience. Having done this he *steps back* and uses his experience from having stepped in to continue to ask questions and build his model.

In spatial terms, the modeller constructs a model *between* himself and the exemplar and then repeatedly *steps in* and *steps out* of that model.

Teach me to be you (Bandler)

When the modeller says to the exemplar "If I was going to fill in for you" or "Teach me to be you" an interesting shift of perspective occurs. The exemplar has to change from just doing what they do, to explaining how they do it to someone else. The modeller listens to the descriptions, does in their mind as much of the process as they can, and asks the exemplar to fill in any gaps. The modeller constructs a more or less content-free model and uses 'I' statements when summarising their model.⁴

Perceptual *pointing* (Lawley & Tompkins)

The perspective adopted by the symbolic modeller enables the modeller to share the exemplar's perspective while simultaneously maintaining their own. To do this the modeller facilitates the exemplar to *self-model*. That is, to create their own model of the way they do what they do within their mind-body space. Since the exemplar will inevitably use metaphor to do this, we follow David Grove in calling the exemplar's model a "metaphor landscape". The exemplar "points out" aspects of his or her inner world, while "clean" questions "point to" and request elaboration of that landscape. The model is thus created in and around the *exemplar* by *both* the exemplar and the modeller.⁵

At this stage the symbolic modeller does not take on the exemplar's model in their own body-mind space, instead they use that space to "muse" on the inherent logic and structure of the exemplar's embodied metaphors.⁶ Later on if required, a formal description of the model can be created, tried on and tested by the modeller.

Two Distinctions

Conscious/Unconscious

I have noticed that even when using conscious modelling methodologies, plenty of unconscious uptake happens at the same time. I regard the debate over the degree of conscious/unconscious modelling as a bit of a distraction. More important to me is *when* the modeller aims to understand the model they are creating. In sensory/intuitive methodologies it is some time *after* the information gathering stage. In conceptual/analytic methodologies it is *during* it. In this regard, if the intuitive and analytic methods are more or less poles apart, Symbolic Modelling sits somewhere in between.

Bottom-up/Top-down

Another way of distinguishing between sensory/intuitive and conceptual/analytic modelling methodologies is to note how much of a pre-existing template or framework is used to organise the information being gathered. Grinder and Gillian's methods are "bottom-up" (behaviour to concept) while Dilts, Bandler, Gordon and Dawes are, *relatively*, more "top-down" since they use previously identified models (e.g. logical levels, perceptual positions, representation systems, submodalities, belief template, etc.). Again, Symbolic Modelling sits somewhere between the two.⁷

Concluding Remarks

When I am modelling from any of the perspectives mentioned above, my body-mind state is unlike any of my everyday ways of being and behaving. Modelling feels different. People often think they are modelling when what they are doing is trying to understand from their everyday-sense-making perspective. Everyday understanding is a useful way to learn, and of course it involves a form of modelling, but I maintain it is not the kind of modelling that is the pumping heart that gives life to NLP.

Once a degree of competence has been acquired with each perspective, the modeller gains the flexibility to adopt any of the perspectives depending on the circumstances (context, content and purpose) of the modelling being undertaken. An experienced modeller can go even further – they can consciously switch between a variety of perspectives as the modelling progresses.

For example, when Penny Tompkins and I modelled improvisational clown trainer Vivian Gladwell, we began by observing what he did while he trained people (including us). At times we used unconscious uptake to model Vivian. Later we (with Marian Way) interviewed him. The interview started out fairly conceptual and analytical while Vivian described his beliefs and criteria related to his work. When metaphors spontaneously emerged we switched to Symbolic Modelling.⁸

Although there are differences between the perspectives, they all share what I call 'the modeller's stance'. That is, there is a conscious aim to create a model that, *initially* at least, is a close replica of the exemplar's way of being excellent – unencumbered by the modeller's own assumptions. I hope I have shown that this can be achieved by a variety of modelling perspectives.

NOTES

This blog was inspired by Fran Burgess' laudable new book, [The Bumper Bundle Book of Modelling](#). This mammoth contribution to the field is the result of 15 years observing many leading modellers first-hand. It is the first publication which provides an extensive compilation and comparison of a number of modelling methodologies used in NLP.

References for the methodologies described in this blog can be found at:
cleanlanguage.co.uk/articles/articles/122/10/How-to-do-a-Modelling-Project/Page10.html

¹ One example of scientists aiming to prove or disprove a hypothesis was recently quoted in the *Guardian* newspaper. Carles Lalueza-Fox, leader of a study at the Institute of Evolutionary Biology, Barcelona was quoted as saying: "Before we started this work, I had some ideas of what we were going to find." This is counter to a modeller's attitude. As it happens, Lalueza-Fox found that "Most of those ideas turned out to be completely wrong." theguardian.com/science/2014/jan/26/swarthy-blue-eyed-caveman-dna-tooth

NLP modelling can be adapted to the standard deductive scientific method, it's just not how it was conceived.

² There is a short video of Robert Dilts modelling an exemplar in our article on the topic:
cleanlanguage.co.uk/articles/articles/266/3/Modelling-Robert-Dilts-Modelling/

³ <http://www.expandyourworld.net/chapter6.php>

⁴ This approach is also used as a therapeutic intervention. In teaching the therapist/coach what they do, the client has to take a different perspective on their problem. Having done so, it is not unknown for Richard Bandler to deliberately get it wrong as a way to 'mess up' the client's unproductive strategy (he uses another less polite four-letter term).

⁵ cleanlanguage.co.uk/articles/articles/326/1/Pointing-to-a-New-Modelling-Perspective/

⁶ cleanlanguage.co.uk/articles/articles/22/1/A-Model-of-Musing-The-Message-in-a-Metaphor/

⁷ cleanlanguage.co.uk/articles/articles/240/1/Modelling-Top-down-and-Bottom-up-/

⁸ You can see the results of that modelling project at:
cleanlanguage.co.uk/articles/articles/203/1/Coaching-in-the-Moment/