

What is self-modelling?

By [James Lawley](#) | Published 13 Feb 2012

<http://www.cleanlanguage.co.uk/articles/blogs/71/What-is-self-modelling.html>

Below is a post of mine from December 2003 that was lost when the original [cleanforum.com](#) was hacked. I thought it was worth posting it again.

What is self-modelling? For me, the client self-modelling is a subset of Symbolic Modelling. While self-modelling is fundamental to Symbolic Modelling there are plenty of other ways to self-model. It is also quite possible for Symbolic Modelling to support clients to make the changes they want without the awareness that they are self-modelling. Generally though, the more a client is aware they are self-modelling the better.

Ernest Rossi puts it in wonderfully simple terms when he says Symbolic Modelling "helps people learn how to facilitate their own creativity in solving their own problems in their own way." Words in this statement which refer to self-modelling are: "learn how to facilitate their own creativity in solving their own problems in their own way." The facilitator's job is to "help people" do that.

In my words, self-modelling is a process whereby a person constructs a model (in the case of Symbolic Modelling, a metaphor landscape) of the way their system operates and in so doing provides feedback to the system from which it can learn.

In this way self-modelling is beautifully recursive: the output from the process forms the input from which the system generates more output etc. As this happens the client has signals/responses about the model they are constructing, its: accuracy / relevance / usefulness / significance / etc. These signals also provide feedback and help the person self-correct (i.e. self-adjust) so that their model improves / is honed / develops / progresses / (insert the client's metaphor here).

It's very much like learning to ride a bike – wobbling is a necessary part of the process of learning how changes in the body result in a more or less advantageous outcome.

So self-modelling is a way of self-learning: The self is learning about the self from the self and through that very process the self develops, which then requires further self-modelling/learning and so on.

I prefer 'learning' to 'problem-solving' because it covers a wider range of contexts, but I think the process is much the same whatever we call it.

The following is an example of self-modelling and the effect it had. A friend discovered (in about 15 minutes of being facilitated to symbolically self-model for the first time) that she had a general direction to her life – straight ahead on a path. Although she was happily moving along her path, she noticed there were always three boxes off to the right which followed her wherever she went. When she explored the boxes she discovered that they contained her desires for singing, writing stories and illustrating. She realised that while she continued on her current path these desires were not being satisfied and that they were not going to go away. Through the process of exploring this state of affairs the boxes moved onto the path with her. That was two years ago. Since then, she has dabbled with story writing and illustrating, but the significant change came when she took up singing lessons, joined a gospel choir, and gave her first public performance. Now one day a week she is a back-up singer.

This story illustrates how learning from self-modelling and acting on that learning can have a significant effect on a person's life. Through the process she gained a clear understanding of a pattern in her life (that she had been ignoring those desires) and how she would like that pattern to change. As often happens this was enough to set in motion a series of changes which means she now says "singing is the most stable thing I have ever done in my life".

Many types of psychotherapy and learning involve some form of self-modelling. What makes Symbolic Modelling different is the use of Clean Language and an explicit aim to facilitate self-modelling.

In its simplest terms, self-modelling is what the client does, facilitating the client to self-model is what the facilitator does, and both of these together form the Symbolic Modelling process.

Historical note: I first heard the term 'self-modelling' at the London NLP Practice Group in the early 1990s (Penny and I have written [an article about the group.](#)) Michael Breen was presenting and when he said "All modelling is self-modelling" it blew my mind. That statement rolled around my brain for several years before I 'got it'. When Penny and I started to model David Grove it was a big surprise to us that he was actively facilitating his client to self-model. At least that is our description. David never liked that metaphor – he preferred his own ever-changing way of describing what he was doing.