

Expanding the Dynamics of Beliefs

Belief is the most powerful option of all

Christina Hall, Ph.D.

Judith Lowe, Principal of PPD Learning, introduces the fascinating work of Dr Christina Hall, one of the original team who developed NLP alongside Bandler and Grinder in the 1970s.

"Dr. Christina Hall is known throughout the NLP world for her innovative and systemic work with language. Her 'live' teaching style is very interactive and fun as she tends to view learning as a form of creative exploration. In her seminars she uses a wonderful variety of stories, activities and puzzles to illustrate and bring to life the more formal ideas about beliefs and choice she discusses in this article."

And here's what a former student said when he learned of Christina's contribution to ReSource:

"I'm already looking forward to an article by Chris Hall, she co-delivered my first Master Practitioner Course; she was excellent."

Ian Berry, NLP Trainer and Educator
(For details of Christina Hall's "Language in Action" seminars in London for PPD, which Ian will be reviewing for ReSource, contact 0870 7744 321)

Human beings are generalisers. We make generalisations about everything. Generalisations set boundaries, which by definition are artificial. Yet we use them as indispensable guides to navigate through the world of experience.

Generalisations are like a "double-edged" sword.

A generalisation is in essence a "law" or principle, which is inferred from particular examples. It is an evaluative statement that goes beyond what is actually observed and the information available. This "going-beyond" is called an inductive leap, to a rule or law, governing some category of experience. An inductive leap occurs when we use particular cases as examples to make a statement (or inference) to define some totality, which includes both observed and unobserved cases. Generalisations are like a "double-edged" sword. They can either restrict and limit or expand and enrich the range of possibility and choice.

Often, there is a tendency to take for granted that one's generalisation is the only one possible or the "right" one, as if it were a fact. This may seem harmless on the surface. However, when that occurs, it can be limiting, because of the emphasis on closure to further exploration of the possibilities. There is an additional implication in that the generalisation is taken to be valid, and perhaps even the same, for all observers.

Knowledge is stabilised by the use of generalisations. One of the uses of knowledge is in its predictive function. However, no generalisation can ever be more than a probability statement, or "working" hypothesis, so to speak, because we can never be utterly certain that all the evidence is in or even available. So, a provocative question arises: **Can we ever assert with complete and utter certainty and confidence that we are completely right about something and the other person completely wrong?**

Meaning — A matter of relationship.

Generalisations are, in turn, stabilized by meaning, which can be described as the cognitive categorization and interpretation of the world of experience. Meaning is a mental construct, and therefore a secondary representation of experience.

Meaning functions to move away from ambiguity and chaos towards building a sense of coherency and stability. Meaning is coded by a set of relations, which creates a focus that sets a certain direction. That is, meaning acts like a set of instructions to organize information, at deeper levels, in certain ways and not others. And as such, represents a powerful force in shaping, organizing and orientating thinking, responses and behaviour.

A belief is low-quality word.

A belief is a categorical generalisation about the world of experience. “Belief” is a **nominalised-coded version** of ongoing process. This means that a static, fixed and unchanging description is used to represent an ongoing process. So, in this sense, beliefs serve as “templates” or “navigators” of behaviour, even though they are not necessarily supported by empirical evidence. Nevertheless, people interact in the world as if their beliefs are true and will continue to be true.

A belief can also be described as a form of **measurement**, which means that one “quantity” is being used to describe another, but the two are of different logical levels (i.e., differ-

ent semantic levels of meaning). In doing so, we go through a process of deletion and distortion. Therefore, any measurement (i.e., description) is always partial and incomplete. They can really never be justified in an epistemological sense. We can never know all experience. We can never know all of the territory.

Alfred Korzybski (author of “General Semantics”) has stated in his writings that human beings act as if they have the ability to transcend and separate (dissociate) from ongoing sensory feedback to arrive at opinions, judgments and beliefs about the real nature of anything.

People interact as if their beliefs are true.

Korzybski suggests an interesting hypothesis about the nature of beliefs. He states that a belief may be something we build when we don’t know what is real, and in that sense, **artificial**. Therefore, a well-formed belief is not going to be based on the statistics there are to support it; rather, on primarily one factor — how well it serves the individual. A valuation and evaluation of belief is to be primarily based on the consequences of having that belief.

Filters direct us to notice those parts of experience which are consistent with belief.

A belief functions as a filter in that it selects and determines what someone notices, and conversely, what someone doesn't notice. It could be described as a "predisposition" that is carried forth into some situation. Even prior to the selection of response, choice is either restricted or expanded, because the belief is synonymous with the set of perceptual filters that direct someone to notice those parts of the world that are consistent with the belief.

A belief is associated with a particular state of mind, characterized by an intensified attention and receptiveness and increased responsiveness to a certain idea or set of ideas. This is reminiscent of the definition that Milton Erickson, M.D. often used in describing hypnosis and trance. So, in this sense, a belief can be thought of as a "post-hypnotic suggestion" in that it basically sets out to prove what it assumes – to verify the validity of the belief, rather than to test the validity. This is referred to as the structure of "self-fulfilling prophecy." This is looped behavior.

When the focus of attention is shifted, the quality of life changes.

When someone perceives something as a problem, a difficulty or a limitation, they have become stuck in a habitual way of looking at something, making it difficult to think creatively and flexibly. The more familiar something becomes, the harder it seems to see it differently in a fresh way. It all boils down to a matter of focus, because when the focus of attention is shifted, the quality of life changes.

Opening "doors" to new and different possibilities

But all is not lost, because the ability that people have to learn is phenomenal. Creative solutions begin to emerge and possibilities open up when the elements are reorganized into a different pattern(s) in ways that broadens the scope of how someone looks at what they are doing. This is one of the things that can be accomplished through the use of the "Meta Model" and the "Sleight of Mouth Patterns."

The Meta Model is more than just an information-gathering tool. It is also an information-organizing tool that invites someone to explore and consider something not only from one perspective, but from various points of view. This is important, because if people don't explore something from different perspectives, they won't change their thinking. One of the purposes of the Meta Model is to expand the range of possibility. It's about adding, and adding in such a way, that enriches the quality of experience, opening up choices where someone perceived there to be none.

The "Sleight of Mouth" patterns are simply an extension of the "Meta Model" and refer to a set of distinctions that reflect the ways in which people defend, validate and maintain their beliefs. The "justification mechanism" is the one we are dealing with here. These patterns represent the "logic" or rationale that someone uses to verify and give credence to (i.e., make

believable) something... to strengthen (or weaken) an idea, an opinion, a belief. In a larger sense, you can think of these patterns as a way in which people preserve the generalisation that what they are doing makes sense.

The degree to which somebody has installed a belief is related to the degree with which they have defended it. People tend to cling to the beliefs that they have defended the most. They have used so many "Sleight of Mouth" patterns to validate the belief that it has become difficult to shift perspectives in order to focus differently.

Opening up choices where there seemed to be none

I would like to expand the notion of what you can do with beliefs. It's not about finding out what is wrong. And it's not about validating or invalidating or even eliminating a particular belief. This simply isn't particularly productive and doesn't lead to generative change. Every belief is the result of learning, and therefore represents a set of choices. You can leave a belief intact, and examine it in such a way that opens a door to new and different possibilities where there seemed to be none.

It is far more useful to explore and examine the assumptions that reinforce a belief. You can use the "Meta Model" and "Sleight of Mouth" patterns to examine the unexplored assumptions in ways that question the universality implied by a belief statement. This begins to diminish the impact of a limiting belief. This also serves as a basis for creating profound shifts in thinking and expanding the range of what is possible.

Expanding the range of choice and possibility

The language patterns of the "Meta Model" and "Sleight of Mouth" are tools to generate requisite variety for conscious and unconscious mind processes to align resources in ways that make desired changes possible in any area of life. Expanding flexibility in all systems is a key, because the real wealth and richness of resources reside on the inside... in the other mind... Whether you describe something as a problem, or difficulty or challenge, or your own enthusiasm to look at life as an opportunity to learn, everything you do is an achievement.

© 2004 Christina Hall, Ph.D.

Author:

Christina Hall Ph.D. is a respected international Trainer, who is acknowledged as a major contributor to the development of NLP. An NLP Trainer since 1980, Chris focuses on a systems and holistic orientation in her work. She is best known for her innovations in the area of language patterning. Her many years of collaboration with Co-Developer, Richard Bandler, produced some of the most outstanding developments during the 80's, including sub-modalities and the Swish Pattern, temporal language patterns and verbal swishes and many of the Sleight of Mouth Patterns. Chris is one of the owners of the Society of NLP and President since 1983. Chris is a key trainer on the PPD Master Practitioner Programme.



References: Korzybski, Alfred. (1994) Science & Sanity:(5th edit). Lakeville, California: International non-Aristotelian Library Publishing Co.